NM rolling ahead

A month after its opening, the New Mexico Rail Runner draws crowds of commuters and the curious. Last stragglers are assisted from the noon train into Albuquerque by its Herzog Rail Services conductor. Passengers have already boarded Amtrak’s Southwest Chief, ready for its punctual departure. Greyhound’s station is visible to the right.

Utilizing existing freight and Amtrak tracks for weekday commuter rail service, New Mexico’s Rail Runner trains began operating to the north of Albuquerque on Friday, July 14th, 2006.

At a kick off ceremony held later on Monday, July 17th, over 600 people endured 100 degree temperatures to hear Governor Bill Richardson and other politicians speak about the necessity of passenger rail before

(Continued on page 6)

The leaves are changing, the air is crisper. What does that remind you of? It isn’t back to school, but it is “Back to Boulder” for rail passengers this Autumn.

Saturday, September 30, at the Boulder Public Library

[See inside page 3.]

“A Voice for Colorado’s Rail Passengers”
C-DOT Committee Gives High Rank to Rail

C-DOT's Transit Task Force has recommended $1.246 million as Colorado’s share for funding a study of passenger rail for the Front Range as well as the I-70 Mountain Corridor.

Front Range Commuter Rail (FRCR) headed by former state representative Bob Briggs requested the funding which now must be matched with local as well as federal funding. Wyoming and New Mexico officials have indicated an interest in extending passenger rail to Casper and Albuquerque and those two states may also contribute funding.

The Transportation Committee is expected to select the transit projects to be funded at their September 21 meeting. The FRCR proposal was ranked 7th of 50 transit-related projects submitted by various agencies across the state. The approximately $66 million comes from 10% of Senate Bill 1 funds made possible by the passage of Referendum “C” last November.

The project has gained interest in places as far away as the Pacific Northwest, where the regional Cascades link two states and a province. The Portland Oregonian carried a brief wire service account of the proposal.

Mountain Rail Technology:

Working in partnership with the Colorado Association of Transit Agencies (Casta) and the I-70 Mountain Corridor Coalition, Front Range Commuter Rail CEO Bob Briggs has announced a half-day seminar on existing passenger rail technology which may be suitable for the I-70 Mountain Corridor.

The seminar will take place Wednesday, September 20 from 1:45PM to 5:00PM at the Two Rivers Convention Center in Grand Junction. Offerings from Stadler Rail, Colorado Railcar, as well as the latest in Maglev systems will be presented.

This is part of the Fall Transit Conference & Exposition. Register on the CASTA web site www.coloradotransit.com. Cost of the seminar is $35 per person.

Administration Predicts Highway Trust Fund Deficit:

On July 11th the Bush Administration released the FY 2007 Mid-Session Budget Review, which is a mid-year snapshot of the federal budget and nation’s economy. The review predicts that the Highway Trust Fund will be in a deficit prior to the expiration of SAFETEA-LU. This projected deficit of $600 million in 2009 includes an anticipated increase in receipts in commercial truck taxes. The projected deficit has been the subject of two Congressional hearings this year and has been discussed at the most recent National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission meeting. -- Report by Linde Marshall, Government Relations Office, C-DOT, July 17, 2006.
Making tracks for Boulder and points north

Colorado Rail Passengers’ “Homecoming” tradition – Boulder in Autumn

Plans for passenger rail in Boulder County and the North Front Range will be the focus of ColoRail’s Fall Membership meeting on Saturday, September 30, at the Boulder Public Library located at Arapahoe and 11th Streets in Boulder. The meeting will take place from 10:30AM to 12:30PM.

Passenger rail issues and developments in the North I-25 Environmental Impact Study between Fort Collins/Greeley and Denver will be reviewed followed by an update of FasTrack’s Northwest Rail project which includes the extension to Longmont.

Progress on the Boulder Breeze streetcar project will also be reviewed.

Former Boulder Mayor and current Boulder County Commissioner Will Toor will provide an overview of transit developments in the area and give his perspective and vision for local and regional transportation in the future. Commissioner Toor, a long time public transit advocate also serves as the Chairman for the Transportation Committee of the Denver Regional Council of Governments and was a member of C-DOT’s Transit Task Force.

In addition to a brief review of other national, state, and local passenger rail issues, those members present will be asked to approve a change in ColoRail’s Bylaws (see accompanying article).

Boulder Public Library is easily reached on Saturdays from Denver’s Market Street and Union Stations on the Regional Transportation District’s Rte B highway coaches. Call 303.299.6000 for information.

