

Southwest Chief and Front Range Passenger Rail Commission Draft Meeting Minutes

Friday, February 26th, 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	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 – 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	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
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: Spencer Dodge (SWC & FRPRC), David Singer (CDOT), Dominic Spaethling (HNTB), Tim Hoover (CDOT), Bill Craven (NMDOT), Carla Perez (HDR), Chris Enright (CDOT), Dan Kline (WYDOT), Dave Genova (Hatch LTK), Drew Brooks (Fort Collins), Geoff Guthrie (CDOT), Jack Tone (ColoRail), Jamie Grim (CDOT), Jeff Dawson (CDOT), John Liosatos (PPACG), Kristin Kenyon (FTA) Lisa Streisfeld (CDOT), Mandy Whorton (Peak Consulting), Mark Langley (AECOM), Mary Shelton (Kimley Horn), Michael Meyer (Quandel), Myron Hora (WSP), Nathan Minor (CPR), Nathaniel Wollinka, Rebecca White (CDOT), Rob Colosimo (HNTB), Scott Lesikar, Terry Hart, Tom Mason (Cheyenne MPO), Tracey MacDonald (FTA),

A. Call to Order and Introductions – Jim Souby

Jim Souby convened the meeting at 9:33 am and began a roll call of attending commissioners. Jim also took a moment to thank David Krutsinger, who is leaving CDOT to become the Director of Transit for the City and County of Denver.

B. Review/Approval of January 22nd Draft Commission Meeting Minutes – Jim Souby

Jim Souby asked for a motion to approve the draft minutes from the January 22nd commission meeting. Rick Klein made that motion, Phil Rico seconded that motion. No comments, amendments or other considerations were noted and the commission approved the minutes unanimously.

C. Public Comment Period – Public

There were no public comments

D. Staff Report – Spencer Dodge/David Singer

Spencer Dodge and David Singer provided the rail commission with a staff report. This report differs from the previous Project Director's Report. Spencer will provide an update on commission staff activities while David will provide an update on CDOT staff efforts. Spencer continued to provide public involvement presentations throughout the Front Range. Spencer and CDOT met with state legislators to address questions on needed funds. Ownership of the frontrangepassengerrail.com website has been transferred to the rail commission and any changes can be forwarded to Spencer. The HDR contract for the Alternatives Analysis has been completed and no remaining tasks are left to do.

David Singer updated the commission on the Risk Register that CDOT staff have compiled. This document compiles potential risks and mitigation efforts. The procurement processes for the two CRISI Grants are underway. David Singer also worked to on board as Randy has moved on from the commission. The CDOT staff are working to plan the March Corridor Coalition meeting. CDOT is also working on Burnham Yard and David is ensuring that FRPR is included in those conversations. Lisa Streisfeld is working with the Front Range MPOs to ensure that plans for FRPR are included in their Long Range Plans.

E. Southwest Chief

Tiger IX Grant – Bill Craven

Bill Craven provided an update on the TIGER IX grant. BNSF has just about finished up their work, if they receive a Buy America exemption then that work is completed. There are still design documents that need to be finalized on the New Mexico side. The Project Management Plan is undergoing a few remaining updates. The work on the NMDOT side of the project should be completed by the end of the year. Amtrak, BNSF, and FRA met to discuss the 2020 CRISI Grant that they received. That environmental work is expected to be done this year and contracts in place by the end of the year. That grant include work on bridges and rock fall mitigation, as well as the installation of continuous welded rail and additional tie replacements. Jim Souby asked about PTC on the New Mexico portion and where that stands. DJ Mitchell stated that the contracts for design have been executed and sent to CDOT. That design work should be about 3 months. There will be a review period and then a 9 month work process. It will likely be done by the end of the year.

2018 PTC CRISI Grant – David Krutsinger

David Krutsinger provided a quick update for the group on the PTC CRISI Grant. As DJ mentioned earlier, CDOT and BNSF have signed Part B of their contracting which allows the project to advance from design to construction. David Krutsinger also thanked Megan Kelly, Brian Hartman, and Lauren Cabot for their work on the agreements.

