



OKLAHOMA
Transportation

Amtrak Heartland Flyer Economic Analysis

INTERIM STUDY DOCUMENT

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1 INTRODUCTION

For more than 25 years, the Amtrak Heartland Flyer (Heartland Flyer) has served as a critical daily round-trip passenger rail connection between Oklahoma City and Dallas-Fort Worth, covering 206 miles along the I-35 corridor. The Heartland Flyer began service in 1999 and has stations in Texas (Gainesville and Fort Worth) and Oklahoma (Oklahoma City, Norman, Purcell, Pauls Valley, and Ardmore). Currently, the Heartland Flyer terminates in Oklahoma City. However, a dedicated bus service operates between Oklahoma City to Newton, Kansas, providing a northbound connection to the Amtrak Southwest Chief.

The Heartland Flyer delivers value to Oklahoma by connecting communities and supporting local economies. In 2024, 80,371 passengers rode the service, paying an average one-way fare of \$26. Further, Amtrak directly employed 4 Oklahomans with total wages of \$475 thousand and invested nearly \$491 thousand in goods and services from local vendors. Nearly 37% of Oklahomans live within 25 miles of a passenger rail station, offering convenient access to intercity travel options.

The Heartland Flyer provides significant mobility and quality-of-life benefits. Passengers use the service for a variety of purposes, with 38% traveling to visit family and friends and 30% taking short trips for recreation. These travel patterns demonstrate the service's role in enhancing connectivity, supporting tourism, and strengthening regional ties across the state.

This state-supported route is a joint venture between Amtrak, the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT), and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). TxDOT had been a partner in supporting this service since Fiscal Year (FY) 2007. In 2025, the Texas did not approve its portion of a two-year funding match to ensure the continuation of the Amtrak Heartland Flyer. The North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) provided emergency funding to prevent route shutdown and continue operations through June 2026.

This economic impact analysis examines the Heartland Flyer's economic contribution to the state of Oklahoma and assesses the impact of potential service enhancements.

1.1 Methodology

The estimated economic benefits and impacts were calculated utilizing data from Amtrak and ODOT. The benefits attributed to the Heartland Flyer were estimated in terms of employment opportunities created, labor income earned, Gross State Product (GSP) generated, and tax revenue collected, illustrating the comprehensive effects that Amtrak service has on Oklahoma's economy. The resulting economic impacts are presented in the categories provided in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Economic Impact Categories

Impact Type	Metrics
Passenger Rail Enterprise Effects	Count of Oklahoma residents that work for Amtrak and their wages and benefits
	Retirement benefits paid by the U.S. Railroad Retirement Board to retirees living in Oklahoma
	Average annual capital investments made by Amtrak in Oklahoma
Tourism and Visitor Spending by Amtrak Riders	Number of Amtrak riders visiting the state by trip purpose and their out-of-pocket expenditures (i.e., the amount they spend on lodging, meals, shopping, and any other expenditures during their visit)
State of Good Repair of the Transportation Infrastructure	Net savings in highway maintenance and repair costs due to passengers traveling by Amtrak instead of driving motorized vehicles
Safety Effects	Net reduction in fatalities, injuries, and property damage from crashes (calculated by subtracting Amtrak fatality, injury, and property damage crash costs from fatality, injury, and property damage crash costs associated with alternative travel modes for passengers)
Train Passenger Transportation Cost Effects	Net changes in train passenger transportation cost (calculated by subtracting the estimated transportation cost associated with Amtrak riders from the transportation cost associated with alternative travel modes)
Train Passenger Travel Time Cost Effects	Net changes in train passenger travel time cost (calculated by subtracting the estimated travel time cost associated with Amtrak riders from the travel time cost associated with alternative travel modes)
Amtrak Energy Effects	Net reduction in fuel spending (calculated by subtracting Amtrak fuel consumption costs from fuel consumption costs associated with alternative travel modes)
Highway User Effects	Savings in travel delays and vehicle operating costs from avoided passenger car trips

2 SERVICE SCENARIOS

This report summarizes economic impacts in Oklahoma for four Heartland Flyer service scenarios. The first scenario reflects current service, and three potential scenarios consider greater levels of investment. Scenarios 1, 1a, and 2 use Amtrak and ODOT data while Scenario 3 utilizes prior work completed under the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) Passenger Rail Service Development Plan for the Oklahoma City–Wichita–Newton Corridor (KDOT Passenger Rail Plan).

