The Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) has reviewed the Regional Transportation District’s FasTracks plan whose centerpiece is the construction of six new commuter/light rail corridors in the Denver Metro area. The fifty member council not only carefully examined the comprehensive transit improvement plan but determined that the financing for it is viable. Reports from the council are positive, particularly in regard to RTD’s assumptions about construction costs.

In the meantime, RTD and the Colorado Dept. of Transportation have reached a landmark agreement defining how use of C-DOT corridor space by RTD for some of the FasTracks projects may be accomplished. The RTD Board and C-DOT Transportation Commission began a series of meetings in January in an attempt to bridge a huge gap in how the two agencies would cooperate on the project once it was approved by voters in November. At one point, Transportation Commission members suggested that RTD pay C-DOT for use of the corridors even though there was no anticipated use of these corridors by C-DOT for highways for the next 30 years. RTD directors took exception to that idea stating that would mean Denver area taxpayers would have to pay twice for the same corridor space. Agreement was tentatively agreed upon in a March 19 meeting and adopted in an April 6th RTD Board meet. RTD Board Chairman Bill Elfenbein and Transportation Commission Chairman Joe Blake both hailed the agreement as being identical to the spirit of T-Rex, the jointly funded RTD light rail/C-DOT highway project on I-25.

Once the anticipated DRCOG approval occurred in mid-April, the campaign to gather some 60,000 signatures for the November ballot initiative began.

ColoRail endorses FasTracks and strongly encourages members to get involved in the FasTracks effort by collecting petition signatures and by contributing funds to the campaign. The FasTracks Yes! campaign office may be reached by calling (303) 773-3138 or by going to their web site: www.fastracks.org. Checks may be mailed to FasTracks Yes!, P.O. Box 40706, Denver, CO 80204.

Herculean efforts by the staff of both agencies were finally able to develop language which both RTD and C-DOT officials could embrace and an intergovernmental agreement was tentatively agreed upon in a March 19 meeting and adopted in an April 6th RTD Board meet. RTD Board Chairman Bill Elfenbein and Transportation Commission Chairman Joe Blake both hailed the agreement as being identical to the spirit of T-Rex, the jointly funded RTD light rail/C-DOT highway project on I-25.

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Union Pacific will be placing portions of the Moffat Subdivision in “curfew” during the upcoming summer months as reported in the winter issue of the ColoRail Passenger. Eleven miles of curved rail and 60,000 ties will be replaced between Denver and Bond during the daylight hours and some track work will also be performed inside the Moffat Tunnel.

Most UP freight trains will operate on the line during night time hours, however, Amtrak will detour the California Zephyr on the UP Mainline through southern Wyoming. Being sensitive to the fact that many passengers want to ride through the scenic Colorado Rockies, UP and Amtrak have arranged an alternating week on-week off schedule for the detour. Amtrak is advising passengers of the days the train is scheduled to pass through Colorado. Bus service from Denver west to Glenwood Springs and Grand Junction will be available for passengers on those days the train runs through Wyoming.

Both east and west bound Zephyrs will detour through Wyoming on and between the following dates: June 8 through June 14, June 23 through June 30, July 8 through July 15, and July 23 through July 30. Amtrak does not plan to stop in Wyoming though ColoRail has requested they consider providing Wyoming residents with a “mini-demonstration” of intercity passenger rail by scheduling station stops across the state.

The cities of Cheyenne (Borie), Laramie, Rawlins, Rock Springs, Green River, and Evanston were last served by the Denver-Portland-Seattle Pioneer which was discontinued in 1997. Start-up difficulties for a short experiment make this experiment unlikely.

"D-MAP" studies Downtown Denver’s future multi-modal access

There may be a trolley in Denver’s future. As a part of the Denver Multi-modal Access Plan (D-MAP), transportation planners are thinking about adding a rail loop into downtown from Union Station along 18th Street to Broadway/Lincoln and then south several blocks. Somewhere between 13th and 6th Avenue, the line could turn west and run to a connection with the Central Corridor Light Rail Line.

