



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The “*Colorado Intercity and Regional Bus Network Plan – 2014*” (*Network Plan*) addresses the bus services operating in Colorado that travel between cities and regions. This 2014 study is an update to one prepared in 2008, and addresses changing conditions, current needs, and funding. The *Network Plan* is a long-range plan and will be adopted as part of the State Transit Plan and the 2040 Statewide Transportation Plan, both now underway.

The plan contains chapters and appendices addressing:

- Existing Services
- Need for Services
- Goals, Objectives, and Service Standards
- Potential Networks
- Facilities
- Recommended Network Plan
- Financial Plan
- I-70 Corridor Plan
- Interregional Express Bus Service

This *Network Plan* has a stronger focus on performance monitoring and regional services than in the 2008 plan. This plan categorizes of regional services in to general regional services, interregional express services, and essential regional transit services. This classification assists in differentiating among the variety of services that are oriented to different markets and have different operating characteristics from each other and from intercity bus services.

The *Network Plan* also contains detailed planning for the development of I-70 corridor services and for the development and implementation of Interregional Express bus services. These two services are each addressed in appendices and the plans for each service were developed within the larger *Network Plan*.

KEY STUDY ISSUES

Key study issues emerged through various means, including discussions with CDOT staff, comments from intercity and transit operators in different forums, and a review of what was implemented in the last plan, what was not, and looking at why some plans did not come to fruition.



- The need for an agency to take a lead role in connecting the local transit systems in Colorado emerged since the last plan was developed. Local agencies were not able to sustain the Front Range Express (FREX) commuter bus operating from Colorado Springs to Denver. It ceased operation despite solid ridership.
- The decision to use Colorado FASTER funds for operations provides opportunities and policy issues to consider.
 - As part of this study, CDOT is developing a plan to implement interregional services to connect local transit systems and major activity centers. This will result in CDOT becoming a transit operator, a role that it has not had in the past.
 - With this funding opportunity, decisions are needed on how best to allocate FASTER funds to support the network of services in Colorado, while still maintaining critical capital funds. This is a policy discussion that is occurring with a broad group of stakeholders based on information developed in the *Network Plan* and other Division of Transit and Rail activities.
- The need for regional services that are oriented to travel needs within Colorado was identified as a key issue. These are services that would enable residents to make a one-day trip to a major city for a variety of purposes, including accessing medical and governmental services, as well as accessing air travel.

STUDY OVERSIGHT AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) provided study guidance for the overall *Network Plan*. The TAC met five times over the course of the project, and assisted in identifying needs statements, providing perspective on how to address the identified needs, and reviewing work products to include goals and objectives and technical reports on existing conditions, demand, draft network plan, and policy recommendations. TAC participants and minutes are included as Appendix F.

The TAC was augmented by a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) for the I-70 Corridor Analysis, with most participants coming from the I-70 Corridor providers, in both public and private sectors. Similar to the TAC, the TAG provided overall guidance to the I-70 Corridor Analysis and service planning activities.

Finally, a subcommittee of the Transit and Rail Advisory Committee supported the development of Interregional Express bus service. This subcommittee included representatives of operators along the north and south I-25 corridors and the I-70 corridor and met throughout the study to address both policy and implementation aspects of developing Interregional Express bus services.

Public involvement activities were important to the results of the *Network Plan* and included:



- Meetings of both the TAC and TAG held at the CASTA conference in May of 2013 to obtain a broader awareness of the study among providers throughout Colorado.
- A survey of intercity providers was conducted to identify issues they might face. Providers served on the TAC and with conference call-in capability were able to participate regularly.
- Presentation of a compendium of regional and intercity services at meetings held throughout Colorado's rural planning regions as part of the development of Regional Coordinated Transit and Human Services Transportation Plans.

