

AGENDA

**RTD Accountability Committee
Finance Subcommittee
Wednesday, April 21, 2021
11:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
VIDEO/WEB CONFERENCE
Denver, CO**

1. Call to Order
2. April 7, 2021 Finance Subcommittee Meeting Summary (5 minutes)
(Attachment A)
3. RTD Financial Information (10 minutes)
(Attachment B) Ron Papsdorf
4. RTD Dashboard Draft Recommendation - Financial Information (15 minutes)
(Attachment C) Ron Papsdorf
5. RTD Presentation: NW Rail Corridor (15 minutes)
(Attachment D) Bill Van Meter and Henry Stopplecamp, RTD
6. NW Rail Discussion – Draft Recommendation (30 minutes)
(Attachment E) Rutt Bridges
7. Finance Subcommittee Work Plan Review (10 minutes)
(Attachment F) Rutt Bridges
8. Member Comment/Other Matters (5 minutes)
9. Next Meeting: May 5, 2021
10. Adjournment

ATTACH A

MEETING SUMMARY
RTD ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE-Finance Subcommittee
Wednesday, April 7, 2021
Note: Meeting held virtually via GoToMeeting

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Rutt Bridges
Dan Blankenship
Rebecca White
Krystin Trustman
Elise Jones
Chris Frampton

Deya Zavala
Lynn Guissing
Troy Whitmore
Deya Zavala
Julie Mullica

Others Present: Ron Papsdorf, Doug Rex, Matthew Helfant, Natalie Shishido, Angie Rivera-Malpiede, Erik Davidson, Debra Johnson, Bill Van Meter, Bill Sirois, Doug MacLeod, Brian Welch, Alex Hyde-Wright, George Gerstle, Mac Callison, John McKay, Sarah Grant, Michael Hughes, Kathleen Bracke, Kent Moorman, Nicole Carey, Peggy Catlin, Shelley Cook, Michael Davies.

Call to Order

Rutt Bridges called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m.

March 17, 2021 Finance/Operations Joint Meeting Summary

The meeting summary was accepted, noting a correction to remove the duplicate “transfer for trip”.

RTD Dashboard Status Report

Rebecca White introduced the topic and provided an overview. She stated that the Operations Subcommittee has been doing a lot work on performance measures and that the Finance Subcommittee should focus on financial transparency.

Deya Zavala stated that it makes a lot of sense for each subcommittee to focus on their part of the dashboard.

Rebecca White noted that she felt there were three specific categories for the Finance Subcommittee recommendations related to the dashboard:

- Simpler budget information that is also contextual – such as a one-page budget that is readily available through the dashboard;
- Easier to follow financial information on FasTracks; and
- Long-term vision and status of RTD’s use of federal stimulus funds.

Rutt Bridges also suggested information about performance parameters for each RTD line.

Deya Zavala asked about the challenge or opportunity the Committee is trying to unlock. For example, from an advocacy standpoint it can be very daunting to really understand the RTD budget.

Elise Jones agreed with the comments, with an emphasis on the idea that the first entry to the RTD web site and data should be the most digestible, with access to more detail for people that want to go deeper.

Rebecca White noted that it is important that the public be able to easily find information on the RTD web site to help them understand RTD's financial situation.

Unfinished FasTracks: NW Rail Discussion

Ron Papsdorf provided an overview of recent RTD discussions about next steps, including a renewed analysis of the corridor. RTD staff will present information at the next Finance Subcommittee meeting.

Elise Jones asked if the information and work associated with this effort feed in to or be useful for Front Range Passenger Rail.

Debra Johnson stated that RTD's intent is to collaborate and explore opportunities.

Elise Jones wanted to confirm that a decision hasn't been made about NW Rail but that RTD's process will help prepare for a decision.

Lynn Guissinger said that Amtrak has released a map of priority corridors and Front Range Passenger Rail is one of those corridors. It could open potential doors to a collaboration that might make NW Rail more feasible.

Rutt Bridges noted that he feels one of the toughest issues to deal with is NW Rail. He hopes to spur some conversation and feedback about how to deal with it. He provided a presentation of the research he has been doing regarding potential cost, ridership and alternatives to NW Rail.

Krystin Trustman stated that express bus between Broomfield and Denver used to be a great option via park and ride access. She doesn't see NW Rail ever being affordable and supports Bus Rapid Transit.

Elise Jones expressed appreciation for all of the work and agreed that it is a big, tough issue. More work to do on addressing overall FasTracks operations sustainability, even without NW Rail. She suggested some key components of a possible recommendation:

- Front Range Passenger Rail should follow the NW Rail alignment.
- RTD's renewed study is an important step to establishing a common set of assumptions for a regional discussion.
- Separate from NW Rail, BRT can be a good, cost-effective solution that should continue to be explored and implemented in a number of corridors anyway.

She asked if DRCOG could take Rutt Bridge's work, the research that's been done, what we've heard, etc. and draft a recommendation.

Lynn Guissinger stated that if people in the NW Corridor want Front Range Passenger Rail/NW Rail, then this might be a good time to pursue it.

Dan Blankenship noted that BRT is a great interim step. He asked if some Flat Iron Flyer ridership might move to NW Rail and if a phase of NW Rail to Boulder might be a good first step.

Bill Van Meter replied that it is a reasonable question, but that NW Rail and Flat Iron Flyer do serve different markets in the region and both are included in FasTracks.

Doug Rex noted for the group that the DRCOG Board of Directors has a policy position supporting federal funding for Front Range Passenger Rail.

Member Comment/Other Matters

Elise Jones raised a question from Monday's Governance Subcommittee meeting about whether the RTD Accountability Committee should weigh in on the State transportation funding proposal. In particular the importance of transit in the region and the state to achieving state goals and that the state should play a larger role in funding transit.

The next meeting will take place on April 21, 2021.

The meeting adjourned at 12:33 p.m.

ATTACH B

To: Members of the RTD Accountability Committee Finance Subcommittee

From: Ron Papsdorf, Director, Transportation Planning and Operations
(303) 480-6747 or rpapsdorf@drcog.org

Meeting Date	Agenda Category	Agenda Item #
April 21, 2021	Information	3

SUBJECT

RTD Financial Information

PROPOSED ACTION/RECOMMENDATIONS

N/A

ACTION BY OTHERS

N/A

SUMMARY

Staff have compiled information from adopted and amended RTD budgets from 2017 through 2021. We anticipate that the attached draft summary will form the basis for findings about RTD's finances as part of the final report.

Staff will also include a summary of the latest financial forecast and other financial information provided to the RTD Board, which can be found [here](#).

PREVIOUS DISCUSSIONS/ACTIONS

N/A

PROPOSED MOTION

N/A

ATTACHMENTS

Draft Financial Information Summary

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you need additional information, please contact Ron Papsdorf, Director, Transportation Planning and Operations, at 303-480-6747 or rpapsdorf@drcog.org.

RTD Financial Information

The RTD Accountability Finance Subcommittee has examined several aspects of the District's financial state in order to address several goals of the Committee's Scope of Work including:

- A review of recent financials from the district, including any recent audits and a thorough review of the agency's use of CARES Act stimulus funds
- A review of the district's short-term and long-term prioritization of resources to maximize the district's limited dollars for the benefit of taxpayers
- A determination of the long-range financial stability of the agency, and how the agency can achieve stability and growth while still meeting its core mission

The following report includes information on budget trends, debt obligation, COVID-19 relief spending, and the Fiscal Policy to inform the Committee's recommendations.

Budget Trends

The Finance Subcommittee reviewed the District's recent budget trends, including adopted and amended budgets from 2017 to 2021. Figure 1 displays the District's Operating and Non-Operating Revenue 2017-2021 and Figure 2 displays the District's Expenses 2017-2021. The budget is divided by three categories: Base System, FasTracks Project, and FasTracks Operations.

Overall, budgeted revenues have been generally flat and declined significantly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, although federal COVID-19 relief funds in 2020 and 2021 will offset those declines, and are not included in the budget information presented. The Base System Revenue was relatively consistent over the timeframe, with the exception of 2021.

The FasTracks Project Expenses have fluctuated over time, and are declining in the most recent years with the completion of the N Line. FasTracks Operating Expenses have increased over time as new projects become operational. However, budgeted expenses have been gradually declining since 2017, driven by significant reductions in FasTracks Project appropriations. Base System and FasTracks Operations budgeted expenses have generally increased during that same time period.

See budget tables for Operating and Non-Operating Revenue as well as Operating Expenses, Debt Service, Capital Expenditures, Fund Balances for additional information.

