

Rail Technical Advisory Team

Meeting #4

Meeting Summary Notes

August 26, 2009, 10:00 a.m.
Phoenix Construction District Office

Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was called to order at approximately 10:00 am by Peggy Fiandaca, PSA/ADOT CCP, who led the participants through introductions and reviewed the agenda.

Rail Framework Study Context

Ms. Fiandaca thanked everyone for attending the meeting and reviewed the rail framework study context, using the PowerPoint presentation as a guide. She reminded the group of the importance of this study as the vision for the year 2050.

Discussion of Rail Strategic Opportunities

Freight Rail

Comments from Rail TAT on BNSF Phoenix Metropolitan Area Development and Operations Strategic Opportunity

Jay Smyth – Southwest Rail Corridor Coalition

Does the Peavine corridor make sense in regards to passenger rail north of Wickenburg?

Project Team

The Peavine corridor can be tricky, and its needs to interface with the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) process. The longer range vision for this corridor is passenger rail to Williams Junction, and possibly Flagstaff. The MAG region process is a priority, but improving the Peavine to allow for freight and passenger rail needs to be considered. There was a meeting on August 25 in Williams, in which they expressed their interest in making this happen to continue in to the Grand Canyon Railroad. This would be a longer range, strategic tourism related initiative.

Wulf Grote – Arizona Transit Association

The I-10 Corridor Study would need to be considered as well because freight rail would affect this corridor. We are focusing on the I-17 corridor and that is the direction we are heading. There is a lot of economic development interest along the I-17 and 19th Avenue corridors. Coordination is important, and the more we coordinate the better. We are trying to make a decision this fall.



Marc Pearsall - MAG

We are modeling that corridor right now. We have some initial runs completed. It is a healthy corridor. BNSF's primary focus is to maintain their existing connections and as long as we do not impede on that they are open to working with us.

Project Team

There may be even a third option which is to possibly use BNSF's 19th Avenue right-of-way to get into the Capitol Complex. The important information is that BNSF is willing to work with us and how it will transition from the MAG region north.

Jessica Smothermon – Department of Commerce

The Mobest Yard is important for economic development and there has been a lot of talk of lots near the Van Buren and 19th Avenue area.

John Aspebakken – BNSF

It is important to emphasize that the freight franchise through Phoenix is very important to BNSF. For every use of the BNSF right-of-way, we need to make sure we are able to continue or improve our freight franchise.

Stuart Boggs – RPTA

We need to look at Public Private Partnership (PPP) opportunities for the potential relocation of the Mobest Yard. Maybe a joint commuter rail/classification yard facility in Surprise. Explore PPPs to provide additional opportunities.

Comments from Rail TAT on BNSF Statewide Development and Operations Strategic Opportunity

John Aspebakken – BNSF

On the Flagstaff Bypass, have you been working with anyone on alignment and feasibility?

Project Team

No, not yet. This is conceptual.

Mark Thompson – Town of Florence

Would a bypass be only freight or passenger as well? Businesses in downtown Florence could be hurt by a passenger bypass.

Project Team

The intent is to focus on freight in the bypass but allow passenger. It would not go away, it would split traffic.

Marc Pearsall – MAG

There has been talk of single track through Flagstaff and converting the other track into bike path.

Project Team

Yes, there is a opportunity there as well.

Comments from Rail TAT on UP Tucson Metro Area Strategic Opportunity

Zoe Richmond – Union Pacific (UP)

There needs to be balance between these ideas to be able to serve our customers. The Red Rock facility is still in our plans. Double track has slowed down but is moving forward; however, there are no specific timelines available because it is driven by economic factors. This year we are 60% complete with double track between Los Angeles and El Paso. We need to be sure we do not leave our existing customers and businesses high and dry.

Comments from Rail TAT on UP Statewide Strategic Opportunity

Mack Luckie – Yuma Metropolitan Planning Organization (YMPO)

One primary interest is passenger rail between California, Yuma, and Phoenix.

John Liosatos – PAG

We need to study economic impacts of bypasses. Will the results from those studies be taken into consideration?

Project Team

Anything that goes into this study would be considered. We are now just identifying opportunities.

Comments from Rail TAT on New Corridor: Greater Hassayampa Valley Strategic Opportunity

Jay Smyth – Southwest Rail Corridor Coalition

If we are successful in reopening the Wellton Branch, would that alleviate need for this? The priority is intercity rail between Phoenix and Tucson.

Project Team

Yes.

Stuart Boggs – RPTA

Is there any chance right-of-way could be preserved upfront to ensure potential for future use?

Project Team

Yes. The cities of Buckeye and Surprise participated very actively in the Hassayampa Framework Study. There were more than 120 meetings during that process, and the whole corridor was jointly working with municipalities and developers. Both roadways and rail were considered. There was well over a majority of consensus on both.

Paul Rasmussen – Department of Environmental Quality

Solar Plant development is being considered in this area which should be seen as an opportunity instead of a potential conflict.

Mack Luckie – Yuma Metropolitan Planning Organization (YMPO)

Plan are underway to build a refinery between Gila Bend and Yuma as well.

Comments from Rail TAT on Mexican Deep Water Ports Strategic Opportunity

Sally Stewart – ADOT Communication and Community Partnerships
Do we know the timeframe for the Panama Canal expansion?

Project Team
That is underway. We can check the website.

Gail Lewis – ADOT
I think it is about 3 years; also **SCT** has just come back with the word that they will be providing an update within 30 days on issuing an RFP for the development of Punta Colonet. This sign a good sign since they had taken it off the table, that funding may be coming available.

Comments from Rail TAT on Inland Ports Strategic Opportunity

No comments from Rail TAT.

