

Southwest Chief and Front Range Passenger Rail Commission Draft Meeting Minutes

Friday, March 26th, 2021
9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
Meeting held remotely via Zoom

COMMISSION MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Member Name	Member Role	Organization	Attendance
Jill Gaebler	Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments	City of Colorado Springs	Yes
Chris Wiseman	Pueblo Area Council of Governments	Pueblo County	Yes
Becky Karasko	North Front Range Metropolitan Planning Organization	NFRMPO	Yes
Rick Klein	Resident of Huerfano, Las Animas, Otero, or Pueblo Counties	City of La Junta	Yes
Sal Pace – Vice Chair	Passenger Rail Advocate	Resident of Colorado Springs	Yes
DJ Mitchell	Class 1 Railroad Representative	BNSF Railway	Yes
Nathan Anderson	Class 1 Railroad Representative	Union Pacific	No
Phil Rico	South Central Council of Governments	Mayor of Trinidad	Yes
Jacob Riger	Denver Regional Council of Governments	DRCOG	Yes
Jim Souby – Chair	Passenger Rail Advocate	ColoRail	Yes
Bill Van Meter	Regional Transportation District	RTD	Yes
Vacant	Colorado Department of Transportation	CDOT	
Rob Eaton*	Amtrak	Amtrak	Yes
Dale Steenbergen*	Cheyenne, Wyoming	Chamber of Commerce	Yes

*Non-Voting Members

Others: Spencer Dodge (SWC & FRPRC), David Singer (CDOT), Geoff Guthrie (CDOT), Chris Enright (CDOT), Brian Hartman (CDOT), Bill Craven (NMDOT), Lisa Sakata (ICF), Mark Langley (AECOM), Kari Linker (Sen. Hickenlooper), Dan Bilka (ColoRail), Mac Callison (City of Aurora), Erin Bergquist (TRC), Dominic Spaethling (HNTB), Katie Goodwin (TRC), Carla Perez (HDR), Jeff Dawson (CDOT), Randy Grauberger (Quandel Consultants), Karen Hedlund, Alan Eckman (AECOM), Myron Hora (WSP), Kristin Kenyon (FTA), Scott Bressler (AECOM), Tom Mason (Cheyenne MPO), Chelsea Gaylord (City of Colorado Springs), Andy Goetz (University of Denver), John Liosatos (PPACG), Tim Hoover (CDOT), Terry Hart, Doug Rex (DRCOG), Andy Karsian (CDOT), Rebecca Rathburn (CDOT), Rebecca White (CDOT), Jamie Grim (CDOT), Lisa Streisfeld (CDOT), Michael Meyer (Quandel Consultant),

A. Call to Order and Introductions – Jim Souby

Jim Souby called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m. and proceeded with a roll call of the rail commissioners.

B. Review/Approval of February 26th Draft Commission Meeting Minutes – Jim Souby

Jim Souby asked if there were any edits or changes needed to the minutes, there were none. Phil Rico made a motion to approve the minutes, DJ Mitchell seconded that motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

C. Public Comment Period – Public

Jill Gaebler informed the rail commission that this meeting would be her last as a Colorado Springs City Councilwoman. The PPACG board did vote to approve Jill as their rail commission appointee for the next three years.

D. Staff Report – Spencer Dodge/David Singer

Spencer Dodge provided a brief overview of his activities from the last month. Among those included were the Corridor Coalition preparation and execution, Public Involvement presentations (ColoRail Board, Aurora Chamber of Commerce, Metro Mayor's Caucus, PPACG TAC, and the Cheyenne MPO Policy Committee), FRA coordination meetings, RTD coordination meetings, Alternatives Analysis distribution, and other activities.

David Singer also provided an update on staff activities related to FRPR. The bulk of the CDOT staff work was focused on the Corridor Coalition meeting, grant execution, and further FRA coordination. CDOT staff hours are low during this month in anticipation of more effort needed in the coming months.

E. Southwest Chief

Tiger IX Grant – Bill Craven

Bill Craven provided an update on the TIGER IX grant. The Project Management Plan has been approved by FRA. FRA approving several invoices can now move forward with payments being initiated soon. There are three outstanding items. One, the agreement between Colfax County and CDOT has yet to be executed. Two, final design needs to be finalized and approved as a project requirement. Finally, the Buy America Waiver for the e-clips is still outstanding. DJ Mitchell informed the rail commission that BNSF Railway is still waiting on FRA to respond on that Buy America Waiver. Brian Hartman discussed the agreement with Colfax County. Early in the process there was some miscommunication internally at CDOT and those issues are being resolved.

