



October 12, 2011

Mr. Mehdi Baziar
Manager, Mobility Analysis Section
Colorado Department of Transportation
4201 Arkansas
Denver, CO 80222

Re: State Rail Plan Comments

Dear Mr. Baziar:

The Colorado Rail Passenger Association (ColoRail) is pleased to provide general comments on the development of the State Rail Plan. The plan is an important first step toward providing the state with an economic and environmentally sound transportation system. Simply stated, such a system will provide more passenger trains which is a major, necessary and overdue shift in the deployment of state transportation resources for the Colorado Department of Transportation. ColoRail believes it is time to implement passenger rail and connecting transit services and we applaud the Legislature and CDOT for creating Transit and Rail Division to promote these changes.

The plan should emphasize the benefits and importance of passenger rail, particularly compared to other modes of transportation. Understanding of its importance will grow dramatically as we see increases in the state's population, the number of older citizens and energy prices. The current state transportation system relies almost entirely on automobiles that are expensive to buy, maintain, insure and fuel. Furthermore, a great deal of the money for those purchases is exported out of the state, at the expense of the local economy. It has been estimated that approximately 3.5 trillion dollars has been spent on building and maintaining the nation's highway system over the past forty years and almost ten times that amount has been spent on insurance. This staggering amount of money has not produced a sustainable system. In fact the highway system is deteriorating rapidly. As high as these numbers are, they do not take into account the billions of dollars that have been spent on motor fuel. Health effects of emissions and other factors. (Source: Amtrak presentation to the CDOT Transit and Rail Advisory Committee and Southwest Energy Efficiency Project SWEEP presentation to ColoRail, October 1, 2011)

The Denver metropolitan region is making great strides in developing alternative modes of transportation such as light rail, commuter rail and bus rapid transit. It is time for the state to make the same investments and extend the Denver system through the major transportation corridors linking the state's population centers and connecting other communities to these corridors with convenient transit services. The vision for this system should not stop at the state's borders. Linkages to Cheyenne, Albuquerque, Kansas City, Salt Lake City and beyond should be part of the long range thinking for passenger rail in the state.

It has been documented that metropolitan regions with strong passenger rail systems save financial resources over time. A study of 66 metropolitan regions worldwide including 11 in the United States found that the share of gross domestic product spent on transportation in those with strong rail systems was 20 percent less than in those dependent on automobiles. The same economic advantage accrued to citizens in those regions. Over time, investing these resources in the local economy rather than transportation provides these regions with a tremendous economic advantage. The same advantages should be provided to Colorado's communities. These analyses do not take into account the environmental benefits of reduced emissions and smaller, more sustainable land use patterns, nor do they include the benefits of local economic development and job creation related to passenger rail systems and terminals. (Source: Newman and Kenworthy, *Sustainability and Cities*)

The following general comments and ideas should be incorporated into the plan and its use in Colorado transportation planning:

- Passenger rail should be the first and primary mode of transportation considered as the state improves and expands its transportation system along the front range. In the I-25 north corridor, the passenger rail component should be the first stage of that plan's implementation. This will allow the state and the citizens along the corridor to realize the economic and environmental benefits from rail as soon as possible and provide an alternative for motorists that reduces their commuting costs and avoids the disruption of highway construction. Furthermore, the cost of the rail component in the corridor is estimated to be less than the cost of the highway component. The transportation planning process must carefully estimate comparative total costs and the local economic and environmental benefits of competing modes and the project plan must emphasize early realization of these same benefits. A model process has been formulated by the Southwest Energy Efficiency Project. The results of these analyses should be key criteria for all transportation projects in the state. A good model for a rail first approach is the I-95 corridor between West Palm Beach and Miami in Florida. The state of Florida built the passenger rail component first, before it began the highway reconstruction. The rail component was designed as a temporary, five year alternative, but it was so successful that it has now run for 22 consecutive years. (South Florida Regional Transportation Authority)
- Alternative modes for personal mobility should be a primary driver for transportation planning for the State of Colorado and should be a central feature of the State Rail Plan. This mobility and the attendant savings afford citizens, particularly those that are older or economically disadvantaged, much greater opportunity for gainful employment and a better quality of life. Dependence on automobiles creates a serious financial burden on the citizens least able to afford them or drive them.
- Reducing land use impacts from transportation modes should be a primary driver for transportation planning for the State and should be a central feature of the State Rail Plan. Passenger rail systems have a smaller "footprint" than highways and yet they can transport more people and expand capacity as necessary with minimal land use impacts. Furthermore, existing rail corridors generally serve existing communities and the development of passenger rail along these corridors stimulates economic development such as residential and commercial real estate development and both temporary and permanent jobs in those communities.

- Rights of way are difficult to acquire and the State Rail Plan should document those that exist and provide a plan for protecting and preserving them.
- Energy efficiency should be a key feature of transportation planning in the State and emphasized in the State Rail Plan as an advantage of passenger rail. In an ongoing study by the Oak Ridge National Laboratory it was found that Amtrak passenger trains are 30% more energy efficient than automobiles and 14% more efficient than airplanes per passenger mile. (source Amtrak and Oak Ridge National Laboratory)
- Passenger trains emit significantly less pollutants and Greenhouse Gases than automobiles. This should be a key criteria for mode selection in State transportation planning and should be emphasized in the State Rail Plan. (SWEEP presentation, October 1, 2011)
- The State Rail Plan and State transportation in general should emphasize and incorporate safety as a key consideration in mode selection. Passenger trains are ten times safer than automobiles. This is easy to understand – just think of the terrible statistics surrounding drunk drivers. Furthermore, alternative transportation choices such as passenger rail allow for sterner measures to deal with drunk drivers without endangering their livelihood. (American Public Transportation Association)
- The State Rail Plan should emphasize the importance of frequency, reliability and connectivity for passenger rail systems. The plan should envision a passenger rail system connecting major communities and wherever else it is feasible. Other communities should be linked to the passenger rail network by transit, regional and intercity bus services creating a system that serves all of Colorado's citizens.
- The State Rail Plan should emphasize the economic development and job creation potential of passenger rail. This benefit extends beyond the immediate communities served by rail to other tourist attractions including tourist railroads, state and national parks and other landmarks. Amtrak and Colorado Rail Vacation packages should be developed with local and regional vendors. ColoRail is developing models for this kind of venue.
- The State Rail Plan should also examine other changes that could enhance passenger rail and tourism in the state. The State should actively support the retention of Amtrak's Southwest Chief on its route through Colorado. Demand for this train is almost elastic during peak travel seasons yet Amtrak does not have the resources to add capacity. The State should consider adding "Colorado" cars to Amtrak's consists. The possibility of a rail link between Denver and the Southwest Chief at La Junta or Trinidad may be possibility. Consideration of opportunities such as these should be a central feature of the State Rail Plan and State transportation planning in general.
- It is important that the State Rail Plan establish a process to continuously consider and evaluate innovative financing mechanisms such as value capture from adjacent real estate that benefits from the rail line, public private partnerships, and other

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mechanisms. However these mechanisms must be carefully scrutinized, developed and executed in a way that protects the public interest inherent in public transportation systems.

The State Rail Plan provides the State of Colorado with a tremendous opportunity to change its passenger transportation system from an automobile dependent one that exports wealth and earnings to an intermodal one that imports wealth, creates jobs, and provides its citizens with economic and environmentally sound travel choices.

Please call on me if you have any questions. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

James M. Souby
President

cc: Mark Imhoff, CDOT