POLICY CONTEXT

The major changes in the policy context for Colorado regional and intercity services have occurred in the state program. The policy context for intercity bus services is detailed in Appendix D of this plan, describing the Federal and State regulatory environment and historical development of current intercity bus policies. The creation of a new Division of Transit and Rail within the Colorado Department of Transportation with significantly broader powers, combined with availability of state FASTER funding that can be used for regional or interregional services, creates a different environment for consideration of transit needs for regional or intercity connections. Although limited, the state funding can be used to operate or contract for services, and the state has the authority to set fares and schedules for such services.

Changes in federal policy regarding intercity bus have been more limited. MAP-21 included statutory authority for the in-kind match program that has been used successfully by Colorado to build a network of rural intercity services without having to use local or state funds for operating match, so CDOT can be secure that administrative directives at the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) will not eliminate the ability to continue the program using the same tools. MAP-21 also removed the language limiting the value of in-kind match to 50% of the fully-allocated cost of the unsubsidized service, however FTA's proposed circular implementing MAP-21 retains the 50% limit on the value of the in-kind match. Currently Colorado's Section 5311(f) program is not constrained by this limit, but it could potentially be limited at some point if it did not have enough unsubsidized connecting service. The end of the Section 3038 accessibility program has little direct impact on the state, because it provided funding directly from FTA to the private carriers, and only for accessibility equipment and training.

The policies of the carriers have also not changed significantly, though there is increased competitive pressure on the traditional "legacy" intercity bus carriers such as Greyhound from firms that offer "curbside" services. This could have an impact in the future if the state is called upon to provide more funding to serve smaller points that have been eliminated, or if Greyhound is forced to reduce its services, resulting in fewer in-kind miles for match. The curbside operators do have different operating policies, generally not interlining or connecting with other carriers, and generally not participating in the programs such as Section 5311(f).



STUDY APPROACH

For this update, three related topics were included in a single study: updating the 2008 intercity and regional bus plan, developing an I-70 corridor plan, and developing a plan for Interregional Express bus services. The base data for service and analysis of need was shared, although different approaches were required for each service type. The reader will find the analysis of need for intercity and regional services in Chapter 3, while detailed demand estimation for Interregional Express services oriented to commuters is in Appendix C. Additional demand analysis for the I-70 corridor services is in Appendix A.

This comprehensive approach also fostered the ability to take a holistic approach to policy questions. For example, the discussion of how allowing the use of FASTER funds for operations would impact both the availability of capital and providing various regional services across the State. Another example is in how performance measures can be used for each type of service, and the different values that might be appropriate for intercity and the various types of regional services. This update emphasizes the analysis of network performance for intercity and regional services and recommends establishing performance measures and using data in fine-tuning the network over time.

Most importantly, the use of FASTER funds for operating services provides opportunities to move beyond the limited intercity services that could previously be funded and make strides forward in connecting Colorado's key activity centers to one another and to the rural residents of the state. This planning process provides several key products.

- An implementation plan for limited interregional express service in the I-25 and I-70 corridors, scheduled to begin by early 2015.
- A base plan for transit services in the I-70 corridor that will respond to the high volumes of traffic in the corridor. This plan identifies the levels of service that would respond to travel levels on peak and regular travel days in winter and summer, the vehicle requirements and costs of operating the service, and the infrastructure and parking requirements. It identifies the steps necessary to develop the services, including evaluating the options for meeting parking requirements, developing customer information materials and applications, and obtaining financing for the comprehensive plan.
- Details of a network of essential services that would connect the rural communities of Colorado to the cities to which residents need to travel to obtain services (medical, shopping, governmental) or connect to other travel modes.

These products, along with the rest of the *Network Plan*, provide CDOT with the tools necessary to:



- Adapt financial policies to address the changing environment. CDOT will be able to consider how the overall Section 5311 program and FASTER funds work with local financing to build a comprehensive network that meets the needs of the residents of all of Colorado.
- Implement Interregional Express bus services.
- Develop the internal management capacities necessary for the operation of transit services and monitoring the effectiveness of the intercity and regional service network.