Colorful skis and skiers were smoothly delivered to the slopes by Amtrak’s Winter Park Express. Photo by Darrell Arndt.

WINTER PARK EXPRESS SUCCESS

Thanks to Amtrak, Winter Park, Union Pacific, many Coloradans, and… Mother Nature!

by Bob Brewster

On two glorious, picture-perfect Colorado days in March, ColoRail’s Building Block #1 was tried in place as the foundation for the next generation Ski Train, re-christened as Amtrak’s Winter Park Express (WPE).

Each day’s Superliner-equipped train transported over 430 delighted passengers from Denver Union Station to Winter Park Resort and back. Passengers were delighted because they avoided the hassles and hazards of the highway, an all-too-familiar scene for Colorado’s mountain travelers for

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ColoRail is taking its message to Colorado’s leaders.

“The time has come to begin mobilizing Colorado’s leaders and the public to support passenger rail,” said ColoRail’s President, Jim Souby.

“As we ramp up to the proposed Year of the Train - 2016, we need to educate our state and local leaders, create alliances and build public support for our goals and our Building Block strategy. ColoRail’s three principle goals are: establish seasonal ski train service on the Amtrak Winter Park Express for 2016; save the Amtrak Southwest Chief and expand its service to Pueblo; and, develop Front Range passenger rail.” The first two goals are also building blocks for the third, Souby explains.

“As volunteers on the train, we witnessed how the Winter Park Express created public appreciation for passenger rail service. Expanding SW Chief service to Pueblo creates a southern anchor for Front Range passenger rail.”

In his briefings of state and local leaders, Souby emphasizes the need for a comprehensive Front Range rail corridor planning effort, another critical building block. While the benefits from efficient, modern passenger rail systems are immense, the front end costs are high and careful planning and public acceptance must be cultivated.

Souby calls for at least three rail items in any state transportation funding measure: funding of the Southwest Chief Rail Line Commission funding request of $8.9 million dollars; funding for a front range rail corridor planning effort at an estimated cost of $5 million; and, funding for intermodal rail and transit facilities at Colorado Amtrak stations, including a passenger platform at Winter Park Resort. Specific estimates for these projects would have to be generated by the communities, Amtrak and the host railroads.

So far, Souby has met with staff at the Governor’s Office, both U.S. Senators Offices, the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation, and the City of Denver Transportation office. He has also briefed the Intermountain Chapter of the National Railroad Historical Society and the Rail Users Network at their national meeting in Los Angeles.

Please contact him if your organization is interested in a briefing: President@ColoRail.org. In the meantime, Souby hopes to establish a ColoRail speakers bureau to distribute the message more widely.

KUDOS TO WINTER PARK EXPRESS VOLUNTEERS:

ColoRail volunteers ‘stuffed’ seat back pockets of the Winter Park Ski Express with informational brochures.

Souby extended his personal thanks to volunteers who helped with the 2015 Winter Park Express. ColoRail members turned out early on Saturday and Sunday and again each evening to help passengers embark and alight from the train. They were: John Bishop, Bob Brewster, Edie Bryan, Keith Dameron, Sergio Pelines, Peter Richards, Rob Rynerson, Ira Schreiber, Nick and Jim Souby, Frank Smucker, Ron Vander Kooi and Don Zielesch.
NARP Leader in Denver

Jim Mathews, president and CEO of National Association of Railroad Passengers will be the featured speaker at the Saturday, May 30th general meeting of ColoRail. NARP has successfully participated in the recent effort to improve train schedule adherence and is upgrading its technology to continue its efforts to reach the new general public that was born after the end of quality rail service offered prior to the mid-1960’s.

A social period from 9:30 a.m. will offer members and friends time to get reacquainted and meet ColoRail board members. The meeting will begin at 10:00 a.m. and continue to 12:30 p.m.

The downstairs meeting room in Denver Union Station -- a location which has proved popular -- is easily reached by RTD service. And snacks or breakfast choices are available on the main floor.

The meeting will also include the election of officers and a bylaws amendment to add two more open positions to the ColoRail board.

2016 - YEAR OF THE TRAIN?
by Bob Brewster

The year 2016 will be a very significant one for rail and transit proponents. Early in the year, what could easily be the crown jewel of FasTracks, the Airport Line, will commence service. Later in 2016, the Gold Line to Ward Rd. and the Westminster segment of the Northwest Corridor will open for business. As will the final segment of the BRT corridor to Boulder along US 36. And the I-225 light rail extension will start serving Aurora as it intersects the Airport Line at Peoria/Smith. Sharpen your scissors for all the ribbon cuttings! That's quite an achievement for our nationally recognized RTD.

And it raises a bigger suggestion: Can the momentum of all the new rail and transit openings in the Denver metro area translate into a wider recognition that rail could play a starring role in other critical corridors of our transportation-challenged state?

Indeed, with the spotlight on rail in 2016, should that year be officially declared “The Year of the Train?” Carrying the idea further, should 2016 be a general celebration of the contributions of rail to our state?