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

Spencer Dodge gave an update on the 2019 CRISI Grant. A consultant team has been selected. The AECOM team has been notified of that award. There are several administrative tasks to be completed, but the project is on schedule.

DJ Mitchell mentioned that BNSF has set aside \$5m for the completion of the rail relay on the La Junta sub. There is no BUILD or CRISI Grant application available, but BNSF has set that money aside to pursue that project. It is 28 miles of continuous welded rail.

F. Front Range Passenger Rail

2020 CRISI Grant: FRPR SDP and Rail Simulation Modeling Update – Spencer Dodge

Staff have provided a draft Scope of Work to the FRA for their review. The hope is to get that back within the next few weeks. Once that document is complete, a more finalized budget and schedule will be built out. Lessons learned from the 2019 CRISI Grant have been applied and trust is being built with FRA. Jim asked if there were any hurdles that staff were facing at the time, there was nothing significant to note.

CDOT MOU – Jim Souby

Jim stated that he believed this document to be an appropriate staffing and support document. Jim recommends approval. CDOT and the rail commission came to an agreement last June and specified where shared resources would go. Much has happened since June and CDOT wanted to refresh the assumptions in that MOU to reflect the changes in work coming. Much of the content is the same, and CDOT is ready to execute. Rick Klein asked what the differences are. Those differences are an update to the scope, discussing the CRISI grants and CDOT's role. With the last effort, CDOT was doing a lot of design, engineering, modeling, and environmental work. In the upcoming efforts, CDOT anticipates their work to be more oversight and technical expertise. Jacob Riger offered a comment on the reference to the Executive Committee. That EOC exists and won't need to be reformed. Jacob noted that this MOU draft seems to only reference the CRISI Grants and not the overall goals of the commission. Rick Klein agreed with this and thought the MOU was only referring to the CRISI Grants. The CRISI Grants are the heart of the work, and with that in mind Jim believes this document will be okay. David commented that further clarifying notes can be added as that won't change the substantive portion. Jacob Riger asked if this document is intended to be an amendment to the older MOU or if it intended to supersede that document and suggested a little more clarity, but is happy to move forward. David and Spencer will take the suggested changes and add those to the document and send back out for approval. DJ Mitchell made that motion, Jacob Riger seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

RTD Collaboration – Jim Souby

Jim began this conversation by discussing conversations he has had with Bill Van Meter. The Northwest Rail line is one of the bigger transportation policy issues that the state legislature is facing. A resolution on this issue will be needed soon. Bill and Jim have discussed an agreement to collaborate on how the commission and RTD to reach their collective goals. Bill provided some background. On February 9th, he gave an update on NWR to the RTD Board and how to find a path forward to implement a peak period service plan. Discussions occurred a year ago with a number of local government officials to gauge interest in a peak service plan (i.e 3 round trips in the morning and the evening). The charge to return to the board 60 days after that February 9th meeting with a set of recommendations was given. The RTD Board of Directors is very interested in this potential collaborative agreement with the rail commission. The potential for authorization of the Network Modernization program that Amtrak is discussing has added another wrinkle. Stakeholders and the RTD Board are interested in partnerships as they see NWR and FRPR succeeding this way. Debra Johnson is in support of formalizing a partnership with the rail commission and RTD. Bill also suggested making this agreement a multi-party agreement beyond just RTD and the rail commission, CDOT would be the additional partner.

Jim Souby supports the idea of demonstrating partnerships and engagement in a way that lends itself to success. A formalized cooperating agreement might convey the importance to policymakers. Sal Pace mentioned that former Speaker of the House KC Becker brought up NWR and how that was reason to not support FRPR. Recently, a lack of NWR has been brought up again in discussing FRPR. This agreement is very important to the politics of both of these projects. Sal supports this path. Rick Klein thanked Bill and Jim and stated that all parties need to be at the table, and if they are not there we don't have the right people in the room. Rick also stated that this kind of partnership will also help the Class 1 railroads. Mayor Rico said he is fine with this, but would like to see support in the southern area when the time comes. Jim stated that he will continue to work with Bill and Sal and it is essential that the rail commission and RTD come together and work this out.

