

# FRONT RANGE PASSENGER RAIL

## WINTER WEBINAR

Wednesday, December 13, 2023

4:30 – 5:30 p.m. MT

### SUMMARY

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## INTRODUCTION

The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) and the Front Range Passenger Rail (FRPR) District hosted a winter webinar on Wednesday, December 13, 2023. The webinar was conducted on Zoom and was open to members of the public with an interest in the future of passenger rail along the Front Range. In total, 415 attendees joined the webinar. A live recording of the webinar can be viewed [here](#).

The webinar objectives were to provide an overview of:

- Where FRPR has been, its status, and where it is going
- The FRPR District and the Corridor Identification and Development Program (CIDP)
- The Service Development Plan (SDP) process, timeline, and near-and long-term milestones
- Public and stakeholder involvement throughout the process and opportunities for input

Following the presentation, the project team conducted a live question-and-answer section to address questions shared during registration and the webinar. At three separate times during the presentation, attendees were invited to share input via surveys that could be accessed on their computer, phone, or tablet.



rail system along the Front Range, the FRPR District has a 24-person board of directors composed of local leaders across the state. The FRPR District has the authority to levy taxes and create Station Area Improvement Districts. The FRPR District boundary stretches between the northern and southern border of the state along the I-25 corridor, encompassing 13 counties. Currently, the FRPR District is collaborating with local communities to support station development.

Andy provided an overview of the SDP, which will evaluate routes, services, stations, operations, financial opportunities, and ways to incorporate existing infrastructure.

Mandy Whorton (Peak Consulting) presented the Purpose and Need for FRPR. The Purpose and Need outlines why an action should be taken and serves as a foundation for exploring alternatives. The purpose for FRPR is to introduce inter-city passenger rail service along the Colorado Front Range urban corridor between Pueblo and Fort Collins, operating within freight railroad corridors and using shared tracks with Burlington Northern Santa Fe Corporation and Union Pacific railroads. The needs that inform this purpose are to: improve mobility and multimodal travel options, connect communities, foster economic vitality and equity, support environmental and sustainability goals.

Angela Jo Woolcott (Kearns & West) opened a second survey asking participants to identify which need resonated most with them. More than 170 responses were submitted. The need that resonated with most participants is the need to improve mobility and multimodal travel.

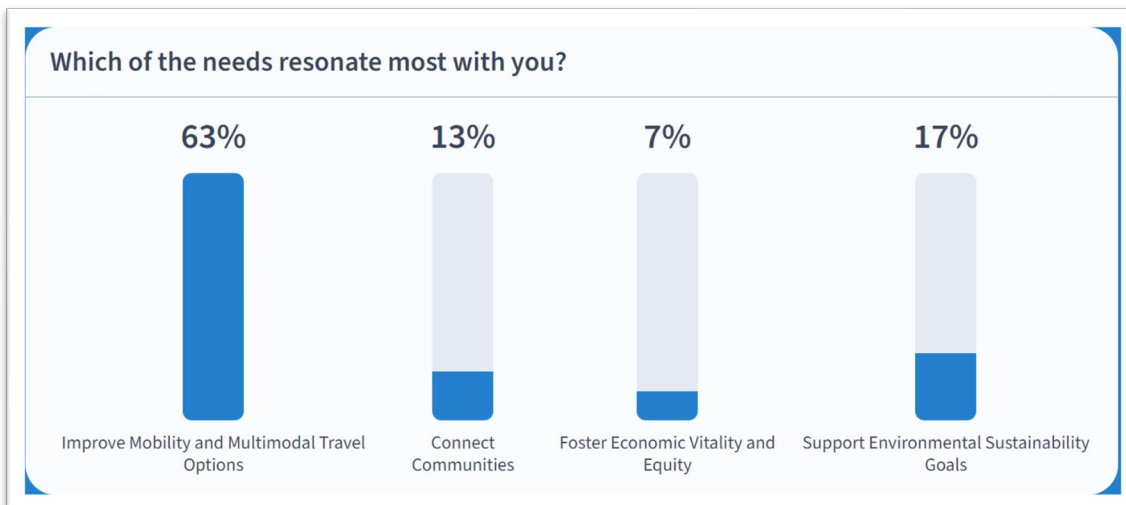


Figure 2: Participant responses to the question "Which of the needs resonate most with you?".