Street cars similar to those in Portland, OR, (pictured) may be used to help provide circulation for passengers arriving from a busy future Union Station.

Once the light and commuter rail lines promised in FasTracks are completed to Union Station, planners believe the existing 16th Street Mall Shuttle will be severely overloaded. D-MAP is also examining other routes that would be served by new circulator shuttles as well as enhancement of existing RTD bus service into the downtown from Colfax Avenue and Broadway.

The study, which began in September of last year, will conclude in August with the adoption of the selected plan by Denver City Council, RTD, and C-DOT.

An open house on the preferred alternative plan will be held at the Wellington E. Webb Municipal Office Building, 201 West Colfax Avenue in Denver on May 4 from 4:30 to 6:30 PM.
Report on potential for new metro rail bypass

Tom Mauser, C-DOT’s project manager for the Front Range Railroad Relocation Study, will be the featured speaker at ColoRail’s Spring Meeting. The meeting will take place on Saturday, May 1, 9:30 AM to 12:00 Noon, at the Malley Senior Recreation Center located at 3380 S. Lincoln Street in Englewood.

Mr. Mauser will be joined on the program by Tom Mulligan, Director of Passenger Operations for the Union Pacific Railroad Company. Mr. Mulligan will make a brief presentation on the Moffat Subdivision track work this summer and comment on other issues of interest.

The Front Range Railroad Relocation Study, which is also known as the Railroad Public Benefit and Economic Analysis Study, is a $450,000 study which was initiated last November as a first step in examining the ways Colorado’s two major railroads can best facilitate the movement of freight trains along the Front Range. The project is a collaborative effort between the Union Pacific and Burlington Northern Santa Fe and is coordinated and funded by C-DOT.

DMJM-Harris, a nationally known railroad engineering consulting firm, is providing the analysis with a completion date set for mid-May. The study was designed to look at the overall benefits and costs of infrastructure improvements such as grade separations, shared intermodal facilities, and re-location of rail lines away from Front Range metropolitan areas. Mr. Mauser will be giving us an initial peek at the results of the study and will also be describing the next steps for the project.

National, state, and local passenger rail issues will be reviewed at the meeting and election of Board members will also take place. May 1 is also the official start of the petition drive to get FasTracks on the upcoming November ballot so information as to how to participate in this effort will be available at the meeting.

The Malley Center was selected as the site of this year’s spring meeting because of the anticipated interest indicated by ColoRail members in the Railroad Relocation Study as well as the participation by a representative of the Union Pacific. The Anderson Room at the Englewood Library adjacent to the light rail station used in previous years was thought to be too small for this meeting.

Elections to choose new ColoRail Board

ColoRail’s Elections Committee has nominated a slate of candidates for election to the Board of Directors by the membership which will take place at the Spring Meeting on May 1 at the Malley Senior Recreation Center in Englewood.

All four Board members whose two year terms ended this year wish to continue serving on the Board and have been nominated. They are Jon Esty (Denver), Daryl Kinton (Englewood), Ira Schreiber (Aurora), and Joe Tempel (Morrison).

Members will be invited to nominate themselves or other candidates from the floor during the meeting, just as long as the nominee gives his/her permission.

Current Board members include: John Ayer (Fredrick), Jo Campbell (Denver), Mark Reever (Cedaredge), Sheila Sloan (Pueblo West), Ron Vanderkooi (Arvada), Hugh Wilson (Lakewood), and Don Zielesch (Denver).
Ed Wright presents new way

SMART—TRaxx proposal

ColoRail members and guests were treated to a presentation by Ed Wright, professional engineer, of his idea to establish a system of modern long distance passenger trains. Ed offered his proposal at the Winter ColoRail meeting which took place at the North Presbyterian Church in Denver on January 24.

