

Southwest Chief and Front Range Passenger Rail Commission
Draft Meeting Minutes

Friday, May 22nd, 2020
 9:30 a.m. – 11:30 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	

*Non-Voting Members

Others: Randy Grauberger (SWC & FRPRC), Spencer Dodge (SWC & FRPRC), Nathan Minor (CPR), Forrest Whitman (Citizen), Mandy Whorton (Peak Consulting), Eric Richardson (CDOT), Bill Craven (NMDOT), Brian Hartman (CDOT), Dan Kline (WYDOT), Dominic Spaethling (HNTB), John Harris (Patch Media), David Singer (CDOT), Jeff Dawson (CDOT), John Liosatos (PPACG), Lisa Sicetta (ICF), Tim Hoover (CDOT), Tom Mason (Cheyenne MPO), Sophie Shulman (CDOT), Mike Meyer (Quandel Consultants), Rob Colosimo (HNTB), Scott Bressler (AECOM)

A. Call to Order and Introductions – Jill Gaebler

Jill Gaebler called the meeting to order at 9:30 am and began introductions.

B. Review/Approval of April 24th Draft Meeting Minutes – Jill Gaebler

Jill Gaebler asked for any concerns; there were none. Rick Klein made a motion to approve the minutes, Phil Rico seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

C. Public Comment Period – Public

No public comments.

D. Project Director's Report – Randy Grauberger

Randy Grauberger, Rail Commission Project Director, provided the Rail Commission with his Director's Report. Rail Commission staff participated in a coordination call with FRA staff regarding Level 1 Analysis. During that call, FRA staff indicated that the project would need to complete Rail Simulation Modeling before entering into NEPA; this was new information for those involved with the project. As such, Randy suggested that the Rail Commission consider including Rail Traffic Control simulation modeling in the 2020 CRISI Grant application. The need for RTC modeling was confirmed in a call with Union Pacific and BNSF Railway. The possibility of sharing Class 1 ROW and track in some places provides the opportunity to utilize RTC modeling to help locate areas of potential shared use to reduce costs in the future. Rail Commission staff also held a call with RTD staff regarding the possibility of sharing their ROW. This meeting was quite productive, and additional coordination will continue; plans are to go to regular monthly meetings with RTD.

Rail Commission staff continued discussions regarding the scope of the HDR budget. The current expenditure rate only allows for the consultant team to continue to September or October. CDOT staff have been involved to determine what they can do, so that HDR can focus their efforts on tasks that CDOT does not have expertise in.

Randy has also been working with the Governor's office regarding new Rail Commission appointments. Rick Klein and Jim Souby have both expressed their desire to be reappointed to the Rail Commission. Pete Rickershauser's term will be ending. Pete will be stepping down and DJ Mitchell, AVP of Passenger Operations for BNSF, will be replacing him pending the Governor's approval.

Rail Commission staff provided a Letter of Support on behalf of the Rail Commission for the BUILD Grant submitted by the City of Trinidad. The application is for continuing improvements along the Southwest Chief alignment in Kansas and Colorado. Randy participated in a radio interview with Forrest Whitman on the Salida Radio station.

Rail Commission staff and consultants participated in two stakeholder interviews. One with the engineering staff for E-470 and one with Denver International Airport. Rail Commission staff are continuing to hold coordination meetings with the team working on the Pueblo Station Area Plan. Lisa Streisfeld, CDOT, and her team of interns assisted the Rail Commission in identifying several private foundations that may be able to help fund the Rail Commission's effort. There is a document in the Rail Commission's packet that outlines these options. In Randy's Project Director's report, he included a few future meetings. The July 12th Rail Commission meeting listed is incorrect.

The financial report for the Rail Commission was also provided. The remaining balance stands at \$166,619. The April 2020 approval to hire a consultant to prepare for the 2020 CRISI Grant is no longer valid. CDOT leadership offered to provide staff resources in assistance to the Rail Commission in developing and submitting that grant application.

