

# Southwest Chief and Front Range Passenger Rail Commission

## Draft Meeting Minutes

Friday, March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020  
 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 – Chair     | Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments                      | City of Colorado Springs | Yes        |
| Terry Hart               | 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                 | Passenger Rail Advocate                                     | Resident of Pueblo       | Yes        |
| Pete Rickershauser       | Class 1 Railroad Representative                             | BNSF Railway             | Yes        |
| Nathan Anderson          | Class 1 Railroad Representative                             | Union Pacific            | Yes        |
| Phil Rico                | South Central Council of Governments                        | Mayor of Trinidad        | Yes        |
| Jacob Riger – Vice Chair | Denver Regional Council of Governments                      | DRCOG                    | Yes        |
| Jim Souby                | Passenger Rail Advocate                                     | ColoRail                 | Yes        |
| Bill Van Meter           | Regional Transportation District                            | RTD                      | Yes        |
| David Krutsinger*        | Colorado Department of Transportation                       | CDOT                     | Yes        |
| Ray Lang*                | Amtrak  | Amtrak                   | Yes        |
| Dale Steenbergen*        | Cheyenne, Wyoming   | Chamber of Commerce      |            |

\*Non-Voting Members

Others: Randy Graubeger (SWC & FRPRC), Spencer Dodge (SWC & FRPRC), Mandy Whorton (Peak Consulting), Carla Perez (HDR), Sophie Shulman (CDOT), Brian Hartman (CDOT), Bill Craven (NMDOT), Dan Kline (WYDOT), Debbie Wagner (City of Trinidad), Jep Seman (BNSF), Rob Colosimo (HNTB), Wally Weart (Public), Jeff Dawson (CDOT), David Singer (CDOT), John Liosatos (PPACG), Tim Hoover (CDOT), Tom Mason (Cheyenne MPO), John Tryba (Triunity), Kathryn Wenger (PPACG), Lisa Streisfeld (CDOT), Michael Meyer (Quandel Consulting), Joe Pimentel (LiUNA), Jose Soto (LiUNA), Greg Hall (I-70 Corridor Coalition)

## **A. Call to Order and Introductions – Jill Gaebler**

Jill Gaebler called the meeting to order at 9:31am and began to address all those on the phone (Zoom meeting). Jill asked those on the call to self-introduce.

## **B. Review/Approval of January 24<sup>th</sup> Draft Meeting Minutes – Jill Gaebler**

Jill asked if there were any questions or concerns regarding the draft February 28th Commission Meeting Minutes. There were no comments or questions. Terry Hart made a motion to approve the minutes, Phil Rico seconded that motion, and the Commission unanimously approved the minutes.

## **C. Public Comment Period – Public**

No public comments.

## **D. Project Director's Report – Randy Grauberger**

Randy Grauberger reviewed his Project Director's Report. Spencer Dodge worked with Commissioners to consolidate comments on draft legislation from Senate President Leroy Garcia, these were presented to the Senate President's office prior to the legislature shutting down due to the COVID -19 pandemic. The most recent update on legislation is that most likely nothing will be introduced this session.

On March 9<sup>th</sup>, the Commission convened a meeting with NMDOT, KDOT, BNSF, Amtrak, and the Rail Commission to discuss a long range plan for the Southwest Chief. Following that meeting, the group participated in a tour of the Transportation Technology Center (TTCI) and were able to view the new generation of Acela train equipment that is at TTCI for testing.

Commission staff and consultants also met with WSP staff who are carrying out the Pueblo Station Area Plan.

Randy and Spencer held a call with FRA representatives to discuss the upcoming Thru-Car Feasibility Study CRISI Grant.

Commission staff also participated on a call with the States for Passenger Rail Coalition, highlights of that call included information showing that long distance trains were carrying more passengers than the rest of Amtrak's NE Corridor and state supported services at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis. Randy also provided a financial report. \$2.3m of the original \$2.5m appropriation has been spent or committed to date. The HDR consultant team has used around 30% of their contract (\$1.5 million) and are expecting to exhaust funds late Fall 2020 if the projected rate of spending continues.

