

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

Friday, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 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	Yes
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	No
DJ Mitchell	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	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 9:35 am.

## **B. Review/Approval of January 28<sup>th</sup> Draft Commission Meeting Minutes – Jim Souby**

DJ Mitchell made a motion to approve the January 28<sup>th</sup> Draft Commission Meeting Minutes. Rick Klein seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

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

There were no public comments.

## **D. Staff Report – Spencer Dodge/David Singer**

Spencer called attention to document #2 for the staff report. The Commission meeting minutes and agenda packet have been finalized and invoices are being processed for the final report. For transition items, Spencer provided that the Commission has been working with MPOs and COGs on getting appointees submitted by the March 1<sup>st</sup> deadline. Most have submitted with the exception of the South Central COG. Spencer asked Mayor Rico about this, and Mayor Rico said Luis Lopez has been nominated. Spencer is working with legislative staff to get the appointees lined up for Senate confirmations and will reach out with next steps. The Governor's appointment process is moving forward to meet their deadline of April 1<sup>st</sup>. The remaining Commissioner comments have been incorporated into the draft Final Report, an onboarding packet is in the works, and the FRPR website has been updated. There are various efforts happening regarding the corridor identification and development program. Spencer recently presented to AASHTO Council on Rail and the team is working with FRA staff and national partners to ensure that we are aligned and following their process as best as possible.

On the financial side, SB-260 allotted \$2.5m for the new rail district and a portion is allocated for the SDP. The state controller is currently processing those funds. The numbers in the Final Report will be different and those changes will be reflected within the next 30 days. Spencer mentioned that the States for Passenger Rail Coalition membership dues have increased from \$5,000 to \$7,500. This amount change needs approval from the Commission since it exceeds the previously approved amount. Spencer advocated for the value of the membership as it allows FRPR to reach out to peer groups and states who have gone through or are going through the same process. The Commission can look at different SOWs, MOUs, and IGAs to draw inspiration from as well as be a part of the national conversation. Bill Van Meter asked if the membership is fully transferable from the Rail Commission to the District. Jacob Riger asked about when membership is due for renewal and if this is a decision that the new board should be making. Spencer will confirm both transferability and renewal deadline with the Coalition. DJ Mitchell motioned to approve the membership fee increase; Mayor Rico seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously but is subject to the membership transferability.

David Singer provided an update on the work happening with FRA staff planners on making their comments a reality. The team is now focused on SDP procurement and completing the RFP which should be finalized the first week of March. The grant award will be issued in the next 30 days. David stated that the environmental team is gathering data to have ready and are looking at other comprehensive CDOT models. David announced CDOT will be working with RTD partners on understanding what is possible on the Denver-Boulder-Longmont route now that RTD selected a consultant. The team is wrapping up administrative tasks on the SWC PTC Grant and getting a head start on the upcoming agreements.

Jim Souby asked about the status of RTD's Northwest Rail. Bill Van Meter responded that RTD announced their consultant selection and are coming to terms on the contract to proceed forward on the Peak Period Service Plan. Mayor Rico asked about the appointees and which members from the current Commission will be on the District. Mayor Rico and Jim Souby expressed concern about continuity.

Spencer confirmed a few members that will continue on to the District including Jill Gaebler, Jim Tylick, Nathan Anderson, Rob Eaton, and CDOT's Amber Blake.

## **E. Southwest Chief**

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

Spencer Dodge provided an update on the Southwest Chief Thru-Car Service Alternatives Analysis. The draft purpose and need and stakeholder engagement plan are ready to be sent out. An email blast will be sent out soon with the draft purpose and need, stakeholder engagement plan, and the updated FRPR website. Spencer would like to utilize the three geographic regions and the south segment coalition to make stakeholder engagement more manageable.

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

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

David Singer provided an update on the preliminary SDP and AA. David announced that FRA clarified the grant award deliverables and FRA expectations have been plugged into the RFP scope of work. FRA has updated their guidelines which has informed CDOT's SOW. The team is also following CDOT's environmental linkages program which outlines best practices according to CDOT's planning and environmental program. There is a heavy focus on rulemaking to move efficiently through the planning process. On the procurement side, David's team is working with CDOT's contract team. The consultant selection process is going to start March 3<sup>rd</sup>. The team can expect upcoming negotiation and issue a master contract by early summer.

