

DUS News Digest

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Administrator Peter Rogoff Delivers Remarks at Denver Union Station

Federal Transportation Administration

Administrator Peter Rogoff
Denver Union Station
February 5, 2010

Thank you for that kind introduction...

On behalf of President Obama and Secretary Ray LaHood, I'm delighted to be here today to celebrate Denver's future.

And we do have a lot to celebrate today.

As the Federal Transit Administrator, I'm here to celebrate Denver's vision. It's a vision:

for a rejuvenated downtown;
for quick and easy rail access between downtown and the suburbs
for easy rail access from one suburban community to another.
And is a vision for easy rail access to a great international airport.
Most importantly, I'm here to celebrate the fact that, this week, Denver's FasTracks program is taking two giant steps forward to becoming a reality.

Five days ago, President Obama sent his budget for 2011 to Congress. That budget included \$80 million dollars for the Eagle projects –

the East Line to the Airport
and the Gold Line out to Ward Road.

These dollars are an initial downpayment on those projects. The most important part of Monday's announcement is that the Obama Administration committed itself to signing a Full Funding Grant Agreement for both of these projects.

That means that the Federal Transit Administration will be contributing over a billion dollars over the next few years to construct those two lines.

That's a billion dollars on top of the \$300 million that we are already contributing to build the West Corridor Light Rail line.

That's a billion dollars and the hundreds and hundreds of jobs that come with it.

Today, we are taking another giant step forward.

I'm thrilled to announce that Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood is today approving over \$300 million in loans to make a rejuvenated Union Station a reality.

Today's commitment means that all the funding sources for Union Station are now secure.

Make no mistake about it – Union Station is going to happen.

The West Corridor, the East Line, the Gold Line and Union Station are all at the center of Denver's FasTracks program. They are also at the center of President Obama's vision for economic recovery.

The Recovery Act is one of a many funding sources that will bring a new Union Station to life. And these projects are what the Recovery Act is all about.

They will create thousands of jobs NOW while improving the lives of millions of citizens in the future.

These projects are what the Obama Administration means when we talk about investing in America and creating jobs right here at home.

And when we create jobs by building projects like these – projects that greatly improve mobility around a region, it means that even more jobs will be coming in the future.

You watch -- more businesses will be relocating to Denver.

Why?? Because, with new rail lines, they will know that their employees and their products won't be spending hours stuck in traffic jams.

More businesses will be relocating to Denver because they will know that their workers will have a good quality of life.

It also will mean that parents will get home in time to actually have dinner with their kids – and supervise homework. It will mean that families will have a family life seven days a week rather than just two days a week.

While that is usually the case when we invest in public transit, the FasTracks vision takes it to a whole new level.

Mayor Hickenlooper, the RTD, the Union Station Authority, and the entire team, have demonstrated the vision, the flexibility and the sophistication to bring this network together in ways that no other cities have.

Union Station will actually piece together funding from so many separate Federal programs covering three different parts of the DOT.

This is the first project in the nation to combine:

Recovery Act money

Federal loan opens development door at Union Station

By Aldo Svaldi

The Denver Post

Posted: 02/06/2010 01:00:00 AM MST

The \$304 million federal loan to fund the redevelopment of Denver's Union Station clears a major obstacle blocking new construction in the surrounding area, private developers said.

But the loan, announced Friday, won't set off a land rush in what remains a difficult market for commercial-real-estate projects.

"There has been a sense of inevitability about this for about the last 60 to 90 days," said Mark Falcone, chief executive and founder of Continuum Partners, one of the developers behind the Union Station Neighborhood Co.

The final confirmation was a pre-condition of IMA Financial Group locating its new headquarters, a \$32 million, five-story building, just north of the station at 18th and Wynkoop streets.

IMA Financial announced the project last week. Over the next three to four months, other projects will probably be firmed up as well.

"It gives everybody confidence to move transactions forward," Falcone said. "We are talking to all variety of users and activities."

