

Northwest Rail CORRIDOR

Times

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RTD FASTRACKS NORTHWEST RAIL NEWS LINK



Environmental Evaluation Update

FROM RTD PROJECT MANAGER CHRIS QUINN

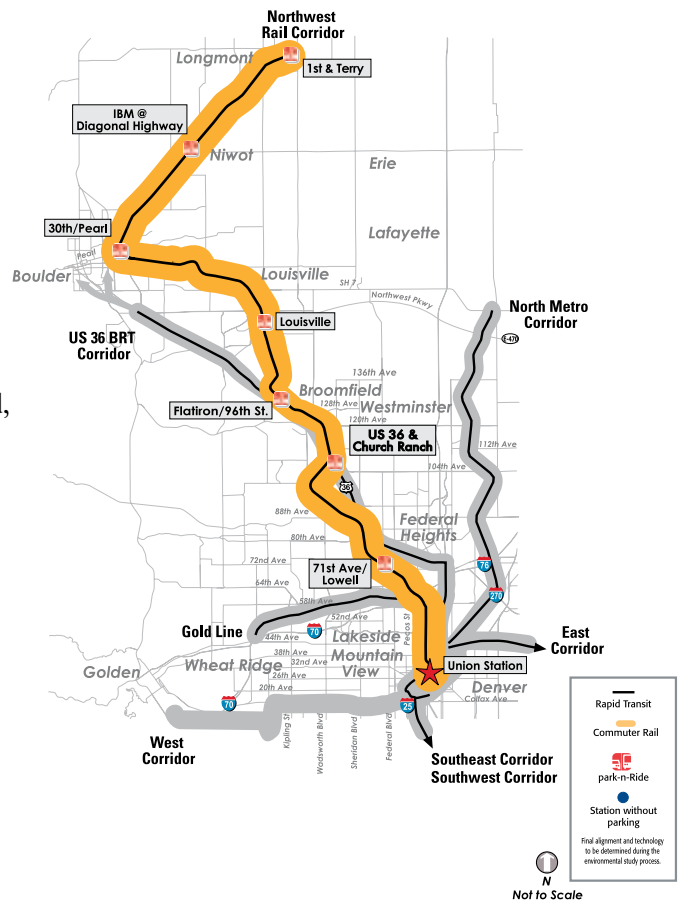
I am pleased to update you on the activities of the Environmental Evaluation (EE) for the RTD FasTracks Northwest Rail Corridor, which is a proposed 41-mile commuter rail corridor from Denver Union Station to Longmont, passing through North Denver, Adams County, Westminster, Broomfield, Louisville, and Boulder.

As 2007 comes to an end and we begin a new year, I look forward to your continued involvement in the Northwest Rail Environmental Evaluation. Opportunities for you to stay involved are included on the back page of this newsletter. Your participation is an essential component of the study and we welcome your thoughts, questions, and ideas.

RTD initiated the environmental study in July 2007. Since then, the project has convened two series of public workshops that took place in July and September. The workshops provided an opportunity for us to hear about the issues of importance to you as RTD prepares to implement commuter rail service along the corridor. These included the type of technology that RTD will use for its commuter rail vehicles and the noise impacts that will be associated with operating commuter rail service along the corridor.

As the Environmental Evaluation moves forward, the project will further address the noise impacts of commuter rail along the Northwest Rail Corridor, including identifying appropriate noise mitigation measures, and working with the local jurisdictions to possibly implement Quiet Zones. The project is also currently refining station design and concept plans with each jurisdiction and defining the track alignment along the corridor. We will share information and the results of this work with you in another round of corridor-wide public workshops in the spring of 2008. We anticipate distributing a draft of the Northwest Rail Environmental Evaluation in the spring of 2008 for public review.

