



DATE: July 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 May 8th, 2020.

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 virtually on June 26th. It is expected that the next 2 meetings will be held on July 24 and August 28 and will also be held remotely.

A 2018 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. Sub agreements with the funding agencies have been finalized and pre-award authority for BNSF to begin designing the system was provided on 2/7/2020. Three weeks ago, scope outlines were sent to BNSF, KDOT, CDOT Region 2, and received scope outline from SWC & FRPRC. The CRISI grant notice to proceed is expected sometime in August.

Also, the TIGER 9 Grant of \$16,000,000 that 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 moves ahead. NMDOT received approval of SHPO consultation and most Tribal Consultation. Cat Ex is finalized. Working on both FRA Agreement and funding partner sub-agreements. Comments are back from Colfax County NM. FRA notified all parties verbally that notice to proceed is expected to be officially issued for the TIGER grant around mid-July.

The Commission was notified on February 27th that it had been awarded a 2019 CRISI grant for a Southwest Chief Thru-car Service to Colorado Springs Feasibility Study. This \$450,000 Study will look at the feasibility of extending the existing Southwest Chief service from La Junta to Pueblo and from Pueblo to Colorado Springs. Matching funds for this study were provided by the Rail Commission, CDOT, Pueblo

County, La Junta and ColoRail. FRA has provided comments on the Draft Scope of Work for the Feasibility Study. Rail Commission staff are revising the Scope of Work in anticipation of the Grant being obligated. After Grant obligation, a Request for Proposals will be developed and issued related to this work later this summer.

Rail Commission staff prepared the Rail Commission's 2020 CRISI Grant Application for Preliminary Service Development Plan and Rail Simulation Modeling. The application was submitted on June 19th with \$137,000 in match commitments from Pueblo County (\$100K) Rail Commission (\$25K), City of Trinidad \$10K) and ColoRail (\$2K). Total project (local match and CRISI Grant) would be \$685,000. It is expected that the announcement of awards will be prior to the 2020 November elections.

A Memorandum of Understanding was executed between the Rail Commission and CDOT related to CDOT commitment of additional staff resources to assist the Rail Commission's consultant team in completing the current phase of planning the Front Range Passenger Rail Project. The MOU also addressed CDOT's commitment to assist the Rail Commission in obtaining future funding for Front Range Passenger Rail related activities.

Meetings were held with the following resource agencies to introduce them to the Front Range Passenger Rail Project: Air Quality, Cultural Resources, Watersheds/Wetlands, and Wildlife. A fourth meeting with FRA, FTA and FHWA about the Front Rail Project will also be held in the next two months.

The Rail Commission staff coordinated with the Governor's staff in getting SW Chief and Front Range Passenger Rail Commission re-appointments for Jim Souby and Rick Klein. BNSF's representative Pete Rickershauser is retiring and DJ Mitchell, BNSF's Vice President of Passenger Rail Operations, has been appointed by Governor Polis to replace Pete on the Rail Commission.

The Front Range Rail Project is moving into Level two of the analysis of alignment alternatives where alternatives will be compared against each other utilizing agreed upon criteria. Passenger Rail ridership modeling continues as well for the various alignments. The existing BNSF freight rail corridor from Denver to Fort Collins and the Joint Line (both BNSF and UP) rail freight corridors from Denver to Pueblo remain as potential alignments for future Front Range Passenger Rail. Additionally, the right of way of the I-25 corridor is still being considered outside of the Denver Metro area.

The Front Range Rail project team also initiated individual meetings with Front Range communities related to localized issues that may occur with the implementation of Front Range Passenger Rail (station locations, access to other transit services, train speeds, quiet zones, preference to the alignment being in the I-25 right of way or along freight rail rights of way within the community, etc.) Meetings to date have been held with Longmont, Loveland, Berthoud, Fort Collins and Boulder. Additional meetings will be held with cities in the central and south segments of the 180-mile corridor between Fort Collins and Pueblo over the course of the summer.

On June 29th, the Rail Commission initiated an online Public Meeting, which will be active through the month of July and Front Range residents will be able to weigh in on important questions such as how they might use the rail service and whether they would want trains to go faster or have more stops. The website also has useful information on the design options for the rail service, such as potential routes. The site can be accessed at: frontrangepassengerrailmeeting.com