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## Study moving trains is delayed

Gives consultants time to try to sway rural officials

A final report on the feasibility of moving interstate coal trains from the Front Range to the eastern plains will be delayed until early next year, in part so consultants can provide initial results to skeptical elected officials in rural counties.

Moving the more than two dozen coal trains that rumble up and down the Front Range each day heading from coal fields in Wyoming to coal plants in Texas would be the first crucial step in creating passenger rail service, officials say.

Although the proposal has met with support among Front Range residents who attended a series of meetings this spring, that hasn't been the case on the eastern plains. Some counties' elected officials have passed resolutions opposing the relocation of the rails, while others say they want more information before supporting the idea. A group composed mostly of farmers and ranchers also have formed a 75-member coalition, Citizens Against Rail Relocation, to oppose the idea.

The Colorado Department of Transportation is overseeing the \$1.75 million study. Originally, it was to be released late this fall. Instead, said CDOT project manager Tammy Lang, the study will be released Jan. 31, after consultants hold a series of meetings with county officials in September and a number of open houses with the public in October.

Critics on the eastern plains say they don't see how relocating coal trains will benefit them or their communities. And farmers and ranchers fear they will be required to sell their land through eminent domain or have to live with pastures being cut up by tracks.

Lang said the feasibility study wasn't designed to address those concerns. Rather, she said, the study will look at predicted fuel and time savings to the railroads if they relocate coal trains from northeast Wyoming to one of two track alignments being studied. Both alternate routes avoid Denver and generally head south from Brush and join up with existing tracks at Las Animas. The study will also 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. Finally, the report will look broadly at environmental issues along both alignments to see if there are any "show stoppers."

Lang said the study will not address who would pay the cost of relocating the trains, estimated at a minimum of \$600 million. There is talk of a public-private partnership to pay the cost, but Lang said the study will not seek to determine who should be part of that partnership or what their share should be.

Lang said she's not sure what happens after the report is released in January. Her department does not have the money to do more in-depth studies but may seek additional funding once a separate but related study on the feasibility of high-speed rail along the Interstate 25 and 70 corridors is released in June.

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