**NATA Board Meeting Minutes**

**September 24, 2020**

**7:30-9:00am**

**Zoom Virtual Meeting**

**Meeting Recording:** [**https://youtu.be/IgyUL3oa1RY?t=887**](https://youtu.be/IgyUL3oa1RY?t=887)

**Welcome and introductions by Chair Julie Mullica. Instructions to sign-in via the Chat function.**

**NATA Members (who signed in)**

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| **Deb Durand** | ACREP | **Tim Williams** | Federal Heights Staff |
| **Eva Henry** | Adams County Comm. | **Kevin Ash** | Frederick |
| **Chris Chovan** | Adams County Staff | **Joan Peck** | Longmont Council |
| **Kristin Sullivan** | Adams County Staff | **Phil Greenwald** | Longmont Staff |
| **Greg Mills** | Brighton Mayor | **Julie Mullica** | Northglenn Council |
| **Sarah Grant** | Broomfield Staff | **Brook Svoboda** | Northglenn Staff |
| **Pat Quinn** | Broomfield Mayor | **Carson Priest** | SCMN |
| **Kevin Standbridge** | Broomfield Staff | **Karen Stuart** | SCMN |
| **Nicole Frank** | Comm. City Mayor Pro Tem | **Tammy Herreid** | SCMN |
| **Brent Soderlin** | Commerce City Staff | **Jessica Sandgren** | Thornton Mayor Pro Tem |
| **Joe Wilson** | Commerce City Staff | **Kent Moorman** | Thornton Staff |
| **Todd Fessenden** | Erie Staff | **John Voelz** | Westminster Staff |
| **Malcolm Fleming** | Erie Staff |  |  |

**SCMN Members (who signed in)**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Pat Monacelli** | Broomfield Chamber | **Michelle Martin** | RS&H |
| **Jennifer Carpenter** | Michael Baker Int’l | **Myron Hora** | WSP |
| **Joyce Downing** | Northglenn Council |  |  |

**Agency Partners (who signed in)**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Rebecca White** | CDOT | **Jennifer Myklebust** | CDOT |
| **Jordan Rudel** | CDOT | **Nick Farber** | CDOT, HPTE |
| **Julie George** | CDOT | **Alex Gordon** | NFRMPO |
| **Andy Stratton** | CDOT | **Christina Zazueda** | RTD |
| **Paul Jesaitis** | CDOT | **Paul DesRocher** | RTD |
| **Jamie Grim** | CDOT | **Judy Lubow** | RTD Board |
| **Danny Herrman** | CDOT | **Troy Whitmore** | RTD Board |
| **Jan Rowe** | CDOT | **Vince Buzek** | RTD Board |
| **Dan Marcucci** | CDOT |  |  |

**Guests (who signed in)**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Randy Grauberger** | FRPP | **Jeremy Rodriguez** | Cong. Perlmutter |

* **Approval of August 27, 2020 NATA Meeting Minutes**

***Approval of August 27, 2020 Meeting Minutes:*** *Motion to approve minutes made by Joyce Downing (Smart Commute), seconded by Thornton Mayor Pro Tem Sandgren and approved unanimously.*

* **Smart Commute update: Karen Stuart, Carson Priest, Tammy Herreid  
  8th Annual TransForum 2020**

**Karen Stuart:** “My Baby Takes the N Line Train” is the theme for this year’s TransForum.TransForum will be held as a free virtual event this year (rather than in-person) on October 22 following the October NATA meeting. The agenda will feature the opening of the N Line and topics will include the history of the N Line, history of some of the station locations, background on the development of the project, highlights from construction, and information about artwork at each station. Additionally, Smart Commute is putting together a commemorative book. Keynote speaker is in process now.

**Tammy Herreid:** If anyone has any good historical photos from any of the stations, we’d like to include them in the book. Historical photos have been hard to find.

**Chair Mullica:** Will the TransForum be on a different link, or on the same link as the NATA meeting?

**Karen Stuart:** There will be a second link, as we need to change the type of virtual meeting to accommodate more people.

* **RTD Directors Comments:** Director Vince Buzek, Director Judy Lubow

**District I Director Update:**

* **Director Lubow:**  As of yesterday, only one applicant; they are expecting more over the weekend, with the closing day Monday, September 28 by end of day.

**New General Manager:**

* **Director Lubow:** I’m very excited, personally, about our new General Manager. She has very strong recommendations. She is a self-described “people-person.”
* **Director Buzek:** We have been in the middle of negotiating her contract. We’ve been meeting regularly with the GM Search Subcommittee, and doing a lot of work in that. We expect her in very early November, pending finalizing her contract and her providing notice to her employer.

**N Line Opening**

* **Director Buzek:** I’ve heard many reports from people riding the N Line.It’s a great train line, and hope it’s been a good experience. It’s free until Sunday night, and Local Fare from end to end for at least six months. The opening was unusual; people were spread out. Opening a commuter rail line in a pandemic has not happened before.
* **Director Lubow:** It is remarkable that we had the opening that we did. The N Line is a terrific line. Its an achievement.
* **Director Buzek:** We have not forgotten that we have 5.5 miles to go. The N Line is not complete.

