



## NORTHWEST RAIL GOVERNMENTS TEAM MEETING SUMMARY

January 30, 2008  
NITA Building  
Louisville, Colorado  
8:00 – 10:00 a.m.

### Goals

- Update the Governments Team on recent agency developments and progress in addressing Northwest Corridor issues
- Review corridor-wide issues discussed in second series of station planning workshops and preliminary station concept plans

### Welcome and Introductions

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Chris Quinn, RTD FasTracks Northwest Rail Project Manager, opened the meeting by welcoming all of the participants and extending a particular welcome to the new members. Following this welcome, Tim Baldwin of the Project Team reviewed the purpose of the meeting, which is to provide updates on Northwest Rail corridor issues and the station planning process. Following an overview of the agenda, Julie McKay, Project Team, asked participants to introduce themselves and then invited Chris Quinn to share RTD updates.

### RTD UPDATES

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#### *Union Pacific Negotiations*

Chris Quinn provided an update on the status of negotiations between RTD and the Union Pacific (UP). Challenges have arisen in the negotiation process, notably around RTD's acquisition of certain portions of the East Corridor Right-of-Way (ROW) and the proposed site of the commuter rail maintenance facility (36<sup>th</sup> street yards). Consequently, RTD is pursuing other options to some UP properties originally planned for FasTracks, including the option of using RTD's Platte bus facility for the maintenance facility.

In terms of the Northwest Rail corridor, the affected section is the shared corridor from Denver Union Station (DUS) to Pecos Street, where the Northwest Rail then splits off from the Gold Line. Should RTD be ultimately unable to use the UP ROW in this section, it will need to consider utilizing the BNSF or some other ROW for this portion of the line. The Gold Line project is currently evaluating



alternative refinements to this segment, as this section of track falls under the prevue of the Gold Line Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

### ***Northwest Rail Project Schedule***

The impacts of the UP situation to the Northwest Rail study schedule should be further known following the February 12, 2008, FasTracks Monitoring Committee meeting. RTD anticipates that there will be a 6-12 month delay in the environmental studies for four FasTracks corridors (East, North Metro, Gold, and Northwest Rail). The Northwest Rail schedule will be impacted because it will need to use the results of the Gold Line study. However, at this juncture, it does not appear that the opening of the corridor (which is expected in late 2014 or early 2015) will be delayed.

## **NORTHWEST RAIL CORRIDOR ISSUES**

### ***Fencing***

After agency updates, Chris Quinn provided an update on fencing for the Northwest Rail corridor. In December, members of the US 36 Mayors and Commissioners Coalition (MCC) participated in a meeting with RTD about fencing. The current RTD policy is that fences are required in areas where train speeds are 30 mph or higher. This policy is based strictly on operational considerations and is driven by safety and liability concerns; it does not factor in land use issues, such as those present on the Northwest Rail corridor.

As a result of the December meeting, RTD will convene a fencing sub-committee of the Northwest Rail Governments Team. To initiate the effort, RTD will first review the FasTracks fencing guidelines with all of the district local governments. The fencing sub-committee will then begin its work. RTD anticipates three meetings of the group, the first of which will be held in March 2008 and will be aimed at reviewing the RTD guidelines in the context of the Northwest Rail Corridor. The subsequent meetings will produce a recommended plan for fencing treatments for the corridor.

### ***Quiet Zones***

Bob Boot, RTD FasTracks Quiet Zone Team, distributed the Quiet Zone Work Plan which outlines the process RTD will use to support local communities in Quiet Zone implementation. Comments on the work plan are welcome and are to be submitted to RTD by February 15, 2008. For the Northwest Rail corridor, Julie McKay will collect comments and forward them to RTD, so that the corridor team and the FasTracks Quiet Zone team can both be privy to them.



Bob Boot also reported that the FasTracks Quiet Zone team will convene a workshop on March 4, 2008. This day-long event will be structured similar to the one organized by US 36 Commuting Solutions in summer 2007. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) will provide an overview on Quiet Zones and lessons learned across the country. Then a panel will respond to questions prepared in advance. Representatives from Commerce City have also been invited to share their experiences as the first and only city in the state thus far to implement a Quiet Zone. Finally, there will be an opportunity to review comments on and progress to date in the implementation of the work plan.

