

ColoRail Passenger

May-June 2008

Issue #57

Southwest Chief Thruway bus link restored at Raton

Amtrak customers to and from Colorado points are again able to make *Southwest Chief* connections in Raton, New Mexico. Thruway bus trips 8603 and 8604 connecting at the traditional gateway city were reinstated effective April 1st.

The Thruway buses are operated by a Greyhound subsidiary, TNM&O Coaches. The service was originally organized after a ColoRail study showed that with the discontinuance of direct *Desert Wind* rail service between Denver and Los Angeles that there was a modest market for high-fare customers who would be willing to make a fast bus trip to trainside as a part of their travel.

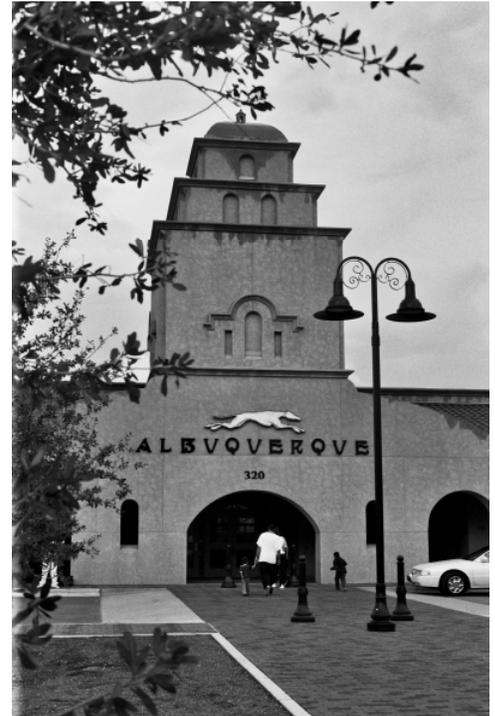
Amtrak's version of what happened last fall is that due to a major route restructuring by TNM&O, Amtrak and TNM&O agreed to a test of a change to the train connecting point for the Thruway service that operates between Denver and Raton. The restructuring changed the connect point from Raton to Albuquerque. As agreed, the service test was reviewed and at

Amtrak's request, TNM&O agreed to reinstate Raton, NM as the connecting point for this Thruway service.

As reported in *ColoRail Passenger* issue 56, the restructuring was part of a major downsizing of intercity bus service. In the same period, Thruway connections north from Denver into Wyoming were cut off and then partially replaced.

There are trade-offs in the new service *versus* its predecessors. Compared to the previous Denver - Raton schedule, the new schedule is a few minutes slower. Stops have been added at Walsenburg in both directions. A southbound stop has been added in Trinidad. The northbound Trinidad stop has been retained. As with the previous combinations, the buses also stop in Colorado Springs and Pueblo bus stations. The Raton bus trip is half the time on a bus that the Albuquerque connection required.

Passengers who booked through Albuquerque will be accommodated with changes to their reservations for the Raton connection.



On the way Southwest...

Albuquerque -- or 'ABQ' as it is known on baggage tags -- is still an important stop on the way between Colorado's Front Range cities and the Southwest. With the introduction of a rapidly growing commuter rail system and the availability of other bus services, ABQ offers alternatives for those who want to escape from the "fly-drive" rat race.

In Amtrak's 40 to 50 minute Albuquerque servicing stop, local artisans continue the tradition of offering their wares at trainside.

Inside:

Dale says "road-building mentality" needs to change to protect communities. -- page 4.

Activity at Union Station aids holiday travelers

Activities focus on stations

From Don Zielesch

Starting May 23rd ColoRail will again provide volunteer hosts at Denver Union Station during the Memorial Day holiday period. (Friday 5/23/08 through Monday 5/26/08).

If you are available to help out anytime from the evening of May 23 through May 26, 2008 would you please either e-mail **Jay Jones** (sunjones@earthtones.com) or call him at 303-733-1519 to set up a time.

