

Draft Meeting Summary

Agency Milestone Workshop

Detailed Evaluation

Thursday, February 15, 2007

9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

FasTracks Regional Conference Room, Suite 700 (7th Floor)

Denver Post Building, 1560 Broadway, Denver

Meeting Goals and Agenda

This was the third Agency Milestone Workshop— a combined meeting of the Agency Working Group (AWG) and Local Governments Team (LGT) — for the Gold Line Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The meeting goals were to:

- Provide an overview of the input from the February 5 and 7 Public Workshops
- Present and discuss the results of Detailed Evaluation, including the project recommendations on Alternatives to carry forward
- Gather input and assess levels of support for the project recommendations from the Agency Working Group and Local Governments Team
- Prepare the Agency Working Group and Local Governments Team for the agency comment period on Detailed Evaluation

The meeting agenda included introductions; a presentation of the Detailed Evaluation findings; an overview of the input gathered at the February Public meetings; presentation and discussion of the project recommendations; and an overview of the third agency comment period. Action items, next steps, and a list of participants are included at the end of this summary.

Preliminary Items

Liz Telford, RTD Gold Line Project Manager, welcomed the AWG and the LGT. She noted that the Detailed Evaluation workshop is the third SAFETEA-LU milestone point for the EIS and that the desired outcome of this phase of the study is to move from four to two build Alternatives.

Louise Smart, RTD FasTracks Gold Line Project Team (Project Team), led introductions and reviewed the meeting agenda. She noted that today begins the

third agency comment period for the EIS and emphasized that the Project Team would like the AWG and LGT to review the Detailed Evaluation information and provide preliminary comments today and written comments within the next two weeks.

Liz Telford also provided an update on the status of the negotiations with the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) and Union Pacific (UP) railroads, which share segments of the Gold Line railroad corridor from the east to Sheridan where they separate (the BNSF corridor then continues west to Ward Road). She explained that safety is a major concern of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the railroads, which was heightened after an accident involving a Commuter Rail (CR) train in California. In this context, the FRA has determined that only FRA-compliant vehicles can operate in the railroad Right-of-Way (ROW). The BNSF and UP also have concerns about liability. As a result, RTD is pursuing legislation with the Colorado state legislature, which would need to grant the agency the appropriate authorities to indemnify the railroad companies. RTD is also pursuing a national insurance pool, as other agencies around the country are experiencing similar issues.

Later in the meeting, Liz Telford noted that the RTD legislative committee will be sending regular emails to stakeholders to keep them updated on this issue. Skip Fischer, Adams County Commissioner, remarked that it is important for RTD to do so, as local communities need to be kept informed about it.

Detailed Evaluation

Don Ulrich, Consultant Gold Line Project Manager, reviewed the Detailed Evaluation information that the Project Team presented at the February Public Workshops. (See “Gold Line EIS AWG Workshop No. 3 Level 3, Detailed Evaluation” PowerPoint presentation. The page numbers provided below refer to this presentation.)

At several key points in the presentation, workshop participants asked questions, discussed, and provided comment about the evaluation information:

Key Performance Discriminators (page 23)

- **Percentage in Mixed Flow:** Don Ulrich indicated that the Project Team would like to reduce the percentage (80%) that the Streetcar Alternative operates in mixed flow. In response to a question from Steve Nguyen, City of Wheat Ridge, Liz Telford indicated that the Project Team would like to try to improve the travel times for the streetcar with operational improvements, not through additional ROW acquisitions, if possible.

- **Capital Cost (2007):** In response to a question from Jody Ostendorf, US EPA, Don Ulrich confirmed that the \$383 million capital cost for Alternative 3 takes into account the cost share between the Gold Line and the Northwest Rail corridor. Without the cost sharing arrangement between the two corridors, the capital costs of the Gold Line would be higher. In response to a question from Shelley Cook, City of Arvada, Don answered that the amount of the Northwest Rail's share is about \$50 million. It should also be pointed out that the above estimate is in 2007 dollars. At the time of construction, the actual cost of construction is estimated at 30 to 40 percent more.
- **Ridership:** Kirk Webb, CDOT, commented that he expected the ridership numbers to reflect the proximity of the three northwest Denver alignments to population density, i.e. that they would be higher. Liz Telford explained that the ridership model emphasizes travel time and vehicular access to stations. It weighs these two factors more heavily than proximity to population when it calculates ridership numbers.
- **Employment within a ½ Mile of Stations:** Rick Garcia, City and County of Denver Council Representative, asked whether the location of the terminus (Denver Union Station) for Alternative 3 factors into the determination of 59,600 for employment within ½ mile of the station. Don Ulrich confirmed that the Alternatives have different termini in downtown Denver which affects the total employment location figure for each. The Project Team agreed to correct the glitch so that all of the alternatives have similar employment near DUS.
- **Baseline Alternative:** As a follow up to the discussion about streetcar operations in mixed flow, Dave Beckhouse, FTA, indicated that FTA requires a Transit System Management Alternative (in this case, an "optimized" bus alternative) to be used as a baseline for comparison purposes. He suggested that the Project Team consider whether any improvements made to the Streetcar Alternative are also applicable to the bus system.

