

Southwest Chief Thru-Car Service Study

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Study?

The Southwest Chief Thru-Car Service Study studies the feasibility of adding a new passenger rail connection between Colorado Springs, Pueblo and the existing Amtrak *Southwest Chief* station stop in La Junta, Colorado. The *Southwest Chief* currently operates eastbound and westbound trains between Chicago and Los Angeles. Proposed Thru-Car train service would connect Colorado Springs and Pueblo to the existing *Southwest Chief* route, allowing travelers aboard the *Southwest Chief* an opportunity to reach Pueblo and Colorado Springs by rail, and vice versa. The project team is evaluating service and capital investment options to accommodate this new passenger service, which would operate predominantly on existing Class I freight railroad tracks.

Why is the Study happening?

The reactivation of passenger rail service along this historic railroad alignment will provide national and regional transportation linkages and social and economic benefits to Colorado communities on the Front Range. The proposed extension of service will also benefit the financial viability of the *Southwest Chief* by adding ridership and revenue to the long-distance service and a connection to future Front Range Passenger Rail service, which is proposed to operate between Pueblo and Fort Collins.

The following needs have been identified through the projects Purpose & Need process:

- Need to provide transit service to additional travel markets along the southern Colorado Front Range to enhance regional and intercity connectivity (primary).
- Need to provide additional safe, reliable, and efficient travel choices in the Southern Colorado Front Range (along 1-25 and US 50), particularly with projected changes in population and employment (primary).
- Need to support tourism and economic development goals of local jurisdictions through attracting out of state visitors and transit station development and/or enhancement (secondary).
- Need to advance a longer-term passenger rail vision throughout Colorado (secondary).
- Need to provide safety improvements and modifications to the rail corridor for the introduction of passenger rail services between La Junta, Pueblo and Colorado Springs (secondary).

What is the status of the Southwest Chief Study?

The Southwest Chief Study's schedule is being adjusted in order to coordinate with the current Front Range Passenger Rail Service Development Plan (SDP). The next phase of study on the Colorado Springs to Pueblo corridor will be advanced through the Front Range Passenger Rail (FRPR).

To allow this to happen, as of August 2023, the Southwest Chief Thru-Car study team will pause analysis on the Colorado Springs - Pueblo segment and focus on the Pueblo - La Junta segment in the near term. At the appropriate point in the Front Range Passenger Rail SDP, evaluation of a Thru-Car and/or integrated Front Range Passenger Rail service option in the Colorado Springs - Pueblo segment will recommence. This revised task sequencing allows for a holistic approach to rail planning in the Colorado Springs - Pueblo segment and avoids two separate efforts to model operations and design infrastructure for two different rail services.

What is a Thru-Car?

Thru-Car is traditionally defined as a train passenger car that is attached/detached to/from a trainset which is operating along a main route, allowing a passenger to travel to a different location and back to the main route. In the context of this project, the Thru-Car would carry passengers between Colorado Springs, Pueblo, and La Junta. The Thru-Car service would be synchronized with the arrival/departure schedules of the eastbound and/or westbound *Southwest Chief*. As an alternate option to coupling and decoupling Thru-Cars to the *Southwest Chief*, standalone equipment may be recommended to shuttle passengers between Colorado Springs, Pueblo, and La Junta.

How does this relate to Amtrak?

Amtrak currently operates a long-distance intercity train, the *Southwest Chief*, which runs between Chicago and Los Angeles. In Colorado, there are station stops in Lamar, La Junta, and Trinidad. The Thru-Car service would be synchronized with the *Southwest Chief* schedule, creating new mobility options and connections between La Junta, Pueblo and Colorado Springs, and other stops along the *Southwest Chief* route.

How does this relate to Front Range Passenger Rail?

This is a standalone Study separate from the Front Range Passenger Rail District. The proposed routing, however, does overlap with FRPR routing between Pueblo and Colorado Springs. In the future, these potential services would likely be synchronized to address common service goals, like increased ridership and connectivity.