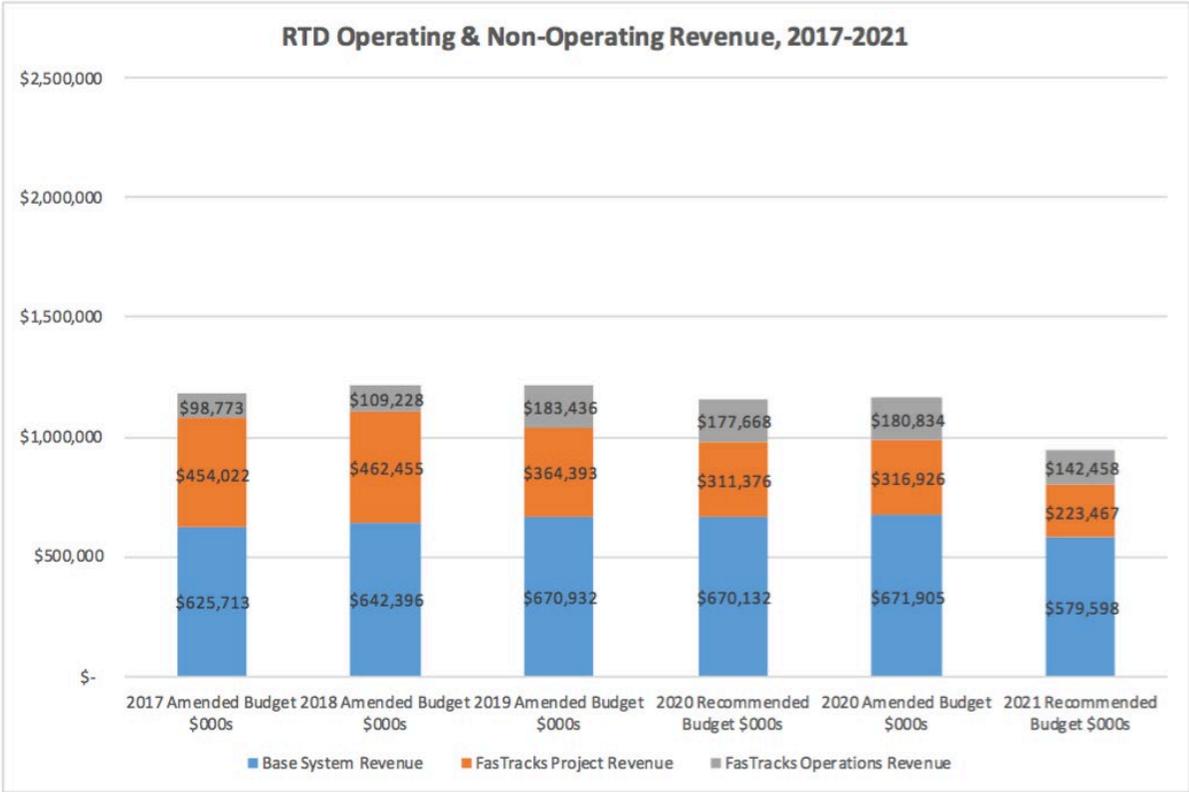


Figure 1

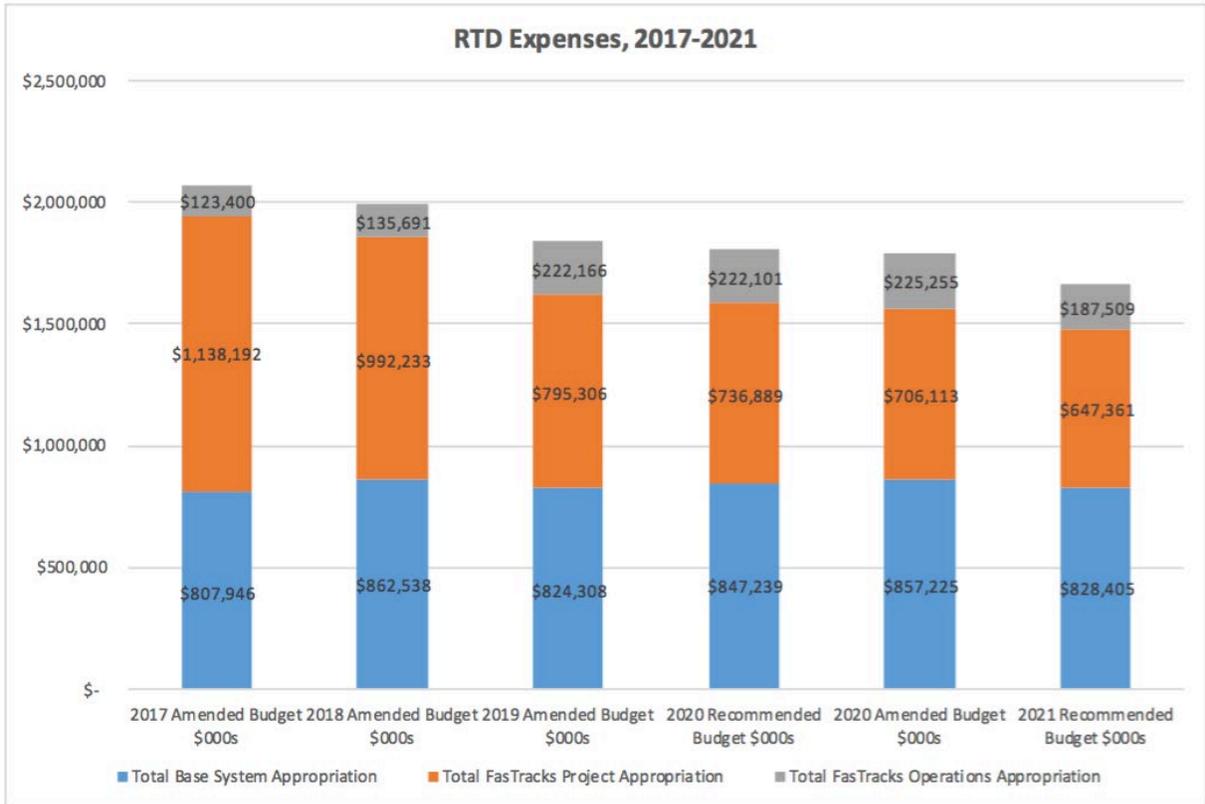


Figure 2

Debt Obligation

Since voters approved FasTracks in 2004, RTD has issued a number of debt instruments for construction, equipment acquisition, and operations, as well as issuances for Base System operations. Table 1 summarizes RTD's current debt obligations, including bonds, certificates of participation, and lease purchase agreements. Appendix ____ shows RTD's current debt service schedule, including principal and interest through the retirement of all existing debt issuances organized by sales tax secured obligations and existing appropriations obligations.

Table 1

Instrument	Description	Purpose	Amount	Maturity
2007A Bonds	Base System Sales Tax Revenue Refunding Bonds	<i>refunding, paying and discharging certain of the District's outstanding sales tax revenue bonds</i>	\$69.8m	2024
2007A Bonds	FasTracks Sales Tax Revenue Refunding Bonds	<i>refunding, paying and discharging certain of the District's outstanding sales tax revenue bonds</i>	\$363.7m	2036
2010A Bonds	FasTracks Tax-Exempt Revenue Bonds	<i>financing additional costs of improvements, facilities, vehicles and equipment for a transit expansion plan known as FasTracks and funding a reserve fund, costs of issuance and termination payments required in connection with managing certain forward starting swaps previously entered into by the District</i>	\$79.1m	2038
2010B Bonds	FasTracks Taxable Revenue (Build America) Bonds	<i>financing additional costs of improvements, facilities, vehicles and equipment for a transit expansion plan known as FasTracks and funding a reserve fund, costs of issuance and termination payments required in connection with managing certain forward starting swaps previously entered into by the District</i>	\$300.0m	2050
2012A Bonds	FasTracks Sales Tax Revenue Refunding Bonds	<i>financing additional costs of improvements, facilities, vehicles and equipment for a transit expansion plan known as FasTracks and funding capitalized interest and costs of issuance</i>	\$474.9m	2037
2013A Bonds	Base System Sales Tax Refunding Bonds	<i>refunding, paying and discharging certain of the District's outstanding sales tax revenue bonds as described herein and funding costs of the premium associated with a surety bond for deposit to the Bond Reserve Account and costs of issuance of the Bonds</i>	\$96.6m	2021
2013A Bonds	FasTracks Sales Tax Revenue Refunding Bonds	<i>refunding, paying and discharging certain of the District's outstanding sales tax revenue bonds as described herein and funding costs of issuance of the Bonds</i>	\$204.8m	2036
2016A Bonds	Sales Tax Revenue Bonds	<i>purpose of (a) financing additional costs of improvements, facilities and equipment for a transit expansion plan known as FasTracks (as further described herein, the "Project"), (b) funding capitalized interest, and (c) funding costs of issuance of the Bonds</i>	\$195.0m	2046
2017A Bonds	Sales Tax Revenue Bonds	<i>(a) retiring, discharging and cancelling the DUSPA Bond (as defined and further described herein, the "Project") and (b) funding costs of issuance of the Bonds</i>	\$82.9m	2040
2017B Bonds	FasTracks Sales Tax Revenue Bonds	<i>(a) retiring, discharging and cancelling the DUSPA Bond (as defined and further described herein, the "Project") and (b) funding costs of issuance of the Bonds</i>	\$119.5m	2036
2019A Bonds	FasTracks Sales Tax Bond Refunding	<i>(a) refunding, paying and discharging certain of the District's outstanding sales tax revenue bonds (as further defined and further described herein, the "Refunding Project") and (b) funding costs of issuance of the Bonds</i>	\$82.7m	2038

2010A COP	Tax Exempt Certificates of Participation	<i>(a) refund certain outstanding RTD certificates of participation, as more fully described herein, and (b) acquire, construct, install and improve certain equipment, vehicles, buildings and other capital projects, certain portions of which are to be leased from the Corporation by RTD pursuant to the Lease</i>	\$212.9m	2031
2010B COP	Taxable COP (Direct Pay Build America Bonds)	<i>(a) refund certain outstanding RTD certificates of participation, as more fully described herein, and (b) acquire, construct, install and improve certain equipment, vehicles, buildings and other capital projects, certain portions of which are to be leased from the Corporation by RTD pursuant to the Lease</i>	\$100.0m	2040
2013A COP	Certificates of Participation	<i>(a) refinance certain leased property by means of the refunding of certain outstanding RTD certificates of participation, as more fully described herein, and (b) finance the acquisition of buses and certain ticket vending machines which are to be leased from the Corporation by RTD pursuant to the Lease</i>	\$224.0m	2027
2014A COP	COP (North Metro Project)	<i>finance the acquisition, construction and installation of a portion of the North Metro Rail Line from Denver Union Station to 104th Avenue, including, without limitation, all real property and improvements related thereto, certain rights-of-way and easements, system elements, including communication, electricity, signals, electric signage, civil and structural elements, park-n-ride stations and certain other items of equipment, machinery and related property (the "2014A Project"). See "PLAN OF FINANCE." The property to be leased by the Corporation to the District will include the 2014A Project and certain rights-of-way and easements previously acquired by the District and leased by a Ground Lease dated the date of the execution and delivery of the 2014A Certificates (the "Ground Lease") to the Corporation</i>	\$440.9m	2044
2016 LPA	Lease Purchase Agreement	<i>34 articulated light rail vehicles</i>	\$74.5m	2022
2017 LPA	Lease Purchase Agreement	<i>57 light rail vehicles; 77 buses</i>	\$156.0m	2025
2020A COP	COP	<i>Refinance a portion of the leased property under the Lease by refunding certain outstanding certificates of participation to achieve interest rate savings</i>	\$63.4m	2031

Note that Base System (0.6% Sales Tax Obligations) debt payments of approximately \$20 million per year will reduce to \$10 million in 2022 and conclude in 2024. RTD has also refinanced much of its debt over the last several years to take advantage of lower interest rates and borrowing costs. After the full \$20 million in debt payment is retired in 2024, it is possible for the Base System Sale Tax obligation to go towards the FasTracks system. However, the Base System revenue will be subject to the TABOR “ratchet down” effect which is linked to RTD property values, and it is unclear how much impact this will have on the available revenue.

For the FY 2021 Budget, RTD estimates total Debt (principal) payments of \$87.8 million (\$63.9m Base System; \$23.9m FasTracks Project) and total interest expenses of \$175.7 million (\$14.3m Base System; \$161.4m FasTracks Project). The total principal and interest payments for 2021 is \$263.5 million, or approximately 16% of RTD’s total budget. However, for the 2021 budget, principal and interest payments make up about 40% of the Sales Tax and Use revenue.

Finally, RTD has begun the process to refinance all or portions of 2012A Bonds, 2012B Bonds, and TIFIA Bond to realize estimated total savings of approximately \$76 million over the remaining life of the bonds through the issuance of 2021A Bonds (taxable sales tax revenue bonds) and 2021B Bonds (tax-exempt revenue bonds) with maturity dates of 2037 and 2045 respectively.

COVID-19 Relief Spending

CARES Act Spending Review

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Trump on March 27, 2020. This over \$2 trillion economic relief package provides direct economic assistance for several facets of the American economy. The package included \$25 billion in direct relief for transit agencies to help them prevent, prepare for, and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. RTD received an award of approximately \$232 million. One of the items this Committee was tasked with is a review of recent financials from the district, including any recent audits and a thorough review of the agency's use of CARES Act stimulus funds. The RTD Accountability Committee consultant, North Highland evaluated RTD's CARES Act expenditures, which involved examining documents and interviewing key RTD staff. Taking this research into consideration, the Accountability Committee has reviewed RTD's use of those funds with the following findings:

- RTD utilized CARES funding in alignment with the earmarked intention for spending – to support operating costs and employee salaries in the interest of avoiding layoffs. Funds were reimbursed by the Federal government for the following two expense types:
 - Represented and Non-Represented Wages and Benefits: Employee wages for both unionized and non-union employees; roughly 64% of CARES funding drawn through September 2020.
 - Purchased Transportation – Bus OR CRT (“Commuter Rail Transit”): Externally contracted routes with Denver transportation partners; roughly 36% of CARES funding drawn through September 2020.
- Funding appears to have been spent in alignment with FTA intentions.
- RTD appears to have balanced provision of transportation options with responsibility for its workforce and regional economic stability in its funding decisions.
- RTD appears to have worked to implement cost cutting measures to reduce the funds required for continued operations as buoyed by CARES funding.
- RTD's use of CARES Act funds was not transparent or easily understandable.

For North Highland's complete Research Summary, see Appendix _____

CRRSAA and Overall Relief Spending

On December 27, the President signed the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021. In addition to Federal Fiscal Year appropriations, the Act includes Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA). Like the CARES Act, CRRSAA includes additional support for the nation's transit systems, specifically \$13.3 billion to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for urbanized area formula grants. On January 11, the FTA released the apportionments for the Federal funding through CRRSAA. The apportionment to RTD was approximately \$203.4 million.

RTD received approximately \$232 million in federal CARES Act funding in 2020. Along with service reductions, cost cutting measures including furlough days for non-represented staff, travel and training reductions, and deferred asset management projects, RTD was able to retain all employees during 2020 and add approximately \$80 million to reserve funds.

In anticipation of continued declines in ridership, farebox revenues, and sales and use tax receipts, RTD adopted its 2021 budget build on a continued service level of approximately 60% of pre-pandemic levels and a reduction of approximately 400 positions. The 2021 budget is \$1.66 billion, a reduction of \$125.3 million from the amended 2020 budget and did not assume any additional federal COVID-19 relief funds beyond the CARES Act.

Spending Recommendations

The RTD Accountability Committee offers the following recommendations to RTD on the use of these additional federal relief funds. The recommendations are aimed at stabilizing RTD operations, restoring services, rebuilding trust, attracting new and returning riders, and positioning the agency for strategic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Provide a transparent process and make priorities clear

RTD should provide full transparency during its process to consider its use of CRRSAA funds so that stakeholders and members of the public can track expenditures. RTD should clearly define its priorities for this funding, what issues are being addressed by additional funds, and the amount of funding allocated to each priority.

