



DATE: November 8, 2019
TO: Transit and Rail Advisory Committee (TRAC)
FROM: Randy Grauberger, Project Director, SW Chief & Fr. Range Passenger Rail Commission
SUBJECT: Update on the SW Chief & Front Range Passenger Rail Commission

Purpose

The purpose of this memo is to provide updated information about the Commission's activities since the last memo dated September 13, 2019.

Action

Information only, no action requested

Background

The SW Chief & Front Range Passenger Rail Commission was created by SB 17-153 in 2017. There are 11 voting members of the Commission (MPOs, RTD, Class I Freight railroads, passenger rail advocates, local leaders) and three non-voting members (CDOT, Amtrak and Wyoming rep.). The Commission has two purposes: 1) facilitate the development of passenger rail along the greater I-25 corridor, 2) ensure existing Amtrak Southwest Chief service remains in SE Colorado.

Details

The Commission has held its most recent monthly meetings in Loveland (October) and Denver (November). The December meeting will be held at a location in the southern portion of the Front Range. The Commission's meeting dates in 2020 will be on the fourth Friday of each month.

Work related to successful 2018 TIGER and CRISI grant applications continues. A Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant of \$9,157,600 was awarded for the design, installation and testing of positive train control (PTC) wayside technology on 179 miles of track between Dodge City, KS and Las Animas, CO. Also, a TIGER 9 Grant of \$16,000,000 was awarded for track upgrades to the Southwest Chief's route between Hutchinson, KS and Las Animas in addition to improvements to New Mexico's route carrying New Mexico's Rail Runner commuter service.

The Commission made a presentation to the Legislature's Transportation Legislation Review Committee (TLRC) on September 16th.

Final results of the Metro Quest Survey conducted from mid-July to the end of September are now available. Results were very positive. With over 6,900 responses, 94+% of respondents support the development of Front Range Passenger Rail service between Pueblo and Fort Collins.

The Commission also engaged a consultant team to conduct a Front Range Passenger Rail Survey of "Likely 2020 Voters" along the thirteen Front Range Counties from October 4 – October 8th. The results of that survey were also very positive. When asked "Generally speaking, do you support or oppose the

future use of passenger rail service as a mode of transportation for residents and communities along the Front Range?"; **85 % "support" and 10% "oppose"**. Then, when asked "Would you support or oppose a sales tax increase to fund a Front Range Passenger Rail Service project that would have regularly scheduled train service to major population centers from Fort Collins down to Pueblo with an estimated cost of \$5 billion?"; **61 % support and 27% oppose**.

The Commission also submitted a 2019 CRISI Grant application to USDOT on October 18th for a Southwest Chief Thru-car Service to Colorado Springs Feasibility Study. Matching funds for this \$450,000 study were provided by the Commission, CDOT, Pueblo County, La Junta and ColoRail.

The Commission is finalizing its updated Charter, and is expected to approve it at the November 8th meeting. At that meeting, the Commission will continue to discuss possible Governance Options for potential legislation in the 2020 Legislative session as it relates to future Front Range Passenger Rail.

The Union Pacific Railroad has named Nathan Anderson as the replacement for Sara Cassidy who has resigned from the Commission.

Randy Grauberger represented the Commission at AASHTO's Annual Council on Rail Transportation meeting in Hartford, Connecticut on September 18 by participating on a "Emerging Passenger Rail Service Corridors" panel. Randy will also be making a presentation related to the Front Range Passenger Rail Project to a "Governor's Transportation Funding Discussion" at the Governor's Mansion on November 5th.

Segment Stakeholder Coalition meetings will be the initial phase of Stakeholder Engagement for the Service Development Plan and pre-NEPA work of the Front Range Rail Consultant Team. These meetings will seek input on the early phases of the Service Development Plan, Purpose and Need, etc. The schedule for those meetings is as follows:

- Fort Collins – November 12
- Denver – November 13
- Colorado Springs – November 14

In addition, individual stakeholder interviews (approximately 30 along the Front Range) have begun to gauge interest, issues, etc., related to Front Range Passenger Rail.