

# Southwest Chief and Front Range Passenger Rail Commission Draft Meeting Minutes

Friday, June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020  
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.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	Yes

\*Non-Voting Members

Others: Randy Grauberger (SWC & FRPRC), Spencer Dodge (SWC & FRPRC), Bill Becker (Loveland Chamber of Commerce), Brian Hartman (CDOT), Bryan Robinson (WSP), Chris Enright (CDOT), Dan Kline (WYDOT), David Singer (CDOT), Deborah Wagner (Lombard and Clayton), Dominic Spaethling (HNTB), Eric Richardson (CDOT), Jamie Grim (CDOT), Jeffrey Dawson (CDOT), Jep Seman (Colorado Advocates), John Liosatos (PPACG), Jose Soto (LiUNA), Kathryn Wenger (PPACG), Kristin Kenyon (FTA), Lisa Streisfeld (CDOT), Mandy Whorton (Peak Consulting), Maureen Dower (Town of Berthoud), Melanie Monarco (HNTB), Mikel Conway, Myron Hora (WSP), Nathaniel Minor (CPR), Rob Colosimo (HNTB), Scott Bressler (AECOM), Sophie Shulman (CDOT), Tim Hoover (CDOT), Walter Weart (Public), Will Karspeck (Town of Berthoud),

## **A. Call to Order and Introductions – Jacob Riger**

Jacob Riger called the meeting to order at 10:01am. Jacob then called role from the list of participants on Zoom.

## **B. Review/Approval of April 24<sup>th</sup> Draft Meeting Minutes – Jacob Riger**

Jacob Riger asked if there were any comments or concerns with the draft April 24<sup>th</sup> Meeting Minutes. Wally Weart commented that he thought he attended that meeting, but did not see his name included in the attendance. Rail Commission staff would edit those minutes to reflect this. There were no additional comments. Terry Hart made a motion to approve the minutes, Jim Souby seconded the motion. The Rail Commission voted unanimously to approve the minutes.

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

Mayor Will Karspeck, Town of Berthoud, commented that he has attended many Rail Commission meetings including hosting a previous meeting. Mayor Karspeck, Mayor Pro Tem Maureen Dower and Trustee speaking in favor of FRPR. The Berthoud Board of Trustee wished to express their concern over the recent conversation regarding the removal of Berthoud as a primary station and they encouraged the Rail Commission to include Berthoud as a primary stop. The Berthoud station was planned in the 2011 EIS and the 2014 EIS Update. The removal of the Berthoud station would be a loss with a negative compounding effect over time in the Berthoud community. Including a loss in economic competitiveness for current and future businesses. Berthoud believes the construction of one more station seems miniscule in the overall scheme of the project and will ensure equal treatment of Colorado's northern communities along the BNSF alignment. Being that the majority of Berthoud residents commute to other cities, they believe it would greatly enhance quality of life. Berthoud hopes that the Rail Commission will maintain at least one stop per municipality in the northern Colorado region. The Town of Berthoud encourages continued conversation on this important topic and the Town Board is available for any further meetings. The support of the 12,000 residents of Berthoud is contingent on them receiving a rail stop.

Berthoud Mayor Pro Tem, Maureen Dower, commented that in consideration of stops for FRPR, she strongly encourages the project to reconsider whether small towns like Berthoud can receive stops. The reasons are many. In addition to Mayor Karspeck's comments, there are additional considerations. One, for other stops, consideration must be given for the geographic area. In Berthoud, there are significant residents near their rail stop. Additionally, Berthoud has grown exponentially and that growth is likely to continue with new approved developments. Although, at the moment, Berthoud does not appear to be large enough they are growing and will be a destination. There are plans in the future for different recreational and other events. This provides the opportunity for people to use FRPR on the weekends and other times during the day, making the whole system more effective and efficient, increasing revenue. Berthoud believes a stop would add to the revenue of the commuter rail.

Mayor Phil Rico asked if two items would be considered at this meeting. First, the potential cutback of the Southwest Chief service to 3 days a week. Second, a letter from various Senators to Amtrak. Randy Grauberger commented that those came about after the agenda, but believes Ray Lang can discuss these during his Amtrak Update. Ray confirmed he could discuss the service proposals but wasn't aware of the letter. Mayor Rico continued that he is concerned with the pushback that has been received.