At this juncture, the FasTracks team's inventory of all crossings is nearly complete. (Note: the Northwest Rail corridor inventory is complete.) It has gathered the necessary application forms from FRA. The team has also collected all of the required background information, including accident reports, existing data on traffic volumes, and proposed designs for crossings.

Initially it had been hoped that diagnostic reviews would be conducted in March; however, given the refinement to the alternatives in some corridors, this may need to be postponed. In the Northwest Rail corridor, this should not present a significant delay, as so little of the alignment is affected.

### Discussion

- Heather Balser, City of Louisville, suggested that the RTD Board be invited to the March 2008 FasTracks Quiet Zone Workshop. This recommendation was noted by the Project Team.
- In response to a question from the group, Bob Boot noted that wayside horns require FRA approval, are reviewed every three to four years and can cost up to \$100,000 per crossing. As such, they are not necessarily the most cost-effective option. A wayside horn does not negate the need for advanced circuitry, so it does not reduce those costs.
- A concern was raised regarding the timing of the quiet zone process and Public Utilities Commission approval. Bob Boot clarified that any safety improvement for a crossing requires PUC approval. By the time the Record of Decision (ROD) is available and the anticipated Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is issued for the environmental study, the designs will be at a 15% level. This will allow for adequate time to issue the notice of intent for Quiet Zones. Close coordination with the other corridors will be necessary to ensure that the PUC application is timed appropriately with the other processes.
- George Gerstle, Boulder County, asked whether the results of the Northwest Rail grade crossing analysis will be available before the March



Quiet Zone Workshop. Chris Quinn explained that the analysis results will not be ready until April 2008, which may require delaying the visit of the FRA. During their visit, jurisdictional representatives will be invited to share their input during joint visits to all of the applicable crossings.

- Kerry Bensman, City of Lafayette, sought clarification about the breakdown of responsibilities for the upgrades required at the crossings. Bob Boot explained that RTD is responsible for implementing all safety improvements associated with implementation of the NWR project. Generally, this will include quad gates and circuitry for constant warning time. Specific requirements for safety will vary by crossing and station area.

In addition to the safety improvements at grade crossings, RTD will be considering improvements that would make individual grade crossings "Quiet Zone" eligible to address noise impacts. RTD will institute noise mitigation measures in cases where the noise analysis finds 'severe' noise impacts or in some cases 'moderate' impacts, as defined by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The noise analysis results will help determine which grade crossings need upgrades due to noise impacts and are therefore the responsibility of RTD. (Note: Although not required, the Northwest Rail corridor will follow FTA requirements for noise to be consistent with the other corridors.)

Those crossings where the FTA noise impact requirements are not met (and thus do not mandate the grade crossing improvements that would make a crossing eligible for Quiet Zone mitigation) will be the responsibility of the local jurisdictions, if they wish to make specific crossings Quiet Zone eligible.

- Kerry Bensman explained that as jurisdictions plan their respective budgets, it would be helpful to know which costs will be borne by the jurisdictions and which will be covered by RTD. Bob Boot noted that cost per crossing varies, depending on what is required to meet the safety requirements. The Northwest Rail has budgeted approximately \$325,000 per grade crossing for standard safety upgrades. In addition to this, the Northwest Rail noise mitigation budget includes funds for mitigation at crossings where noise impacts are determined to be moderate and/or severe. In cases where noise impacts are not deemed 'moderate/severe,' and jurisdictions still choose to institute additional measures to bring a crossing to quiet zone status, the costs incurred cannot be applied to meet the local jurisdiction contribution to the FasTracks program.
- Gordon Pedrow, City of Longmont, asked whether the connection between Boulder and Longmont will be single or double track and how



that will affect travel times. Chris Quinn reported that RTD is currently holding discussions with BNSF to help make this determination.

**Next Step:** All comments on the Quiet Zone Work Plan are to be sent to Julie McKay ([jmckay@mediate.org](mailto:jmckay@mediate.org)) by February 15, 2008.

