MEMORANDUM

Project: Front Range Passenger Rail Service Development Plan and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Meeting Date: September 17, 2020

Time: 1 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Location: Google Meet

Attendees: South Segment Coalition Members

ATTENDEES

COALITION MEMBERS AND SWC & FRPR COMMISSIONERS

John Adams, PACOG
Rachel Beck, Colorado Springs Chamber
Craig Blewitt, City of Colorado Springs Mountain Metro Transit
Victoria Chavez El Paso County
Eva Cosyleon, Pueblo Area Council of Governments
Debbie Flynn, Town of Monument
Jill Gaebler, PPACG
Chelsea Gaylord, City of Colorado Springs
Andy Gunning, PPACG
Amy Kelley, US Air Force Academy
Len Kendall, Downtown Partnership of Colorado Springs
Jennifer McCorkle, US Air Force Academy
Mark Northrop, PPACG
Greg Pedroza, Pueblo Airport
Ariel Pezoa-Sir, PPACG Intern
Phil Rico, Mayor of Trinidad
Gayle Sturdivant, City of Colorado Springs
Scott Trainor, City of Fountain
Brian Vitulli, City of Colorado Springs - Mountain Metro Transit
Mike Valentine, City of Trinidad

CDOT EMPLOYEES

Geoff Guthrie, CDOT Region 2 Planning/Environmental Transit

PROJECT TEAM

Cristina Beermann, Strategic Communications Coordinator, HDR
Tara Bettale, Strategic Communications Manager, HDR
Jeff Dawson, Transportation Engineer, CDOT
Spencer Dodge, Commission Liaison, SWC & FRPR Commission
Daniel Estes, Program Associate, CDR Associates
Randy Grauberger, Project Director, SWC & FRPR Commission
Jamie Grim, Local Government Liaison, CDOT
Sarah Grossi, Front Range Passenger Rail Intern, CDOT
Timothy Hoover, Communications Integration Lead, CDOT
Steve Long, Program Manager, HDR
Carla Perez, Consultant Project Manager, HDR
Jeffrey Range, Program Manager, CDR Associates
David Singer, Environmental Policy and Biological Resources Section Manager, CDOT
Lisa Streisfeld, Assistant Director of Mobility Services, CDOT
Mandy Whorton, Principal, Peak Consulting Group, LLC

MEETING SUMMARY

The following summary was written based on the presentation and discussions that took place during the meeting. Attachments to this summary include the meeting agenda and presentation slides.

WELCOME, AGENDA, AND INTRODUCTIONS

Jeffrey Range, Project Team, opened the meeting by going over Google Meet protocols and asking participants to take a poll using Menti.com. This was to test the polling site for a later survey.

Randy Grauberger, Southwest Chief & Front Range Passenger Rail Commission (SWC & FRPR Commission) Project Director, welcomed the Coalition members to the meeting and thanked them for their participation. He discussed the agenda and the purpose of the meeting which included discussions on the work that has been done on developing line alternatives, the July online public meeting, ridership data, and potential partnerships.

Jeffrey Range invited participants to introduce themselves as well as make a comment in the chat stating their name and organization. Jeffrey noted that attendees were free to jump in or put a question or comment into the Google Meet chat.

ONLINE PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY

Tara Bettale, Strategic Communications Manager, HDR began the presentation by describing the highlights and outcomes of the July online public meeting. Tara stated the success of the meeting, revealing that it was open for a month and received nearly 9,000 total users and 10,000 total sessions. She then went on to say that residents of Colorado Springs were the top users of the public meeting with the most hits. However, the meeting had a diverse geographic spread.

Tara also discussed zip code participation, which she noted was interesting because while they saw many participants of the online meeting located in the Front Range area, participants were also responding from outside the State and Country.

