

**Testimony of Abilene and Smoky Valley
Railroad House Committee on Transportation
Proponent for HB 2502 – February 7, 2024**



Abilene & Smoky Valley Railroad
Abilene, Kansas • Est. 1993



Chairman Francis and members of the Committee

On behalf of the Abilene and Smoky Valley Railroad Association Board of Directors I want to thank the Committee for considering this bill. The Abilene and Smoky Valley Railroad is wrapping up our 30th year of operations. Since June 18, 1993, we have transported, entertained, and educated over 300,000 folks between Abilene and Enterprise. Last year (2023) over 12,000 passengers rode our train and enjoyed the Kansas countryside. These 12,000 passengers came from over 50-percent of Kansas communities as well as 41 states and several foreign countries. I expect that we had riders from each of your districts. Contrary to what some may think, we are truly a regional attraction. We routinely see riders from as far away as St. Louis, Omaha, Denver and Wichita or Oklahoma City, sometimes on the same train. We also find about one-half or more of our passengers are first-time riders with us, and for many, their first-time riding on a train at all.

Why do they come to Abilene? Trains and railroads are a special fascination for just about everyone. While Kansas has a number of outstanding rail-related displays and museums, the A&SV is currently the only operating attraction with regularly scheduled trains offering a variety of activities for our passengers. We have an operating steam locomotive, the 1919 ATSF 3415 4-6-2 Pacific Class, the only one operating in Kansas. We are a moving museum that is 100-feet wide and 5-1/2 miles long.

Our founders envisioned a museum and heritage railroad that would remind passengers of the importance of railroads in the growth of Kansas, Kansas agriculture and Kansas communities. That is what we strive to accomplish. We convey this message through our operations of vintage equipment, our live onboard narrations that bring history to life, and through the operation of the Hoffman Grist Mill at Enterprise. Together, these bring a unique perspective that helps passengers reconnect with the importance of this mode of transportation. Our recent ridership increases, and response is exactly what we are trying to achieve.

The difficult thing about being a heritage museum and railway is that while we may operate 1940's and 1950's equipment, we must pay 2024 prices for repairs and maintenance. All railroads, whether for-profit or non-profit (like us) are capital intensive endeavors. While we can generate sufficient revenue to cover day-to-day operations, many things, such as track repair and replacement or rebuilding a steam locomotive exceed our financial capabilities. Our financial resources only come from donations, ticket and merchandise sales, grants, and gifts. We have written several grants in an attempt to get the large (\$1.5-2M) funding necessary to improve our foundational track and facilities so they can last another 30 years. We were not awarded any of them.

Your designation of the A&SV as the *official state heritage railroad* would, of course, be of great assistance to us as we pursue grant and gift opportunities. But just as important, it would be recognition of the 30-year endeavor of our all-volunteer members and their tens-of-thousands of donated hours they give just to keep things going. I am the only full-time employee, everything else that is done on the A&SV is, and has been, done by volunteers. Our volunteers come from as far away as Oklahoma and Missouri as well as from several hours away in Kansas. They are drawn to our organization because of the opportunity to help preserve and operate our vintage equipment, and because of their love of railroads and what they do. We are seeing a resurgence of new volunteers as we continue our improvements in operations.

House bill 2502 declaring the A&SV as the official state heritage railroad will help us continue our mission of preservation, education, and entertainment of our ridership. Our 2024 tagline is "We will move you in 2024". The focus and assistance provided by this legislation will allow us to continue telling the story of Railroads in Kansas and their effect on building Kansas, Kansas agriculture, and Kansas communities.

Thank you again for your consideration.
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