The four service scenarios evaluated are described below and shown in **Figure 1**:

- **Scenario 1: Baseline – Current Service Level** – This scenario represents existing conditions based on Amtrak’s current service between Oklahoma City and Fort Worth. This scenario serves as the reference point for comparison with future service scenarios.
- **Scenario 1a: Thackerville Stop** – This scenario adds a new station stop in Thackerville, OK, providing access to WinStar Casino and serving the local community.
- **Scenario 2: Increased Service Frequency** – This scenario provides an additional daily round-trip along the existing corridor to enhance connectivity and increase potential ridership.
- **Scenario 3: Service Expansion to Newton, Kansas** – This scenario extends Amtrak service north from Oklahoma City, OK to Newton, KS, broadening geographic coverage, connecting additional communities, and the Amtrak Southwest Chief service.

Three years were considered for each scenario:

- 2024 (Baseline Year): Establishment of a baseline for existing service, and reference point for expenditures
- 2033 (Opening Year): Assumed opening year of Scenarios 1a, 2, and 3. It would provide up to seven years for design, construction and service implementation
- 2053 (Horizon Year): 20-year horizon from Opening Year. The analysis period for the economic impact study is 20 years from the opening year

Figure 1: Heartland Flyer Map with Proposed Service Scenarios



3 FINDINGS

Total economic impacts encompass both direct impacts and broader economic impacts. This section breaks down these key findings by scenario.

3.1 Direct Benefits

Direct benefits refer to the monetization of current and potential rail activity that has an immediate and direct economic outcome on lives and infrastructure. Traveling by train significantly reduces the risk of being involved in a crash, lowering costs related to injuries, fatalities, and property damage (Crash Cost Savings). The Heartland Flyer also reduces the number of drivers on the road, easing congestion and travel delays while avoiding costs tied to lost productivity and vehicle wear (Reduced Travel Delays and Vehicle Fuel Operating Cost Savings). The Heartland Flyer service saves costs on fuel consumption by moving more people with less fuel compared to those people taking car trips and reduces costs associated with highway maintenance by lowering traffic volumes (Energy Savings from Reduced Fuel Consumption and Savings from Maintaining Transportation Infrastructure). Lastly, tourists and visitors take the Heartland Flyer to the communities along the route, spending money on hotels, food, and other retail (Tourism and Visitor Spending in Oklahoma).

To compare the four service scenarios, average annual monetized impacts were projected over the 2033-2053 period, and the results can be shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Average Annual Monetized Impacts, 2033-2053 (2024\$)

Impact Type	Scenario 1	Scenario 1a	Scenario 2	Scenario 3
Tourism and Visitor Spending in Oklahoma	\$9,031,909	\$10,555,619	\$13,547,863	\$10,553,194
Net Crash Cost Savings	\$1,621,879	\$1,775,440	\$2,432,819	\$2,703,756
Net Transportation Cost Savings for Train Passengers	\$1,497,262	\$1,798,356	\$1,741,733	\$1,908,376
Savings from Reduced Travel Delays and Vehicle Fuel Operating Costs for Highway Users	\$484,526	\$530,401	\$726,789	\$995,763
Net Energy Savings from Passenger Train Fuel Efficiency	\$80,889	\$88,548	\$121,334	\$93,977
Net Savings from Maintaining Transportation Infrastructure	\$12,296	\$17,905	-\$5,028	\$6,739
Net Additional Travel Time Cost for Train Passengers	-\$1,022,026	-\$1,089,670	-\$1,625,189	-\$1,429,101
Total Direct Impact	\$11,706,735	\$13,676,599	\$16,940,321	\$14,832,704

Note: Positive dollar amounts indicate cost savings, while negative dollar amounts represent additional costs.