“Nothing needs to be exotic here. We’re not talking rocket science ...and I’m a rocket scientist,” declared Ed referring to his previous experience working on rocket engines for government and private agencies. He calls his proposal “SMART-Traxx.”

Ed suggests trains be made up of “pods” of bi-level cars which are bi-directional and contain compact 1250 hp gas turbine power modules in each articulated car. The trains would be capable of tilting into curves and have electronic braking. Top speed would range between 130 to 150 mph and be able to accelerate twice as fast as conventional diesel locomotives. Auto carrier cars would trail the train so that passengers could bring along their cars for their own personal use once they arrived at their destinations.

Ed favors a general upgrade of existing railroad track in the country for these trains rather than the development of dedicated high speed rights of way.

All passenger and freight trains would be fitted with GPS technology so that dispatchers could have more precise control over operations. He believes that the private railroad companies might be interested in operating these trains or at least allowing them to run over their track because of the needed infrastructure investment they would bring as well as potential profit. Upgraded track would allow the private companies to provide express freight service.

Ed thinks the proposals by US Senators Kay Bailey Hutchison and Ernest Hollings to create a six year bonding program for high speed rail through (Continued on page 5)

Long-time Contributor
George Hinds dies

Long time ColoRail member, George Hinds, passed away at his home in Colorado Springs on January 2, 2004. George rarely missed a ColoRail meeting, in spite of the distance, and wrote numerous letters to the newspapers and to the Colorado congressional delegation in support of passenger trains.

George spent his life in railroading starting with the New York Central (ConRail) in Michigan where he worked on freight and passenger trains as a conductor. Later, he worked as an assistant to the president of the United Transportation Union.

On April 23, 2000, George heard that a new four car Amtrak/California Surfliner was going to pass through Colorado Springs on its way for evaluation at the Transportation Technology Center in Pueblo. He took this picture on that early rainy Sunday morning as the train was passing the former Colorado Springs station. The picture was first published in issue #33 of the ColoRail Passenger and is also used to illustrate what modern train travel could be like along Colorado’s Front Range in ColoRail’s brochure.

We wish to extend our sympathy to George’s wife, Ruth, and to members of his family and express to them how greatly we appreciate his life-long dedication and advocacy for passenger rail.
the use of tax credits may be the financing of choice for this project. Besides increasing the number of destinations and train frequency to and from Denver, he argues that there would be huge economic benefits to Colorado starting with the testing the trains would require at the Transportation Technology Center at Pueblo and manufacturing trains at plants like Colorado Railcar. The bonding program would also help pay for the necessary grade crossing separations to help improve traffic flow as well as train safety.

Ed is making his presentation available to area service clubs. He is also leading an effort to interest Denver University’s Intermodal Transportation Institute in sponsoring a symposium on modern passenger rail in 2005.

Ed’s comments were preceded by State Representative Bob Briggs who discussed his vision for transportation development in Colorado and his Regional Transportation Authority bill as a way to achieve it. Rep. Briggs supports the formation of Front Rail passenger rail but sees this as the responsibility of cities, counties, and regional municipal planning organizations (MPOs) such as the Denver Regional Council of Governments. His legislation would build on the existing Rural Transportation Authority Act by including metropolitan Denver.

The bill would provide the necessary structure for any governmental entity in Colorado to form agreements with others to provide any transportation service.

(Ed. Note: At press time, Rep. Briggs Regional Transportation Authority bill, HB-1392, has cleared the House Appropriations Committee and is awaiting approval by the House Appropriations Committee.)

Front Range Passenger Rail Study gets support

For the second year in a row, the Colorado House Transportation Committee voted to support a Front Range Passenger Rail Study. The resolution (HJR-1010) was offered again by Rep. Dorothy Butcher (D-Pueblo) who this time worked with C-DOT Legislative Liaison Herman Stockinger to craft a resolution which could utilize all or parts of existing studies dating back to 1993 rather than spend additional dollars on development of a total new inquiry.