The loan from the U.S. Department of Transportation will cover the bulk of the \$480 million needed to create a multi-modal hub linking light rail, commuter rail, bus and Amtrak service around the station.

An estimated 1.3 million square feet of retail, office and residential development valued at \$450 million is planned on the 19.5 acres surrounding the station, with projects also possible in nearby parcels.

"Everybody knows that eventually Union Station will get developed, but this doesn't automatically translate into real-estate development," said Randy Nichols, president of Nichols Partnership. "The market dictates what can get built."

But he said the loan announcement gets "us over the hump."

In the current market, tenants with financing lined up are apt to call the shots on early projects that take root.

"It will be more user-driven rather than development-driven," Falcone said.

USDOT approves \$303.9 million in loans for Denver station rehab

Progressive Railroading

February 8, 2010

On Friday, the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) announced it will provide more than \$303 million for upgrades to Denver Union Station — the centerpiece of the Regional Transportation District (RTD) of Denver's FasTracks program.

The USDOT approved a \$151.6 million Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act loan and a \$152.1 million Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing program loan for the project, which calls for transforming the station into a multi-modal hub for light- and commuter-rail trains, and buses. The loans will cover about 64 percent of the project's \$479.4 million cost. RTD already has received \$28.4 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds.

The project includes a light- and commuter-rail station, underground bus terminal with 22 bays, and public plazas to integrate transit service. Construction is projected to take four years to complete.

The project will be implemented by the Denver Union Station Project Authority, a non-profit entity formed in July 2008 through a partnership between RTD, the city and county of Denver, Colorado Department of Transportation and DUS Metropolitan District.

In addition to redeveloping Denver Union Station, the FasTracks program calls for building 122 miles of commuter- and light-rail lines, and 18 miles of bus rapid-transit lines.

Union Station project funding guaranteed

Feds also guarantee funding for other FasTracks lines

Peter Marcus, DDN Staff Writer

Monday, February 8, 2010

Federal Transit Administration officials swept FasTracks and Union Station supporters off their feet Friday with an announcement that “all the funding for Union Station is now secured.”

Union Station will receive a \$300 million loan from the federal government to fund the \$480 million redevelopment project, Peter Rogoff, FTA Administrator, announced outside the FasTracks lines at Union Station on a gorgeous afternoon.

Rogoff also announced the department’s intention to sign full-funding grant agreements of more than \$1 billion for the proposed Gold Line corridor from Union Station to Wheat Ridge and the east line from Union Station to Denver International Airport.

President Obama has already proposed \$40 million each for the two corridors as part of his budget proposal for fiscal year 2011.

“Make no mistake about it, the discussion is over, Union Station is going to happen,” said Rogoff to a crowd of cheers.

The Denver City Council recently guaranteed the loan with the use of general funds if necessary.

The Regional Transportation District, however, says it will cost \$6.7 billion to build all of FasTracks, and will likely still ask voters to double the existing tax. Without additional revenue, FasTracks would be about \$2.5 billion short, if the agency wants to complete the transit expansion project by 2017.

But the news Friday was all good for FasTracks planners, who have now crossed their last hurdle in beginning construction on the Union Station redevelopment project.

A prideful Mayor John Hickenlooper said voters should be very proud of themselves for having approved the FasTracks project in 2004.

“The voters are the ones who saw the promise and they recognized that this is something that not only will help our mobility and attract businesses, but it will also define this state as a collaborative place where we get things done, and that in the end, that will perhaps be the greatest economic part of all.”

The mayor believes the federal government is finally seeing how taxpayer dollars can be spent on collaborative efforts that benefit communities as a whole, such as building FasTracks stations along with affordable housing and at Brownfields sites.

“You are seeing a revolution in how the federal government can maximize our tax dollars into something that can really be rejoiced over,” said Hickenlooper, a Democrat who is also running for governor of Colorado.

U.S. Sen. Michael Bennet, D-Colo., spoke at the event of the 10,000 jobs the FasTracks project is expected to create.