Bylaws change proposed for election dates

The ColoRail Board of Directors has approved presentation of a Bylaws change to the membership at the September 30th meeting at the Boulder Library. The change presented below will allow for election of members to the Board of Directors to take place at the January ColoRail meeting when member attendance has always been higher than at the May meeting when the election has typically been held. In the future, some meetings in the Spring may be scheduled for locations in Colorado outside of the Denver Metro area where membership is not as large.

The recommended change is:

3) BY-LAWS CHANGE – Article VIII - Elections

1) The membership will be notified by mail or newsletter to submit nominees by mail for the available positions on the Board of Directors by December 15th each year.

2) The Membership and Elections Committee will develop a slate of candidates prior to January 15th of each year.

3) The membership will be notified by mail or newsletter the names of all the candidates for the Board of Directors by January 15th of each year.

4) The candidates nominated for the Board of Directors will be listed in random order on the ballot presented to the members attending the ColoRail Winter General Membership Meeting. Additional candidates may be nominated in the meeting subject to prior approval of the candidate. Election ballots will be tabulated by the Elections and Membership Committee and the candidates receiving the most votes will be elected to the Board of Directors.

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Fusion of energy ideas

“There is no perfect way to generate electricity,” stated Bob Wilson, an electrical engineer with the Western Area Power Administration of the US Dept. of Energy. Mr. Wilson, who has worked on power systems for over 26 years, addressed ColoRail’s Spring Membership meeting that took place at the University Hills Library in SE Denver on May 13.

Though Mr. Wilson fully supports the development of alternative and renewable resources to power transit systems, he acknowledged that this goal would not be achievable with the resources available in the very near future. Instead, he suggested government and private industry set a goal of “25 by 25”: Achievement of 25% of our energy needs obtained from renewable/sustainable sources by 2025.

At present coal provides about 77% of our electric power generation in Colorado followed by natural gas at 19%. Even though coal puts greenhouse gases and other pollutants in the air, it is still a relatively cheap method of generating electricity because of its supply and availability in the west. Most new power plants are gas fired but gas prices are quite volatile because of dwindling supplies. Nuclear power has waste problems, hydroelectric power requires dam construction which is very unpopular with environmentalists and outdoor enthusiasts, and solar power...

(Continued on page 5)

Focus on passenger transportation at Union Station meet

Front Range Commuter Rail (FRCR) hosted a discussion about Denver Union Station at its second annual membership meeting held at the Oxford Hotel in downtown Denver on June 10. The 60 people who attended heard presentations having to with the station and access to it for the proposed RangerXpress passenger rail service along the Front Range.

FRCR President Bob Briggs welcomed the attendees and reported that C-DOT had just agreed to provide a small grant to FRCR to study what governance structure would work best for Front Range passenger rail service. Mr. Briggs said FRCR would be making an application for Senate Bill 1 funds from C-DOT for a rail study along the Front Range [see page 2]. He intends to coordinate this effort with the states of New Mexico and Wyoming.

Kirk Strand, a FasTracks planner, reviewed Denver Union Station coming transportation and commercial development that is scheduled to be completed by 2014. He mentioned that a through station connection south to the Consolidated Mainline (CML) could possibly be part of Union Station Phase II construction at which time the terminal tracks are to be depressed. Since tunneling under city streets, Speer Blvd., and Cherry Creek could be very expensive, Mr. Strand mentioned that an auxiliary station for the RangerXpress could be built along the CML northeast of the Millennium Bridge.

Attendees raised a number questions about adequate track capacity in the station to handle all of the FasTracks corridors plus Front Range rail and possible Amtrak expansion, expense of depressing the station tracks, problems of operating on grade coming out of Union Station, and the encroachment of commercial development overwhelming the ability of Union Station to function as an efficient transportation center.

Mr. Briggs suggested that a supplementary study be done now which would address these questions and specially ascertain the location of the station serving the RangerXpress either along the CML or at Union Station.

Tom Mauser, Modal Program Manager at C-DOT, reviewed efforts his agency is making to get the BNSF Railway and Union Pacific Railroad to continue planning a Front Range freight bypass that would free up rail capacity for passenger trains through the populated Front Range corridor. Bert Melcher, speaker on behalf of the Friends of Union Station described that group’s efforts to make sure the plaza area in front of the station is an inviting place for the public and is not overwhelmed by development.

