

# ColoRail Passenger

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Issue #50

## Rail of two cities

### New "Twist" in Utah, but NM working like the "Dickens"

New Mexico is not the only Rocky Mountain state where commuter rail slated to begin soon. **Utah's** Governor, congressional delegation, and numerous other dignitaries were on hand on August 31 for the driving of symbolic golden spikes signaling the beginning of construction of a commuter rail line from Pleasant View, just north of Ogden to Salt Lake City.

Service operated by the Utah Transit Authority is expected to begin in three years, possibly sooner. Eventually, rail service will extend from Brigham City to Payson along a 175 mile corridor which UTA has purchased from the Union Pacific.

A \$29 million order for 12 bi-level coaches with an option for 23 additional cars has been placed with Canadian car-builder Bombardier. The cars will be manufactured at Bombardier's plants in Thunder Bay, Ontario and Plattsburgh, NY and are scheduled for delivery to UTA between June and October, 2006.

Each Rocky Mountain commuter rail project is proceeding in the type of process that fits the style of its home state. In **New Mexico**, the planned *RailRunner* service between Belen, Albuquerque and Bernalillo is running behind its own aggressive schedule. Any other commuter rail project would consider itself to be ahead of the calendar with New Mexico's assets: station sites in preparation, eight of the ten passenger cars delivered and the first locomotive on the way, strong support from Governor Bill Richardson, etc.

However, many important details are still reported to be under negotiation, and so the opening has slipped from "Fall 2005" to January 2006. That "delayed" opening would still be an accomplishment.

Regardless of the exact outcome of the New Mexico "full-court press" approach to planning, their new railcars are a hit with observers. According to a State of New Mexico press release, the symbol for the RailRunner is a sleek, flowing rendering of a Roadrunner, the state bird of New Mexico. Colors for both the interiors and exteriors of the railcars incorporate the traditional hues of the Land of Enchantment: brown, deep orange, yellow and red. Free-lance "bloggers" on the internet describe them with awe.

In **Colorado**, among the many elements of the FasTracks election package there were three commuter rail proposals. Environmental Impact Studies continue on the Union Station - Boulder - Longmont corridor and the Union Station - Stapleton - DIA "East" corridor. Funding for these was approved in the FasTracks plan approved by voters. Work is about to begin on the Union Station - North Metro corridor study. Each of these was proposed as commuter rail, but study rules require reopening the choice of modes. On the East corridor, Denver and Aurora city officials have pushed to convert the line to Light Rail, with added stops to assist real estate and community developments.

(Information on Utah from KSL-TV5, Salt Lake City and the Thunder Bay *Chronicle-Journal*, August 31, 2005. Information on NM also from Belen *News-Bulletin*.)

*You are welcome to attend ColoRail board meetings. See page 3 for information.*

*"A Voice for Colorado's Rail Passengers"*

Freight traffic goes long way through Front Range cities

## Relocation could ease problems

**C-DOT gave a sneak preview of their Public Benefits and Cost Analysis study (AKA Front Range Freight Rail Relocation Study) at a May 11 conference celebrating National Transportation Week sponsored by the University of Denver's Intermodal Transportation Institute, and the National Centers for Intermodal Transportation.**

Executive Director **Tom Norton** gave the keynote address and was followed by a panel which included study project director, **Tom Mauser**, who was able to give more detail on the study.

A collection of freight rail improvements that include an eastern by-pass, relocation of rail terminals, and consolidation of rail operations could be optimistically worth \$5.2 billion to the railroads and Front Range communities by 2030 assuming the rail projects were completed by 2010.

Cost of the project was estimated at around \$1.2 billion much of which would be for 95 miles of new track that would connect existing lines in the eastern plains. Savings to the railroads and public accrue from speedier transport of coal and grain trains, reductions in trains traversing busy grade crossings in urban areas, reductions in air and noise pollution, efficiencies in terminal operations, and release of rail corridor space for commuter rail operations.

**Warren Wilson**, Director of Rail Line Planning for UP and a panel member, applauded the study results and reminded attendees the railroad industry has been plagued with capacity issues beginning in 1980 with rate deregulation of the industry. Even though UP has just completed the North Denver Yard by-pass north of Utah Junction at a cost of \$36 million, the railroad still supports the other elements of the study including the by-pass which

primarily benefits BNSF.

Another panel participant, **William Schuck**, described his company's efforts to build a large manufacturing and "dryland intermodal port" attached to the Front Range Airport in Watkins just southeast of Denver International Airport.

