

FRPR Public Webinar

December 8, 2023

0:00

Good afternoon and welcome to the Front Range Passenger Rail Winter 2023 Public Webinar.

0:07

My name is Angela Joe Wolcott with Kearns and West.

0:10

I'm a neutral third party facilitator here to help run today's meeting before handing it over to Andy Carson from the Front Range Passenger Rail District.

0:21

We would like to welcome all elected officials, Front Range Passenger Rail District Board members, representatives from state and local government who have registered and joined us today.

0:34

Thank you for being here.

0:36

Andy, over to you to provide a welcome to everyone that's attending today.

0:43

Really great to see everyone this evening, especially now that I'm unmuted and it's hard to believe that few and a half years have passed since the alternatives evaluation was completed.

0:53

We're all excited to update you on the progress that the conversation since then.

0:57

Candy, thank you.

0:59

Before I walk through how to participate in today's webinar, Please note that today's meeting is being recorded.

1:05

In addition, we will develop a post meeting summary including answers to the questions asked throughout the webinar that will be posted to the project website following the meeting at ridethefrontrange.com.

1:21

Today, your video and sound will be turned off and we encourage you to participate through Zooms Q&A button that is in the menu bar at the bottom.

1:32

To submit a question, press the Q&A button in the meeting control task bar to submit and share with the team.

1:40

We will answer your questions in the second-half of the meeting.

1:44

We will not be typing answers back in the Q&A chat tonight.

1:49

In addition to the questions asked during the webinar, we will also answer several questions that were submitted during the webinar registration.

1:58

If you encounter technical issues today, please message Caitlin Sheridan through the chat.

2:04

You may also e-mail Caitlin at CSHERIDAN at kearnswest.com.

2:16

That's KEA RNS west.com.

2:22

Today we will provide you with information about where Front Range passenger rail has been, where the process is now and where Front Range passenger rail is going.

2:33

The first section of our presentation will discuss what Front Range passenger rail is, the history and the purpose and need.

2:42

The 2nd portion will provide you with more information on the Front Range passenger rail district, the service development plan, the process and the ongoing technical analysis.

2:56

Lastly, we will close the webinars presentation portion with a discussion on the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor identification development program, lean and financing and ongoing ways for you to stay involved throughout the webinar.

3:13

We will collect your questions to answer as many as time permits following the presentation.

3:19

You may submit your questions at any time throughout the webinar.

3:24

Additionally, we plan to engage you this afternoon with a few short survey questions.

3:32

Before we dive into the content, I would like to introduce the different members of the project team who will be presenting this evening on the screen and for those of you that have dialed in, you will see and I will read the names off to you with C dot.

3:50

We are joined by Project Manager David Singer with the Front Range Passenger Rail District, Andy Carson with HNTB, Dominic Stabling with Pete Consulting, Mandy Wharton.

4:06

If you would like to connect with anyone on the project team, you can visit ridethefrontrange.com or e-mail info@frprdistrict.com.

4:19

And I would also like to note that not the not everyone from the full project team is in attendance today.

4:26

This is a select group of panelists to present in the winter webinar.

4:33

So as a reminder, if you have questions throughout the presentation, I will keep asking you to submit those through the Q&A button on the Zoom taskbar.

4:44

I'll now introduce you to our first presenter.

4:47

You will be hearing from David Singer with CDOT who will provide an overview of Front Range passenger rail.

4:54

So David, what is Front Range passenger?

4:56

Thank you.

4:57

Angela.

4:59

Before I jump into, I just wanted to say thank you to everyone tuning in on behalf of the project, the larger project team.

5:06

It's been a real privilege to advance the technical elements.

5:10

It's an exciting time over the Front Range and we're happy to carry on this vision.

5:17

I do want to spend a minute to kind of level set and provide some definition to our charge.

5:22

We're look passenger Front Range passenger rail.

5:25

We're looking to introduce inner city train service and while there's opportunities for us to connect South to New Mexico and N to Wyoming in an effort to start and provide Front Range, we're looking between Pueblo and Fort Collins with stops along the way as the first like a segment or or backbone for us to start.

5:49

We're also examining using existing tracks within the study area and sharing those with freight that's out there right now.

5:57

This is an opportunity for us to accelerate this service date and to do so in a more cost effective way.

6:04

So I mentioned the term intercity rail and I wanted to spend a minute to say that not all trains are created equal.

6:11

For those of us in the metro area maybe fast tracks is your is your reference point and that's a commuter rail system.

6:19

The goals of fast tracks or commuter rail is to move customers within one area IE the metro Denver area.

6:26

In this area you recognize that their stops every two or three or four miles and because of that it's not really getting as high speeds and sustaining those speeds and the service area is, is restricted to that one area as well.

6:41

The technology, the type of trip, the customer experience is all distinct to those getting on and commuting on a daily basis.

6:51

What we're focusing on today is something called intercity rail and we're looking to move much larger service areas obviously 180 a 190 miles from Pueblo to Fort Collins.

7:02

The stops and the stations are much further apart and as a result, we can hit higher speeds and sustain those higher speeds with a much higher average.

7:12

As you see here.