As a follow up, Judy Montero, City and County of Denver Council Representative asked how FTA would consider bus impacts. In response, Dave Beckhouse explained that New Starts focuses on performance, although there are also environmental criteria (benefits and impacts). Bus and rail alternatives usually perform in a similar manner for New Starts, but *cost effectiveness* is a key discriminator.

- **Bus Service:** Rick Garcia asked how bus service in northwest Denver will operate if RTD's goal is to attract transit riders to the rail system. Liz Telford explained that RTD will not provide bus service that is duplicative of the rail

service. Instead, the agency will design bus service operations so that it supports the rail transit corridor. In addition, RTD will identify where bus travel times increase and decrease as a result of the capital investment (rail corridor). The agency will then adjust (and keep adjusting) bus operations so that bus riders and rail riders experience the most optimal travel times that are feasible.

Cost-Effectiveness (page 25)

- **Cost-Effective Index:** Shelley Cook asked how cost-effectiveness is determined. In response, Don Ulrich walked the group through the calculation for the Cost-Effective Index. It is determined by taking the sum of the annualized capital costs and annual operating expenses and dividing the result by the Transit System User Benefit (TSUB) number. [Annual capital expenses + annual operating expenses/TSUB = Cost-Effectiveness Index]

As a follow up, Dave Beckhouse noted that to be competitive for New Starts funding the project needs a “medium” rating in the categories of cost-effectiveness and financial, which considers the local financial commitment to construction. In response to a question from Kevin Nichols, City of Arvada, Dave Beckhouse confirmed that proposed New Starts projects are competing against other projects on a nationwide basis, so it is advantageous to pursue higher ratings. Liz Telford added that the Gold Line needs a cost-effective index of \$22.99/hour (which is adjusted annually) to earn a medium rating. Don Ulrich added that cost-effectiveness for the best projects is \$16-17/hour. Dave Beckhouse added that only a few projects nationwide earn a “high” rating.

Mobility Improvements (page 26)

- **Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT):** Rick Garcia asked for an explanation of this measure. Don Ulrich explained that the VMT measure is closely related to environmental benefits, specifically air quality, on a regional level. Essentially, the measure determines whether the project reduces the number of vehicle miles traveled on the road. Don noted that all of the Alternatives do reduce VMT compared to the No Action Alternative, but that the reduction is not particularly significant. Dave Beckhouse added that some congestion is needed to motivate people to use the transit system.

Environmental Benefits (page 28)

- **Energy:** Bob Manwaring, City of Arvada, asked for an explanation of the energy measure. Don confirmed that the energy measure is determined by

the daily consumption of BTU's (in millions). The energy measure considers different types of energy uses (diesel, electricity, etc.). In response to a question about the relationship between the energy and VMT measures, Don did not speculate on why the VMT measures for the Alternatives decrease while the energy measures for them increase slightly over the No Action Alternative.

Environmental Impacts (p. 29)

- **Biological and Wetlands Impacts:** Rena Brand, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, asked about the location of these impacts in the Gold Line corridor.
- **Historic Properties:** Rick Garcia asked how the number of Historic Properties was determined for each alternative. This has been a significant issue for Denver on other projects. Liz Telford explained that these numbers include properties listed as eligible on the National Historic Register.
- **Traffic Impacts:** As the project moves forward, it will conduct additional VISSIM analysis on these impacts.

At the end of the discussion about the Detailed Evaluation findings, Don Ulrich presented the Project Team's recommendations, namely to carry forward electric rail in the railroad corridor and streetcar on a northwest Denver alignment and to eliminate from further consideration the two alternatives involving light rail on northwest Denver alignments (see page 30).

