

Southwest Chief and Front Range Passenger Rail Commission

Front Range Passenger Rail Summary of Major Issues & Strategic Considerations

Last Revised: November 1, 2017

Overview

This document summarizes relevant issues, questions, and considerations being discussed by the Southwest Chief and Front Range Passenger Rail Commission as it works to draft legislation by December 1, 2017 to facilitate the development of Front Range passenger rail.

Overarching Issues for Consideration

Target Markets

- What would make interregional passenger rail a compelling investment for the entire Front Range?
- Who are we trying to serve?
- What future mobility needs must be met?
- What is the best balance of travel times, price points, construction costs, and other factors?

Public Engagement

- Increase public awareness of key Front Range transportation and mobility issues
- Establish a Front Range mobility vision
- **Comprehensive public and stakeholder engagement is critical**

Technology

- Options include high-speed rail, commuter rail, etc.
- How would Front Range passenger rail relate to the potential Hyperloop?

Alignment

- **Strategic choice: serve downtown Denver/Denver Union Station vs. serving Denver International Airport**
- Interface/interoperability with RTD – touch RTD rail lines vs. interoperating (or adjacent operations)
- Maximize connections with local transit service
- Several potential route options exist north and south of metro Denver, and for other Front Range communities
- North Denver metro potential alignment options include:
 - Longmont to Boulder to downtown Denver
 - I-25 corridor to downtown Denver
 - North Metro corridor to downtown Denver
 - E-470 corridor to Denver International Airport
- South Denver metro potential alignment options include:
 - US-85 to RTD Southwest rail lines to downtown Denver
 - I-25 to RTD Southeast rail lines to downtown Denver
 - E-470 corridor to Denver International Airport

- Shared existing rail corridors or “greenfield” (new) alignment?
 - Up to 90 mph, depending on train density and energy source, can be on an upgraded freight railroad
 - Over 90 mph, on the freight railroad’s property/ROW but not on its tracks
 - High speed rail (150-200 mph) – on ROW parallel or adjacent to the freight railroad

Service & Operating Characteristics

- Frequency, span of service (rush hours vs. all day), station locations, etc.
- Speed, travel time considerations
- Fares and fare structure
- Connections with other modes – rail, bus, Bustang, bicycle/pedestrian, park and rides, Uber/Lyft/others

Costs

- Determine capital, operating, maintenance, and other costs
- Pre-construction (planning, environmental/NEPA, design, ROW acquisition, etc.)
- Establishing the network:
 - Construction
 - Fleet
 - Systems
- Ongoing operations, maintenance (State of Good Repair), life cycle costs

Potential Funding Options

- Several potential funding mechanisms and options at the local, regional, state levels
 - Special districts, Regional Transportation Authorities, others
- Ongoing, dedicated funding source needed
- Federal, state, local funding opportunities and constraints
- Private (Public-Private Partnership (P3))
- Passenger fares

Governance Structure & Service Operator

- Governance: several options, including new elected/appointed “interregional rail authority,” special district, existing transit agency, others
- Operator: also several options, including existing transit agency, other public agency, Amtrak, private operator, others

Regulatory Environment

- Depending on technology and other project characteristics, several federal/state agencies are involved, including:
 - Federal Railroad Administration
 - Federal Transit Administration
 - Colorado Department of Transportation
 - Colorado Public Utilities Commission
- Many federal project planning and development process requirements (example: National Environmental Policy Act)