

Southwest Chief and Front Range Passenger Rail Commission

Draft Meeting Minutes

Friday, April 24th, 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	

*Non-Voting Members

Others: Randy Grauberger (SWC & FRPRC), Spencer Dodge (SWC& FRPRC), Bryan Robinson (WSP), John Adams (PACOG), John Liosatos (PPACG), Sophie Shulman (CDOT), Bill Craven (NMDOT), Jeff Dawson (CDOT), Mandy Whorton (Peak Consulting), Dan Kline (WYDOT), Brian Hartman (CDOT), Tim Hoover (CDOT), David Singer (CDOT), Myron Hora (WSP), Eric Richardson (CDOT), Melanie Monarco (WSP), Dominic Spaethling (HNTB), Joe Pimentel (LiUNA), Carla Perez (HDR)

A. Call to Order and Introductions – Jill Gaebler

Jill Gaebler called the meeting to order at 10:00am and began calling names of those who were on the Zoom participant list.

B. Review/Approval of March 27th Draft Meeting Minutes – Jill Gaebler

Jill asked if there were any changes. Pete Rickershauser made a motion to approve, Rick Klein seconded and the Commission approved the minutes unanimously.

C. Public Comment Period – Public

No public comments.

D. Project Director's Report – Randy Grauberger

Randy Grauberger provided his Project Director's report to the Rail Commission. During this time, Randy took the opportunity to thank front line responders. Randy then discussed the dire budget projections for the state and informed the Rail Commission that CDOT leadership had expressed a reluctance to ask the Transportation Commission for further Rail Commission funding. In 2018, the Rail Commission received their first \$2.5 million from the state legislature. That same year, the Multi-Modal Options Fund was created. Unfortunately, that money is unable to be allocated to the Rail Commission. SB 267 funds have been used in the past for pre-construction and transit related purposes, including a \$50,000 match for the recently awarded CRISI Grant for the Southwest Chief Thru-Car Feasibility Study. CDOT has stated that they will not ask the Transportation Commission for any SB 267 funds for the Rail Commission. Sometime in the future there will be a vaccine for COVID-19 and traffic will again be at the levels previously seen, with the public clamoring for other transportation options. Randy and many Commissioners were excited following their joint lunch with the Transportation Commission. Randy encouraged Commissioners to reach out to their individual Transportation Commissioners to explore options for Rail Commission funding. Randy has been charged with finding funding for the Commission in the next six months and this is likely to be a reoccurring topic. Rick Klein commented that he would be happy to reach out to Bill Thiebaut, Chair of the Transportation Commission, to discuss funding.

Sophie Shulman, CDOT, suggested that everyone watch Shoshana Lew's presentations to the Transportation Commission over the last few weeks. SB 267 funds are at risk of losing a couple years of funding, putting local projects at risk. Sophie wanted to make sure that everyone had the full background and context around the funding conversation. Pete Rickershauser asked if there was anything anyone would recommend. Randy responded that Rail Commission staff are exploring the upcoming CRISI Grant for future funding, but that would be at least a year before those funds could be received. He mentioned state funding which may become available because of lack of required local matches., There is a Commission sub-committee that is looking at submitting language for stimulus bills and reauthorization. Jim Souby suggested that the Rail Commission look into foundations that fund transportation projects, although he is unsure how much could be available or if the Rail Commission is eligible to receive such funding. Phil Rico discussed a potential talking point that the state has seen much cleaner air since traffic has alleviated off the roadways. Jill Gaebler discussed, following a conversation with Shoshana Lew, a couple of grant opportunities including a DOT IES grant; Sophie will check to see if this is a funding possibility. Sal Pace echoed Rick Klein's comments regarding outreach to the Transportation Commissioners. In May, the JBC will be opening up budget conversations and it would not be out of line to earmark some transit funds for FRPR. David Krutsinger responded to this and suggested that the Rail Commission also talk with each of the MPOs along the corridor. Phil Rico asked Sal Pace if any of the stimulus money coming from the federal government could be used for FRPR; that is unlikely at the time.