Dominic Spaethling (HNTB) presented on the FRPR's current phase. FRPR will operate on existing freight railroad tracks and corridors, and interface with Union Station and RTD services. The preliminary analysis shows that FRPR has a similar market size and can offer competitive travel times, comparable to other inter-city

passenger rail systems around the country. Preliminary planning also shows that, if funding allows, service is feasible within a decade.

Dominic spoke to the ongoing work to better understand what is possible for FRPR. An alternatives analysis is underway, which will define a preliminary range of reasonable options and will recommend one alternative to carry into the SDP planning process. Additional analyses are underway regarding host railroad negotiations and operations, analyzing revenue and ridership, conducting station area outreach and analysis, and understanding the environmental context.

## Where We're Going

Andy Karsian (FRPR District) shared that in December 2023, the FRPR District was accepted into the Corridor Identification and Development Program (CIDP) and received a \$500,000 grant. The program, created by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), opens a pipeline for federal funding with a 90/10 federal match. The FRPR District is also initiating funding discussions with stakeholders to advance FRPR and is working to identify and understand funding options.

**To view the “Where We’re Going” portion of the presentation, begin the recording at the 28:30-minute mark.**

Andy presented a timeline of project steps. The SDP process represents the current phase. Next steps include understanding financial strategies as well as conducting the environmental analysis before construction can begin.

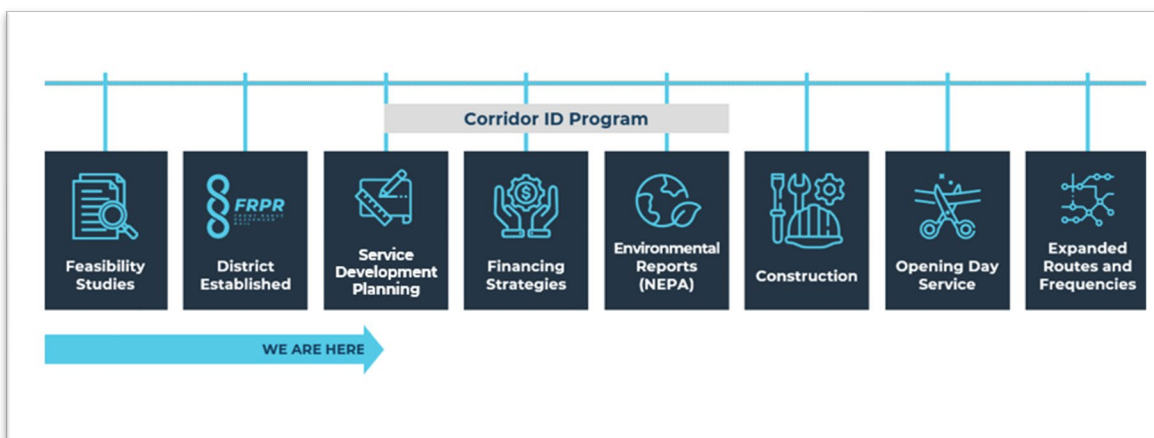


Figure 3: A graphic displaying the timeline of steps that the project will progress through before completion.

## Public Engagement

Angela Jo Woolcott (Kearns & West) summarized public engagement to date. One of the earliest engagement steps was launching the project website, [www.ridethefrontrange.com](http://www.ridethefrontrange.com). The website includes FRPR Frequently Asked Questions, a recorded presentation, and a project mailing list sign-up and comment

form. She invited participants to continue checking the website, and to sign up for the mailing list. FRPR attendance at community events will continue in 2024. There have also been ongoing conversations with members of the public, including segment and corridor-wide meetings held with stakeholders as well as one-on-one stakeholder interviews.

Angela opened the third survey question asking participants to select what topic they would like to hear about during future engagement opportunities. More than 170 responses were submitted with Route, Schedule, and Stations identified as the topics that participants are most interested in learning more about.

