

# AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

## FORT COLLINS CITY COUNCIL

ITEM NUMBER: 15

DATE: October 6, 2009

STAFF: Kathleen Bracke

### SUBJECT

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Resolution 2009-095 Supporting the Reinstatement of the Amtrak *Pioneer Route* and Requesting That Amtrak Include Fort Collins as a Stop in its National Passenger Rail System.

### RECOMMENDATION

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Staff recommends adoption of the Resolution.

The City's Transportation Board voted unanimously to support this Resolution at its meeting on September 16, 2009.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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A citizen initiative is reaching out to communities along the North Front Range, such as Fort Collins, Loveland, and Longmont, to garner support for the potential reinstatement of the Amtrak *Pioneer* passenger rail service along the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad corridor.

Staff is requesting that the City Council adopt this Resolution to demonstrate to Amtrak the City's support for including the BNSF corridor and a stop in Fort Collins as part of the national study to consider reinstatement of the Amtrak *Pioneer* passenger rail service. The intent is to share this Resolution with Amtrak and the Colorado Congressional Delegation to demonstrate Fort Collins' support for the future passenger rail service.

### BACKGROUND

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Staff requests City Council support of the proposed Resolution, supporting a future Amtrak passenger rail service stop in Fort Collins as part of the national ongoing study for possible reinstatement of Amtrak's *Pioneer* route. Amtrak has recently released its initial study of the *Pioneer* Route and the study does not currently include analysis of the BNSF corridor. The intent of this Resolution is to encourage Amtrak to reconsider and include the analysis of the BNSF corridor for the *Pioneer* Route.

The future passenger rail service could potentially be a great benefit to the Fort Collins community, including residents and visitors, if Amtrak includes a stop/station at the existing Downtown Transit Center (LaPorte and Mason) and/or at the new South Transit Center site (south of Harmony Road, at Fairway Lane).

This would be compatible with the future connections to the City's Mason Corridor "MAX" Bus Rapid Transit service, as well as to other local Transfort routes and, in the future, to the Colorado Department of Transportation's long-term plans for interregional commuter rail service.

Staff intends to share this Resolution with Amtrak and the Colorado Congressional Delegation.

It is important to note that Amtrak will need to get agreement from the BNSF Railway Company in order to pursue this potential alignment of the Pioneer Route passenger rail service.

The cities of Loveland, Longmont, Boulder, and Cheyenne have provided similar support resolutions, requesting that Amtrak study the potential reinstatement of the *Pioneer* passenger route along the BNSF corridor and providing stops in all of these communities.

To learn more about the study to reinstate the Amtrak Pioneer passenger rail service, please visit the following websites:

<http://www.pioneertrain.com/index.htm>

<http://www.amtrak.com/servlet/ContentServer?pagename=Amtrak/InsideAmtrak>

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## ATTACHMENTS

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1. Draft Transportation Board meeting minutes, September 16, 2009
2. Letter of support received from the Transportation Board
3. Letters of support received from the public

Draft Transportation Board Minutes 09/16/09 Amtrak Resolution

**DRAFT**

**\*\*\*DRAFT\*\*\*  
MEETING MINUTES  
of the  
TRANSPORTATION BOARD**

**September 16, 2009**

**6:00 p.m.**

**City of Fort Collins Community Room  
215 North Mason  
Fort Collins, CO 80521**

**7. ACTION ITEM**

**B. Amtrak Draft Resolution (Pioneer Train)**

Chair Thomas introduced guest speaker Robert "Bob" Rynerson who is with Pioneer Restoration Organization, a group interested in bringing back passenger train service between here and Seattle, Washington. With a question of whether it would be better to bring the train through Fort Collins or Greeley.

*Rynerson:* We are working with Amtrak and their consultants who are conducting a study mandated by Congress. One of 7 studies this year that they were asked to do in particular regarding new or revival of old routes. The study is looking at revenue, costs, infrastructure, demographics, typical of any business plan. When the study is complete it will be placed in the hands of Congress. Ultimately, the routes are a political decision. We do not know what will become of this, but do know that nothing will happen if we do not participate.

I will provide a copy of this presentation to Gary Thomas, if anyone is interested, or visit our website [www.pioneertrain.com](http://www.pioneertrain.com).

