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Study: Moving freight rail lines east would pay off

It will cost \$1.2 billion to move much of the freight rail traffic that crawls through central Denver to a faster route on the plains east of the metro area, according to preliminary results of a rail relocation study obtained by The Denver Post.

But over the next 25 years, the move of many freight trains out of the congested urban corridors of Denver and Colorado Springs could generate \$2.3 billion in direct economic benefits for the Front Range and add 6,000 new jobs, the study shows.

Colorado Department of Transportation officials are expected to formally release details of the one-year, \$500,000 rail relocation study in the coming weeks.

"We still have to verify the numbers," said CDOT Executive Director Tom Norton, "but I'm excited about the positive nature of the findings and the willingness of the railroads to work with the state on a major economic investment in Colorado."

The study said the \$2.3 billion in economic benefits includes: about \$694 million in railroad operating efficiencies; \$332 million in reduced auto and truck travel delays at railroad crossings; \$118 million in rail efficiencies for the Colorado coal industry; and \$245 million in air-quality savings.

Currently, southbound 100-car coal trains frequently creep through central Denver on their way to Texas and other locations in the Southwest.

The move of freight lines to the plains also could facilitate the future launch of regional passenger rail service linking the urban centers of Fort Collins, Denver, Colorado Springs and Pueblo.

The relocation of lines of the Union Pacific and Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroads - Colorado's two principal rail freight haulers - still requires a detailed negotiation to determine how much money various parties will contribute to the move.

Moving the rails

A new state study estimates the cost of moving freight rail lines from central Denver to the Eastern Plains will be \$1.2 billion. But the move could have direct economic benefits to the metro region of \$2.3 billion over the next 25 years and could create up to 6,000 new jobs, the study says.

The railroads, CDOT, the Regional Transportation District, local governments and even private developers all may share a portion of the cost.

Other elements of the \$1.2 billion price tag include construction of new intermodal freight loading and distribution facilities and new train maintenance centers, officials say.

Developers of land near Front Range Airport hope to establish a rail and truck freight distribution complex called TransPort near the airport, which sits just southeast of DIA.

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