



COLORADO
Department of Transportation
Division of Transit & Rail

4201 E. Arkansas Ave., Rm. 227
Denver, CO 80222

DATE: May 11, 2018
TO: Transit & Rail Advisory Committee
FROM: David Krutsinger, Director, Division of Transit & Rail
Sharon Terranova, Senior Transit & Rail Planner
SUBJECT: Update on the Southwest Chief & Front Range Passenger Rail Commission

Purpose

The purpose of this memo is to provide information about this independent Commission, both for TRAC, and for the CDOT Transportation Commission

Action

Informational only, no action requested.

Background

The Southwest Chief & Front Range Passenger Rail Commission was created by Senate Bill 17-153 in May 2017. It has eleven voting members (MPOs, Freight Railroads, RTD, Passenger Rail Advocacy, Local Leaders, and others) and two non-voting members (Amtrak & CDOT). It has two purposes: (1) to improve the existing Amtrak Southwest Chief service through track maintenance and other improvements, and (2) to facilitate the development of passenger rail along the greater I-25 corridor.

Details

The Vice Chair of the Southwest Chief & Front Range Passenger Rail Commission (SWC&FRPRC) last presented to the Transportation Commission at a workshop in November 2017. Following that presentation and dialogue, the SWC&FRPRC made a submittal to the State Legislature which included a work plan for further developing Front Range Rail, and asking the State Legislature for funding (\$8.7 M total, or about \$2.9 M/yr for each of the next three fiscal years) to carry out the development task (visioning, planning, environmental clearance). In this case, "visioning" is defined, not as thinking big, but in terms of reaching agreement about the definition of "Front Range Rail."

At the January meeting of the SWC&FRPRC, the Commission welcomed David Krutsinger as CDOT's new representative, following Mark Imhoff's retirement. The SWC&FRPRC also welcomed the interest and attendance of representatives from Cheyenne, WY who are also interested in a larger Front Range rail system. A non-voting member from Cheyenne, Dale Steenbergen, was voted onto the SWC&FRPRC. Three work items were discussed: (1) to carry out the support / communication following upon the December 2017 report to the State Legislature, (2) to develop a Scope of Work for the future "development" effort (visioning, planning, environmental clearance), and (3) to develop a duty description for a possible Executive Director or Project Manager of the "development" effort. In contrast to the CDOT DTR Director with multiple responsibilities (transit, rail, grants, bus operations) or CDOT Senior Transit & Rail Planner who has statewide responsibilities, the Director/Project Manager would devote 100% of his/her time to Front Range Rail and report to the SWC&FRPRC.

At the March meeting of the SWC&FRPRC, Jill Gaebler, representing Colorado Springs, was elected as the new Chair of the commission, effective for the May meeting. Jacob Riger, representing DRCOG, was retained as Vice Chair. Current Chair, Sal Pace, gave an update on efforts to support / communicate the need for the State Legislature to fund the SWC&FRPRC's development effort. Other members of the Commission also shared policy conversations that had occurred with MPO Transportation Advisory Committees and MPO Board Members. Becky Karasko, NFRMPO, noted the scope of work and initial Request for Proposals (RFP) had been drafted and that she would re-send it for further review and comment. David Krutsinger, CDOT, noted that he had collected a range of job / duty descriptions from multiple transportation positions from Project Manager to Transportation Director. He noted the differences relate to the technical and policy expertise, with technical (planning, environmental clearance) emphasized more for the Project Manager, and the policy emphasized more with the Transportation Director level of position. At this March Meeting, the SWC&FRPRC celebrated the announcement (a week earlier) that the Southwest Chief had won a third TIGER Grant. That brings the total of all sources to \$75 Million invested in this corridor, with \$41 Million of that from the three TIGER grants. The discussion continued with concerns about positive train control (PTC) (think air traffic control system, but for trains), and the new Consolidated Rail

Infrastructure and Safety Improvement (CRISI) grant program which might be an opportunity to address the requirements for PTC.

As of the writing of this memo in early May, it appears the SWC&FRPRC will be successful with approximately \$2.5 Million in funding from the State Legislature. This would enable the SWC&FRPRC to proceed, in earnest, with the development effort. If confirmed, the SWC&FRPRC will want to schedule a workshop with the CDOT Transportation Commission.

Also as of the writing of this memo, Colfax County NM and NMDOT have begun organizing meetings to secure the TIGER IX grant agreement. Environmental clearances are the main requirement before the grant agreement can be completed.

Next Steps

Await the final outcomes of the 2018 Colorado Legislature.

Meeting being scheduled for last two weeks of May to discuss and proceed with additional work.

Request a workshop with the CDOT Transportation Commission in July.

Attachment

Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvement (CRISI) grant program information