2. Strategically recall previously laid off front line employees

The Committee acknowledges and supports RTD's decision to recall approximately 200 direct-service employees. However, in keeping with the above recommendation, RTD should explain the amount of CRRSAA funding needed to recall these workers and what amount of funding is available for additional priorities. The focus of these recalls should be to ensure that RTD has capacity to restore quality transit service, particularly to transit-dependent communities as quickly as possible.

3. Share federal stimulus funding with other transit service providers in the metro area

There are several non-profit and community-based transit service providers in the RTD district. They supplement RTD's fixed-route and para transit services, often at lower cost than RTD could provide comparable service. As with RTD, these providers have been impacted by reduced ridership and revenues due to the COVID-19 pandemic and will benefit from CRRSAA funding.

4. Implement a reduced flat fare for 6 months to rebuild ridership and attract new riders

During the pilot program, use this time to explore other ways to improve affordability of existing and/or new pass programs, including LiVE, that can be put in place as a longer-term solution

5. Work to improve uptake and ease of use of passes

Allow flexibility in the EcoPass programs and contracts so that more neighborhoods and businesses can participate.

6. Offer free RTD parking and transit "Day Pass" benefits to anyone traveling to a COVID vaccination facility for a primary or 'second dose' shot

A printed or digital COVID immunization reservation acknowledgment would serve as an RTD "Day Pass" on the vaccine appointment day.

7. Implement an RTD trial ridership program by offering temporary free RTD rail or bus service for anyone receiving a COVID vaccination

Offer free RTD rail or bus service for anyone receiving a COVID vaccination, valid until three days after their second dose shot is due. After the second dose, they get another pass valid for 15 days of free rides. For customers who already have a monthly pass, RTD might allow a free pass renewal with proof of vaccination.

8. Leverage new partnerships

Develop, expand, and leverage existing and new partnerships to improve service efficiency and grow ridership. This can also provide cost-effective service in areas experiencing RTD service cuts and leverage local community investments in the transit system.

Fiscal Policy

RTD follows a fiscal policy approved by the Board of Directors annually or as necessary due to modification. The fiscal policy contains policies for revenue, investments, expenditures, capital improvements, fund balance, debt, budgeting, accounting and grants. For these areas, the 2021 Fiscal Policy remained largely unchanged.

The 2021 Fiscal Policy also includes COVID-19 Response Policies that provide guidance for reductions and for restoration. Guidance for reductions states that administrative and overhead costs be considered first and that service should not be reduced that current levels. The policy also states that RTD should not use FISA account balances for restoration except for prior Board approved projects. Restoration guidance also states that reserves shall be restored to three months if possible, as well as capital maintenance projects and service, as ridership allows.

Include in Appendices/ Attachments

- Budget Tables (2/17 Agenda Packet)
- RTD Debt Service Schedule (1/20 Agenda Packet)
- North Highland CARES Act Research Summary (12/16 Agenda Packet)
- Fiscal Policy (2/17 Agenda Packet)

ATTACH C

To: Members of the RTD Accountability Committee Finance Subcommittee

From: Ron Papsdorf, Director, Transportation Planning and Operations
(303) 480-6747 or rpapsdorf@drcoq.org

Meeting Date	Agenda Category	Agenda Item #
April 21, 2021	Discussion	4

SUBJECT

RTD Dashboard Draft Recommendation – Financial Information

PROPOSED ACTION/RECOMMENDATIONS

N/A

ACTION BY OTHERS

N/A

SUMMARY

Based on previous discussions by the Finance Subcommittee, staff has prepared a draft list of financial information to include in the recommendation. Staff seeks specific feedback and direction from the subcommittee on refinements in order to complete this task.

PREVIOUS DISCUSSIONS/ACTIONS

[April 7, 2021](#)– Finance Subcommittee discussed the RTD dashboard

PROPOSED MOTION

N/A

ATTACHMENTS

Draft Financial Dashboard Recommendation

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you need additional information, please contact Ron Papsdorf, Director, Transportation Planning and Operations, at 303-480-6747 or rpapsdorf@drcoq.org.

RTD Dashboard Draft Recommendation – Financial Information

The RTD Accountability Committee recommends that RTD implement a “dashboard” that is prominent and easily accessible on RTD’s web site to provide summarized financial and performance information for the public, stakeholders, partners, and elected officials.

Financial Information

- Revenues and Expenses by category, at least quarterly, and in relation to the current adopted budget
- A one-page budget document
- Quarterly reports on the specific use of federal stimulus funds
- Up to date financial information on FasTracks
- Capital project schedule and expenditure information, updated at least quarterly

ATTACH D

BOARD OF DIRECTORS DISCUSSION ITEM

Northwest Rail Update

Committee Meeting Date:
April 6, 2021

STAFF REPRESENTATIVE

Henry Stoppelcamp, Assistant General Manager Capital Programs

William Van Meter, Assistant General Manager, Planning

PRESENTATION LENGTH

20 Minutes

BACKGROUND

At the February 9, 2021 Regional Transportation District (RTD) Board of Directors' Study Session regarding the Northwest Rail Corridor (NWR), staff committed to return to the Board and provide additional information regarding the potential next steps to provide peak service along the Northwest Rail (NWR) Corridor prior to April 30, 2021.

DISCUSSION

In an effort to formulate plans pertaining to next steps for the NWR corridor, a critical component of this effort entailed leveraging jurisdictional stakeholder engagement sessions in order to garner a better understanding of their concerns, ideas and recommendations as to the next steps in developing a Peak Service rail plan. Through the compilation of this feedback, as well as input from the RTD Board members, staff has developed a road map to a path forward.

Considering the District does not currently have the funds available for either a full build-out or Peak Service operations, there is a strong need to understand the impacts and costs of moving forward with a rail option along the corridor. RTD and BNSF will need a 30% conceptual design plans and the identification of environmental impacts along the corridor before either entity can commit to an operational scenario for the Peak Service Plan.

The presentation contains:

- Recurring themes identified during the jurisdictional stakeholder engagement sessions
 - Frustrations – Communities have paid into FasTracks but still do not have rail
 - Required activities - schedule and completion timeline needed for all activities
 - Peak service and BRT (Hwy 119, Hwy 7 and 287) is not interchangeable with full rail build-out
 - Strategic investments interest (E.g., Improve mobility via BRT + Rail)
 - Leverage FISA to fund 30% plans and environmental work
 - Requests that the RTD Board formally supports the BNSF alignment as preferred Front Range Rail alignment
- Summary of tasks and items that need to be addressed in order to support the project (depicted on a one-page diagram)

- Steps required to develop a Scope of Work for the identification of all requirements and costs required for the Peak Service Plan
 - Formulate a Communications Plan
 - Develop a detailed schedule
 - Develop staffing needs for Implementation
 - Risk Identification and Mitigations
 - Solicitation and award contract for Environmental, Planning and Engineering Services

ATTACHMENTS:

- NWR Establishing Impacts and Costs 03-30-21 version (PPTX)

Prepared by:

Henry Stoppicamp, Assistant General Manager, Capital Programs
William Van Meter, Assistant General Manager, Planning

Approved by:



Henry Stoppicamp, Assistant General Manager, Capital Programs 3/30/2021

Authorized:



Debra A. Johnson, General Manager and CEO 3/30/2021



NORTHWEST RAIL

SOLIDIFYING SCOPE, OPERATIONS, IMPACTS AND COSTS

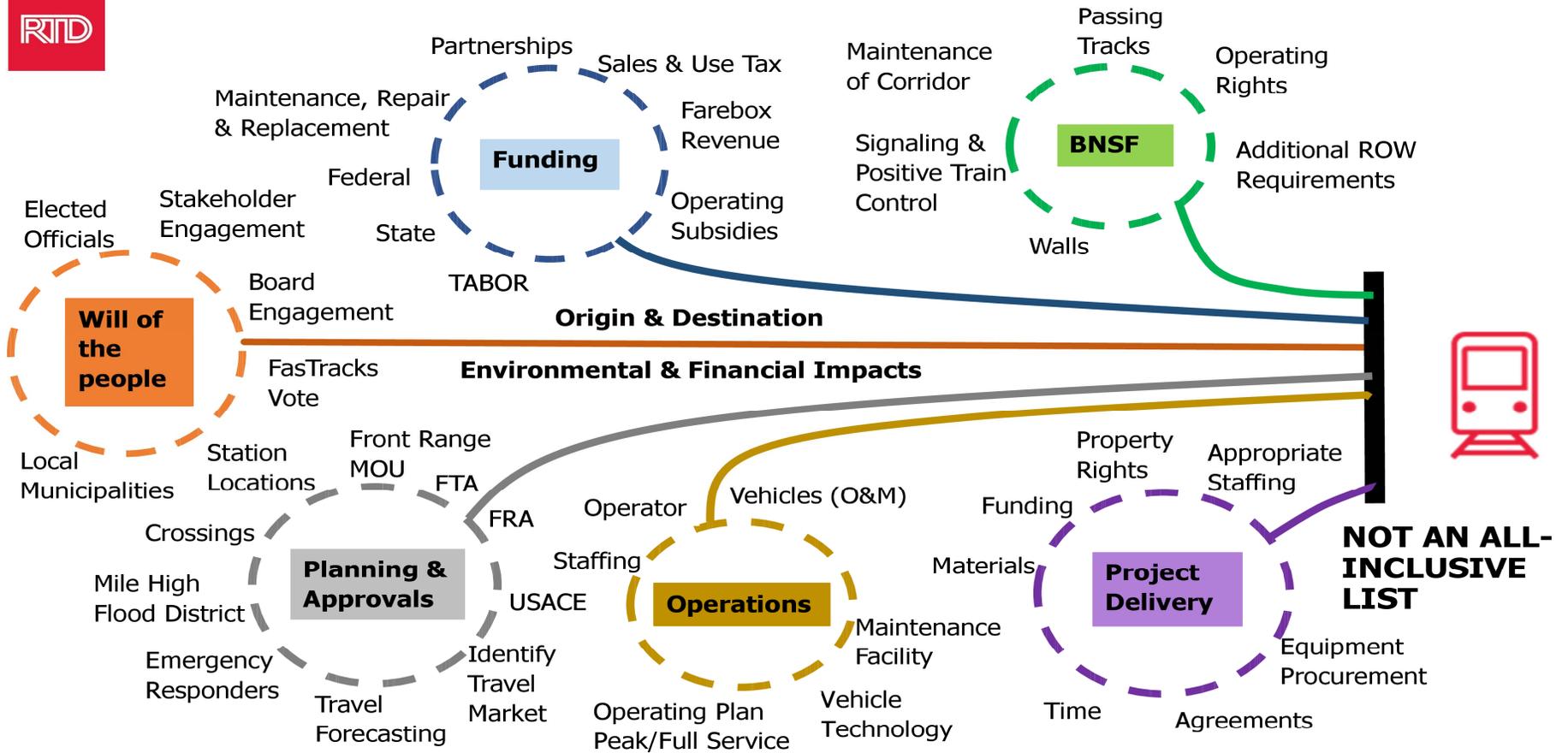
Presented by Bill Van Meter, AGM Planning