Jim Souby asked about the term "preliminary" when talking about the scope, especially regarding the PEL vs. EIS. David explained that corridor planning is a long and complex process starting with conceptual steps, moving into NEPA, and then the final design. The SDP will be finalized much further into NEPA. Right now, we are in the conceptual stage. At the conclusion of the 2020 CRISI grant, we will have an understanding of the alternatives, but not as precise as needed. Jim also asked about satisfying the legislative requirements and Spencer Dodge confirmed that the SOW meets the requirements.

Mayor Rico inquired about the RAISE Grant and asked how it will affect Pueblo rail, mainly regarding Evraz rail mill and the Ukraine/Russian conflict. Spencer validated this concern and will follow up with the Governor's office on Russian sanctions. Jim Tylick commented that there haven't been implications for BNSF yet. DJ Mitchell mentioned that there are other methods of procurement with the Buy American Act.

## **G. Other Items**

### *Draft Final Report Narrative Approval – Spencer Dodge*

Spencer affirmed that the remaining comments have been incorporated in the final report and asked for approval of the draft. He also asked for any other questions/comments from the Commissioners. Phil Rico thanked Spencer for including his comments. He also mentioned that the figure on page 13 is unclear. Jim Souby and DJ Mitchell saw no additions and thanked Spencer and the contractors for their work on the final report. DJ Mitchell motioned to approve the draft, Rick Klein seconded the motion. The Commissioners unanimously approved the draft of the final report.

### *District Transition Facilitation Contract Approval – Spencer Dodge*

Spencer Dodge shared the facilitation contract proposal. There have been discussions on having two separate 8 hour workshops for Board members, or the potential of reducing it to two 4 hour meetings. Spencer said that the FRPR team is flexible with options then turned the discussion over to the group.

Commissioners were happy to hear of the flexibility and the ability to accommodate schedules, especially for officials who have other duties. Becky Karasko asked about the differences in the two chartering workshops and reconciling the differences between the two. Spencer affirmed that there would be a follow-up meeting to consolidate any items and reconcile the discrepancies. Jacob Riger would like to see a scope of work for the workshop to have a clear understanding of its intent. David Singer said that the board will have an opportunity to work closely with the vendor and offer suggestions later. Spencer Dodge suggested extending the April meeting to discuss the workshop agenda but there is an urgency to move forward with the budget and procurement process. DJ Mitchell motioned to approve the budget and procurement process, Jacob seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Jim Souby emphasized the importance of the District being the largest taxing district in the state of Colorado as they can refer a tax measure to voters within the district. Jim wants to ensure that all the district appointees understand the importance of the role that they play and the responsibilities they have. Jim also asked if there can be a subcommittee to solve some concerns and plan out this facilitation process. Spencer approved putting together a transition subcommittee and the idea received support from other Commissioners. Jim Souby motioned to create a subcommittee. Jacob Riger, Sal Pace and Phil Rico will be on the subcommittee with Jim. The motion passed unanimously.

### *Amtrak Updates – Rob Eaton*

Rob Eaton provided a quick update on Amtrak. Amtrak is responding to FRA's request for corridor development and planning information and is continuing to work on spend plans. They have formulated a team to work on over 60 initiatives through IJA and are working with emerging corridors to educate them on FRA's process. Amtrak is now operating service about 5 times a week and are developing plans to emerge from covid impacts. There will be a press release at the end of March to roll out plans for cross country services. Rob also mentioned that as the board is transitioning, he is happy to provide whatever support CDOT and the Rail Commission need. Additionally, the Winter Park Express has had success in ridership (410 passengers in one day), and the refurbished car continues to get compliments.

Jim Souby asked about major procurements of major equipment (i.e. Siemen's engines). Rob confirmed that part of the spend plan is looking at equipment for long distance locomotives and trains. Mayor Rico inquired about updates on infrastructure money that may be coming to the state for rail. Rob did not have an update on that but he did follow up with Mayor Rico on the Trinidad Station and will get more technical information to David Singer.

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

The next Rail Commission meeting is on Friday, March 25<sup>th</sup>. The board will confirm the MPO/COG appointees at the next meeting. The March meeting will be centered around a Congressional panel to provide everyone an opportunity to learn from the panelists and ask questions. The April meeting will be a joint meeting with new members to kick off the District and wrap up the work of the Commission.

## **I. Adjourn**

Jim Souby adjourned the meeting at 10:34 am.