

Southwest Chief and Front Range Passenger Rail Commission Draft Meeting Minutes

Friday, August 28th, 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	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	No

*Non-Voting Members

Others: Randy Grauberger (SWC & FRPRC), Spencer Dodge (SWC & FRPRC), Carla Perez (HDR), Bill Craven (NMDOT), Brian Hartman (CDOT), Brian Vitulli (Mountain Metro Transit), Chris Enright (CDOT), Cristina Beermann (HDR), Dan Kline (WYDOT), David Singer (CDOT), Deborah Wagner (Lombard and Clayton), David Engstrom (Colorado Springs School District 11), Dominic Spaethling (HNTB), Doug Rex (DRCOG), Edward Parks (AECOM), Erik Sabina (CDOT), Jose Soto (LiUNA), Jamie Grim (CDOT), Jeff Dawson (CDOT), Jeff Schultz (David Evans and Associates), Jeffrey Range (CDR Associates), John Liosatos (PPACG), John Maddox (KSDOT), Lindsey Sousa (AECOM), Lisa Sakata (ICF), Lisa Streisfeld (CDOT), Matt Inzeo (CDOT), Melanie Johnson, Michael Meyer (Quandel Consultants), Mikel Conway (LiUNA), Rebecca White (CDOT), Sally Chafee (CDOT), Scott Bressler (AECOM), Sophie Shulman (CDOT), Sharon Terranove (CDOT), Tim Hoover (CDOT), Wally Weart (Public), Andy Karsian (CDOT)

A. Call to Order and Introductions – Jill Gaebler

Jill Gaebler called the meeting to order at 9:32 am and began a roll call.

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

Jim Souby suggested a correction in the legislative update section. The word “dedicated” was not used regarding federal funds, that word should be used. Jim Souby made a motion to approve the July 24th Draft Commission Meeting Minutes. Terry Hart seconded the motion, and the Rail Commission approved the meeting minutes unanimously.

C. Public Comment Period – Public

There were no public comments.

D. Project Director’s Report – Randy Grauberger

Randy Grauberger provided the Rail Commission with his Project Director’s report. Randy began by discussing an FRA coordination call to move the Thru-Car Alternatives Analysis CRISI Grant. FRA attorneys are making minor revisions to the project Scope, Schedule and Budget. Randy gave a rundown of the different meetings that were held by Rail Commission staff. These included, the Executive Oversight Committee, City and County of Denver, United States Air Force Academy, Longmont Transportation Advisory Board, and the US 36 Mayors and Commissioners Coalition. Rail Commission staff also coordinated with Amtrak staff.

Rail Commission and FRPR Project staff held a coordination with RTD staff and Bill Van Meter to explore partnership opportunities. Bill Van Meter suggested that the Rail Commission and the new RTD Board meet in the future. Rail Commission also held a coordination meeting with BNSF Railway and Union Pacific to discuss operational challenges in some of the alignment alternatives. A meeting with Great Western Railway was held to discuss the possibility of the hosting of a maintenance facility for FRPR. The Pueblo Station Area Plan project team and Rail Commission staff met to discuss their final results of that study. Randy Grauberger had lunch with Karen Stuart; Karen would like for the Transportation Commission and the Rail Commission to meet again.

Randy discussed the financial report for the Rail Commission. There are several subscriptions, totaling approximately \$651, that will need to be acquired with the HDR consultant team finalizing their work. Rick Klein made a motion to approve this expenditure, Terry Hart seconded the motion. The Rail Commission approved this unanimously.

E. Southwest Chief

Tiger IX Grant

Bill Craven provided an update on the TIGER IX grant. FRA and Colfax County executed their grant agreement on August 4th. BNSF has begun work on the rail. Materials have been ordered and final design has begun for certain work. A project management plan and a short term plan, is being completed. The work that the grant funded is finally underway.

2018 PTC CRISI Grant

David Krutsinger provided an update for the 2018 PTC CRISI Grant. CDOT signed the initial parts of the FRA agreement and expects Notice to Proceed next week. CDOT is also holding a final meeting with BNSF Railway to finalize all terms and conditions. That effort is anticipated to be complete next week.