The evening slots are the hardest to fill and if any of you can volunteer evenings that would be very helpful. Even though the train often runs late, it does help to have us there to answer questions and try to calm the anxious, impatient riders.

And if you would please sign in on the sheet provided in our "office" at DUS it will help us to determine who is eligible for a free Volunteer Host Shirt. As you know, the Board approved providing a free shirt to each volunteer who has volunteered for ColoRail at DUS five times or more. This is how we keep track of the number of times you have

volunteered. Please also let me know if you have served 5 or more times and have not received your shirt.

If any of you are no longer able or interested in serving as volunteer hosts, please let me or Jay know so that we can remove your name from our list. Hopefully you are all still interested as we are short of volunteers and would hate to lose any of you.

Thanks much to the following Volunteer Hosts who worked over the Easter holiday period. There was a lot of activity at DUS and we appreciate all of you who came down to help. The following volunteers signed in. If we have missed anyone, please let me know. We appreciate your help.

- Mike Cronin**
- Tom Peyton**
- Ira Schreiber**
- Betty Vander Kooi**
- Ron Vander Kooi**
- Don Zielesch**

*Last stop,
Fort Morgan!*

ColoRail's board has been in contact with Fort Morgan interests in regard to their Burlington (BNSF) Station used by Amtrak. Fort Morgan is the last stop eastbound on the *California Zephyr* route through Colorado and it is the last Colorado station that has had no improvements or local efforts.

Mike Rowe has spoken with Acting City Manager **Keith Kuretich** who now knows that ColoRail is interested in the welfare of the station. **Ira Schreiber** said he spoke with Arrow Stage Bus Lines management who might be interested in using the station as their Ft. Morgan stop. Mike agreed to draft up a letter for Ira's signature formally indicating ColoRail's interest in the station and willingness to assist in its rehabilitation in any way we can. The issue was originally brought to ColoRail's attention by member **Robert Noyes**.

The Fort Morgan station's importance in northeastern Colorado increased after Amtrak discontinued its original High Plains stop in Akron. Interest in it has increased again recently as growth in northeastern Adams and in Weld County makes it an alternative to backtracking into Denver. This will become more significant when reconstruction of Denver's Union Station requires months of "Amshack" operation in the big city.

The current state-assisted bus service has a typical outlying stop designed to hold down mileage, but can do little for the downtown area of Fort Morgan. The rail station is close to the business district in a growing city that says that it "...serves as the commercial and retail hub for all of Northeastern Colorado."

Union Station a meeting point for ideas

Denver's Union Station redevelopment process continues to attract the interest of diverse groups. At the same time, growth in transit and Amtrak ridership is making the existing facility an intermodal terminal as the traveling public gets ahead of the planners, engineers and urban development enthusiasts.

A public forum will be held on June 4th by the official design teams selected for the DUS project, according to the *Denver Post*. Teams will present their qualifications and initial design concepts during the hours of 5:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. in the Auraria Events Center.

Regional Transportation District staff and consultants have entered the engineering design phase of the project. They are working out details that were of necessity only blurs in the earlier conceptual drawings. In the meantime, a split has occurred in the citizens group concerned primarily with use of the public spaces. Their meetings and events have been scheduled too closely to the *ColoRail Passenger* printing deadline to permit providing further information, but ColoRail's board is following their proposals and continues to be the group representing actual passengers.

Key freight study aims to cut jams

And Northern Flyer
Alliance reports
progress

ColoRail's Spring Membership Meeting will be held on Saturday, May 17 at the Ross-University Hills Library, 4310 E. Amherst Avenue in Denver.

The focus of this meeting will be a presentation on the CDOT Freight Rail Relocation Implementation

Study, which has recently gained media attention as the next phase of the study moves forward.