Henry Stopplecamp, AGM Capital Programs

April 6, 2021



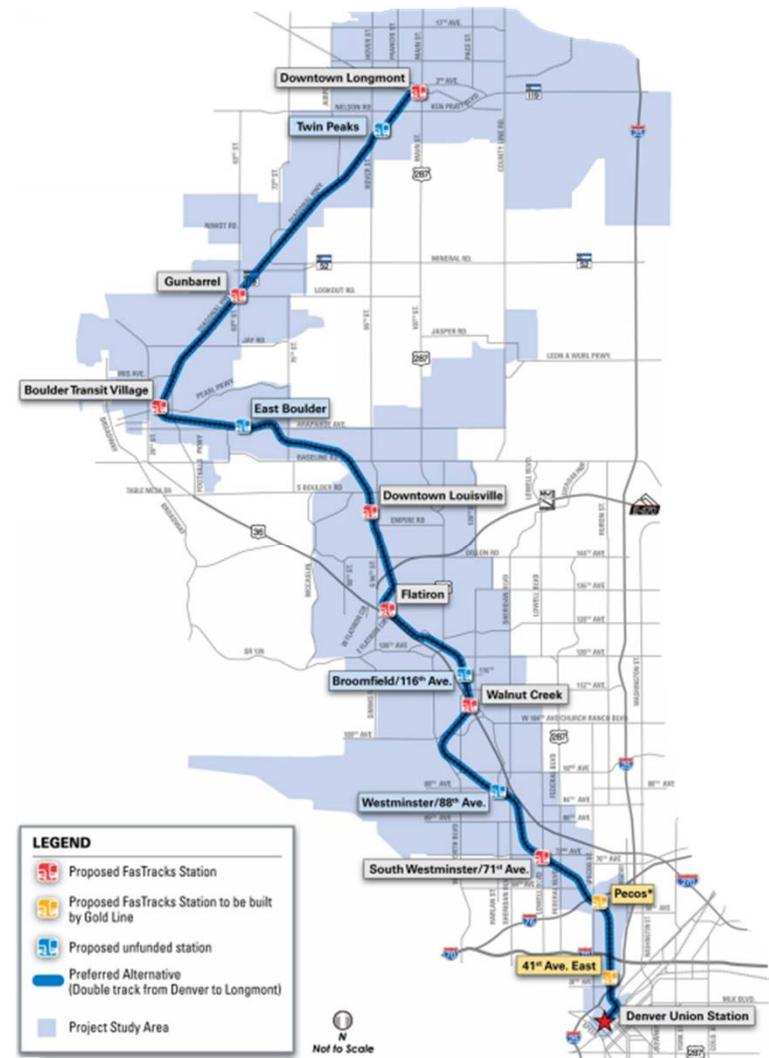
NORTHWEST RAIL IMPLEMENTATION NEEDS SUMMARY



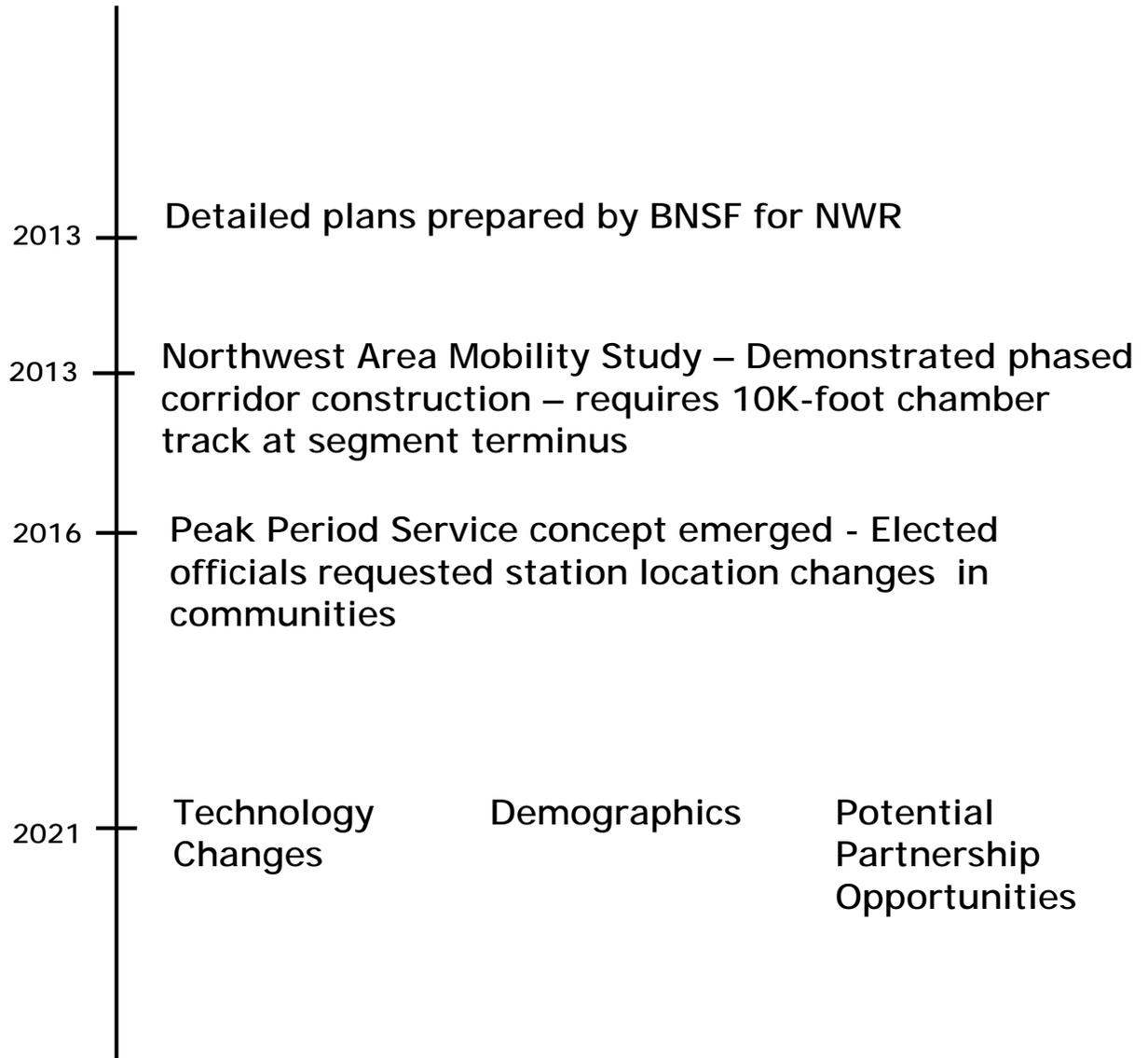
Plans and Studies Prior to 2010

Date Completed	Title (Agency)
2001	US 36 Major Investment Study (RTD)
2004	FasTracks Plan (RTD)
2005	Longmont Diagonal Rail Feasibility Study (RTD)
2006	Longmont Diagonal Rail Environmental Evaluation (RTD)
2007	US 36 DEIS/Basic Engineering (URS)
2009	Commuter Rail Maintenance Facility Supplemental Environmental Assessment to FasTracks Commuter Rail Corridors (RTD)
2009	Gold Line Final EIS (RTD)

April 6, 2021

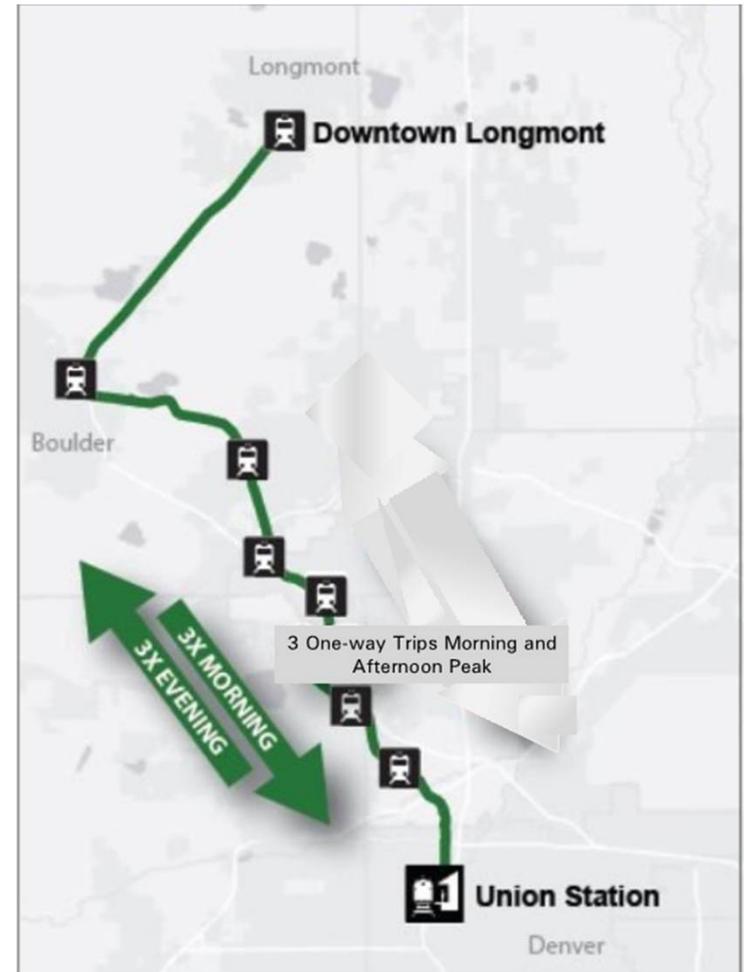


Project conditions have changed since the 2010 Environmental Evaluation



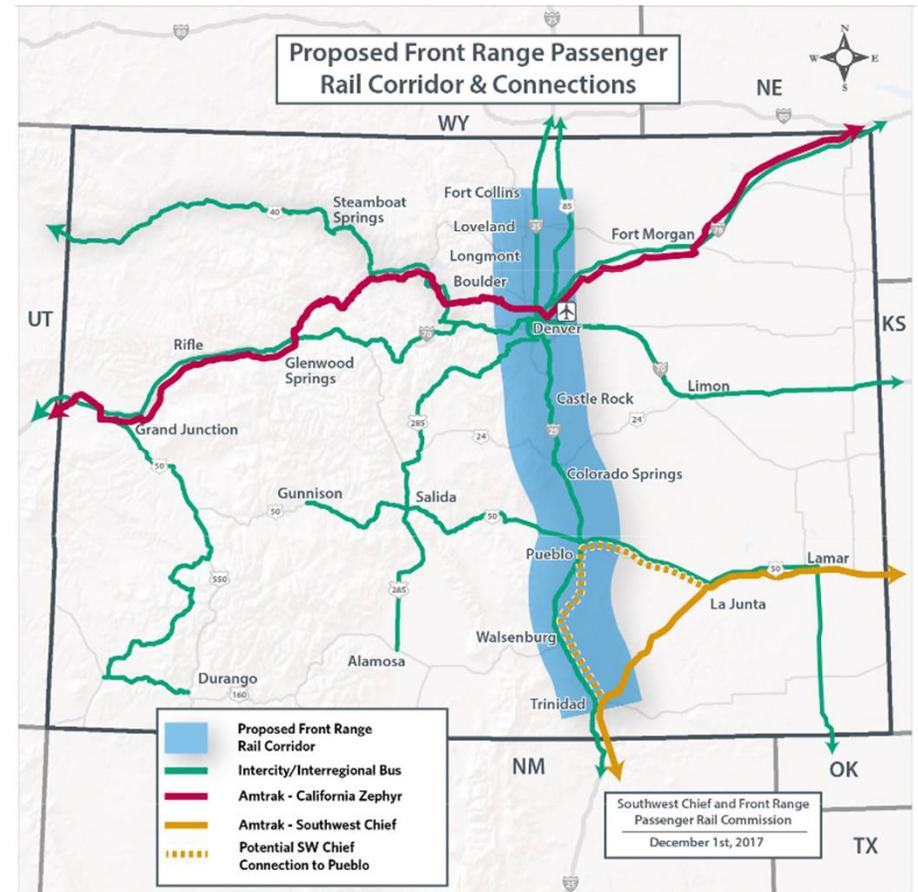
Peak Service Concept

- § 3 morning trips: Longmont to Denver
- § 3 evening trips: Denver to Longmont
- § 6 miles currently operational between Denver and Westminster
- § 35.3 miles remaining
- § 60-70 minutes travel time (contingent upon stations + vehicle technology)
- § Diesel technology



Partners and Regional Collaboration

- § Corridor Communities
- § BNSF
- § US Army Corps of Engineers
- § FTA/FRA
- § CDOT
- § Front Range Passenger Rail Commission
- § Amtrak



