

Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) Formation Committee – Meeting Recap

Location: Virtual – Zoom
Date: Friday, March 7, 2025
Time: 10:00 – 11:30 AM

Attendees: Michael Buccino (City of Steamboat Springs), Sonja Macys (Routt County), Randy Looper (City of Craig), Ryan Banks (Town of Hayden), Stacy Geilert (Town of Yampa), Tom Leeson (City of Steamboat Springs), Dan Foote (City of Steamboat Springs), Jia Carroll (City of Steamboat Springs), Jonathan Flint (City of Steamboat Springs), Peter Brixius (City of Craig), Kevin Booth (Yampa Valley Regional Airport), Ciara Bartholomew (South Routt School District), Skyler McKinley (AAA/Oak Creek), Eli Nykamp (Stagecoach), Bill Ray (WR Communications), Jason Miller (Fehr & Peers), Mikhail Kaminer (Fehr & Peers), Polly Jessen (Kaplan Kirsch), Kirsten Crawford (Kaplan Kirsch) and Steve Kaplan (Kaplan Kirsch)

Quick recap

The meeting focused on developing and refining service goals, cost estimates, and funding options. Discussions covered potential bus routes, service frequencies, fare policies, and the possibility of incorporating commuter rail into future plans. The committee reviewed and revised the intergovernmental agreement (IGA) and discussed upcoming public hearings.

Next steps

- Kaplan Kirsch (KK) legal team to update the IGA document based on the discussions, including removing property tax as a funding source and clarifying language around visitor benefit taxes.
- Sonja to check with Eric (Route County attorney) for any feedback on the IGA.
- Bill to send out the updated IGA packet with clean versions to all members by Wednesday, March 12.
- All members to review the updated IGA packet when received and prepare for the upcoming public hearings.
- Bill to schedule another formation committee meeting between the two public hearings.
- Michael to attend all first public hearings in person and join the second hearings via Zoom.
- Sonja to work with Bill to invite a representative from the state working on mountain rail to a future meeting.

Ongoing Projects and Updates Discussed

Michael welcomed team members and discussed his conversation with Senator Dylan Roberts regarding funding. Bill reviewed the meeting agenda and briefly discussed the upcoming public hearings. Jason and Mikhail from Fehr & Peers led the discussion on the project list. Mikhail presented a preliminary service goal document that outlines cost estimates for the RTA's proposed service goals. The document included low-cost and high-cost scenarios for each service goal.

Jason discussed the levels of service for transportation planning and noted that they were not fixed but rather based on demand and potential ridership. Polly asked about accounting for initial capital investment versus ongoing operational expenses, to which Jason responded that they amortized capital expenses over time, considering strategies like leasing or bonding.

The committee discussed the tradeoffs of fare-based versus free service. The cost estimates provided by Fehr & Peers did not include fare revenue, noting that if the RTA decided to charge fares it would allow the RTA to use that revenue to improve and expand service. The committee discussed retaining the fare on the regional route and using polling to gauge voters' preferences. Randy noted that it might not be viable in Craig to only have taxes fund service.

At Service Goal 8, Sonja provided an update on state interest in the RTA and mountain rail project, emphasizing the need for local funding to operate a potential commuter line. She suggested keeping rail discussions in the RTA plans without specifying costs until more information is available. The group considered inviting state representatives to the next meeting for input, with Michael emphasizing the importance of including mountain rail in discussions without derailing the RTA. Polly noted that the current IGA draft includes language allowing the RTA to provide financial support for rail and transit services. Concerns were raised about the potential divisiveness of the project, but there was also a sense of progress, with potential that community members may now be supporting the project.

The service goals conversation concluded with discussing potential RTA facility and administrative costs. Mikhail summarized the low and high cost estimates, which were approximately \$6.3 million for the lower service levels and \$9.8 million for the higher levels. The current sales-tax revenue estimates were provided at \$7.4 million for a 0.5% sales tax and \$13.8 million for a 1.0% sales tax, not including other revenue sources or the resort contribution. The committee discussed preferences for service levels and frequencies, and increasing costs of equipment and operations.

IGA Updates:

Polly presented revisions to the IGA based on input from the last meeting, focusing on mandatory terms and transition of regional services. She walked through changes, including removing a placeholder about resort contributions and clarifying election coordination responsibilities. Polly updated language regarding the authority's ability to support

transportation for recreational access and wildlife crossings. Sonja suggested adding "local and regional" to the wildlife crossing provision to avoid limiting language, which Polly agreed to incorporate.

Polly highlighted the exclusion of property tax as a funding source, with the understanding that a future RTA board might choose to amend this. The committee also agreed to retain the ability to utilize visitor benefit taxes for funding. The IGA does not limit individual jurisdictions from having a visitor tax that is pledged separately to the RTA.

Polly then discussed other pieces of the IGA, including provisions for asset distribution, amendment processes requiring a super majority vote, and limitations on the authority's powers. The discussion also covered the process for adding or withdrawing members, with a focus on the need for elector approval. The IGA conversation ended with a discussion on the transition of SST regional facilities to the new authority.

Public Hearing Process Template Discussion

Kirsten Crawford from Kaplan Kirsch presented the templates for the Public Hearing process and outlined the process for the public hearings. The outreach for the Public Hearings included advertising in Steamboat Pilot and Craig Daily Press, social media, and outreach to local organizations. A follow-up formation committee meeting is planned to discuss feedback and potential adjustments for the second round of public hearings.