



DATE: March 13, 2020
TO: Transit and Rail Advisory Committee
FROM: Randy Grauberger, Project Director, SW Chief & Fr. Range Passenger Rail Commission
SUBJECT: Update on the SW Chief & Fr. Range Passenger Rail Commission

Purpose

The purpose of this memo is to provide updated information about the Rail Commission's activities since the last memo dated January 10th, 2020.

Action

Information only, no action requested

Background

The SW Chief & Front Range Passenger Rail Commission was created by SB 17-153 in 2017. There are 11 voting members of the Commission (MPOs, Class I Freight railroads, passenger rail advocates, local leaders) and three non-voting members (CDOT, Amtrak and Wyoming rep.). The Rail Commission has two purposes: 1) facilitate the development of passenger rail along the greater I-25 corridor, 2) ensure existing Amtrak Southwest Chief service remains in SE Colorado.

Details

Southwest Chief & Front Range Passenger Rail Commission Meetings

The Rail Commission held its most recent monthly meeting in Berthoud on February 28. The March meeting will be on the 27th in Denver and the April 24 meeting will be held in Pueblo. Meetings of the Commission occur on the 4th Friday of each month.

The Rail Commission and CDOT Transportation Commission met for a lunch on February 20th. There was excellent dialogue between the members of the two Commissions and all participants expressed interest in meeting together in this fashion about twice a year.

Activity related to Ensuring the Amtrak Southwest Chief Service Remains in Colorado

Work related to successful 2018 TIGER and CRISI grant applications continues. A Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant of \$9,157,600 was awarded for the design, installation and testing of positive train control (PTC) wayside technology on 179 miles of track between Dodge City, KS and Las Animas, CO. Sub agreements with the funding agencies are being developed and pre-award authority for BNSF to begin designing the system was provided. Also, a TIGER 9 Grant of \$16,000,000 was awarded for track upgrades to the Southwest Chief's route between Hutchinson, KS and Las Animas in addition to improvements to New Mexico's route carrying New Mexico's Rail Runner commuter service.

The Commission was notified on February 27th that it had been awarded a 2019 CRISI grant for a Southwest Chief Thru-car Service to Colorado Springs Feasibility Study. This \$450,000 Study will look at the feasibility of extending the existing Southwest Chief service from La Junta to Pueblo and from Pueblo to Colorado Springs. Matching funds for this study were provided by the Rail Commission, CDOT, Pueblo County, La Junta and ColoRail.

Activity to Facilitate the Development of Passenger Rail Along the Greater I-25 Corridor

The Rail Commission is in the process of reviewing a Draft bill to create a Front Range Passenger Rail District that is to be sponsored by State Senate President Leroy Garcia. Comments are to be provided to Senator Garcia on March 9th.

Round 2 of Segment Stakeholder Coalition meetings were held for the Service Development Plan and pre-NEPA work of the Front Range Consultant Team. These meetings occurred in:

- Loveland – January 21
- Denver – January 22
- Pueblo – January 24

A third round of these important stakeholder engagement meetings are anticipated to be held April 7 – 9. These will be followed by a Second Corridor Coalition meeting near the end of April.

In addition, individual stakeholder interviews (approximately 30 along the Front Range) continue to take place gauging interest and issues related to Front Range Passenger Rail.

The Project Vision for the Front Range Passenger rail project is:

Developing passenger rail service that serves Front Range communities from Pueblo to Fort Collins is a critical component of Colorado's future. Front Range Passenger Rail (FRPR) will provide a safe, efficient, and reliable transportation option for travel between major population centers along the Front Range and create a backbone for connecting and expanding rail and transit options in the state.

The Commission's federal partners in the project (FRA, FHWA, and FTA) have indicated that this Vision will provide a foundation for the eventual Purpose and Need as project proceeds into NEPA near the end of this calendar year. A third meeting of the Project team and the three federal partners has been scheduled for April 2.

The Project team has been working with CDOT's modeling staff to provide inputs into the travel demand model which will be projecting rail ridership for the various proposed alignments.