“Ten-thousand good-paying jobs for Coloradans who want to get to work, we’re gonna help pay the bills, feed the family and help parents put money away to fund their child’s education,” said Bennet.

For RTD Chief Phil Washington, the announcement Friday brings his district one step closer to seeing FasTracks trains zooming in and out of a beautiful, redesigned Union Station.

“I can see the trains, I can see them coming in to this historic Denver Union Station, I can actually see them,” he said. “I hope you can see what I can see in terms of this build-out of this great FasTracks investment initiative, and also this great historic Denver Union Station. This is going to transform this entire region.”

Passenger rail group decries feds' funding promise

Lakewood Edge

Charley Able on February 8th, 2010

Colorado's most active – and vocal – group of passenger-rail advocates is raising concerns over the federal government's decision to guarantee more than \$300 million in funding for Denver's Union Station project, saying the money will go to build "a train station without trains."

"The 12 light rail trains per hour going toward downtown Denver will not access the present location behind Union Station. Nor will those light rail trains access the new

train station at all. And the ski train is gone, too," trumpets a press release issued by ColoRail in the wake of last week's announcement that the Federal Transit Administration will provide \$304 million in loans to convert the historic train station Union into a regional "commuter rail hub."

ColoRail, the Colorado Rail Passenger Association, has raised concerns about the new train station since the project was first conceived eight years ago. The inability to make easy connections quickly and easily is the group's primary concern.

In May, the group filed a federal court lawsuit challenging redevelopment plans for Union Station, complaining that plans to sell off part of the 19.5-acre Union Station parcel for private development will cause difficulty for light rail passengers.

When the lawsuit was announced, Ira Schreiber, president of the rail-advocacy group, said the Union Station project's original mission statement of convenient, passenger friendly multi-modal had transportation been abandoned.

One of ColoRail's objections is that FasTracks light-rail passengers – including those using FasTracks' West Corridor line, would be forced to walk a quarter-mile to reach Union Station from a platform that will be located near the freight train tracks west of the station. The platform would be served by buses, but those passengers heading for Union Station would be exposed to the elements during their trek to the station." If a train station isn't designed for the convenience of the passengers, what is it for?" asked ColoRail board member Edie Bryan after Friday's FTA announcement that the \$304 million in federal money would be included in the Obama administration's 2011 budget proposal.

Bryan, a former Lakewood City Councilwoman and former member of the Regional Transportation District board of directors, said the inability to make connections "quickly and easily" remains one of ColoRail's major concerns.

Light-rail passengers would endure rain, wind, snow, hail and scorching summertime temperatures to make their way from the out-lying platform to the station and rail passengers with limited mobility would face even tougher challenges, Bryan said.

The group also is concerned about the Union Station project's lack of planning for future capacity, partly because – after 5 years of construction – there would be no room for the trains going up into the mountains, a proposed train serving the Front Range or future high-speed rail service, according to the ColoRail statement.

“The whole plan is only planned for 20 years into the future, year 2030. Yet the historic Denver Union Station has served Denver well since 1881. The present building, built in 1914, has had only minor modifications,” the group said in the statement.

Schreiber said his group backs an alternative plan that he says would be more convenient for passengers and would cost millions less because it would eliminate what ColoRail calls “the cramped underground bus box.”

The issues raised aren't new: ColoRail has been raising concerns about the new train station since the project was first conceived eight years ago, Schrieber said.

And ColoRail's complaints extend to the design of the Union Station project.

“The proposed new station has a huge hole in the center of the roof.

Passengers will be exposed to Denver's changing weather, even with the

expenditure of over \$500 million of taxpayer dollars, not counting

interest payments. It looks like a yellow and white medicine capsule,” the group's press release said.

Redevelopment of the train station is expected to cost about \$478 million and is expected to be complete by 2014. It is the focal point of the FasTracks light rail project and is expected to serve as the centerpiece of a light rail/passenger rail/bus transit center.

FasTracks will cover about \$208 million of the cost. The remainder will come from the federal government and local sources.

