

Southwest Chief and Front Range Passenger Rail Commission Draft Meeting Minutes

Friday, January 28th, 2022
9:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Meeting held remotely via Zoom and YouTube livestream

COMMISSION MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Member Name	Member Role	Organization	Attendance
Jill Gaebler	Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments	City of Colorado Springs	No
Chris Wiseman	Pueblo Area Council of Governments	Pueblo County	No
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

A. Call to Order and Introductions – Jim Souby

Jim Souby called the meeting to order at 9:32 am.

B. Review/Approval of December 10th Draft Commission Meeting Minutes – Jim Souby

DJ Mitchell made a motion to approve the December 10th Draft Commission Meeting Minutes. Bill Van Meter seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

C. Public Comment Period – Public

Public comments were asked to be made via the FRPR website. There were no public comments.

D. Staff Report – Spencer Dodge/David Singer

Spencer Dodge acknowledged the FRPR blended team for winning the 2021 WTS Colorado Innovative Transportation Solution award for the Front Range Passenger Rail Alternatives Analysis. Spencer then presented his monthly staff report. Highlights included: continuing to coordinate with MPOs, COGs, counties, municipalities, and other stakeholders on public outreach plans; coordinating with CDOT on Rail District transitions; finalizing the Rail Commission final report; coordinating with local planning efforts; and continuing the procurement and planning processes for the CRISI grants.

David Singer commented on FRA's messaging regarding information on rulemaking, timeframes, program criteria, and the upcoming pipeline. CDOT is looking at all aspects of the IIJA and is anticipating the upcoming rulemaking announcement - not just for passenger rail, but for all guidance on planning, structures, and resiliency. Lisa Streisfeld is working on the planning and environmental side, identifying the cultural, biological, and community resources within the area. The team is working with FRA and stakeholders on the statewide plan for passenger rail as a pre-requisite for their upcoming distributions and discretionary grants.

Spencer gave an update on the Commission's financial position. The Commission will receive \$2.5m through SB-260 in about two weeks. A portion of this is designated to the SDP. There are no new expenses to report, leaving around \$300,000 for facilitation and consultant support for the District. Sal Pace inquired about a potential \$3M in the Governor's budget for front range rail. Spencer will look into this and follow up. Jim Souby asked about the City of Denver's planning effort in the development of Burnham Yard. David Singer's response indicated that the City of Denver is interested in a comprehensive non-transportation planning effort for the Burnham Yard parcel. HBTE and CDOT are collaborating on the land use plan, considering the interests for RTD, a consolidated mainline, and CDOT/FRPR efforts. Jacob Riger confirmed and added that DRCOG is pursuing a holistic approach and has been engaged with all the stakeholders for Burnham Yard from a land use and TOD perspective.

E. Southwest Chief

2018 PTC CRISI Grant – David Singer

Jim Tylick and DJ Mitchell provided an updated on the 2018 PTC CRISI Grant. Jim Tylick said the PTC is now fully operational effective January 18th; an additional 175 miles will now benefit both passenger and freight operations. So far, the PTC has received positive feedback from BNSF and Amtrak crews. DJ Mitchell added that they have stopped seeing single failures in the territory. David suggested that this item be closed out on the agenda. Jim and DJ agreed. Jim Souby commented that the Commission should take advantage of this project's success for marketing purposes, and suggested it be emphasized in the final report and a press release.

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

Spencer Dodge provided an update on the Thru-Car Service Alternatives Analysis. Spencer stated that the study is moving along nicely and the FRPR team is getting deliverables out to FRA. The team just received the stakeholder engagement plan with comments from FRA. They are now working on the purpose and need statement and working closely with FRA to abide by their guidelines. The FRPR team is also coordinating with the CO Springs station area planning effort including market analysis and feasibility of expanding services north. Jim Souby asked if the Alternatives Analysis will aid in the completion of the SDP for the entire front range rail. David Singer affirmed that there will be different components to the SDP for the entire rail project but this exercise does benefit the entire SDP by advancing and informing the larger effort.

F. Front Range Passenger Rail

2020 CRISI Grant: Preliminary SDP and Alternatives Analysis – Spencer Dodge

Spencer Dodge provided an update on the Service Development Plan. Spencer stated that the expanded budget will provide adequate funding that was identified as necessary by the FRA. The team is engaging with CDOT's internal procurement agreements team to get the ball rolling. David Singer noted that the team received clarity from FRA to align with their guidelines and expectations and the grant award is expected to be finalized within the next two or three months. This process is more imminent now that the team has marching orders at the federal level. David also shared that CDOT has started to broker agreements with Amtrak and host railroads on how we will work together on this planning effort. Jim Souby added that the SDP is a great way to keep momentum with the upcoming District transition.