Tammy Lang from C-DOT's Division of Transportation Development and **Randy Grauberger** of Parsons, Brinkerhoff will make presentations on the study. Lang is the project manager for CDOT and Grauberger is the consultant project manager. The series of studies began in 2002 with BNSF and Union Pacific proposing a joint Front Range Railroad Infrastructure Rationalization Project. In 2005, CDOT published the Public Benefits and Costs Study, which showed more benefits to the citizens of Colorado such as reducing congestion in urban areas, than just speeding up traffic for the freight railroads.

Also on the agenda, in light of National Train Day, May 10, is an update on the Northern Flyer Alliance (NFA). **John Bishop**, ColoRail's representative to the NFA, will give an update on the Alliance's efforts to expand rail service between Oklahoma City and Kansas City. The group has been busy in the last year and has won over many local

governments in support of the extension as Amtrak begins a study to extend the *Heartland Flyer* north to connect with other passenger rail routes. This will increase rail options for residents of Colorado as it may be feasible to connect to the Heartland Flyer from the *Southwest Chief* in Kansas for destinations in Oklahoma and Texas.

Registration and networking begins at 10:00 AM with the meeting presentations beginning at 10:30. The general public is cordially invited to attend. Light refreshments will be served courtesy of First Transit.

The modern library is located 2 blocks east of Colorado Blvd. on E. Amherst Ave. (E. Amherst Ave. is located between E. Yale and E. Dartmouth Aves. On S. Colorado Blvd. in southeast Denver.) The second floor meeting room is accessible by stairs or elevator.

Parking in the library's lot and the adjoining streets is available. Transit options include **Rte 27** (from Englewood or Yale Station), **Rte 40** (from Southmoor or Colorado Station), and the **Rte 46** (from Belleview or Colorado Station).

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>Notes from the president's file<

Hello all!

We are all ready four + months into the ColoRail year. Several exciting things have happened.

A March 15th Region 10 NARP meeting in Omaha, NE, revealed a renewed interest in rail travel. Kansas is funding a study, with Amtrak, to extend the *Heartland Flyer* for a Kansas City connection. A group from St. Joseph, MO was there to push Omaha/ Kansas City service. Iowa is pushing to extend Amtrak service across the state. A second schedule Denver/Chicago was also discussed but no action was taken.

In mid-April, we held a very successful going away luncheon for Jon and Rosemary Esty. By the time you read this, Jon and Rosemary will be on their way to Ridgway and their new home.

The Colorado Rail Association was unable to get a bill before the legislature but managed to get a resolution introduced, a first step. This proposal now has NO sales tax financing, a plus point to the voters.

The May quarterly meeting is just around the corner, Saturday, May 17th. Be sure to attend!

Ira Schreiber, President, ColoRail

Basic policy considerations need to be made.

Policy choices- Government will never

If a state is going to begin giving serious consideration to the development of a passenger rail program, there are some basic policy considerations that have to be decided as well as a plan for where the service will go and who it will serve. Both of these questions were addressed in the ColoRail Winter meeting held at the Englewood Center on January 26.

John Valerio, Project Director for the C-DOT Rail Governance Study, described the conclusions his group is working toward to help define the governing structure under which a passenger rail system might operate in Colorado.

John said his study was originally requested by **Bob Briggs**, founder of the Rocky Mt. Rail Authority (RMPA), to help the DOT and legislature define a legal framework for a passenger rail system. Representatives from the Colorado Association of State Transit Agencies, the Colorado Rail Association, RMPA, I-70 Coalition, Amtrak, and the governor's office have all helped shaped the policy recommendations based on the experiences all have

had in Colorado or elsewhere in the country.

John pointed out there is a lack a clarity as to whether or not C-DOT, itself, can go out and operate a rail system but C-DOT Executive Director, **Russ George**, is supportive and does not what to specifically formulate an approach without giving consideration to practical options. It is the intention of the study to come up with specific options.