Tara moved on to unveil what participants responded to as being most important to them for the Front Range Passenger Rail. The results included (in order of importance) station location being close to their origin and destination, the ability to interconnect with other modes, and reasonable travel times. It was also acknowledged that the majority of respondents' primary preferences were for an alignment that passes through Downtown Denver, followed by an alignment that connects to the Denver International Airport. Tara then stated that all responses could be viewed on the project website.

Looking at other data from the online public meeting, Tara discussed the respondents' primary purpose for utilizing Front Range Passenger Rail. According to results, the majority of respondents would utilize FRPR for recreation/leisure, followed by commuting. However, Tara did state that modeling that the FRPR team has been conducting shows that commuting will actually generate the majority of riders.

Tara closed by going through some open ended comments that were received. The comments were tagged based on sentiment of the comment being either negative, positive, or neutral. A large majority of comments (69%) were positive with only one out of 500 being relation to COVID concerns and long-term transit use, which showcases the public's interest for the future of transit in Colorado.

Jeffrey invited participants to provide feedback on online polls and outreach, and whether or not we should continue with these surveys in the future:

- Surveys are very valuable, and they should be continued. They help communities gauge what public is thinking of the proposed project. When it comes to future milestones, such as when further legislative authority is needed to move ahead, all surveys prior to that will help map the way forward. Should continue on at least a regular basis.

- Surveys should not be redundant and should pose new questions. Southern coalition would like to be updated on the opinions/preferences of other two segments. Randy responded that both north and central stakeholders are in agreement, that there is value in the surveys and they should be continued. Tara specified, that CDOT has heard from other segments that the project team should tailor survey questions to the milestone. As the project progresses to the NEPA phase, questions will shift. Questions will change as technical milestones move forward.

- Survey is very useful and the Rail Commission is hitting on all the right mediums

- It was particularly interesting to see what people would primarily use the travel for (i.e. lot of recreation/leisure). It will also be helpful to gauge sentiment around language as the project identifies funding/ballot opportunities (similar to what has been captured in the previous survey)

PROJECT UPDATES

The presentation was then handed off to David Singer, Environmental Policy and Biological Resources Section Manager, CDOT and Mandy Whorton, Principal, Peak Consulting Group, LLC who went on to discuss technical assumptions and recommendations including methodologies and assumptions, the corridor as a whole, and specific details of the South Segment.

LEVEL 2 EVALUATION PROCESS

David Singer began by discussing the project team's methodology and assumptions as well as the process of gathering information. He noted that currently, the project is in the Level 2 Evaluation phase of the process where alternative alignments can be compared. This can be taken into the next phase, NEPA, which will help FRPR compete for federal funds. David went on to outline each step of this phase:

Step 1: Developing alignments from corridors

In April, the project team had focused on more feasible "backbone" alignments, knowing that all of them have opportunities to connect further North and South. The result was three distinct corridors. David referred to the map of alignment options (teal, yellow, and purple alignments). The project team has worked over many months to improve speeds and travel times along these alignments. Additionally, the project team spoke with community members about assumptions on where stations are going to be placed. David stated that putting these where residents want, will allow FRPR to increase ridership. *This step is complete.*

Step 2: Performance and Operating Assumptions

Number of trains per day, times of service, and costs based on modeling were discussed. David also noted the importance of looking at the possibility of secondary stations where fewer stops occur. All of these factors will help the project team better understand who is using FRPR and when. *This step is complete.*

Step 3: Ridership Projections

David continued to step three on ridership and stated that the model being used does not look at what people are excited about today, but looking 20 years into the future to understand where we will be and what will be needed then. To complete modeling, census data, homes, nearby, and other data is being used as an input, resulting in projections for ridership, where trips are happening along the corridor, etc. *This step is complete.*

Step 4: Cost Estimating

It was made clear that the project team does not have these numbers right now. They are looking at the cost to build, but also maintain and operate, and must follow federal standards to get federal money. The cost of operating and maintenance will largely depend on how many trains and train equipment sets there will be. That information will ultimately inform costs, and will be discussed further at a subsequent coalition meeting. *This step is in progress.*