Melissa Feldbush, Executive Director of the Berthoud Chamber of Commerce, commented in support of Mayor Karspeck and Mayor Pro Tem Dower's comments. She further expressed that her organization would like to ensure that their small businesses get the same access that others will benefit from. The community is growing and will have a lot to offer in the future.

Sal Pace commented that the Rail Commission should comment on the Berthoud issue and advise them on the Rail Commission's response. This topic will be addressed in the Project Director's Report.

Stormy Peters, Berthoud Resident, commented in support of the previous Berthoud comments.

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

Randy Grauberger, Rail Commission Project Director, provided his monthly Director's Report. Randy discussed a few highlights of the report. Rail Commission staff have coordinated with the Governor's Office regarding the renewal of Jim Souby and Rick Klein's terms. Additionally, DJ Mitchell has been appointed to represent BNSF Railway moving forward as Pete Rickershauser's term has ended. Randy took a moment to thank Pete for his work. Other Rail Commissioners also commented and thanked Pete. Rail Commission Staff also finalized the 2020 CRISI Grant application for Rail Simulation Modeling and finalizing the Service Development Plan. The application was submitted on June 19<sup>th</sup> with \$137,000 in matching funds. Pueblo County provided \$100,000, the Rail Commission provided \$25,000, the City of Trinidad provided \$10,000 and ColoRail provided \$2,000. The total grant application is \$685,000. Rail Commission expects notification in October, prior to the November general election.

Rail Commission staff also worked with CDOT on a draft MOU for additional CDOT staff resources and future funding cooperation. That MOU has been executed by CDOT Director Shoshana Lew and Rail Commission Chair Jill Gaebler. Rail Commission staff provided a Letter of Support for CDOT's CRISI Grant for the Burnham Yard project. CDOT did not provide a Letter of Support for the Rail Commission's grant application. Ongoing coordination has occurred between the consultant team undertaking the Pueblo Station Area Plan; that team will be providing an update later in the meeting. CDOT and Rail Commission staff are also beginning to hold meetings with municipalities to discuss specific issues with FRPR. Longmont, Loveland, Berthoud, Fort Collins and Boulder have all been engaged. Meetings with southern communities are being scheduled.

Randy provided a few PowerPoint presentations over the last month, including to the National Association of Rail Passengers and ColoRail. BNSF Railway and UP met with Rail Commission staff to discuss future shared use of track or facilities. Finally, Rail Commission staff heard from FRA that they are providing comments on the Draft Statement of Work for the 2019 CRISI Grant to study the Southwest Chief Thru-Car Service.

Randy commented on the Berthoud meeting. In that meeting, CDOT and Rail Commission staff identified that FRPR is different from the North I-25 Commuter Rail Update, as that looked just at service between Denver and Fort Collins. As FRPR is looking at Fort Collins to Pueblo, that is a different service. Rail Commission staff reiterated that the project is in the very early planning phases and everything is preliminary. Ridership modeling efforts with Berthoud in the corridor will be undertaken. Randy commented that committed communities are a help to the project and Berthoud has always been a strong area of support. A station in Berthoud has not been eliminated. Decision on stations will not be finalized until the NEPA stage of the project. The Rail Commission is in the process of drafting a formal response to the letter received from the Berthoud Board of Trustee, as well as to the emails Rail Commission staff have received.

Jacob Riger thanked Pete Rickershauser once more for all of his work. Additionally, Jacob thanked Spencer Dodge and Randy for all of their work and effort on submitting the CRISI Grant application. Jacob also thanked those organizations who provided matching funds and Letters of Support. Phil Rico thanked Pete as well.

Randy provided one amendment to the Financial Report in his Project Director's Report. The remaining balance should show \$141,619.

## **E. Southwest Chief**

### *Tiger IX Grant*

David Krutsinger provided an update in Bill Craven's absence. The Office of the Secretary of Transportation has approved the draft grant documents. The grant agreement is expected to be issued to Colfax County on July 15<sup>th</sup> for signature and Notice to Proceed. The construction entities, BNSF and Herzog, are beginning to line up the rail and other track materials in anticipation of Notice to Proceed.

