

Paper: Pueblo Chieftain

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Group promotes moving rail lines east: Ranchers and farmers voice concerns about effects on property values.

Representatives of a group promoting the relocation of freight-train lines to Eastern Colorado made a stop in Pueblo on Thursday.

John Tone of Rail Relocation of Colorado Communities gave a brief presentation at City Hall, outlining the progress the group has made studying the possibility of moving some of the coal and other freight trains to a new line along the Eastern Plains.

Ranchers and farmers from Eastern Colorado communities were also there to remind the group of their concerns about the plan.

Tone told the sparse gathering that the group is considering two options for connecting a rail line, generally from Fort Morgan to Las Animas.

One alignment would cost about \$800 million and uses a portion of Union Pacific's existing line. Another alignment is almost entirely new and could cost about \$1.2 billion.

Tone said the study estimates that the first alignment could mean a total economic benefit of \$1 billion and the second could generate a benefit of \$1.5 billion.

Tone noted that the benefits-to-cost ratio isn't terribly appealing, but ranchers and farmers in small communities are concerned that the new rail line won't benefit them at all.

Travis Taylor, a rancher in Karval and member of Citizens against Railroad Relocation, said farmers are concerned the railroad would negatively affect their property values and cut off access to their land.

Property values mean more to farmers than the amount their land actually would be worth at sale.

Lower property values threaten county and school district funding in these small counties.

Taylor also said many farmers and ranchers borrow against the value of their land in order to generate operating capital for the year.

Lower values mean less money to operate ranches.

Taylor said while the farmers expect they will get paid for any easements the railroad needs through their properties, they suspect it will be a one-time payment and won't be enough to recoup costs to their livelihoods and homes.

Any implementation of the plan is still years away.

The next step is to get a report from a separate committee studying the feasibility of passenger rail along the Front Range, Tone said.