E. Southwest Chief

Tiger IX

Bill Craven provided an update on this grant. Attachments for the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) are being submitted that week. BNSF provided feedback on the schedule and are sending over performance reports. Colfax County currently has draft for all other documents. FRA reviewed the Statement of Work attachment and they have no issues with how that is structured. Bill is planning on sending that out to Colfax County for them to submit to FRA. Sub-agreements still need to be completed, but are in the process of approval now. The status of the BNSF and Colfax County sub-agreement is unknown. Pete Rickershauser will look into this and reach back out to Bill. Once BNSF and NMDOT have sub-agreements with Colfax County that are complete and the overall grant agreement is completed, Colfax County can issue a notice to proceed. December 31st, 2021 is the required completion date for all work. Bill hopes that work will not continue beyond December 2021.

2018 CRISI Grant

David Krutsinger provided an update on the 2018 CRISI Grant. CDOT has met with each of the grant partners and are close on sub-agreements. The sub-agreement between CDOT and BNSF must be completed before the grant can move forward; this is a distinguishing requirement with CRISI grants compared to TIGER. David is optimistic these agreements will go out in draft form in the next few weeks and will possibly be signed by the end of May. The next two progress meetings are on May 5th and May 26th. Pete Rickershauser asked if there was anything David needed from BNSF; at the time, there was not and David was working on finalizing sub-agreements before the final agreement is sent to BNSF. Pete asked when that could be expected from BNSF and David suggested two weeks.

2019 CRISI Grant

Randy Grauberger discussed the CRISI Grant for the Thru-Car Feasibility Study. David Krutsinger, Spencer Dodge, and Randy held a kickoff call with FRA for FRA to provide direction and input. Randy is drafting the Scope of Work and will distribute that to the Southwest Chief sub-committee for their review. Randy is also finalizing a schedule and budget. FRA informed Rail Commission staff that these kinds of projects take 3-18 months to obligate the money; FRA indicated that this planning study should be obligated on the lower end of that range. FRA provided a document that showed additional service, including two round trips per day instead of just the one. FRA is revising this document following their call with Randy and Spencer and the new version will be provided to the Southwest Chief sub-committee for their review and comment. The study will not be big enough to analyze all service options so Randy is requesting that the Southwest Chief sub-committee decide on 2 or 3 to focus on.

2020 BUILD Grant

Randy then discussed the 2020 BUILD Grant application. Since the last meeting, the state of New Mexico had backed out of the application. The application will just be for improvements on the La Junta Subdivision in Kansas and Colorado. Seneca is working on this application; the City of Trinidad is the sponsor for the grant. Local commitments are still being sought for matches. CDOT provided \$1 million from SB 267 in matching funds for this effort. The application is due May 18th. Due to budget issues, there are a few communities who are unable to provide matching funds as they have in the past. Ray Lang added that Amtrak divided the 2020 BUILD Grant into two applications; half of which going to the La Junta sub and the other to a new CRISI grant for improvements in New Mexico. Amtrak received feedback that their last application was too big and too expensive and were encouraged to pare that down. Ray also commended BNSF for their increase in capital match for the La Junta subdivision application. This leads to a greater match and smaller federal ask. Pete Rickershauser shared that BNSF was expecting to increase their match from \$3 million to \$5 million. At least 50% of the funding needs to be matching funds that are non-federal.

Pete also mentioned it is his understanding that FRA is also looking to Amtrak to provide a plan for how the already-approved \$50 million appropriation for the Southwest Chief will be spent and that plan needs to be a part of this application. Ray responded that he had heard some rumblings of that, but had not heard of FRA's specific ask to include that information. Amtrak has received feedback on some failed applications that the Amtrak match is perceived as a federal match and so Amtrak is considering that. \$34 million of that original \$50 million is remaining. Ray doesn't believe FRA is looking for this plan in the BUILD application, but that FRA does need the plan at some point.

Phil Rico asked when a final draft of this application would be available. Randy was unsure but will work with Rick Klein and Pete Rickershauser to determine that. Phil also asked if BNSF might be able to provide funding for the Rail Commission. Pete suggested that it is a question can be asked, but he suggested not to get his hopes up.