**COVID Service Plan** *(interjected after Front Range Rail Commission Update)*

* In April, RTD started a pandemic service plan in response to significant ridership reductions due to the pandemic. We will have a new service plan that keeps levels the same across the system, but allocates higher service to higher-demand routes. Our area isn’t seeing any reductions to our service. Public comment on this new plan closes October 14, and the service plan proposals are on the website. The Board will vote October 22. Go to the website to provide your comments. We are calling this the “Pandemic Service Plan 2” just so that it’s clear it’s still temporary.

**Discussion:**

* **Chair Mullica:** It was a strange opening, but also very good. The speakers were very good. Many people on this call have fought for a long time to make sure the N Line opened. Thank you for your commitment. Additionally, the artwork was great all along the line.
* **Mayor Pro Tem Sandgren:** I was impressed by the opening. It was unfortunate that we opened in a pandemic, but a great accomplishment none the less. I wanted to thank Kent and Brooke especially for their involvement in this project.
* **Front Range Rail Commission Update, Randy Grauberger**
  + **Randy Grauberger:** The last time we made a presentation to you was last summer. We’ve been doing survey work since then, and we’re seeing very strong support for this Front Range Rail project. Our Commission has been stable, aside from the addition of DJ Mitchel of BNSF (a strong addition to this project). Earlier in this week, the commission received a CRISI Grant from the federal government, $548,000, allowing Commission to finalize some planning. We should be prepared for NEPA process next. In the survey work and online meetings, we asked pointedly where people would want the rail to go. In the survey, Downtown Denver received 59%, DIA received 32%, and the Denver Tech Center received 8% as Front Range Rail alignment. The majority of trip purposes stated by survey respondents showed strong interest in recreational travel, along with commuting (although *modeling* shows majority of trips would be for commuting). Write-in comments were strong majority positive, and only one comment in over 500 mentioned COVID. Modeling shows strongest ridership on Boulder alignment. Using modeled ridership numbers, the Front Range Passenger Rail on the BNSF alignment would be the sixth-most ridden passenger rail in the country. Modeling is showing strong improvement with a per-mile price drop (to keep system in alignment with fares across the country), and modeling is also showing few end-to-end trips, with most trips happening within smaller segments of the overall line. Currently, Amtrak is proposing a “Network Modernization Program” in the new transportation reauthorization bill that would give dedicated funds to passenger rail improvements, with the Front Range Passenger Rail being “top of the list,” potentially giving Colorado $2.1B. Project is currenting in “Level 2” stage, where final alternatives are identified prior to NEPA. Three alignments are still under review, and all three are technically feasible; the selection may come down to partnerships (CDOT, RTD, C-470, etc.). All three alignments are potentially going to be under NEPA review. Polling showed strong support, even in willingness to approve higher sales tax. A rail district or authority will likely need to be created by the legislature, although that has yet to be determined.

**Discussion:**

* + **Phil Greenwald:** I’ve heard that Amtrak is cutting long-haul services. What does this mean for this project?
  + **Randy Grauberger:** Ray Lang has been very upfront with our Commission. Amtrak’s ridership is down due to Coronavirus, just like every other agency. They will be going to a temporary three-days-a-week service plan for their long-haul routes, but they plan to return to full week service as ridership grows. It is Coronavirus related. They set record ridership in 2019 and were showing strong ridership in the beginning months of 2020.
  + **Malcom Fleming:** Is electric or diesel service planned? Also, how will you overcome the challenges of expanding service on the BNSF corridor, with how expensive it has been for RTD’s Northwest Rail?
  + **Randy Grauberger:** We are planning to start with diesel, and then possibly convert to electric. A diesel passenger train is still more greenhouse gas friendly than the cars it replaces. The cost of electrification is prohibitive to start. A lot of places start with diesel and then convert to electricity later on. For your second question, BNSF is at the table with us on this. Their representatives has changed the tone of BNSF’s participation since joining this Commission. There are opportunities on the horizon regarding BNSF that I can’t yet disclose publicly.
  + **Director Lubow:** The timing for Amtrak investing money in short-trip trains seems poor, given how they are cutting long-haul trips. How do they justify investing money in short-range services while cutting long-haul services?
  + **Randy Grauberger:** Amtrak is fully committed to their long-distance trains, and will be doing a capital improvement on then in the near future. Their new CEO continues to make strong plans, and a strong commitment to a return to 7-day service. Additionally, the proposal in the transportation reauthorization bill not only proposes funding for short-range passenger rail, but also funding for the rest of Amtrak’s network, including long-range rail. So far, there is unprecedented funding for passenger rail in this reauthorization bill.

