



NORTHWEST RAIL PEAK SERVICE FEASIBILITY STUDY

FACT SHEET



WHAT IS NORTHWEST RAIL?

RTD’s Northwest Rail is a 45-mile voter-approved FasTracks passenger rail line between Denver Union Station (DUS) and Longmont. Six miles of the project were completed in 2016 and now operate as the B Line between DUS and Westminster Station. Funding challenges have prevented the remaining portion of the corridor from being completed.

RTD always envisioned that this project would operate on existing BNSF-owned freight tracks between Westminster Station and Longmont. This contrasts with other RTD commuter rail corridors, including the current B Line, which operate on new tracks built exclusively for passenger service. Operating on the freight railroad system, especially as a continuation of an existing RTD commuter rail corridor, introduces complex operational issues.

The FasTracks plan envisioned a two-way, all-day service for Northwest rail comparable to other RTD services, but this would require significant upgrades to the BNSF freight tracks. In contrast, the Peak Service Feasibility Study evaluated the feasibility of completing the Northwest Rail corridor project, one of four remaining “unfinished corridors” in the FasTracks plan, with a reduced level of service from the original proposal.



WHAT IS THE PEAK SERVICE FEASIBILITY STUDY?

Between 2022 and 2024, RTD assessed the reduced service concept for commuter rail in the Northwest Corridor with input from stakeholders and the public. The Study focused on defining a

Common Set of Facts to inform the RTD Board of Directors of possible next steps. The Project Team identified and addressed key issues, including station configurations and concept design, environmental and community issues, and track design and modifications required to support both RTD’s passenger and BNSF’s freight service.



WHAT IS PEAK SERVICE COMMUTER RAIL?

The Peak Service Concept consists of three southbound morning peak trips from Longmont to DUS and three northbound trips on the same route during the evening peak period each weekday. The Peak Service Concept includes six new stations, a rail maintenance facility, and evaluation of potential train types.



WHAT IS THE COMMON SET OF FACTS?

The Common Set of Facts focuses on five key components to implement the Northwest Rail Peak Service plan:

1. BNSF Requirements
2. Operating Specifications
3. Infrastructure Requirements
4. Projected Ridership
5. Capital and Operating Costs

The Common Set of Facts describes the mutual understanding reached in the Study between RTD, BNSF, and local stakeholders on what the Peak Service Concept would require.



WHAT DID RTD LEARN FROM STAKEHOLDERS AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT?

RTD engaged with agencies, stakeholders, and the public throughout the Study. A Study Advisory Team (SAT) included members of local agencies along the proposed project corridor, public interest organizations, and transportation agencies. The SAT, partner agencies, the public, and the BNSF Railway supported the technical development of this study and provided historical context and general feedback.

Key points of stakeholder involvement and public engagement occurred early in the study and at the completion of the Base Configuration phase of the study, a basic service concept defined by stakeholders and the RTD Board that would operate three trains in the morning from Longmont to DUS and three trains in the afternoon from DUS to Longmont. The Base Configuration defined the baseline for development of the Common Set of Facts. SAT engagement occurred at regular intervals throughout the study, and the SAT directly supported public engagement efforts.

Residents expressed support for rail transit in the corridor at public meetings and pop-up events. In addition, the public expressed interest in reverse commute trips, special event trains, additional stations along the route, and intercity rail service.



WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NORTHWEST RAIL AND INTERCITY RAIL?

In 2019, the State of Colorado delegated CDOT the responsibility to plan an intercity passenger rail service along the Front Range between Fort Collins and Pueblo. This work led to the formation of the Front Range Passenger Rail District (FRPRD) in 2022. Throughout the US, commuter and intercity rail services operate on the same tracks. However, Commuter Rail serves one metropolitan area connecting suburbs to an urban core, while Intercity Rail connects cities with longer distances between stations.



While the purpose of the Study was to identify the facts associated with an RTD peak service operation, the Project Team identified a potential opportunity for RTD and FRPRD to coordinate efforts for a rail solution in the Northwest.

Legislation passed in 2024 requires RTD and FRPRD to work together to determine how the two projects could be delivered simultaneously. Completion of the RTD and intercity rail studies would enable RTD and FRPRD to develop a combined approach for improving infrastructure on the corridor and provide service, either jointly or separately, while sharing common infrastructure.

A joint effort would require an allocation of costs and responsibilities, but economies of scale could be realized between RTD and FRPRD that include joint operational efficiencies, shared fleet, and shared improvement costs.



CONCLUSION

The Northwest Rail Peak Service Feasibility Study defined the Base Configuration required to operate the Peak Service Concept and developed a Common Set of Facts to identify capital costs, operating and maintenance costs. Additionally, the Study identified the ridership forecast, an initial partnership framework with local jurisdictions, and initial requirements to deliver commuter and intercity rail service in the corridor. For further details on the study findings, please visit the project website.



www.rtd-denver.com/about-rtd/projects/northwest-rail-peak-service-study

