

Southwest Chief and Front Range Passenger Rail Commission Draft Meeting Minutes

Friday, September 25th, 2020
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 – 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
DJ Mitchell	Class 1 Railroad Representative	BNSF Railway	Yes
Nathan Anderson	Class 1 Railroad Representative	Union Pacific	No
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	No
Dale Steenbergen*	Cheyenne, Wyoming	Chamber of Commerce	No

*Non-Voting Members

Others: Randy Grauberger (SWC & FRPRC), Spencer Dodge (SWC & FRPRC), Andy Karsian (CDOT), Rob Colosimo (HNTB), Bill Craven (NMDOT), Brandon Najdovski (CDOT), Brian Hartman (CDOT), Carla Perez (HDR), Chelsea Gaylord (Colorado Springs), Dan Kline (WYDOT), David Singer (CDOT), Deborah Wagner (Lombard and Clayton), Drew Brooks (City of Fort Collins), Emma Belmont (FTA), Eva Cosyleon (Cosyleon and Cosyleon), Geoff Guthrie, Jamie Grim (CDOT), Jeff Dawson (CDOT), Jeff Schultz (David Evans & Associates), Jeffrey Range (CDR Associates), Joe Pimentel (LiUNA), John Adams (PACOG), John Liosatos (PPACG), John Maddox (KDOT), Karen Hedlund, Kathryn Wenger (PPACG), Kay Kelly (CDOT), Kristin Kenyon (FTA), Lisa Sakata (ICF), Lisa Streisfeld (CDOT), Melanie Johnson, Michael Meyer (Quandel Consultants), Myron Hora (WSP), Nathan Minor (CPR), Mandy Whorton (Peak Consulting), Rebecca White (CDOT), Sally Chafee (CDOT), Sarah Grossi (CDOT), Tim Hoover (CDOT), Tracey MacDonald (FTA)

A. Call to Order and Introductions – Jill Gaebler

Jill Gaebler called the meeting to order at 9:31 am.

B. Review/Approval of August 28th Draft Commission Meeting Minutes – Jill Gaebler

Rick Klein made a motion to approve the August 28th Rail Commission Meeting Minutes, Jim Souby seconded that motion, and the Rail Commission approved the minutes unanimously.

C. Public Comment Period – Public

Jim Souby shared a report from the Rail Passengers Association that indicates the Amtrak decision to reduce long distance train service to three times a week, which includes the California Zephyr and the Southwest Chief, will yield a loss of \$73m a year in economic benefits. This finding is based on a conservative model that was designed for the Southwest Chief and has been applied to other national network routes. The Rail Passengers Association is working diligently to return service because history has shown that once these trains are gone, they usually don't come back. Bill Craven asked Jim if that \$73m was just for Colorado. That is correct, the loss of the Southwest Chief from west of Newton, KS to Albuquerque, NM would have cost all three states over \$143m.

D. Project Director's Report – Randy Grauberger

Randy Grauberger provided the Rail Commission with his monthly Project Director's Report. A meeting was held with FRA staff regarding their comments on the Draft Statement of Work for the 2019 CRISI Grant: Thru-Car Alternatives Analysis. These comments were forwarded to BNSF Railway and Union Pacific because some of the specifics were in relation to the data that FRA wants to see. Rail Commission staff are anticipating this grant being obligated in October. The Rail Commission's 2020 CRISI Grant application has been approved. \$548,000 in federal funding will help complete the Rail Traffic Control Simulation Modeling and the preliminary Service Development Plan. Rail Commission staff had a conversation with CDOT Budget Analysts and were surprised to learn that the Rail Commission had been provided an extra \$100,000 in May. Rail Commission staff were unaware of this. Rail Commission staff will continue to learn more about this money. The fourth round of Segment Stakeholder Coalition meetings were held the week prior to the Rail Commission meeting. Colorado Springs is pursuing funding for a station area planning effort. US Air Force Academy has requested additional meetings with FRPR staff. Rail Commission staff have received multiple requests for presentations throughout the region. The consensus of all the Segment Coalition meetings was that there is a lot of momentum and stakeholders are very supportive of the work continuing.

Rail Commission staff presented several times throughout the Front Range corridor during September. Ray Lang, during a national webinar discussing the proposed Network Modernization Program, called out Colorado for the work of their Rail Commission. The Colorado Front Range corridor is at the top of Amtrak's list for funding as their work is advanced. Rick Klein added that the South and Midwest have been working for much longer than the SWC&FRPRC. Rick couldn't believe that FRPR had passed these other larger Commissions. A coordination meeting with the Class 1 railroads was held, an update will be given later in the meeting. CDOT staff completed additional ridership modeling using fares at 17c/mile instead of 32c/mile. These fares are closer to national averages and are exactly the same as Bustang's fares. This change boosted ridership by 50%. Rail Commission staff talked with California High Speed Rail Commission staff. Rail Commission staff are working with them to gather their lessons learned from their process. Randy reminded the Rail Commission that the November and December Rail Commission meetings were combined and will be held on December 4th. Sal Pace, Jill Gaebler, Randy, and Spencer met with the Governor's staff as well as other staff from OSPB to request funding for the next Fiscal Year. Randy reminded the Rail Commission that NEPA funding can be acquired through CRISI Grants. Jill Gaebler thanked Randy and Spencer for their work on the successful CRISI 2020 Application and getting that awarded. David Krutsinger commented on the different ridership data and fares. David reminded

that, a policy decision will need to be eventually made on fares as FRA has specific policies around fare structures.