ColoRail President Jon Esty, who testified before the committee in favor of the study, presented a list of 12 prior studies and Transportation Commission policy statements which C-DOT could employ in its analyses.

During his testimony Mr. Stockinger informed the committee of his collaborative work with Rep. Butcher and said that C-DOT “was not opposed to the study” which had been the case last year. The resolution now awaits action by the entire Colorado House of Representatives.

Quote:

“Denver has been ranked third worst congested city in the country. All our Board members are saying something has to be done and FasTracks is a response to that problem.” Bill Vidal, Executive Director of the Denver Regional Council of Governments, addressing Transit Alliance partners, December 11, 2003.

“Federal investment in rail could relieve congestion and improve travel choice”

A report released February 11 by the Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP), The State of the Nation’s Intercity Rail: Federal Investment Could Relieve Congestion and Improve Travel Choice, argues that dedicated federal investment in the nation’s rail infrastructure is critical to America’s mobility and economic growth.

The report summarizes results from a study by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) which found that public investment in the nation’s rail infrastructure could take 15 million trucks per year off our highways by 2020 and save drivers nearly $20 billion per year in time and fuel costs. In addition, reduced wear and tear on highways would save taxpayers $17 billion in repairs over twenty years, and shippers would enjoy $25 billion in cost savings annually which could be passed on to consumers.

“Making a significant commitment to our rail network is the only way we will keep our highway network from being completely overwhelmed. Increasing freight volumes and reduced passenger travel choices make it imperative,” said Anne Canby, STPP President. “We must utilize every mode of transportation in an integrated, balanced system to improve freight and passenger mobility. The long term health of our economy deserves no less.”

STPP’s full report is available online at www.transact.org.
Candidates differ on rail service

Once again the Bush Administration has recommended a $900 million allocation for Amtrak for fiscal year 2005 and once again, Amtrak President David Gunn has pronounced the administration recommendation “a shutdown budget.” The administration made the same dollar recommendation in 2004 but fortunately Mr. Gunn was able to convince Congress to provide a total of nearly $1.4 billion.

Mr. Gunn requested $1.8 billion for 2005 which he claimed he needed to continue operation of the railroad and improve infrastructure and repair damaged rolling stock.

Administration officials want to encourage Amtrak to accept the recommendations contained in the report from the Amtrak Reform Council but Congress’ response to this idea has been lukewarm at best. The report seeks to separate Amtrak operations from infrastructure on the Northeast Corridor and eventually place the cost of operating Amtrak’s long distance train network on the states.

Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) attempts to promote the Reform Council’s ideas in his Passenger Rail Investment Reform bill (S.1505) have gone nowhere.

The presumptive Democratic nominee for president, Sen. John Kerry, has a different attitude about Amtrak and passenger rail. “Sen. Kerry has been a leading advocate for increased spending on Amtrak and rail infrastructure” according to a statement issued by the Train Riders Association of California (TRAC) on February 27.

The TRAC statement adds, “Kerry believes that a strong investment in intercity passenger rail is necessary to maintain a balanced transportation system and promote economic growth. As a member of the Senate Commerce Committee, he has consistently fought to increase Amtrak’s budget and has supported numerous proposals to upgrade the railroad’s aging infrastructure. He also supports developing high-speed rail corridors across the country, which would provide Americans a viable alternative to driving or flying.”

Urban sprawl a cause of “human sprawl?”

— Study cites sidewalks as an aid to health

The more spread out a city is, the less people walk or bike and the more they drive, according to research on how a community’s design can influence a person’s daily physical activity. Several health psychologists working with urban planners hope to get people back to foot travel by paving the way for more activity-friendly communities. Such efforts may help fight the obesity epidemic, they say.

Researcher James Sallis, Ph.D., a psychology professor at San Diego State University, says he is alarmed at the impact sprawling cities can have on people’s health. Sallis found that residents living in neighborhoods with higher density and connectivity as well as with more shops and homes mixed together walk 15 to 30 minutes more per week than residents who live in sprawling communities.