Amtrak Update

Ray Lang provided an Amtrak update. Ray began by discussing the upcoming service reductions. These reductions, to tri-weekly, will be phased in during October. The trains are set up in the schedule so that they all arrive and depart Chicago the same days, this is to ensure the best connectivity. Amtrak is anticipating saving \$150m next year with these efforts. When COVID hit, ridership went from 100% to 2%. In July and August, this number was around 20%. Amtrak received CARES Act money in early April that replaced the lost revenue that would have been earned this year, allowing for the preservation of the long-distance services. Amtrak has been clear with appropriators and Congressional staff their funding needs and ridership levels. An outline was sent in May with the Supplemental Appropriations Request. Amtrak requested \$2b in their annual request and \$1.5b in their supplemental request. This \$3.5b is Amtrak's largest appropriation request ever. House Appropriators "did very good by Amtrak." An FY21 funding bill provided \$10b in funding to Amtrak passed the House but an accompanying Senate bill has not been produced. This funding bill included daily service for long-distance lines and money for the needed upgrades along the sole-source portion of the Southwest Chief. Ray Lang believes a Continuing Resolution that upholds current government spending is most likely. If this is the case, Amtrak's funding will be the same; this is not enough to fund the railroad during the pandemic. Congressional staff have asked Amtrak for information on funding around \$5b, this is around where Ray believes the funding will fall. In all of the discussions that have been had, there is always money for the Southwest Chief. Particularly, money for the necessary infrastructure and PTC improvements on that line. The plan for long distance trains is that the reduced service would be temporary and daily service would be returned when ridership was back up. There have been metrics set up to measure this demand in a way that doesn't punish services for not having ridership. Amtrak has set a hard date to return daily service by next summer.

Ray then discussed Reauthorization of the Surface Transportation Bill. The House in DC took up and passed a Reauthorization Bill. In this bill, Amtrak included and the committee approved funding that has \$25b over 5 years. Amtrak intends to use this for a grant program for states to use to develop corridors. This grant program is meant for states with no service to have a significant pool of money to develop intercity passenger rail. Amtrak believes, due to the work of the Rail Commission, that Front Range Passenger Rail is low-hanging fruit for this grant program.

Jim Souby asked Ray about Amtrak Board appointments and where that situation stands. There have been five individuals nominated to the Amtrak Board of Directors. All five have had confirmation hearings. The most recent two were democrats, Chris Koos and Sarah Feinberg. Sal Pace mentioned that a federal stimulus regarding COVID for Amtrak has not been introduced yet. Sal also discussed Randy's suggestion to get funding for the Rail Commission; Sal believes it would be helpful for a working group or sub-committee to meet to strategize around finding funding in the next State Legislature session.

In September, Ray Lang is making a presentation to the Rail Passenger Association's scheduled Webinar.

Thru-Car CRISI Grant Update

FRA attorneys are reviewing the Scope of Work and indicated that some minor changes might be made. FRA staff suggested the study be an Alternatives Analysis instead of a Feasibility Study.

F. Front Range Passenger Rail

Online Public Meeting

Carla Perez, HDR, provided a review of the recently completed Online Public Meeting. The project team provided an initial review but this review operated as a Final Review. Nearly 8,000 total sessions were completed. The additional social media advertisements that were approved at the last Rail Commission

meeting provided a boost in participation. 1,917 questionnaire submission were received, 3,838 different zip codes were represented, and 503 open ended feedback submissions were received.

22.16% of responses indicated that station locations are the most important factor in their support. Reasonable travel times and the ability to interconnect with other modes followed. 59.64% of responses indicated their preferred destination was Downtown Denver. 57.79% of responses identified recreation and leisure as their primary purpose for using FRPR. 69% of the open-ended comments were positive, 16% were neutral and 15% were negative. The primary themes of these comments were general support, alignment/routes, and construction costs. Given many of the comments, an FAQ is being developed that addresses many questions that the public has. An official final report will be provided to the Rail Commission. Rick Klein and Phil Rico also both strongly requested that Cheyenne and Trinidad be shown on all FRPR project related maps.