FTA's Peter Rogoff announces \$304 million for Denver Union Station
Monday, February 08, 2010

FTA Administrator Peter Rogoff announced federal funding for Denver Union Station, the centerpiece of the Regional Transportation District's FasTracks transit expansion plan. The Department of Transportation approved a \$151.6-million Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) loan and a \$152.1-million loan application under the Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing Program for Denver Union Station.

These loans, which constitute 64 percent of the nearly half-billion-dollar project cost, will help transform Denver Union Station into a true multi-modal transportation system, connecting light rail, commuter rail, buses, streets and public spaces.

"Denver Union Station will be a model of a seamless, interconnected system that joins transportation options at one location," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. "When completed, this regional multimodal hub will reinvigorate downtown Denver and serve as an example of what we are trying to accomplish across the country with our sustainability and livability goals."

In addition to the TIFIA and RRIF loans, Denver Union Station has already received \$28.4 million in funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

"Together, our multi-pronged federal investment in the Gold line, the East line and Denver Union Station will mean huge mobility improvements for the people of Denver and its suburbs," said Federal Transit Administrator Peter Rogoff. "The loans are a great example of how critical federal funding can advance transportation projects and create thousands of jobs that will have a big impact in Colorado's recovery."

The Denver Union Station project is a 50-acre public-private development venture in lower downtown Denver. The intermodal transit development project will serve as a regional multimodal hub that will improve transportation and reduce congestion in the downtown area. Transportation elements include an underground bus terminal with 22 bays, a light rail station for current and future light rail routes, a commuter rail station that will serve Amtrak and possibly a ski train, and public plazas to integrate transit service. Construction is estimated to take four-years to complete.

The East Corridor and Gold Line commuter rail lines are part of Regional Transportation District's FasTracks expansion program of major transit investments in the Denver region. These projects, which were included in President Obama's budget request to Congress, will both feed into Denver Union Station,

By 2030 ridership is expected to reach 43,400 weekday boardings with 11,450 daily new riders. The total project cost is \$479.4 million.

The project will be implemented by the Denver Union Station Project Authority, a non-profit, public benefit entity formed by the city in July 2008, through a partnership of RTD, City and County of Denver, Colorado Department of Transportation and DUS Metropolitan District. DUSPA is the applicant for the TIFIA and RRIF loans and will receive various revenue streams to use both as security for the loans and for funding construction. RTD will assist with the construction management of the transit improvements and will own and operate the facilities after the construction period.

The TIFIA and RRIF programs provide Federal credit assistance in the form of direct loans, loan guarantees and standby lines of credit to finance surface transportation projects of national and regional significance and the development of railroad infrastructure. These loan programs can help advance qualified, large-scale projects that otherwise might be delayed or deferred because of size, complexity, or uncertainty over the timing of revenues.

Denver's Union Station awarded fed funds

Metro Magazine
February 8, 2010

The U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) approved a \$151.6 million Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) loan and a \$152.1 million loan application under the Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing Program (RRIF) for the Denver Union Station, the centerpiece of the Regional Transportation District's (RTD) FasTracks transit expansion plan.

These loans, which constitute 64 percent of the nearly half-billion dollar project cost, will help transform Denver Union Station into a true multi-modal transportation system, connecting light rail, commuter rail, buses, streets and public spaces.

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Sustainability pushed

The Metropolitan
February 11, 2010

By J. Sebastian Sinisi

Sustainability — also known under various “green” aliases — and preservation, whose sound bite might be “saving worthwhile structures and places for posterity and re-use,” appeared on the same stage Feb. 5-6 in Denver.

At the 13th annual Colorado Preservation Inc. conference, Colorado Gov. Bill Ritter, Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper and Denver pioneer preservationist Dana Crawford all called for stronger preservation efforts as an indispensable partner of suddenly-chic “sustainability.”

Along with Crawford, Ritter and Hickenlooper both said they were proud to be known as preservationists. Both have backed that claim with a number of pro-preservation initiatives from the Governor’s Mansion to downtown Denver.