Sallis says sidewalks, bike trails, easily accessible recreational activities and prominently placed stairwells all spur physical activity. Studying such environmental factors as a community’s design and creating cities and buildings that reengineer physical activity back into daily routines may go a long way toward curbing the nation’s obesity epidemic adds Tracy Orleans, Ph.D., a clinical health psychologist and a senior scientist at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The Monitor (a publication of the American Psychological Association) January, 2004, page 49. M. Dittman, Vol. 35, No. 1.
Incentives work for BNSF

(Ed. Note: Keith Dameron, Col-Rail’s Amtrak/Intercity Rail Co-Chairman and Colorado Coordinator for Operation Lifesaver, a national railroad safety organization, wrote a letter to Amtrak President David Gunn asking for a definition of incentives provided for on time operation of Amtrak trains. This is the reply.)

January 16, 2004

Dear Mr. Dameron:

Thank you for your letter of December 21, 2003.

The fee for Amtrak’s use of a railroad is based upon the incremental costs of that use. Basic fees vary because each railroad provides different services.

Incentives are paid to railroads dispatching Amtrak trains on-time 80% or better for a given month. Railroads are assessed penalties for 70% or less on-time performance in a given month. Penalties in a given month may not exceed incentives received in the previous 12 months.

Currently, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe and the Canadian Pacific-Soo Line have the best on-time record for dispatching Amtrak trains. The Union Pacific and the Canadian National-Grand Trunk Western are in last place.

I trust that this information is helpful and responsive. Your support of Amtrak is appreciated.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

Doris Baker for DLG

David L. Gunn
President and Chief Executive Officer
National Railroad Passenger Corporation
60 Massachusetts Ave., N.E.
Washington, DC 20002

Scenic Mt. Shasta as seen from Train 14 running late in September 2003. This portion of Coast Starlight trip should have been made at dawn.
Late last year, Amtrak officials rolled out a new services standards plan which they hope will provide passengers with greater service consistency than customers have previously experienced on intercity trains. The Amtrak Service Standards Manual made its debut at the Fall Meeting of the National Association of Railroad Passengers Board Meeting in October in New Orleans.

David Nogar, Amtrak Service Standards Director, explained the manual was an attempt to begin to codify on board staff appearance and behavior so that there would be greater service consistency across the Amtrak system. He readily acknowledged the manual would not instantly change the occasional surly or discourteous employee, however, it does provide basic standards that could help begin to resolve some common service problems.

The new standards solve one of the most irritating inconsistencies for Amtrak travelers: Cafe/lounge and dining car service hours. The manual states, “The cafe/lounge car will be open upon passenger boarding, at the initial terminal. No exceptions. Normal hours of operation of cafe/lounge cars of long distance trains are 6:00 AM until midnight. Short-distance trains must offer continuous hours of operation. The Cafe/Lounge car should remain open until 30 minutes prior to arrival at the final terminal. If a passenger wants to make a purchase after closing, all efforts should be made to provide service. Cafe cars on all trips of 500 miles or less must be open continuously from initial terminal to final destination, or “bumper-to-bumper.” Unless otherwise directed by an Operations Service Advisory, dining cars are expected to be open at the following times: Breakfast 6:30 AM - 10:00 AM, Lunch 11:30 AM - 2:00 PM, Dinner 5:00 PM - 9:00 PM.

Passengers are invited to send comments about their experiences both negative and positive to Kevin Scott <ScottKev@amtrak.com>.

Notable Quotes

“Trains are my acoustic family taking me elsewhere.” Joan Sherman, Poet, WNYC (New York Public Radio) date unknown.

“This has been a truly historic public process which establishes the standard for progress and conduct. It is a contract which sets the standard for other negotiations in this state.” C-DOT Transportation Commission Chairman Joe Blake commenting on the achievement of an RTD/C-DOT intergovernmental agreement regarding RTD’s proposed FasTracks project, March 19, 2004.