LAND USE TRENDS

In 1940 Larimer and Weld County had about 100,000 persons. By 1970 the population had grown to 180,000. By the Year 2035, these two counties are expected to have over 1 million people.

TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

The North Front Range area has three primary north-south roadways – US 287, I-25, and US 85. These three roadways are the primary way for residents of the North Front Range area to travel south to the Denver metropolitan area or north to Laramie and Cheyenne, Wyoming.

I-25 , just south of SH 56, is expected to have almost 100,000 vehicles using it by 2030. US 287, between Loveland and Ft. Collins, is expected to have 45,000 daily vehicle trips.

There are a number of east-west, SH 14, SH 392, US 34, and SH 60. These roadways provide the primary way for residents to travel between Ft. Collins, Greeley, and Loveland.

Weld and Larimer County are also developing parallel county roads to take some of the pressure off of these primary travel corridors.

Pubic transit systems exist in Ft. Collin, Greeley, and Loveland. There also a number of rural transit service that provide residents of the North Front Range area will an alternative form of transportation, but there is not regional transit agency that is meeting the mobility needs during the morning and evening peak-hours.

There is a very extensive rail system in the North Front Range area. The Union Pacific and Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad companies have major north-south rail lines that run through Ft. Collins, Loveland, Greeley, and numerous other smaller communities. The Great Western Railroad has the most number of rail lines that service Ft. Collins, Greeley, and Loveland.

FUTUR RAIL SYSTEM

The North Front Range MPO has only selected a portion of this rail system for commuter rail service. The Transportation Vision for the North Front Range area ignores a number of other existing rail lines.

What if all of the existing rail lines were either purchased or leased from these three railroads, you would have a rail network that would rival what is planned in the Denver metropolitan area.

This rail network could have 80 rail stations. At each of these stations, the land would be redeveloped to a higher density. The land around these rail stations would be too valuable to leave them in their current uses. The land within ¼ mile of a rail station is an excellent candidate for redevelopment into a Transit Oriented Development (TOD). This area is referred to as the Station Influence Area (SIA).

If each rail station had 1,000 dwelling units and 750,000 square feet of commercial development, you are looking at 80,000 dwelling units, housing 200,000 people, and 26,250,000 square feet of commercial space.

These rail stations would provide residents with the ability to commute between all of the major population and employment centers of the North Front Range area as well as Laramie and Cheyenne, Wyoming and the Denver metropolitan area. This system would also provide numerous opportunities to connect with the proposed high speed rail line that will run along the I-25 corridor. This rail system could provide access to Colorado State University and the University of Northern Colorado. It would be possible to reach Denver International Airport in 60 minutes.

ANTICIPATED REVENUES

This rail system could cost $2.5 billion to build including the 80 stations. Most people would say that it is not possible to raise this amount of money solely from the residents of the North Front Range area and meet the other transportation needs of the region. However, it may be possible to construct this system without any public funds. All of the funds needed to construct this system could come from within the North Front Range area.

Home buyers will usually pay a higher price for a home that fronts a golf course or open space area. For this extra money, the homeowner gets in return is access to the open space or a view of the golf course.

What would happen if residents who purchase a home in the SIA paid an additional $25,000 at the time of closing. A $250,000 home would cost $275,000. For this one time fee, all of the people living in that home would have free use of the proposed rail system, as long as they lived in the home. This $25,000 is equivalent to one new automobile. When the home is sold, the new residents would now own this right. This right would follow the home.

For commercial businesses, a one-time fee of $10 per square foot would be assessed at the time the building permit was issued. This fee would allow any employee working in that building to be able tor ride the rail system for free as well.

With this Public Access To Transit (PATT) fee system, it would be possible to raise $2.6 billion which would be enough to cover the cost of constructing the rail system along with the 80 stations. It would be possible to get developers of the rail station to construct the rail station. There may be a good possibility of getting as much as 25 percent of the cost of the system from State an Federal sources. By using a design, build, operate and maintain approach, there may be some additional savings.

It may be necessary to institute a small sales tax to pay for the operation of the rail system. This tax would be 0.1 to 0.2 percent, or one to two cents on every $10.

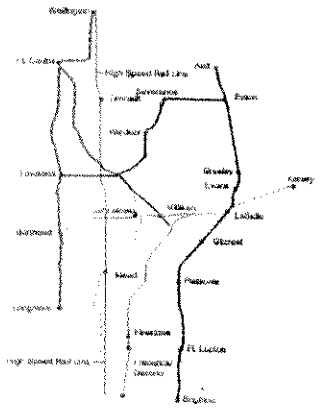
By building this rail system, it may be possible to have more open space between communities so that they don't have to grow together. TODs are more energy efficient and

would have less emissions associated with the traveling in the North Front Range area.

REGIONAL TRANSIT AGENCY

A regional transit agency would need to be established for the North Front Range area. This agency would be called FLAG Transit for the Ft. Collins, Loveland, and Greeley Transit. This agency could also include the three public transit agencies.

The proposed FLAG Rail System is noted below:



The FLAG Rail system would consist of eight corridors:

1. Wellington to Longmont (Red Line)
2. Ault to Brighton (Blue Line)
3. Kersey to Thornton (Green Line)
4. Loveland to Eaton (Pink Line)
5. North of Ft. Collins to Greeley (Yellow Line)
6. North of Johnstown to Longmont (Orange Line)
7. Berthoud to Milliken (Black Line)
8. Ft. Collins to Milliken (Gray Line)

This system is approximately 260 miles in length with most using existing rail corridors.

PREFERRED TECHNOLOGY

The preferred commuter rail technology is Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU). This is the only technology that can operate on the same rail line with freight trains. There is only one manufacturer of FRA-certified DMU, that manufacturer is Rader Colorado Railcar which is located in Ft. Lupton, Colorado.

This vehicle cost between $3 and $4 million to build. It has lower emissions that an Electric Multiple Unit (EMU) train. It can travel at 60 to 90 mph with a seat capacity of 60 to 170 seats.

PHASING

The FLAG Rail System would be built in three phases. The first phase would be the Red, Blue and Black Lines. The second phase would include the Pink, Gray, and Yellow Lines. The last phase would include the Green and Yellow Lines.

It would take between 10 and 15 years to construct. The number of years needed to build the system would depend in large part on the revenue stream for the PATT fee system.

NEXT STEP

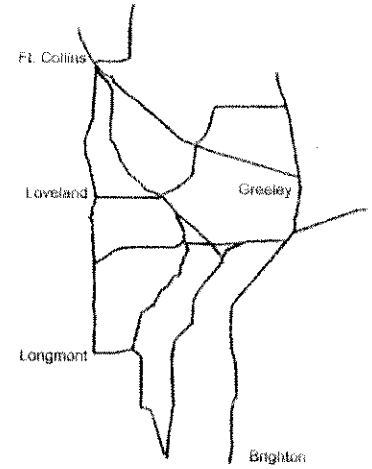
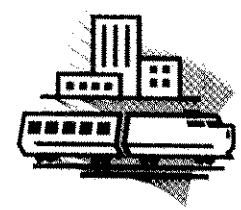
The next step in the process would be to conduct a feasibility study of the FLAG Rail System. This study would refine the cost of the system. It would estimate transit ridership, and establish the PATT fee rates for residential and commercial land uses.

If you want to get involved in this effort, you can contact:

John Peacock
3039 Anchor Way, #4
Ft. Collins, CO 80525-4700
(970) 223-0541

or
Dave L. Ruble, Jr.
14662 East Oberlin Place
Aurora, CO 80014
(720) 231-1947

Connecting Northern Colorado by Rail



FLAG Transit