

This is the seed catalog, folks, the play script, the stage directions, the building plans. If the info and recommendations of this study were taken to heart by the public and our policymakers, we could have a trial commuter rail system within weeks, for a very small relative cost. This rail system could be in place and actually running for less than the cost of the current study for a new rail system between downtown Albuquerque and Rio Rancho. The rail system proposal here would give Rio Grande Valley commuters, air travelers, casino patrons, university students, and local area tourists a real experience of the best way to travel.

Provisions are made for bicycles and wheelchairs, as well as pedestrians and park and ride drivers from outlying areas.

One other virtue of this document – it's not hard to read.

We have excerpted below some passages we feel summarize the principal ideas in the study.

Operating Advantages of Regional Rail

Regional/commuter rail is intended to operate with stops every five to ten miles in and near metropolitan areas and every 20 to 40 miles between cities, and to serve lower density areas. Stations on the extreme ends of the system often include park and ride lots while the intermediate and neighborhood stops are designed for better access by pedestrians, bicyclists, and drop-off passengers referred to by the transit industry as “kiss and ride” customers. The ability to carry large numbers of passengers with a relatively small investment in land (a single railroad track has the carrying capacity of eight freeway lanes) and lower labor costs than buses can give rail options practical viability in the metropolitan environment. The travel time advantage of regional rail over other conventional surface modes is obtained by both total average speed and use of the railroad tracks as an exclusive right-of-way.

Speed is the factor usually misunderstood when comparing rail to highway travel

because of the misconception that posted speed limits determine an automobile commuters minimum travel time. Most regular commuters acknowledge that the true determinants of travel time are a combination of the time of day the trip occurs, the cyclical, seasonal or day of the week time period one chooses to drive and the random acts of traffic, weather and a multitude of independent drivers. None of these factors has any significant influence on the scheduled operation of railroads. This allows them to obtain unrestricted peak speeds near 79 mph or more, and to maintain constant average speeds of 45 to 50 mph, including the time necessary to complete five to six station stops per hour. Automobiles in rush hour traffic rarely reach a peak speed greater than 55 and most frequently travel at average travel time speeds of 25 to 30 mph or less, until a traffic accident occurs and then they simply stop moving.

The major operating advantages of regional rail trains over buses for metropolitan corridor operations is the high-capacity, high-volume, low unit cost per passenger, and the quick loading that is possible with multiple doors that are wide enough for people to pass in either direction with the level platform loading of wheelchairs, eliminating the time-consuming chair lift process. The relative permanence of railroad tracks also creates a greater incentive for developers to invest in property amenities near each station in order to take advantage of the high volume of pedestrian traffic most desired by retailers and fast food franchises. Train stations also tend to concentrate higher volumes of passengers at one location than do bus stops. Studies have also shown that people actually walk or drive farther to ride a train than they will to catch a bus.

Passenger Comfort and Convenience

The final and perhaps the most important characteristic of regional passenger rail service is the high quality amenities and conveniences which only a large self-contained modern rail car can provide. Regional/commuter rail on a western system is rarely a standing ride and then only because of late boarding on a rush hour train. The image of a graffiti covered steel tube lined with steel benches, as depicted in Hollywood movies showing thugs and uncivilized masses, is a very distorted picture of transit and is virtually nonexistent even in metropolitan New York City or

Chicago.

Western regional/commuter rail cars are not subway cars, or bullet trains packed with commuters. Instead, these modern rail cars are equivalent to an airport lounge on wheels. The ride on today's commuter style trains is smooth and quiet and the comfortable air-conditioned surroundings offer spacious room to sit, walk, or stand. The comfortable high-backed seats can be specified as easy to clean vinyl or deluxe reclining cloth for longer trip service. Restrooms are available on-board and the newer equipment is quickly following the airline practice of providing public phones and other deluxe amenities targeted for the business commuter or traveler. The cars recently delivered for service in Vancouver Canada include a coffee espresso concession bar on-board each train. Each car can hold about 120 to 150 seated passengers with the average train proposed for Albuquerque consisting of three bi-level passenger cars and one locomotive for a combined capacity of approximately 400 to 450 passengers. No other form of transportation can offer so many advantages while providing such a high level of personal safety and comfort. However without the full participation of public sector partners, this system will not become a reality. Million dollar transportation investments will continue to be made by state, federal and local governments, but it will be up to the people and their elected officials to decide whether New Mexico benefits from a "transportation transformation" to modernize passenger rail service.

Technical Assessment

Can You Run A Passenger Train On This Line? - YES

One of the most basic prerequisites has been achieved: the determination of technical feasibility. The initial review of the technical merit of the project was completed during the preparation of the draft concept plan. The basic operating plan calls for passenger rail service on existing tracks in a sub-division (railroad terminology referring to a designated segment of the line) with excess capacity. Therefore, there are no physical barriers to prevent the immediate start of service and the locomotive equipment required for service is presently available for lease or purchase. Crews to provide the labor for operations and maintenance are available, and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) is interested in working together with

the BCTDD to operate and dispatch the trains on their tracks. The manager of passenger services for BNSF, Mr. D. J. Mitchell, has offered to work with BCTDD and configure local railroad operations in the Belen to Bernalillo segment of the line to accomodate local commuter rail operations.

Excerpted from THE NEW MEXICO REGIONAL RAIL MARKET TEST FEASIBILITY STUDY prepared for The Bernalillo County Transportation Development District (BCTDD) by EP Hamilton & Associates, Inc. in June 1996.

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