This presentation is a record of a trip I made in 2008 from Denver to Portland. The first Pioneer proposal in the '70's did not work, because Washington D.C. did not feel this was feasible. We decided to preempt them by looking at every possible station. In the process we found the possibility of not necessarily running this on the same tracks that it ran on before.

When you get to Laramie (which is set up for rail service now) and Cheyenne there are alternate ways to get to Denver. What we are working on is an alternative that would also encompass Cheyenne. The original Pioneer skipped Cheyenne and ran from Laramie directly to Greeley.

Amtrak will only study the old route in the first stage. We want to set up a better route so that it does not get discontinued again. In Fort Collins you do not have a station set up for rail service; however, you do have an opportunity in the construction of the Mason Corridor. This line might also serve Loveland.

One of the things that Amtrak did not know when they began the study is all of the work that has been done already to develop the Front Range rail service (Fast Track plans) from Longmont to Denver. There are many issues but it is generally acknowledged that the rails will be upgraded for speeds faster than many of the Amtrak trains operate now.

The North Front Range project will also improve the rail from Fort Collins to Longmont, which means Amtrak would operate on a secondary rail from Cheyenne to Fort Collins which isn't very far. We discovered that people in Washington pictured the rail system traveling through homey ranch lands, our tracks are actually better than some of the main lines used on the east coast, but we do not have signals which presents an obstacle. In 2015 railroads are

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supposed to switch to satellite based GPS traffic management which would allow them to run faster on lines without signals.

In Longmont, the Fast Track program would provide Amtrak access to many more suburban populations other than Denver. At the Longmont Depot area, the RTD Longmont station has a lot of room available. Amtrak could stop at the Longmont railroad depot or nearby. Some equipment that RTD is required to purchase would also be needed by Amtrak to be compatible.

There are two scheduled alternatives; either way would be with service running outside or on the edge of the rush hour. This would use capacity that is unused now. RTD will have to pay for an additional site to run trains between Boulder and Longmont. Those sites would not be used on off hours. This would be the same type of system used in Chicago.

Boulder is missing a station; however, they do have Boulder Transit Village Plan in place for the commuter rail line to come in so there will be room there to go with this. Boulder City Council has voted its endorsement on this project.

One of the reasons that the citizens study has gone this way is that Greeley has never produced much rider ship compared to its population. Laramie was far more successful than Greeley, even though they have comparable demographics. We have found that Greeley's population has more ties in other directions, many going south with direct bus services to El Paso and that area. There are also ties to the eastern plains. It would be easier to drive, for example, to Fort Morgan where trains go through which is only an hour drive from Greeley versus riding a train to Denver and out.

All the indications are that Fort Collins and Boulder populations travel more. There is more affluence in the corridor and the University's are larger. The trains would travel slower, but would serve more people. The scenery is also better traveling this area versus going thru Greeley and Fort Lupton. The first phase of this study is to be released this week. We are still asking municipalities for community support. We are expecting them to come out to state that the route should go through Greeley. There is a possibility that the entire route may fail if the rider ship isn't high enough. At that point, we are going back to the elected officials having identified several faults and working on a winning counter offer.

Another interesting item is that Greeley spent a lot of money refurbishing their depot to be an interval bus terminal and then for unknown reasons moved the inter-city buses to a gas station several blocks away and the Chamber of Commerce moved into the facility. Amtrak customers were allowed to stay at the end of the entrance, but they lost the relationship for bus service. They have worked on setting up a Farmers Market to use some of the unused space. The location in Greeley is basically located in an industrial section. The platform in Greeley is the shining star and is ready to be used with modern ADA accessibility. The State of Oregon is planning on replacing rail in Greeley that the Union Pacific had removed with money they received with stimulus funds program, because they expect to be running trains through that route.

Fort Collins with all its modern ADA requirements fulfilled still has easier navigation for a train passenger than they would experience in Greeley. The Mason Corridor will have the latest modern amenities.

*Chair Thomas:* Could you please go back to the economics of why the land line failed the first time.