## Station Planning Process

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### ***Corridor-Wide Issues***

Lissa Myers, Project Team, reported that since the October 2007 Governments Team meeting, two series of station planning workshops have been held with each of the communities along the corridor. The discussions have yielded some cross-cutting issues, including:

- Parking: The sense that there is either too little or too much parking in specific station areas. This impression is due, in part, to the absence of 2035 model run data.
- Property Acquisition: RTD's legal restrictions regarding property acquisition, partial acquisitions, and residual space.
- FasTracks Station Budget: Budgeting for the stations, particularly the breakdown between the responsibility of the jurisdiction and the responsibility of RTD.

*Note:* See PowerPoint presentation for further explanation of these issues.

### **Discussion**

- Matt Lutkus, City of Westminster, suggested that the parking requirements for individual stations should not be looked at in isolation. There is a need to share information among jurisdictions regarding plans for parking spaces so that each jurisdiction can take that information into consideration in their own station design process.
- Audrey Debarros, US 36 Commuting Solutions, asked whether the outcomes of the RTD Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) workshop that were held the previous year were incorporated into the station planning process. Lissa Myers reported that at the first round of station planning workshops, each group reviewed the TOD recommendations to assess if they were still relevant. The RTD TOD staff is also looking at the station plans and providing feedback, so they are being considered internally as well.

- A group member asked whether the budget for each station is driven by parking demand or is it a set budget. Chris Quinn noted that the original station budgets were based on parking estimates at each station, plus the additional 1,000 spaces for the corridor. The budgets, consequently, do reflect the parking demand for each station.
- Lissa Myers noted that the 2035 modeling numbers are not yet available as RTD is waiting on travel time estimates from BNSF. Once the information is available, it can be plugged into the model to generate more precise parking estimates. This information will then be used to further refine the station concept plans in each area.

### ***Track Design Update***

Kim Proia, Project Team, prefaced the station concept plan presentations with an update on track alignment at the stations. She explained the evolution of track alignment at the stations, noting the necessity to avoid safety hazards resulting from the gap between the floor and the platform and the need to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

To bridge the gap, the Project Team looked at moveable platforms and contacted other agencies using those platforms. This would entail using a plate on top of platform that would come down and bridge that gap. With the frequency of the trains on the corridor, there was concern about the potential for wear and tear with the regular movement of the platform. Another option that was considered is that of rubber filler. It was determined that this would not be able to sustain the impact of large loads, such as the 12-foot wide Boeing 737 fuselages that pass through the corridor.

In light of the limitations of the afore-mentioned options, run-around tracks were considered as a possibility. In this case, freight cars would continue through the center and commuter rail would come off on adjacent track to drop off passengers on the platform. Initially these were looked at in conjunction with an 800 foot platform length to accommodate an eight-car train. From point of switch to point of switch this would cover almost 1800 feet. Boulder (Transit Village), Louisville, and Longmont, were challenged to accommodate this, as the platform needs to be on tangent track. To reduce tangent length, it is now proposed that platform length be reduced to 400 feet, which would accommodate a four-car train. While higher capacity is not anticipated by 2035, should higher capacity be required in the future, the frequency of trains could be increased or even a double-decker vehicle could be considered. After analyzing the range of options, it was determined that the bypass (or run-around) tracks would be the most appropriate track design to pursue.

## Discussion

Kim Proia noted the following points in response to questions posed by the Governments Team:

- With the addition of the run around tracks to the existing track, there are some Right of Way exceedences at stations, most of which are captured in the RTD park-n-Rides at the stations.
- Grade-separated pedestrian bridges or tunnels will be provided for pedestrians to cross over the tracks.
- In terms of a possible Denver-Boulder express train, the intention at the moment is to stop at each station, however, the track design does not negate this possibility in the future.
- The normal freight cars are wider than the commuter rail vehicles, so it is not just the frequency of a wide load freight train that is of concern, but rather the difference between the width of a normal freight car and the width of a standard commuter rail car.