Randy Grauberger also discussed the recently released NOFO for the new CRISI grant. Shoshana Lew suggested to Randy that it might be a good idea for the Commission to submit an application for the full NEPA process. The state of Washington received a CRISI grant to complete a Service Development Plan. FRA stated that the Commission would not be penalized for receiving a CRISI Grant previously. The last CRISI Grant application was compiled with a \$24,000 contract with a consultant. CDOT is considering two projects for this year's CRISI Grant. The Rail Commission should make a decision to provide funding for a consultant team to put together an application for the CRISI Grant. The application is due June 19th and work would need to begin soon. Jim Souby stated that, if FRA is telling us we can use this grant for a key part in the entire FRPR project, the Commission should do so, which Rick Klein and Phil Rico agreed with. This item was not on the agenda, so a motion was unable to be made. However, Randy received approval to begin work on the application. Randy understands only a 20% match is required. Terry Hart suggested the agenda should be amended, adding this line item and have a vote on it. Terry Hart made a motion to amend the agenda and add CRISI 2020 Grant line item, and approve staff utilizing approximately \$20,000 to retain a consultant to compile the application. Jim Souby seconded the motion, and the Rail Commission unanimously approved it.

F. Front Range Passenger Rail

Level 1 Alternatives Evaluation/Analysis

Carla Perez introduced the Level 1 Alternatives Evaluation presentation to the Rail Commission. One of the benefits to social distancing and working remotely is that it has allowed the team to increase productivity. Documents have been provided to Commissioners for further detail on this information. Additionally, Segment Stakeholder Coalitions will be held the following week where this information will be provided to stakeholders.

David Singer, CDOT, began a presentation on the Level 1 Alternative Analysis. The project team will provide this progress update to the Rail Commission as well as a preview of Level 2 Evaluations. To start, David provided the existing opportunities for alternatives. These include highway and freight rail alignments. The project team is also looking at an alternative for no action, which is an expansion of Bustang service. This serves as a baseline. The project team is examining the corridor in different segments; North, Central, and South. The presentation provided at this meeting focused on alternatives that were unable to survive the Level 1 fatal flaw analysis.

David reviewed the four Fatal Flaw Evaluation categories for each alternative. These include: operational characteristics, community and environmental impacts, financial and economic factors, and finally feasibility and implementation. In Level 1, the project team is evaluating these categories on a Yes/No basis. Level 2 Analysis will be more detailed. David highlighted two corridor segments that have been eliminated as they have one or more fatal flaws.

The first alternative eliminated is in the Central Segment: I-25 RTD Light Rail Retrofit. This area is along I-25 in Southeast Denver, including the Denver Tech Center (DTC), where there is little room for expansion. Severe community disruption and interruption to RTD service for as long as six years renders

this alternative unfeasible. There are also several locations in this corridor where the geometry does not allow for Front Range Passenger Rail. Pete Rickershauser asked if this route was the route that follows I-25 all the way to E-470 and not to the route that goes along Santa Fe to the Mineral Station (RTD's Southwest Corridor). David confirmed that it is only the SE corridor along I-25 that has been eliminated

The second alternative eliminated is the Union Pacific/Great Western alignment in the North Segment; Denver north to Greeley on the UP and on to Fort Collins along the Great Western. This alignment does not allow for a "backbone" alignment and avoids major population and employment centers. The route bypasses Boulder, Longmont, Berthoud and other I-25 corridor communities. NFRMPO, in the past, has deemed the US 85 corridor better served by bus than train. Public support for this route is low, both historically and currently. Pete Rickershauser noted that it appeared the project team had not looked at the alignment that uses the UP Fort Collins Subdivision. From I-25 northwest to Fort Collins, the UP's Fort Collins Subdivision was still under consideration as a connection into Fort Collins. David responded that there were similar concerns such as community disruptions and lack of support as well as not reaching population centers as well. Sal Pace asked if the route that goes through Broomfield and Boulder along 287 is still being considered; at the meeting, this was understood to be RTD's NW Rail alignment, which is still being evaluated.

Level 2 Evaluation Next Steps

Mandy Whorton then discussed the alternatives being carried forward to Level 2 Evaluations; two corridors in the South Segment, five in the Central Segment, and two in the North Segment. The South Segment includes the freight rail corridor and the I-25 corridor. In the Central Segment, there are two routes entering Denver from the south and three different routes exiting Denver to the north. In the North Segment, there are two routes going into Fort Collins.