2018 PTC CRISI Grant – Brian Hartman

Brian Hartman gave an update on the 2018 PTC CRISI Grant. On March 1st, Notice to Proceed was given for the rest of the project. Design has been underway and a 90% design review meeting was held on March 10th. That 90% design is expected to be given to FRA in the coming week. Indications suggest construction beginning in mid-April in La Junta and going east, and construction beginning in May in Dodge City and working west. Current completion date for construction is expected in early November.

2019 CRISI Grant: Thru-Car Alternatives Analysis Update – Spencer Dodge

Spencer Dodge gave an update on the 2019 CRISI Grant for the Thru-Car Alternatives Analysis. Over the last month, Spencer and David Singer have been working with the AECOM team to bring them on board. Spencer also let Pueblo County, La Junta, and ColoRail know that he will be reaching out to them regarding their matching funds moved into the project fund center.

Jim Souby asked Chris Wiseman about Pueblo's station area study. Chris has sat down with technical staff and they are narrowing down their locations. Their plan is to create an option for through car service to Colorado Springs. They expect that Amtrak will not only want to go to Pueblo, but also Colorado Springs. The design for the station will include a through car design. Sal asked about Pueblo County's two station areas that they are looking at. The majority of Puebloans would like to see that station at the historic Union Depot, Pueblo officials are focused on this. The second location is the "Pueblo Civic Center". This is less preferred, but they'd like to keep another option on the table in the event that the Pueblo Union Depot.

F. Front Range Passenger Rail

2020 CRISI Grant: FRPR SDP and Rail Simulation Modeling Update – Spencer Dodge

Spencer Dodge provided an update on the 2020 CRISI Grant. FRA is still reviewing the scope of work provided to them. Staff are waiting for a response from them. Additionally, Trinidad, Pueblo County, and ColoRail will be contacted soon regarding their matching funds. Jim Souby asked DJ Mitchell about this project's impacts on BNSF Railway. DJ responded that it depends on how the study proceeds. If it goes forward similar to other projects, it will be very valuable to all involved. This study should give the project a sense of how much track will be needed. If the study is done with sufficient detail, the project will have a good sense of how to move forward. Phil Rico asked about the dollar amount for the 2020 CRISI Grant, that amount was \$10,000. Mayor Rico also asked about the Monument Hill tunnel and how long that would be. Chris Enright let the group know that the tunnel would be about 6,000' so that the rail does not need to go all the way around Palmer Lake.

CDOT MOU Adoption – Jim Souby

Jim informed the rail commission that commissioner comments were incorporated and that CDOT has committed to supporting the rail commission in their broader goals, not just the CRISI Grants. The MOU is largely focused on staff support for those grants, but also addresses additional areas. Wording was changed to reflect this, CDOT was graciously accommodating. Jim asked if the rail commission was ready to adopt the MOU. Spencer discussed the changed language included. David Singer discussed this MOU addressing the known areas of work effort, as well as addressing this partnership again in the future at the end of the CRISI Grants. Jill Gaebler let the rail commission know that she is comfortable with the revised MOU and made a motion to accept the MOU. Jacob Riger seconded that motion and thanked those involved for their work. Jim furthered that this document is important to address where the project is at the moment and can be revisited in the future. The MOU was adopted with unanimous support from the rail commissioners.

Technology Conversation – Jim Souby

Jim Souby began this conversation by commenting on views that passenger rail is an outdated technology. Rail technology has advanced and is still developing cutting edge innovations. Moving forward, Jim wants to learn how passenger rail can continue to develop with an eye on cleaner technology. Alstom has a hydrogen fueled light rail vehicles that is running commercially in Germany, Alstom has stated at ColoRail meetings that they are looking forward to running this kind of technology in heavier rail lines. Jim anticipates that questions around technology will be asked as this project advances and moves into the legislature. Jim also mentioned that he and DJ Mitchell had discussed this topic and BNSF Railway is also advancing clean technology for locomotives. DJ continued that BNSF has been working to integrate PTC into train control systems and operate more safely. DJ discussed the development in mode of power technology. BNSF Railway is working to operate local/switch engines that operate within yards and the industries surrounding yards, engines that can go a couple hundred miles, and commuter engines that are powered by batteries. BNSF is not quite comfortable with hydrogen power because of the expenses, the storage needs, and the volatility of the material. At an appropriate time, BNSF is happy to bring their technical staff to address their advancing battery technology. Chicago Metra is cooperating with BNSF and others to purchase several battery-powered commuter rail engines. DJ

stated that they are more than happy to discuss these technologies with staff as the project moves forward. Jim suggested that this kind of discussion would be appropriate soon.

