

Testimony of Abilene Convention and Visitors Bureau
House Committee on Transportation
Proponent for HB 2501 • February 7, 2024

Chairman Francis and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Abilene Convention and Visitors Bureau, whose mission is to generate economic growth in Abilene through tourism, I thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bill 2501 regarding designating the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe #3415 as the official state locomotive.

In the 1950s, the 1919 Baldwin 4-6-2 "Pacific" type locomotive, ATSF #3415, found a new home in Abilene's Eisenhower Park. Over forty years later, the City of Abilene donated the locomotive to the Abilene & Smoky Valley Railroad, marking the beginning of an incredible process of restoration and its triumphant return to the rails. After tens of thousands of volunteer hours and generous donations, the iconic ATSF #3415 proudly returned to operation in 2009, captivating riders and photographers alike ever since.

While the Abilene & Smoky Valley Railroad's diesel engine offers a delightful ride, the experience of traveling aboard an iconic steam engine is unparalleled. The steam engine has become the railroad's most sought-after and popular train ride, attracting photographers from across the country to capture its beauty traversing the rural Kansas countryside. Moreover, the inclusion of Texas longhorns aboard this iconic steam engine helps recreate a living history experience of Abilene during its Chisholm Trail cowtown days.

Yet, for safety reasons, steam engines must undergo extensive boiler safety checks every fifteen years—a time-consuming and expensive process that often prevents many engines from returning to rail operations. Designating ATSF #3415 as the official state locomotive would significantly aid the Abilene & Smoky Valley Railroad in securing additional funds necessary to complete the mandatory rebuild and return this historic engine to the tracks.

As the only operational steam engine in Kansas, ATSF #3415 is undeniably worthy of the designation as the official state locomotive. With your invaluable support, we can return this steam locomotive back on the rails in time for the 160th anniversary of the Chisholm Trail, allowing us to celebrate our state's cowboy history.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this special designation. The travel season in Abilene is not the same without the sound of the steam engine's whistle.

Respectfully,



Julie Roller Weeks, director
Abilene Convention and Visitors Bureau