Jim Souby asked when the Joint Budget Committee is meeting to discuss the upcoming state budget. Sal Pace responded that the JBC was supposed to meet on April 20<sup>th</sup>, and that the Legislature is supposed to reconvene in the next week. It is anticipated that legislators will gavel in and gavel out and extend the shutdown. The State Legislature is awaiting a recommendation from the State Supreme Court on guidance for the session. Given the overall economic impacts of the COVID 19 crisis, the state budget is expected to be cut significantly.

Phil Rico asked, based on the budget projections and the Commission's current funding, what the plan is in the event that the Commission runs out of money and is unable to receive more. Sal Pace responded that even in the "worst case" scenario CDOT will still be receiving their budget and part of that is dedicated to Transit and Rail. Going to CDOT for some funding from "cash in the cushions" is a possible scenario. Carla Perez also added that the legislature may remain a possibility for funding as there will be many moving parts over the next few weeks.

David Krutsinger also discussed CDOT's action in relation to funding. David discussed CDOT working through the issuance of SB 267 funds which is an area that CDOT could work with the four area MPOs and RTD and look at the projects to find money that could possibly be used for the Commission.

Phil Rico mentioned to Randy and Spencer that they should continue to keep future funding at the forefront of the Commission's actions and not wait until the very last second before the Commission's budget "goes dark". Sal also followed and suggested that it is unlikely the Commission "goes dark" and there are still opportunities to look elsewhere, local municipalities for examples. Sal also discussed a potential federal infrastructure bill. Sal believes there is not a situation where the Commission's work stops.

## **E. Southwest Chief**

### *TIGER IX*

Bill Craven (NMDOT) discussed the TIGER IX grant. There was a call with Colfax County, Amtrak, KDOT, NMDOT, FRA, and BNSF on Tuesday, March 24th. FRA is suggesting that they do not go for pre-award authority and go straight to the final agreement executed. They've stated that the sub-agreements do not need to be executed up front, which differs from the past. Sub-agreements do need to be completed. Colfax County has yet to receive a draft agreement from CDOT and will need that to move ahead.

### *2018 CRISI Grant*

David Krutsinger and CDOT are still working through the contracting phase of the CRISI grant. BNSF and CDOT have discussed pre-award authority actions and next steps. CDOT is clarifying state law and it appears they will need to do a quick contract with BNSF in order for the pre-award authority to be effective. State money cannot be spent without a matching amount and a contract. That contract process is underway. Budget and other elements will need to be compiled and sent out in mid-late April. The end of June or beginning of July is the anticipated date of award from FRA. David Krutsinger stated that CDOT had sent a draft prior to the first of the year; he will resend.

### *2019 CRISI Grant*

Randy Grauberger and Spencer Dodge have had a few discussions to set up a kick-off meeting call. Karla Maffett is in charge of this phase of the project for FRA. Karla is looking at the second week of April for the kick-off meeting to discuss the elements required. Lyle Leitelt brought up a concept for the Commission to consider studying, that being two round trips per day instead of one. David Krutsinger provided thoughts and Randy is looking forward to hearing from other Commissioners.

Additionally, the idea was brought to Randy's attention to provide HDR with the contract for the Thru-Car Feasibility study. Randy would prefer to issue a full RFP. Pete Rickershauser pointed out two things: First, the capacity study that BNSF carried out in 2016 would need to be re-done once the new schedule is issued and confirmed. The infrastructure needed will be driven by Amtrak, BNSF and the Commission and what the proposed schedule looks like. BNSF and UP would both need to be involved because both railroads own tracks that may be involved. Secondly, the proposed "2-round trips per day" service would tend to duplicate what Amtrak is already carrying out by way of its Thru-way Bus Service.

Bill Craven asked if a second thru-car train to Pueblo/Colorado Springs would leave La Junta following the eastbound train coming from Los Angeles. Yes. Randy asked if the Commission would prefer to continue looking at the original plan or have the consultant analyze the proposed alternative from FRA. David Krutsinger advised the proposed operation could have the passenger cars La Junta-Pueblo-Colorado Springs stay with the locomotive used for this service and not be taken from or added to the Chicago-Los Angeles Southwest Chief train. Rick Klein supports looking at two round trip trains. This

conversation will be finalized in the Scope of Work that will go into the RFP. There will be many opportunities to revisit this over the next several weeks.

