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Transportation

Voters will decide on Front Range train in November



A rendering of the proposed Colorado Connector train between Fort Collins and Pueblo
FRONT RANGE PASSANGER RAIL DISTRICT



By [Lincoln Roch](#) – Intern, Denver Business Journal
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The next stop for passenger rail in Colorado is this November's ballot.

The Front Range Passenger Rail District voted Friday to refer a 1/3 cent sales tax to voters along the Interstate 25 corridor to fund the Colorado Connector train that would link Fort Collins to Pueblo.

The ballot measure would raise the sales tax by 33 cents on a \$100 purchase within the district's boundaries. The district estimates it will raise \$295 million annually.

If voters approve the tax, the district says that service on the full route would begin by 2032, with a pay as you go plan to expand service as more revenue is generated from the tax over time.

Under the district's delivery plan, in 2032, trains would make four round trips between Denver and Fort Collins each day, stopping in Westminster, Broomfield, Louisville, Boulder, Longmont and Loveland.

There would be two round trips between Denver and Pueblo, with stops in Littleton, Sterling Ranch and Colorado Springs. That would then increase to six trips to Fort Collins and four trips to Pueblo by 2037.

Regardless of whether the sales tax passes, an initial service with three trips on the northern route is slated to begin by 2029.

That is expected to cost \$332 million, with funding secured from the state and the Regional Transportation District. The expansion of the Colorado Connector service to Colorado Springs and Pueblo would then cost an additional \$2.7 billion.

Operating the full route would cost between \$85 million and \$116 million annually, the district forecasts.

In July, the district board also [added two special event stops](#) to the proposal. On game days, they would serve Denver's Burnham Yard, the preferred site for the Denver Broncos' new stadium, and the planned Denver Summit FC stadium at Santa Fe Yards.

The district has spent five years preparing to bring a measure to the ballot.

Unlike RTD's light rail and commuter trains, the CoCo, as it's been branded, would use the tracks of the Union Pacific and BNSF railroads. The district has already signed a track sharing agreement for the initial service.

The majority of construction would come from building stations, upgrading rail crossings and building bypass tracks in certain areas.

"The signed term sheet with BNSF really demonstrates a novel approach that hasn't been done before in any other state for delivering service, where it's a true partnership with the host railroads," FRPR General Manager Sal Pace said.

The State Legislature shrunk the district's boundaries in the spring to remove some of the more conservative communities, like most of Douglas County. Municipalities in the district now include cities with a station and those within close proximity to a station. Opponents of the train called the redrawing a gerrymander meant to help the ballot measure's odds of passing.

"This is Chicago-style politics at its worst, and it really shows you this is not about moving people; this is about moving money," said Jon Caldara, president of the Independence Institute and former chair of the RTD Board.

In the Denver-metro area, the following cities fall within the district boundaries: Arvada, Boulder, Bow Mar, Broomfield, Centennial, Cherry Hills Village, Columbine Valley, Denver, Edgewater, Englewood, Federal Heights, Glendale, Greenwood Village, Lafayette, Lakeside, Lakewood, Littleton, Longmont, Louisville, Sheridan, Superior, Wheat Ridge and Sterling Ranch.

The district would be responsible for building the core infrastructure at stations, like the platforms, but it would send back money annually to each municipality with a station to help build multimodal connections.

Denver would receive \$9 million annually from that local return funding. An additional incentive increased the funding to \$9.9 million after the Denver City Council voted earlier in July to issue a proclamation supporting the train.

Additionally, Pace wants the district to spend at least \$100 million on additional transit and pedestrian infrastructure at the stadium stops, he said. That would bring the total investment from FRPR in Denver to [nearly \\$350 million over 25 years](#), the district says, according to previous Denver Business Journal reporting.

The board voted 14-1, with the only no vote coming from board member Cory Applegate, who is also an El Paso County Commissioner. Applegate did not respond to a request to comment from the Denver Business Journal prior to publication.