

Southwest Chief and Front Range Passenger Rail Commission Draft Meeting Minutes

Friday, January 22nd, 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 – Chair	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	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	
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
Rob Eaton*	Amtrak	Amtrak	Yes
Dale Steenbergen*	Cheyenne, Wyoming	Chamber of Commerce	No

*Non-Voting Members

Others: Randy Grauberger (SWC & FRPRC), Spencer Dodge (SWC & FRPRC), Brian Hartman (CDOT), Dominic Spaethling (HNTB), Douglas Rex (DRCOG), Jamie Grim (CDOT), Jeff Dawson (CDOT), Jeff Schultz (DEA), John Adams (PACOG), John Maddox (KDOT), Laura Shabe (WSP), Lisa Sakata (ICF), Lisa Streisfeld (CDOT), Mark Northrop (PPACG), Myron Hora (WSP), Nathan Minor (CPR), Mandy Whorton (Peak Consulting), Rebecca White (CDOT), Rob Colosimo (HNTB), Scott Lesikar, Terry Hart (Pueblo), Tim Hoover (CDOT), Tom Mason (Cheyenne MPO), Tracey MacDonald (FTA), Wally Weart, Matthew Hazleton (TRC Companies), Katie Goodwin (TRC Companies), Dave Genova (Hatch LTK), Geoff Guthrie (CDOT), Alan Eckman (AECOM), Chelsea Gaylord (CoS EDC), Jane Donovan (Triunity), John Liosatos (PPACG), Carla Perez (HDR),

A. Call to Order and Introductions – Jill Gaebler

Jill Gaebler welcomed everyone on the Zoom call and called the meeting to order at 9:31am. Terry Hart informed the Rail Commission that he would no longer be representing PACGO and introduced Chris Wiseman as his replacement. Chris is from the Pueblo area, has worked in state politics and for the Colorado State Fair, and is now a Pueblo County Commissioner.

B. Review/Approval of December 4th Draft Commission Meeting Minutes – Jill Gaebler

Jill Gaebler asked if there were any comments or questions regarding the draft December 4th Rail Commission meeting minutes. There were none. DJ Mitchell made a motion to approve the minutes, Rick Klein seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Phil Rico asked a question, and voiced concerns, over the Rail Commission participating in regional rail commission conversations. Phil is concerned that this will divert attention and disrupt the Rail Commission's progress.

C. Public Comment Period – Public

Dominic Spaethling provided an updated on the Transportation Research Board meeting that would be occurring next week on Readiness Assessment for Federal Intercity Rail Funding. This session will focus on FRA and what rail agencies around the country are doing in anticipation of new federal funding. This meeting will be held on Thursday, January 28th and requires registration. Dominic provided further information within the Zoom chat.

D. Project Director's Report – Randy Grauberger

Randy Grauberger provided his Project Director's Report to the Rail Commission and began by thanking Terry Hart for all of his work and support over the last two years. Some of the high level topics discussed follow. Randy provided an update on the various Public Involvement events that he and Spencer Dodge participated in. The 8-page brochure document that HDR developed for the Rail Commission is almost final. The HDR team has finished their contract and final close out items are being completed. A March Corridor Coalition meeting is being planned. FAQs are being refined and are being posted to the FRPR project website. A Risk Register for FRPR is also being developed. This pertains to risks throughout all aspects of the project, such as engineering, policy, and planning issues. The Rail Commission has about \$255,968 in remaining funds. Randy also mentioned that the Rail Commission's charter may need to be updated to reflect the changing roles in Rail Commission staff.

E. Southwest Chief

Tiger IX Grant – Bill Craven

David Krutsinger provided a brief update on the TIGER IX grant. The construction in Colorado is largely complete. A significant portion of the track is now running at 79 mph instead of 60 mph. DJ Mitchell added that BNSF has largely completed their work.

