



SOUTHWEST CHIEF & FRONT RANGE PASSENGER RAIL COMMISSION

On July 1, 2017 the Colorado Southwest Chief Commission was legislatively repurposed to become the Southwest Chief & Front Range Passenger Rail Commission. The Commission was tasked with facilitating implementation and operation of future passenger rail in and along the Interstate 25 corridor. In 2018, the Colorado General Assembly made a \$2.5 million General Fund transfer to fund the Commission, including the development of a rail passenger service plan for the Front Range Corridor.

The Commission is charged with two mission elements:

- Continuation of the existing efforts to improve and expand Amtrak's existing Southwest Chief route across southeastern Colorado, including track and signal upgrades on the existing route, extending service to Pueblo, and assessing possible service to Walsenburg as part of a reroute of the Chief between La Junta and Trinidad; and,
- Facilitating the development of Front Range passenger rail in the I-25 corridor.

Front Range passenger rail service would meet the following needs:

- Address the mobility demands of future population growth,
- Improve mobility and system capacity by providing an alternative travel option,
- Enhance economic growth and development through improved connectivity,
- Improve the state's economic environmental quality and energy efficiency,
- Provide economic benefits sufficient to attract new funding sources.

Commission Membership

The Commission is comprised of eleven voting members and three non-voting members.

Five Commissioners are appointed by the Governor; they include:

- Two public rail transportation advocates,
- Two representatives of Class I Freight Railroads that serve Colorado,
- And one resident of Huerfano, Las Animas, Otero, Prowers, or Pueblo County who has public advocated for public rail.

Five Commissioners represent Front Range Councils of Governments and Metropolitan Planning Organizations; these include:

- The North Front Range Metropolitan Planning Organization (NFRMPO),
- The Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG),
- The Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments,
- The Pueblo Area Council of Governments,
- And the South Central Council of Governments.

The remaining voting member is a representative of the Regional Transportation District (RTD).

There are three non-voting members of the commission including a representative from the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), a representative from Amtrak, and a representative from Cheyenne, Wyoming.

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Why Does Colorado Need Front Range Passenger Rail?

A passenger service rail linking Pueblo, Colorado Springs and Fort Collins to Denver—a 173-mile corridor, which contains the majority of Colorado’s population—will benefit all Coloradans. The project would be the transportation “spine” along the Front Range, with other multimodal systems east and west of the I-25 corridor integrated into Front Range Passenger Rail.

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Growth in the Front Range

In the next 25 years (by 2045):

- There will be 7.8 million Coloradans, a population increase of 47%.
- There will be 5 million jobs statewide, an increase of 51%.
- Although the number of miles per capita traveled in Colorado is expected to remain flat, the increase in population and employment will increase the demand for travel by approximately 47%.

Front Range 2020 Growth:

- The Front Range is forecast to grow from 4.9 million persons in 2020 to 6.6 million in 2045, a 35% increase.
- The North Front Range/Upper Front Range Region (Larimer and Weld Counties) will grow 65% from 0.7 million to nearly 1.2 million persons.
- Colorado Springs (El Paso County) will grow 39% from 0.7 million persons to 1.1 million persons.
- Metro Denver will grow 27% from 3.3 million to 4.2 million persons.

Corridor Planning

The Southwest Chief & Front Range Passenger Rail Commission is initiating a decision-making process with interested local, state and federal stakeholders to move forward with passenger rail service along Colorado’s Front Range. This public process will be consistent with the Federal Railroad Administration’s (FRA) project delivery streamlining of environmental procedures to align with those of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

This process will blend a rail passenger service development document and a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process that will prepare the state for preliminary design and project level NEPA.

The elements of the preliminary effort will include:

- Identification of purpose and need
- Identification of alternative alignments/routes
- Define service characteristics (commute only vs. all day service)
- Define technology, speeds, possible station spacing
- Perform high level environmental analysis
- Identify high level capital and operating costs
- Identify rights-of-way that need to be preserved

