

Southwest Chief & Front
Range Passenger Rail
Commission Overview for
Transportation Legislative
Review Committee
November 2, 2017

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FIRST WE WERE THE SOUTHWEST CHIEF COMMISSION

COMMISSIONER SAL PACE, CHAIR,
SOUTHWEST CHIEF & FRONT RANGE
PASSENGER RAIL COMMISSION

THE ISSUE

IN 2011, DISCONTINUING AMTRAK'S SOUTHWEST CHIEF ACROSS SOUTHERN COLORADO WAS A LIKELIHOOD

- 632 miles of track between Newton, KS, and Lamy, NM needed upgrading to maintain Amtrak's Southwest Chief operations, particularly in Kansas and Colorado
- Amtrak's contract with BNSF Railway expired in 2016
- BNSF freight traffic over the route had declined since the original contract was executed 25 years ago
- Track repair and maintenance estimated at over \$200 million over 10 years, well beyond Amtrak's budget

Accomplishments

- 2014 TIGER 6 Grant
 - BNSF, Kansas DOT and Amtrak pledge \$9 million match
 - 14 Colorado and Kansas Counties, Communities and Advocates additionally pledge over \$330,000
 - BNSF commits to repair worst track segments to maximize improving the SW Chief's performance
 - US DOT awards \$12.5 million grant!

Accomplishments (cont'd)

- 2015 TIGER 7 Grant
 - Colorado and New Mexico DOT's joint application
 - 22 communities, counties and advocates from 3 states join application
 - US DOT awards \$15.2 million grant
- New replacement rail manufactured in Colorado!
- Over \$46 million has now been raised and 137 miles of track has been replaced, creating "time table" space for Pueblo stop

Accomplishments (cont'd)

- Success leads BNSF to assume full maintenance costs for restored track, relieving Amtrak of huge burden
- Commission seeking Southwest Chief “through car service” for Pueblo and beyond
 - Chicago to Pueblo through service on dedicated cars cut off at La Junta for traveling to and from Pueblo
 - Beyond Pueblo, Colorado Springs at 40 miles, and Denver at 110 miles create potential realistic Front Range passenger rail scenario serving more Coloradans
 - Pueblo County ballot measure approved in 2016

2017 SW Chief Commission Sunsets; General Assembly Creates New Commission

- SB 17-153 creates the SOUTHWEST CHIEF AND FRONT RANGE PASSENGER RAIL COMMISSION
- Housed under CDOT
- Broad Commission make-up, including:
 - Two freight railroad industry representatives
 - Five representatives from the Councils of Government/Metropolitan Planning Organizations in the Front Range
 - RTD representative
 - Two statewide passenger rail advocates
 - SW Chief representative, and –
 - Non-voting representatives from CDOT and Amtrak

Commission Purpose (SB 17-153)



- *Continue Amtrak Southwest Chief Line track rehabilitation, expansion to Pueblo, and consider adding service to Walsenburg*
- *Facilitate the development of Front Range Passenger Rail*
- *Directed to draft legislation due by December 1, 2017 to facilitate mission; however, Commission continues statutory purpose beyond that date*
- *Authority to receive & expend funds*

What we've been working on

- We were appointed in July, 2017
- We have held five very comprehensive Commission meetings
- We established two subcommittees and an ad hoc committee to address our commitments - they have collectively met another dozen times
- We participated in Southwest Chief Tiger 9 application submitted October 16th
- We have two more formal meetings slated in November to formalize our recommendations to the General Assembly

Why is Exploring Front Range Rail Important?

- Colorado and Front Range population growth is coming – traffic congestion will get worse
- Travel options and mobility freedom need to be enhanced
- Critical for economic development & ability to compete for major employers – maintaining highest quality of life
- Passenger rail is popular – growing support and demand
- Passenger rail is a multi-year strategy – won't delay current projects
- Greater connectivity between rural and metro areas of Colorado

Front Range Passenger Rail Subcommittee

Purpose

- Address December 1, 2017 legislative deadline
- Identify Front Range passenger rail vision, issues, needs, next steps to move toward a proposal for implementation

Commission Members

- Front Range MPOs, governments
- BNSF and UP railroads
- RTD and Colorado Rail Passenger Association (ColoRail)
- CDOT staff support

Schedule

- Met 1-2 times monthly between August-November

Many Issues to Consider...

Target Markets

Public
Engagement

Technology

Alignment

Service &
Operating
Characteristics

Costs

Potential
Funding Options

Governance
Structure &
Service Operator

Regulatory
Environment

SWC&FRPR
Commission
Considerations

Potential
Legislative
Request

Commission's
Next Steps

Target Markets

- What would make interregional passenger rail a compelling investment for the entire Front Range?
- Who are we trying to serve?
- What future mobility needs must be met?
- What is the best balance of travel times, price points, construction costs, other factors?

Public Engagement

- Increase public awareness of key issues
- Establish a Front Range mobility vision
- **Comprehensive public engagement is critical**

Technology

- High performance rail technologies are available – high speed, commuter rail, etc.
- Relationship to potential Hyperloop?

Alignment

- **Directly serve downtown Denver vs. DEN/DIA**
- Maximize RTD, other transit rail/bus connections
- Several route options north and south of metro Denver, other communities
- Shared existing rail corridors or greenfield?

Service & Operating Characteristics

- Frequency, span of service, station locations?
- Speed, travel time?
- Fares?
- Connectivity with other modes?
(Bustang, local transit, park and rides)

Costs

- Determine capital and operating costs
 - Pre-Construction
 - Construction
 - Fleet
 - Operations, maintenance, life cycles

Potential Funding Options

- Several mechanisms/ options (special districts, RTAs, etc.)
- Ongoing, dedicated funding
- Federal, state, local
- Private/P3
- Passenger fares

Governance Structure & Service Operator

- Governance: Interregional authority, special district, transit agency, etc.
- Operator: public or private



Regulatory Environment

- Federal Railroad Administration
- Federal Transit Administration
- Colorado PUC
- Planning, project development process requirements

SWC&FRPR Commission Considerations

- Draft legislation by December 1, 2017
- Ongoing stakeholder outreach and consensus building
- Staffing need:
Commission work,
study processes and
consultant assistance

Potential
Legislative
Request –
NOT
asking for:

- Legislative changes
- Immediate, complete solution

Potential
Legislative
Request –
May ask
for:

- Continued support
- Financial assistance for:
 - Public engagement/
visioning
 - Federally compliant
project development
process leading to
implementation
 - Staff support & ongoing
Commission activities

Commission's Next Steps

- Engage public, set Front Range mobility vision
- Establish preferred route
- Meet federal requirements
- **The Commission intends to position the project for funding and construction**



Questions & Discussion

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THANK YOU!