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Rail relocation study under way

DENVER -- The Colorado Department of Transportation has launched a study to determine the feasibility of moving most rail freight traffic away from Front Range cities to the state's eastern plains.

While numerous proposals for rail relocation have come forward in Northern Colorado, the CDOT announcement describes a zone from Denver to Pueblo as the subject for the study that a contracted consultant will undertake.

"Originally we wanted to look at freight lines statewide," said Jack Tome, senior associate with Parsons Brinkerhoff, the global planning and engineering consulting firm that will manage the study. "CDOT narrowed the focus to the Denver to Pueblo area."

The new project will build on a 2005 study of costs and benefits of rail relocation, one that concluded the state would reap significant benefits from the move. The purpose of the current project is to determine rail alignments and project costs and identify potential funding sources. "We're talking about a public-private partnership for carrying this out," Tome said.

Participants in the study are Burlington Northern/Santa Fe Railway, the Union Pacific Railroad and the Regional Transportation District serving metro Denver.

The relocation proposal is unrelated to plans for an eastern plains transportation corridor for rail and vehicle traffic known as the "Super Slab," Tome said. "We're looking at locations that are much further east than that."

Parsons Brinkerhoff and CDOT plan to schedule public meetings to allow Front Range residents and those on the eastern plains to comment on the relocation plans.