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Study: Moving freight rail lines recommended Would unclog traffic, free city lines for passenger trains

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Freight trains that stop Denver commuter traffic and clog the rails for passenger trains would be diverted to the eastern plains of Colorado under a recommendation being made by the Colorado Department of Transportation.

CDOT yesterday released the Colorado Rail Relocation Implementation Study, which analyzed the costs and benefits of building possible rail bypass routes for freight trains. The report says the estimated \$797 plus million it would cost to bypass freight trains from the Front Range to eastern Colorado would be a worthy investment because it would reduce noise, operating costs, fuel expenses and train activity in the urban areas of Colorado. Also, bypassing the freight trains would allow for greater commuter rail capacity in and out of Denver.

"The Public Benefits Study concluded that the citizens of Colorado would accrue more than sufficient benefits to warrant the investment of public dollars in the proposed relocation project," the study says.

Recession not a factor

Because it would be years before the recommendations would be put into effect, the current recession did not impact the study's analysis, according CDOT spokesman Bob Wilson.

"We can be in all kinds of economic climates but we are always looking forward," he said. "In a market economy, conditions change year to year and transportation needs don't go away, so you have to consistently look forward."

Financing won't come easy for the project. To help cover the high price tag, CDOT is recommending public and private entities like the coal mining industry, local transportation authorities and the state and local government help finance the project. Wilson couldn't say if any stimulus money could eventually go to the project.

Waiting on RMA results

CDOT is waiting to examine the results of a study being done by the Rocky Mountain Rail Authority (RMRA) before rolling forward. The RMRA study coming out in June will detail the feasibility and economic viability of implementing high-speed intercity passenger rail service within Colorado and into neighboring states. If the study says that the passenger rail service is an economically sound idea, the two studies might be combined into one proposal going forward, said Wilson.

Citizens advisory group

CDOT is also putting together a citizens advisory group to keep communications going with the various stakeholders — which include communities in the eastern plains where the bypass rails would be built — as the project moves forward.

"There's still a long way to go before any of this, if ever, would be put into effect," said Wilson.

"There's still a lot of work to be done."