Executive Oversight Committee Recap

Jill Gaebler spoke on the recently convened Executive Oversight Committee. The first meeting was pretty basic and was really intended to kick off this group and not dig too far into details. These meetings will become more content-filled. Jacob Riger added that he appreciated everyone's time and that it is important, moving forward with the closer blended team, coordination will be more important to make sure everyone is on the same page. Randy Grauberger stated that he looks forward to future meetings and discussing funding, governance, and other tough conversations. Sally Chafee supported all the prior conversations and expressed gratitude for the EOC being established.

3D Tunnel Model

Chris Enright, CDOT, provided an overview of a potential tunnel under Monument Hill. Using OpenRoads Designer, Chris was able to do quick comparisons and effective design along the corridor. The corridor is complex and has different characteristics throughout. The project team designed the system around a 2% grade. The set of data shown was very preliminary. Accuracy would need to be at least 10x better for further design. DJ Mitchell asked if he would be able to access this model and be able to dig into it. Chris responded that they would figure out how to get it to him. Jim Souby asked if this model had been tested on the ground. This technique is used for all CDOT projects. The difference here is that the level of detail is very different; but, this is the method used for day to day designing at CDOT.

Ridership Modeling Presentation

Erik Sabina provided a review of initial ridership modeling data. Some of the initial takeaways include: there is demand for rail service along the Front Range, demand is highest for commuters but there is also substantial demand for recreation and special events, FRPR ridership projections fare well when compared to other successful intercity rail lines across the country, and finally there would be real reductions in emissions and vehicle miles traveled.

In the modeling process, the team is about halfway done. Scenarios that are being evaluated will continue to be optimized. The CDOT model uses the highest scientific standards; survey data on people and their travel shows their revealed preference, each person is modeled individually, and the model is checked and double-checked using Census data, vehicle and transit ridership counts. This model is one of the most advanced state-level models in the US and was adapted from the DRCOG model.

Along the BNSF Alternative through Boulder and Longmont (14 stops total), early ridership projections show around 2.9m riders annually. Compared with other intercity corridors throughout the country, this number compares favorably. 2.9m riders falls between the South Shore line in Chicago and the Capital line in Sacramento. In this comparison, 2.9m 2045 riders are being compared to current riders. Special trips, such as weekends and stadium events, account for about 20% of yearly boardings. About 210,000 vehicle miles traveled (VMT) would be saved per typical weekday. The EPA estimates about 411 grams per mile is emitted for a typical car, this means about 94 tons of Greenhouse Gas emissions are saved

per typical weekday. Most trips in the model show travel within MPO areas. The strongest demand would be for commuting.

Jim Souby asked about the difference between trip purposes in the model and in the public opinion polls that have been done. Current motivations towards a potential rail service are likely to be different from future motivations. Jim also asked about the sensitivity to speed and if what would happen if the train ran slower. Erik and his team did do such a comparison. Run completed in the spring were done with longer travel times and slower speeds, this resulted in lower ridership. DJ Mitchell asked about the next best alternative for the rider and wants to explore what the next best alternative in the market is to beat.

Segment Stakeholder Coalition Meetings

Spencer Dodge provided an update on the Segment Stakeholder Coalition meetings. Dates have been scheduled. North Segment will meet on 9/15, Central 9/16, and South on 9/17. An agenda is being developed and will be distributed.

G. Other Items

States for Passenger Rail Survey

Spencer Dodge also provided an update on a survey that was sent to members of the States for Passenger Rail Coalition. The survey was provided to Rail Commission members.

H. Confirm Next/Future Meetings

The next Rail Commission meeting will be held on September 28th, 2020.

I. Adjourn

Jill Gaebler adjourned the meeting at 11:32 am.

Action Items

Date Assigned	Task	Assignee	Deadline	Completed
2/28/2020	Work with FRA to get the 2019 CRISI Grant obligated	Spencer/Randy	Estimated October, 2020	
01/24/20	The Commission will discuss the addition of the I-70 Coalition during the February Commission meeting.	Commission	02/28/20	Tabled until the next in-person Commission meeting is held in the Denver area.