7:14

Buying tickets is a different experience.

7:16

There's different amenities on this on the train, it's different technology.

7:20

Now we would be complementary to commuter rail service and our team is working very closely with RTD to identify how we can coexist and complement one another.

7:30

But these are two different types of training systems.

7:34

And so I just wanted to throw that out to start.

7:37

We're also not coming to you from at the outset.

7:42

This has long been an ambition for the Front Range.

7:46

Advocates have long thought about bringing passenger rail, and it's coming from a place of what's out there and what's experienced across the country and across the world.

7:57

And so past studies have looked at it through a different lenses.

8:00

Maybe it's looking at a Greenfield alignment to the east of the Front Range or through a Hyperloop, or through laying down tracks in the median of the Interstate.

8:09

And each of these ideas reflected the political will and the ambition for to bring it here.

8:16

But it all had really a hard an inability for us to take a first step to implement.

8:23

That is, until this most recent study led by the Front Range Passenger Rail Commission, which examined a first step.

8:32

And it did so in talking with rail partners and talking with our federal partners and most importantly, successful services across the country.

8:40

And that is to, like I said earlier, introduce service on existing tracks.

8:46

It's reaching early adopters, it's providing a proof of concept and it has the ability to change behaviours and to expand as the system matures.

9:00

And so that was something that we are focusing on today.

9:03

This last study also resulted in the state legislature taking action with the creation of the necessary governance to advance the system in the Front Range passenger rail district.

9:14

And Andy Carson will be talking more about that new entity and the rules and responsibilities in the charge it has.

9:21

But first I'll throw it back to Angela for our first survey question.

9:25

Great.

9:26

Thank you, David.

9:28

For those of you that have just joined, I did want to let you know that the presentation is being recorded and the recording and a summary will be published to the project website after the meeting.

9:42

Throughout the webinar, we will ask you a few survey questions to answer our questions.

9:47

You can either one go to the following URLPOP as in Paul OLL E as in Edward V as in Victor so pollev.com and enter the following letters and numbers uppercase W, uppercase P, uppercase O, uppercase L, uppercase L255 SWPOLL 255.

10:22

When you are prompted, you can then text the same code WPOLL 255 to this text number 22333.

10:35

So you're either welcome to participate through a browser, through a computer or through a smartphone multiple ways.

10:43

You are welcome to scan the QR code on the screen that you see in front of you as well.

10:49

And once you're in the poll you do not need to re enter or rejoin later.

10:54

After hearing more about Front Range passenger rail, this is our first question.

10:58

Now we have described a little bit about Front Range passenger rail.

11:03

We would like to hear from you.

11:05

What type of trip do you plan to take?

11:10

Now this is called a word cloud.

11:12

So people are invited to use one to two words to describe your answer.

11:17

Type that in.

11:20

We'll see this start to populate on the screen.

11:24

For those of you that have joined by phone, we'll let this fill up our screen here and then we will read aloud some of the answers.

11:34

The fun thing about this tool is that some of the shared words and experiences and destinations get bigger than some of the other ones that have one or two responses.

11:47

So I am seeing it's moving all around.

11:49

We're seeing some leisure trips.

11:51

We're seeing vacation weekend and family, seeing some destinations on here like Boulder and Fort Collins.

12:05

The word commute is big, so definitely a good diverse mix of uses and how people plan to take and use Front Range passenger rail.

12:17

And this ties nicely to the slide that David presented earlier talking about inner city versus commuter.

12:24

And we're seeing that people are planning to use it in both for commuting as well as leisure and recreational purposes.

12:34

Anybody else on the panel have any observations before we move to the next slide?

12:44

I look forward to that word stopping.

12:47

It's making me dizzy.

12:49

It's very busy.

12:49

Yes.

12:50

So that's showing us there's lots of activity and it's getting really full.

12:55

So I think people are also saying there's lots of different ways to use this service.

13:00

So thank you, everyone.

13:01

Please go ahead and keep typing in those answers.

13:04

It will continue to fill and we will now move into the next slide.

13:11

As a reminder, if you do have any questions, I'm going to keep asking and encouraging people to type those into the Q&A button on the Zoom taskbar.

13:21

Now I'm going to go back to Andy Carson with the Front Range Passenger Rail District.

13:27

During this section, we will also be hearing from Mandy Wharton with Pete Consulting to review more about what we know about Front Range passenger rail, the service development plan, the purpose and need and some ongoing technical analysis.

13:41

Andy, thank you, Angela.

13:44

So again, my name is Andy Carson.

13:46

I'm with the Front Range Passenger Rail District.

13:49

The district was created by the legislature in 2021.

13:54

It's an independent agency with the directive to design, finance, design, construct and operate of passenger rail service all along the Front Range.

14:05

And as you can see on this map, the district boundary covers all or parts of the 13 counties all along the I-25 corridor.

14:12

They're straight stretching from the northern border to the southern border of the state.

14:17

And in fact, it is the largest special district in the state.

14:21

The district has the authority to levy taxes and create station improvement districts, which are similar to business improvement districts.

14:29

So looking into the future, you know, we will be having to run a ballot measure in order to get taxpayer approval moving into the future.

