

Public and Private Coalition Save Railroad Line

A vital link of rail transportation for Southwest Kansas, the Oklahoma Panhandle and Eastern Colorado has been saved by efforts of a coalition of forces consisting from various government and private business sectors. The Cimarron Valley Railroad line, consisting of 254 miles of track servicing Southwest Kansas, the Oklahoma panhandle and Eastern Colorado was slated for abandonment and tracks sold for salvage. This was considered unacceptable for shipping interests in this rural area according to Bob and Dian Boaldin who have farming, ranching and business interests served by the railroad.

The Boaldins feel it is essential for the farming communities as well as to industrial companies and future businesses to have access to fast, safe freight travel via the railroad and not to let the CVR (Cimarron Valley Railroad) cease to operate. Boaldin set forth to put together the coalition to try to save the rail line.

After nearly three years of working on a plan to keep and upgrade the railroad, Mike Shannon, Economic Development Director for EPIC TOUCH, Dave and Linda Durbano, (the owners of the Cimarron Valley Railroad), State and Local governments, the Kansas Department of Transportation, and Morton County Economic Development, now have a plan so the railroad will undergo rehabilitation to allow for faster, safer freight travel.

WeKanDo (Western Kansas Development Organization), a coalition comprised of Morton, Stanton, Stevens and Grant Counties along with Deb Miller, Kansas Secretary of the Department of Transportation, the KDOT, and the owners of the Cimarron Valley Railroad in an unprecedented coordinated effort, have signed a contract that would allow the rehabilitation of the railroad line which some parts of the rail are over 100 years old.

The contract establishes financing for a five-year, 15 million dollar rehabilitation project. The State of Kansas is contributing \$5 million in grants and loans. WeKanDo has committed to \$5 million over five years. Cimarron Valley Railroad and its owners, Dave and Linda Durbano, will contribute the balance of revenue needed to complete the rehabilitation and have agreed to earmark 10 percent of its annual gross revenues for maintaining the tracks, and 15 percent of its net revenues for the rehabilitation project.

Gray, Haskell and Ford counties have been invited to join WeKanDo in their efforts, since the main spur of the Cimarron Valley Railroad lies between Satanta and Dodge City. EPIC TOUCH Economic Development Director Mike Shannon says "Leadership is essential to getting things done in economic development.

Shannon is also working with the State of Oklahoma to secure financing for rehabilitation of the rail from Elkhart Kansas to Boise City, Oklahoma as well as the State of Colorado DOT railroad division, for funding for rehabilitation of the rail from the Kansas/Colorado state line to Springfield, Colorado.