## ***Preliminary station concept plans***

To update all of the communities along the corridor on station planning in each area, representatives from each community presented their preliminary station concept plans to the group. These are subject to change as the station planning process moves forward.

### Longmont (Downtown Longmont Station)

Phil Greenwald, City of Longmont, presented the station concept plan for downtown Longmont. Similar to other jurisdictions along the corridor, Longmont had initial concern over the amount of parking shown in the draft station design, as the City wants to adopt a more TOD-based model, which would entail more scattered parking, will be pedestrian/biking friendly, and have easy bus access. Phil Greenwald also reported that, with the shorter platform length, RTD is able to avoid the station extending into Main Street.

## Questions

- *On the left side of the station, is that a grade separated crossing or an at-grade crossing?* This is already grade separated. Ideally, the City would like to have structured parking in the area just to the east of it.
- *How much of the parking demand in downtown Longmont will be coming from other counties?* This is still to be estimated. One of the reasons that



the City is looking at a Boston Avenue connection off of Highway 119 is to capture some of the traffic coming from the east. [Note: RTD is currently considering the option of charging parking fees for residents out of the district. This could be used as a management tool to regulate parking if a park-n-Rid becomes overwhelmed].

- *In Fort Collins they have a Transit Oriented Development overlay zone. Have local jurisdictions looked at existing zoning to implement high density planning?* The City has made significant progress in its planning for TOD in this area.

#### Boulder (Gunbarrel Area, Transit Village, 63rd/Arapahoe)

Martha Roskowski, City of Boulder, and George Gerstle, Boulder County, reviewed the status of station designs for the three Boulder stations: Gunbarrel Area, Transit Village and 63rd/Arapahoe.

##### *Gunbarrel*

In Gunbarrel, a location has not yet been selected, as the one previously under consideration is no longer a possibility. To aid in the selection process, RTD is carrying out a pro/con analysis of the three potential sites. Some of the variables that will be considered are local transit access (particularly connectivity with the BOLT), local traffic circulation, and proximity to population/employment centers.

##### *Transit Village*

The City of Boulder went through an extensive planning process in collaboration with RTD, so a lot of design work went into the City's area plan. The Transit Village Station is a part of this larger plan. The City likes that the updated station design allows access to the station from both sides of the station, though the preference is for an underpass rather than overpass. The City's plan promotes a hierarchy of uses: pedestrians have priority, followed by bicycles, and then cars.

Among the issues that still need work are bus connectivity, the Goose Creek bridge, and parking configurations (parking in this area needs to be 'right-sized'). The City would also like to have partnership conversations with RTD and private landowners to try to reach willing-seller agreements whenever possible in property acquisition. The City also wants to be sure that the environmental clearance required for the footprint does not become a de facto build alternative.

##### *63<sup>rd</sup>/Arapahoe*

This is a proposed station which is not funded by FasTracks. The City would like to see the station built, however the downside is that it will add some travel time. The upside is that it would serve the eastern side of the City and Boulder County.

#### Louisville (Downtown Louisville Station)



Paul Wood, City of Louisville, reviewed the map of the station area and noted that this is the heart of Louisville's revitalization area. He raised the concern that there appears to be a disconnect between the station planning process and the revitalization process. The station design shows a predominant emphasis on surface parking. While the transit platform is consistent with the process, this is only one of the goals of the revitalization area. Louisville appreciates the staggered platform design which connects the platform with downtown.

Given the size and space constraints of the station area, Louisville would like to look at how it is going to preserve existing neighborhoods and connect the station to the mixed use development envisioned for downtown Louisville. The City is concerned that surface parking minimizes the ability to address other planning principles.