14:37

So stay tuned for that.

14:41

While the creation of the district is exciting enough, the new passenger rail programs are funded established through the bipartisan infrastructure law.

14:51

This makes it a once in a lifetime opportunity for the communities along the Front Range.

14:58

The district and our 24 person Board of Directors values the partnership of C dot and HNTB as we develop the service development plan for the future Front Range passenger rail service.

15:11

The district is currently working with local communities to support station development.

15:15

The service development plan or the SDP is the process through which we identify the steps to introduce inner city passenger rail.

15:23

The plan is the means through which we can evaluate the route and the service and the stations operations and financial opportunities while also considering how best to use what has already been built.

15:37

And the SDP is currently managed by CDOT and developed in partnership and Ford the railroad, the Federal Railroad Administration.

15:45

And that process began in late 2022 and is on track to be concluded at the end of next year in mid to late 2024.

15:54

And back to you, Mandy, please.

15:57

Thank you.

15:58

Andy As David mentioned the planning for Front Range passenger rail has gone on for more than a decade and I've had the pleasure of talking to hundreds of people about the reasons that we need Front Range passenger rail and some of the benefits that might provide.

16:12

And over that time the answers are pretty much the same.

16:16

You know we have we continue to have a need to improve mobility and travel options.

16:22

We identified a lack of reliable travel times, no easy way to to to expand highway capacity and significant employment and population growth that has just intensified Those needs connecting communities, integrating a multi modal modal network and connecting the Front Range population centers and key destinations and supporting rural access to urban economies and amenities to really provide a new travel option across the state fostering economic vitality and equity.

16:53

We have a really strong economy in Colorado.

16:55

We're top six and almost all key indicators and there's really an unequal distribution of economic opportunities within the state.

17:03

And a lot of our communities are Hanford by disconnected and inefficient travel options for which we think Front Range can be a potential answer, partial answer supporting environmental sustainability goals.

17:17

We know that attractive alternatives to single occupancy vehicle reduces vehicle miles travel and the traveled and the associated emissions and that this is the near term action that was identified in the greenhouse gas and climate goals in the greenhouse gas reduction road map for Colorado Front Range passenger rail can't solve all of these big problems.

17:37

But what we have seen is that there is overwhelming support for that these kind of benefit that this it can be an answer for part of these benefits.

17:47

And we have gone through this, this process of developing it to this point And as Andy mentioned we're kind of in a once in a lifetime opportunity to move it to the next level.

18:00

OK, great.

18:01

Thank you, Andy and thank you Mandy.

18:04

For those of you that have just joined, we do want to remind you that there are ways to submit, submit questions today to the panelists here.

18:14

If you type your question into the Q&A button on the zoom bar, then your question will go to the team and after the presentation we will start to answer the questions.

18:27

And I also did want to let people know that one question was asked about current total attendees on the webinar at this very moment.

18:37

So at this very moment we have 329 attendees that does not include the panelists and that number is people coming and going.

18:47

So the number of total participants, we will put that in the summary, it will be higher than the 329.

18:55

So now we are looking at the survey instructions.

18:58

If you did just join, I'm going to walk back through how to join our next survey question.

19:04

So to text your answer or participate by your browser or your computer, go to pollev.com and enter WPOLL 255 when prompted.

19:20

Or you can text WPOLL 255 to the following number, 22333.

19:28

These instructions are also also on the outgoing message board.

19:33

You are also welcome to scan the QR code on this slide in front of you.

19:37

So now we want to ask you the next survey question following what Mandy presented, what of the needs resonate most with you?

19:52

So you can see that it's improved mobility and multimodal travel options.

19:59

Connect communities.

20:03

C Foster economic vitality and equity.

20:06

D support environmental sustainability goals.

20:10

So four options please select the needs that resonate most with you.

20:17

And for those of you that cannot see the screen currently, we're over 60% of participants here are seeing improved mobility and multimodal travel options and we have about third, a third and a third for the other three options right now.

20:37

So B, as Connect communities, C, foster economic vitality and equity and DS support environmental sustainability goals.

20:48

So A continues to grow and now we're up to close 65% improve mobility and multimodal travel options.

20:57

I would also say that looking at some of the questions coming in that looks consistent to some of the questions people are asking around travel options and ways that this will connect mobility choices.

21:12

Any other observations from our panelists based on needs that are resonating with participants today in the webinar?

21:27

OK.

21:28

It does vary depending on who we're meeting with.

21:30

So to hear today that mobility and multimodal travel options resonates the most with this group is interesting for us to take away.

21:39

So thank you for participating.

21:41

There will be one more survey question, so don't exit the polling device.

21:46

We will come back to 1/3 survey question here shortly and you can continue to answer.

21:53

We are showing that at least about 200 people as of right now have answered the survey questions.

22:01

So that's a pretty good turn out for having about 330 people here.

22:05

So please keep your answers coming.

22:08

We will publish these in the meeting summary.

22:11

Now we're going to hand it over to Dominic Stabling.

22:16

He's going to tell you, first of all, what HMTV stands for, and I know that.

22:22

And then you're going to tell us basically what we know now and what the team continues to analyze.