Overview of Input from the February Public Workshops

The third set of Public Workshops for the Gold Line EIS was held on February 5 and 7 in northwest Denver and Arvada, respectively. Andy Mountain, Project Team Public Involvement Manager, provided an overview of the comments gathered by the Public Involvement Team at those meetings and during the days immediately before and after them. He also noted that several newspapers published stories about the Gold Line after the January 30 LGT meeting, which resulted in an increase in public comments received about the project at that point.

From January 31 to February 11, the project received 114 public comments. Andy Mountain reported that the top five issues, in order of number of comments received, were: 1) Alignment; 2) Transit Technology; 3) Public Involvement; 4) Right-of-Way and Property Impacts; and 5) Operations. The comments about Public Involvement expressed appreciation that project decision-making has been transparent and also, from those who have not previously participated, asked how to be involved in the study. Andy noted that this is the first time that Operations has

ranked this high. Public comments about this issue have largely focused on streetcar operations in mixed flow, with concerns expressed about travel times, reliability, and whether streetcars offer any advantages over buses.

Andy Mountain noted that 80 of the 114 comments addressed the Gold Line Alignment. Andy suggested that this outcome is consistent with the Project Team proactively asking the public about this issue during Detailed Evaluation. Specifically, the comments about this issue:

- Overwhelmingly support the railroad alignment—Alternative 3. This support was indicated directly (2/3 of the comments about the alignment indicated direct support for Alternative 3) or was expressed as opposition to the northwest Denver alignments—Alternatives 6DD, 6G, and 7BB. Comments about these three alignments included concerns about impacts, limited access to the transit system, and deviation from the FasTracks vote.
- Continue to indicate that there is a segment of the northwest Denver community that is still interested in a northwest Denver alignment. At the Public Workshop held in Denver, the group was evenly divided between those who support a northwest Denver alignment and those who do not.

Rick Garcia asked whether there are different levels of support for LRT or Streetcar technology. Andy explained that the comments acknowledge the differences between the two modes. The project has not received any comments suggesting that the LRT Alternatives be carried forward. The four comments that have been received about LRT (compared to the 28 that address Streetcar), express concern about its costs and impacts. Andy suggested that there appears to be a public assumption that LRT will not be carried forward in the study and, if a northwest alignment were to continue to be evaluated, there would be support for Streetcar as the technology.

At the end of the discussion, Andy Mountain described the anticipated Public Involvement activities for the next several months, focusing on the next round of Issue-Focused Team (IFT) meetings:

- In addition to ongoing outreach activities, including listening sessions, the Project Team will organize another round of IFT meetings to address platform locations and parking, including amount and location, at stations for the different alignments.
- The IFTs will meet when additional technical information is available about the stations.

- Before the IFTs convene, there will be an LGT meeting which will include a project update and additional information about the IFTs.
- The Public Involvement team will distribute the schedule and locations for the IFTs to the LGT when this information is available.

In response to a question from Kirk Webb about how the project will move forward if it is not in a position to identify a Preferred Alternative, Andy Mountain explained that the analysis of the Alternatives will continue. The issue that remains open is the timing of the next decision milestone public workshop to present recommendations for the Preferred Alternative.

Detailed Evaluation Recommendations

To begin the agency comment period, which is outlined in the next section of this summary, Louise Smart asked AWG and LGT representatives for their input on the project recommendations– that Alternatives 3 (Electric Rail, BNSF/UP alignment) and 7BB (Streetcar on Harlan) *be carried forward* and Alternatives 6DD (LRT on Sheridan) and 6G (LRT on Harlan) *not be carried forward*. (See page 30 of the presentation.)

In response, agency representatives provided the following comments:

- Crissy Fanganello and Karen Good, City and County of Denver: City and County of Denver staff will support the project recommendations and also have ongoing concerns about the Streetcar Alternative on the northwest Denver alignment. While this Alternative should be carried forward, the City and County wants to continue working on the issues associated with it, including parking, structures, operations in mixed flow, bicycle and pedestrian connections, and the connection to the Northwest Rail Corridor. Streetcar operations on and impacts to 38th Street continue to be of particular concern. (Crissy Fanganello and Karen Good, City and County of Denver)
- In response to a question from Jody Ostendorf, Karen Good described the City and County’s Main Street concept, which includes four zoning categories and is intended to encourage appropriate redevelopment. The City and County would like the Streetcar Alternative to be designed and operated in a way that supports this concept. More information is available at www.denvergov.org/ms
- Judy Montero, City and County of Denver Council: I have received comments from stakeholders in the Globeville, Sunnyside, and Elyria Swansea communities. Their input so far has aligned with the City and County’s perspective, including its support for the project recommendations. As the

project goes forward, I would like to work further with the City and County, RTD, and the Public Involvement team to make sure that communication continues and to involve those citizens that have not yet participated in the study. It is important to know what these communities are thinking and address issues as they come up.

