

La Junta Workshop/ Open House Meeting Notes – August 31, 2011

Please provide us with your comments by October 14, 2011. Comments received at the Open Houses and Workshops, and via email and letters will be considered and used to help refine goals, objectives and priorities. CDOT does not intend to address each comment individually but all comments will be considered, included in the appendix of the report with a response provided as to how information was considered in the course of the study.

Questions:

- Who is responsible for maintaining the vegetation along the Towner Line?
- What is the status of the state's lease of the Towner Line and what will occur after December 2011 if the lease/purchase does not happen?
- Is it correct that the V&S has added a surcharge to any rail cars moved on the Towner Line?
- Does the UP railroad have any current involvement with the Towner Line?
- If the Towner Line is scrapped will the ownership revert to adjacent land owners?
- If CDOT buys back the Towner Line, will the state re-bid for operations on that line?
- How will urban vs. rural projects be prioritized in the State Rail Plan?
- Does the UP railroad have any current plans to re-open the Tennessee Pass route?

Comments:

- The Rail Plan should oppose movement of the Amtrak Southwest Chief from the La Junta – Trinidad line. The State of Colorado should create a 3-state coalition (Colorado, Kansas and New Mexico) to save this line.
- The new Governor of New Mexico had a campaign pledge to get Amtrak off of the Raton Pass route.
- The only other use of that line in Colorado is the US Army's shipments of equipment to Pinon Canyon.
- The proposed relocation of freight rail from the Front Range to the eastern plains should not be a project that is identified in the State Rail Plan.
- The overgrown vegetation along the Towner Line is causing a serious fire hazard.
- The poor condition of the at-grade rail crossings on the Towner Line is also hazardous.
- White wheat and millet are agricultural products that are now very much in demand and these products could increase the value of and need for rail service on the Towner Line.
- Kiowa County has lost \$6.3 million in tax revenues in the 12 years since the Towner Line was sold to the state. Crowley County has lost a proportionate amount during that time period as well.
- The Surface Transportation Board would be more likely to approve an abandonment of a rail line if there has been no service for a 2-year period.
- The Towner Line right of way could possibly be used for transmission lines for wind farms or water pipelines.

- Rail lines should be saved in Colorado because railroads are more energy efficient than other modes of transportation, they are environmentally friendly, they alleviate highway congestion and associated wear on the highways, and have a better safety record in shipping hazardous materials.
- The State Rail Plan should address programs such as those in Kansas that benefit Short Line railroads such as the Kansas Short Line Assistance Programs (low interest loans and grants) and also the use of Port Authorities.
- The state should see that all railroad infrastructure is maintained.
- The State of Kansas is implementing a \$15 million project on the Cimarron Valley Railroad for rail, ties and ballast upgrades. This project costs approximately \$750,000 to \$1 million per mile.
- The lack of a connection of the Cimarron Valley Railroad with the BNSF at Springfield isn't critical. The Cimarron Valley Railroad does connect to the BNSF at Boise City, OK and Dodge City, Ks.