E. Southwest Chief

Tiger IX Grant – Bill Craven

Bill Craven, NMDOT, provided an update on the TIGER IX Grant. A second CRISI Grant application for the sole-use portion of the Southwest Chief between Trinidad and Madrid, NM was successful. This project is \$11.5m with \$5.6m being from CRISI. This grant will complete rock fall mitigation, bridge work tie refreshments, and installing continuous welded rail.

The TIGER IX project started in early August. FRA has now taken the lead on meetings as they are under contract with Colfax County. A project management plan is being prepared to give to FRA. There are also final design documents being prepared. BNSF started work about a month ago and rail and tie replacement work will begin in October. Rick Klein congratulated the team responsible for the successful CRISI Grant. There are still 33 miles of improvements in Kansas and Colorado to finish.

2018 PTC CRISI Grant – David Krutsinger

David Krutsinger announced that a grant agreement was signed with FRA on August 26th. The project management plan will be submitted next week. Sub-agreements need to be signed still, but the project is moving forward.

2019 CRISI Grant: Thru-Car Alternatives Analysis – Randy Grauberger

Randy Grauberger informed the Rail Commission that the FRA staff member who has been coordinating with the Rail Commission has left for a few months. Consultant firms have begun reaching out to Rail Commission staff to discuss the RFP that will be released soon.

Amtrak Update

Ray Lang was unable to attend the meeting and provide an Amtrak update.

F. Front Range Passenger Rail

Emissions Comparison Presentation – Lisa Streisfeld

Lisa Streisfeld, CDOT, provided a PowerPoint on comparisons between emission producing vehicles. CDOT Interns Sarah Grossi, Christelle Matsuda, and Brandon Najdovski assisted Lisa in this research. The goal of this research was to determine which mode of travel had the lowest level of emissions per passenger mile traveled. Transport modes researched included: Diesel Trains, Electric Trains, Internal Combustion Engine gas-powered passenger vehicles, electric powered passenger vehicles, electric buses, and Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) gas-powered buses. The metric used, emissions per passenger vehicle mile, is the amount of emissions if a person took a one-mile trip. This metric makes it easy to then calculate emissions for a 10-mile or 100-mile trip. Data was used from the United States Environmental Protection Agency, as well as Japan, Spain, Britain, and South Korea to determine average rates of emissions. Additional data, such as the portfolio of energy production in Colorado, was also used.

Lisa and her team discovered that electric buses produce the fewest emissions. A diesel train will also produce fewer emissions than an EV or ICE automobile. Electric trains and ICE buses produce less emissions than diesel trains. Using Pounds of Carbon Dioxide per Passenger Mile Traveled, the ICE automobile is the worst for air quality. EV automobiles are the second worst, Diesel Trains are the third

worst, electric trains are the fourth worst, ICE buses are the second best, and Electric Buses are the best. A key takeaway is that electric vehicles are still worse for GHG emissions than public transportation options, even diesel trains. While electric buses are very low in emissions, their charging times result in longer travel times. No technology has been picked for Front Range Passenger Rail. Electric trains are significantly more expensive to construct than Diesel Trains.

Phil Rico emphasized that this information is really important and helpful for the Rail Commission. Phil asked if Lisa would present at a Trinidad work session. Lisa is happy to do so and they will coordinate. Phil thinks it is crucial for this information to be presented to the general public. Jim Souby commented that this whole notion is very powerful for the electorate. Additionally, Jim is interested in hydrogen fuel engines that are in commercial service on a provisional basis. This emerging technology is following our timeline. DJ Mitchell mentioned another technology that BNSF has been working on, a battery-powered engine. Chicago's METRA will be submitting bids for this technology. Manufacturers have discussed a "tender car" that is full of batteries to extend the range. There is likely to be a solicitation for bids to build a commuter rail engine in Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Diego. Phil added that it is exciting for the Rail Commission to be on the cutting edge of a lot of this technology. Sal Pace stated that this is really valuable information and he wants to connect Lisa with Chris Markuson, the Executive Director of the Blue Green Alliance.

Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Coordination Meeting

Randy Grauberger provided a small update on the FRA Coordination Meeting. Peter Schwartz will be the point person for FRA now. The FRPR team is making an effort to meet with FRA more regularly. Now that they have money in the project, their role will change. Due to scheduling conflicts, the two-hour call was reduced to an hour and the entire agenda was not able to be covered. Additional coordination regarding the Ridership Modeling is still needed.