Jurisdictional Stakeholder Outreach

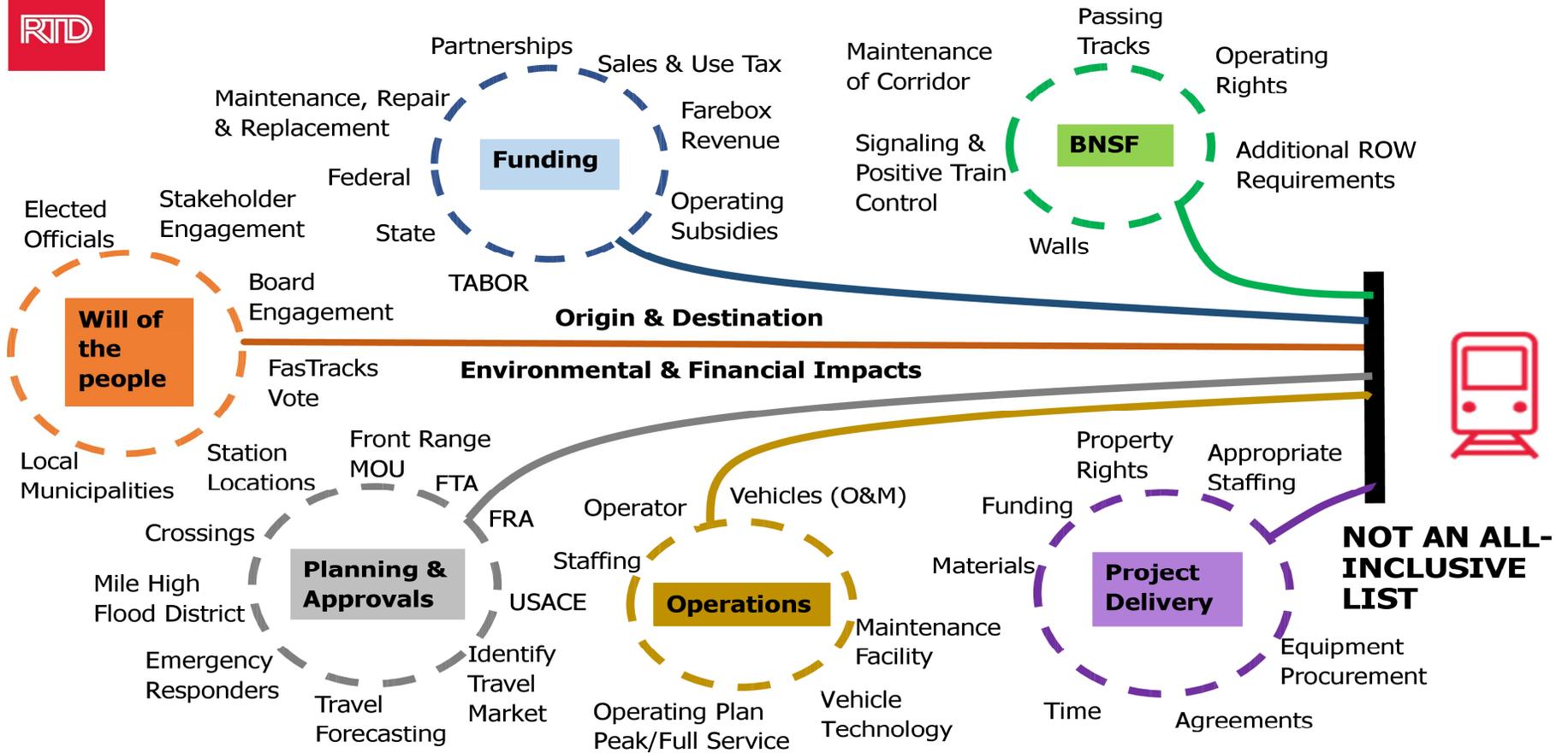
§ Engagement Sessions with consistent format were held in March 2021

§ Frequently heard themes:

- Frustrations - paid into FasTracks, but no NW Rail
- Activities schedule and completion timeline needed
- Peak service and BRT (Hwy 119, Hwy 7 and 287) not interchangeable with full rail build-out
- Strategic investments interest
 - E.g., Improve mobility via BRT + Rail
- Leverage FISA to fund 30% plans + environmental work
- Request RTD Board to support BNSF alignment as preferred Front Range Rail alignment



NORTHWEST RAIL IMPLEMENTATION NEEDS SUMMARY



Options - Going forward

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Planning and Environmental Review	Limited/High-level Study	Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study	Combination PEL and Environmental Impact Statement (Clearance)
Engineering and Project Development	2013 BNSF Plans, Peak service, sidings, as needed updates	Revisit vehicle technology and impacts	Assess assumptions – alignment, station locations, technology?
Level of Community Engagement	Low	High	Highest
Timeline (from NTP)	12-18 months	18-24 months	24-36 months
Funding Needed	\$2.5M - \$5M	\$5M - \$8M	\$8M - \$13M

Scope of Work

§ Formulate Communications Plan

§ Develop detailed schedule:

- Major tasks
- Dependencies
- Implementation Timeline

§ Staffing for Implementation

§ Risk Identification and Mitigations

§ Solicitation and award

- Municipalities participation

Next Steps

§ Formulate Scope of Work (SOW)

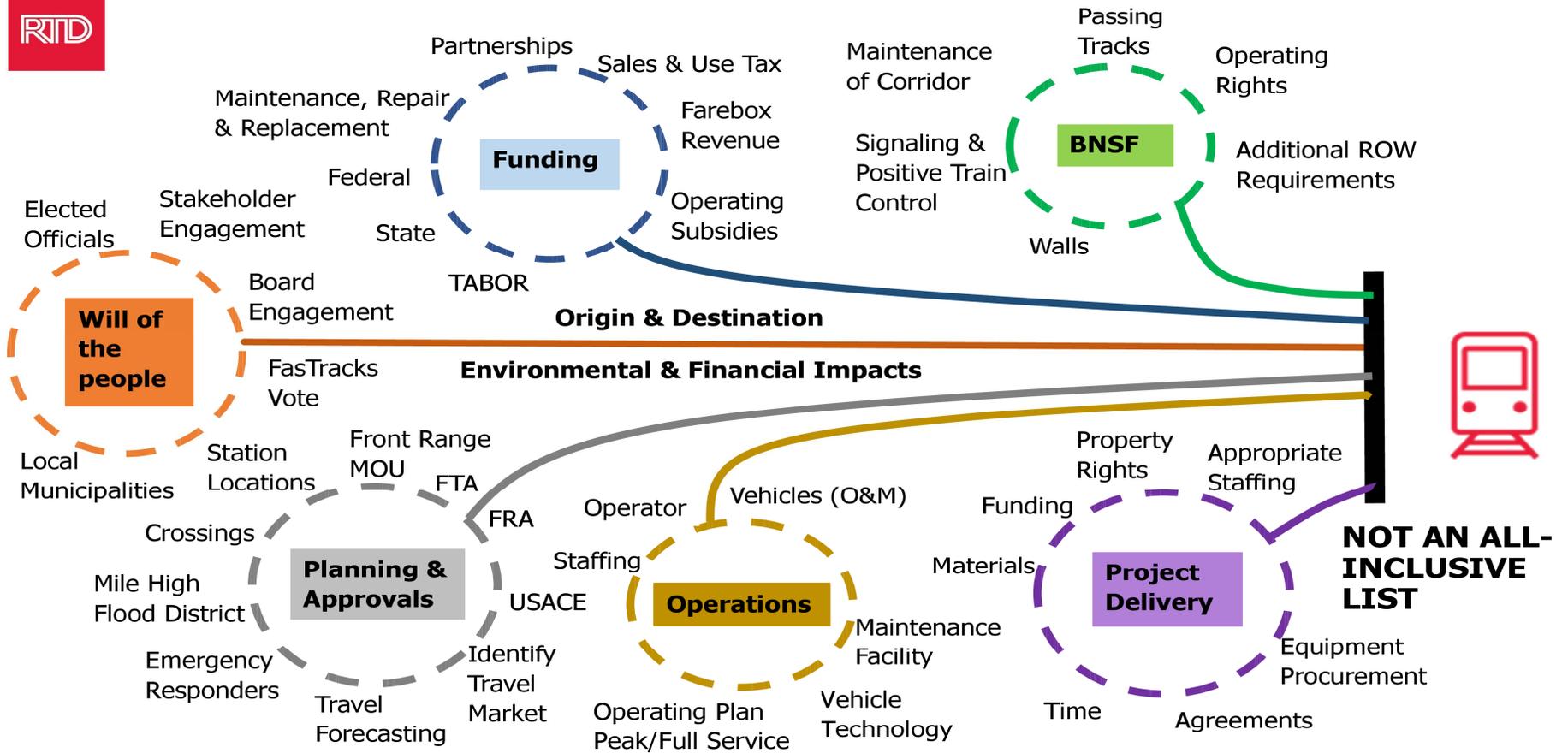
§ Identify support

§ Present Board SOW framework Summer 2021

- Detailed schedule
- Planning requirements
- Engineering levels and elements
- Including recommendation to use the FISA account to fund this effort



NORTHWEST RAIL IMPLEMENTATION NEEDS SUMMARY



ATTACHE

To: Members of the RTD Accountability Committee Finance Subcommittee

From: Ron Papsdorf, Director, Transportation Planning and Operations
(303) 480-6747 or rpapsdorf@drcoq.org

Meeting Date	Agenda Category	Agenda Item #
April 21, 2021	Discussion	6

SUBJECT
NW Rail Discussion – Draft Recommendation

PROPOSED ACTION/RECOMMENDATIONS
N/A

ACTION BY OTHERS
N/A

SUMMARY
FasTracks is RTD's voter-approved transit expansion program. Since 2004, RTD has built 25.1 miles of light rail track and 53 miles of commuter rail track, launched the Flatiron Flyer bus rapid transit service, and opened an intermodal hub at Union Station in downtown Denver. Those investments and projects represent over 75% of the FasTracks program. There are four (4) unfinished corridors in the approved FasTracks program.

Snapshot of Unfinished Corridors

Corridor	Description	Daily Ridership Opening Year	Capital Cost (2018 millions)	Annual O&M (2018 millions)
Central Rail Extension	30 th & Downing to 38 th & Blake	3,200	\$140.0	\$2.6
North metro Completion	124 th Ave to SH7	3,100	\$280.0	\$3.6
Northwest Rail, Westminster to Longmont	Peak Service Plan	800	\$708.2	\$14.0
	Full Service	4,100	\$1,500.0	\$20.6
Southwest Extension	Mineral Ave. to C-470 & Lucent Blvd	3,700	\$170.0	\$3.2

Rutt Bridges has prepared and will present an analysis of NW Rail for discussion by the Finance Subcommittee for further input.

Finishing the FasTracks corridors is a significant challenge for RTD. As discussed previously, revenues have not kept pace with increasing costs and RTD is now expending about 70% of its FasTracks sales and use tax revenues on debt service – although RTD has recently completed a new round of debt refinancing that will provide some near-term relief. In addition, the NW Rail project does not appear to be highly competitive for federal Capital Improvement Grants. Finally, since RTD sales and use tax revenues continue to lag behind increasing operating costs, the operating burden of additional FasTracks corridors could create a further drag on RTD's finances.

At the same time, each of these FasTracks corridors were “promised” to the voters when they approved Referendum 4A and there are significant constituencies for each of these unfinished corridors. NW Rail has also been identified as a strategy in the Colorado Greenhouse Gas Pollution Reduction Roadmap. There may be opportunities to leverage new partnerships to reduce costs, increase ridership, and/or increase additional resources for these projects through strategic partnerships.

At the April 7, 2021 meeting, the Finance Subcommittee asked DRCOG to develop a draft recommendation based on previous analysis and subcommittee discussions.

Draft Recommendation for feedback

- The RTD Accountability Committee supports the NW Rail alignment for the Front Range Passenger Rail (FRPR) corridor and recommends RTD pursue all reasonable partnership opportunities with the FRPR project. This route not only appears to provide significant benefits for the FRPR project but also offers an opportunity to leverage investments and services to support NW Rail.
- Work with local jurisdictions and DRCOG to explore opportunities for transit-oriented development and other strategies to increase projected ridership on the unfinished corridors.
- Investigate opportunities for local cost sharing, tax increment financing, or public-private partnerships to increase non-RTD resources for stations.
- Complete a comprehensive analysis of the NW Rail project to establish a common set of assumptions and engage in a regional discussion about opportunities and alternatives, both near-term and long-term, for the corridor.
- Work with CDOT and DRCOG to implement Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) projects in the northwest region as identified in the DRCOG 2050 Regional Transportation Plan.