Comments from Rail TAT on Short Line Railroads Strategic Opportunity

John Dugan – ARG Trans
The study team has done a great job identifying issues and problems. Decisions to apply for abandonment are not made lightly. There are issues such as property taxes, maintenance, liability, etc. No shortline operator wants to abandon right-of-way.

Diane Arnst – Department of Environmental Quality
When right-of-way is abandoned is there an opportunity to do rails to trails in this state?

Project Team
Don't know of any in this state, but it can be seen as an opportunity to preserve right-of-way. In some areas it has started to revert back to railroad.

Passenger Rail

The Project Team discussed the five Passenger Rail Strategic Opportunities and asked for comment on all.

Regarding the discussion of the Western States Rail Coalition, currently limited to membership by COGs and MPOs and under consideration for opening up to additional members, Mr. Smyth pointed out that ADOT does belong to the Southwest Rail Coalition.

Zoe Richmond – Union Pacific
UP is in multiple (23) states. A lot of states are approaching UP with requests to participate in studies. As much as these studies can be consolidated that would help us. Our resources are not unlimited and such consolidation will help us respond to you better. We can suffer from study fatigue. Also, it often is unclear who the lead organization is and what is or is not a legitimate study.



Wulf Grote – Arizona Transit Association

Does the state intend to go for FTA "new starts" funding? If so, there needs to be coordination. There is only so much money that the state will get. We do not want to compete against ourselves by being uncoordinated. We need to be strategic in our priorities.

Other team members spoke of the federal reauthorization, stimulus, and potential new funding via Obama Administration.

Shannon Scutari – ADOT i

The intent is not to compete for funding but to find funding that we may be missing out on by not having essential fundamental items in place. As a state, we need to put the competition for funds to rest and work together to advance as a state.

Jay Smyth – Southwest Rail Corridor Coalition

Are any other corridors, besides the Peavine, being considered heading north? If not, should other options be considered?

John McNamara – AECOM/ADOT

The door was cracked open with BNSF. As we begin to look at north-south corridors, using an existing corridor will be a lot easier than building a new corridor in this area due to environmental groups and lots of public lands. The other option is the I-11 concept. The Peavine will not be attractive for passenger rail and other options needs to be considered.

Project Team

This is very long range and alternative analysis will be conducted on any northward extension outside the MAG region.

Jay Smyth – Southwest Rail Corridor Coalition

Have you talked to California?

Project Team

Yes.

Stuart Boggs – RPTA

Rail in California would relieve their airports.

John McNamara – AECOM/ADOT

California has not expressed much interest in coming to Arizona, they are more interested in going to Las Vegas.

Organizational Development and Support Systems

Shannon Scutari discussed the organizational development and support systems opportunities. She presented three options, along with their advantages and disadvantages. The final report is intended to be presented in a similar manner. This study will not be putting forth a recommendation, just things to consider. An inventory of what has worked and not worked in other states has been put together. This is not a hands-down the state department of

transportation comes in and tells you what is going to happen. We need your input as to what will work for Arizona and its stakeholders.

Comments from the Rail TAT

Wulf Grote – Arizona Transit Association

I assume you are talking about statewide rail not commuter rail within metro regions?

Shannon Scutari

Yes. I could see an advantage to having an organization that has a policy board that's primary focus is on the rail program. Right now the State Transportation Board is focused on highways and this would be secondary to them. There is legislation that was put together in the 70s that allows for a public nonprofit organization to be created. Powers of eminent domain are essential. There are advantages and disadvantages to all forms. There is an advantage with the state department of transportation in developing corridors that are multimodal. We have seen, by having created Metro, very distinct advantages and disadvantages. First of all we are not contiguous with other transit organizations. We all have our own agendas. Direct funding link is critical.

Jay Smyth – Southwest Rail Corridor Coalition

It doesn't matter what the organization is; the key is that they have to be devoted to rail. They cannot be distracted by other items. It also has to be an organization that is stable. ADOT has not seemed very stable over the past few years; we are always having to re-educate people.

Stuart Boggs – RPTA

Whatever option is chosen it is important that the railroads have a single entity to communicate with. Not having that hampers the discussion. What form it takes depends on procurement options (e.g., design build, design build operate, etc.) Design build option might be more attractive in the long term to attract more interest from the private sector.

Dianne Arnst – Department of Environmental Quality

It is important to stagger board terms to help continuity and inability to sweep funds.

Mark Thompson – Town of Florence

Regional focus is better than local focus.

Paul Rasmussen – Department of Environmental Quality

The Washington DC area would be a good model to look at. The state authority lends itself more to uniform vision and ability to deal with tradeoffs.

Jessica Smothermon – Department of Commerce

A state authority would be the best model to ensure we have a balance in things we consider as a state. State authorities are also interested in jurisdictional accountability.

John Aspebakken – BNSF

This authority needs to address freight as well as passenger. The interests are very different. It would be helpful to make sure the new authority has a good understanding of freight.

Next Steps

- Formulate implementation program that will include a timeline that will address organizational structure first and will become more general the further out it gets.
- State Rail Plan—ADOT is moving ahead immediately with this as its foundation. The state will be starting from scratch, because a formal rail plan hasn't been completed to date. ADO will review what other states have done and the spirit of what the Obama Administration is looking for. No federal funding unless we have a state rail plan.
- Rail Technical Advisory Team will review implementation plan in early October and comment. The team will be notified when it is posted to web for review and comment.

Three public forums are being planned on the Statewide Framework Study. These forums will present the study's recommendation and will take place in late October or early November.

Closing Comments:

The project team appreciates the continued interest and involvement of all participants in the third Rail Technical Advisory Team meeting. We look forward to your continuing contribution to this important project.