Identified Risks – All

DJ Mitchell began this discussion by providing some of his thoughts. The objective is to ensure the commission ensures their credibility through a long process. There are a lot of political issues, sizable amount of money involved, etc. DJ has seen efforts like this run afoul when promises are made that cannot be met. In other areas, promises have been made in respect to timeline and cost that could not be delivered, this casts a shadow over the rest of the process. DJ has identified a couple of catch points that can hamper the overall project. These include environmental reviews, dollar commitments before the engineering is completed and environmental mitigation efforts are identified, and before the operating plan. DJ has focused a good amount of attention on the operating plan. Conceptually, it is easy to grasp a number of trains running per day. The implication of what the commission decides to accomplish from a policy view is major. DJ used Washington as an example and posed the question, if you want to have everyone home before bedtime you'll need to have trains leaving before 6:00pm. What do you want to accomplish? How do you want the rest of the transportation network to operate with passenger rail? These kinds of questions fall to the rail commission and it is the collective role to answer these questions that make sense to the public. The question in short, what do we want to accomplish? Transit time, time of day, and frequency are all important to understand.

Jim Souby agreed with DJ and mentioned that ColoRail members are also asking these questions. Jim asked David Singer and Spencer Dodge how they are thinking about this matter. Spencer responded that he and David have done some work on the specifics of these topics. David continued by explaining that this conversation was held with the commission previously. He also discussed the Risk Register that CDOT has developed. This is a common practice with big projects and depending on your perspective, you can find a lot of risks. These risks have all been compiled and sorted into themes such as environmental, service development, right of way. Neutral identification of the risks occur first, then the team prioritizes these risks. The risks evolve over time and highlighting the most critical helps guide efforts. With these risks identified, a mitigation plan is developed and this helps the team determine where to focus their energy. Much of the mitigation strategies are quickly approaching initiation.

David Singer also added that FRA is also expecting an approach to clarifying what we want to accomplish. Mayor Rico asked if David has a list of primary risks. David and the CDOT team are working to produce that in a way that can convey the risk information in an appropriate manner. Jim Souby asked if Service Development Planning will reach the objectives. DJ responded that the questions that still need to be answer, will be done so in an SDP. Depending on the objectives sought after, the SDP will be based around answering those questions.

G. Other Items

Surface Transportation Reauthorization – Jim Souby

Jim discussed Amtrak's proposal for funding within the reauthorization bill. The House has been supportive and the Senate will be weighing in soon. Some of the big issues include a passenger rail trust fund which would increase the likely success of passenger rail.

Amtrak Update – Rob Eaton

Rob Eaton had to leave early but provided a quick update in the chat. This included administrative COVID funding. If that funding is provided, the long distance lines would have restored service. Recalling service employees and initiating every day service would take about 90 days. After COVID funding, Amtrak will pivot to focusing on reauthorization and an infrastructure funding bill. Amtrak 2035 corridor vision includes FRPR. Restoration of service on the long distance trains is a condition within the House reauthorization bill.

State Legislative Update – Andy Karsian and Sal Pace

Andy Karsian provided a quick update to the rail commission. Andy informed the commission that things were relatively quiet at the capital. One bill, as part of the state's stimulus, provided \$30m to CDOT to pass through to local governments. This money is intended to be used to improve main street safety. Andy also added that the legislature will want to see a clear Service Development Plan. Much of what Andy hears are questions that haven't been answered yet, but will be addressed in the SDP.

H. Confirm Next/Future Meetings

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

I. Adjourn

Jim Souby adjourned the meeting at 11:12 am.