PREVIOUS DISCUSSIONS/ACTIONS

[March 3, 2021](#) – Finance Subcommittee discussed unfinished FasTracks Corridor/NW Rail

[April 7, 2021](#) – Finance Subcommittee discussed the NW Rail project

PROPOSED MOTION

N/A

ATTACHMENTS

NW Rail, Analysis and Alternatives (Bridges)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you need additional information, please contact Ron Papsdorf, Director, Transportation Planning and Operations, at 303-480-6747 or rpapsdorf@drcog.org.

Appendix A1: Economic Viability of Proposed NW Rail Solutions

Seventeen years ago, Colorado voters approved a 0.4% sales tax increase to fund FasTracks, a visionary rail transit network for the greater Metro Denver Region. Future projections for sales tax growth were to help fulfill those promises. RTD pressed ahead, using future sales tax revenue as a guarantee against which to bond and borrow money.

The 2008 Great Recession soon stalled that vision. By 2021, RTD rail projects' growing debt burden is expected to consume about [two-thirds of annual FasTracks sales tax revenues](#). More recently, [the pandemic drove rail ridership down to a third of what it was in 2019](#). Lower fare revenue and crushing debt now strangle RTD's budget, and with the pandemic, ridership recovery may take some time. Everyone wants to make sure the shark is dead before they get back in the water.

In 2020, RTD paid over six times as much for FasTracks interest as for principal reduction. According to [RTD's 2020 Amended Budget \(pages 3 and 4\)](#), FasTracks fares—\$28M—covered less than a sixth of rail's operating expense of \$180M. And those operating costs don't even include the interest expense. Today, RTD is in a severe financial crisis.

Before her departure last November, [CFO Heather McKillop noted](#) that to keep up with the maintenance and operations of the six train lines RTD opened since 2013, costly repairs will be needed starting in about six years. "We have a systematic problem that we have to fix in FasTracks," she said. "Because after 2026, it only gets worse."

RTD also has four major unfinished FasTracks projects: the North Metro (\$290M), SW Corridor (\$180M), Central Rail (\$150M), and the Line B extension/NW Rail (\$1,600 million). All four deserve attention and resources. However, the toughest, most expensive, least finished, and most politically sensitive is NW Rail. This analysis is limited to a search for solutions to that problem, though hopefully some of the ideas may apply to the other three unfinished projects. And if an equitable and financially advantageous solution to NW Rail can be found, RTD may have the resources to address the needs of the remaining unfinished projects. This is particularly important since the Governor has recently made it clear [that the state does not intend to provide additional funds directly to RTD](#).

Since promises were first made in 2004, NW Rail's original cost estimates have tripled to about [\\$1.5 billion](#) (2018\$) due to 1) [construction materials price inflation \(page 12\)](#), 2) unexpectedly high costs for BNSF right-of-way use, and 3) the resulting federal requirement for commuter rail. The final cost of NW Rail will be even higher by RTD's proposed date of 2042—a date Governor Polis has made clear is not a ["legitimate date for discussion."](#)

From Broomfield to Boulder to Longmont, taxpayers are justifiably upset that the train promised for 2017 isn't scheduled to arrive until 2042—two decades into an uncertain future. Some communities have even begun planning for development near proposed NW Rail stations. Action is being demanded from an agency that was recently financially forced to cut its transit services by 40%.

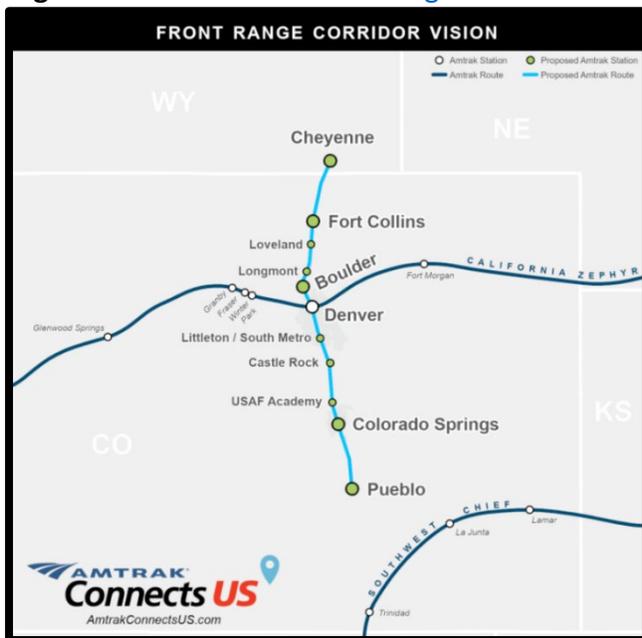
This is an analysis of the three NW corridor rail alternatives currently under consideration by RTD:

- 1. RTD collaboration with Front Range Passenger Rail (FRPR)/Amtrak:** President Biden recently announced details of his new \$2 trillion [American Jobs Plan](#), which proposes \$80 billion in new Amtrak funding spread over the next ten years. While it is always difficult to predict Congressional action, at an [April 12th press conference on Amtrak's Front Range Corridor Vision, CEO Bill Flynn was](#)

[quoted as saying](#) “We believe that our state-supported services are not contingent on just one piece of legislation.” Amtrak President Stephen Gardner reportedly said the state’s existing support for the project among political leaders and the intense population growth along the Front Range are two key reasons why Amtrak wants to invest in Colorado.

When you examine the details of Amtrak’s [Front Range Corridor Vision document’s discussion](#) (Figure A1-1), it appears to be a lot like FRPR’s “starter service”: three Pueblo-Fort Collins round trips daily, with one extending to Cheyenne. It would use BNSF and UP tracks, with ten new Amtrak stations along the way. In Dec 2020, [FRPR estimated Pueblo to Fort Collins construction cost](#), sharing existing freight track, to be \$1.7 billion to \$2.8 billion.

Figure A1-1: Amtrak Front Range Corridor Vision



While it is possible that Amtrak may provide most of the construction costs, it is likely that a significant local financial commitment will be required to fund ongoing maintenance and operations. There is currently [a bill in the legislature](#) that creates a special taxing district mostly along I-25 in preparation for a ballot initiative. This could happen as early as Nov 2022 but might be Nov 2024 to give FRPR time to educate stakeholders and build campaign support. Upon mutual agreement of RTD and FRPR, RTD could share costs. However, while three daily round trips is helpful, is modest compared with FasTracks promised 15-to-30-minute NW Rail service frequency ([RTD Board NW Rail Study Session, 2/9/21, page 60](#)).

At an average of 45 mph, this “starter service” is not likely to convince many folks to give up their cars. FRPR might instead focus on a shorter 100+ mph demonstration line. Denver-Boulder would be a prime candidate. RTD could share these tracks, though intermediate NW Rail stations and sidings would still be needed. RTD could operate a relatively low-cost BRT on the proposed Boulder-Longmont CO 119 managed lanes. A collaboration could make both projects less expensive, and is something RTD should continue to pursue—while also exploring shorter-term alternatives.

2. **NW Rail Rush-Hour-Only service:** RTD is considering a [Rush-Hour-Only service estimated to cost \\$708 million \(2018\\$\) that serves 800 people](#) (1600 boardings/day) initially with 1400 people (2800 boardings/day) by 2035. Here's why the economic justification of this project is challenging:

- Workdays with rush hours = $52 \times 5 - 10$ for holidays = 250 rush-hour days/year
- RTD's estimated average annual operating and maintenance cost is \$13.5 million ([RTD Board NW Rail Study Session, 2/9/21, page 43](#)).
- Financing \$708 million at 2% interest over 30 years = [\\$1,132 million](#)
- Financing and capital cost = $\$1,132 \text{ million} / 30 \text{ years} = \$37.7 \text{ million/year}$
- Annual transit service cost = $\$13.5 + \$37.7 = \$51.2 \text{ million/year}$
- Initially: $\$51,200,000 / \text{year} \div (1600 \text{ boardings/day} \times 250 \text{ days/year}) = \$128/\text{boarding}$
- By 2035: $\$51,200,000 / \text{year} \div (2800 \text{ boardings/day} \times 250 \text{ days/year}) = \$73/\text{boarding}$

After pass discounts, the [2019 RTD rail service average boarding fare was \\$2.08](#), so RTD's net cost per boarding would be \$126 initially, \$71 by 2035.

This boarding cost is an irrationally high expense. It is also not obvious why commuters would prefer this route over the Flatiron Flyer. Furthermore, this service would use the same freight rails as the FRPR "starter service" which could create freight rail access conflicts. **The NW Rail Rush-Hour-Only service is not an economically viable solution. It doesn't serve very many people for \$708 million—almost a million dollars a customer at startup.**

Expanding BRT to Longmont is a more economical and practical alternative than adding \$1.132 billion to RTD's already staggering debt obligations. BRT would be available much sooner and at a fraction of the cost.

3. **Build out the NW Rail extension (Figure A1-2):** RTD's Feb. 2021 estimate for NW Rail ridership is [5,400 boardings per weekday by the target year 2035](#). Data from [MTA New York City Transit](#) indicate that weekend transit boardings average about half of the weekday boardings. So, ignoring holidays, we will estimate annual boardings as $5,400 \times 52 \times (5 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2}) = 1,684,800$ boardings per year.

We'll use a 30-year useful life, and the 2019 [RTD Draft Initial Unfinished Corridors Report \(page 5\)](#) estimated annual operating and maintenance cost for the NW Rail extension of \$20.6 million per year. At an average \$1.5 billion construction cost estimate and a 30-year 2% financing, here is the math (all 2018\$):

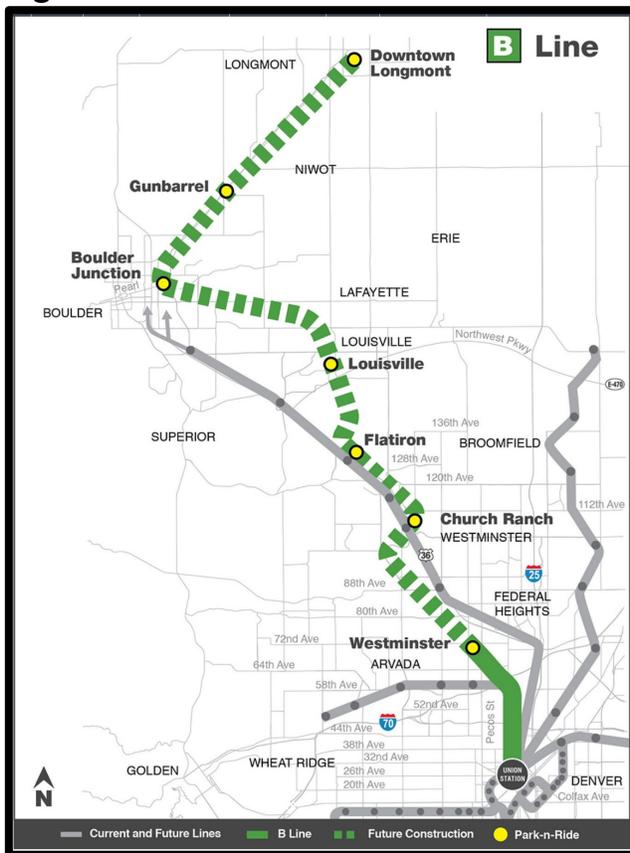
- Total Debt Service = [\\$1,500 million at 2% interest over 30 years](#) = [\\$2,400 million](#)
- Annual Debt Service = $\$2,400 \text{ million} / 30 \text{ years} = \$80.0 \text{ million/year}$
- Annual transit service cost = $\$20.6 + \$80.0 = \$100.6 \text{ million}$
- $(\$100,600,000/\text{year}) \div (1,684,800 \text{ boardings/year}) = \$59.71 \text{ per boarding}$

After pass discounts, the [2019 RTD rail service average boarding fare was \\$2.08](#), so RTD's net cost per boarding would be about **\$57.63—an unreasonably high number**. At 1,684,800 trips per year, that would add a new \$97 million unfunded yearly obligation to RTD's annual budget. Given that RTD's 2020 Amended Budget for FasTracks Operations ([Exhibit 1, Page 3](#)) shows revenue from FasTracks Sales Tax (\$135M) and use Tax (\$15M) that total only \$150 million, it is not clear how RTD could afford this—especially with FasTracks Project interest expenses already totalling \$152 million ([Exhibit 1, Page 2](#)).