Phil Rico suggested that the Rail Commission concentrate on which private foundation grants can be used for administrative purposes, along with what were the immediate next steps, as time is so short – what can we do to move forward ASAP? Randy advised most private foundation grants are used for more long-term purposes, and that CDOT is also looking at this funding source. Jill Gaebler asked Randy to discuss the November and December Rail Commission meeting dates. The Rail Commission meetings are scheduled for the fourth Friday of every month. In November that falls on the day after Thanksgiving and in December the meeting falls on Christmas Day. Randy asked the Rail Commission if they would consider the first Friday of December for the November and December dates. The Rail Commission agreed to hold one combined meeting for November and December on the first Friday in December.

E. Southwest Chief

Tiger IX Grant

Bill Craven discussed the TIGER IX grant. FRA is reviewing the grant agreement but has not provided comments yet. FRA staff agreed with all of the attachments and sent the documents to their supervisors for review. Colfax County sent comments to CDOT, KDOT, and BNSF on their respective sub-agreements. David Krutsinger confirmed that they had received their sub-agreement. Bill believes the grant agreement will be executed at the end of June or beginning of July. If all sub-agreements are in place, Notice to Proceed can be issued as early as the end of June.

2018 CRISI Grant

David Krutsinger informed the Rail Commission that CDOT has held meetings with each of the grant partners. There was an accounting issue relating to Amtrak funds and CDOT has confirmed that these funds can move directly to BNSF. CDOT is moving ahead with the BNSF agreement as a priority; FRA has stated that they must review this agreement before the overall grant agreement can be signed. KDOT, CDOT, and Amtrak had a conversation to work out performance reporting details. A follow up is expected soon. David believes the grant agreement can be signed in mid-July.

2019 CRISI Grant

Randy sent a document to the Rail Commissioners regarding FRA recommendations for different service options for the Southwest Chief Thru-Car Operation. Originally, Amtrak had only considered a thru-car attached to the west bound train, separating at La Junta, and returning the next day. Randy believes that the feasibility study should look at more than one option, and is hoping the Rail Commission can determine two or three options to include in the study. FRA's suggestions included every other day service and thruway bus service, among others.

Ray Lang asked Randy if, regarding the two daily rounds trips, those both connect to the Southwest Chief or if they go back and forth. These would connect to the Southwest Chief. Pete Rickershauser suggested that only daily service be studied. This is viewed as the lowest hanging fruit, and anything other than daily service likely wouldn't work for the travelling public; if people have to use a calendar to determine if they can catch the train, it will likely become prohibitively difficult and inhibit ridership on even those days that the trains would run. Phil Rico, Rick Klein, Jim Souby, and Terry Hart agreed that daily service is a must. Jim Souby asked Ray Lang if Amtrak can sustain two trips and what Amtrak's ability to run thru-car service would be. Ray wasn't able to address that at the time. A second daily connection would require overnighing equipment and a facility to accommodate that, as well as crew costs. Once the Scope of Work is finalized, Ray offered to connect the project with Amtrak's planning department. Daily service would necessitate a change in where the crew was based, which would increase capital and operating costs. Rail Commission staff will continue forward with daily service, but not include every other day service in the Scope of Work.

Rail Commission staff have submitted a draft Scope of Work, budget and schedule to FRA but have not yet received comments back.

Phil Rico suggested that starting with every day service would be easier to scale back if it doesn't work, rather than moving from every other day service up to every day service. Pete Rickershauser described a "shuttle service" where separate equipment (locomotive and passenger cars would be in La Junta. Passenger for Pueblo and Colorado Springs would get off of the SW Chief and board that train for Pueblo and Colorado Springs instead of de-coupling cars from the SW Chief. Pete clarified that the thru-car operation is not a simple thing to achieve at La Junta and turning around at Colorado Springs could be difficult. There are a number of ramifications to this, but it might be worth studying to see how this effects ridership, costs and service levels. Pete suggested that a helpful study would be seen as to what service would maximize ridership; what is the most attractive service to provide the most ridership. This suggestion was one of FRA's suggestions. Randy stated that this idea should be looked at in the feasibility study. Ray Lang stated that Pete's shuttle proposal would no longer be considered a long-distance train and it would become a state-funded train.