Jason Longsdorf, a planner with the City & County of Denver who attended the meeting, said, “The station must be a functional transportation center and above all else, it must be walkable and easy to use. He estimated that a total 190,000 people will visit Union Station each day connecting to transit, conducting business, or enjoying the ambience, appeal, and the activity of the area itself. He said the city would like to see all transit (light rail, bus, and commuter rail) below grade so that pedestrian traffic could move through the station area, primarily along 18th St. to better access the growing development on and near the South Platte River. He suggested the northeast connection to the CML be further explored and added that other station locations for the RangerXpress such as at I-25 and Broadway be studied.

The meeting concluded with lunch and an extensive tour of Union Station and adjoining areas where attendees were helped in visualizing the coming development of the area.
needed for transport

(Continued from page 4)

It is not just transit vehicles but also transit facilities that can utilize alternative energy resources. Mr. Wilson mentioned a number of things that RTD is doing to conserve resources such as lighting and air circulation in the new Elati Light Rail Maintenance Facility and the recycling of steel salvaged from Mile High Stadium into new rails for the SE Corridor line. But more could be done such as sun powered lighting and heating at transit stops, something that cloudy Vancouver, BC, Seattle, and Portland, OR, have done. New building design and placement on the property can also have major effects on energy usage.

Mr. Wilson recommended that government, industry and academia begin working together to make sure Colorado’s energy future is both economically and environmentally sustainable while encouraging consumers of energy such as RTD to initiate modest demonstration projects such as the installation of solar panels to illuminate one West Corridor light rail station or panels for heating water to wash transit vehicles at the new commuter rail, light rail, and bus maintenance facilities.

Ritz-Carlton and Greyhound

According to the June 12 issue of the Denver Business Journal, BWAB Ventures LLC of Denver, owner of downtown Denver’s new Ritz-Carlton hotel, is thinking about buying the nearby Greyhound bus terminal located at 1055 19th St. for redevelopment.

The Ritz-Carlton is under construction and is expected to be ready for occupancy by next spring. It has been anticipated for some time that Greyhound and other intercity bus companies would move their Denver operations to a redeveloped Union Station that is 0.8 mile from the bus terminal. Sale of the bus terminal may hasten that move.

“We not going anywhere any time soon,” was the comment Mike Timmons, Greyhound’s Colorado Director of Operations, said in response to the Journal’s story. “We get about one or two requests like this a week from commercial interests who want to redevelop our property. We have no intention of moving until we relocate to Union Station several years from now,” he said.

Look! Up, up in the sky… it’s Light Rail!

With the important decisions now being debated on FasTracks projects it might be easy to forget that the Regional Transportation District’s Southeast Light Rail is due to open in mid-November. A public opening ceremony will be held after the morning rush hour on Friday the 17th. Free rides for the rest of that day, plus all day Saturday. On Sunday, the 19th, regular fares will apply and scheduled rail service by RTD will double. Four new letters will join the two existing service lines.
boarding a special mid-day train that ran from the northern-most station to downtown Albuquerque. When the southern half of the line opens in early October, the Rail Runner will operate over a total of 48 miles and serve 9 stations, with the downtown Albuquerque station roughly at the center of the line.

The service has a total of 5 new diesel-electric locomotives (Motive Power), and 10 new double-decker commuter cars (Bombardier). Each commuter car seats 140 with room for another 60 standing. Operating in push-pull mode, each 2-3-car train has capacity for 400-600 passengers. The Rail Runner service is primarily designed for commuters with three inbound morning trains into Albuquerque from the north and the south, a corridor-long mid-day train, and three outbound evening trains to the north and south. Bus routes and schedules have been adjusted to feed into the commuter rail corridor and further connections at the downtown Albuquerque station provide links to the city’s transit system, Amtrak’s Southwest Chief, and Greyhound.

Governor Bill Richardson led the way in bringing the commuter rail line to reality. In just under three years, the political support, financial planning, negotiations with BNSF, service design, station construction, and testing have been completed to deliver the fastest commuter rail opening in the country.

The Governor spoke about the necessity of commuter rail in addressing transportation problems: “A new era of transportation for all New Mexicans starts today with the Rail Runner. With increasing highway congestion, oil at $80/barrel and gas at $3.15/gallon, the Rail Runner offers a safe, environmentally friendly alternative to highways and gridlock. It is a less costly, energy-efficient, and pleasant way to travel.”