- Rick Garcia, City and County of Denver Council: I agree with the City and County of Denver's staff comments to support the project's recommendations. As the Streetcar Alternative advances, I would like the evaluation to be conducted at a level that enables the City and County to really understand its impacts. This will require a full analysis. The City and County of Denver would like RTD to consider streetcar for the next level of investment. This will keep northwest Denver competitive with other areas and support its revitalization. My vision for streetcar is for it to run ancillary to the main transit corridor and replace bus service on 38th Avenue.
- Kevin Nichols, City of Arvada: The City of Arvada strongly favors Alternative 3-EMU on the BNSF/UP railroad alignment. If it were my choice alone, I would also drop the Streetcar Alternative. However, I understand why the project needs to retain it. The City supports Alternative 3 because it best supports the FasTracks vision, the project Purpose and Need, and the City of Arvada's local planning goals. Streetcar travels too slowly to support the City's goals. The Streetcar Alternative will result in less Transit-Oriented-Development (TOD) and the City will lose its Sheridan station, which is concerning. I do not have a problem with the project's recommendations to drop the two LRT alternatives.
- Bob Manwaring, City of Arvada: I echo Kevin Nichols' comments. As Mayor Fellman said at the Public Workshop, the City of Arvada supports Alternative 3. As the two remaining Alternatives move forward, the City would like analysis and feedback about the impacts to Grandview so that it can communicate with the public. Parking and impacts to Olde Town will also be important to know about. The City is also interested in vehicle selection and would like to be a part of the process. I would also like to know when the decision about a Preferred Alternative will be made. The City needs to know how long it will be before one is identified because it does not want to get too far ahead in its planning efforts.
- In response to Bob Manwaring's comment about vehicle selection, Liz Telford explained that when RTD begins its discussions about choice of vehicles, there will be a public involvement effort and likely an advisory group in which local communities can participate. She also noted that the IFTs will focus on platform and parking issues and that RTD should know more about the timing for study decisions at the April LGT meeting.

- Steve Nguyen, City of Wheat Ridge: The City of Wheat Ridge is currently having internal discussions about the project recommendations and will provide feedback on them. At this point, there does not appear to be any opposition to the recommendation to remove LRT from consideration. The City can support the determination to carry forward Alternatives 3 and 7BB, although it needs additional information and analysis to really understand each one. For example, the City needs details about parking impacts.
- Skip Fischer, Adams County Commissioner: As I expressed at the most recent LGT meeting, Adams County prefers Alternative 3. The County has similar concerns about the Streetcar Alternative as the City of Arvada. Adams County is also interested in knowing when the Preferred Alternative will be identified. The County has a grade separation project at 56th Avenue and Pecos with the UP railroad and does not want to begin work on it until the Preferred Alternative has been identified.
- Rena Brand, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: The Army Corps of Engineers regulates impacts resulting from fill into Waters of the U.S. (stream channels and wetlands). Linear transportation impacts on these resources from each of the carry-forward alternatives are below the 0.5 acre impact threshold and would be considered minimal enough to qualify for a Nationwide permit. The Corps will continue to stay involved in the study as a cooperating agency to make sure that the impacts remain under the .5 acre threshold, but the 404 consultation process does not need to continue at this time.
- In response to a question from Dave Beckhouse, Rena confirmed that if something were to change in one of the Alternatives such that the wetland impacts exceed .5 acres, the Corps would have to evaluate whether the alternative is the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA).
- Jody Ostendorf, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: The EPA can support the recommendations, the process has been open, and the EPA has no concerns regarding this project.
- Mike Ramsey, Federal Railroad Administration: The Federal Railroad Administration has no concerns about the project recommendations. The agency will continue to participate in the study process to address any safety issues.
- Vicki Vargas-Madrid, Colorado Division of Wildlife: The Colorado Division of Wildlife wants an Alternative that has the least impacts to wildlife. The agency will also consider whether there are any wildlife managements issues for the project.