*Rynerson:* Amtrak's management always had the attitude that nobody important was in Idaho, Wyoming or Oregon. I worked on the original project in Oregon; I was the rail transportation

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manager from 1974 to 1976. We found that we were dealing with people in Washington who dismissed us. The only way that communities in the west have achieved any success was to organize and get information to them. One of the things we discovered was that trains were very limited in equipment. The service would sell out and yet there was still demand. The way that would be dealt with was to raise fares.

With the new administration we are coming to end of 16 years of neglect with Amtrak. When a side car was in an accident, it was side tracked and not repaired. The fleet was shrinking every year. The new administration has agreed to use stimulus money to repair cars, providing high tech jobs in arenas that are needed.

*Miller:* When they add equipment in order to meet peak demand what is the economic effect. Is there a subsidy required?

*Rynerson:* The more people that are on a train the better ability to make money. By capping capacity they increased their subsidies. This saved capital costs, but the incremental people are more than paying for themselves. In the Carter administration, there was a Congressional report that, if you added coach to trains, the cost of the coach train seat was only 02¢ or 03¢ if you ran enough cars. The fares could be made to fall below the rate of a bus seat. When they tried this, the inter-city bus industries organized against this. Ever since then a rate umbrella has been enacted that will not allow rail rates to go below bus service rates.

*Miller:* With a direct cost analysis and if you do not look at environmental or externalized cost, the additional passengers pay for the marginal cost in the increased cost of equipment.

*Rynerson:* Correct, it is possible to put enough passengers on the train that the carbon output on a luxury train would be comparable to driving a Prius, but you have to have enough cars.

*Robert:* If we had an Amtrak service pass through Fort Collins what is the infrastructure requirements? Would the transit center be opened all the time? How would we tie that into our City bus transit system?

*Rynerson:* That would depend on which location you would decide upon. There are plenty of Amtrak trains that go into towns on hours that buses are not running.

*Robert:* My real question is the effect if it came in on off-hours?

*Rynerson:* The two night pattern would mean that you could ride a Transfort bus into to go north, but if you were to get off of the train from Denver late in the evening most of the Transfort buses would no longer be operating. Train passengers are economically able to use a cab. On the infrastructure, Amtrak stations are more expensive to build now due to ADA requirements. Platforms have to be accessible.

*Bracke:* I was asked to bring forward a resolution for Council by citizens to support this initiative to study the Pioneer train route. The cities of Loveland, Boulder, Longmont and Cheyenne have been asked to sign a similar resolution based on the model resolution passed by the other communities along the route demonstrating our support and if the train would come through this route to have a stop in Fort Collins. In terms of infrastructure and location, that would need to be fleshed out. I am here tonight to ask your support of this resolution supporting the study of reinstating the Pioneer rail system and it will be presented to City Council on October 6<sup>th</sup>.

*Duvall:* How soon could the Pioneer service start?

*Rynerson:* The earliest would be 2 to 3 years depending on the equipment. It would depend on the release of cars that were sent east at the time of line closures. It could even be pushed out 3 to 4 years.

*VanTatenhove:* Would it be possible for commuters to use this for business? People who work between these communities might be interested in using this service.

*Chair Thomas:* These trains have been traveling for 2 days. The chances the train would arrive on time are doubtful. An hour late after 48 hour traveling time is not bad, but an hour late on a one hour train ride would not be acceptable.

*Robert:* I noticed that multi-modal environment is not mentioned in this resolution, yet this is expressed in most documents that the City creates. Can this be added?

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*Bracke:* This resolution was modeled on the resolutions being used by the other Front Range communities, but I am sure that this can be added.

*Miller:* During the presentation you alluded to riding a train is equivalent to driving a Prius. The internet made a distinction between light and heavy rail. What is the difference between heavy and light rail?

*Rynerson:* Heavy rail in the transit system is like the NY State subway systems. Heavy refers to the capital investment involved and is completed separated from traffic. RTD light rail is really a heavy rail line. Amtrak energy consumption did not compare well to Greyhound buses, but that was because personal space was much larger on the Amtrak train. If you crammed seats in the same manner that buses are designed Amtrak would come out as or more efficient.