He thanked a host of leaders in the state including Lawrence Real, the Executive Director of the Mid Regional Council of Governments, which implemented the commuter service, and Representative Tom Udall who lobbied at the federal level. Richardson estimated the service would reach north to Santa Fe in 2008 and eventually connect with Denver and El Paso.

Also speaking in the opening ceremony was Joe Boardman, Administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration. “The Rail Runner is a good solution – as a transit guy, you’ve done it right – without connected systems, it doesn’t work.” With numerous at-grade crossings, while gated, Mr. Boardman encouraged the community to educate residents about grade-crossing safety, as crossings are where most accidents occur.

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The 5:25 from Albuquerque

(Continued from page 6)

Attending the ceremony from Colorado, Front Range Commuter Rail President Bob Briggs spoke with New Mexico officials about the envisioned Casper-Denver-Albuquerque line. “The T-REX light rail opening in Denver will create a transit connection between the regions two largest employment centers. The Santa Fe extension will connect New Mexico’s two largest employment centers. With the State of New Mexico’s purchase of the BNSF line from Belen to Trinidad, CO, and FRCR’s tentative award of $1.2 million in Colorado state funds for a passenger rail feasibility study along the Front Range, the critical first steps are being taken to establish a corridor that connects the Rocky Mountains with passenger rail service.”

Taking the northbound 5:25pm train from Albuquerque, the 3-car consist appeared full. Several commuters commented they had already established their commuting routine and will take the train every day. Employer-based shuttles have already started meeting the trains. As the engineer announced the current speed of 79 mph, the 2-day old service seemed well-established.

Meanwhile in Colorado commuter rail news...

Northwest Rail is the new name of the commuter rail portion of the US 36 Corridor from Denver Union Station to Boulder including the extension to Longmont. RTD and CDOT have split the US 36 EIS into rail and highway studies because FasTracks money is available for trains whereas no funding will be available for the highway portion for the foreseeable future.

Of course RTD still has an interest in US36 for its bus rapid transit line and will continue to participate in the study process. FasTrack’s budget does provide $66 million for BRT on the corridor much of which will be spent for expanded stations as well as ramps off and on the highway for those stations that will allow for more efficient bus operations.

ColoRail Membership

Name: ____________________________________________________________

Address: ______________________________________________________________________

City: ______________________________ State: _____________ Postal Code: __________

Telephone, with area code: ________________________________________________________

E-mail address, fax number or other contact information: ____________________________

$10 PER YEAR pays for mailings, printing, publicity

New members in Fall 2006 are credited for the full year 2007.

P.O. Box 480452
Denver, CO 80248

“Fastest commuter rail start-up project in the nation.”
Utah residents are going for passenger rail in a big way. Beginning in early 2008, commuters will be able to ride the Front Runner, a 44 mile rail line from Pleasant View just north of Ogden to Salt Lake City in about 50 minutes.

About 12,000 riders are expected to take the trains each weekday when the service becomes operational. Ironically, the steel rail being used in the project comes from recycled automobile bodies.

The federal government will fund Eighty percent of the $581 million cost of the project. Former US Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta announced the full funding agreement in June during a visit to Farmington, one of the stations on the line. Payment will extend into the next seven years with an initial $80 million promised this year.

Much of the grading, installation of grade crossings, and bridge work can be seen from the adjoining UP rail line. Work on the project is currently about 25% complete.

Eventually commuter rail will be available to residents from Brigham City to Payson along the Wasatch Front where an estimated 62% increase in population is expected in 20 years. For information and a brief video of the project, go to: www.rideuta.com/CalendarAndNews/CommuterRail.

Meanwhile, TRAX, Salt Lake City’s light rail line, is not standing still. On July 17, the Salt Lake County Council voted 6-1 to place an $895 million property tax increase on the November ballot which would be used purchase bonds to finance four extensions of the TRAX line. If the voters approve the increase, light rail transit would be extended to Draper, West Valley City, South Jordan and Salt Lake City International Airport in five to seven years. Environmental impact studies are already under way on the West Valley, and South Jordan extensions.

_Notable Quotes:

“If you build more highway lanes, how is that going to encourage people to ride trains?” Federal Heights resident’s comment about the proposed highway lane expansion at a US36 EIS Corridor EIS public meeting, July 12, 2006

“It was like talking to a mannequin. He never showed any intellectual engagement in terms of dealing with any (Amtrak) problem.” David Gunn describing the only business meeting he had with former USDOT Secretary Norman Mineta during his 3 ½ year term as Amtrak President, Philadelphia Inquirer, July 17, 2006