

**Paper:** Fort Morgan Times

**Date:** Wednesday, April 30, 2008

## **Front range trains could move east**

A north/south railroad bypass through Colorado's eastern plains could remove about 85 percent of coal and other freight rail traffic from the Front Range, according to Randy Grauberger, senior transportation planning manager for Parsons Brinkerhoff.

During a rail relocation open house Tuesday at East Morgan County Library in Brush, Grauberger said the decreased number of slow-moving trains would provide the potential for passenger trains to operate along the I-25 corridor in the future.

"It's going to be difficult to operate passenger trains that anyone would want to ride on if you're behind a nine-mile- to 13-mile-an-hour coal train trying to get over Monument Hill," he said.

Colorado's growing population will continue to demand more transportation, Grauberger said, and the Colorado Department of Transportation would rather add rail capacity to the existing Front Range tracks than add lanes to I-25.

Grauberger said the rail relocation would also prevent many highway users from waiting for slow-moving unit trains to pass by railroad crossings along the more populated Front Range. The decreased idle vehicles would create less pollution, he said.

"You have a lot of folks sitting there wasting their time and burning fuel," he said.

Additionally, Grauberger said, the new rail lines would indirectly create more jobs and economic opportunity in northeastern Colorado. The existing Burlington Northern-Santa Fe route in Morgan County is near capacity, he said, and the alternate routes could create potential for more local service.

The existing 300-mile route directs trains west through Morgan County to Denver, along the I-25 corridor and southeast toward Los Animas.

One proposed 220-mile bypass, Alignment A, would construct new rail lines from the Morgan and Weld county lines south to Byers, Grauberger said. The route would then follow the existing Union Pacific railroad to Arroyo, and new track would be constructed from Arroyo to Los Animas.

Alignment B, Grauberger said, would re-route railroad traffic from the Brush area through the Limon area and southeast to Los Animas. The entire 178-mile track would be new construction, he said.

Alignment A would require less new construction than alignment B, he said, but it would require the Union Pacific Railroad to negotiate an agreement for the Burlington Northern-Santa Fe trains to use its existing lines. Project planners are still balancing various costs and benefits, he said, and no decisions have yet been made about which line would be best.

Grauberger said the two routes have enough individual characteristics that portions of each could be pieced together to create the best possible track. He said the routes have not yet been carefully scrutinized, but there have not been any major environmental flaws found so far.

Grauberger said the project planners have considered seeking funding from various sources, including the Mineral Impact Fund, private railroad companies and the Federal Railroad Association. He said the estimated cost of one of the new bypasses would be about \$500 million to \$700 million, but there are many variations that could influence the cost in the future.

He said the price of steel is rising almost as fast as the cost of fuel, and the cost to build new rail lines could rise drastically if the project is not completed soon.

If everything went according to plans, Grauberger said, there could be a new functioning railroad on the eastern plains within five years.