### *Amtrak Update*

Ray Lang provided the Commission with an Amtrak update. Ridership has declined 93-94% from last year at the same time. System wide, everything is down, there is considerable available capacity on the trains right now. Amtrak has been working aggressively with Congress to secure federal support. Management salaries have been cut 25%. All of this is intended to make up for lost revenue from loss of passenger loads due to the Coronavirus. Amtrak is attempting to move through this time with very limited layoffs and furloughs. Amtrak has cut their service dramatically right now; some services have been shut down completely. States have led these service cutbacks, particularly those that have "Stay at Home" orders. Congress has acted directly and have ensured that the Amtrak system stays up and running.

### *March 9<sup>th</sup> Southwest Chief Long Range Plan Meeting Recap*

Randy provided a few highlights from the March 9<sup>th</sup> meeting. Amtrak provided numbers on the performance of the Southwest Chief. The Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexican stations are showing higher ridership growth numbers and are performing well. Amtrak also discussed the improving On-Time Performance due to TIGER and CRISI grants. It is anticipated that the average speeds will be continuing to increase as more TIGER and CRISI grant projects are completed. Amtrak gave an update on equipment. Over the next five years Amtrak is intending on replacing all of their locomotives.

### *2020 BUILD Grant*

At the conclusion of the March 9<sup>th</sup> meeting, a good amount of time was spent on whether a 2020 BUILD Grant application should be submitted in the upcoming cycle. The idea was to "re-submit" the application submitted during the summer of 2019, with minor updates. Randy was charged with contacting the City of Trinidad to determine if they would like to sponsor that application. The City of Trinidad accepted. A debriefing from the 2019 BUILD Grant application is being sought. Finally, the group discussed matching funds from partners in the application. The Commission committed \$100,000 in matching funds to the 2019 BUILD Grant application. Randy proposed a question for Commissioners: does the Commission want to commit another \$100,000 or another amount?

Jim Souby asked if there is an expectation for the May 18<sup>th</sup> application due date would be pushed back due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Randy received a response from USDOT that it will not be moved at the moment. Sal stated that the May 18<sup>th</sup> deadline would decrease the amount of applicants. However, the issue is the Commission's cash in hand and if that is enough to cover a \$100,000 match. Sal suggested an offline conversation to discuss funding. Randy responded that Amtrak, BNSF, KDOT, NMDOT, and others are still committed to their original match. David Krutsinger will check with CDOT. Sal asked if the Commission contributed an amount showing commitment but something lower than \$100,000 where that number would fall. The Commission is the only entity in the three state area that exists in this way. It is expected that anything the Commission can commit would be appreciated. Pete Rickershauser asked, if the application was successful, when that check would need to be written. David Krutsinger responded that, assuming the same environmental process from previous awards is still needed, the Commission would likely not need to secure the funds until FY22 for CDOT/Commission, more specifically a July-September 2021 timeframe. Sal believes that an amount should be offered that shows the Commission's commitment but does not exhaust all funds, something in the \$10,000-\$15,000 range. Sal continued and suggested that legislators would be very unlikely to fund new projects while cutting everything else; Sal advised the Commission to not wait for the JBC or Legislature to provide more funding. Sophie Shulman also reiterated that CDOT and other state budgets will be limited based on forecasts.

Rick Klein made a motion for the Commission to provide \$20,000 in matching funds for the 2020 BUILD Grant. Jim Souby seconded the motion. Phil Rico asked if that \$20,000 would come from the remaining Commission's funds, it will. The motion passed unanimously.

Randy Grauberger asked David Krutsinger if the CDOT \$1,000,000 match pledged for the 2019 BUILD Grant would still be feasible for 2020. There has been no confirmation from CDOT at this time.

## **F. Front Range Passenger Rail**

### *Level 1 and 2 Evaluation Process*

Mandy Whorton, Peak Consulting, presented information on Level 1 Analysis to the Commission. Before beginning, Randy Grauberger discussed Segment Stakeholder Coalition meetings. Save the dates have been distributed for the last week of April; the North Segment will meet April 28<sup>th</sup>, the Central Segment will meet April 29<sup>th</sup>, and the South Segment will meet April 30<sup>th</sup>. The Coalition meetings will be held remotely via Zoom.

Mandy began by refreshing Commissioners with the overall evaluation process, using a graphic showing each of the steps. Each of the previously studied different alternatives were revisited. These include the “Best Bus” alternative, existing freight corridors, and highway corridors. All of the alternatives considered enter Denver. Level 1 Evaluations are intended to address two considerations: can the alternative meet the Vision, and is the alternative feasible to build?

