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CDOT to explore moving railroad freight traffic

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A nearly two-year study on the feasibility of moving most railroad freight traffic away from the Front Range is expected to be released late next week.

The \$1.75 million study, commissioned by the Colorado Department of Transportation, is expected to provide a better understanding of the benefits, costs and issues of moving more than two dozen freight trains that rumble up and down the Front Range each day, heading to and from coal fields in Wyoming to coal plants in Texas.

Experts have said removing such rail traffic from Front Range tracks is critical if the state is to develop commuter rail service serving Colorado Springs, Denver and Fort Collins.

The report is tentatively scheduled to be released Feb. 12 and will be posted at www.dot.state.co.us/railroadstudy/default.asp.

The feasibility study will examine the predicted fuel and time savings to the railroads if they relocate coal and freight trains to one of two track alignments that avoid Denver and generally head south from Brush and join up with existing tracks at Las Animas. The study also will try to establish the cost of building all new track along one alignment and extending tracks on a partially built line on the other alignment.

The report will not suggest a recommended alignment, said consultants.

A coalition of eastern plains residents and agricultural interests has objected to moving freight traffic, saying it will split ranches and farms, bring noise and dangerous train traffic to quiet rural areas and provide little benefit for those living in the area.

CDOT has said the study will not address who would pay the cost of relocating the trains, estimated at a minimum of \$600 million. There has been talk of a public-private partnership to pay the cost, and consultants have met with representatives of the two railroads that operate in the state, Union Pacific and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe.

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