

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

The 2040 Regional Transit Element (RTE) replaces the 2035 RTE and will become a part of the 2040 North Front Range Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The purpose of the 2040 RTE is to guide development of transit in the region, which encompasses the Fort Collins Transportation Management Area (TMA) and Greeley urbanized areas.

The 2035 RTE defined a vision for regional transit services by providing a framework to understand the types of regional transit services that may be needed in the future. Since its publication in 2011, the North I-25 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), has provided a guide for how transit could be implemented along the I-25 corridor. Addressing transit service needs along the major corridors in the region is a necessary step to connect the region to the transit elements identified in the North I-25 EIS.

The 2040 RTE focuses on the steps necessary to translate a long-term regional transit vision into reality. It provides alternatives ranging from maintaining the status quo to rapid progress towards the service levels envisioned in the North I-25 EIS. This planning effort reflects a different approach and a more detailed level of analysis than has been done in the past. The 2040 RTE Alternatives:

- Define service levels to move a corridor from no service to a well-developed transit mode and illustrates the potential for service development in the region's primary corridors.
- Provides factual information on what is necessary to provide regional transit, at a variety of service levels.
- Broadly identifies the funding and governance challenges needing to be addressed prior to implementing transit services.
- Provides strategies and tools for developing regional transit services.

PROJECT GUIDANCE

The North Front Range Metropolitan Planning Organization (NFRMPO) developed the 2040 RTE with input and guidance from the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), the three regional transit providers, and the Larimer and Weld County Mobility Councils. The Planning Council guided the development of the report and adopted the plan at their August 6, 2015 meeting as part of the regional planning process.

Key concepts of this plan include:

- How to connect communities in the region with each other and with activity centers outside the region;
- Practical and implementable results; and
- Strong public involvement.

The 2040 RTE builds on local planning efforts and other planning studies in the region. **Appendix A** contains a listing of relevant planning reports, including corridor plans, mode-specific plans, and local transit plans. Since the completion of the 2035 RTE in 2011, eight planning reports and plans have been completed, necessitating a full update of the 2040 RTE. These plans include:

- CDOT Statewide Transit Plan (2015)
- Interregional Connectivity Study (2014)
- 2040 Economic and Demographic Forecast North Front Range Metropolitan Planning Organization (NFRMPO) (2013)
- NFRMPO Coordinated Public Transit/Human Services Transportation Plan (2013)
- North Front Range Transit Vision Feasibility Study (2013)
- Colorado State Freight and Passenger Rail Plan (2012)
- Greeley Transportation Master Plan Update (2011)
- North I-25 Final Environmental Impact Statement (2011)

This study considers local transit plans, but does not address specific local transit services or schedules. All decisions about local levels of transit service remain with local entities. The regional services addressed in this plan are public, fixed-route services.

PLANNING PROCESS

The development of the 2040 RTE has proceeded in two major phases. The first phase documents regional characteristics; existing and planned transit services; analysis of demand for transit; and the development of alternatives for regional transit services. The second phase involves an action plan to move the region forward in the development of regional transit services.

The planning activities for this 2040 RTE began with the solicitation of comments from the Mobility Councils and residents in Larimer and Weld counties. The public involvement continued with public meetings in each County to solicit comments on the 2040 RTE corridors. In addition, it included a series of meetings with the jurisdictions in the region to solicit their views on the alternatives for developing regional transit services.

PLANNING ISSUES

Within the region, local governments have developed transit services primarily to meet the local travel needs of residents within their communities. As the region has grown there has been an increasing need for transit services between communities and to major activity and employment centers.

The NFRMPO region is growing rapidly, with the population projected to increase by 78 percent from 488,513 in 2010 to 896,191 by 2040. Much of the future development in the region is anticipated to occur within the center of the region and in unincorporated areas where transit services may not exist or are not as well developed as in the urbanized areas.

The region's rapid development also taxes the transportation network. Travel forecasts project regional congestion levels will require significant investment in the transportation infrastructure for all modes. This raises the issue of transit's role in the future regional transportation network. Transit services could provide an effective alternative during peak period travel times as a feeder service to regional transit corridors.

Many questions still must be answered. What transit services are needed in the future? How will they be delivered? How will they be funded? A significant amount of planning work has gone into addressing the question of what services are needed within and between communities. The preferred alternative developed in the North I-25 EIS includes significant regional transit services. The outstanding issues are how the services will be developed, funded, and delivered.

The funding of transit services is a perennial challenge and the development of regional transit services requires stable funding across and between communities. Currently, each community is responsible for determining how they fund their local transit services and any connections to other communities through regional services.

While it is widely recognized that regional transit services are important to Northern Colorado's future, an implementation plan does not exist for developing such services. There are two possible approaches: 1) extend out from existing services or 2) establish new routes in corridors where conditions are conducive to establishing transit services. Pilot route services have been started, but permanent financing for successful services are still needed.

Recognizing these issues and challenges, this 2040 RTE will focus on the practicalities of identifying how to move forward in the development of transit services for the region.