

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
OCTOBER 29, 2012
REYNALDO MESA, PRESIDENT
GARDEN CITY AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

Mister Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing my testimony to be presented regarding passenger rail service. I am Reynaldo Mesa, President of the Garden City Area Chamber of Commerce.

Passenger rail provides a transportation link to residents of southwest Kansas that is of growing importance and will likely become critical as rising energy prices curtail the attractiveness of driving and flying. Amtrak's Southwest Chief currently serves Kansas on its route between Chicago and Los Angeles on the host railroad line of Burlington Northern Santa Fe. Both eastbound and westbound trains stop at Garden City daily and served more than 44,000 Kansas passengers in 2010, including 7,075 Garden City passengers. However, as you are aware, deteriorating track conditions are threatening this route.

Passenger rail is a vital means of transportation for many in our community, from college students traveling to and from home and school to families who want a safe, affordable way to travel to the elderly who can no longer drive. It is also an important transportation option for those from the business community who wish to remain productive during travel time. I would encourage the committee to explore the affordability of traveling by rail. There have been reports that traveling by train has become too expensive, but this couldn't be further from the truth. While I served as a Kansas legislator, I made the trip from Garden City to Topeka and back frequently on the Southwest Chief. Doing so was more affordable than traveling by car.

In addition to providing travel options for the residents of our community, the Southwest Chief brings passengers from across the nation to Garden City. If the Southwest Chief is rerouted, we will lose a vital access point into our community. In addition, the economic impact of Amtrak ceasing operations along this section of the Southwest Chief would be substantial, including the loss of jobs.

The Garden City Area Chamber of Commerce supports the efforts of the Southwest Chief Rural Rail Partnership. This group of communities is working together through the Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico congressional delegations to explore solutions at the federal level. It will need the State's support moving forward. As a former Kansas legislator, I understand the State has many demands for financial assistance. However, it is important that the State is supportive of the effort to keep passenger rail accessible to western Kansas.