### *2018 PTC CRISI Grant*

Given this grant is not like a usual agreement, all parties are taking a bit more time to make sure things are right. Notice to Proceed is expected in August.

### *Pueblo Station Area Plan*

Bryan Robinson, WSP, provided a presentation on the Pueblo Station Area Plan (PSAP). Commissioner Terry Hart expressed Pueblo County's excitement on the progress this project has seen. Bryan provided an overview of the presentation which included a Process Update, Engagement Results, Preferred Areas, and time for Q&A.

Bryan provided the Project Purpose, which is to select a location for a future station and provide the necessary rail and station infrastructure improvements needed to make that a reality. Bryan also provided a graphic showing the overall process. The project started with three initial sites, these were expanded to 5 sites with community input, and then those 5 were reduced to 2 preferred sites. At this stage, the PSAP team is beginning to engage Amtrak, FRPR, and local land owners. Rick Klein asked that Ryan McWilliams of WaterTower Place be reached out to for engagement.

The first round of public meetings online saw 50-60 attendees and that survey is still online. The PSAP team asked attendees to provide one word to describe a vision for the future station. Additionally, the team asked what community members for their preference on the five potential site areas/concepts. Multimodal, connectivity, development, and community were some of the words used by attendees to describe their vision. About 40% expressed economic development and new development as a value for the station. About 30% stated connections to other modes was their major value in evaluating the future station.

The five station areas included the Union Avenue District Station Area, the Municipal Complex Station Area, the Recreation Complex Station Area, the Grove Neighborhood Station Area, and the North Riverwalk Station Area. The first two came from the first public meeting, the last three were added after public input. These five sites were presented to the public.

The project team provided the public with four slides for each area. The first slide is an introduction, the second was a quick concept slide showing basic layouts, the third slide provided Pros and Cons for the area, and the final slide was a preference voting exercise. The Union Avenue Depot Area was approved by 80-90% of meeting attendees in the voting exercise. The second favored area is the City Municipal Area with 65-70% of support. Site number five received the least amount of support.

The overall considerations for the sites included needs for looping and avoiding reverse train movements, operations among the wye junctions, and issues with access. Area 1, Union Avenue District Area, is the first site that is being advanced for further review. This site is intended to weave the past, present, and future. The new station and parking would be attached to the Union Depot and mixed in with the outdoor Rail Museum. Neon Alley would be incorporated in this site, extending a portion into overflow parking. Additionally, this site includes existing museums and areas of interest. There is a strong connection to walking and biking connections. There is a fair amount of flexibility for track layout. However, this site has limited access to I-25, there are challenges related to parking, and it is unlikely to spur any new major

developments. The PSAP team developed six layout options for the Union Avenue site and included these in the PowerPoint to the Rail Commission

Area 2, the Municipal Center Station, is intended to build the concept of the “Station on the Civic Square”. Most of this property is City of Pueblo owned. Additional city land could be used for developments. Generally, there is some sense that a hotel could survive in this area with or without a station. Some of the pros for this area include: the existing surface parking in the area, site provides flexibility, and has good access to other transit. Cons include a lack of existing built character, circulation challenges, and potential challenges with rail Rights of Way. The Municipal Center Station has seven different layout options that were included in the PowerPoint to the Rail Commission. The Pueblo Station Area Plan next steps include coordinating with various stakeholders, finalizing evaluations, preparing final recommendations, developing a station area design guide, a third public meeting, and preparing a final concept plan and final report.

Terry Hart thanked the PSAP project team and informed the Rail Commission that at each of the in-person meetings there were well over 100 attendees indicating strong community support and excitement. Terry continued by expressing that there were some disconnects in what the public wanted to achieve by the site and what each site was capable of providing. If either of the two sites were selected, Terry believes that these issues could be resolved. Jim Souby asked how much funding was going into the analysis of the site selection and how much funding would remain for the actual construction of the station. Terry responded that it depends. The 1A projects have had estimates for each, and an estimate for site implementation has been moving around a bit. It is possible these projects could be impacted by the impacts on the economy from COVID. Jose Soto, LiUna, wanted to ensure that labor organizations were included in the outreach.