Source: HNTB Analysis

3.1.1 Scenario 1: Current Service Level

Scenario 1, the baseline scenario, demonstrated an average annual monetized impact of **\$11.7 million**. The top three economic impacts, all greater than \$1 million, are the following:

- **\$9.0 million** in tourism and visitor spending,
- **\$1.6 million** in net crash cost savings, and
- **\$1.5 million** in net transportation cost savings.

3.1.2 Scenario 1a: Thackerville Stop

Scenario 1a, adding a new stop at Thackerville, demonstrated an average annual monetized impact of **\$13.7 million**, a **17%** increase in value from the baseline scenario. The top three impacts, all greater than \$1 million, are the following:

- **\$10.6 million** in tourism and visitor spending,
- **\$1.8 million** in net crash cost savings, and
- **\$1.8 million** in net transportation cost savings.

3.1.3 Scenario 2: Increased Service Frequency

Scenario 2, adding an additional daily round trip, demonstrated an average annual monetized impact of **\$16.9 million**, a **45%** increase in value from the baseline scenario. The top three impacts, all greater than \$1 million, are the following:

- **\$13.5 million** in tourism and visitor spending,
- **\$2.4 million** in net crash cost savings, and
- **\$1.7 million** in net transportation cost savings.

3.1.4 Scenario 3: Service Expansion to Newton, Kansas

Scenario 3, expanding the service to Newton, Kansas and connection to the Amtrak Southwest Chief, demonstrated an average annual monetized impact of **\$14.8 million**, a **27%** increase in value from the baseline scenario. The top three impacts, all greater than \$1 million, are the following:

- **\$10.6 million** in tourism and visitor spending,
- **\$2.7 million** in net crash cost savings, and
- **\$1.9 million** in net transportation cost savings.

3.2 Total Economic Impacts

Total economic impacts refer to the combined direct, indirect and induced impacts that result from the availability of rail service to Oklahoma residents, visitors, and businesses. Average annual total economic impacts were assessed over the 2033-2053 period, estimating the employment, labor income, GSP, and tax revenue (including local, state, and federal revenues) generated by each scenario. Employment is measured in jobs (created or supported under the scenarios), while the latter three metrics are measured in 2024 dollars. Scenarios 1a, 2, and 3 are described in comparison to Scenario 1 to illustrate their additional value. **Table 3** highlights the Total Economic Impacts by scenario.

Table 3: Average Annual Total Economic Impacts, 2033-2053 (2024\$)

Impact Type	Scenario 1	Scenario 1a	Scenario 2	Scenario 3
Employment	130	150 (+15%)	180 (+38%)	155 (+19%)
Labor Income	\$5.9m	\$6.5m (+10%)	\$7.6m (+29%)	\$6.3m (+7%)
GSP	\$12.0m	\$13.1m (+9%)	\$15.0m (+25%)	\$12.8m (+7%)
Tax Revenue	\$2.2m	\$2.5m (+10%)	\$2.9m (+30%)	\$2.4m (+9%)

Note: +% is in comparison to Scenario 1

Source: HNTB Analysis

3.2.1 Scenario 1: Current Service Level

In Scenario 1, the average annual benefit that the Heartland Flyer generates is the following:

- **130** jobs,
- **\$5.9 million** worth of labor income,
- **\$12.0 million** worth of Gross State Product, and
- **\$2.2 million** worth of tax revenue.

Every **\$1** of public investment in the existing Amtrak Heartland Flyer service produces **\$1.3** in economic activity statewide.

3.2.2 Scenario 1a: Thackerville Stop

Scenario 1a generates an 15% increase in jobs in comparison to Scenario 1. It also provides 10% increases in labor income and tax revenue and a 9% increase in GSP. The average annual benefit that this scenario yields is the following:

- **20** additional jobs,
- **\$.6 million** worth of additional labor income,
- **\$.1 million** worth of additional Gross State Product, and
- **\$.3 million** worth of additional tax revenue.

Every **\$1** of public investment in the existing Amtrak Heartland Flyer service produces **\$1.7** in economic activity statewide.

