

DATE: January 10, 2020  
TO: Transit and Rail Advisory Committee  
FROM: Randy Grauberger, Project Director, SW Chief & Fr. Range Passenger Rail Commission  
SUBJECT: Update on the SW Chief & Fr. Range Passenger Rail Commission

### Purpose

The purpose of this memo is to provide updated information about the Rail Commission's activities since the last memo dated November 8, 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, Class I Freight railroads, passenger rail advocates, local leaders) and three non-voting members (CDOT, Amtrak and Wyoming rep.). The Rail 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 Rail Commission held its most recent monthly meeting in Colorado Springs in December. Meeting dates in 2020 will occur on the 4<sup>th</sup> Friday of each month. The January meeting will be held in Denver and the February meeting in Berthoud.

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 also submitted a 2019 CRISI Grant application to USDOT on October 18<sup>th</sup> for a Southwest Chief Thru-car Service to Colorado Springs Feasibility Study. Matching funds for this \$450,000 study were provided by the Rail Commission, CDOT, Pueblo County, La Junta and ColoRail. Successful grant winners are expected to be announced by USDOT sometime in February.

The Rail Commission finalized its updated Charter at the December Meeting and is in the process of developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Rail Commission and CDOT.

The Rail Commission also continued its discussion of possible Governance Options for potential legislation in the 2020 or 2021 Legislative session as it relates to future Front Range Passenger Rail. In general, the primary differences between the final two options being considered are as follows: The majority of Commissioners support an option that gives the opportunity for entities to create a future rail authority where counties "may" be members. A minority of Commissioners appear to support a

more prescriptive option where counties “shall” be part of the authority. Following discussions, the Commission will not be seeking governance legislation during the 2020 Legislative Session.

Segment Stakeholder Coalition meetings were held as the initial phase of Stakeholder Engagement for the Service Development Plan and pre-NEPA work of the Front Range Consultant Team. These meetings occurred in:

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

Input from all three of those meeting led the Project Team to revise the Project Vision to read as follows:

***Developing passenger rail service for communities along the I-25 Corridor is a critical component of Colorado’s future. Front Range Passenger Rail (FRPR) will provide a safe, efficient, and reliable transportation option for travel between major population centers along the Front Range and create a backbone for expanding rail and transit options in the state.***

An initial meeting of the full Corridor Stakeholder Coalition took place in Denver on December 12<sup>th</sup>. That meeting included representation from all the entities that participated in the earlier three Segment Coalition meetings. The Corridor Coalition members concurred in the above revised Project Vision.

The next round of Segment Stakeholder Coalition meetings has been scheduled for January 21 – 23 and will be held in Loveland, Denver and Pueblo.

In addition, individual stakeholder interviews (approximately 30 along the Front Range) continue to take place gauging interest and issues related to Front Ranger Passenger Rail.

A second meeting with the three federal partners on this project; FRA, FTA and FHWA; has been scheduled for January 13<sup>th</sup>.

The Rail Commission will need additional funding prior to the end of State Fiscal Year 2021 (June 30, 2021). The \$2.5 million the Rail Commission received in SB 1 in 2018 was for 2 years of staffing for the Project Director and Rail Commission Liaison and initial funding for the Service Development Plan and Pre-NEPA work, as well as funding for match for Commission related federal grants for infrastructure improvements for Amtrak’s Southwest Chief and related projects.