Each of these alternatives can be improved with geometric refinements. Ridership modeling numbers are being produced now. It is very likely that there will be several combinations of route options. Mandy then reviewed the criteria for the Level 2 Evaluation. The same four categories that were in the Level 1 Analysis are being used, albeit at a more detailed level. Mandy then reviewed each of the alternatives for each segment.

In the South Segment, one alternative follows I-25 from Pueblo to Monument and Castle Rock and the other alternative is along the consolidated mainline freight corridor from Pueblo to Monument and Castle Rock. These two routes are very similar; in some places one alternative might work better than the other so there is likely to be a hybrid route. The project team is taking into account considerations for refinements. These include connections to the Southwest Chief, access to downtown Colorado Springs, topography and sensitive natural areas, and access to Denver area destinations. Phil Rico stated that he did not hear any mention of the route going south of Pueblo. At the moment, the project team is showing a future connection to the Southwest Chief in Trinidad; or even a future re-route of the Southwest Chief through Pueblo and Walsenburg to Trinidad.

In the Central Segment there are 5 alternatives being carried forward. The two routes entering Denver from the south include: I-25 to E-470 with a transfer to RTD; and, the freight corridor that follows US 85 and the RTD Southwest LRT to Burnham Yard/Denver Union Station. The three routes exiting Denver and heading north include: RTD North Metro and I-25, the BNSF/RTD Northwest Commuter Rail corridor that goes to Boulder, and E470 and the I-25 corridor. There are quite a few constrained right of ways and development adjacent to the corridors being analyzed. A question was raised as to the location that Amtrak's California Zephyr intersects with the E 470 alignment. That intersection is right where I-76 and E-470 meet. Sal Pace reminded the group that there was great upside to working with RTD, particularly along their Northwest Rail line. Jacob Riger asked Mandy to discuss the E-470 route and if that precludes other options. Mandy explained that Castle Rock is a key decision point as that choice will eliminate other routes that go either to downtown Denver or DIA, and factors heavily in travel times as some routes allow for faster speeds. The Central Segment is, by far, the most complicated.

In the North Segment, the two alternatives carried forward are the I-25 corridor and the BNSF corridor. Several factors being considered in this segment include impacts on developed communities, grade separations, train speeds, and planned and desired intraregional transit. Pete Rickershauser commented on the diagonal line from I-25 into Fort Collins and asked if that was the Great Western Right of Way. Pete pointed out that the arrow going straight north to Cheyenne is more complicated than it shows. Pete suggested the team give preliminary thought to how the alignments would move north from Fort Collins as that will be a challenge. Mandy responded that this should be added to considerations and is a key point. Bill Craven asked how many stations were being considered between Longmont and Castle Rock. The project team is still looking at this but expects three in central Denver, one in Longmont and one in Castle Rock. This is preliminary and not final.

Mandy then discussed ridership. Preliminary modeling has been completed for six baseline scenarios, five passenger rail scenarios and a best bus scenario. These alignments have not been optimized for peak ridership yet.

Phil Rico asked when the project team anticipates having final recommendations for the Rail Commission to consider. For a final plan and to apply for grants, those will be needed soon. Randy responded that the project team is working to get this down to a couple of reasonable alternatives to take into formal NEPA and to the legislature by the end of the year. The Level 2 Evaluation will take quite a bit of detailed work. The goal is to try and have the project ready for a Notice of Intent by the end of the calendar year. Jim Souby asked if the project team would be able to deliver by December in relation to the financial situation. Randy is working with the consultant team to identify absolute necessary efforts to get the project to the stated goal. CDOT is also exploring the possibility of putting more of their resources on this project. Jim commented that this information will paint the picture for this project to be acceptable to the public and those who may help fund it. Mandy Whorton stated HDR wants to ensure the Commission receives a quality product. Jim concurred,

Front Range Passenger Rail Online Public Meetings

Tara Bettale, HDR, provided a brief overview of the what was being planned for online public meetings. An example was shown from the I-70 Westbound Peak Period Shoulder Lane Project Online Meeting. Given the tight budget, online public meetings are an easier and less expensive way to gather feedback and provide information to the public and stakeholders. Tara provided examples of each of the different features available. Randy commented that he believed this to be a very appropriate method of communication, especially given the current public health crisis.