Northwest Rail Corridor





RTD BOARD SELECTS A PREFERRED TECHNOLOGY FOR THE NORTHWEST RAIL CORRIDOR

The RTD Board unanimously approved the use of Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU) trains on the Northwest Rail Corridor at its October 16, 2007 meeting. The Board approved DMU technology along with the 'Responsible Rail Amendment' that requires RTD to consider environmental features, including fuel efficiency and low emissions, to be amongst the top features of the vehicle purchasing standards. RTD will continue to work with the local communities to address the noise concerns of residents along the Northwest Rail Corridor. *Please visit www.RTD-FasTracks.com or contact the project for the full text of the Responsible Rail Amendment.*

In comparing DMU and Electric Multiple Unit (EMU) technologies, the project conducted a cost and environmental analysis and also considered public input. The RTD Board determined that DMU is appropriate for the Northwest Rail Corridor because it is significantly less complex and less expensive to implement than electric trains. These factors were major discriminators between the two technologies. The complexity associated with EMU technology stems largely from the required clearance to the overhead catenary wire that would result in the reconstruction of bridges along the corridor, making the system prohibitively expensive.

While most environmental impacts for EMU were slightly less than DMU, the differences in the level of impacts for the two technologies were not significant enough to outweigh the cost and complexity issues, particularly when mitigation is considered. Although public support for the implementation of EMU technology was stronger, RTD is committed to continuing to address the issues and concerns the public raised at the September Public Workshops about DMU technology.

July & September Public Workshops

The Northwest Rail Environmental Evaluation kicked off in July 2007 with a series of public workshops along the corridor. At these meetings, the team presented information about the study and asked participants to identify important issues. The July Public Workshops in Boulder, Westminster, and Longmont drew 372 people.

KEY STUDY ISSUES:

- Station Locations
- Noise Impacts & Mitigation
- Commuter Rail Vehicle Technology
- Project Cost
- Travel Times
- Ridership
- Bus, Bicycle & Pedestrian Connectivity
- Rail Transit System Connectivity
- Project Purpose & Need

The September Public Workshops focused on commuter rail vehicle technology. The project team presented technology analysis results and participants commented on the preliminary project recommendation that Diesel Multiple Units be used on the Northwest Rail corridor. The September Public Workshops were conducted in Denver, Broomfield, and Gunbarrel/Boulder and drew 205 people.

COMMUTER RAIL TECHNOLOGY ISSUES:

- Noise & Vibration Impacts
- Use & Availability of Fossil Fuels
- Hybrid & Other New Technologies
- Air Quality Impacts
- Low-Income & Minority Community Impacts
- Visual Impacts
- Capital & Operating Costs

The public input collected in July and September has informed the study and influenced its direction, as reflected by the RTD Board's adoption of the Responsible Rail Amendment and the continuing focus of the Environmental Evaluation on noise impacts and mitigation.

Noise Impacts & Mitigation Measures: Frequently Asked Questions

Here are responses to commonly asked questions about noise impacts and mitigation measures:

How will the Northwest Rail Environmental Evaluation determine noise impacts?

Community response to noise is measured in terms of level of annoyance. This includes the level of the noise event, its duration and frequency, and the time of day in which it occurs. The Environmental Evaluation will determine the number of residences that will be impacted by noise on a scale from 'no impact' to 'moderate impact' to 'severe impact.' RTD is using the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Noise & Vibration Manual and Criteria to determine noise impacts. The noise analysis considers the impact of existing noise plus the impact of the NWR project.

What are the different sources of commuter rail noise?

Sources of commuter rail noise are the diesel engine, vehicle cooling fans, wheel-rail interaction, and train horns. The majority of commuter rail noise comes from blowing the train horn when approaching at-grade street crossings. The noise from the train horn is the same regardless of the type of commuter rail vehicle technology (DMU or EMU).

How will the Northwest Rail Environmental Evaluation determine noise mitigation?

During the Environmental Evaluation, the project will develop avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures for each adverse impact for all environmental resource areas, including noise. Because noise mitigation is site-specific, not every situation will result in the same recommended mitigation measure.

What are the possible noise mitigation options that exist?

There are many different kinds of mitigation measures, including:

- Ensuring quality track design
- Optimizing the location of train horns on commuter rail vehicles
- Installing sound walls or berms
- Insulating sound with train mufflers
- Establishing Quiet Zones
- Installing wayside horns at grade crossings

What is a Quiet Zone and how would a community qualify for one?