* **HPTE/CDOT update on I-25 projects and funding opportunities, Nick Farber, Paul Jesaitis, Andy Stratton**
  + **Paul Jesaitis:** In 2016, CDOT invested $65M in I-25 N (84th-104th) to introduce a tolled express lane. This project did help with congestion, but also introduced safety issues. CDOT is currently working on an $230M EA to look at this same segment, especially regarding 2012 PEL recommendations (one of which would introduce center-loading bus station). However, some new elements are introducing new factors (COVID, funding reductions, N Line opening). We want to address safety on this corridor in the near term. N I-25 and I-270 are both interrelated. For instance, if the bottle neck on I-270 is removed, what happens to I-25? We want to understand how one corridor effects another.
  + **Andy Stratton:** I-270 and I-25 are very interrelated. We don’t have the $230M due to budget cuts, so we can take a fresh look. We see that, as we improve I-270, we are creating more problems on N I-25. This modeling shows that congestion on I-270 will move to I-25, especially onto the ramp from I-270 to I-25. This shows us that the north area of I-25 is critical to making I-270 successful. Even if we improve I-270, I-270 will still congest without improvements on N I-25. The US-36 and I-270 ramps join N I-25 within the same small segment of highway – three systems joining into one, which is about 40% of the traffic volume in this area. Looking back at the $230M PEL on I-25, at the Thornton Park-n-Ride, the N Line opening a mile to the east of this station may change ridership demands in the future, and what future transit accommodations are needed on I-25. There is also an “Express Lanes Master Plan Direct Connections” plan for the I-270/US-36/I-25 interchange. A high-level concept is under review currently. Several funding opportunities are under review currently.
  + **Nick Farber**: We are moving forward with a TIFIA (Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act) loan on I-25. Provides direct loans, loan guarantees, and standby lines of credit. TIFIA is a favorable loan program. There is significant flexibility and good interest rates. However, only one third of the project costs can be borrowed. CODT is working on a Letter of Interest, which kicks off the process. If all goes as expected, a loan will be in place in 2021.
  + **Andy Stratton**: Our next steps are to understand the I-270 traffic a bit better, discussing the RTD bus service plan, complete T&R studies, evaluate the Direct Connections plan, and then have a design charette to evaluate the N I-25 improvements with stakeholders in 2021.

**Discussion**:

* + **Commissioner Karen Stuart**: As your CDOT Transportation Commissioner, I’ll be watching this TIFIA process closely. Part of this process takes in revenue from Segments 2-8 to pay back the loans ($154M goes to improvements north of us). There are no improvements for Segments 2 or 3 immediately. However, as projects become available (for instance Segment 2 and 3 projects as we return to them), these projects may be eligible for this funding as well. This is probably the most expedient way we will get any work done on these segments. Toll revenues generated by these northern managed lanes segments will then be paying into this. I’m going to watch this very closely. We’ve always maintained that the revenues that are collected in our segment should go back into our segment to make improvements.
  + **Paul DesRocher:** Is the $230M for the I-25/Thornton PnR median station design/implementation alone or for the whole I-25 construction in that area?
  + **Paul Jesaitis:** The improvements as part of the $230M package include widening I-25 in addition to the median station, from 84th-104th, and extending the auxiliary lane ramp. It’s for the whole package, not just the median station, although the median station is about $100M of the overall costs.
  + **Chair Mullica**: This is an important project, especially due to safety issues and congestion. How can local governments be involved earlier in the process? We need to make sure we’re bringing the voice of our residents.
  + **Andy Stratton**: We are bringing local governments into the design charette. We need to do the preliminary work. We’re involving local governments in the I-270 project as well, so that we have your input.
  + **Phil Greenwald**: I wanted to point out the comment made in the presentation, about moving one bottle neck from one part of the metro to another as we build improvements. I hope this reminds all of us that we it’s really difficult to build our way out of congestion. Unless we want to look like California or Phoenix. I know that CDOT is working with their division of rail. N Line isn’t going to see the ridership if we keep trying to reduce congestion. I just wanted to remind everyone of that, and see how CDOT was working with the division of bus and rail on this project.
  + **Paul Jesaitis**: That’s a great comment. We are working with RTD, and we’re also working to price our Express Lanes. We will be looking at transportation as a system rather than just looking at a highway. I agree with you.
* **Photo collage from N Line Opening Celebrations**

*Smart Commute shared photo collage from N Line opening activities:* [*https://youtu.be/IgyUL3oa1RY?t=6459*](https://youtu.be/IgyUL3oa1RY?t=6459)

**Meeting adjourned at 9:08 am.**

Full meeting record is available: <https://youtu.be/IgyUL3oa1RY?t=887>

* Smart Commute Update: <https://youtu.be/IgyUL3oa1RY?t=1024>
* RTD Directors Comments: <https://youtu.be/IgyUL3oa1RY?t=1307>
* Front Range Rail Commission Update: <https://youtu.be/IgyUL3oa1RY?t=1770>
* HPTE/CDOT update on I-25 projects and funding opportunities: <https://youtu.be/IgyUL3oa1RY?t=4512>
* Photo collage from N Line Opening Celebrations: <https://youtu.be/IgyUL3oa1RY?t=6459>