With the help of the Colorado Attorney General's office, different kinds of model structures were reviewed. They included development of a rail based system through a set of intergovernmental agreements, a defined regional area such as the current Regional Transportation District, a special transportation district, a joint powers authority involving communities and counties, or simply operation by the state DOT. John mentioned that the development of a system could also be done incrementally with the formation of special districts and intergovernmental agreements followed by a more formal joint powers authority and state involvement.

Esty receives thanks for service



Rail advocates line up at the January General Meeting to thank outgoing ColoRail President Jon Esty for his efforts. From left to right: Jon Esty, Georg Ek, Lowell Williams, Bob Wilson, and Ira Schreiber. *More on p. 8.*

John said that 12 out of 14 rail programs surveyed are run out of DOT's or a state-wide rail authority. If the DOT is not supportive of passenger rail, then a transit district within the specific service area is usually formed.

Some of the characteristics of a successful rail system include a "clear vision" of what is expected, cooperative relationships with the private railroad companies, grass roots support, incremental development, multiple frequencies as opposed to higher speeds, and integration with local transit activities.

Harry Dale, Chairman of RMRA and a Clear Creek County commissioner, detailed his concerns with the current road building mentality of most current officials. He repeatedly stated that transportation and land use are tied together and than current land policies have led us to a sprawl-based transportation system. "Because we keep growing the urban edge further and further beyond our cities, we have to add roads. Even the federal government admits expanding roadways to provide connections to every increasing development does nothing to solve congestion," he said.

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“catch-up with the need for new roads”

High Speed Rail
study in the works

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Harry also cited data from the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) that vehicle miles traveled (VMT) is actually increasing 25% more than the rate of population growth in the Metro Denver region. By 2035, DRCOG projects metro area population will increase 58% and VMT will be 72% higher. In addition, many believe that the world has reach peak oil production so the costs of driving will begin to escalate rapidly as the amount of oil diminishes. This plus the struggle to pay for maintaining existing highway infrastructure let alone finding funds to pay for new roads all add up to the inevitable conclusion that we are now in a position where governments will never catch up with the need for new roads.

There must be a way to provide for future transportation needs without becoming strangled in roads and the struggle to pay for them.

Unfortunately, none of the current environmental impact statement (EIS) studies in Colorado give much support to anything other than adding lanes to highways thus the impractical and non-productive road solution is being consistently put forth as a congestion and mobility solution.

Support in legislature grows for Front Range High Speed Rail

On April 24, 2008, the Colorado House Transportation Committee passed House Joint Resolution 08-1039 "Concerning Support for a High-Speed Rail Corridor Along the Front Range of Colorado" by a 9-1 vote, with three excused. Rep. Swalm was the sole negative vote.

Sponsored By Representative **Dorothy Butcher** (D-Pueblo) wearing an Amtrak railroad cap loaned to her by ColoRail's own **Keith Dameron**, the resolution was modified to make it clear that it applied to both "high speed passenger rail service that would run from Casper, Wyoming, to Albuquerque, New Mexico, and along an East-West alignment west of Denver."

It noted that matching funds for the feasibility study by the Colorado Department of Transportation have been raised by the counties of Arapahoe, Boulder, Clear Creek, Douglas, Eagle, Garfield, Gilpin, Grand, Jefferson, Larimer, Las Animas, Pueblo, Routt, Summit,

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Fortunately, 10% of Senate Bill 1 money for transportation (mostly highway) purposes as been set aside over the next few years for transit projects including \$1.5 million for a high-speed passenger rail study which will be directed by RMRA. The study which is expected to be completed by late February, 2009, will be looking at potential ridership, maximum average cruising speed, amount of public support and cooperation from the railroads, federal, state, and local sources of financial support, impact on traffic congestion, and what are the areas of agreement among political jurisdictions for a rail system.

