



MEETING SUMMARY

Project: Southwest Chief Thru-Car Alternatives Analysis

Subject: Stakeholder Coalition Meeting 2

Date & Time: August 16, 2023, 3:30pm to 5:00pm

OBJECTIVES

- Provide update on the study and schedule
- Provide update on key technical work (Service Options, Operations Analysis, Station Planning)
- Provide update on next steps

AGENDA

Key discussion topics included:

- Project Update
- Schedule
- Service Options
- Operations Analysis & RTC
- Stations
- Next Steps

PROJECT UPDATE

PROJECT RECAP

To open the meeting, the Project Team presented the history of the Southwest Chief (SWC) and background of the SWC Thru-Car Study, as well as other pertinent Federal Rail Administration (FRA) studies.

Around 2010, while preparing for a renewal of the Amtrak contract with BNSF, Amtrak proposed rerouting the Southwest Chief. Based on that meeting, the legislature created the first SWC Commission which advocated to keep the SWC route in Colorado. When the concept for a Front Range Passenger Rail (FRPR) emerged, the legislature (in 2017) created the SWC & FRPR commission.

Subsequently, Amtrak proposed a thru-car service from La Junta to Pueblo and Colorado Springs. This study exists to evaluate the feasibility of the Thru-Car services and to determine a preferred service option. In 2021, the SWC & FRPR Commission was dissolved and the FRPR District was created. The FRPR District seeks to create passenger rail service from Fort Collins to Pueblo, eventually connecting Wyoming to New Mexico.

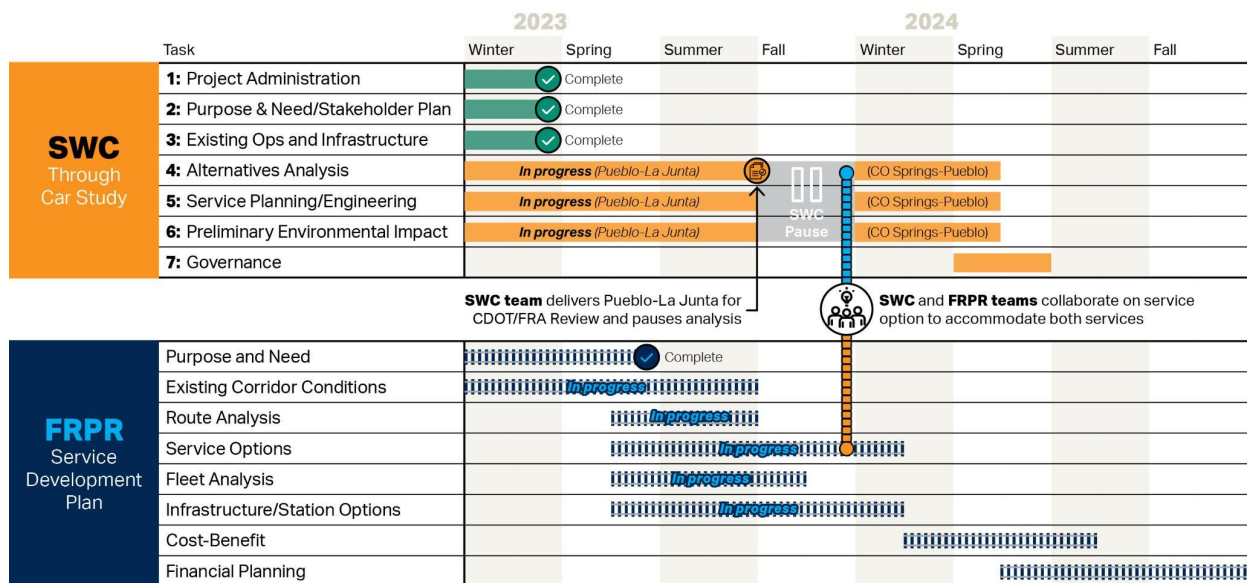
FRA grants are supporting both the SWC Thru-Car Study and the FRPR Service Development Plan (SDP).

- In 2019 the FRA selected the SWC thru-car study for a Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant. In 2020, the FRA selected the Fort Collins to Pueblo segment of the FRPR for a CRISI grant.
- The FRA is conducting a Long-Distance Rail Service Study to consider the development of a national network, in order to provide holistic cross-country services. The SWC is a part of the study.