Quiet Zones are segments of railroad lines where train crews are exempt from sounding the horn at grade crossings. Communities can qualify for Quiet Zones if they meet certain safety standards. In order to do so, they typically must make infrastructure improvements at grade crossings. RTD is committed to working closely with the

Northwest Rail communities as they consider applying for and implementing Quiet Zones. The RTD FasTracks Northwest Rail Corridor budget includes funding for noise mitigation measures, where appropriate, including the establishment of Quiet Zones. It should be noted that train crews are still permitted to sound the horn within a Quiet Zone for railroad-related or safety reasons. *For more information, refer to the Federal Railroad Administration's Quiet Zone Web site at www.fra.dot.gov/us/content/1318 or contact the project.*

What are the requirements for creating a Quiet Zone?

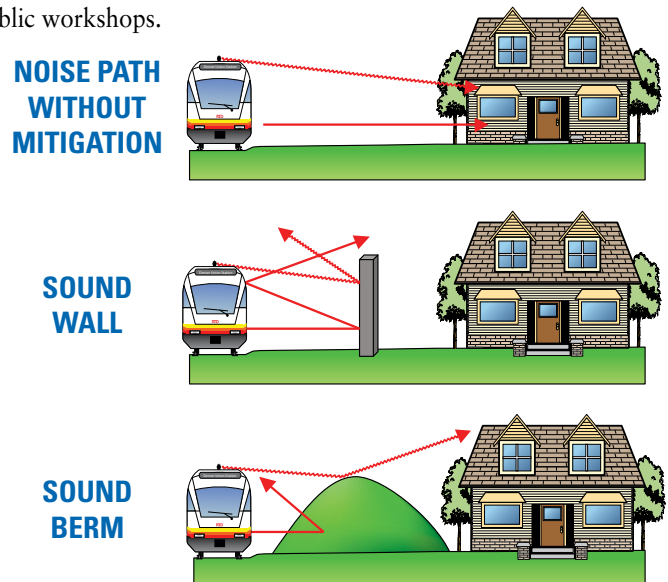
All crossings must have automatic warning devices with both flashing lights and gates. The crossing must be upgraded so that the improvements compensate for the loss of the train horn, and make the crossing as safe as if the horn were used.

What is a Wayside Horn?

A Wayside Horn is an alternative to a train-mounted horn. Wayside Horns are mounted at the crossing and focus noise toward approaching vehicles and nearby pedestrians. This mitigation option would focus the horn at the crossing and limit the amount of noise exposure for noise-sensitive areas approaching the crossings where trains would otherwise have to sound their horns.

When will the Northwest Rail project determine what can be done to mitigate noise impacts?

Before the project can determine noise mitigations, station planning and alignment design needs to occur in order to identify a project footprint. While this work is taking place, the public can submit comments to the project and plan on participating in the spring 2008 public workshops.



HOW TO STAY INVOLVED!

As the Environmental Evaluation moves forward, your participation in the study continues to be invaluable. There are many avenues available to learn about and contribute to the project:

VISIT THE PROJECT WEB SITE

Visit the RTD FasTracks Project Web site at www.RTD-FasTracks.com and click on the Northwest Rail button to:

- Learn about project issues and activities
- Subscribe to the mailing list
- Share your comments
- Ask questions

SUBMIT A COMMENT OR QUESTION

In addition to the Project Web site, you can share your ideas and questions by phone, e-mail, or mail. Please refer to the contact information listed on this page.

ATTEND A PUBLIC WORKSHOP

The project will hold the next series of corridor-wide Public Workshops in the spring of 2008. If you are on our mailing list, you will receive a meeting announcement. The project will also provide notification in local papers and post meeting details on the Project Web site.

REQUEST A MEETING

If your organization would like to meet with members of the Northwest Rail Project Team to discuss specific issues or learn more about the project, please send an e-mail to the address below, make a request through the Web site, or call the number below.

CONTACT US

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