Step 5: Community and Environmental Impacts

David emphasized that the project team has a great understanding of these issues up and down corridor. At this level of the process, the team is focusing on differentiators and are considering a multitude of potential impacts at a high level. *This step is largely complete.*

Step 6: Comparative Evaluation

Finally, David walked through the criteria being used to compare alternative alignments, considering what is important to stakeholders and residents along the corridor. *This step is in progress.*

Participants asked questions or made comments regarding the current phase and methodology of the project including:

- A participant called out the map presented on the first slide of the section. Trinidad area shows future extension. However, the map needs to show that currently there is transportation from La Junta to Trinidad and to New Mexico in the area. “Future Extension” is NOT the right words to use. Participant requested for current rail in Trinidad to be shown on map. Randy responded that he agrees, and that the project team will add both future extensions while also including existing rail. The participant reiterated that they disagree with the “Future Extension” wording because the rail line is current.

- What is the relationship with FRPR and I-25? Is it assumed there will be new improvements on I-25 other than what is already occurring? David answered that the long range model takes into consideration other planned projects, just like projects along I-25. The project team is running a scenario showing impacts if FRPR did not come to fruition. What does I-25 look like in that case? Also looking at if only Bustang is utilized. With current models it is showing utilization of I-25 will have a dip.

- In order to compete with cars, it will be important to understand how fast these trains will need to travel to compete effectively.

ALIGNMENT ALTERNATIVES

Mandy Whorton continued the presentation, moving on to the three alignment alternatives.

BNSF Freight Rail Alignment

This alignment focuses on existing transportation corridors to avoid community disruptions. Mandy emphasized that the project team did engineering to smooth out curves to reduce travel times and increase speeds, and revealed that this option was overall the best of the three considered. She went on to point out that this alignment would serve 2.2 to 2.9 million riders per year, with the difference being the addition of secondary stations to the model. The time on this alignment is longer, but ridership increased, with some of the strongest ridership seen within MPO area, between Denver and Boulder, and between adjacent stations.

Mandy also addressed environmental Impacts of this alignment saying that introducing new transit system along this route (or any route) would result in substantial impact. Overall, there is a lot of public support for this alignment, especially because it goes in between Boulder and Union Station.

At this point, Randy made a comment that the project is proposing quiet zones in urban settings for the entire corridor. Those quiet zones would also apply to freight trains within the corridor.

BNSF + North 1-25 EIS Commuter Rail Alignment

This alignment is the same as the BNSF alignment south of Denver Union Station, but as it travels north, instead of following out to Boulder, this alignment follows RTD North Metro line up to Thornton. Mandy stated that this alignment has notably less ridership, primarily due to the lack of the Boulder connection, as well as less opportunities for partnerships. However, potential for adding secondary stations is possible here and would increase this ridership. Also, impacts to open space, parks, streams, and wildlife habitat would be less compared to the BNSF alignment that traverses Boulder County open space.

I-25/E-470 Highway Alignment

This alignment has almost identical base ridership to the BNSF alignment. Because it doesn't travel along population centers or planned commuter rail corridors, there is less of an opportunity for secondary station ridership but does have potential to integrate with CDOT mobility hubs along I-25 served by Bustang. However, this alignment does have much stronger ridership to south compared to the other two alignment options. This alignment would also offer less of an impact to water and parks, but provide limited potential for track and Right-of-Way sharing with freight railroads.

Mandy concluded that all thee alignments provide good range of options, different partnership opportunities, and impacts and seem reasonable to carry forward into NEPA.

Participants asked questions or made comments regarding the alignment alternatives including:

- Randy began the conversation by stating that the project team is also aware of the comments from early South Segment meetings about the preference for the alignment to NOT go to Denver International Airport, but instead Downtown Denver.