The SWC Thru-Car Study and the FRPR SDP are both focusing on the rail systems from Colorado Springs to Pueblo. In order to avoid redundancy, the SWC study will pause work that includes the Colorado Springs to Pueblo corridor, in order to allow the FRPR study to complete its work in this area. The SWC study will continue to work on the operations analysis, station designs, and service options from La Junta to Pueblo.

SCHEDULE

The Project Team shared the following schedule graphic, which represents both SWC and FRPR studies and how they connect to one another.



SERVICE OPTIONS & SCREENING

SERVICE OPTIONS

The Project Team presented the different service options that were studied.

The Southwest Chief service runs daily east-bound (EB) and west-bound (WB) between Chicago and Los Angeles. In Colorado, it currently stops in Lamar, La Junta, and Trinidad.

The Team developed and evaluated six different thru-car service options in Level 1:

1. Two roundtrips to overlap with SWC schedule
2. One roundtrip to serve EB SWC schedule (evening)
3. One roundtrip to serve WB SWC chief (morning)
4. Serve WB SWC but start location would be in La Junta
5. Serve EB SWC but start location would be in La Junta
6. Two roundtrips but start location would be in Pueblo

After screening the six options against the project needs, the two daily roundtrip options (1 & 6) will be advanced.

Questions/Comments:

- John Liosatos, PPACG, asked a series of questions regarding the timing of connecting the thru-car train to the SWC, in order to be sure the system will not have long delays or miss connections. The discussion included: SWC dwell time in La Junta; the plan in the event of the SWC arriving in La Junta before the Thru-Car arrives; the plan in the event the Thru-Car is late; the modeling used for the various service options; and connection reliability. The team described that the SWC has a 15 minute stop in La Junta. The Thru-Car would be scheduled to arrive 15 minutes before the scheduled arrival of SWC, resulting in a 30 minute window for the connection. The team also stated that modeling was used to understand travel times, connection reliability, and potential delays. Modeling would be further discussed later in the meeting.
- Comments in the chat from Jim Souby, FRPR Board: When this all began, the SWC was one of the best performing long distance trains on Amtrak at 92%. Don't know how often, if ever it was early. Lately, performance has not been so good but we would hope Amtrak is striving to improve its reliability. Glad John raised this as reliability is very important to potential passengers. Another caution, a LD train can be late to one stop and make up time before another. Don't know if the train stays at a station a la La Junta until its scheduled departure if it is early

The team presented information regarding the Level 2 Service Option evaluation. The recommendation is to advance Service Option 6 for further analysis in the near term, and to pause further evaluation of the Colorado Springs-Pueblo segment until appropriate alignment with the FRPR SDP.

OPERATIONS ANALYSIS & RTC

David Burd, AECOM, shared the Rail Traffic Controller (RTC) models for Service Option 6. Service Option 6 would run twice a day between Pueblo and La Junta: The main goals of the SWC Connector are to have a reasonable run time and the reliability of meeting the SWC in La Junta. The main goal for freight rail is to minimize delays. Siding will allow opposite travel trains to be able to pass each other at various points in this segment.

The Operations Analysis modeled the relation between various lengths of siding tracks and travel time reliability for both the Thru-Car Connector and freight trains. 1,000' and 8,000' provide slight improvements to reliability. 16,000' siding and siding extensions are able to meet reliability objectives.

As a result of the above modeling results, the Team recommends using 16,000' siding and siding extensions.