Corridor Coalition Meeting Recap – Spencer Dodge/David Singer

Spencer and David provided a brief recap from the Corridor Coalition meeting that occurred this week. The participants were very active with robust conversation. A lot of what was discussed had been heard throughout the outreach efforts over the last two years. The project team does have a good idea now of who and what should be discussed. David continued by mentioning that there is a challenge in doing these meetings remotely. In the past, conversations had been held regionally. This meeting was intended to revisit the project as a whole and to look at the long term vision, not just the technical aspects. There were 60 participants in the meeting that lasted over an hour. The project team worked to solicit the first steps that community members saw as imminent. Acknowledgment was given to Sarah Grossi, Tim Hoover, Jeff Dawson and Jamie Grim for their assistance in putting this coalition meeting together.

Jill Gaebler attended and was impressed with the diverse range of questions and comments from folks all along the corridor. Jill stated that it was the best coalition meeting FRPR has held to date. Jill gathered a sense from participants that there is real belief in this project and community members are beginning to view this as a reality. Rick Klein shared the La Junta paper that had the meeting on their front page. Jacob Riger was impressed with the specificity of the questions and discussion. Jim asked about follow up and what David and Spencer would be providing. Meeting minutes will be distributed and staff are available for follow-up conversations.

Purpose and Need: Goals – Jim Souby

Jim Souby is interested in the public message that the rail commission wants to carry forward. A ballot initiative is likely in the future, and commissioners should be on the same page with a clear, powerful argument. Jim had a good conversation with CDOT environmental staff, including Lisa Streisfeld, on the topic of Purpose and Need within NEPA. Jim would like to discuss what the people want, what the stakeholders want, and how the group messages that. Jim continued and discussed how the internal group understands this concept, but he's not sure if that has been messaged publicly. Lisa is working on a detailed handout on the purpose and need question. This document can be tailored to certain communities depending on the information that is to be conveyed.

Phil Rico asked about having a couple of work sessions on this item and inviting various stakeholders to get targeted information. DJ Mitchell commented on his prior message on risks and the timing of going to the public with a concept that doesn't have enough detail to convince the public. DJ also stated that costs often change and there is a risk in messaging information that doesn't end up being true. The rail commission has several policies that the state has set forth, such as air quality goals. Questions should be answered on the ability for FRPR to address these policy goals. DJ's message is for the group to determine what it is they want to accomplish, why they want to accomplish, and if they can accomplish it. Phil Rico reiterated that it's very important to target various entities as the needs and wants of communities in the north and the south may be different.

G. Other Items

Amtrak Update – Rob Eaton

Rob Eaton informed the rail commission that they did receive \$1.7b in the COVID relief package. As a result, service on long-distance trains will be restored to every day service. The Southwest Chief will be reinstated the week of May 31st and the California Zephyr will begin the week of May 24th. Additionally, Amtrak has recalled all of their employees. The Amtrak Board recently met to review the FY22 Grant Request as well as their 5-year reauthorization plan. That document will be finalized and Amtrak is waiting for President Biden to release his budget and the Amtrak will follow up with the 5-year reauthorization request, their proposed policies for grant programs, and FY22 grant request. Senator

Hickenlooper has joined the Senate Commerce committee and that's where Amtrak's proposed policies will be vetted. Rob also added that their planning department is ready to interface with the Colorado team on the upcoming planning studies.

State Legislative/Policy Update – Andy Karsian and Sal Pace

Andy Karsian provided a brief update on the current state legislative session. There is an ongoing conversation around a transportation funding package and a variety of other conversations around various transportation issues. The state long bill will be introduced on April 5th, which limits conversations around big policy conversations.

Sal Pace provided the rail commission with a slide deck that provides a high-level overview of the proposed transportation funding bill. FRPR is included in that package. The summary of that draft references FRPR four times as an indication of the reality of possibly getting funds for FRPR. There is no amount spelled out for FRPR specifically. Senator Garcia has submitted a bill title, but there is nothing imminent. Sal has been working with Senator Garcia on a draft bill to be shared for discussion. The concept would be to create a special district that can go to the voters to spend and receive money. If a bill is introduced, the rail commissioners' comments from last year's discussion will be included.

H. Confirm Next/Future Meetings

The next Rail Commission meeting will be April 23rd, 2021.

I. Adjourn

Jim Souby adjourned the meeting at 11:30 am.