Besides the airport, TransPort also has I-70 and UP's Kansas Pacific line serving the property. Mr. Schuck pointed out that lower landing fees and leasing charges at Front Range Airport make the move of air freight from DIA attractive.

**Don Morrison**, a former Colorado Transportation Commissioner from Limon and President of DJ Petroleum, agreed that there was significant potential for development at

### ColoRail Station Hosts

ColoRail continues to maintain its very active station host program at Denver Union Station. Volunteers greet departing and arriving Amtrak passengers during busy holiday periods and familiarize them with train and station services.

ColoRail members who have volunteered one or more times as station host since last Christmas include:

- Mike Cronin
- Keith Dameron
- Jay Jones
- Sarah McDowell
- Tom Peyton
- Rebekka Struit
- Rob Rynerson
- Bob Shedd
- Paul Steinhauer
- Ron Vander Kooi
- Don Zielesch

TransPort and mentioned that UP has already signed a letter of intent to establish a multimodal transportation facility on Schuck Corporation property adjacent to the Front Range Airport.

He also added that local grain shipping improvements could be made along the north/south rail by-pass and a connection with the NA Junction/Towner Line could potentially improve business on this underutilized 122 mile C-DOT owned railroad.

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# ColoRail Joins Front Range Rail Effort

Route might be able to use Colorado-built equipment

The Colorado Rail Passenger Association has joined Front Range Commuter Rail, the group formed earlier this year by former Colorado State Representative Bob Briggs to bring passenger rail to Colorado's Front Range in 10 years.

"Commuter rail along the Front Range has been one of the goals of ColoRail since its foundation in 1989. Rep. Briggs has stepped forth with the enthusiasm and dedication to make this happen and we are pleased to be associated with this endeavor," said ColoRail President, Jon Esty.

Efforts to enlist the help of New Mexico and Wyoming for a passenger rail line between Albuquerque and Cheyenne were announced by Rep. Briggs in a press conference at Denver's Oxford Hotel on August 24. He planned to have

a study for the train dubbed the Ranger Express completed by 2007 followed by a vote to form a special Regional Transportation District in Colorado to finance construction and operations for the state's initial segment between Pueblo and Fort Collins / Greeley.

The eventual line linking the three states could have commuter rail connections in the Albuquerque and Aurora-Denver-Boulder metropolitan areas, light rail connections in the Aurora-Denver metropolitan area, and city bus service links in communities such as Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Pueblo, Colorado Springs, the Regional Transportation District's service area, Loveland, Fort Collins, Greeley and Cheyenne. Amtrak connections are available at Denver, Trinidad, Raton, Lamy, Las Vegas, NM and Albuquerque.

ColoRail will not hold its traditional Fall general membership meeting this year, due to scheduling conflicts. Efforts are already underway for important 2006 meetings.

ColoRail's Board meets the second Monday of every month from 6:00 to 8:00 PM at the offices of Bicycle Colorado, Room 236, Denver Union Station.

Member attendance is welcome. Members from points south *enjoy* a train ride home on Light Rail!

## Colorado Railcar delights participants in Pueblo test track open house

The fact the train was gradually circling and would wind up right where it departed didn't seem to bother anyone. That is because these were among the first passengers to ride the new double deck diesel multiple unit (DMU) and unpowered double-decker coach which had recently emerged from Colorado Railcar's manufacturing facility in Fort Lupton.

The June 28 event which drew numerous political and community leaders from the Pueblo area and beyond was sponsored in part by Front Range Commuter Rail which may ultimately use DMU equipment for their Front Range rail service

The new units were joined by the well-traveled single level DMU prototype to make a three car train at the Transportation Technology Center, Inc., the American Association of Railroad's internationally known testing facility located about 30 miles east of Pueblo.

All three cars were painted in Tri-Rail colors in preparation for their

use in a three year, US DOT sponsored demonstration for the south Florida commuter rail agency. Tri-Rail has ordered an additional two double-deck DMUs and one double coach that will also operate on the 75 mile corridor between West Palm Beach and Miami.

The equipment performed flawlessly while making two revolutions of TTCI's 14 mile high speed oval. Though capable of 100mph operation, the train approached speeds of 79mph which it handled quite comfortably. Some riders noted a moderate amount of noise coming from the two on board Detroit Diesel engines, but TTCI staff said sound insulating material that would normally surround the engines had been temporarily removed for the purposes of testing the equipment.

Upon completion of the test run, passenger disembarked and observed a photo run-by which delighted both the sizable number of media reporters as well as train enthusiasts.