Questions/Comments:

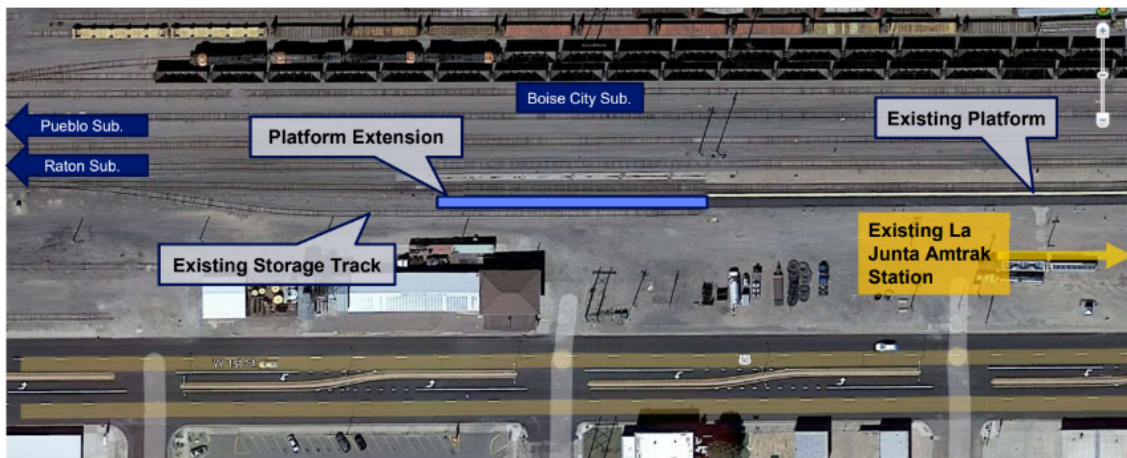
- Marc Pearsall, Amtrak, asked about the tracks for the SWC Connector at the La Junta train station. The Team replied that there has been examination of the tracks at this station, including the house tracks adjacent to the station.
- Sal Pace, FRPR, underscored the importance of engaging with Class 1 freight partners in order to ensure concepts being advanced have the buy-in from the Class 1 Railroads. The Project Team agreed and described the approach in engaging freight partners. BNSF and UP have been providing baseline data for the RTC. Vic Stone, UP, confirmed that the Project Team has been working with them.
- Jim Souby, FRPR Board, asked what kind of speeds the trains would operate at. The team responded that there is only freight operating there now with a speed limit of 55 mph. It is a class 4 track, which can accommodate speeds up to 79 mph. The models used that 79 mph speed.
- Chrissy Breit, FRPR, asked if the new siding tracks would be in existing freight ROW. The team responded that further analysis is needed, but from a desktop ROW analysis, the assumption is that these would be maintained in the current ROW.

STATIONS

The Team presented on the station area analysis and integrating previously completed/ongoing study findings. Part of the Project Team's task was looking at the three stations (Colorado Springs, Pueblo, and La Junta) using Amtrak's station program and planning guidelines and integrating 3 studies that already exist. In this review, the Team evaluated: user access, complementary mobility services, first/last mile connections, existing amenities, and improvement options.

LA JUNTA

The team discussed a proposed platform extension at La Junta. The SWC Connector could park on the existing storage track and extend the platform approximately 800' from the station.



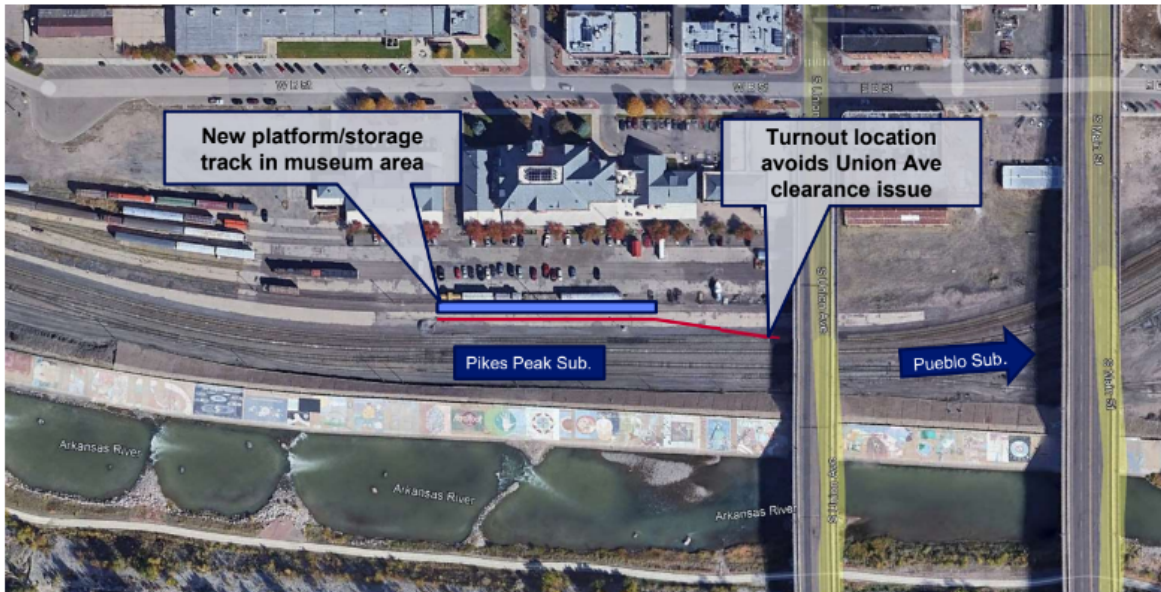
Questions/Comments:

- Marc Pearsall, Amtrak, stated that if the storage track were extended further east it would abutt a maintenance shed, creating a platform-to-platform connection, which would help with accessibility. **ACTION:** The Project Team will look into a further extension.

- Rick Klein, La Junta, stated that the City is getting ready to create a new multimodal transit station.
ACTION: The Project Team will follow up with Rick to make sure the proposed design will not interfere with the new multimodal transit station.

PUEBLO

In describing the Pueblo station, the Project Team discussed clearance issues with the Union Avenue Bridge.



*The preferred platform and track layout at Pueblo is still under analysis by their team and stakeholders. This is an assumed platform location for the purpose of the SWC Through Car study RTC model.

Questions/Comments:

- Mike Ricottone, Pueblo County, noted that in the study there was a 1,200 ft platform. He asked whether having an 800' train allows for greater flexibility in the station design. The Project Team replied that they used the proposed platform length for modeling purposes.
- Marc Pearsall, Amtrak, stated that the Amtrak Intercity standard is a 1,200 ft platform. In the future, FRPR trains may be 1,200' so it would be good practice to have the 1,200' platform. David Singer, CDOT, agreed, stating that CDOT is following Amtrak's national guidelines. Jim Souby stated that the Winter Park ski train platform was built to the 1,200' standard.
- Mike Ricottone asked if there is a baseline that Amtrak has for ridership and whether the Thru-Car meets that baseline. The team replied that it has been working with Amtrak on travel demand studies. Final travel demand will be determined using both FRPR SDP data and SWC Thru-Car data.

NEXT STEPS

The Project Team ended the meeting by describing the next steps for the study, which include:

- Conceptual Engineering/Cost Estimation
- Travel Demand Modeling
- Governance

CDOT Project Page: <https://www.codot.gov/projects/studies/swchiefstudy>

STAKEHOLDER AND COALITION-MEMBER ATTENDANCE

First Name	Last Name	Organizations
Marc	Pearsall	Amtrak
Chris	Enright	CDOT
David	Singer	CDOT
Geoffrey	Guthrie	CDOT
Jamie	Grim	CDOT
Jeff	Dawson	CDOT
Cody	Hedges	CDOT
Jacob	Matsen	City of Colorado Springs
Lan	Rao	City of Colorado Springs
		Colorado Springs Downtown Partnership
Devin	Camacho	Colorado Springs EDC and Chamber
Dave	Dazlick	Colorado Springs EDC and Chamber
Todd	Leopold	DOLA
KC	McFerson	DOLA
Justin	Kilgore	El Paso County
Kari	Parsons	El Paso County
Jim	Souby	FRPR District
Chrissy	Breit	FRPR District
Sal	Pace	FRPR District
Rick	Klein	La Junta
Kim	Zant	Otero College
Jessica	Bechtel	PPACG
John	Liosatos	PPACG
Ed	Parks	Project Team
Jeffrey	Range	Project Team
David	Burd	Project Team
Julia	Oleksiak	Project Team
Justin	Fox	Project Team
Mark	Langley	Project Team
Mike	Ricottone	Pueblo County
Daneya	Esgar	Pueblo County; FRPR

Vic	Stone	Union Pacific
Nathan	Anderson	Union Pacific
Chrispoter	Taylor	unknown
Three people joined by phone		