


STATE OF COLORADO

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 29, 2012
TO: Mark Imhoff, Director, Division of Transit and Rail
FROM: Donald Hunt, CDOT, Executive Director 
SUBJECT: 2009 Colorado Rail Relocation Implementation Study

During the development of the *Colorado State Freight and Passenger Rail Plan*, specific rail freight projects were solicited from Class I and short line railroads. An eastern bypass relocating through freight rail traffic off the Front Range was not proposed. This omission reflects a change in the Class I railroads' priorities in reaction to changing market conditions that currently do not emphasize the north/south movement of coal from the Powder River Basin in northeast Wyoming to Texas. To complete a project of this magnitude, significant railroad investment is needed. Additionally, state and federal funding for this type of project is extremely limited for the foreseeable future. While the concept of through freight rail relocation to a yet to be determined location in eastern Colorado is included in the Plan's list of Rail Facilities/Relocation projects, the project received a "low" prioritization ranking evaluation.

In addition, since completion of the *Colorado Rail Relocation Implementation Study*, CDOT has clarified its position on a future rail relocation effort. CDOT will not take the lead, initiate discussion, or take action on a rail relocation effort. However, CDOT would participate in discussions of such an effort if initiated by another party. Should the Department be notified of interest in such an effort, CDOT will inform affected jurisdictions for inclusion in any discussions. Further, if at any time in the future a rail relocation effort is initiated by another party, any conclusions made in the *Colorado Rail Relocation Implementation Study* would require re-evaluation. Moreover, CDOT will work to ensure all applicable state and federal regulations are adhered to, including but not limited to, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Rail relocation to eastern Colorado could divide farms, ranch lands and residential neighborhoods; NEPA would require a detailed assessment of the proposed action containing: an alternatives analysis, an evaluation of impacts to natural, cultural and historic resources (including wetlands, Section 4(f) and historic properties, threatened and endangered species, etc.), mitigation of impacts, and public involvement in the NEPA decision making process. CDOT will continue to coordinate with the railroads and other stakeholders on transportation priorities and participate in any subsequent discussions related to the need for further study of a north/south rail bypass off the Front Range. Additionally, CDOT will work in partnership with stakeholders in eastern Colorado to ensure they are engaged in any subsequent rail relocation discussions.

As a result of the project's "low" priority ranking and CDOT's position on the rail relocation effort, the project is considered inactive.