Regional rail lines  
from Pueblo to Fort  
Collins/Greeley

# Range of successful ideas

**Progress toward the initiation of Front Range passenger rail took a huge step forward on Saturday, June 11, with an all day conference dedicated to the subject. Some 70 elected officials, transportation planners, and rail advocates attended all or part of the proceedings which featured several speakers from Colorado, California, New Mexico, and Washington, DC.**

Former State Representative **Bob Briggs**, who formed the non-profit company Front Range Commuter Rail earlier this year, organized the conference and included presenters who outlined ways passenger rail between Pueblo and Fort Collins/Greeley can be accomplished. It is his belief that passenger trains can be running on the 190 mile corridor by the time RTD's FasTracks opens in Metro Denver a decade from now.

Senator **Ken Salazar** (D-CO) welcomed attendees and went on to enthusiastically endorse the project. He strongly suggested that the corri-

dor be extended northward to Cheyenne and south to Albuquerque. He stated that mobilizing the support of congressional delegations from the three states for passenger rail only improved the chances of it succeeding and pledged that he and his staff would make a continuing effort to build such a coalition. He said that added momentum for passenger rail service north and south of Denver has been driven by the passage of the FasTracks initiative last November and it is time now to capitalize on that interest.

In describing some of the benefit of passenger rail along the Front Range, Sen. Salazar spoke of speeding up intercity and interstate travel, providing a viable alternative to growing highway congestion, and making the corridor a social and economic magnet while improving the quality of life for Colorado's citizens.

Sen. Salazar was followed by **Lee Waddleton**, Director for Region VIII of the Federal Transit Administration which covers the states of Colorado,

Wyoming, Utah, Montana, and North and South Dakota. Mr. Waddington outlined ways in which the federal government can be of assistance in getting a Front Range service started including utilization of federal funding grant matches of up to 80% of the total costs for infrastructure development and purchase of equipment.

**Chris Blewett**, Project Director for New Mexico Commuter Rail, however, described an alternative funding scenario. Eighteen months ago, Mr. Blewett and the Mid-Regional Council of Governments (MR-COG), which serves the greater Albuquerque area, was directed by New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson to open a commuter rail line between Belen and Bernalillo through Albuquerque by late fall of 2005. Funding came entirely from the New Mexico Department of Transportation which has worked cooperatively with MR-COG in planning the new service.

"We are doing traditional planning backwards to get the project done as soon as possible," said Mr. Blewett.

"For example, when we are up and running, we will let you know our ridership forecasts. We just don't have time to work on that now." The 46 mile route will operate on Burlington Northern Santa Fe's well maintained but lightly used track which hosts Amtrak's *Southwest Chief* as well as one or two freight trains per day. Mr. Blewett be-



*RailRunner* commuter trains will meet Albuquerque city bus service at the Alvarado Transportation Center. The location is familiar to Amtrak customers, as it also serves the *Southwest Chief*.

# delivered to Coloradans

"We just overlook these [highway] tragedies."

(Continued from page 4)

believes the \$85 million cost of improving track, building stations, adding signals, and acquiring equipment is cheap and of greater apparent value compared to the \$90 million price tag for the construction of the Coors/I-40 Interchange in Albuquerque.

**Gil Mallery**, Amtrak's Vice President for Planning and Business Development, described how Amtrak works cooperatively with states in developing intercity service and can provide access to railroads. Even though Amtrak guarantees access, he said that considerable care must be taken in negotiating a contractual arrangement that is respectful of private railroad operations so that the companies don't undermine passenger train schedules.

The Capitol Corridor, Amtrak's third busiest in the country is an example of how Amtrak, the Union Pacific, and regional and state governments can cooperatively operate an efficient and well-patronized intercity passenger rail service. Managing Director **Gene Skoropowski** of the Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority, which governs operation of the line, described his growing service which has been able to provide a 33% increase in daily train frequencies with no increases in financial support since 2003. The 170 mile corridor serves 16 stations between Sacramento, Oakland, and San Jose. Incentives paid to Union Pacific for on time performance and completion of double tracking on most of the route has allowed scheduled trip times to be more reliable and slightly faster.

RTD General Manager **Cal Marsella** expressed his enthusiasm for Front Range rail as logical extension of FasTracks corridors. He

said RTD provided \$25,000 in support to Mr. Briggs's Front Range Commuter Rail organization as well as staffing assistance because if there is to be passenger rail service north and south of Denver, there has to be a seamless connection planned with FasTracks corridors.

"Fifty-thousand people die on our highways each year and we just overlook these tragedies," he said and added, "we should be thinking larger than just our (RTD) little area. We should be thinking about the whole (Front Range) corridor and it is the smart thing to do to plan the route early to keep the costs down."