22:29

Dom, go ahead.

22:31

Thanks, Angela.

22:31

Yeah.

22:32

HNTB is an infrastructure solutions company and we are known for doing the planning, engineering and construction of rail systems across the US And so we're the lead consultant on the service

development plan that we're doing on behalf of CDOT and David Singer who was introduced as the project manager.

22:53

We're working for him in that capacity and I'm I'm Dominic Stapling, I'm the project manager on on the consultant team.

23:00

So with that, hopefully that answers the question and we can get into the, the work and what we know and it's really exciting as David mentioned earlier and as we've sort of talked about already this afternoon, you know there's been fair amount of study of different corridors that could serve the Front Range.

23:21

The service development plan that we're working on right now really focuses on using the existing freight tracks that are out there today that are owned and operated, are currently owned and operated by the Union Pacific Railroad and the BNSF Railway.

23:36

And of course we'll be interfacing with RTD in certain places such as Union Station in, in in Denver.

23:44

So again that the focus is looking at how we could fit inner city passenger corridor service on the existing rail system.

23:55

The, the good news is when we benchmark the market size, the travel times, the potential ridership, we're very comparable to other successful inner city corridors around the US like the Cascades in the Northwest which serves Vancouver, BC, Seattle and and Portland OR the San Joaquin service which serves the Bay Area, the Central Valley in, in Los Angeles.

24:20

Those are some of the comparable sort of inner city rail, state supported inner city rail corridors that we see the Front Range being sort of fitting in with as potential guideposts and marks.

24:33

So again a lot of potential here and what I'll talk a little bit more about the ridership evaluation that we're doing.

24:40

But again we're seeing promising signs about the viability of the service.

24:45

The other aspect is in an obvious question I'm sure many people on the call today have is well how long would it take to actually have a service.

24:54

And you know when you look at the actual planning, environmental clearance, negotiation, construction and everything else, you know we see it that if funding allowing and Andy will talk a little bit about that down in a little bit.

25:08

You know we could have a service operating within a decade, which again is fairly typical for planning of inner city services around the US.

25:20

So really one of our major next steps as far as our technical work is creating an alternatives analysis.

25:26

And you know we will define a range of alternatives and in this case that range will really focus on the frequency of the trains and and what speed they'll be travelling on on the existing rails that are out there today.

25:41

Well then we'll study those, evaluate which ones have frankly hit that sort of sweet spot of provide us the greatest benefit is the number of riders against you know how much investment we would need to make in the rail system to allow that train service to operate.

26:00

And once we've done that, we would categorize we would put that into our alternatives analysis and carry that into our service development plan and do a benefit cost analysis on that and then eventually turn it into an environmental evaluation of the corridor to get us in the next step which would be final engineering and construction.

26:24

So some of the work that we do to support that alternatives analysis are sort of in the details here of of what the technical work and that includes actually building a computer simulation model with the host railroads who are partners in this process along with the Federal Railroad Administration.

26:44

So the Union Pacific Railroad, the BNSF Railway, we are building a model that simulates the physical infrastructure that's out there today as well as the train movements on that on the corridor and we're figuring out how many, how we fit in passenger rail service on that corridor with the existing freight trains.

27:07

Likewise we're also doing revenue and ridership analysis.

27:10

We have, we are partnering with C dot with Colorado Department of Transportation.

27:15

They have a statewide transportation demand model that we're using as a basis to understand who is traveling within the state and from from what city to what city and that's we're using that to understand the ridership potential for the for the system.

27:32

So those are ongoing studies.

27:34

Likewise we're also meeting with the cities and the corridors along the corridor to understand where a station might fit best.

27:45

But again evaluating what the ridership could be at those stations.

27:49

But also understanding that at some, you know at some point in the future we're going to need to pick a location to have a station where the where the train could stop and people kick in and get on and off also looking at the intermodal connections at those locations.

28:05

All of that will also feed into our environmental context, understanding what next steps in evaluating what kind of environmental process we would follow to take it into NEPA, the National Environmental Policy Act, so that we can again get it cleared and get on to the design and eventual construction of the system.

28:25

So a lot of a lot of technical analysis happening currently that are feeding into this service, service development plan that we're we're working on.

28:36

With that.

28:36

Andy, what you want to describe what the district is working on as far as next steps?

28:41

Absolutely.

28:42

Thank you so much, Don.

28:45

The next slide please.

28:49

The FRA, the Federal Rail Administration has developed a new program that came out of that federal transportation legislation called the Corridor Identification and Development Program, Corridor ID for short.

29:05

And what this program does is new or existing passenger rail corridors from around the country applied in March to be a part of this.

29:17

And the district just found out last week this week, but we could this week that we have been approved and and we are part of the the corridor ID program.

29:29

And So what that means, it's very exciting and that's this is a kind of a comprehensive intercity passenger rail program kind of like a incubator program for passenger rail.

29:41

And it creates A pipeline that allows the district access to specific federal funding that was unavailable if we were not in the corridor ID.

29:52

And it opens up all of that federal funding at a 9010 federal match, which is wonderful.

29:59

You know with a, we get a 10% match on the local level to the 90% federal level.