RTD and Amtrak’s Winter Park Express will provide the tangible evidence that passenger rail makes sense. These events provide the impetus to launch a serious Front Range rail corridor planning effort and reconsider the high plains freight bypass. On a larger scale, 2016 – Year of the Train in Colorado can celebrate the current and future contributions of rail service to the citizens and the state economy.

The recently announced selection of Colorado as a rail convention site in 2016 indicates that other rail organizations see the importance of these developments, as well. Let’s discuss these ideas!

Train Day from Trinidad
by Gary Carter

A group of 5 people boarded Train 3 in Trinidad the morning of May 9th for the annual Train Day ride to Las Vegas, NM. A total of about 25 people boarded the SWC in Trinidad that morning. In addition, there was local support for the train by displaying 2 banners on the platform.

Stormy weather here in southern Colorado, but another good Train Day.

Key vote coming for SW Chief

The CDOT Transportation Commission vote for Colorado to join the Southwest Chief TIGER application with $1M will be Thursday, May 21. The Commission meeting begins at 9:00 a.m. with Public Comment being toward the beginning of the agenda. The meeting will wrap up by 12:00 noon.

We need any available supporters from our TIGER grant group to attend this meeting and voice their support of Colorado’s participation in this application.

WHAT: CDOT Transportation Commission meeting
WHERE: CDOT Headquarters, 4201 E Arkansas Ave, Denver CO 80222
WHEN: Thursday, May 21, 2015 at 9:00 a.m.
MORE: on page 7.
Smart snow seekers resort up to 9 months (75%) of the year. And they arrived at their destinations relaxed and stress-free. It was all smiles all the way! All age groups were well-represented, with lots of youngsters, many probably enjoying their first train ride. Future ColoRail members?!

The priceless bonus, of course, is the breath-taking scenery along the route, familiar to Amtrak’s California Zephyr passengers, some of whom take advantage of the nearby Winter Park/Fraser station stop, long served by rail. The WPE route gives credence to the former Rio Grande Railroad's slogan “Thru the Rockies, not around them.” The oft challenging trek over the Continental Divide by highway is replaced by a 6.2 mile bore, the Moffat Tunnel, depositing winter recreationists at the base doorstep of Winter Park Resort, immediately west of the tunnel’s portal, rather than the more distant CZ stop at Fraser.

Overheard were many comments about the smooth ride and the spacious seating of Amtrak's famed Superliner coaches, some of which were the Coach Baggage style cars, supplying ample and convenient room for winter sports gear. And the generous space between seats allowed for easy changing of footwear. An airline would slip another row of seats into that space! Those familiar with the former Ski Train noticed the improved experience. Plus, the lower level vestibule areas seemed to expedite loading and unloading of passengers, who didn't have to negotiate the steep set of steps of the former cars.

ColoRail selected the "Ski Train" as Building Block #1 because it was deemed to be the easiest, cheapest, and quickest rail service implementation project feasible. And it has a strong foundation upon which to build, since the 60-year-old ski train tradition was sorely missed by many in its 6-year absence.

[ColoRail's Building Block strategy establishes a progressive expansion of rail services in 'bite-size', doable, manageable, and affordable increments, with each successive Block "built" upon the success of the previous Block. In other words, introducing the public to the rail alternative without the sticker shock of mega projects that have little prospect of attaining fruition, thus denying the public any rail solutions to our myriad transportation maladies.]

(Continued on page 5)
to Superliner traffic bypass

ColoRail is proud of its role in planting the seed that became the trial run of the WPE. Further, ColoRail is even more proud of ace Amtrak CZ train conductor, Brad Swartzwelter, who germinated and incubated the ColoRail/WPE seed, which then sprouted under careful and thorough guidance of Amtrak management in cooperation with Winter Park Resort and, finally, railroad track owner Union Pacific. Brad, in a former life, was employed by the Ski Train when operated by Phillip Anschutz. Anschutz, recently honored with the annual Citizen of the West award. deserves credit and praise with his team for keeping their Ski Train operating until Denver Union Station underwent redevelopment. That created an impediment to continued operation. Brad's intimate knowledge of the Ski Train's operation, and his passion for it, led to his creation of a professional business plan, resulting in the WPE.

Members and friends of ColoRail remember the advocacy for return of the Ski Train at the ColoRail 25th Anniversary celebration at Denver Union Station on September 27, 2014. Little was know then about what was soon to follow in a short span of time (especially in "rail years") - due to the persistent work of many dedicated people, too numerous to mention in this space.

Be sure to attend ColoRail's May 30th meeting at Denver Union Station for a shout-out to those good people and a slide show of the trial runs of the WPE!

We fervently hope that the WPE becomes a permanent operation during the 2016 ski season, giving rise to another rail asset in 2016's Year of the Train! A hearty thank you to Amtrak, Winter Park Resort, and Union Pacific Railroad for their cooperation in a successful Winter Park Express!