Mr. Marsella's support was seconded by State Representative **Dorothy Butcher** (D-Pueblo) who has been an active proponent for Front Range service in the legislature since her election in 2002.

"Highway construction is never done," She declared. "It is an absolute waste of tax dollars when you have other means available to move

people." Rep. Butcher believes C-DOT as the only statewide transportation agency has a responsibility to do more than just build and maintain roads and should be actively involved in the planning and financing of the Front Range rail project.

Denver attorney, **Gwen Anderson**, who has been active in local transit initiatives and Denver Union Station planning, reviewed opportunities for transit-oriented development as a means for enhancing rail ridership.

Berthoud Mayor **Milan Karspeck** spoke of how rail service can help his downtown and others along the Front Range become vital centers of activity where people will want to live and visit.

Mr. Briggs concluded the conference with a call for commitment and support for the project in the coming months: "Passenger rail along the Front Range is definitely going to play a major role in the future growth and development of Colorado," he said.



Early morning *Capitol Corridor* passengers gather in Sacramento. White-knuckle driving on I-80 in terror fog has made more than one driver say, "Next time take the train."

Communities  
need to organize

# Real restructuring for Amtrak

**“Federal policy ignores passenger rail as a viable transportation mode. There is just no long term vision that acknowledges passenger rail’s potential.”**

This was the observation of **Marc Magliari**, Media Relations Manager for Amtrak, who addressed the ColoRail spring meeting in Englewood on May 7. Mr. Magliari reviewed the package of proposals devised by the Amtrak Board and Amtrak management many of which accommodated suggestions from the Bush Administration as enunciated by US-DOT Secretary **Norman Mineta**.

Amtrak and its Board have agreed to break out financial reporting so that NEC, state corridor, and long distance trains can be individually evaluated.

Both believe the 50-50 federal/state funding match is totally inadequate and have suggested an 80-20 federal/state match similar to the match provided for highways. Amtrak will accept entrance of new employees under Social Security instead of the Railroad Retirement plan and will not contest efforts by private companies to compete for contracts to serve existing Amtrak routes.

Other proposals included bringing Amtrak owned infrastructure and equipment to a state of good repair, requiring NEC commuter rail authorities to pay full costs of operating on the corridor, streamlining what is a very complicated and inefficient ticket collecting system, and allowing some outsourcing of activities such as food service which is hugely expensive for Amtrak.

Long distance trains, frequently a target for derision by some politicians and the media, would be subjected to an annual ranking of route productivity.

Routes would be terminated if agree upon performance improvements were not made by FY-2009 unless Congress agreed to pay for continuing the service.

Mr. Magliari said he had great respect for Amtrak President **David Gunn’s** management skills pointing out a paring down of 6,000 employees from an all time high of 25,000. This reduction in staff has resulted in a 15% reduction in of expenses/train mile since 2002, the year when Mr. Gunn took over. Steady progress has been made in repairing track on the NEC as well as cars and locomotives systemwide.

Unfortunately, Amtrak’s cash-starved budgets have made it difficult to invest in new train technologies such as diesel multiple units (DMUs) which could provide an improvement in service for short corridor routes such as the Hiawatha service between Milwaukee and Chicago. Amtrak currently operates seven trains a day on this route with locomotive hauled trains which utilize heavy

reconstructed P-40 locomotives as cab cars to allow for reverse running. These adapted cab cars are loaded with sand bags which are needed to properly weigh the car down in place of the engine for suspension purposes.

“You can imagine the waste of fuel in having to move several tons of ballast back and forth from Chicago to Milwaukee,” said Mr. Magliari.

Mr. Magliari suggested communities served by specific long distance trains such as the California Zephyr organize to lobby Congress to continue the trains.

He cited Montana’s efforts on behalf of the Empire Builder and TEMPO in Texas which supports continuation of the Texas Eagle as examples of effective community advocacy.

In closing, he commented optimistically that perhaps zeroing out Amtrak’s budget by the Administration may serve a good purpose by forcing the Congress into a real discussion of what a US passenger rail system should be like rather than just trying patch funding together which has been the approach generally employed over the 34 year history of Amtrak.



**Observations:** Far from Norman Mineta, your *ColoRail Passenger* editor found himself in a very rural traffic jam on US99 in the San Joaquin Valley this January. The line of semi-trailer trucks in front of and behind my bus after a flaming wreck was graphic evidence of what we’ll see more of with current government policies. The sign at right was in my Albuquerque stop, but explains what ColoRail members hope to see more of.