30:05

And that's an amazing ratio for being able to leverage money for capital projects and for the planning stages that described earlier.

30:15

So for funding and financing, we are looking to a variety of different ways to fund and finance the needs of an inner city passenger rail service along the Front Range.

30:26

We are currently conducting the following activities.

30:29

We have initiated funding discussions with the leaders and the stakeholders to continue to advance frontage passenger rail and we're trying creating an understanding of the various menu of options that could fund the project in its entirety.

30:44

The route to Front Range passenger rail slide shows you kind of the progression of steps that we need to take in order to get to where we need to be.

30:54

We are currently in the service development plan phase as we talked about before with the future steps including understanding the financial strategies that we're about ready to undertake next year as part of the STP as well as conducting environmental analysis moving into the next stages.

31:12

So now I'll hand it back to Angela to describe some of the ongoing engagement opportunities and our last survey question.

31:19

Thank you.

31:19

Thank you, Dom and thank you, Andy, and thank you for those of you that have just joined.

31:25

As a reminder, we will be taking your questions as they come in here shortly.

31:32

We're almost through the presentation portion from the panelists and in just a moment we'll turn to your questions and we'll start here shortly with the questions that were provided during the registration process and then turn to the questions being asked during the webinar.

31:47

On the slide now you can see a quick recap of some of the ongoing engagement that we have been working on with the project team as an integrated approach.

31:58

So you can see down the left side of those of you that have joined by phone, part of the first step was launching a website and really repurposing a prior site to get ridethefrontrange.com off the ground.

32:13

And then that is a great, great resource for all materials and information to keep you current on the project.

32:20

We've been hosting conversations with community members like you and other representatives from the public, more facilitated interviews and one-on-one discussions over the last several months and picking back up some of our committee specific meetings that were held in different sections and segments of the corridor.

32:43

To keep those a little bit smaller and more conversation based.

32:48

We also developed again back on the project website a recorded presentation providing an overview of really project background history and what the service development plan entails.

33:01

We have a very robust frequently asked question document also on the website and seen a lot of similarities for some of the questions that are coming in here.

33:12

So if we don't get to all your questions, that FAQ document will be a good one to turn to.

33:18

We also have some other upcoming community events over the next several months, so please do join the e-mail list if you haven't already and check the website For more information about ongoing station area outreach and that is happening in partnership with the district and again, more community events coming your way in 2024.

33:42

So before we get to your questions, we have one last survey prompt here.

33:48

So to get back in those of you that have already joined, it looks like most of you have already been in there, but a quick reminder and also in the outgoing messages to all of you, just go to pollev.com and enter WPOLL 255.

34:06

You can also text that same code to the following number, 22333.

34:12

There's also AQR code.

34:14

So if you just joined, go ahead and scan that.

34:16

The question that we want to hear from all of you has to do with what we just described for engagement.

34:23

So please select your top choice, top choice only.

34:29

What would you like to hear more about during future engagement opportunities?

34:33

So there's a list A through I several choices here.

34:38

Would you like to hear about Route A, Schedule B, ridership, C stations, D fares, E Project cost, F project funding, G technology H and how to get more involved?

34:59

I please go ahead and enter your answers now and we'll take a look and this will continue to jump around.

35:10

But as of right now we're seeing a lot of questions and interest more opportunity to better understand schedule and by that we do means the the look ahead so that the project schedule and what gets us from here to where we are going towards implementation.

35:30

So schedule does seem to be rising to the top and then we also see route following closely behind as well as stations.

35:39

So a lot of questions is does somewhat go hand in hand, So lots of people saying stations schedule, route and then we do have another one trailing close behind how to get more involved, which is great.

35:55

So please, again one of the best ways to stay in touch with us is to go to the project website, make sure you're in our database and any other observations from our panelists before we move into the questions.

36:15

OK.

36:17

So keep typing those in.

36:20

Now we would like to make sure that we have an opportunity to take your questions and answer what you've been asking as we've been moving along here today.

36:37

So you have been providing many thoughtful questions and we'd like to start with what we heard again during the registration process.

36:45

So if you want to ask something else as the panelists are answering and taking questions from the webinar, then please keep typing them in.

36:54

We may not get to all of them, but they will be published on the website.

36:58

So that is another way to make sure that we have gotten to some of your questions.

37:03

So the very first one that did come in.

37:05

So panelists, we're going to go ahead and switch over.

37:09

The most commonly asked question during the registration for the webinar was when will the route in major market stations be finalized and that has come up with some of your questions you've submitted I saw as well.

37:23

David, I'll hand that question to you.

37:26

Thank you, Angela.

37:27

In working with our federal partners, we have worked very closely on our methodology on how to make that a recommendation that got endorsement from the Federal Railroad Administration earlier this fall and just this week was endorsed by the rail district.

37:47

We identify we're focusing on existing rail corridors and and to the South there's only one from Denver to Colorado Springs down to Pueblo that made our choice very easy that consolidated mainline to the north of the most viable route to start.

38:04

And that's doesn't say the other ones can't be advanced, but is along the BNSF Front Range sub and that goes through the downtown areas of Boulder, Longmont, Loveland and Fort Collins.