Molly and Connor Blakley, of Littleton, at left, verify their train tickets with Assistant Conductor Renee Serratore, of Denver, Feb. 6, at Union Station. Union Station is the focus of Dana Crawford’s preservation efforts. Photo by Jeremy Papasso
At the Hyatt Regency hotel, opposite Denver’s Convention Center, the CPI conference drew 900 preservationists, planners, architects, students, elected officials, historians, archeologists and exhibitors for the biggest turnout ever — despite the sluggish economy — since non-profit CPI launched these conclaves in 1998 with less than 150 attendees.

Keynote speaker Emily Wadhams, vice-president of public policy for the Washington D.C.-based National Trust for Historic Preservation, urged preservationist to step up legislative efforts.

“Not since the 1980s has preservation been under such assault, with federal budget cuts, as in President Obama’s 2010 federal budget,” she said.

Wadhams said the federal funding contribution to historic preservation has shrunk from \$150 million last year to \$80 million this year and is slated for \$55 million in 2011. In view of “job-creation as a top Obama Administration priority,” those cuts are “tragic,” because preservation projects create local jobs, she said.

At a later session, Crawford was elated over approval of a \$304 million federal loan for the redevelopment of Denver’s Union Station as a major Front Range transportation hub. But she pointed out that “not one red cent” has been set aside for preservation at the station. The same zero preservation funding held true, she said, for the Carnegie Library in Civic Center Park, “so we have a lot of money to raise.”

Sustainability involves nothing new. Neither does preservation. More than 40 years ago, Italian-born architect and visionary Paolo Soleri promoted what is today called “sustainability.” Nobody listened — any more than they heeded Canadian urban advocate Jane Jacobs, who was fond of livable cities when few others were. Jacobs laid the groundwork, a decade before Soleri, for what is today known as human-scaled and pedestrian-oriented “new urbanism.” Paoli, whose sustainable community called Arcosanti slowly rises in the Arizona desert, 70 miles from Phoenix, is still active at age 90. Jane Jacobs was the same age when she left us in 2006.

Between those two benchmarks, preservation gained ground in America when New York City’s heroic-scaled Penn Station — built of marble, along the classical lines of ancient Rome, and designed to last for centuries — was demolished in 1965 by its Pennsylvania Railroad owner. To add insult, Penn Station’s classic columns, carved eagles and magnificent innards were dumped in the New Jersey swamps.

Outrage over that uncaring crassness galvanized the preservation movement, and preservation was no longer limited to the “little old ladies in tennis shoes” stereotype — but took in the spectrum now seen at CPI conferences. Later, former U.S. first lady Jackie Kennedy used her influence to save New York’s 1912 Grand Central Station from desecration when preservationists scored a U.S. Supreme Court victory over property rights.

In Denver, preservation coalesced around 1970 when the Moffat Mansion was demolished. Shortly after, the Molly Brown house was also threatened with demolition, leading to the formation of Historic Denver, Inc.

Denver’s Union Station, the focus of preservation efforts led by Crawford and a coalition of local businesses, was itself threatened with demolition about 15 years ago. Plans, later defeated, called for replacing the 1916 Beaux Arts monument with a sterile box — on a smaller scale than the sterile, low-ceilinged box that replaced the grandeur of Penn Station.

Last week, conference presenters urged the “adaptive re-use” of historic building — Crawford’s Larimer Square was an early example as good sustainability practice. And D.C. architect and sustainability advocate Carl Elefante commented that “the greenest building is one that is already built.”

Divided RTD board gives preliminary OK to deleting Union Station moving walks

InDenverTimes

By Kevin Flynn

February 12, 2010

A divided RTD board committee has given preliminary approval to removing a set of planned moving walkways from the design of the FasTracks transfer facility at Denver Union Station, a controversial element that has divided transit advocates and helped spawn a lawsuit.