A prime candidate for passenger rail is the I-25 Front Range Corridor between Fort Collins and Pueblo where more than 80% of Coloradans live and work. The I-70 Mountain Corridor between DIA and Grand Junction will also be looked at including possible branches off the corridor to Breckenridge, Steamboat Springs, and Aspen.

According to Harry, rail is the best solution for the I-70 Mountain Corridor particularly now that conventional electric rail technology which can handle mountain grades is in use. He mentioned the FLIRT train manufactured by the Stadler Company which can sustain speeds of 60-80 mph in mountainous terrain. A growing number of I-70 area residents and politicians are beginning to favor such an approach because further road expansion serious harms and degrades sensitive mountain environments and only serves to stimulate intractable sprawl in mountain communities.

RMRA currently consists of 35 members consisting of county and municipal governments with about a dozen more government applications pending. The engineering consulting firm PBS&J has been hired by the authority to direct the project and a search is underway for another firm(s) who will actually do the study. Numerous previous C-DOT studies such as the Colorado Rail Feasibility Study (1996), The Eastern Colorado Mobility Study (2002), and the I-70 Mountain Corridor Study (2003) will be extensively reviewed.



Fighting like a trout on a hook, Coloradans try to get free

Switch to transit threatens *status quo*

Like a trout fighting to get off the hook, Colorado citizens are responding to higher energy prices. At the same time, local governments and other entities show a mixed pattern-- some seem to want to help OPEC reel us in.

First, the RTD internal newsletter headlines **Ridership Reaches All-time Record Numbers**. The May 5th edition reports that RTD passenger boardings totaled up to almost 98 million passengers for the 12-month period ending in February 2008. This was up by 13.1% over the previous record of 87.6 million boardings carried during the same 12 months ending in 2007. This is the largest number of boardings over a 12-month period ever carried in the transit agency's 30-year history.

Light Rail daily ridership, the

newsletter continues, reached an average of nearly 68,000 daily passenger trips in February 2008, an increase of 8.7% percent over the same month in 2007. Fixed route bus service (not including access-a-Ride and call-n-Ride and special events) boarded nearly 15% more passengers in February 2008 *versus* February 2007.

Fort Collins Transfort bus system is among the other Colorado transit services reporting increased ridership.

Private enterprise interest in public transportation is increasing. Google, the on-line search system, is now testing the provision of transit information on a worldwide basis, including Colorado's Regional Transportation District as one of the pioneers. Apartment and condo

developers are now advertising in Light Rail trains and mentioning transit service in their ads.

Not everyone is in tune with this. Jefferson County commissioners took time out from trying to divert RTD resources from urgent needs on the higher volume parts of its system to push an old highway plan forward.

On May 13th they voted to join the "Jefferson Parkway Public Highway Authority" which hopes to punch the "missing link" of a metro beltway through Golden. Toll financing may be difficult in today's capital markets unless they can encourage long commutes or make taxpayers ultimately responsible.

In an obscure news item, the *International Herald Tribune* (May 9th) reported that some in OPEC want to ratchet down prices in order to "maintain OPEC's position" --in other words, get us back on the hook.

Colorado House gets on board

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and the cities and towns of Aspen, Aurora, Castle Rock, Colorado Springs, Fort Collins, Frisco, Georgetown, Glenwood Springs, Idaho Springs, Leadville, Monument, Pueblo, Thornton, Timnath, Trinidad, Vail, and Yampa.

This study is expected to take 18 months to complete, and will answer many questions. If favorable, the Federal Railroad Administration can then select this corridor as the 11th high-speed corridor in the U.S. So far there is no funding for these corridors from the feds, but the addition of three additional state congressional delegations is helpful.

This resolution encourages the speedy completion of the study with the support of the affected cities and counties, urging them to adopt resolutions of support and that copies of this resolution be forwarded to those cities and counties and Ranger Xpress, Action 22, Club 20, Progressive 15, and the governors of New Mexico and Wyoming in addition to the Governor of Colorado.