Class 1 Railroad Coordination Meeting Update

FRPR project staff are working to meet with Class 1 Railroad staff every six weeks. Conversations continue regarding the ability to either share or operate on the BNSF corridor. The high amount of rail freight along the Front Range means that passenger rail is unlikely able to share much track, but conversations around ROW usage are being held. Additionally, to the south of Denver there are two separate rights-of-way. Conversations are occurring to determine if one right-of-way could be used for passenger rail and the other for freight, with double tracks. Potential double tracking for both freight and passenger rail. North of Denver, , the BNSF corridor is being looked at. This corridor is the same that RTD intended to use for NW Rail.

North Carolina Survey Response

Spencer Dodge provided a quick look at a response from North Carolina to the survey that was distributed to the States for Passenger Rail Coalition. Spencer described various elements of North Carolina's response.

FAQ Document

Spencer also provided a brief update on the FAQ document that the project team has been working to produce. Those questions are intended to be added to the Rail Commission website by the end of the next week. Jill Gaebler suggested including specific questions on technology, which are in the document.

G. Other Items

Legislative/Governance/Funding

Randy Grauberger began the conversation. A year ago, conversations were held around governance before the 2020 Legislative Session. At that time, a FRPR District was the preferred structure by the Rail Commission. Senate President Leroy Garcia had proposed legislative language that the Rail Commission reviewed. Unfortunately, COVID disrupted these discussions. A governance structure can be passed through the legislature and this doesn't need to go to the public for a vote. The various scenarios considered will be reviewed again.

Sal Pace stated that he has spoken with Senate President Leroy Garcia and with JBC Chair Daneya Esgar and he believes there is a chance Esgar could be the House Majority Leader. As these two senators are supportive of FRPR and have run related bills before, there is strong support in the legislature. Senator Garcia has expressed an interest in finalizing the legislative components of FRPR before he leaves due to term limits. A district could be created before the district goes to voters for funding. Sal doesn't think there are many serious conversations occurring before the November elections. OSPB will propose their budget to the JBC in November and then the legislative budget is put together based on that. Jill Gaebler added that it is important for Commissioners to begin talking with their own jurisdictions to work towards FRPR, not just the Rail Commission. Jim Souby agreed that a united view up and down the Front Range is important. Jim asked Sal how important it is to engage with other elected officials. Sal agreed that it is important for organizations and local governments, and their lobbyists, to support FRPR. Drafting resolutions in support is another way to help. Jim suggested that engagement with local elected officials should be included on the agenda as well.

Phil Rico stated that the Rail Commission is in a uniquely strong position to move the project forward. Phil added that, in talking about the Rail Commission funding, he believes it prudent to ask the communities along the Front Range if they are willing to commit to providing funding. Phil suggested that the City of Trinidad will commit \$10,000 a year over the next two years provided that 75% of communities along the Front Range also contribute money. Jim Souby generally supports something like this concept but is concerned on how it is presented to local communities. The last thing Jim wants to do is alienate anyone with this kind of a request. It is important to be very careful with the budget and how the Rail Commission represents themselves. Terry Hart added that there isn't much of a disparity between Phil's recommendation and Jim's response. One thing Terry has learned is how powerful it is for municipalities to show a united front and dig into their local dollars for matching funds. This is kind of the idea that Phil is proposing. While everyone is suffering right now, it is critically important that Central and Northern communities also support the project in addition to the southern communities. This project can't be done with all local money though. Terry believes now is good timing for this request as most municipalities are putting together their Fiscal Year budgets. Terry asked for municipalities and organizations to take this into consideration and see if they can locate money. Sal Pace asked what exactly the Rail Commission would be asking for. Terry stated that it has generally come in the form of projects and matching funds, and he expects that to continue similar to the CRISI and BUILD grants. Phil Rico appreciated the conversation and reiterated the City of Trinidad is committed to the project. Jim Souby added that ColoRail is not opposed to this, but believes the ask needs to be very careful.

Sal Pace suggested a letter from the Rail Commission to counties, municipalities, and MPOs to request funding and the City of Trinidad could follow up with their own letter. Becky Karasko suggested that the ask be very specific in the request and what that funding goes for. If it is not successful, then there is less of a chance of funding in the future. Phil Rico followed that he is very concerned about funding the Rail Commission staff and operations and that was his main focus. Jim Souby added that matching funds for grants for a specific goal would be a powerful ask. If there is a larger benefit that is defined that municipalities would help to reach by providing funds. David Krutsinger suggested that the goal might be to pursue \$500,000 to fund staff salaries and ask the legislature for \$2-\$3m for matching funds from a federal grant. Sal suggested Spencer and Randy draft a letter for the Rail Commission to edit to get sent off.

H. Confirm Next/Future Meetings

The next Rail Commission meeting will be held on October 23rd., 2020. The final Rail Commission meeting of 2020 will be on December 4th.

I. Adjourn

Jill Gaebler adjourned the meeting at 11:20 am.