Mandy followed by reviewing the evaluation categories. Two initial categories that are being evaluated in Level 1 are: Operational Characteristics and Community and Environmental Impacts. Mandy requested input from Commissioners on the level of disruption on communities. Jim Souby suggested that many local communities are concerned about disruption from construction and grade crossings. At this level, the team is just considering fatal flaws. The next stage of analysis will find it easier to quantify disruptions.

Additional evaluation categories include Financial and Economic Factors and Feasibility and Implementation. Financial and Economic Factors are unlikely to be a distinguishing feature during Level 1 Evaluations but will be more impactful in Level 2. Feasibility and Implementation are also less impactful during Level 1 Evaluations but will be easier to evaluate in Level 2. Pete Rickershauser stated that the team should be looking at blends of corridors - a combination of available corridors using the best option of existing rail corridors and available rights of way using I-25; corridors should not be viewed as being mutually exclusive.

Phil Rico asked if the team was only evaluating the area north of Denver or if they’re evaluating the entire Front Range corridor. Mandy responded that the entire 180-mile corridor from Pueblo to Fort Collins is being evaluated. The highway and rail alignments are very similar south of Castle Rock, north of there is where the bigger differences are. Sal Pace reminded the group that a Southwest Chief re-route is being considered in the future and that should be considered in the study. Mandy responded that connecting with future and current transit lines is where that consideration is incorporated. Randy Grauberger also discussed the Pueblo Station Area Plan study and how that is also being considered to accommodate future re-route of the Southwest Chief; and also how the two Consultant Teams; WSP for the Pueblo Station Area Plan, and; HDR for Front Range Passenger Rail, are coordinating their efforts.

Phil Rico recommended that the team include in future discussions as to what the team is doing for the re-route of the Southwest Chief south of Pueblo; and the area south of Pueblo should be included in the evaluations. Pete Rickershauser pointed out, likewise, that options north to Cheyenne be considered as well, as Cheyenne/Wyoming interests are included formally on the Commission.

### *Executive Oversight Committee*

At the February Commission, the prospect of an Executive Oversight Committee was introduced. At that meeting, it was indicated that a representative of the Transportation Commission would be included. At the recommendation of CDOT leadership, that representative was removed. Carla Perez, HDR Inc.,

presented an outline on the EOC. This group is important for coordination among the groups involved with the project. Carla outlined the memo that discusses the EOC, the EOC's role, its members, and the purpose. One change from the prior introduction of this group is the removal of the representative from the Transportation Commission and the inclusion of the Director of Transportation Development at CDOT. In the schedule, three specific meetings have been included. The first, within the next month or so, is intended to be a kickoff meeting.

Jim Souby commented that the focus of this document seems to be on the Front Range Passenger Rail project, but the content of the memo indicates that the Southwest Chief will be included. Jim suggests that the chair of the Southwest Chief sub-committee should be included for coordination. Pete Rickershauser agreed. Terry Hart agreed and continued that these two efforts need to be coordinating and that it is critical for FRPR to indicate how it will tie into the Southwest Chief and the area south of Pueblo. Pete Rickershauser stated that the group shouldn't lull themselves into believing FRPR will end in Pueblo or end in Fort Collins and the connectivity north and south beyond those two points should be considered. Rick Klein supports modifying the EOC and adding the Southwest Chief sub-committee Chairperson. Randy indicated that the EOC document would be updated with the Division of Transportation Development and the Southwest Chief sub-committee. Randy continued by discussing the reaction of FRA and USDOT to a southern terminus for Front Range Passenger Rail south of Pueblo: "The FRA will not accept adding in Walsenburg and Trinidad to the EIS." The federal agencies are not comfortable with the Front Range Passenger Rail project looking south of Pueblo. Jim Souby responded that there is no declaration that the first phase of FRPR will be south of Pueblo or north of Fort Collins. The project team should be conscious of discussing future north and south connections. Terry Hart acknowledged that the team should be responding to the federal agencies but also has to serve the citizens of Colorado and believes this can be resolved through simple wordsmithing to show corridors extending north of Fort Collins and south of Pueblo and is not a major project refocus. Phil Rico said he is concerned about connectivity, and that politically, this project becomes very difficult if southeastern Coloradans feel neglected.