However, suppose US DOT or Amtrak was willing to fund the entire cost of construction of the rail lines, leaving RTD liable only for the \$20.6 million annual operating costs. RTD's cost per boarding after adjusting for the \$2.08 average fare would be \$10.15, and the additional unfunded obligation would be reduced to \$17.1 million per year. This would be a much more manageable annual cost.

The other important “knob” to turn in improving transit economics is increased ridership. This is where mutually-beneficial partnerships with local governments and large employers can play a big role. Neighborhood or flexible employer pass discounts are one key strategy. Creating and promoting effective gathering mechanisms, from first/last mile, whether through TNC's or sponsored vanpools, is another. And providing access lanes and trails suitable for bikes, e-bikes, scooters and all micromobility devices, along with “train-then-bike” and safe station storage, can provide great returns on investment. Finally, transit-oriented development combined with affordable housing can lead to affordable living for everyone while locking in transit customers.

Figure A1-2: Buildout of the NW Rail Extension



Source: [RTD Website](#)

To Summarize:

- **Amtrak's** plans to initially offer three 45 mph Pueblo-Fort Collins round trips per day, stopping at Boulder and Longmont, may be unconvincing to current I-25 drivers. Though Amtrak will likely fund a major part of the construction, it may still depend on voter approval of a substantial sales tax initiative. A collaboration among CDOT, RTD, and FRPR to create a Boulder-Denver 100+mph demonstration line may be a better strategy. It would still be roughly ten years away from

completion, but that's far faster than RTD's NW Rail estimates. This concept should be actively investigated and the NW Rail route actively supported.

- **The NW Rail Rush-Hour-Only service** proposal includes three Longmont-Boulder-Westminster station trips in the morning with three return trips in the afternoon. Unfortunately, it only serves 800 people/1600 boardings, 1400/2800 by 2035, operates on weekdays only, at a net cost of about \$126 per person each way, \$252 round trip—or \$71/\$142 by 2035 if the ridership projections are correct. A train change to the B Line is also required to get to Union Station. At a capital cost of almost a million dollars a passenger at inception, the Rush-Hour-Only service is not economically justifiable. Expanding Flatiron Flyer BRT services is a more reasonable alternative and could be implemented much sooner, and without spending \$708 million.
- **Building out the full NW Rail extension** would require either waiting two decades to pay off debts from the rail that RTD has recently built or convincing the federal government to pay all construction costs. Even then, NW Rail would operate at an annual net loss of \$17.1 million. RTD cannot build out NW Rail within a reasonable timeframe and still achieve long-term financial sustainability. But if it does come to pass, particular attention should be given to strategies to drive ridership. Finally, if Amtrak will build a high-speed rail demonstration segment along the NW Rail route, many of these issues can be addressed, and NW Rail can be a reality.

Conclusion: The Legislature and the Governor charged the RTD Accountability Committee with ensuring RTD's long-term financial sustainability. But given the debt RTD has accumulated building out the current FasTracks system, the required completion of the unfinished corridors in a timely fashion seems unlikely at best. It appears that none of these three NW corridor rail alternatives has the potential to deliver a solution, though there is some promise in an Amtraks-FRPR-RTD-CDOT collaboration. It is apparent that finding alternative solutions to meet the 2004 FasTracks transit promises is essential if RTD is to meet its obligations to the people of the NW Corridor.

RTD needs to work with the local governments, transit organizations and customers to find an acceptable and more cost-effective alternative. Waiting two decades while growth stagnates and air quality continues to degrade is not an acceptable option. In Appendix A2 we will explore other ideas.

Appendix A2: Recommendations for Alternative Solutions

This Appendix describes a potential alternative solution to NW Rail, mostly based on the [Northwest Area Mobility Study](#) and subsequent research by various groups. RTD, CDOT, DRCOG, [Commuting Solutions](#), [Northwest Mayors and Commissioners Coalition](#), and other regional partners should work together to evaluate this and any other alternative solutions that can provide genuine relief—concrete plans that can meet or exceed the 2004 FasTracks promises or at least begin to deliver services far sooner. There should be expectations of measurable progress for the people of Boulder, Longmont, and all the communities within the Northwest Corridor.

Let's start by reviewing those 2004 promises.

Promises Made, Promises Broken: The 2004 FasTracks Plan

- Cost estimate: \$565 million [now \$1.5 to \$1.7 billion]
- Estimated completion date: 2015 [now 2042]
- Denver to Boulder Service: 15-minute peak/30-minute off-peak
- Longmont to Boulder Service: 30-minute all day
- Double-track rail corridor, Denver to Boulder
- Single-track rail corridor, Boulder to Longmont
- Technology: Diesel Locomotive-hauled coaches

(Source: [RTD Board Northwest Rail Study Session, Feb. 9, 2021, page 30](#))

There are some folks in the Northwest Corridor who may feel that without a train, they can never be made whole. But consider this: Do you want a train, or do you want fast, frequent, comfortable, safe, and reliable transit? Because it may be possible without a train and without the expense, disruption, and delays that come with that choice.

Many Boulderites say good things about the [Flatiron Flyer BRT buses](#) (*Figure A2-1*). In 2019, it achieved 3,366,474 boardings, almost half the boardings of all 20 RTD Regional transit routes. The coaches are comfortable, there are 110v and USB connectors, plus bike and overhead storage. Also, the buses and the stations are designed for “[Bus-Then-Bike](#)” (*Figure A2-2*). You can even catch a nap on the way to Union Station, Denver Civic Center, or the Anschutz Medical Campus. The biggest complaint is, “RTD slashed our BRT services when the pandemic hit!” Such cuts have been made throughout RTD, with pandemic ridership dropping by up to 70%.

Figure A2-1: Flatiron Flyer, US 36 BRT



UPGRADED, UPDATED, STYLISH STATIONS
Stations include canopies, seating, ticket vending machines and digital information displays. These facilities provide protection from the elements as well as technological conveniences.
Passengers can purchase a ticket before boarding the bus, which speeds up boarding times. The digital information displays also show scheduled bus departure information.

Figure A2-2: Flatiron Flyer, US 36 BRT



BIKE CONNECTIVITY
Alternative forms of transportation are a key part of creating a sustainable transportation network, which is why on-board bike storage, bike parking, and bike paths are key features of the Flatiron Flyer and US36 improvement project.

US36 Bikeway
An 18 mile bike highway is being constructed between US36 & Table Mesa Station and 82nd Avenue in Westminster. The bikeway is paved, 12 feet wide, and features protective barriers along the highway.

Bike Parking and Storage
There are over 270 bike parking spaces on RTD property along the Flatiron Flyer route, including bike racks and reusable bike lockers. The Flatiron Flyer bus can also carry up to eight bikes if you need to complete your commute on two wheels.

Secure Bicycle Parking
Bus-Then-Bike Shelters currently provide long term, secure, and weather-protected bicycle storage at two future Flatiron Flyer stations: US36 & Table Mesa Station and Downtown Boulder Station. Commuters can combine a bus trip and bike ride by keeping a bike in the shelter overnight or during the day and taking the first or final mile to or from a Flatiron Flyer Station.

Additional shelters are in the works at US36 & McCaslin Station and Boulder Junction at Depot Square Station, and planned for the US36 & Sheridan and US36 & Dopenfield Stations. For an access card, sign up at www.BusThenBike.com

But is BRT a reasonable and financially sustainable alternative to the train? According to RTD data, the average pre-pandemic cost per boarding for the Flatiron Flyer was \$4.94 ([RTD Service Performance 2019, Page 19, Route FF](#)). That's half of RTD's 2019 average rail boarding cost and a dollar less than RTD's average regional bus boarding cost—neither of which include infrastructure construction costs. More importantly, it is less than a tenth the estimated NW Rail boarding cost of \$57.63 since RTD gets free use of US 36 (a public highway) and its managed lanes (since it has 2+ passengers!).

Briefly, here is the case for why RTD should aggressively push ahead with a comprehensive BRT solution, [as supported by the Northwest Mayors and Commissioners Coalition](#), and by doing so deliver services that exceed the 2004 promises of FasTracks:

- Unless alternative sources of funding are found, NW Rail won't be built for decades
- These delays will result in growth of harmful emissions and impact ozone compliance
- The NW corridor is poised for strong economic growth, but needs better transit alternatives
- We already have a solid BRT infrastructure on US 36—no waiting for tracks to be laid
- The Flatiron Flyer already provides twice as many boardings as the 2035 NW Rail projection
- Flatiron Flyer could serve the anticipated NW Rail ridership demand simply by adding buses
- We'll save enough by skipping trains and tracks to exceed NW Rail service frequency
- CO 119 Longmont-Boulder BRT can offer over twice as frequent service as the single track NW Rail
- Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is an RTD/CDOT-proven, economical transit solution
- CDOT pays for construction and maintenance since personal autos dominate managed lane use
- By contrast, all rail construction and maintenance costs fall squarely on RTD's shoulders
- Managed lanes will greatly reduce future congestion on SH 119, US 287, SH 6
- If we choose electric buses powered by renewables over a diesel train, we'll all breathe easier
- Planning is already underway for adding managed BRT/bike lanes (*Figure A2-3*) for
 - [SH 119 from Boulder to Longmont](#), shovel-ready, "Construction could begin in 2021"
 - [US 287 from Denver to Fort Collins](#) (planning stage)
 - [SH 7 from Boulder thru Lafayette and Broomfield to Brighton](#) (early planning stage)
- Nothing prevents NW Rail addition if funds become available or the full FRPR is built

Here is how RTD can exceed the NW Rail transit service promises:

- Instead of a Denver-Boulder-Longmont train with a single track for Longmont, create a grid of two-way BRT routes throughout the NW corridor
- Managed lanes will mostly serve 2+ passenger personal autos and toll customers during rush hours
- These managed lanes will be built and maintained by CDOT, as is the case with US 36
- Since BRTs won't require dedicated lanes, fares and net boarding costs can be kept low
- Up to 15-minute peak/30-minute off-peak for all BRT lines (demand-based with room to grow)
- Begin BRT service to Longmont ASAP (*Figure A2-5*) while building out SH 119 managed lanes
- Begin building out SH 7 and unimpacted portions of US 287 as soon as planning is completed
- Put the Rapid back into B-Rapid-T with hourly one-stop Longmont-Boulder-Denver service
- BRT buses can provide service for special weekend events like concerts and CU games
- BRT in managed lanes reduces congestion, CO₂, and ozone

Why BRT is better for Longmont than a single-track train:

- If a train's single track is somehow shut down (repairs, accidents, etc.), all service stops
- BRTs can run on managed lanes and, if need be, any traffic lanes
- Station access by rubber-tire buses is much simpler and less expensive than rail stations

- Free road use is far cheaper than building train tracks
- Electric buses are cleaner and cheaper than diesel trains
- Reducing costs keeps fares low
- It is far easier to grow capacity with buses than trains—*especially single-track trains*
- BRT’s impact on managed lanes is negligible, and service can be expanded by adding buses

The restoration to pre-pandemic levels of [Flatiron Flyer service](#) (Figure A2-4), including Union Station, Anschutz, and Civic Center, should begin right away by using some of the CRRSAA funds and part of the \$124 million in RTD’s FasTracks Internal Savings Account (FISA). Using US 287/South Boulder Road highways (Figure A2-5), a temporary path to the Flatiron Flyer Table Mesa station can be provided from Longmont that would also serve Lafayette and Louisville residents while the CO 119 road construction is underway. Then the South Boulder Road route can be maintained to support Lafayette and Louisville while CO 7 and US 287 BRT managed lanes are being built. The goal should be a grid of full regional BRT services, as proposed by the [Northwest Area Mobility Study](#) and [supported by the Northwest Mayors and Commissioners Coalition](#), within ten years. This is far better than the twenty-plus years for NW Rail, and the service frequency can more than exceed the 2004 promises of FasTracks.

