



Project: Southwest Chief Thru-Car Alternatives Analysis

Subject: Draft Preliminary Purpose and Need Statement, November 2, 2021

PURPOSE OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

The purpose of the *Southwest Chief* Thru-Car Alternatives Analysis Project is to identify the necessary operational and infrastructure requirements to provide passenger rail service along the BNSF Pueblo and Union Pacific (UP) Colorado Springs Subdivisions (the “corridor¹”) between La Junta and Pueblo and Colorado Springs, by connecting to the Amtrak *Southwest Chief* service (Amtrak Trains 3 and 4) at the La Junta station, with an eventual connection to future passenger rail service along the entire Colorado Front Range.

NEED FOR THE PROPOSED PROJECT

Five overall needs have been identified for the *Southwest Chief* Thru-Car Alternatives Analysis Project. Two are seen as primary needs and three are seen as secondary needs:

PRIMARY NEEDS

- **Need to provide transit service to additional travel markets along the southern Colorado Front Range to enhance regional and intercity connectivity.** Amtrak’s *Southwest Chief* route operates daily service between Chicago and Los Angeles. While overall ridership on the route has declined in recent years from about 355,000 total passengers in 2012 to about 331,000 in 2018, boardings have increased at the La Junta station from approximately 6,500 in 2012 to about 7,300 in 2018. The increase in boardings in La Junta (as well as a similar increase in Trinidad) demonstrates that demand exists from residents in southern Colorado to travel via Amtrak. Connecting Pueblo and Colorado Springs to Amtrak’s national passenger rail network will help meet travel demand for long-distance travelers in southern Colorado as well as passengers from other cities along the *Southwest Chief* route to Pueblo and Colorado Springs.
- **Need to provide additional safe, reliable, and efficient travel choices in the southern Colorado Front Range (along I-25 and US 50), particularly with projected changes in population and employment.** Relying only on existing roadways creates risk and uncertainty due to increasing congestion, periodic road closures, natural disasters, and weather events. Providing an additional, reliable travel alternative to existing roadways would support resident access to jobs, shopping, recreation, and health care facilities. The Colorado State Demography Office projects that El Paso County (Colorado Springs) and Pueblo County (Pueblo) will grow in population in 2020 from about: 731,000 and 168,000 residents today to 950,000 and 197,000, respectively, by 2040. Employment is also projected to grow from 381,000 and

¹ The “corridor” refers to the Southwest Chief Thru-Car Alternatives Analysis study area that extends from the existing Southwest Chief Station in La Junta to Pueblo generally following US 50 and then to Colorado Springs along I-25.

72,000 jobs in 2020, to 483,000 and 86,000 jobs, respectively, by 2040. Meanwhile, Otero County (La Junta) is projected to lose population from about 18,000 in 2020 to 16,000 in 2040 and employment from 7,900 jobs in 2020 to 7,300 in 2040. The nearest major medical facilities for smaller rural communities such as La Junta are in Pueblo and Colorado Springs. These medical facilities and hospitals include Parkview Hospital (Pueblo), UCHHealth Memorial Hospitals (Central and North), the St. Francis Medical Center, and Children's Hospital (Colorado Springs).

SECONDARY NEEDS

- **Need to support tourism and economic development goals of local jurisdictions through attracting out of state visitors and transit station development and/or enhancement:** Sitting at the base of Pikes Peak, Colorado Springs is home to some of the state's most popular tourist destinations including Garden of the Gods, the Broadmoor Hotel, the Colorado Springs Olympic Training Center, and the U.S. Air Force Academy. Pueblo is home to the Pueblo Riverwalk, the Union Avenue Historic Commercial District, many outdoor recreational opportunities, and the Colorado State Fair. Tourism in the Pikes Peak region brought 23 million visitors to the area in 2018 (10 million of which were overnight visitors, spending 3.2 nights on average and generating \$1.7 billion for the local economy). Approximately one-quarter of the existing *Southwest Chief* riders at the three existing Colorado stations (La Junta, Lamar, and Trinidad) are out-of-state leisure visitors. Providing a fixed connection to the tourist attractions of Pueblo and Colorado Springs for these travelers and others with similar trip purposes could boost ridership and revenues for Amtrak as well as tourist dollars for these local communities. Bringing rail passengers to Pueblo and Colorado Springs will add tourist dollars and encourage more development around stations as the state and Amtrak look at future passenger rail opportunities along the Front Range.
- **Need to Advance a longer-term passenger rail vision throughout Colorado:** The Amtrak Vision for Improving Transportation Across America, part of its Amtrak Connects US initiative released in May 2021, shows that the company hopes to introduce passenger rail service along the Front Range between Pueblo and Fort Collins and potentially to Cheyenne, Wyoming. With potential increases in service frequency and ridership throughout a well-connected statewide rail system, the state could make progress in reaching its goal of significant greenhouse reductions. The Connects Us initiative also helps the state advance its legislative charge to deliver passenger rail along the Front Range with the passage of SB21-238 to create the Front Range Passenger Rail District (to plan, design, finance, construct, operate, and maintain a passenger rail system along the Front Range). In addition, the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) is coordinating with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) on a Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Grant to develop a service development plan for potential future Front Range Passenger Rail as a next step in corridor development.
- **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.** Currently, positive train control (PTC) does not exist along the La Junta to Pueblo segment. Also, several existing at-grade railroad crossings between La Junta and Colorado Springs do not meet the standards necessary for implementing passenger rail. Substandard signaling also exists along portions of the corridor throughout the study area. Additionally, addressing these deficiencies would also provide safety benefits to the existing freight rail service as well. Finally, freight rail capacity and flexibility will need to be maintained while also introducing passenger rail service in this corridor.