2020 BUILD Grant

Randy provided the Rail Commission with an update on the BUILD Grant. Seneca Consulting Group submitted the grant, with the City of Trinidad as the sponsor. CDOT provided a letter of support, and the CDOT Transportation Commission also provided matching funds. ColoRail and the City of La Junta also provided a match.

Phil Rico sent a request to Senator Bennett's office regarding a Letter of Support. Randy did not receive anything from Senator Bennett's office, but Rick Klein might have. Letters of Support can be submitted after the application is submitted. Phil Rico also asked why NMDOT had backed out of supporting the grant. Randy believes that NMDOT and Amtrak were submitting a separate grant for the New Mexico portion. Ray Lang confirmed this, and clarified that FRA had advised Amtrak their previous grant request was too large. Amtrak split the grant into two with a higher percentage of matching funds. Rick Klein advised that support letters were also received from Prowers County and Bennett.

F. Front Range Passenger Rail

2020 CRISI Grant Application Status

Randy discussed the status of the CRISI Grant. At the last meeting, the Rail Commission approved for Rail Commission staff to use \$20,000 to hire a consultant to put together an application to move the project forward into NEPA, as well as undertake Rail Simulation Modeling. FRA suggested the focus of the CRISI Grant application move from full NEPA funding to the RTC modeling and completion of the Service Development Plan. This would mean the \$10m NEPA application would be scaled back to ~\$1m application. Rail Commission staff held an exploratory call with Washington State DOT; WSDOT received a CRISI Grant for their own service development planning. The WSDOT grant included \$500k in local matching funds. CDOT executive leadership offered OPGR (spell what these letters stand for?) staff resources to complete the application in lieu of hiring a consultant. The main issue is that the Rail Commission has not received any matching funds. Randy indicated that the application would need \$250k in matching funds (20% non-Federal match required) to apply for a \$1 million Federal grant in this application. Randy suggested that the money that was originally intended to hire a consultant be used as the Rail Commission's match. The MPOs and RTD don't seem like they are able to provide funds. CDOT has also not provided matching funds.

Rick Klein confirmed that the Rail Commission staff originally needed \$20k for the consultant, but that money is no longer needed. Randy recommends using that \$20k as Commission matching funds for this grant application. Sal Pace stated that, in a normal year, this would be a good idea. However, at this point, there are no funds for future Rail Commission operating funds. The only currently guaranteed money is the \$186,000 in the Rail Commission's budget and Sal suggests that the Rail Commission hold

off on this matching funds decision. The decision doesn't have to be made today, but Rail Commission staff are spending an inordinate amount of time on this application. Jill Gaebler asked that this decision postponed for now. Rick Klein asked if this grant would come back around again. CRISI Grants are being issued around every six months. Sal Pace asked that Rail Commission staff continue to work on the grant, but a decision on spending Rail Commission dollars should wait. Randy asked Sal if there was a chance the Rail Commission could receive funding through the legislature this year. Sal believes that chance is low.

Jill Gaebler informed the Rail Commission that CDOT leadership has presented a proposal to provide additional CDOT staffing resources to assist the Rail Commission's consultant team. Jill Gaebler suggested that an off-cycle, special meeting be held in early June before the next regular monthly Rail Commission meeting to discuss a draft MOU between CDOT and the Rail Commission more closely. Phil Rico stated he supported holding a special meeting, and that this brings up several questions. Jill stated that she is happy to talk with each Rail Commissioner to discuss. Rail Commission staff will work with CDOT to negotiate this document. Rick Klein, Jim Souby, Terry Hart, Pete Rickershauser, and Becky Karasko all voiced their support for a special meeting. Jacob Riger reemphasized that this concept has come about because of the limited funds available. CDOT is making an effort to come up with an idea to get more work done, without providing additional financial resources. Sophie Shulman also offered to talk with Commissioners offline if need be. Terry Hart asked if the Rail Commission would be looking at multiple options for the consultant work to free up the Commission's available funds, or if just the CDOT option was on the table. Sal Pace responded that money would eventually need to be found to continue future consultant work, and the Commissioners just need to keep in mind where the money is to come from for the options being considered. Jill Gaebler asked Rail Commission staff to identify a date for the meeting on either the first or second Friday in June and get it scheduled.