By a 7-5 vote, members of the FasTracks Monitoring Committee – where the elected board typically gets its first look at FasTracks issues – approved a recommendation to delete the pair of moving sidewalks from the design. They had been proposed to cover 217 feet of the total distance of about 850 feet that will separate the new light rail and heavy rail passenger platforms.

The board still must consider final approval next week. With three members absent for the committee vote this week, one more member still must cast a “yes” vote to approve the change, assuming all 15 are present.

The heavy-rail commuter platform was originally planned to be adjacent to where the current light rail platform is located. Under a proposal from the developer, Union Station Neighborhood Co., in 2006, the commuter rail will stay there but the light rail will be relocated north two and a half blocks near the freight tracks and Millennium Bridge, with a new underground bus transfer facility as part of the multimodal station, replacing Market Street Station on the 16th Street Mall.

The underground bus station would double as a connector between the two rail modes, and the mall shuttle system will be extended to reach down to the new light rail platform.

The moving sidewalks were originally a concession to passengers, such as airport-bound families toting luggage, who would have to cover the distance between rail platforms.

But refined design of the 22-bay underground bus facility narrowed the width of the space so that a bus staging lane could be added underground. That made the walkways an impediment rather than a help to pedestrians, according to a report to the board by Rick Clarke, FasTracks’ acting manager for engineering.

That didn’t stop five board members from voting no, however, in a rare display of division over FasTracks among the board.

“The reason I voted for the amended master plan (several years ago) was because of the moving sidewalk,” said board member Bill Christopher. “Just fundamentally, when we moved the light rail station out, we got the moving sidewalk. But now, we have the moving sidewalk out but the light rail station is still out there.”

Rendering shows passengers headed toward commuter trains from behind Union Station. Courtesy Union Station Neighborhood Co.

Christopher voted against taking out the moving walks, along with members Matt Cohen, John Tayer, Jack O'Boyle and Wally Pulliam. Those voting in favor were Bill James, Bruce Daly, Noel Busck, Lee Kemp, Chris Martinez, Kent Bagley and Tom Tobiassen.

"One of the things I was able to tell people who were concerned about the distance between the light rail and commuter rail was that at least we were having a moving sidewalk," Tayer said.

"We're doing this at the expense of providing our passengers a convenient way of getting from light rail to commuter rail," said Pulliam, who went on later in the meeting to vote against advancing \$9 million from FasTracks to the developer to get construction underway in advance of receiving federal loans for the project this spring.

Pulliam wanted RTD to go with an alternative that would widen the pedestrian area within the bus station by deleting the six-bus staging lane on the west side of the underground facility. That would bring an additional 11 feet of width to the pedestrian area.

But Clarke said the staging area is essential and RTD would have difficulty finding such an area above-ground nearby in the lower downtown neighborhood, where people object to idling buses.

The move saves the \$480 million project the \$2 million cost of the mechanisms, known in the industry as "travelators." It also removes \$25,000 a year in anticipated operating and maintenance costs for them.

The irony is that many who advocate the moving walkways would rather not have them at all – they have been urging RTD not to relocate the light rail platform at all, but to keep it where it is and make it adjacent to the new commuter rail boarding area.

The design is part of a lawsuit filed by transit-advocate ColoRail, which says the inconvenience of the transfer will hurt ridership. RTD maintains the level of projected ridership transfers between light rail and heavy rail is small enough to minimize the problem. The transit agency also says it is too late to engage in the substantial redesign without imperiling the already tight schedule.

The transit improvements at Union Station must be completed by 2014 in time for FasTracks' West Corridor light rail, currently under construction, to terminate there and for the imminent start of construction on the heavy-rail East Corridor line to Denver International Airport.

Other FasTracks corridors planned to terminate at Union Station are the Gold Line from Arvada-Wheat Ridge, Northwest Rail from Longmont, Boulder, Broomfield and Westminster, North Metro from Thornton and Commerce City, and the C and E light rail lines of the existing Southwest and Southeast Corridors from Littleton and Douglas County.