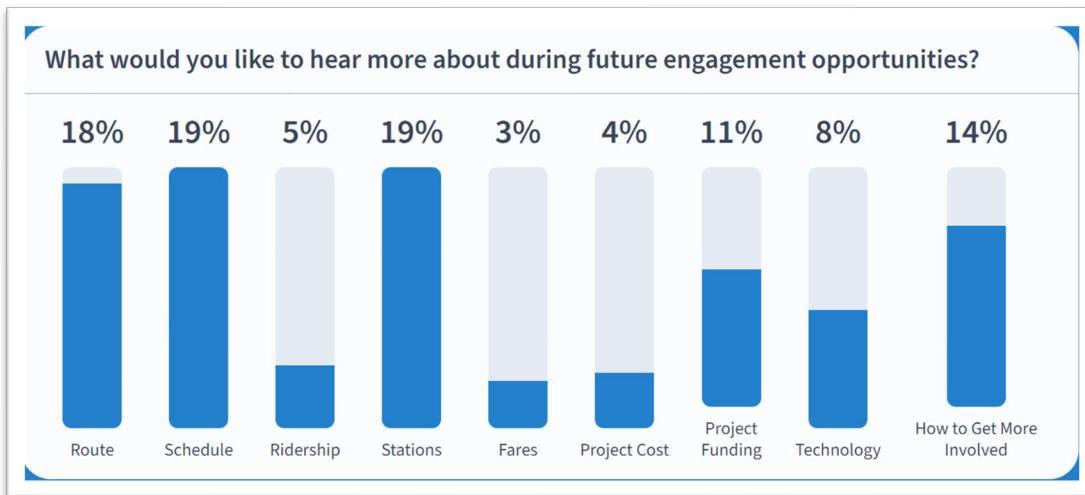


Figure 4: Participant responses to the question "What would you like to hear more about during future engagement opportunities?"

Angela thanked participants for joining the webinar and encouraged ongoing engagement by visiting the project website at [www.ridethefrontrange.com](http://www.ridethefrontrange.com) or emailing the project team at [info@frprdistrict.com](mailto:info@frprdistrict.com).

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Participants submitted 132 questions during the webinar registration, and 128 during the webinar. These questions were grouped into consistent themes. While the project team was not able to respond to all comments during the webinar, the FAQs on the FRPR website ([www.ridethefrontrange.com](http://www.ridethefrontrange.com)) will be updated in early 2024 accordingly.

**To view the Question-and-Answer portion of the webinar, begin the recording at the 36:20-minute mark.**

| QUESTION                                                                                                                                                | ANSWER                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>When will the route and major markets/stations be finalized?</b>                                                                                     | The Route Options Analysis Methodology was reviewed and approved by the FRA in October 2023. The route was endorsed by the FRPR District on 12/11/23. The methodology identifies feasible routes along freight rail corridors. There is only one existing line going south from Denver to Colorado Springs, the Consolidated Main Line. To the north there are potential routes, the most viable being the BNSF Front Range Sub. These routes combine to make Route 1. Route 1 is the most viable route based on preliminary ridership numbers, connectivity, multimodal benefits, and other analyses. Having one route in mind helps the planning team model service options, and makes current comparisons and analyses more manageable. The route will be subjected to environmental permitting and NEPA analysis. The station and market analysis is also subject to methodology and has yet to be finalized. |
| <b>How are “major markets” and stations determined? Are the stops already identified or can communities work with the decision-makers to add stops?</b> | The FRPR District is working with local governments along the corridor to plan potential stations. Nine possible “major markets,” or station locations have been identified, and a final determination will be made in partnership with the FRA. Inter-city rail is different from commuter rail in that there are fewer stations. There may be partnership opportunities with other transit providers to connect to additional stations.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