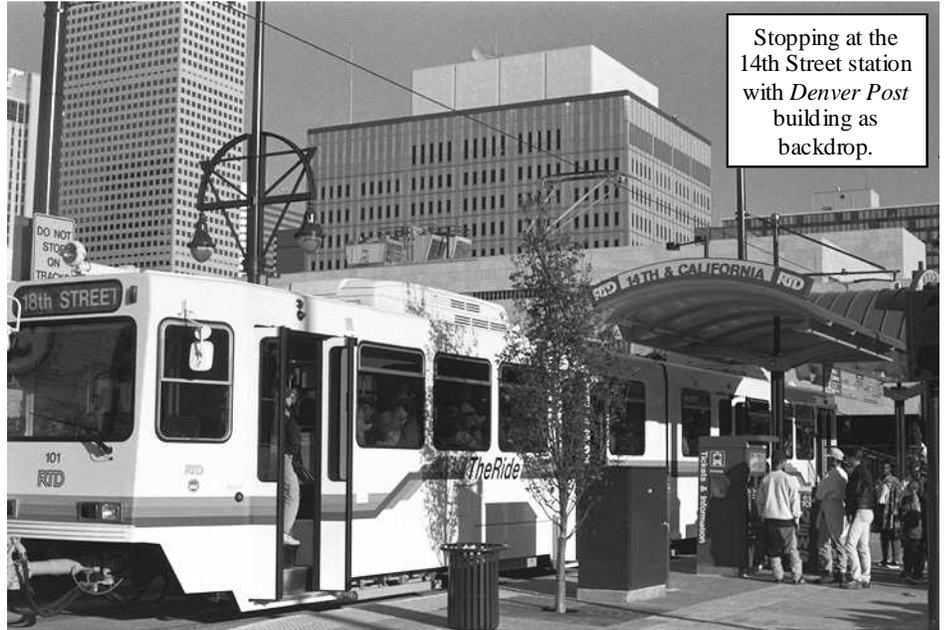
# Do you know where your calendar is?

More grand openings to be feted in 2006

**Happy 11th Birthday!** That may seem like an odd exclamation, trained as we are by the mass media to celebrate or commemorate events on a five to ten-year cycle. However, this year's calendar coincides with the exact days of the week for some historic events of 1994-95.

On Friday, September 23rd, the ceremony opening the North I-25 Busway for transit operations was held at the Union Station stop. ColoRail was the driving force behind inclusion of this stop-- original plans calling for buses to race through the station were based on the lack of development in the area.

On Friday, October 7th, the ceremony opening Denver's first Light Rail Transit line was held. ColoRail members were involved in support of the project. The first scheduled train, just before 4 a.m. on Sunday, October 9th, carried two passengers, one of whom was a ColoRail member. (The



other was a customer who did not know it was the historic trip.)

At the end of February 1995, DIA and RTD's skyRide service opened.

This next year, 2006, is set to see more transportation festivities, with the opening of three SE Light Rail lines, and New Mexico commuter rail



# ColoRail Membership

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**\$10** for 2006  
pays for mailings,  
printing, publicity

Rail technology improvements respond to needs

# News from here and there

## An Evolutionary Development

GE Transportation, the nation's largest builder of diesel locomotives, has announced the "Evolution," a hybrid locomotive that will be designed to recapture power through regenerative braking which would feed storage batteries.

Energy stored in the batteries would then be available to provide an estimated 2,000 hp to the locomotive's existing 4,400 hp at times when a special boost in power was needed. Canadian Pacific officials have indicated that locomotives with this feature would be very useful on their mountain grades in western Canada.

GE estimates the Evolution could reduce fuel consumption by 15 percent or more and would also cut nitrogen-oxide emissions. The hybrid locomotive is expected to be available in 2008. (Erie Times News, May 11, 2005)

## Colorado Springs Studies

### Transit Center Potential

The Colorado Springs City Council has unanimously approved a non-binding resolution to purchase the former Santa Fe station and adjacent property near downtown for \$4.5 million. The resolution puts in motion a nine month federally funded feasibility study which will examine whether the two acre site is large enough to house a city transit center and whether the streets around it would accommodate bus traffic.

The study will also look at what pollution or traffic problems the center could

create. Giuseppe's Depot Restaurant currently occupies most of the station space and might have to move if plans for the transit center go forward. (Colorado Springs Gazette, July 27, 2005)

[Photo by George Hinds shows the Colorado Springs station on the Front Range rail corridor. This reminder of George's efforts courtesy of his family.]



Follow the development of FREX on its own website:  
[www.frontrangeexpress.com](http://www.frontrangeexpress.com)

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