



DATE: September 11, 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 July 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

The Rail Commission held its most recent monthly meeting virtually on August 28. It is expected that the next 2 meetings to be held on September 25 and October 23 will also be held remotely.

Work related to successful 2018 TIGER IX and 2018 CRISI grants 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. FRA notice to proceed was given on August 26th to begin design of the system and fully executed sub-agreements with Amtrak, BNSF, KDOT and the Rail Commission are expected in September.

Also, the TIGER IX Grant of \$16,000,000 that 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 has been obligated. Notice to proceed was given on August 10th and track work in Kansas has begun with rail for the project coming from the Evraz steel facility in Pueblo.

The Commission was notified in February that it had been awarded a 2019 CRISI grant for a Southwest Chief Thru-car Service to Colorado Springs Alternatives Analysis. 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. FRA is providing final comments on the Draft Scope of Work and has

issued Commission staff authorization to begin the RFP process with CDOT Procurement. The 2019 CRISI Grant is expected to be obligated in October and the RFP should be issued shortly after that.

Rail Commission staff have had conversations with Amtrak regarding Amtrak's Network Modernization Program included in Amtrak's federal transportation reauthorization program to Congress. The program would make federal grant funds (estimated to be \$2.1 billion for Colorado's Front Range) to Amtrak to cover up to 199% of the capital costs and initial operating costs of New Corridor. States would then gradually assume a greater share of the operating costs over a 5-year period.

The Front Range Rail Project has moved into Level Two of the analysis of alignment alternatives where alternatives are being compared against each other utilizing agreed upon criteria. Passenger Rail ridership modeling continues as well for the various alignments and details will also be presented to the TRAC in a PowerPoint at the September TRAC meeting. The existing BNSF freight rail corridor from Denver to Fort Collins and the Joint Line (both BNSF and UP) rail freight corridors from Denver to Pueblo remain as potential alignments for future Front Range Passenger Rail. Additionally, the right of way of the I-25 corridor is still being considered outside of the Denver Metro area.

The fourth round of Segment Stakeholder Coalition Meetings will be held virtually September 15 -17.

On June 29th, the Rail Commission initiated an online Public Meeting which ran through July 31. The results will also be presented in a PowerPoint at the September TRAC meeting.