Front Range Passenger Rail Online Public Meetings

Randy next discussed the upcoming Front Range Passenger Rail Online Public Meetings. HDR's original scope included an online public meeting. People in Colorado still like in-person public meetings but with COVID-related restrictions, an online meeting has become the best tool. Tara Bettale, HDR, provided the Rail Commission with the framework for the meeting. With the footprint of the project area so large and with budget constraints, an online meeting seems to make the most sense. The project team is working on storyboarding the site now. The Rail Commission has seen much of this information, but this is the first time much of the study's work will be presented to the broader public. The project team is working with CDOT staff on a promotional plan. The I-70 Peak Period Shoulder Lane project saw a 300% increase in participation using this type of tool versus an in-person meeting.

Typically, these meetings are live for 30 days; and the project team is proposing 30 days for this effort as well. Participants will be required to provide a zip code to enter the meeting. This allows for an identification of gaps in information coverage. The agenda of the meeting shows what each slide will discuss. These include items such as the project history, vision statement, project schedule and current status, among others. The public will be able to comment on the results of Level 1 Evaluations. As the public scrolls through the meeting, they will see what has been screened out and why. As they move into Level 2 Evaluations, a comment map will be provided so that participants can provide feedback in a meaningful and direct way. The project team will run weekly reports and provide those to Rail Commission staff. Content is being finalized and a toolkit for promotion will be provided. Phil Rico wanted to get the public access information to attend these meetings into the Trinidad newspaper; Tara responded that a point of contact would be provided and someone would be available to answer any questions. Jim Souby reiterated Phil Rico's point and continued to state that, in previous surveys the people participating have been individuals who already support FRPR. This public meeting should be reaching people who are not already supporters. Forrest Whitman stated that Randy Grauberger's appearances on his radio show have been the highest listened-to shows, and that radio show would also get the word out about the online public meeting.

Level 2 Analysis Introduction

Mandy Whorton provided a few updates on the project development. The Segment Coalitions were supportive of the Level 1 Results. Two segments were eliminated, the Great Western/UP line north of Denver and the I-25 corridor through the Denver Tech Center. The Segment Coalitions also provided valuable feedback during their late April meetings that rail service needs to be better than bus; there is support for lower speeds and sealed corridors through communities; and there is a lot of interest in station locations.

The South Segment showed considerable interest in downtown Denver and DTC as destinations instead of DEN. The integration with the Southwest Chief was also highlighted. The South Segment also discussed station area planning in Colorado Springs. The Central Segment highlighted interest in Denver International Airport and Denver Union Station as destinations. Integrating and leveraging RTD service was also important for Central Segment stakeholders. The North Segment provided input relating to the integration with planned/desired local transit, growth along the I-25 corridor, the BNSF corridor serving the current population centers more directly, and envisioning FRPR as a mode to commute between Northern Colorado and Denver.

Sal Pace asked if another route could be added for consideration. Sal proposed, in the North segment, a route that followed the RTD northwest route to Broomfield, but going straight north along US 287 to Longmont. If there is a potential for shared use on that line, that would save money. Bill Van Meter stated that he would need to discuss this with RTD staff before he can comment. The line to Boulder is a priority for the RTD board and if there are opportunities for RTD and the Rail Commission to collaborate, that is likely to be supported. Jim Souby commented that he thinks that route is a great idea, and we should look at it as a future option. This route would consist of greenfield, as there is not currently rail infrastructure along US 287. Pete Rickershauser mentioned BNSF's Lafayette Branch track between Broomfield and Lafayette which could be considered for some of this route, as it gets around the hill Broomfield's core is located on and crosses US 287 north of Broomfield. This route has not been analyzed before.