38:17

The rationale was we're looking at legislative intent, we're looking at preliminary ridership connectivity, multimodal benefits and some other factors about the state of the infrastructure out there.

38:27

So this is the route that is recommended and it's subject to subsequent environmental permitting and NEPA analysis, but is a near term milestone and endorsement for the district.

38:40

I think stations and market analysis is the also subject to a methodology and and is yet to be finalized.

38:51

But we we need to kind of do this incrementally.

38:56

Thank you David panelists, I will ask you if you do have anything to add just to help us move to the next question, please raise your hand panelists and that way I'll know to add you to the response.

39:08

The second question and the most commonly asked from pre registration was how are the major markets and stations determined?

39:18

Are the stops already identified or can communities work with the decision makers to add stops?

39:24

Andy how about you take this question.

39:27

So the district is currently working with a lot of the local governments along the corridor.

39:32

There have been identified 9 stations, 9 possible stations along the corridor and remember is that in the presentation that we saw earlier, David was speaking to the characteristics of intercity rail, which are very different than the commuter rail system.

39:48

So there are just by definition fewer stations for intercity rail service.

39:54

That doesn't mean that there may be able, you know, partner partnering opportunities for other transit providers to provide additional connections for stations and opportunities for communities, so.

40:06

All of that is to say that the district is working with the local governments on developing planning efforts around the stations and those will be determined in partnership with the service development plan and the FRA over the next few years as we continue through the planning process.

40:25

So the next question will be going to David.

40:29

David, how many trains per day might run at the beginning of service and will there be an hourly service?

40:38

Thank you, Angela.

40:39

We've talked about the goals of introducing service and it may be more modest than a more mature established service.

40:48

So it really is looking at a few trains in the morning and a few trains in the afternoon or evening.

40:53

Weekends may have unique travel patterns, but it's something that will be an output of our service development plan process and negotiating with the host railroads.

41:03

Thank you, David.

41:06

Andy, the next question I'll send back to you, how will we make sure that Front Range passenger rail has competitive travel times.

41:15

So this is a really good point.

41:17

So a couple of points.

41:18

One, by law, the district in our implementing statute there is language in law that says that this the in order for it to be feasible and to move forward that the the service needs to be competitive with traffic times.

41:35

So and that's that was 2021 traffic.

41:38

Imagine in 10 years, you know it's not going to be that hard for us to be competitive with traffic, but we're shooting for the 2021 traffic times not in the future when it gets even 10 times more congested.

41:48

But we also have the initial modeling that the service development plan has undertaken and in conversations with the freight railroads looking at some of those are exciting and and are predicting that the times for the trains traveling along the corridor will be competitive and if not faster than traffic.

42:12

Thank you, Andy.

42:13

Thank you for sharing more about the forecasted analysis as well as some of the modeling.

42:19

It's very helpful to understand.

42:21

I also wanted to let people know that we did receive over 100 questions in the last 30 minutes.

42:27

So we will not get to all those questions tonight.

42:30

We really appreciate you submitting all of those.

42:33

We are trying to go through them and pull them together into common questions right now.

42:37

So if we have one more from the pre registration, then we're turning to the live questions that have been coming in.

42:43

In just a moment.

42:44

Dom, the next question is coming to you.

42:47

When do you anticipate trains to start to run and I know you spoke about this earlier, but can you talk to it a little bit more?

42:55

Sure, happy to and clearly not not fast enough, right.

42:59

But you know this is a multi stage and multi phase process to get to the initiation of a passenger rail service on the on the existing corridor.

43:09

You know, we're currently in the planning process and as I mentioned in my presentation, you know the idea is to get to a preferred alternative that then we would take into the NEPA process.

43:21

And right now NEPA in a, if you're doing really well that takes two years and depending on and I saw a comment in the in the chat, you know, yeah, you're but you're using an existing fray.

43:34

Why, why is it so complex?

43:36

Well, you also have to remember we're adding stations on the impacts, the traffic impacts of those stations to to the local communities.

43:44

It's and also some of the.

43:47

And so we we have to evaluate the, you know the corridor, all of the potential impacts and we'll likely have infrastructure improvements that we'll need to make like sightings in order for us to be able to pass freight trains or freight trains to sit in the sightings as we pass by.

44:03

All of those things need to be evaluated as part of the environmental process and then of course and then you have a construction.

44:10

That goes on after that.

44:11

And as you know, some of the construction that we will likely need to undertake is the installation of a positive train control, which is actually a safety enhancement for both passenger and freight.

44:24

But there's some parts of the current corridor that don't have that on there.

44:28

And so those are some improvements that we would need to make in order to make it ready for passing rail.

44:36

So there there, there are quite a few phases that will lead to it taking a few years for us to get the service going.

44:44

But if you know, provided that the funding is there and that the process goes smoothly, we could see again within a decade some form of rail service.

44:54

But we're only at the very beginning steps of this process which are really exciting, but it it can lead to a A service coming up in again in in a 10 year.

45:07

And I see Mandy has raised her hand.

45:10

I was just going to add, I think another big part of the timeline is we are working on host railroad, freight railroad tracks and that requires agreements that take some time.

