

# M RMRA Public Involvement Process

## M.1 RMRA Public Involvement Process

A unique component of this feasibility study was the commitment made by the Rocky Mountain Rail Authority (RMRA) to an extensive and transparent public involvement process. Key stakeholders were engaged throughout each phase of the evaluation process and their input helped inform the decision-making process.

The objectives of the public involvement program were to:

- Closely collaborate with state, regional and local policy-makers and senior planning staff on issues related to public/political acceptance and local planning efforts
- Gather targeted input at each phase of the study to help inform the decision-making process
- Keep the general public informed throughout the process

## M.2 Elements of the Public Involvement Process

Considering the level of detail and decision-making needed for a feasibility study, the RMRA focused its public involvement efforts on deeply informing and engaging key decision makers from both corridors. There were also opportunities for the general public to get information and engage in the study.

### Corridor Input Teams

Three Corridor Input Teams were formed:

- *I-70 Corridor Input Team* – This team focused on issues specific to the I-70 Corridor west of the Denver metropolitan area. It included representation from the I-70 Coalition, the towns/cities/counties/transit operators/resorts in the corridor as well as the corridor’s various Transportation Planning Regions (TPRs) and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). Meetings were coordinated through the I-70 Coalition with dial-in meeting locations in Steamboat Springs and Grand Junction.
- *Denver Metro Input Team* – This team focused on issues specific to the Denver Metro area and the convergence of the two rail lines. All members of the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) were invited to participate. In addition, this team included representation from the Regional Transportation District (RTD) and Denver International Airport (DIA).

- *I-25 Corridor Input Team* – This team focused on issues specific to the I-25 Corridor north and south of the Denver metropolitan area. It included representation from the towns/cities/counties in the corridor as well as the various TPRs and MPOs. Joint meetings, connected by teleconference and/or web-conference, were held in Fort Collins and either Colorado Springs or Pueblo.

Each Corridor Input Team met three times:

- *Scoping (September 2008)* – Summarized the scope of the study, the evaluation criteria and evaluation methodology. Gathered input on local needs and desires within the scope of the feasibility study.
- *Alternatives Selection (December 2008)* – Summarized the alternatives that were going to be evaluated as well as the evaluation process. Gathered input on local preferences related to the alternatives under consideration.
- *Alternatives Analysis (April 2009)* – Summarized the preliminary results of the Alternatives Analysis and Feasibility Determination. Gathered input to inform the optimization of the recommended alternative.

## **Study Workshops**

Two all-day workshops were held at critical milestones in the study: Alternatives Selection and Alternatives Analysis. Each of these workshops had attendance from more than 50 individuals representing municipalities and organizations throughout both corridors. The workshops provided participants with a deeper understanding of the methodology and rationale being used in the study so they could provide more informed input into the development, evaluation and refinement of alternatives.

## **General Public Outreach**

As part of the study, the RMRA sought to engage the general public through various efforts including:

- *Project Web Site* – An entire section of the RMRA web site was devoted to the feasibility study and engaging the general public. All presentations, fact sheets and other project information were made available on the site. In addition, the comment and stakeholder database was integrated into the site, allowing members of the general public to register for updates and/or submit comments. Email blasts were developed and distributed to the stakeholder database to encourage stakeholders to access information and provide input.
- *Community Partnership Program* – Provided business, civic and other organizations with articles, maps and other information at key milestones in the study. These organizations republished this content in their newsletters, web sites and other communications vehicles.

This effort resulted in broader dissemination of study information from a more diverse group of information sources.

- *Media Relations* – An aggressive media relations program was used to generate broad coverage of the study. Significant statewide print, television, radio and online media coverage was achieved. The media coverage resulted in increased visits to the project web site and comments submitted to the team.
- *Community Presentations* – In coordination with partners in the Community Partnership Program and separate requests, members of the RMRA delivered presentations to third-party organizations throughout the study.

### **M.3 Input Gathered**

At each decision milestone, input was gathered from the Corridor Input Teams. Input from these teams, as well as general public input, was reported to the RMRA Rail Feasibility Study Steering Committee for their consideration before developing recommendations that were brought to the RMRA Board of Directors. Below is a high-level summary of the input received during each phase of the study.

#### **Phase One: Scoping Input**

- General agreement with the study approach and process, particularly with regard to the types of technology and the range of speeds under consideration;
- Desire to study non-high-speed rail options that may be perceived to be easier to build due to existing infrastructure and right-of-way;
- Emphasis on the importance of this study to work with ongoing and past studies;
- Recommendation that the study consider local land-use and development plans in relation to station location options; and
- The issue of system interoperability between corridors (e.g. having one technology versus various technologies) was identified as an important trade-off to consider.

#### **Phase Two: Alternatives Selection Input**

- General support for the range of alternatives under consideration;
- Concerns about existing rail rights-of-way routes due to freight-capacity constraints and controversy/cost of freight rail relocation;
- Interest in a 470 route around Denver was raised;
- Importance of local-transit (both rail and bus) connections;
- Some recommendations about station locations to add, remove or relocate were offered; and

- Interest in non-stop “direct-service” options between major destinations (e.g. DIA to Vail, Colorado Springs to Denver) was identified.

### **Phase Three: Alternatives Analysis Input**

- General support for initial phase of the system to be truncated at Fort Collins, Pueblo and Eagle County Airport.
  - The second phase of the system would evaluate extending the I-70 Corridor to Grand Junction, Steamboat, Aspen and Leadville and the I-25 Corridor to Cheyenne and Trinidad
  - Some questions were raised about grouping all routes west of Eagle County Airport (to Grand Junction, Aspen and Craig) as one segment in the truncation analysis
- Strong desire to optimize the best performing alternative:
  - Explore sections of the I-70 Corridor where the 4% alignment evaluated for other technologies could improve the 220-mph technology
  - Evaluate costs/benefits associated with reducing/avoiding the use of freight rail rights-of-way
  - Evaluate costs/benefits of being able to operate the existing, non-FRA compliant version of the 220-mph technology
- A few comments brought up earlier continued to be important
  - Interoperability to allow for a one-seat trip between corridors
  - Close integration with FasTracks stations and other local transit options

## **M.4 Public Involvement Summary**

The public involvement approach for the study proved effective at engaging a diverse array of policy makers and other leaders throughout the process. The effort proved to be very effective in helping identify and resolve those issues that could be resolved. For those issues that couldn't be resolved or are not appropriate to resolve at this early stage of the planning effort, the issues were identified and documented so that future work can address them.