When you compare a rail car or bus to an automobile the energy cost difference becomes relative to the difference in personal space. When discussing carbon footprints you usually have an assumption as to what the source of electricity in the Pacific Northwest is normally, hydro-electric, locally it comes from Colorado coal.

**Bill Jenkins motioned to support, Shane Miller seconded, motion passed unanimously**

**Transportation Board**

Gary Thomas, Chair

September 22, 2009

Mayor Hutchinson and Members of Council,

The Transportation Board has voted unanimously to support a resolution encouraging the return of Amtrak passenger rail service (The Pioneer Train) between Chicago, Denver and Seattle with routing through Fort Collins.

At the direction of Congress, Amtrak has undertaken a study on whether the Pioneer Train, last run in 1997, could be returned to service. The scope of their initial study is only based on using the previous routing which took the train up through Greeley which missed most of the Northern Front Range population centers and even missed Cheyenne. The cities of Boulder, Longmont and Loveland have already recommended that the study be expanded to include the Burlington Northern Santa Fe tracks that link those towns with Fort Collins and Cheyenne.

The T-Board supports returning long distance passenger rail service to this area if for nothing more than additional travel choices for our residents. Train travel could again become an attractive alternative to driving or flying if the price of fuel continues to rise.

There is also an economic development opportunity for Fort Collins, especially if we were to become one of the stops on the line. Amtrak seeks to limit its stations to a minimum of 30 miles separation. Having a regional stop here could bolster development of the Mason Corridor and bring new tourist and traveler dollars into the community. Having train access to Colorado State University opens great possibilities for rail passengers while the Masson Corridor Bus Rapid Transit system would connect the rest of the city.

I would be happy to discuss this proposal more at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Gary D. Thomas  
Chair

From: "Marc Cittone" <mcittone@hotmail.com>  
To: KBRACKE@fcgov.com  
Date: 8/25/2009 11:00:44 PM  
Subject: Support for Pioneer Train service

Hello Kathleen,

I'm writing you to express my support for the resolution in support of Pioneer train service.

I believe the rail service would be a valuable addition to the future of our region. The proposed route through the Front Range would add an important transportation choice.

Twice a year, I visit my family in Wyoming. Every year, I am faced with the choice of an eight-hour drive across Wyoming, or an equally hectic (and often expensive) trip to DIA for a flight. Counting time to DIA and arriving early for the flight, my total travel time by air is still 5 hours! Not to mention the costs of driving - and flying - when gas prices rise.

I believe there are many of us who would use this service - I also occasionally visit friends in Salt Lake City, or spend weekends in Denver. And perhaps my parents, who are older, would be more willing to pay a visit via Amtrak than get on an airplane (as they will no longer drive this route). I believe many Fort Collins residents would love to have additional travel choices, whether for family, business, or vacation.

I remember taking trains elsewhere and enjoyed the "luxury" of arriving 15 minutes before my train, not having to worry about airport check-ins or baggage claim; and sitting and relaxing in the car, reading, watching scenery, not having to drive. Add to this that it is environmentally positive compared to the car or airplane. That is just the practical side - no doubt Amtrak service would be a tourist draw as well.

As our community looks at the Mason Street Corridor, commuter rail paralleling I-25, and other transportation improvements, I believe Amtrak service for medium-distance trips would be a wonderful addition to our choices here in Colorado.

To those who say Amtrak is subsidized, I ask when was the last time you paid a toll to drive I-25? I simply mean to point out that most forms of transportation in this country are subsidized - but Amtrak adds the benefits of environmental responsibility, gives us greater choice in getting where we want to go, and would bring tourists to our community. I also understand the ridership on rail is enjoying an upward trend.

Amtrak would be only one choice and hopefully a step along the way to developing a higher-speed rail corridor in the Front Range. We all know population is growing and that transportation alternatives should be a priority. Hence, I believe demonstrating support for the alignment through Boulder, Fort Collins and Cheyenne is important. The more effective route through our denser population centers seems like it would help make the route more self-supporting.

I am sure there are questions - about station location; about use of the BNSF rail line - but I feel this is precisely why the route should be studied.

As a five-year resident of Fort Collins and a nine-year resident of the Front Range, I can say our Council and Mayor has shown balance and vision and I encourage them to support Pioneer service through Fort Collins.