- For the BNSF alignment, does that share the freight track, or is it a separate line for passenger use within the Right-of-Way? Jeff Dawson, Transportation Engineer, CDOT, answered, there are opportunities for track sharing with the freights. The project team modeling is assuming a separate track(s) for FRPR. There are ongoing meetings with the Class I freights to discuss those opportunities

- Can you ID the primary and secondary station locations for the south segment. Jeff responded that secondary stations identified to date in South include Monument and Fort Carson. Although specifics are yet to be finalized. Randy affirmed and added that the primary stations would be in Pueblo, Colorado Springs, and Castle Rock.

- Another participant was trying to get a sense of which alignment would serve Colorado Springs. Mandy responded, into Colorado Springs, FRPR would be on the BNSF alignment. No real room on I-25. The alignment would enter North Colorado Springs on the BNSF just south of the Air Force Academy.

- Jeffrey stepped in to clarify that the alignment options will be "mix and match." Mandy concurred, stating yes. The project team tried to develop alternatives that were mostly in I-25 or freight rail Right-of-Way, and then made adjustments to optimize lines and speeds.

Jeffrey moved on to ask whether there were any concerns or preferences in this area thus far:

- One participant mentioned their community had sent in a letter noting concerns with both alignments, but couldn't say they had a preference due to the challenges with residential and environmental impacts. Randy responded that he would follow-up with the participant separately.

- Looks like biggest difference is alignments in the Denver Metro area. What are the key destinations from southern communities into the central area? What were the purposes of those trips? Mandy answered that strongest destinations coming from the south are the south suburban station on purple line (I-25/E-470 alignment) and Denver Union Station and Denver International Airport. All destinations are served differently, but those are the three big destinations coming from the south. There are far more riders coming from the south on the I-25 / E-470 Highway alignment than on the BNSF alignment. The project team has a good idea of where it is projected that southern residents would go based on travel behaviors and some of the GPS data.

- Request for the possible shared rail to be shown on all maps

- Mission statement talks about serving major existing population centers. How does the I-25/E-470 alignment even make the cut if it is bypassing downtown Denver? Mandy responded that it is a tradeoff. That alignment doesn't serve many downtown cores.

- Would like to see other distances, not necessarily end to end, but station to station travel time. Important to include in future surveys. Mandy responded that end to end travel time is just a benchmark right now, but the project team does have all travel times. For reference, in the south, travel time for Pueblo to Colorado Springs is 25-30 minutes, Colorado Springs to Castle Rock is about 28 minutes. On the purple line, Colorado Springs to Lone Tree is about 37 minutes and to Denver International Airport is just over an hour. For the freight alignments, Colorado Springs to Denver Union Station is just over an hour.

SOUTH SEGMENT

David kicked off the discussion on the South Segment specifically, by speaking about how the South Segment performs and how the project team is comparing options for the southern section of the Front Range. He stated that modeling has shown that there is a preference for the I-25/E-470 alignment in the south. It has also been identified that Bustang has been building ridership and continues to change behaviors, which exhibits momentum in terms of changing behaviors and getting people out of their cars. In addition, in the South Segment, more so than the north or central, the speeds are optimal because of the spacing and relative geometry of the south. Environmental and community impacts on each line in the south are relatively similar.

Before moving forward, David and Jeffrey invited initial reactions from stakeholders:

- There is a need to consider bad driving conditions especially in wintertime and how that will affect ridership. Rail is safer during these times. David affirmed that trip reliability is a big factor.

- If there is a route to the airport, people could use FRPR instead of using a car. But that is a lot of potential luggage carrying. In the grand scheme of things, getting this operational is far more important than the airport impact.

- Great to have airport option, but most trips will be going in between Colorado Springs and Pueblo

- Last mile factor will play in. Jeffrey reiterated this comment that there is a high importance of going from train to other modes.