### *Amtrak Update*

Ray Lang provided the Rail Commission with an update from Amtrak. The Surface Transportation Reauthorization Bill, the INVEST Act, moved through the House Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Committee and had a hearing. This bill authorizes billions of dollars per year for Amtrak and the national network. The bill also authorized significant capital funding for new corridor development, including the Front Range. It also authorizes transitional operating funding. If the bill becomes law, there would be sizable federal capital to develop the corridor as well as transitional operating funding to help pay for the new service. New states often struggle with significant up-front capital for corridors so this bill would address that challenge. On the operating side, it helps states build a ridership base. Amtrak had approached CDOT and Rail Commission staff with a thumbnail for this project with corridors that Amtrak believes are ripe for service. It is unclear what the Senate will do with this bill when it gets there.

Since the last Rail Commission meeting, Amtrak submitted a supplemental appropriations request to Congress for next year. For FY21, Amtrak has requested about \$3.5 billion to get through next year. Amtrak received \$16 billion from the CARES Act to make up for the complete loss in ridership revenue. In exchange for that funding, Amtrak agreed to no furloughs or layoffs. In October, that funding is likely to run out and Amtrak will face serious issues. For FY21, Amtrak is facing serious service reductions. Best case scenario, is 50% loss in ridership. Ridership is expected to be worse than this fiscal year. All services on the long-distance network are proposed to be cut to tri-weekly service effective October 1<sup>st</sup>. Amtrak has set a series of metrics to determine when full service can be brought back on the national network. These metrics are geared towards a load factor, a measure of demand for the existing services. Ridership will not be an appropriate metric at this time. Of the available seats for sale, they will be compared to prior times. This metric will be good to use as social distancing is being enforced and only 50% of tickets are being sold. By definition, the best case would be 50%. The load factor doesn't need to be equal to two years ago, but somewhere around 90%. Amtrak will monitor COVID and determine based on regional trends. National trends from competitors, such as aviation, will also factor into the decision-making. All of these cutbacks are temporary. The goal is to have all services back to normal by next summer. Amtrak is hoping to make these decisions around February 15<sup>th</sup> of next year. Capital work

has not been suspended. Matching capital funds have been provided for CRISI and BUILD grants. Investments in the long-distance network are still being made.

Amtrak is undertaking passenger focus groups with their guest rewards programs members. Ray Lang watched one of these focus groups and walked away concerned that guests had not heard of the safety precautions that Amtrak is doing. One individual commented that they were not planning on traveling any time soon so it didn't matter much what efforts Amtrak was making. These views on travel in the intermediate future are a concern for Amtrak.

Jim Souby commented that ColoRail members are not anticipating traveling until a vaccine is available. Jim continued that the cutbacks initiate more problems than they solve because they will effect connectivity. Jim uses Amtrak frequently and is worried about how to connect on lines. Ray responded that 8 of the 15 long-distance trains are hubbed in Chicago. The plan is for all of these to arrive in Chicago the same day so that connections can be made. Jim Souby asked if Amtrak had responded to the Commerce Committee's letter. Ray was unsure. The responses they are looking for were exactly what Ray Lang provided, albeit with maybe a little more detail. Phil Rico mentioned that the local newspaper published the information from Amtrak. One line that says Amtrak has made the decision to operate with reduced capacity and goes on to say that the trains will begin to run "when or if" COVID cases go down. Phil asked if that "if" should be cause for concern. Ray responded that this statement was meant to convey that the goal is bring back full service but they are worried about how long this will continue. The goal is to return service by next summer. Randy encouraged Ray Lang to try and bring out Amtrak leadership to meet with CDOT, the governor, and the Rail Commission to discuss the capital investment plans.

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

### *MOU/Blended Team Kickoff Update*

Randy provided an update that the MOU had been signed by both CDOT Director Shoshana Lew and Rail Commission Chair Jill Gaebler. David Singer, CDOT, reiterated that CDOT remains committed and excited for FRPR. In addition to David Singer, Jeff Dawson and Chris Enright are working on the engineering, Erik Sabina and his team are working on the modeling efforts, Tim Hoover is working on communications, messaging and promotion, and Lisa Streisfeld is working on agency coordination. The Rail Commission can expect more involvement from CDOT staff. Jacob Riger commented that the Rail Commission appreciates the commitment from CDOT and looks forward to working together even more.