- John Schwab and Kirk Webb, Colorado Department of Transportation: The Colorado Department of Transportation does not have any concern about the project recommendations and, in particular, supports the elimination of the Sheridan LRT Alternative (6DD) because of right-of-way and traffic impacts. As the study moves forward and the timing is appropriate, CDOT will want to look at the I-76 crossing and the impacts to the facilities there.
- Bill Brunskill, Union Pacific Rail Road. The Union Pacific Rail Road is comfortable with the project recommendations.
- Dave Beckhouse, Federal Transit Administration: The Federal Transit Administration is comfortable with the project recommendations and wants to continue working with RTD on developing a baseline alternative and service plans. The agency also wants to continue discussing whether the project should carry one or two Alternatives into the DEIS and how New Starts will be discussed in the document, as it is a key element in FTA's decision-making.

After all of the AWG and LGT representatives commented on the project recommendations, Louise Smart concluded the discussion by noting that agencies can provide additional input during the project's comment period.

Agency Comment Period

In addition to the comments provided during the workshop, Cooperating and Participating Agencies also have the opportunity to provide comments in writing within 15 calendar days. Louise Smart reviewed the key procedural aspects of the third agency comment period:

- Comments are due by Friday, March 2, 2007.
- Agencies are requested to focus their comments specifically on the Detailed Evaluation recommendations, although they may also comment on other issues.
- Agencies should submit their comments (on their own letterhead or on the comment form, which was distributed at the meeting and emailed before and after the meeting) to Louise Smart by email to: shortsmart@aol.com; or by mail to: Louise Smart, CDR Associates, 100 Arapahoe, Suite 12, Boulder CO 80302; or by fax to: Louise Smart, 303-442-7442.
- Agency representatives are requested to provide a single set of written comments for their agency. Comments from different agency officials and staff should be consolidated.

- Louise Smart will compile and organize the agency comments. She will then forward them to RTD, the Project Team, and FTA for review. The LGT and AWG will receive a compilation of the agency comments.

Next Steps

In addition to the comment period, Liz Telford identified the following next steps for the AWG and LGT:

- The fourth Agency Milestone Workshop (the fourth combined meeting of the AWG and LGT) will be held when RTD and FTA are ready to recommend a Preferred Alternative.
- The next LGT meeting will be held in April. Julie McKay will confirm the date, time, and location with the group. [Note: The next LGT meeting will be Tuesday, April 3, 2007.]
- The Public Involvement team will send a schedule of IFT meetings, including locations, to the LGT when it is available.

Meeting Participants

1. Evania Archuleta	Office of U.S. Senator Wayne Allard
2. Tim Baldwin	RTD FasTracks Gold Line Team
3. Dave Beckhouse	Federal Transit Administration
4. Bob Boot	RTD FasTracks Gold Line Team
5. Rena Brand	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
6. Bill Brunskill	Union Pacific Rail Road
7. Shelley Cook	City of Arvada
8. Crissy Fanganello	City and County of Denver
9. Skip Fischer	Adams County, Commission
10. Rick Garcia	City and County of Denver, Council
11. Karen Good	City and County of Denver
12. Melanie Kaknes	Colorado Division of Wildlife
13. Bob Kochevar	City and County of Denver
14. Bob Manwaring	City of Arvada
15. Julie McKay	RTD FasTracks Gold Line Team
16. Judy Montero	City and County of Denver, Council
17. Andy Mountain	RTD FasTracks Gold Line Team
18. Steve Nguyen	City of Wheat Ridge
19. Kevin Nichols	City of Arvada
20. Jody Ostendorf	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
21. Wally Pulliam	RTD Board
22. Mike Ramsey	Federal Railroad Administration
23. John Schwab	Colorado Department of Transportation
24. Louise Smart	RTD FasTracks Gold Line Team
25. Stephanie Syner	City and County of Denver, Council
26. Jonathan Spencer	RTD FasTracks Gold Line Team
27. Liz Telford	RTD FasTracks Gold Line Team
28. Don Ulrich	RTD FasTracks Gold Line Team
29. Vicki Vargas-Madrid	Colorado Division of Wildlife
30. Ashland Vaughn	RTD FasTracks Gold Line Team
31. Kirk Webb	Colorado Department of Transportation