2018 PTC CRISI Grant – David Krutsinger

David Krutsinger also provided an update on the PTC Grant. The BNSF team is moving through design and a meeting will occur next to assess progress. The goal is to complete design this spring and initiate construction later this year.

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

Spencer Dodge provided an update on the 2019 CRISI Grant. Three firms have been shortlisted for interviews. Interviews are scheduled for the next week and a consultant will be selected at the end of the week.

F. Front Range Passenger Rail

2020 CRISI Grant: FRPR SDP and Rail Simulation Modeling Update – Randy Grauberger

Randy Grauberger gave an update on the 2020 CRISI Grant. It will still be a few months until obligation. There will be a few changes made to the Scope of Work from the original application. Ongoing meetings with FRA are scheduled to continue close coordination. In summary, the work has not begun, a good scope hasn't been finalized and the direction of the project has not been determined with 100% certainty. Randy informed the Rail Commission that they would receive the updated Scope of Work when it is completed.

FRPR Alternatives Analysis – Randy Grauberger

Randy Grauberger provided a briefing on the recently finished Alternatives Analysis. Much of this presentation was not new information, but a summary of the last 16 months of activity. Items discussed included the background, Vision, Alternatives Evaluation, Governance Options, Stakeholder and Agency Involvement and Next Steps. Sal Pace commented on the background that he doesn't believe the legislation limited passenger rail from Pueblo to Fort Collins as the legislation also speculated on the Southwest Chief re-route. Randy continued his presentation by explaining the Alternatives Evaluation process, and how/when certain alignments were eliminated leaving the three remaining alternatives. Comparing alternatives included looking at operational, contextual, financial, and political and public interest factors. Deliverables provided in the Alternatives Analysis included the Preliminary Alternatives Analysis, Screening Criteria, Travel Demand Forecasting, Preliminary Engineering and Design Criteria, Cost estimates, Stakeholder engagement, Pre-NEPA Activities, Governance Memo and a Funding and Finance Memo. Randy provided an overview of the Long Range Vision for the fully built out corridor. Some next steps include advancing an initial phase of the project that can be implemented (2-6 round trips daily), kicking off the 2019 and 2020 CRISI Grants, seeking additional federal grants for a SW Chief re-route study, and seeking funding for a Front Range Passenger Rail NEPA Review.

Phil Rico asked about the Long Range Vision that goes to the year 2045 and the SW Chief re-route. Phil believes the route between Trinidad and Pueblo, possibly in the form of the Southwest Chief re-route, to connect FRPR should be included in the Long Range Vision. Jim Souby asked Randy about combining the remaining NEPA work and the Service Development Plan and if that was still a possibility. That is still possible.

G. Other Items

Amtrak Update – Rob Eaton

Rob Eaton provided the Rail Commission with a legislative update from the Amtrak perspective. Amtrak did receive \$2b in appropriations. Amtrak originally asked for \$2.9b in COVID relief funding, but only received \$1b. With that level of funding, Amtrak is maintaining their long distance services at three times a week. Increasing to daily service is not feasible with the provided funding, as it is not enough to get through the year. Amtrak is determining how much additional funding they need to go back to full service. Amtrak is concurrently continuing to monitor their metrics for reintroducing full service. These metrics include COVID levels and their booking curve. In February, Amtrak will look more closely at these metrics. Amtrak staff are working on their FY22 funding requests which are undergoing their initial drafts. Amtrak is waiting for President Biden to release his budget before they release theirs. Legislative drafts, such as the Passenger Rail Trust Fund, are being monitored by Amtrak staff. Phil Rico asked Rob to send him an update on the Trinidad overhead structure. David Krutsinger and Rob Eaton have discussed this and will circle back to address Phil's question. Randy Grauberger asked Rob for an update on a meeting with Amtrak staff to discuss Amtrak's assumptions on FRPR costs.