| QUESTION                                                                                            | ANSWER                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>How many trains per day might run at the beginning of service? Will there be hourly service?</b> | The goal is to introduce modest service in the beginning. This will include trains in the morning and evening and a unique schedule on weekends. Service schedule decisions will be an outcome of both the SDP process and negotiations with host railroads.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>How will you make sure FRPR has competitive travel times?</b>                                    | By law, for FRPR to move forward, the service needs to be competitive with traffic times. Feasibility is determined by looking at the anticipated travel time by train and average traffic times along the I-25 corridor in 2021. Traffic along the corridor is anticipated to increase in the future. Initial SDP modeling and conversations with freight railroads demonstrate that passenger rail travel times are competitive, if not faster, than vehicle travel.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>When would trains start running?</b>                                                             | Initiating passenger rail service on the existing corridor is a multistage and multiphase project. The planning process is currently focused on developing a preferred alternative for the environmental review process. FRPR would use existing freight lines but adding stations requires an assessment of that impact on local communities and new sidings to allow trains to pass one another. The construction process will include installing positive train control systems on parts of the corridor to enhance safety for passenger and freight rail. Provided that funding is available, it will take time to get this service up and running. There is also time needed to build relationships with freight operators since freight tracks will be used. |

| QUESTION                                                                                                                                                               | ANSWER                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Why would freight want to collaborate with us? What did we do to facilitate that?</b>                                                                               | The FRPR District included freight rail interests on their 24-person board. FRPR presents a potential revenue stream for freight operators thanks to paying passenger rail customers. Any infrastructure built as part of FRPR can be used in day-to-day freight operations. The availability of federal funding also incentivizes partnerships and encourages collaboration.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>The average speed seems slow compared to cars on interstate. Will running freight allow those speeds the needed reliability to make the train more competitive?</b> | There is an average and maximum speed. The SDP team is examining maximum speeds reaching 80-90 mph – the existing standard for the potential host railroads. The average speed considers starts and stops coming into stations and established communities, and the corridor’s unique topography. We are examining opportunities to improve travel times.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Describe the phased approach and how we will get to the future buildout.</b>                                                                                        | Recommendations from prior studies and planning efforts indicate that it is best to use existing infrastructure to develop a service that can be built upon as opposed to creating something new from scratch. This allows us to establish the presence of passenger rail as an option for Coloradans. We are optimistic that the route we have chosen presents opportunities to expand rail service in the future to other cities in Colorado, as well as Wyoming and New Mexico. The existing long-distance rail service that Amtrak operates through the state could also be a nexus with FRPR. The phased approach is an expectation of FRA as well. They are focused on corridors, not just projects, and it is expected that these corridors will be built in phases, |

| QUESTION                                                                                       | ANSWER                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
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| <p><b>How will rural areas be serviced when we are looking at stations in urban areas?</b></p> | <p>FRPR needs to start somewhere, and the first step is to develop a feeder system that makes passenger rail effective for the whole state. Until we can build out an extensive network of passenger rail across the state, we will need to rely on connections to those stations in major hubs. Stations are in major hubs because those areas are destinations that serve a broader area, and population, than just the immediate station area. For example, for someone traveling from Trinidad to Denver, they will need to find a way to Pueblo but that service from Pueblo to Denver is still useful.</p>                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <p><b>What rail technology is planned, diesel or electric?</b></p>                             | <p>There are exciting developments in rail technology. State mandates for zero emissions technology are a driving force for this project. Such vehicles are in development, but currently not many are used in an inter-city function. Battery and hydrogen technology are being tested. We will evaluate several types of technology, including clean diesel, while looking at the viability of other services depending on industry developments. The alternatives analysis looks at all reasonable options and considers factors like life cycle cost, maintenance yards, availability, safety, and compatibility with railroads, as well as environmental and sustainability goals. Market innovations are currently being demonstrated at the federal rail testing center in Pueblo.</p> |
| <p><b>Will bicycles and dogs be allowed on the train?</b></p>                                  | <p>Absolutely.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

## APPENDIX A: PANELISTS AND FACILITATOR

| Name               | Organization                |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| Andy Karsian       | FRPR District               |
| David Singer       | CDOT                        |
| Dominic Spaethling | HNTB                        |
| Mandy Whorton      | Peak Consulting             |
| Angela Jo Woolcott | Kearns & West (facilitator) |