Stay tuned!

UP plans Colorado $$$

In 2015, Union Pacific plans to spend $41 million on MOW, including $34 million to maintain track, $860,000 to enhance signal systems, and nearly $6 million to maintain or replace bridges on lines west of Denver.
Jay Jones and I would like to thank the following ColoRail volunteers who helped out at the Denver Amtrak station over the Easter weekend, 4/3/15 - 4/6/15. This was a good turn out and we appreciate the effort you all made to help.

Here is the list of the volunteers:

- Edie Bryan 4/4/15 P.M.
- Mike Cronin 4/4/15 A.M.
- Ron Kaminen 4/6/15 P.M.
- Rob Rynerson 4/4 and 4/5/15 P.M.
- Frank Smucker 4/3, 4/4, and 4/6/15 P.M.
- Vince Szafranko 4/3 and 4/5/15 A.M.
- Don Zielesch 4/3/15 A.M.

If there are any corrections that need to be recorded, please let me know. Thanks.

-- DwZ

Photographers tell stories in pix

by Bob Brewster

Potential caption: Ace rail photographer, Darrell Arndt, scales staggering heights to get just the right shot.

It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words. But probably many more if the picture is of a train! ColoRail wishes to thank several local, well-known train enthusiasts/photographers who captured numerous photos of the Winter Park Express. Darrell Arndt, Steve Patterson, Joe Mc Millan, and John (Chip) Sherman have also generously shared their handiwork with ColoRail, including archival photos of the Rio Grande Ski Train.

Likewise, John and Linda Fike have shared shots from their deck as the WPE sped through the western suburbs.

Seeing is believing and ColoRail believes the success of the WPE will garner much-deserved attention to the advantages of rail modes. Plan on attending ColoRail's May 30th membership meeting at Denver Union Station, and enjoy the visual record of the WPE.

by R. W. Rynerson

As editor of the ColoRail Passenger for most of the issues since it began, one of the hardest parts of the work is choosing pictures and their formats. This has become more complex with the introduction of color in the on-line edition, as some color photos do not reproduce well in the black and white print edition. The earliest ColoRail newsletters did not have that problem, as they were just type.

Nevertheless, choosing pictures for the past two decades has been a privilege. In this ColoRail anniversary year, I appreciate having the opportunity to thank everyone who has contributed photos or drawings. It would be hard to choose the best of two decades, but the two above are sentimental favorites. The late George Hinds caught a hopeful scene in Colorado Springs. And my own B&W photo is a reminder that with hard work, dreams come true.
SW Chief Coalition Seeks TIGER Grant

Led by the City of La Junta, the Southwest Chief Coalition has filed a pre-application for a U.S. Dept. of Transportation TIGER Grant (Transportation Infrastructure Generating Economic Recovery). Rick Klein, City Manager, is heading up the effort with support from Amtrak, BNSF Railway and communities and counties in Colorado, Kansas and New Mexico. The Coalition hopes to obtain matches from the states of Colorado and New Mexico.

As of May 8, $176,000 in Colorado match has been pledged, including $1,000 from ColoRail. Four New Mexico communities and the New Mexico Department of Transportation are considering participation.

New Mexico participation would strengthen the application, much as Colorado participation strengthened Garden City, Kansas’ application last year.

The Colorado Transportation Commission is expected to review an application for $1.0 million in match funds from so called “S228” funds on May 21st. Time for public comments is scheduled at the Commission meeting. These funds are available based on a legislative formula that applies to revenues that are not eligible for taxpayer refunds under the Tabor Amendment. The deadline for the grant application is June 6th and awards are not expected to be announced before the fall.

Las Animas 1999: “Slow to 80 mph”

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The U.S. House reauthorized Amtrak in the Passenger Rail Reform and Investment Act of 2015 (H.R. 749) on March 4. The final passage was an overwhelming, bi-partisan endorsement of Amtrak, passing 316 to 101.

Prior to the final vote, an amendment to eliminate federal funding for Amtrak was proposed by Representative McClintock of California. It was defeated 147 - 272.

Colorado's delegation voted as follows on the measures:

Ken Buck
- voted for amendment
- voted against bill

Mike Coffman
- voted for amendment
- voted for bill

Diana DeGette
- voted against amendment
- voted for bill

Doug Lamborn
- voted for amendment
- did not vote on bill

Ed Perlmutter
- voted against amendment
- voted for bill

Jared Polis
- voted against amendment
- voted for bill

Scott Tipton
- voted against amendment
- voted for bill

“CenturyLink town” wants air subsidies

A million dollar package is in negotiation for direct air service between Denver and Monroe, Louisiana, according to the Denver Post of May 1st. Half of that could come from Federal grants under the cover name of “Community Air Service Development Program.” If a deal is worked out, Denver would contribute $400,000 and Monroe $100,000.

Denver - Monroe travel is available via Greyhound Lines, with connections in Dallas.