45:23

And so I thought maybe you might speak a little bit to that part of the process as well.

45:27

And also I think I did see some questions about, you know, why they would want to work with us and how that might happen and you know, what kind of work we had done to to grease the skids there.

45:38

Well, yeah, there's a lot, a lot in there.

45:41

But Mandy is absolutely correct.

45:43

You know we have to enter in an agreement with the freight railroads in order to operate passenger trains.

45:49

And right now Amtrak has certain rights to be able to operate passenger trains on freight railroads and they could be an important partner in this overall process.

45:59

But regardless certain agreements need to be made to allow passenger trains to operate on a on a corridor like this.

46:08

And that's one of the the that's what's so exciting and and yet challenging about this that there hasn't been passenger service on this corridor for a long time.

46:18

And so we really need to start from scratch on some of those agreements.

46:22

Yet they're great models from around the country to do that.

46:26

So that again is just part of the process.

46:28

And Mandy you've made a second point that I can't, I can't recall what it was.

46:34

I think there were just a couple questions I saw in the 100 as I was scanning through them which were hard not to want to respond to all of them.

46:40

But I think I, I saw a couple questions about why the freight railroads would want to work with us and and what kind of potential work we had done to facilitate that.

46:54

Yeah.

46:54

Thank you.

46:55

Yeah.

46:55

And two things, one I I want to give Andy and the district a lot of credit for actually including the freight railroads on their on their board.

47:05

So they are willing participants and partners in this overall process and they are included and are very familiar with the work that's ongoing.

47:14

And second of all as far as the demand you know some, you know it can be a a revenue stream for the freight railroads, the payments provided by an operator can actually provide revenue to the freight railroad.

47:30

So they do have an incentive to work with us plus you know if infrastructure is required as part of the passenger service that can also be utilized as part of their day-to-day operations.

47:43

So those are some of the reasons and benefits of partnering with the freight railroads for the Front Range service.

47:51

Andy SE raising the hand just very briefly, I think just one small thing is also the availability of federal funds that really incentivizes a lot of partnerships and and has actually changed some of the attitudes of the railroads to bring forth more of a collaborative nature and some of the negotiations.

48:10

Great, thank you.

48:11

You can see there's lots of connectivity between some of the questions that are being asked and we appreciate everyone describing the the partnerships in that process in more detail.

48:23

And then as a reminder, with all of these questions coming in around schedule and the excitement there about schedule that that was the survey the most responded.

48:34

People want to know more about when will this be coming and how to get this service brought to the Front Range.

48:42

So thank you everybody.

48:43

The next question, David will be coming towards you.

48:47

So this now is turning to some of the live questions that we're receiving and this goes back to Slide 8, David.

48:54

So the average speeds seems slow compared to cars on an Interstate.

48:59

Will running freight allow those speeds, the the needed reliability to make the train more competitive?

49:08

Yeah, it's a good question.

49:09

And and just like automobiles, there's an average speed and then there's a maximum speed.

49:15

We're examining maximum speeds to reaching up to 80 or 90 miles an hour.

49:19

That's the existing standard for the host railroads.

49:22

The average speed considers starts and stops coming into stations, established communities as well as the quarters, unique topography moving up Palmer divide or meandering through the landscape also impacts the potential for speed.

49:39

Dom mentioned the opportunity for us to provide infrastructure to improve some of that and so that's another opportunity that we're examining.

49:47

But it really is the average speed and the maximum seat are two different time horizons.

49:56

Thank you, David for explaining that.

49:59

Andy, we have a question here and I I think this is a great question.

50:03

It goes back to again just some of the planning around initial service and the future build out.

50:11

So can you describe how we that that phased approach and how we will get to the future build out?

50:19

Yeah, yeah.

50:20

And I'll try and do it quickly.

50:21

So there's a lot there.

50:22

There's a lot of history that led us to where we are today.

50:27

Recommendations from prior studies and planning efforts have suggested that a variety of different options, one of which was using existing infrastructure.

50:40

And the general consensus around the around the dinner table if you will, around the policy discussions is that it is better to start off with the existing infrastructure and get a service under way that we can build upon and and get a service there so that people can can start using it.

50:58

As opposed to trying to develop a, you know, high speed maglev all along the I-25 corridor that's going to cost \$19 billion.

51:06

That would be a wonderful accomplishment.

51:08

But I think it it's more important for us right now, especially in the state here to establish a presence of passenger rail as an option for or Coloradans.

51:18

And so for that reason we're starting with the kind of the existing infrastructure and then moving up into the was the question was the question for the the phasing out of moving into the future?

51:33

Yes, exactly.

51:35

It's been a long day moving out into the future.

51:38

We're we're really optimistic and and hopeful because you know the route that we chose goes along up to Boulder and and Fort Collins.

51:46

But there are other spurs, there are other connections that we are looking to develop moving into the future.

51:53

For example, the southern portion of the district includes Trinidad down there and we'll have to include them in the future portion as well as move it up north into Cheyenne and down into New Mexico moving into the future.

52:08

That doesn't even take into account the existing long distance service that Amtrak has that could also be a Nexus with the development of passenger rail service along the Front Range.

