

Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) Formation Committee – Meeting Recap

Location: Virtual – Zoom
Date: Wednesday, May 14, 2025
Time: 9:30 – 11:00 AM

Attendees: Michael Buccino (City of Steamboat Springs), Sonja Macys (Routt County), Angelica Salinas (Routt County), Randy Looper (City of Craig), Ryan Banks (Town of Hayden), Bryan Swintek (CSS), Sarah Jones (Steamboat Ski and Resort Corp), Dan Foote (City of Steamboat Springs), Jia Carroll (City of Steamboat Springs), Jonathan Flint (City of Steamboat Springs), Peter Brixius (City of Craig), Mathew Mendisco (Town of Hayden), Kevin Booth (Yampa Valley Regional Airport), Eli Nykamp (Stagecoach), Tim Wohlgenant (Yampa Valley Community Foundation), Rick Ridder (Colorado Transportation Commission), Bill Ray (WR Communications), Jason Miller (Fehr & Peers), Mikhail Kaminer (Fehr & Peers), Polly Jessen (KK), Kirsten Crawford (KK), Kathryn Hayne (New Bridge Strategy)

Quick recap

A statistical survey among registered voters in the Yampa Valley area revealed strong support for creating a Regional Transportation Authority, though support decreased when the potential tax was introduced. The group discussed various strategies for forming and funding the RTA, considering factors such as voter demographics, economic conditions, and community needs. The committee discussed putting the RTA formation on the 2025 ballot without funding, emphasizing the need for community outreach and education before pursuing a future funding measure.

Next steps

- Bill Ray will send a Doodle poll to schedule the next meeting in late May or early June.
- Fehr & Peers will prepare sheets on service goals with more details for public-facing documents.
- Consultants will research startup costs and potential service levels based on funding through ski area contribution, Xcel funds, and Senate Bill 230.
- Consultants will contact Eagle Valley Transit Authority about startup costs and initial operations.
- Kaplan Kirsch team will begin drafting ballot language for the 2025 RTA formation measure.
- Consultants will create a plan for community outreach and engagement over the next 3 months.

- Consultants to create customized informational mailers for each community about the RTA process.

Yampa Valley RTA Survey Results

Katherine Hayne from New Bridge Strategy presented the results of a survey conducted among 300 registered voters regarding the potential formation. The survey was conducted in late April and used a mixed methodology of text message invitations and live telephone interviews, ensuring proportional representation across the district and demographic subgroups. The presentation discussed voter opinions on creating and funding the RTA, showing strong initial support for creating the RTA, with about 75% in favor. However, when voters learn about the potential sales tax increase to fund it, support drops to 53%. The decline is most significant among Steamboat residents, representing the largest voting block. Republicans and longer-term residents show less support for the RTA, especially when tax implications are mentioned. The survey also gauged opinions on the Mountain Rail project, which received strong support for creation (80%) but less enthusiasm for funding. Voters were more likely to support the RTA when informed about the Steamboat Ski area's pledge of \$1 million annually for 20 years.

Survey showed strong support for new bus routes and improved transportation options, especially for local workers. The survey tested various supportive and opposing statements, with messages about local transportation accessibility and safety resonating well across all demographics. After learning more about the proposal, voter support for creating the RTA remained strong at about two-thirds, while support for the sales tax increase received a slight bump in support.

Michael Buccino asked for reactions. Randy Looper noted that the results are more positive than expected, particularly regarding Craig's numbers. Angelica Salinas reported that South Routt residents are cautiously optimistic about the RTA but want more information on the level of service. Bryan Swintek expressed concern that the results don't seem overwhelmingly convincing, prompting discussion on improving support. Randy expressed that the formation of the district should be a "no-brainer" based on the high level of awareness and positive survey results.

Election Discussion

The group agreed that creating the RTA will likely succeed, but they have concerns about the funding question. The committee discussed a multi-year approach, potentially separating the district formation vote from the tax vote. The current economic and political environment was noted as challenging for tax increases. The group reviewed a matrix of election options to determine the best strategy for moving forward with the RTA formation and funding. Bill Ray presented three scenarios for 2025: formation only, formation with tax, and a two-question option. Committee members discussed the advantages and challenges of each

approach, including voter perception, ballot language, and the potential for a simple majority vote across the entire RTA area on a future funding question. The discussion emphasized the importance of demonstrating value to voters, particularly in smaller communities, before asking for funding. Committee members also considered how to address concerns about larger communities potentially outvoting smaller ones within the RTA. The committee also discussed voter turnout and reviewed demographics and turnout patterns.

Formation Vote in 2025

The committee continued to discuss the importance of the formation question on the 2025 ballot and a funding question in the future. The committee noted that the new RTA would be able to have the resort pledge and potential funding from Xcel and Senate Bill 230. The committee discussed the need for more information about costs to start up the organization and staffing of an RTA and the potential improvements using limited funding after the start-up costs are known. Committee members also discussed that if the RTA started without dedicated tax funding, it would have to demonstrate its effectiveness before seeking funding on a future ballot.

Public Outreach

Bill discussed a mailer plan being developed with Fehr & Peers that will send a customized mailer to each jurisdiction considering the RTA. The mailer would include a link and QR code to a survey customized to that jurisdiction to receive feedback and thoughts about the RTA specific to that community. That mailer will go out this summer.

IGA and Jurisdiction Review

Polly from Kaplan Kirsch provided a list of items that may need to be updated or clarified within the IGA. These included the resort contribution and changes needed if the formation committee decided not to proceed with formation only on the 2025 ballot. The committee also received an update on the IGA being sent to CDOT and neighboring jurisdictions. Core Transit (EVTA) already signed off on the IGA, and Moffat County approved the flagpole and signed off on the IGA. Kaplan Kirsch will continue to follow up with CDOT, and Bill Ray will contact the neighboring counties. Kaplan Kirsch was asked to start working on the ballot language for formation.

The formation committee will meet in late May or early June to discuss the IGA, ballot question and other issues that were not covered at this meeting.