



COLORADO

Department of Transportation

Office of the Executive Director

2829 W Howard Place
Denver, CO 80204

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Transportation Commissioners and CTIO Directors,

As we have discussed at length during recent months, the Bustang family of services provides vital connections across the state, standing out as a national model of success for interregional transit. Bustang ensures that our infrastructure investments – ranging from managed lanes to general purpose lanes to mobility hubs – are truly multimodal. The frequency and reliability that we have added in recent years make it a service that Coloradans can turn to as an additional choice for travel, whether it is up and down the I-25 Corridor, across I-70 to our iconic mountains or to the Western Slope, or to a broadening network of rural destinations. Bustang connects to regional and local transit services, making them more versatile for statewide travel and linking growing transit destinations from Greeley to Summit County to interstate arterials.

As you know, SB 22-180 offered an important opportunity to experiment with operating Bustang's interstate arterial routes at significantly increased frequency. That experiment effectively demonstrated demand for more service and showed that "if you build it, they will come." On I-25, both the North and South lines grew from six daily round trips on weekdays to twelve round trips, while tripling service on the weekends from two daily round trips to six trips. On the I-70 West line, service grew from four daily round trips to fifteen. Ridership, which pre-COVID peaked in FY 2019 at 266,000 trips, has grown to 353,000 trips in FY 25, representing a year-over-year increase of 21%. Along with increased service, Bustang farebox revenue remains high, covering approximately 20% of our operating costs, well above the national average of 7%. However, as the SB 22-180 funding period comes to a close, we must – in a more constrained fiscal environment – chart a path forward to continue funding these important statewide transit routes at frequency, service levels, and quality that can compete for riders' demand. This is a top priority for our team.

Achieving this goal will require continued effort and creativity, as well as alignment with infrastructure investments along the corridors served by Bustang – including I-70 and I-25. To that end, we have engaged in extensive discussions about the feasibility of utilizing excess toll revenues to bolster Bustang operations. Excess toll revenue is the remaining revenue after all operations, maintenance and debt service is paid on the corridor.

This use was envisioned in the Colorado Transportation Investment Office's (CTIO) authorizing statute, and there is precedent for toll revenues funding both transit infrastructure and services. On I-25 segments 6/7/8, CTIO secured \$501 million for the corridor that was directly invested in the construction of two new \$30 million mobility hubs to improve mobility connections, including Bustang. As part of its Globeville and Elyria-Swansea Tolling Equity Program, CTIO is investing toll revenues to support transit ridership through bus passes and a new micro-mobility program, the Denver Connector. It would also be consistent with how many larger transit agencies collaborate with peer agencies to manage demand when highway capacity is expanded. For example, in Virginia, VDOT lacked a reliable,





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long-term, and substantial local funding source to cover the increasing capital costs of the Metrorail Silver Line extension. Through a partnership with the Metropolitan Washington Airport Authority, they were able to dedicate a portion of net toll revenue to finance new transit service extending to the airport. While this is just one prominent example, other innovative models aligning transit and tolling exist across the country that CTIO and CDOT can learn from to craft a solution that works for Colorado.

One particular point where we have engaged extensively with stakeholders was to better understand whether there would be support for a legislative change that allowed for some limited and scoped use of I-25 toll revenue on areas of I-70 that serve an overlapping user base. After careful consideration, and notwithstanding significant evidence of users whose regular trips incorporate many areas of overlap between these two key arterials, it appears that such a change would generate significant consternation among I-25 partners in particular.

We appreciate that our I-25 partners utilize Bustang and that many have taken the time to express their strong support for the Bustang family of services. We have also heard significant willingness to utilize excess toll revenues for Bustang's North and South lines, provided that doing so does not interfere with financing and completing projects already included and proposed in the Ten Year Plan. We appreciate our partners' engagement and candor in helping us refine our approach.

To that end, CTIO has put forth a financing plan to complete the suite of I-25 10 Year Plan projects that we will ask the Transportation Commission to approve at their May Board Meeting. We also intend to focus on developing a proposal to utilize existing authorities to holistically support the North and South Bustang lines, using excess toll revenues from I-25 managed lane operations, while allocating other current revenue sources – including, but not limited to, I-70 toll revenues – to augment I-70 West Line service.

As part of this process, we intend to seriously explore the possibility of moving Bustang operations to the CTIO to better align business functions with use of toll revenues as a significant funding source. We will conduct a management review of how Bustang could best integrate with CTIO business processes, which will increasingly include passenger rail over the coming years.

To that end, I wanted to provide you with this update and to put forward an advanced request for time on the calendar over the coming months for a series of workshops that will cover different aspects of our proposed approach.

Many thanks for your partnership on this critical priority.

Sincerely,

Shoshana Lew
Executive Director