### Questions

- *Have ridership numbers from Lafayette been included in the parking calculations?* The parking range in downtown Louisville is from 500 to 900 spaces. This demand will be further refined based on the DRCOG regional model. The 2035 estimates are to accommodate demand at this station, including travelers from elsewhere in Boulder County.
- *The 2015 estimates are lower than the 2035 estimates, so what is the phasing employed by RTD? Does the agency purchase land up front or later?* RTD will only be purchasing land to accommodate the 2015 parking demand, but has to environmentally clear the land that would be needed to accommodate the 2035 demand. In order to determine if a parking area should be surface or structure, RTD conducts a cost-benefit analysis. If it is more expensive to acquire land and build surface parking lots than to build a structure, then the agency will consider a structure. In this corridor RTD is not required to apply the FTA cost-effectiveness formula for the project, so there are opportunities for cost sharing here that are not possible elsewhere.
- The jurisdictions should look at winter-type patterns. It is critical that transit connections are considered, as alternate modes of transportation such as bikes are used less frequently in the winter months.
- Chuck Sisk and other City representatives expressed concern about the estimated parking demand at the downtown Louisville station. In particular, the City is concerned about the possible influx of parking into the downtown area.

### Broomfield (Flatiron, 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue)



Debra Baskett, City and County of Broomfield, presented the station plans for the Flatiron and 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue stations.

- *Flatiron:* At Flatiron there is an existing Park and Ride, and pedestrian underpass. This station is a funded FasTracks station. Broomfield has requested that the Project Team to move the platform a bit north to improve the connection with the Park and Ride.
- *116<sup>th</sup> Avenue:* The 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue station will serve the redevelopment area. Broomfield asks that RTD integrate planning for the Northwest Rail and the US 36 improvements (Bus Rapid Transit) and is concerned that this is not happening. Overall, Broomfield feels that the process is in 'a positive place' and will expect to talk further about parking in the area, including rail/BRT parking and parking on both sides of US 36.

Westminster (104<sup>th</sup>/Church Ranch, 88<sup>th</sup>/Harlan, 71<sup>st</sup> & Lowell)

John Carpenter, City of Westminster, presented the station plans for the three Westminster stations:

- *104<sup>th</sup>/Church Ranch:* In this area there is a proposed BRT station and a commuter rail station within walking distance of each other, so the City of Westminster would like the project team to position the station as close to the BRT as possible. There are also a lot of planned trail connections in this area that the City would like to maximize.
- *88<sup>th</sup>/Harlan:* This station is not a FasTracks-funded station. The City is developing a plan that will include structured parking (rather than the surface parking presented in the station design). Also, the City would like to move the station platform farther west without affecting the intersection at Harlan and would like to include a bridge that would allow people to go over tracks. The City prefers that parking be located on north side of 88<sup>th</sup> Avenue.
- *71<sup>st</sup> & Lowell:* In South Westminster, the City is working on a redevelopment project. The City wants to connect the South Westminster to the park on the south side of the tracks by use of a plaza. The City strongly supports cooperative efforts with the private sector and RTD to look at different parking options in this area.

To conclude the discussion, Julie McKay summarized the main themes from the jurisdictional presentations on the station planning process:

- **Station Area Parking:** There is a need for station parking to be site-specific, based on demand and integrated with community goals and principles.



- Corridor-Wide Parking: There is a need to consider the corridor-wide interplay among stations for parking demand and the impacts of individual station plans on other stations along the corridor.
- Environmental Evaluation: There is a need to fully understand the implications of the environmental footprint for the build of the station and on communicating about the station planning process with the public.

**Next Steps:** The Project Team will continue working with the local communities to refine the station concept plans in each area and will contact each of the jurisdictions about their feedback on the station concept plans. The Project Team will also consider the suggestion to conduct a meeting to discuss parking at the corridor-wide level. The next round of station planning workshops, if needed, will be held in spring 2008.

### **Summary and Next Steps**

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To close the meeting, Chris Quinn summarized the next steps, noting that RTD would like to conduct a joint workshop with the Northwest Rail Governments Team and state and federal Agencies at the end of March 2008 to review the development of the project alternatives, including the Purpose and Need. (*Note:* This workshop will likely take place in April 2008.)

### **Meeting Handouts**

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- Northwest Rail Environmental Evaluation, Governments Team, January 30, 2008, PowerPoint presentation (two handouts)
- FasTracks Quiet Zone Work Plan
- Northwest Rail Cross Sections (station platform, runaround track progression)

*Note:* This meeting summary was not reviewed by RTD or meeting participants.