

August 2008 Environmental Evaluation Update

The following is an update on the progress of the RTD Northwest Rail Environmental Evaluation since the circulation of the Spring 2008 Newsletter.

RTD FasTracks Update

RTD FasTracks Budget & Annual Program Evaluation

While the media has reported that there could be changes to RTD's FasTracks program, the RTD Board remains committed to working through current budget issues to deliver the voter-approved FasTracks program. As the economy continues to tighten, RTD and the FasTracks Team is moving forward to meet these challenges.

Like you, RTD must deal with the reality of rising costs and a weak economy. It is no secret that as oil prices rise, there have been record-setting increases in the price of construction-related materials that the FasTracks program relies on, such as fuel, copper, steel, concrete, and labor.

Think about how much more you are paying at the gas pump and the grocery store today than just one year ago. Now, imagine how much those price increases affect a \$6 billion program.

In just one year, the Colorado Construction Cost Index, which has traditionally increased by only 3 percent a year, dramatically spiked an incredible 52 percent. These costs have continued to climb as RTD's largest revenue source – sales tax income – has been less than expected. The current financial challenges impacting all major infrastructure projects will require RTD to get more creative and innovative in how FasTracks is delivered.

Despite these challenges, RTD is dedicated to moving forward with the FasTracks program.

The FasTracks Team will update the RTD Board of Directors on the status of the FasTracks program and the options for moving forward at a Budget Workshop on August 21. The Board will review all options and then provide the FasTracks Team with direction for implementing FasTracks.

As was the case a year ago, RTD's three general alternatives for moving forward with FasTracks include:

- Extend the schedule beyond the original completion schedule of 2017
- Reduce the scope of the program
- Seek out additional revenue sources

While none of these alternatives is ideal, RTD must face current financial realities. No decisions have been made this year on the above three options. Last year, consideration of these same three options resulted in the FasTracks Team moving forward with Public-Private Partnerships to provide additional revenue.

The RTD Board of Directors is firmly committed to working with staff to address these financial issues and keep FasTracks on-track. While the current budget challenges will be relatively short lived, the FasTracks program is an investment that will continue to benefit our communities for the next century and beyond.

We will contact you again following the RTD Board's August 21 Budget Workshop to inform you of the results and how the Northwest Rail project plans to move ahead.

Release of Gold Line Draft Environmental Impact Statement

As you may know, the [Gold Line](#) and Northwest Rail will run on a shared track alignment between Denver Union Station and Pecos Street. In order to implement portions of the Gold Line, a refinement to the track alignment was needed to avoid properties owned by the Union Pacific Railroad that were unaffordable to RTD.

The Gold Line Team has completed its work on refinement of the proposed Gold Line Preferred Alternative track alignment, released the [RTD Gold Line Draft Environmental Impact Statement](#) (DEIS) for public review, and held [Public Hearings](#) earlier in August to gather comments on the DEIS.

Northwest Rail Schedule Update

RTD FasTracks continues to work with the BNSF Railway to identify Northwest Rail's proposed commuter rail track alignment. Before impacts analysis – such as noise – can begin on the corridor, a preferred track alignment must be defined from Denver to Boulder. Along this portion of the corridor, it must be determined whether the new track will be located to the east or west of the existing track. Trains from Boulder to Longmont will run on the existing track.

Much of the Northwest Rail Environmental Evaluation (EE) work will be based on this determination, so the project schedule has now changed and may change again, depending on how long it takes to finalize the exact alignment.

Originally, we had anticipated holding public workshops to discuss project impacts and release the draft environmental document for the Northwest Rail Corridor this summer. We are now working to hold public workshops on project impacts in 2009; release the Draft Environmental Evaluation in mid 2009; and then host corridor-wide Public Hearings to collect comments on the Draft Environmental Evaluation. We are scheduled to submit the final document to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the lead agency for the study, in late 2009 for approval.

At its meeting in August, the RTD Board will update the schedule for the NWR EE. We will then be able to communicate the new project timeline to you. In addition to announcing when we will expect to have the NWR preferred alignment identified, we will also let you know when we anticipate beginning the impacts analysis and holding public workshops to share information with you.

Current Northwest Rail Project Activities

As RTD works to identify the preferred alignment, the Northwest Rail Project Team continues to work on several other activities to move the project forward. Those activities are:

Station Planning: The Northwest Rail Project Team is working with local communities along the corridor to finalize the refined station area concept plans and make them available for public review. The Project Team will use these "station footprints" to identify impacts associated with the station areas and develop mitigation measures for them. [Click here](#) to request plans about a specific station.

Fencing: The Northwest Rail Fencing Subcommittee, made up of Project Team members and local community representatives, has completed its work to address fencing issues, such as fencing types and section-specific design issues, and has formulated recommendations to carry forward into the Northwest Rail Environmental Evaluation for analysis.

Grade Crossings: The Northwest Rail Project Team has completed its inventory of the rail crossings along the corridor. The Project Team is using this information and conducting field visits along the corridor to identify the safety upgrades that RTD will need to make at each crossing in order to implement commuter rail service. RTD will also use this information to identify the infrastructure upgrades that would be required to implement Quiet Zones.

Quiet Zones: Progress is being made toward Quiet Zone implementation. Field visits are taking place to determine what Quiet Zone implementation steps need to be taken at each crossing. RTD has developed a [Quiet Zone Work Plan](#) that identifies the steps that RTD will take to assist local communities in the Quiet Zone application process. RTD is also developing grade crossing inventories, diagnostic reviews, and cost estimates for all crossings along the Northwest Rail corridor and will work with local jurisdictions to determine an implementation approach for each individual grade crossing.

Noise Impact & Quiet Zone Resource Packet: The Northwest Rail Project Team has developed a Noise Impact and Quiet Zone resource packet which answers your questions about how noise impacts are being analyzed, and how these impacts can be abated or mitigated. This packet explains the implementation requirements and features of Quiet Zones. Please let us know if you would like us to [mail one of these packets to you](#); or you can [view all of the information electronically on this Web site by clicking here](#).

We will continue to update you as the study progresses and new developments occur. In the meantime, feel free to [submit a comment](#), [ask a question](#), or sign up for our [mailing list](#) if you haven't done so already.

Thank you for your continued interest in the Northwest Rail Environmental Evaluation and the entire FasTracks program to build 122 miles of new rail transit, 18 miles of bus rapid transit service, add 21,000 new parking spaces, redevelop Denver Union Station and expand bus service across the eight-county district.