



COLORADO
Department of Transportation
Division of Transit & Rail
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DATE: July 12, 2019
TO: Transit Rail & Advisory Committee
FROM: David Krutsinger, Director - Division of Transit & Rail
Michael Timlin, Bus Operations Manager
SUBJECT: Bustang Planned Expansion 2019 - Estes Park/RMNP Pilot Test

Purpose

The purpose of this memo is to update the T & I Committee on 2019 Bustang expansion plans beyond the normal “line” frequency upgrades within budgetary guidelines and in response to increasing ridership demands.

Action

No action is necessary.

Background

There have been several attempts over the years to establish regional service to Estes Park without success:

- As early as 1998, the City of Fort Collins had a dedicated vehicle stationed in Estes Park, with an Estes Park resident operating the bus. The service’s target users were local seniors and disabled riders. An additional weekly trip to Loveland and Fort Collins targeted medical appointments and shopping. Eventually, the Estes Park driver was unable to continue safely driving the bus. In response, a Fort Collins paratransit operator drove to Estes Park for local weekday service, and the weekly trip down the mountain. The service was expensive for Fort Collins to operate, while demand from the Estes Park community was nearly non-existent
- The City of Loveland Transit (COLT) provided services from Estes Park into Loveland in early 2000 on a limited basis. High operating costs and low ridership resulted in service discontinuing.
- Special Transit (now called Via) in Boulder launched services from the Estes Valley to the Front Range on 3 separate occasions based on senior customer requests. Special Transit reached out to riders, and the Estes Park Senior Center frequently to promote the service without much success. Ridership and farebox revenues were too low to offset the high costs of running the buses.
- Currently, the VanGo Vanpool program has no vanpools that run up to Estes Park. With the recent, multi-year US34 Big Thompson Canyon flood reconstruction, a coordinated PR campaign launched to establish vanpools to Estes Park. Targeting the Front Range workforce, the new vanpools were expected to reduce the amount of traffic encountering the construction zone every day. The push for new vanpools proved ineffective due to the variable nature of shift work that is typical in Estes Park. Service sector jobs do not always lend themselves to a set schedule.

The common theme is lack of attention to customer amenities and nothing in the way of branding nor a coordinated marketing plan with the Town of Estes Park and local famous attractions such as the Stanley Hotel.

Details

One of Bus Operations goals for 2019 is to provide advice and operational level planning for additional Bustang service. The Estes Park /Rocky Mountain National Park handles over 4.6 million visitors (2018) annually. Tourism drives the \$200M area economy in a community of 6,000 full time residents. 83% of these visitors descend on Estes Park between May and October clogging the two main arterials into the area, U.S.36 (AADT 6,000-11,000) & U.S. 34 (AADT 6,200 - 50,000) with both being two lane winding mountainous roadways.

The local transit consists of a free fare local fixed route transit system but only has budget to operate seasonally (Spring & Summer) while the National Park Service contracts out a free “Hiker” shuttle to the Park’s popular hiking trails (Spring & Summer). Via operates an on call demand response senior service to/from the Front Range.

The Town of Estes Park has invested heavily in infrastructure to encourage visitors to use other modes but no intercity bus nor van pools serve the community. Only one private airport shuttle service operates to Denver International Airport,

Denver Union Station or the Denver Greyhound Station by reservation only (estesparkshuttle.co). The fare is \$45 one way and \$85 round trip.

With the transit investments made by the Town of Estes Park and the National Park Service, roads in Estes Park seasonally remain very congested with no affordable intercity transit available.

Operational Details

We believe there is an opportunity to successfully demonstrate weekend recreational service is viable to this area from Denver. The National Park Service has provided data that shows in 2018 the busiest days for the Park was between Late August and September therefore our target 6-week pilot service operating weekends beginning August 24 and ending September 29. Since there have been failed operating attempts it is imperative that an aggressive fare and marketing campaign is needed to foster future interest for following years. Normal fare would be \$25 round trip for walk up adult fare with 25% discounts for seniors over 65 and the disabled. Promotional fare during the 6-week pilot would be \$10 round trip with \$5 for children 11 years and under with no further discounts for senior or disabled.

After meeting with the Town of Estes Park they are committed to a pilot of Bustang later this summer and have pledged strong support to assist anyway they can. They have recently hired the firm retained by Red Rocks Entertainment. Estes Park Free Transit and the National Park Free Hiker Shuttle all depart at the Visitor Center.

With two daily round trips recommended, total operations and maintenance expenses are calculated to be \$2,970 per day or \$38,610 for the 13-day run. Maximum possible fares to collected \$13,260, net cost \$25,350 from Bustang cost center. Buses can be staged all day at the Visitor Center in Estes Park for free.

Contracts

Only a three way simple access agreement is needed with Ace Express indemnifying the Town of Estes Park CDOT will guarantee a minimum 40% Fare Box recovery which is equal to a 50% load factor on each bus.

Marketing Campaign

CDOT will use existing Marketing dollars for strong social media campaign along with collaborated committed marketing from the Town of Estes Park and extra Hiker bus service provided by the National Park Service.

Schedule

Service to the "PARKS"

2019 days operating: August 24, 25 & 31; September 1, 2, 7, 8, 14, 15, 21, 22, 28, 29.

Northbound (read down)

| | | Run # 201 | Run # 203 |
|---|-----|--------------|--------------|
| Denver Union Station - Bus Concourse Gate B3 | Lv | 07:00 AM | 08:00 AM |
| Sheridan & U.S. 36 Station | Lv | 07:30 AM | 08:30 AM |
| Estes Park - Visitor Center - 500 Big Thompson Ave. | Arr | 08:55 AM | 09:55 AM |

Southbound (read down)

| | | Run # 200 | Run # 202 |
|---|-----|--------------|--------------|
| Estes Park - Visitor Center - 500 Big Thompson Ave. | Lv | 03:00 PM | 05:00 PM |
| Sheridan & U.S. 36 Station | Lv | 04:25 PM | 06:25 PM |
| Denver Union Station - Bus Concourse Gate | Arr | 04:55 PM | 06:55 PM |

Service Goals

- Promote the service and attract ridership a minimum 68% load count per bus or 140 per weekend to provide a base for permanent operations in starting in Spring/Summer 2020.

Next Steps

- Begin Marketing campaign mid July
- Launch August 24.