Figure A2-3: Proposed BRT and Bikeway Additions

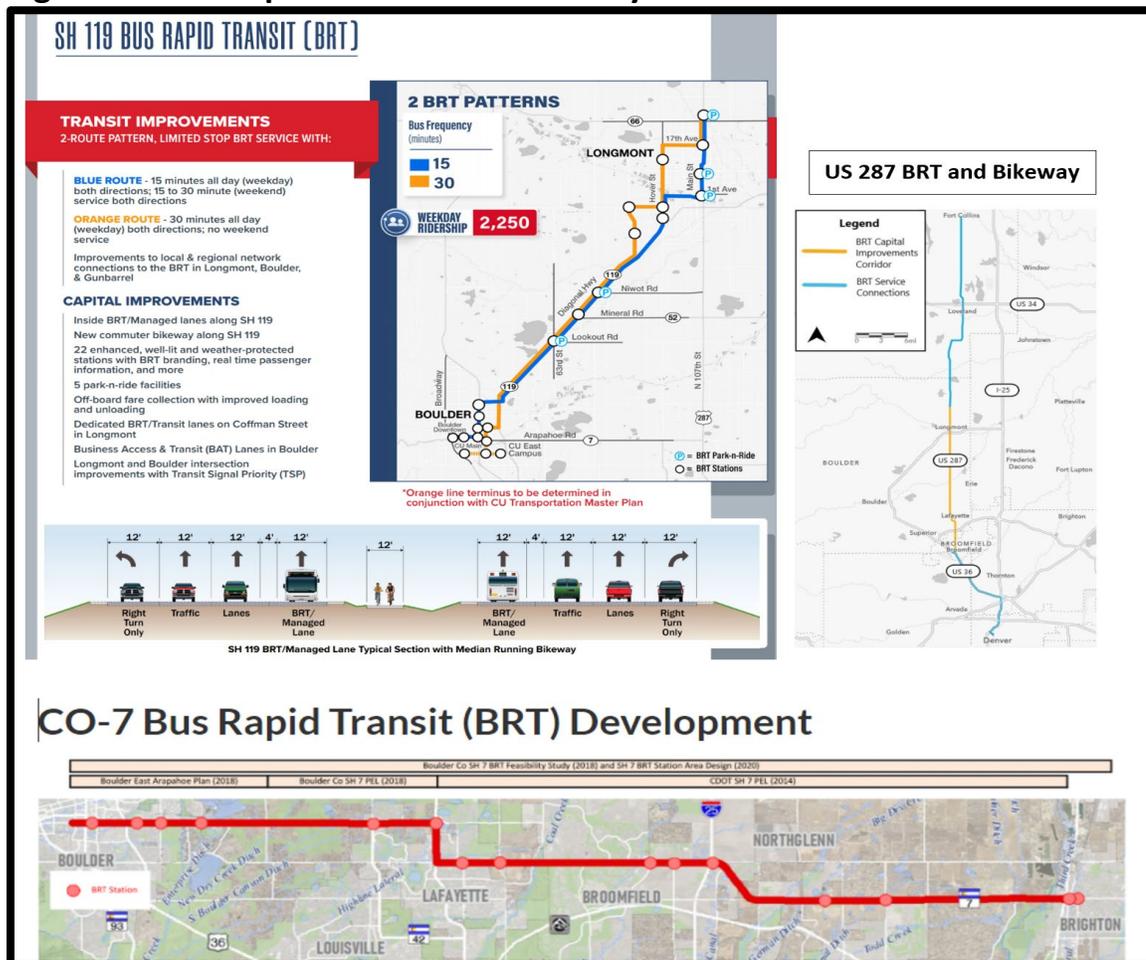
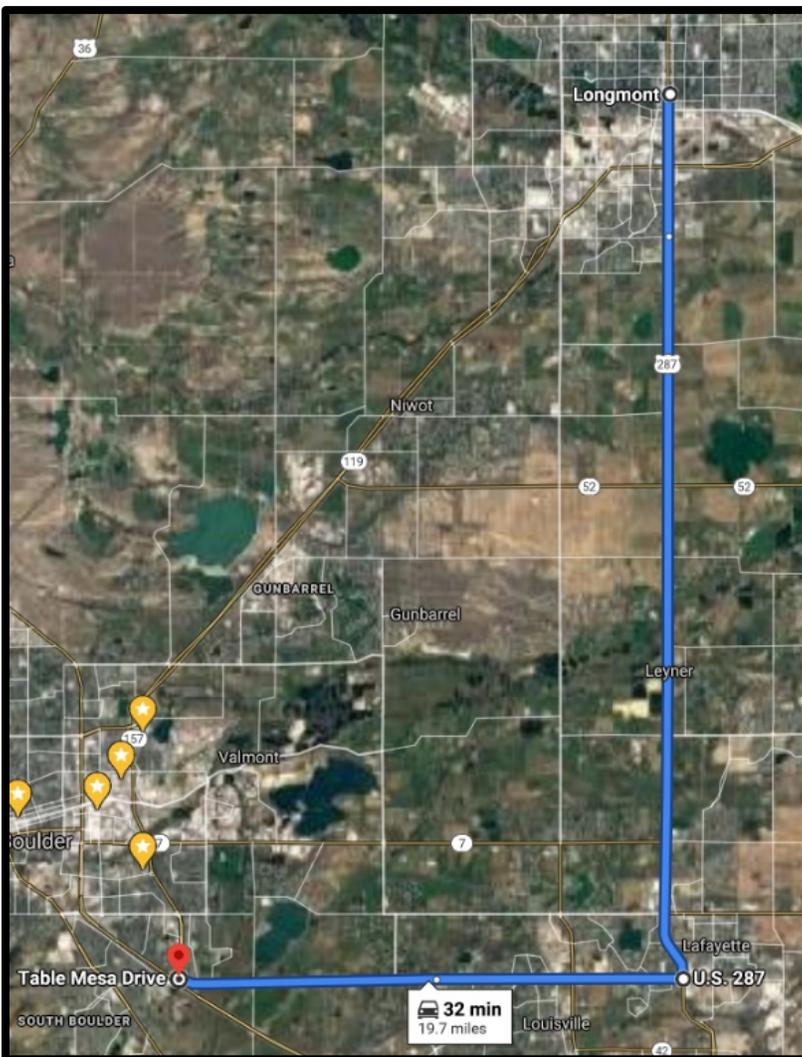


Figure A2-4: Flatiron Flyer, Pre-Pandemic Weekday BRT Service Frequency

Bus Rapid Transit Route		Eastbound to Denver			Westbound to Boulder		
		AM Peak	Midday	PM Peak	AM Peak	Midday	PM Peak
FF1	Union Station and Downtown Boulder Station	15 min	15 min	15 min	15 min	15 min	15 min
FF2	Express Union Station and Downtown Boulder Station	10 min	--	10 min	10 min	--	10 min
FF3	Union Station and US 36 & Broomfield Station	15 min	--	--	--	--	15 min
FF4	Boulder Junction at Depot Square and Civic Center Station	15 min	--	15 min	15 min	--	15 min
FF5	Downtown Boulder Station and Anschutz Medical Campus	30 min	--	3 trips	3 trips	--	30 min
FF6	Boulder Junction at Depot Square Station and Union Station	--	--	3 trips	3 trips	--	--
FF7	US 36 & Sheridan Station and Civic Center Station	20 min	--	--	--	--	20 min

Figure A2-5: Interim Longmont-Lafayette-Louisville-Table Mesa BRT Service



Of course, all BRTs don't have to start or end in Boulder or Denver. By adding some smaller electric buses we can increase service frequency between and among lower-volume destinations like Superior, Flatirons, and Church Ranch.

Meanwhile, RTD and CDOT planners should be busy writing grant requests for some of the \$2 trillion in federal infrastructure spending being sought by DOT Secretary Buttigieg and the Biden administration. And by relieving congestion on our state highways—for example, by adding and maintaining managed lanes—CDOT will be a vital partner in creating this grid of BRT within the NW corridor. CDOT can play the key role by empowering cost-effective mass transit and cutting this Gordian knot known as NW Rail.

To summarize:

- Expanded BRT Flatiron Flyer service should begin as soon as possible
- While managed lanes are added to CO 119, BRT service connecting Longmont, Lafayette, and Louisville to US 36 BRT should begin on existing surface roads (*Figure A2-5*)
- Similar strategies should be used while US 287 and CO 7 BRT is built out
- First/Last mile and bike/micromobility strategies should be part of BRT planning to drive ridership
- Greater transit ridership allows for growth while reducing greenhouse gas emissions
- Boulder should consider building solar or wind farms that use electric buses for power storage

The ultimate goal is the creation of a grid of BRT throughout the NW corridor with transit service that exceeds the 2004 FasTracks promises. This can be available decades sooner and at less cost than than NW Rail.

As a final note, a separate RTD Accountability Committee Recommendation for first-last mile services (called “*FreeLift*”) is currently under development. RTD should avoid a “build it and they will come” philosophy towards BRT. The grid of BRT stations can extend their ridership reach by offering easy access to the bypassed NW corridor neighborhoods who are within a few miles of a BRT station. This should be seen as a great market opportunity for RTD. In parallel with the expansion of Northwest Corridor BRT services, plans should include provisions for first/last mile services and bike/micromobility lanes and storage. These topics will be discussed as part of the *FreeLift* recommendations.

In advance of any final recommendations, we welcome ideas and suggestions from all sources. We would also sincerely appreciate hearing about any errors you see in this analysis or any challenges to this approach regarding proposed concepts or accounting for the costs.

Comments/Suggestions? Please contact: Rutt Bridges
Chair, Finance Subcommittee of the RTD Accountability Committee:
rutt@bridgesfamily.net, (720) 840-1680 (mobile)

ATTACH F

Finance Subcommittee

Focus Area	Issues in progress or yet to address	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
<p>1. Recommend changes to statutes that currently limit opportunities for revenue generation, cost savings and increased ridership, including provisions that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require RTD to raise a certain amount through fares (this is a barrier to lower cost service). • Limit RTD’s ability to develop anything but parking lots on its properties (e.g., rather than affordable housing and key services at TOD sites that can generate transit riders and potentially revenue). • Limit RTD from charging for parking. Examine how changes in parking policies and pricing could increase revenues, TOD and ridership. • Affect RTD’s ability to contract for cheaper service delivery. 	<p>Review of current legislation to identify opportunities to provide RTD with greater flexibility to improve services and increase revenue, draft proposed legislative changes (completed, included in January 2021 interim report)</p>	XXXXXX				
<p>2. Gov. Polis and the Legislature specifically requested “A thorough review of the agency’s use of CARES Act stimulus funds”</p>	<p>The Finance Subcommittee worked with North Highland consultants to define requirements, and then reviewed and approved their report with some modest changes. (completed, included in January 2021 interim report)</p>	XXXXXX				

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3. Review and recommended changes to RTD operations and policies to achieve a more sustainable financial model, including review of investment policies/guiding principles, debt strategies.	Review of past investment policies, financing/debt strategies	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	XXXXXX		
4. Recommend alternatives for regional/subregional funding allocation.	Will work with Governance Subcommittee			XXXXXX	XXXXXX	
5. Peer review of RTD Administrative Overhead / Organizational Efficiencies	Working with North Highland Consultants	XXXXXX				
6. Review FasTracks spending and make recommendations on how to achieve an equitable resolution for the unfinished FasTracks Corridors. This will include answering the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have FasTracks and base operating monies been generated and spent to date across the RTD service area? • How much of base funding has been diverted to FasTracks projects? • What is the cost of finishing FasTracks? • How can unfinished corridors be served in a cost effective and cost efficient manner (e.g., project completion, equivalent mobility, financial, etc.)? 	FasTracks/base system funding Cost to finish FasTracks Finishing FasTracks		XXXXXX	XXXXXX XXXXXX		XXXXXX
7. Improve financial transparency to build back public trust and demonstrate RTD accountability to the voters and policy makers Strategy: Create a recommendation for a public, online dashboard that includes how RTD money is generated and spent, detailed monthly reporting of ridership, and information on planned service changes and rationale for those changes. The content should mostly be well-organized links to existing RTD reports. RTD should generate a publicly accessible prototype and then seek public comment before finalizing the design.	Dashboard Recommendation	XXXXXX	XXXXXX			

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<p>8. Examine partnership opportunities (i.e., with CDOT, local governments, human services agencies, non-profits, private sector, etc.) to enhance mobility services, allow RTD to focus on delivering the types of service(s) they can do most effectively/efficiently, and leverage RTD funding and/or decrease costs of service.</p>	<p>Contracted Services/ Partnership Opportunities</p> <p>Enhanced/Innovative Mobility Services</p>	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	