G. Other Items

CARES Act and Federal Stimulus

Randy Grauberger discussed a document that was provided to the Rail Commission that discussed the FRPR project and COVID-19. These were talking points that Commissioners can use if asked about how the project is continuing during this time. Randy asked for comments on this document by April 29.

Randy also discussed the CARES Act and federal stimulus actions. There were several documents distributed to the Rail Commission relating to these items as well as Federal Reauthorization. Jim Souby mentioned four things needed to be done. These include: determining priorities for Colorado (this includes Amtrak's priorities), determine which are feasible, what Congressional opportunities will exist, and finally the reauthorization of the federal Surface Transportation Act. After that, the Rail Commission needs to determine provisions to ask of Congress that can be delivered. Bill Van Meter discussed specific draft wording that Rail Commissioners might be able to use for FAST Act Reauthorization or Stimulus Funding Requests. This document attempts to find language changes or opportunities that would be not specific to Colorado but something that gives leverage to try and identify new funding opportunities in planning, NEPA, SDP, and construction on joint operating corridors shared between different services and agencies. Sal Pace provided an update via the Zoom chat feature on the work he

had been doing. The comment read, "I received a call from Gardner's staff this morning. They asked for suggested language ASAP and want to connect us to Commerce staff. After we can agree on language that would be beneficial for us and Colorado we need to start putting it into an ask ASAP. Incidentally, I am representing passenger rail on Monday in a discussion with Colorado Concern about a Colorado request in the stimulus. I suggest that the sooner we can reach consensus the better off we'll be. I'd like to ask for direction for the subcommittee to keep moving with haste." That subcommittee included: Jill Gaebler, Jacob Riger, Sal Pace, Bill Van Meter, Jim Souby, and Pete Rickershauser. Carla Perez also mentioned that she and Jennifer Webster are there to support that conversation. Pete Rickershauser commented that there were three documents distributed and that Commissioners are encouraged to review those for fatal flaws or key highlights. Pete suggested that the document from Bill Van Meter is key and should be reviewed first. Jim Souby reiterated that Amtrak and Ray Lang were very helpful in this process.

Ray Lang discussed the Amtrak reauthorization proposal that they have been working on. There are a number of corridors that are underserved or not served at all. The price tag for these services is very high. The proposal has been delayed, but it is a capital grant program to develop new corridors, one of which is the Colorado Front Range. Ray suggested that these capital infrastructure projects could be funded through a stimulus bill. Phil Rico asked that the Amtrak document referred to be shared with the Commission, and Ray said it would be provided.

Pueblo Station Area Plan

Bryan Robinson, WSP, presented on the Pueblo Station Area Plan that Pueblo County is undertaking. Bryan reviewed the purpose of the project. This includes: identifying a station location, identifying trackage improvements, and determine station area elements. The study is currently in the middle of their process and will soon be recommending final site locations options. A public meeting was held in Pueblo and 150 people attended. Public input was gathered regarding evaluation criteria. Three areas were provided and input was gathered on those. In those three areas, five station sites have been identified. These include: Union Avenue District Station Area, Municipal Complex Station Area, Recreation Complex Station Area, Grove Neighborhood Station Area, and the North Riverwalk Station Area. Preliminary concept drawings have been rendered and Pros/Cons are being evaluated for each. These Pros/Cons are being taken to stakeholders and used to rank the five concepts. Next steps for the project include narrowing options down to two alternatives, continuing to work out details and providing these for stakeholders and the community. Randy asked Commissioners to review the presentation due to the shortened time available for Bryan to present. Randy offered to have the WSP team back to provide a more detailed presentation in the future. Phil Rico asked that the top two options be presented in detail.

H. Confirm Next/Future Meetings

Jill Gaebler stated that details regarding future meetings are still to be determined. The next meeting will again be held remotely using ZOOM on May 22nd; 9:30 to 11:30 a.m.

I. Adjourn

Jill Gaebler adjourned the meeting at 12:04pm.

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
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 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