Randy pointed out that Amtrak's long-range vision is to connect the Southwest Chief and California Zephyr routes along the Front Range. Jim Souby pointed out he has proposed this as far back as 1982. Rick Klein mentioned the possibility of a future Amtrak network where the westbound Southwest Chief comes into Denver through Pueblo and Colorado Springs and then continues on to San Francisco following the current routing of the California Zephyr west of Denver. Also the California Zephyr would come into Denver from Chicago, then continue on to Los Angeles by way of Colorado Springs, Pueblo, Walsenburg Trinidad, New Mexico etc. following the existing routing of the Southwest Chief.

## **G. Other Items**

### *Commission Staffing and Operating Funds*

Randy Grauberger discussed the funding needs for the Commission and referenced the financial report that was previously presented during this meeting. He will show the \$20,000 proposed 2020 BUILD grant match for the Southwest Chief. The consultant funds are likely to be exhausted by the end of September or October. Continuing efforts should be coordinated to find more funding. Pete Rickershauser suggested that the Commission should remain alert to grant opportunities at a federal level, which David Krutsinger concurred with.

### *Mobility Hubs Briefing*

David Krutsinger presented briefly on the Mobility Hubs that CDOT have incorporated into their 10-Year Plan. The plan is for the Mobility Hubs to be "places" and not just parking lots. A "Best Bus" scenario attempts to maintain the express nature of the service. To maintain that express service and meet the "need for speed", Bustang buses need to stay on the highway and not use on and off ramps. Customers should stop fewer than seven times before getting to Denver to maintain speedy service. When there are managed lanes along I-25, Mobility Hubs are planned for the center median. This would ensure that

buses aren't switching lanes and can get in and out of the stations quickly. David demonstrated where stations would be located given the ten-mile spacing both north and south of Denver. To summarize the ten mile spacing and Best Bus concept; CDOT needs to construct ten stations at an estimated cost of \$200m. Service would need to expand from the current peak service offered to all-day service. David also showed some of the design elements for the Mobility Hubs. Sal Pace asked how concrete the station locations are at this point and if Mobility Hubs can be relocated off of I-25. The North I-25 EIS committed CDOT to both bus service on I-25 and rail service along the BNSF right-of-way adjacent to the 287 Corridor.

## **H. Confirm Next/Future Meetings**

The dates of future meetings will stay the same. However, these are likely to be held remotely for some period of time. The April meeting was supposed to be held in Pueblo. Once meetings are able to be held in person again, the rotation will restart in Pueblo so that they are not skipped as a host.

## **I. Adjourn**

Jill Gaebler adjourned the meeting at 11:35 am.

### Action Items

| <b>Date Assigned</b> | <b>Task</b>   | <b>Assignee</b>                 | <b>Deadline</b> | <b>Completed</b>   |
|----------------------|---|---------------------------------|-----------------|--|
| 02/28/20             | 1) Commissioners will provide any additional comments to Spencer by Monday morning, 2) Spencer will consolidate those comments and redistribute to Commissioners on Monday, 3) the Commission will sit down to finalize that document, 4) Spencer will redistribute the document to the Commission for a final fatal flaw review and then 5) Spencer will send that document to President Garcia's office by the end of the week, before the March 9 <sup>th</sup> deadline | Commissioners, Spencer Dodge    | 03/09/20        | Completed  |
| 02/28/20             | Consultant project team will distribute a memo describing the EOC to be discussed at the March Commission meeting   | Consultant Team                 | 03/27/20        | Ongoing  |
| 02/28/20             | Spencer and Randy will work with FRA to determine next steps for the awarded CRISI grant  | Spencer Dodge, Randy Grauberger | 05/30/20        | Ongoing  |
| 01/24/20             | The Commission will discuss the addition of the I-70 Coalition during the February  | Commission                      | 02/28/20        | Tabled until the next in-person Commission meeting is held in the Denver area. |



|          |   |                  |            |           |
|----------|---|------------------|------------|-----------|
|          | Commission meeting.   |                  |            |           |
| 01/24/20 | Commission staff will ensure that links between both Commission and project websites exist. | Spencer Dodge    | 02/28/20   | Ongoing   |
| 12/13/19 | Reconvene the Southwest Chief sub-committee   | Randy Grauberger | 01/24/2020 | Completed |