State Legislative Update – Andy Karsian and Sal Pace

Andy Karsian gave the Rail Commission a quick update on state legislative items. The legislature is adjourned until mid-February due to COVID. There is a lot of talk about a Transportation Funding package centered on a variety of fees. Emerging technologies, like Lyft and Uber, are being considered as well as delivery services. There are additional transportation bills that may be introduced, such as project management. Sal Pace expects a passenger rail governance from the House Majority Leader and the Senate President, if not this year than certainly next year. Sal's preference is to run this legislation this year so that a potential funding measure can be brought to voters in 2022. Politically speaking, Front Range Rail will be the entire Front Range from Fort Collins to Trinidad. RTD's Northwest Rail will also have a major impact on any FRPR legislation. There are also concerns with representation on the Rail Commission, with some policymakers feeling the southern portion of the Front Range is overly represented. Jim Souby commented on this topic and stated that it isn't the fault of the Rail Commission. Jim asked Sal how federal funding will effect a legislative bill. Sal believes this funding will positively affect legislative chances and any potential successes. Phil Rico asked about the Rail Commission's current funding and if there was an opportunity to go to the legislature for further funding. Sal believes this could happen, but hasn't had these discussions. CDOT is providing the Rail Commission with a lot of in kind support and any funding conversation needs to happen collaboratively with CDOT. David Krutsinger asked if there was any way to work a way to transition membership as funding and taxation takes effect. David continued that while there may appear to be overrepresentation among the southern region it is necessary to ensure the Southwest Chief's continued operation. Sal stated that it is a reasonable request to make.

States for Passenger Rail Coalition 2021 Dues Approval – Spencer Dodge

Spencer Dodge provided an update on the Rail Commission's involvement with the States for Passenger Rail Coalition. Dues for 2021 are becoming due and approval to pay \$5,000 for annual dues is requested. Rick Klein made a motion for this funding approval, Bill Van Meter seconded the motion, and the motion to approve \$5,000 to continue S4PRC membership was passed unanimously.

Farewell, Randy! – Jill Gaebler

This month's Rail Commission meeting is Randy Grauberger's final meeting as Project Director. Jill Gaebler became by apologizing for not being together for this conversation, as that is more appropriate. An e-card was prepared and sent to Randy Grauberger, signed by all of the Rail Commissioners. Jill continued by thanking Randy for his work and effort and highlighted the effective progress Randy was able to spur. Jim Souby commented that, at ColoRail board meetings, Randy has provided updates for all of their meetings and members across the state hold Randy in high regard. Phil Rico added that he is thankful for Randy's work for the Rail Commission. Terry Hart, Sal Pace, Rick Klein, Jacob Riger, Becky Karasko, Bill Van Meter, Rob Eaton, and David Krutsinger all expressed their gratitude and appreciation for all of Randy's work. Several members of the public also thanked Randy for his work in the Zoom chat feature. Randy addressed the Rail Commission, stating that it has been an honor and privilege to work with the Rail Commission. Randy encouraged the Rail Commission to forge ahead with the partnerships that have been developing. Randy thanked Spencer Dodge for his role in assisting his work as well. This position has been Randy's dream role and an honor and privilege to carry out his role.

Rail Commission Elections – Jill Gaebler

Jill Gaebler and Jacob Riger have served as Chair and Vice Chair for two years. Both individuals expressed hesitancy to step down, but acknowledge that this was a good time to transition to new leadership. Jill then took nominations for Chair, Jill nominated Jim Souby and Sal Pace and Rick Klein seconded that. Jim Souby was appointed as the new Chair unanimously. Jacob Riger nominated Sal Pace as Vice Chair. Jim Souby seconded this nomination. Sal Pace was appointed Vice Chair unanimously. Jim Souby thanked Jill and Jacob for the job they have done over the last two years. Jim is greatly looking forward to continuing to work with Jill and Jacob.

H. Confirm Next/Future Meetings

The next Rail Commission meeting will be February 26th, 2021.

I. Adjourn

Jill Gaebler adjourned the meeting at 11:19am.