Mandy continued by presenting information on the engineering efforts that have been underway. These include improving horizontal alignment for 90 mph scenarios, improving vertical profiles for 90 mph scenarios, and developing speed profile and alignments for 125 mph operating speeds and cost estimating methodology.

The project team is documenting the Level 1 evaluation, refining ridership modeling based on the refined alignments, refining stations locations and TOD assumptions, coordinating with USDOT agencies and other agencies, compiling environmental, community and transportation data, and evaluating the potential for portions of shared track operations.

Mandy provided an update on ridership modeling. The observations provided were very preliminary. There are six scenarios that have undergone baseline models. Ridership is expected to improve as corridors are optimized. Initial results, while still not optimized, show that the corridor compares well with other well-known passenger rail corridors. Jim Souby asked if these corridors are seen as successful by their owners and communities. The first two, the Keystone and Hiawatha, are Amtrak lines. The third line, the San Joaquins, is a state-supported line. Randy commented that the Keystone operation is currently carrying about 1.5 million riders a year, connecting densely populated locations. Pete continued that the Keystone between New York, Philadelphia and Harrisburg, PA. The Keystone is only a portion of the overall service in that area; it provides a one seat service between NYC, the major New Jersey cities, Philadelphia and Harrisburg. There are a number of small and intermediate sized cities west of Philadelphia served by the Keystone. Randy then briefly discussed the Hiawatha, an 86-mile corridor. This line carries less than a million riders per year. The San Joaquins provides service between Bakersfield, Oakland and Sacramento, is operated by UP and BNSF and carries a little over a million riders per year.

Mandy displayed high level observations regarding each of the corridors. The BNSF alignments, including RTD's B and N lines, are showing similar trends and ridership. Most of these riders are coming

from the central Boulder and Denver stations. They both show strong ridership in the north and south segments. The I-25/E-470 alignment is showing higher ridership than the others. Randy stated that the modeling team has indicated that these numbers do not include major events, such as Broncos and Rockies games, and major transit oriented development changes that occur around station locations. There is very likely to be dense development around the stations in the future. These numbers should be interpreted as “minimum” ridership projections.

Phil Rico commented that, due to budget constraints, there is limited money to pay the consultants and the Rail Commission should look at phased development and concentrate on which segment to start with. This is important for funding and for the general public to understand where service might start first.

G. Other Items

Sal Pace commented that Amtrak and other states did not have an update on this agenda. Sal suggested that these are important topics and should be included in future meetings. Sal also discussed federal stimulus. Sal was invited by Colorado Concerns to sit on a committee to provide federal stimulus priorities. Sal is sitting on the transportation group and has provided them with specific projects including the continued NEPA work, Southwest Chief re-route, and RTD B Line (potential joint use with FRPR). Sal has also been talking with Senator Gardner and his staff for a couple months about a potential stimulus package. The conversations have moved along and Amtrak has been helpful in putting together language that would request additional funds in a federal stimulus package for state-supported new corridors. There are no longer earmarks so FRPR can be funded specifically. However, Amtrak has identified four intermediate distance intercity corridors to fund including FRPR. Amtrak has indicated that House appropriators are supportive of this concept. If this language is inserted into a federal stimulus bill, it would provide \$2b+ for FRPR. These discussions are ongoing, and Sal doesn't want to instill false hope, but these are possibilities.

H. Confirm Next/Future Meetings

The Rail Commission will continue to meet remotely in the coming months and the next regular monthly meeting will be June 26th.

I. Adjourn

Jill Gaebler adjourned the meeting at 11:23am.

Action Items

Date Assigned	Task	Assignee	Deadline	Completed
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 th deadline	Commissioners, Spencer Dodge	03/09/20	Completed Let's take this one off
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 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	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

Can these last 2 be taken off as well?