### *Executive Oversight Committee*

Randy discussed a previously proposed Executive Oversight Committee. Randy informed the Rail Commission that a first meeting of that group was expected in early July. Representatives include the Chair and Vice Chair, the Rail Commission Project Director, Rebecca White, and David Singer. The only change from the prior document is that the facilitator will be Spencer Dodge instead of Carla Perez.

## **G. Other Items**

### *Burnham Yard Update*

Eric Richardson, CDOT, provided an update on their CRISI Grant application. CDOT submitted a \$40 million grant application, with \$10 million in matching funds, for a CRISI Grant to purchase Burnham Yard from UP. CDOT originally intended to use SB 267 funds to purchase Burnham Yard. With COVID impacts, that is no longer possible. When the CRISI Grant opportunity came about, CDOT felt this would be a good use of money. Steve Sherman and Chris Enright helped submit this application. CDOT thanked RTD and Bill Van Meter (RTD) for their Letters of Support. They also thanked the Rail Commission for providing a Letter of Support.

## *Intercity Passenger Rail Trust Fund Act*

Jim Souby shared with the group a memo from Senator Blumenthal. This act was intended to operate within the INVEST Act. This is a Senate bill to create a trust fund and dedicated revenue source for Amtrak. The amount of revenue would fit in with the 5-year reauthorization of the Surface Transportation Bill, essentially a companion measure. 10% of general revenues that go into the highway trust fund be put into a rail trust fund. These appropriations would be automatic. It would be very similar to other transportation trust funds. The bill would require that 40% of these funds would go to the Northeast Corridor, the remaining 60% would go to the national network. This is something that would greatly assist Amtrak in reinstating services following COVID. Jim Souby also asked when the Rail Commission would formally support measures like this. Jim believes Colorado Senators and the Congressional delegation needs to hear from the Rail Commission on these measures and draft support letters. Sal Pace supported this idea and supports setting up a formal process for Jim to draft letters and have the Rail Commission vote on support via email. Jim Souby is happy to draft support letters. There were no objections to this. This was not on the agenda, so a motion was not made.

## *Colorado Concern Update*

Sal Pace stated that he served on a Infrastructure/Transportation Task Force for Colorado Concern to make recommendations to the federal delegation on any potential stimulus. Colorado Concern is essentially a statewide Chamber of Commerce. The working group that Sal worked on included several high-profile Coloradan transportation professionals. Sal explained that when COVID hit and the legislature was disrupted it became clear that FRPR would not be addressed Sal took a personal interest in looking at what came out at the federal level. Similar to the Great Recession in 2009 and 2010 when local municipalities and state governments did not have the resources, the federal government provided packages of stimulus funds. Multiple packages have come from the federal government this year. Sal has focused much of his energy with Senator Cory Gardner and his office, given the current political climate.

Colorado Concern has worked with Colorado's Senators, Amtrak and a few other individuals to prepare language to assist in stimulus packaging. Language was prepared to allow for appropriations for Amtrak to work on corridors of less than 500 miles. Amtrak is currently prohibited from working on short range corridors. Amtrak has been very public about their wish to work on four short-range corridors, including FRPR. Sal proposed and talked extensively in this working group about the RTD B Line, Southwest Chief Thru-Car, Burnham Yard, and the proposed language for Amtrak to be able to work on short range lines. Colorado Concern is a private organization. Sal received confirmation that the group is suggesting to the congressional delegation to incorporate language for Amtrak's wish to work on short range corridors.

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

July 24<sup>th</sup> and August 28<sup>th</sup> are the next Rail Commission meetings. The Rail Commission is advised to plan on these being virtual meetings.

## **I. Adjourn**

Jacob Riger adjourned the meeting at 12:07pm.

### Action Items

<b>Date Assigned</b>	<b>Task</b>	<b>Assignee</b>	<b>Deadline</b>	<b>Completed</b>
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 (Meeting Tentatively scheduled for August 16 <sup>th</sup> )
02/28/20	Spencer and Randy will work with FRA to determine next steps for obligating 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 meeting.	Commission	02/28/20	Tabled until the next in-person Commission meeting is held in the Denver area.