- As home prices are increasing, Pueblo residents are looking at making the area more advantageous for home buyers. They want to connect people to jobs. These jobs would probably be out where the Denver International Airport is, but Pueblo also wants people coming in from DTC. This respondent suggested it would be better to go through DTC and Downtown Denver to get people coming to Pueblo who want to do business in those areas.

There are three primary markets in the south: Pueblo, Colorado Springs, and Castle Rock. David began a discussion about each market, what the characteristics and plans for those areas are, and then invited feedback on alignment options.

Pueblo—All alignments come into Pueblo through a freight line, and these alignments are all consistent with city's station area planning. All alternatives presented can integrate with the Southwest Chief. In addition, it was found that 90% trips heading out of Pueblo ended at Colorado Springs, which is an interesting projection.

Colorado Springs—Colorado Springs has a lot of potential ridership but is a constrained area. Here, there is not the same kind of station area planning like in Pueblo. Across Colorado Springs, secondary stations would be in close proximity to each other. Looking at weekend travel on the freight alignment, 38% of riders are going to Pueblo, and 45% are going to Union Station. The project team is ultimately working hard to be consistent with the community's local visions.

Castle Rock—The project team found that along the freight alignments 80% of trips from Castle Rock are heading to Union Station. Utilizing the purple line, 50% of riders are going to the Denver International Airport, 40% to DTC, and 10% to Colorado Springs. This alignment is technically in the central segment, but used here to exhibit alignment departure.

David invited participants from southern communities to pose questions or comment on feelings on alignment options:

- Colorado Springs is working on station area planning. This will be critical for getting station location right. Overall excited about project.

- If the purple line is selected, what would be the travel time to downtown if a rider is transferring to RTD. Similarly, if the alignment does go through Downtown Denver, what is the travel time to Denver International Airport for instance. That would be helpful information. A second participant agreed that those travel times on different routes would be helpful information.

- With adding secondary stops, travel time will increase. Will there be express trips that bypass those secondary stops? David responded that the project team is looking at that dynamic. Secondary communities have demand, but maybe not on the same frequency.

- As mentioned, Colorado Springs is working to get funds for station location study. Are northern communities also moving forward with these studies? David answered that yes, some communities have looked at station locations as part of previous studies. Some baseline info to work off of with these. Randy concurred that some of the communities up north have done high level studies, but nothing like what Pueblo has done. They are the standard of what needs to be done. This is a high priority for Colorado Springs.

- A participant requested the presentation slides be provided.

- Randy stated he would attend the PPACG Technical Advisory Committee meeting to brief them on the presentation.

- When the network of local officials is discussed, it is important to recognize elections are about to occur and there will be new members joining councils. Need to be able to assist communities to have conversations about this project.

ADVANCING FRPR - NEXT STEPS

Randy began the final conversation, stating the notable momentum FRPR has, being endorsed by state legislature. An article in the Denver Post even included positive comments from State Senator Leroy Garcia. Additionally, Amtrak has been creating a new network modernization program, which would create a $30 Billion grant program for new state short distance corridors. Colorado is at the top of Amtrak's list for new rail corridors in the country because of the established commission, the completed transit studies, and the evident support for passenger rail up and down the Front Range. The proposal has already passed the House of Representatives, and if it eventually passes in the Senate, Amtrak has targeted over $2 billion for the Colorado Front Range for instituting state supported Amtrak service from Pueblo to Fort Collins.

Carla then continued by detailing the next steps of the project. She pointed out the framework for advancing to the next steps, which includes three phases: Policy, Program, and Project. All three are key to the project being implemented down the road. Carla also reviewed governance options for the project: Public Rail Authority, FRPRA, and the ability to expand the current commission authority. Carla specified that these were the same three options presented last year.

CLOSING REMARKS

Randy thanked the meeting attendees and encouraged anyone to reach out to the project team with questions. All participants should be looking out for another coalition meeting in early December where new information on the progress of the project will be presented.