52:19

Great.

52:19

You touched on several questions that came in during the webinar.

52:23

So thank you Andy for taking an extra minute there.

52:26

David, did you have something to add?

52:29

I only would say that this is an expectation of FRA as well.

52:33

They're focused on corridors, not just projects.

52:36

And it's their expectation and the industry expectation that it's not all built at once.

52:41

And so one of the outputs of this study is an implementation plan is a pipeline of projects.

52:48

And so all communities and the entire corridor knows where it stands in terms of delivery of the entire corridor.

52:58

Thank you, David.

52:59

The next question, I could see Andy and Dom perhaps wanting to provide some thought here, but there are a couple of people wondering, well, how exactly will the rural areas be serviced when we're looking at several stations being in the urban areas?

53:18

So that's the first part of that question, David.

53:22

We just heard you and Andy kind of talk about future service locations like Trinidad.

53:30

Why don't we start with that first part of that question and then we can see if we have a follow on And it does look like Mandy has put her hand up.

53:40

Mandy, would you like to start in response to that?

53:46

Sure.

53:46

I think the reason I was asking is I think I saw that question come through after we were talking about the needs and connecting rural communities as well as the urban communities.

53:57

And I think one of the fundamental parts of Front Range passenger rail as Andy noted is that you have to start somewhere and we need feeder systems that are going to be effective to make Front Range passenger rail work for the whole state.

54:11

And so until we can build out an extensive network of passenger rail across the entire state, we're going to have to rely on connections to those stations.

54:20

And those stations are going to be major hubs and they are also destinations.

54:24

So they're places that serve a much broader area than just the immediate station area.

54:29

And that's true whether you're in a rural area or in an urban area.

54:32

You know that the catchment or the service area is much bigger than the intersection on which the station is located and the benefits then also extend longer because we're talking about longer trips.

54:45

There's a little bit of a you plan that in you know if you're coming from Trinidad to Denver and you have to find a different way to get from Trinidad up to Pueblo, but then can get on the train.

54:56

You know that that still is a service that's going to be available and is going to be useful even if it's not the first initial part of the service.

55:03

Great.

55:03

Thank you.

55:04

I am looking at the clock, it is 526.

55:07

We do have time for probably a couple more questions.

55:10

Dom, I am going to ask you to respond to the next one.

55:14

So if you do want to say anything in addition to some of the future stations, then please feel free to add on.

55:21

But this is a shifting gears a little bit for this next question.

55:25

What rail technology is planned, diesel or electric?

55:29

So Dom, over to you.

55:32

Sure.

55:32

I, you know there are a lot of exciting developments in rail technology happening right now.

55:40

The I think the state's goal, the environmental goals of the state would want us to look for a 0 emission vehicle.

55:48

They there's a lot of excitement in the industry about Zevs Zevs 0 emission vehicles and they're they're in development, they're not many that are used in an inner city function but both battery technology and what's the other one that I'm thinking of it's hydrogen.

56:12

Also our our considerations right now and I think some folks on the on the screen today actually got to see that type of technology being tested in Pueblo at the at the rail center there.

56:27

But Long story short, the the technology we will be evaluating different types of technology including tried and true tested clean diesel technology, but also evaluating the viability of other services.

56:43

Again if we have a few, you know thinking about the planning process again finding out from industry where they are with the development of these new technologies, who knows the timing could work out that such a 0 emission vehicle could be available for the initiation of of the service.

57:00

But David, I don't know if you saw my note, maybe you want company on your visit.

57:06

Yeah, just to add on Dom, you know we, we are developing an alternative analysis where we look at all the reasonable options and and factors include life cycle costs, maintenance yards availability, safety, compatibility with the railroads, but also environmental and sustainable goals at the state level.

57:27

We talked about it as one of the driving forces for us.

57:30

Colorado is fortunate that we have a testing facility right in our backyard in Pueblo.

57:35

And so that's something that is a federal testing center.

57:38

And so the latest and greatest innovations in the market are brought here for demonstrations.

57:44

And so we had the fortune and opportunity to go and ride one of these new latest fleets on its way to California.

57:53

And so it's ever present on all of our minds.

57:56

And so we want to tap into those and see what opportunities are for us, not relying on what's effective today, but thinking to the future and sustainable solutions.

58:07

OK, team, we are pretty close to time.

58:10

So I do have one bonus question.

58:13

It's a surprise.

58:14

Lots of people tonight we're asking about will bicycles and dogs be allowed to ride the train?

58:21

What is the response to that question before we all close out?

58:26

Absolutely.

58:29

There you go.

58:31

The final word there to Andy.

58:32

Thank you, Andy.

58:34

Here's your answer everyone.

58:35

I do want to thank you again for your time.

58:38

Thank you to the panelists.

58:41

And this does conclude the Winter 2023 Front Range passenger rail public webinar.

58:47

We're so grateful for the time and the interest that everyone had to be here and to participate and to please.

58:54

We asked to stay connected with us in the future.

58:57

Go to ridethefrontrange.com to contact us with any questions and to stay in touch.

59:04

And we look forward to seeing you next time.

59:06

Have a good evening.