Rep. Butcher said that it had taken six years to get this resolution passed. The first year Jon Esty and she were dismissed after a brief five minutes.

Edie Bryan spoke briefly in support of this resolution for ColoRail, after conferring with **Jon Esty** and President **Ira Schreiber**. Former Representative **Bob Briggs** spoke in support and ably answered questions. Rep

Glenn Vaad (R, Meade and a former CDOT district engineer) spoke convincingly of his support for this resolution "even though I am a conservative" and indicating that Colorado needs to create a Colorado Rail Authority in the future.

This measure went to the House floor with the support of House co-sponsors: Reps. **M. Carroll, Casso, Ferrandino, Fischer, Frangas, Gallegos, Hodge, Kefalas, A. Kerr, J. Kerr, Liston, Madden, Massey, McFadyen, Merrifield, Middleton, Primavera, Rice, Riesberg, Roberts and White**. Senator **Abel Tapia** was the only Senate sponsor.

House of Representatives Joint Resolution 1039 "Concerning Support for a High-Speed rail corridor..." did pass the House easily 42-8 on May 5th, the next to the last day of the legislative session with no further amendments. But it did not get any hearing in the Senate.

This is the furthest such a resolution has gone. Thanks are due to Rep. Butcher for her leadership on this issue. Unfortunately Rep. Butcher is term limited, so it needs a new sponsor for next year.

"One small step..." said Edie Bryan, long time ColoRail member, transit advocate and former RTD Board member.

Keeping track of commuter rail projects

Utah FrontRunner pulls ahead - next line in the works

The Northwest Rail Corridor project continues to move forward through the complex Environmental Evaluation process. Corridor commuter trains are expected to operate over the BNSF - former Colorado & Southern - tracks from Denver Union Station through Boulder to Longmont.

In a recent mailing to members of the public and local government officials, the project team reported that it has "worked with representatives of the local communities to refine the station plans... These plans were originally developed in the US36 Environmental Impact Statement and the two Longmont Diagonal rail studies. They have been updated to reflect current community plans and transit elements of the commuter rail stations. Drawings are to be posted on the RTD FasTracks website.

Residents of mountain states who would like to see an operating commuter rail line now have two choices. Utah Transit Authority opened its Salt Lake City - Ogden line ahead of schedule on April 26th. The line provides all-day service, daily except Sundays. The pioneering New Mexico RailRunner is available to the south. Both the New Mexico and Utah systems expect to expand their reach before the first Colorado line opens.

Work on the Salt Lake City - Provo extension is underway, with the city of Draper trying to "steal" a station from neighboring Bluffdale. Bluffdale's city council in February voted 3-2 to "block" UTA from building commuter rail, due to worries about traffic and unwanted activity. But -- in sharp contrast with the political environment in Colorado -- state lawmakers passed a bill that allows UTA to bypass city ordinances

and route FrontRunner commuter wherever necessary.

Bluffdale may get part of its wish, however, as their competitors in Draper (37,000 population) have already lined up a transit-oriented development proposal to attract the station.

Planning for FrontRunner began in 1996. In 2002, UTA revealed that it had been able to purchase 175 miles of rail rights-of-way from Union Pacific Railroad, the single largest ever purchase of a rail line by a transit authority.

The first stage of the Utah project is comparable to the RTD's Northwest Rail project, with 44 miles of roadbed and trackwork completed. Park-n-Rides and bus transfer facilities at seven locations were ready at the opening, with more to come. Light Rail service was extended to the Salt Lake City Intermodal Center, too.



ColoRail Membership

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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

Esty's contributions as president of ColoRail appreciated

Jon Esty recognized for service



During Jon Esty's service as a "voice for Colorado rail passengers" much was accomplished. Seen here thanking him for his leadership are former State Senator Hugh Fowler (above) and Arvada ColoRail activist George Ek. At right, Jon and Rosemary Esty.



ColoRail Passenger

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