User Experience Discussion part 2 - Chris Enright

Chris Enright, FRPR rail design engineer, gave an updated presentation on conceptual user experience (UX). Chris reiterated the importance of the user experience study and highlighted three components for a successful system: better experience, comparable cost, and competitive, reliable travel time. Chris then presented on station layout and accessibility, calling attention to pick-up and drop-off options such as micro-mobility options (e-bikes and scooters), and integrating with local and regional transit services. Chris mentioned the need for bike racks and lockers, and a well-designed parking lot with e-vehicle charging stations. Each station will need place and context sensitive solutions as each community will have unique needs; stations should partner with local businesses to provide amenities. Other items include well-lit, secured areas, heated platforms, real time schedules, and ADA accessibility.

The Commission was asked to give feedback. DJ Mitchell brought up safety and security of the parking lot, assuring that people will feel safe leaving their car overnight. Sal Pace brought up the importance of first-mile last-mile solutions, expanding on the concept of mobility hubs with multimodal transit options, using Portland as an example. Commissioners noted that these solutions will be important for local station area planning. Chris confirmed that the design team is working with the mobility hub guidelines, station area criteria, and first- and final-mile solutions as an ongoing objective in planning.

The next segment of the presentation addressed onboarding accessibility including the boarding platforms, furnishings, and amenities. Chris gave examples from Siemens rail and ensured that passenger comfort and ease of travel is of utmost importance. Multiple members of the Commission emphasized the importance of comfort. Jim Souby stressed that onboard amenities will make a big difference and leave users with a good impression of passenger rail. Jim also suggested conducting a survey, similar to that of the Winter Park ski train, to further gauge public interest in Front Range rail. DJ Mitchell referenced a French rail line as an example of a comfortable user experience and suggested further research into other national and international rail services.

Chris concluded the presentation by sharing next steps. The team is conducting ongoing research and investigation; they will monitor progress and continue to work with Amtrak to identify best practices on user experience and engagement.

G. Other Items

Final Report Discussion – Spencer Dodge

Jim Souby invited the Board to talk about any structural changes or omissions on the final report. Spencer Dodge invited the Board to email any remaining comments. Dale Steenbergen offered his assistance with any further steps in the transition process; Spencer will follow up. Rick Klein and Phil Rico questioned the Southern region representation and partnership throughout the document, including the maps. It was suggested for the map boundaries to include Trinidad, both state lines, and expansion to Cheyenne, WY, to accentuate the full “end to end” potential of the rail service. Spencer assured that these comments and concerns will be addressed in the next draft of the report.

Future Meetings and Transition – Spencer Dodge/Jim Souby

Jim Souby and Spencer Dodge talked about next steps in facilitating the transition from the Commission to the District including an onboarding packet for the board that will roll out in the upcoming weeks. Spencer suggested bringing the district in prior to the May start date and proposed a joint meeting with the Commission on April 22nd. DJ Mitchell made a formal motion, Rick Klein seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved. Spencer also mentioned bringing consultant help to initiate the onboarding, chartering, bylaws, etc. Jim and Spencer reminded the Board of upcoming federal agency outreach and a Congressional panel at a future Commission meeting.

Amtrak Update/Coalition Information – Rob Eaton (taken place after public comments)

Rob Eaton provided an update on Amtrak. Amtrak is continuing resolution for the FY22 budget. They do not have appropriations yet but are working with Congress. The funding from IIJA is still on hold but will be released once the FY22 budget is agreed upon. Amtrak is working with FRA on spend programs and improvements on Amtrak’s appropriation of capital assets. Rob stated that Amtrak is continuing to work with states on state corridor plans and CDOT/FRA to advance front range studies. There has been a system wide reduction in all service lines down to five times a week through March. It is being evaluated on a monthly basis. The impacts have been due to a slim workforce with covid, family leave, etc. Jim Souby asked about hiring process and employment changes. Rob further expanded saying that Amtrak has been hiring but there are still several open positions. Amtrak is looking into outside contractors to help with recruitment. Jim also asked about the analysis of long-range ridership changes due to the pandemic. Rob responded that they have seen ridership come back but it varies depending on geography. Phil Rico inquired about the starting salary at Amtrak. Rob replied that Amtrak is competitive with other railroad companies. Sal Pace asked about any news on the infrastructure package and allotment of grants. Rob confirmed that Amtrak has a meeting with FRA about the grant roll out schedule and there will be more information to come. Jim Souby, Rob Eaton, and David Singer expressed that the Commission has a good track record with the FRA.

H. Confirm Next/Future Meetings

The next Rail Commission meeting is on Friday, February 25th. Spencer reminded the Board that they will confirm the MPO/COG appointees at the next meeting.

I. Adjourn

Jim Souby adjourned the meeting at 11:00 am.