3.2.3 Scenario 2: Increased Service Frequency

Scenario 2 generates a 45% increase in jobs in comparison to Scenario 1. It also provides 49% increases in labor income and GSP and a 50% increase in tax revenue. The average annual benefit that this scenario yields is the following:

- **50** additional jobs,
- **\$.7 million** worth of additional labor income,
- **\$.3 million** worth of additional Gross State Product, and
- **\$.7 million** worth of additional tax revenue.

In this scenario, every **\$1** of public investment in the existing Amtrak Heartland Flyer service produces **\$1.2** in economic activity statewide.

3.2.4 Scenario 3: Service Expansion to Newton, Kansas

Scenario 3 generates a 23% increase in jobs in comparison to Scenario 1. It also provides increases of 18% in labor income, 20% in GSP, and 22% in tax revenue. The average annual benefit that this scenario yields is the following:

- **25** additional jobs,
- **\$.4 million** worth of additional labor income,
- **\$.8 million** worth of additional Gross State Product, and
- **\$.2 million** worth of additional tax revenue.

In this final scenario, every **\$1** of public investment in the existing Amtrak Heartland Flyer service produces **\$0.5** in economic activity statewide.

3.3 Qualitative Benefits

While this analysis focuses on quantifiable economic impacts, it is also important to recognize the qualitative benefits of the Heartland Flyer service, which reflect meaningful improvements to well-being and accessibility. Consideration of these benefits offers a more complete picture of the service's long-term value and alignment with public goals.

- **Economic & Regional Benefits**
 - Increased tourism spending across Oklahoma, driving revenue for local businesses such as hotels, restaurants, and retail
 - Strengthens the economy by providing affordable, reliable service that also provides benefits for highway users
- **Bolstered Connectivity & Tourism**
 - Links Oklahoma to major destinations and events (e.g., Annual OU-Texas Football Game in Dallas, Annual Women's College World Series in OKC, 2026 FIFA World Cup in Dallas, and the 2028 Olympic Events hosted in OKC)
 - Supports small-town economics and regional mobility
- **Affordable Transportation Mode**
 - Round-trip fares of \$50–\$60 make the Flyer a cost-effective alternative to driving or flying
 - Expands access to jobs, schools, and healthcare, enhancing workforce mobility and economic opportunity
- **Enhanced Comfort & Accessibility**
 - With reclining seats, power outlets, restrooms, and a snack bar, the Flyer offers a stress-free experience—especially for older adults (23% of riders), low-income households (21%), and those with mobility challenges
- **Educational & Cultural Enrichment**
 - “Trails and Rails” program turns trips into mobile classrooms
 - Promotes Oklahoma's history, culture, and natural heritage






4 CONCLUSION

The Heartland Flyer continues to deliver value to Oklahoma by connecting communities and supporting local economies.

The analysis found that the Heartland Flyer offers an affordable and reliable travel option that helps reduce roadway congestion and improve regional accessibility. Tourist and visitor spending represent the largest share of direct economic impacts, accounting for 70-80% of total benefits. In FY 2024 alone, passengers spent \$7.4 million on lodging, dining, entertainment, and shopping in Oklahoma. The remaining 20-30% of direct benefits stem from safety improvements and travel cost savings.

Overall, all scenarios provide economic benefits to Oklahoma. The scenarios are summarized in descending order by greatest impact, expressed in average annual long-term impacts (2024 dollars):

Future Scenarios: Average Annual Impacts (2033-2053)

Values Rounded in \$M	Direct Benefits	Total Economic Benefits			
Scenarios In Order of Impact	 Direct Benefits *	 Jobs Supported	 Labor Income	 Gross State Product	 Tax Revenue
2: Increased Frequency	\$16.9M	180	\$7.6M	\$15.0M	\$2.9M
3: Expand to Newton, KS	\$14.8M	155	\$6.3M	\$12.8M	\$2.4M
1a: Stop in Thackerville	\$13.7M	150	\$6.5M	\$13.1M	\$2.5M
1: Existing Service	\$11.7M	130	\$5.9M	\$12.0M	\$2.2M

*Direct Benefits include Tourism and Visitor Benefits, Transportation Safety Benefits, Transportation Cost Savings, Highway User Effects, Highway Maintenance Savings and Energy Savings; Values have been normalized in 2024 Dollars