Sincerely,



Marc Cittance  
524 W. Laurel St. Apt. A  
Fort Collins, CO 80521

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**From:** "Jonathan Hole" <drjmhole@msn.com>  
**To:** KBRACKE@fcgov.com  
**Date:** 8/28/2009 11:00:06 PM  
**Subject:** Amtrak train

I would like the Council to consider passing the consent agenda item concerning the passage of the Pioneer through Fort Collins. Passenger count on long distance trains has improved in the last two years. As Fort Collins is an important city on that route, I would hope that the Council would be supportive of the effort to include this train in its plans for transportation. Thank you.

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Masters Hole  
4309 Kano Drive  
Fort Collins, CO 80526

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**CC:** kaannos@centurytel.com  
**From:** "neal" <nealm323@hotmail.com>  
**To:** KBRACKE@fcgov.com  
**Date:** 8/10/2009 12:05:37 PM  
**Subject:** Getting AMTRAK in Fort Collins

Hi Kathleen,

As you know Amtrak is planning on restoring the old Pioneer route which as you know would hopefully go thru this town, and I think that this is THE answer to everyone's problems on local commuter train to help people to go to Denver or Boulder or Longmont even Loveland.

This is the time to get this whole thing going and to prove to Amtrak that Fort Collins wants passenger rail back in this town. Not only would it go perfectly with MAX, it would also bring people to down town fort collins and Transfort would get busier as well!

This is a win win situation here, and I am hoping you can convince our beloved Mayor and the city council to accept Amtrak to come thru town using of course the Burlington Northern tracks even though I am still wondering how close they can actually get to the transit center without holding up traffic on Laporte Ave but never the less it is a great idea that Amtrak has by going this route! Maybe a new set of short tracks can be installed on Mason to get close to the sidewalk at least.

I am all for this and in fact when the news broke of this, I was excited and thrilled and when I saw the map of the new route, I was even more excited then ever because even though it would take AMtrak some time to go to Denver via this route it would be worth it! People( as I read ) in the Coloradoan this past July are also excited about this and wants this to happen. So I am asking to please get this to happen, get Amtrak (prove to them ) that our city wants Amtrak to go thru fort collins, I would hate to see what happens if the our Mayor and city council disapproves of this. It might make a ripple effect for, Loveland, Longmont, and even Boulder.. Fort Collins is last on the list to get on this wagon and we need this more then ever to get our economy going.

Sincerely

Neal Moody

RESOLUTION 2009-095  
OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF FORT COLLINS  
SUPPORTING THE REINSTATEMENT OF THE AMTRAK *PIONEER ROUTE*  
AND REQUESTING THAT AMTRAK INCLUDE FORT COLLINS  
AS A STOP IN ITS NATIONAL PASSENGER RAIL SYSTEM

WHEREAS, the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 directed Amtrak to study the restoration of passenger service on the Chicago-Denver-Seattle *Pioneer Route*; and

WHEREAS, Fort Collins is a growing city and the home of a major university which needs a wide array of transportation facilities to serve its population; and

WHEREAS, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway route through Fort Collins and other Front Range population centers warrants study as the best route for the *Pioneer Route* between Denver and Cheyenne; and

WHEREAS, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe route is being considered for upgrading for regional passenger rail service, which would complement long-distance Amtrak service; and

WHEREAS, trains are an environmentally friendly means of multimodal travel that can substantially reduce transportation-generated carbon emissions; and

WHEREAS, the City has long been committed to the support of environmentally friendly transportation as an alternative to congested roads and airways; and

WHEREAS, passenger trains perform an especially important function when roads and airways are shut down by winter weather, leaving rail as the only intercity transportation alternative; and

WHEREAS, a range of transportation facilities contributes to the vitality and attractiveness of the City to residents and visitors alike.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF FORT COLLINS that:

Section 1. The City Council hereby requests that Amtrak include Fort Collins as a stop in its national system.

Section 2. That the City supports all efforts to reinstate the Amtrak *Pioneer Route* with direct service to Fort Collins.

Passed and adopted at a regular meeting of the Council of the City of Fort Collins this 6th day of October, A.D. 2009.

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Mayor

ATTEST:

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City Clerk