

**Transportation Secretary
Announces Heartland Flyer
Funding Commitment**
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Oklahoma Department of Transportation

Information Release



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Secretary Phil Tomlinson today announced that the Oklahoma Department of Transportation officials have received a commitment from the Texas Transportation Commission to share with Oklahoma the cost of funding the *Heartland Flyer*, which provides passenger rail service between Oklahoma City and Fort Worth via the Amtrak system.

The train on June 14 celebrated its seventh anniversary of operation. The celebration, however, could have been bittersweet due to the lack of federal funding beyond the current year.

The *Heartland Flyer* costs approximately \$4 million annually to operate. Last year, the Oklahoma Legislature, through HB 1078, and with the help of Sen. Johnnie Crutchfield, D-Ardmore, authorized \$2 million annually for the train leaving the requirement that the remaining \$2 million be secured from other sources. Governor Henry had requested that ODOT make the securing of the balance of this funding a high priority.

Following meetings between Oklahoma and Texas transportation officials this summer, Secretary of Transportation Phil Tomlinson was advised by Ric Williamson, chairman of the Texas Transportation Commission, that they concurred as to the importance of the passenger rail service to both states and he would recommend that Texas participate in half of the cost. Tomlinson particularly acknowledged assistance from U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe and former Lt. Gov. Jack Mildren during the negotiations with Texas.

Their Commission voted earlier this week to approve the funds.

The *Heartland Flyer* provides daily service between Oklahoma City and Fort Worth with stops in Norman, Purcell, Pauls Valley, Ardmore and Gainesville, Texas, and Oklahoma communities along the *Heartland Flyer's* route have invested more than \$6.3 million in rehabilitating their depots.

Approximately 30 percent of *Heartland Flyer* passengers connect to the national rail system by transferring to Amtrak's *Texas Eagle*, in Fort Worth.

The *Heartland Flyer* made its first trip from Oklahoma City to Ft. Worth on June 14, 1999 as a federally funded joint venture between Amtrak and ODOT, ending a 20-year absence of passenger rail service in Oklahoma. More than 400,000 people have ridden the train, since it began operations in 1999, and ridership continues to increase.

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