

West Rail Line Public Information Plan

Nominating Agency: Regional Transportation District

Accomplishment: West Rail Line is a 12.1 mile light rail transit system serving Denver, Lakewood, the Federal Center, Golden and the Jefferson County Government Center. The voter-approved, Federally-funded rail line will open in May 2013 with an expected daily ridership of 19,300, increasing to 29,700 by 2030. West Rail Line is an anticipated service that not only adds to the quality of transportation offered by Regional Transportation District, it adds to the regional growth of the Denver, Lakewood and Golden area.

This rail line is unique because it travels through quiet, rural neighborhoods, with residential properties just a few feet away on either side of the tracks. During the design and EIS stages of the project, nearly 50 public meetings were held. Based on information gathered at these meetings and with such a direct community impact, the Public Information team for the West Rail Line developed an effective Public Information Plan.

Innovation: As the first RTD FasTracks corridor under construction, the West Rail Line's PI team has set the standard for future rail lines regarding public outreach with local community and business members. The aggressive Public Information Plan addresses communication goals, key audiences, and communication strategies and tactics. The plan outlines ways to maximize communication with key audiences, which in turn minimizes construction impacts and community concerns.

Achievement: To date, the Public Information Plan has proven to be an effective communication tool, evident by statistics tracked since 2008. Given the strategies in the plan, the Public Information team has provided more than 100 public presentations; held more than 470 external meetings; distributed nearly 6200 fact sheets; sent more than 50 press releases; sent construction update newsletters to 5,000 subscribers on a monthly basis; distributed nearly 12,200 informational door hangers in conjunction with more than 50,000 emails describing potential construction impacts. Additionally, given the scope of public outreach tactics, the Public Information Plan has generated more than 4000 public comments.



These statistics are a good representation of the effectiveness of the strategies implemented and the successful attainment of the plan goals.

Transferable: The Public Information Plan is an excellent basis for other FasTracks corridors to reference. The plan is easily transferable, with room for modifications given the location of future projects and key audiences.

Cooperation: Through several public meetings and meetings with stakeholders, the West Rail Line Public Information Plan was developed as a collaborative effort between RTD and the contractor, Denver Transit Construction Group.

Summary: By developing an effective communication plan, the West Rail Line Public Information Plan has become a reputable framework for future RTD FasTracks rail lines. ●



West Rail Line Pedestrian Level Audible Signals

Nominating Agency: Regional Transportation District

Accomplishment: West Rail Line travels 12.1 miles directly west from downtown Denver to Jefferson County Government Center. Planning started on this line in 1997, and an Environmental Impact Statement was completed in 2003, with a Record of Decision from the Federal Transit Administration in 2004. Following a successful ballot initiative for a tax increase in November 2004, the West Rail Line was funded and design began, followed by construction in 2008. The new light rail line will open in May 2013. This corridor is unique due to the fact that for three miles, the line travels through a quiet, rural neighborhood, with residents just a few feet away on either side of the tracks. There are 20 at-grade crossings (locations where pedestrians and automobiles can cross the tracks) on this line, 11 of them in the residential area. In Colorado, the Public Utilities Commission has final approval of all at-grade crossings, and RTD is required to submit individual applications for each crossing which is reviewed for safety by the PUC. The neighborhood was very concerned about the 294 trains per day that will be traveling in front of or behind their homes and the thought of having each of those trains blow their horn or having bells on the crossing gates sound each time the train passes was a serious concern. RTD agreed to install 'quad-gates' or gates in four locations at each intersection, on the West Rail Line. This is one of the safest solutions to prevent automobiles from driving around gates across tracks when a train is approaching. RTD also agreed to recommend to the PUC that no horns on the trains or bells on the gates be used at any of the intersections where quad gates were in place. We referred to these situations as "quiet crossings." Understanding that the PUC would have final say on these proposed solutions, the neighborhood was very interested in testifying when this issue went to the PUC in April 2011. What wasn't expected were the 60 blind community members that had shown up at the hearing to oppose the "quiet crossing" solution, stating safety concerns.

What followed for the next six weeks was a collaborative process between RTD, the adjacent neighborhoods and the visually-impaired community. There were a series of field demonstrations of the typical decibel level bells as well as a sample of a bell that could be set at a lower level.



The compromise that was reached and presented by all parties to the PUC judge was a bell that varied constantly with the ambient noise and that also had a maximum cap noise level that was based on pre-construction level noise. Prior to his final ruling, a follow up demonstration was performed for the PUC judge so he could hear the noise level of the device that was proposed.

The PUC ruling allowed for the use of the lower decibel "pedestrian audible signals" that were recommended by the group. RTD is currently in the process of having these signals manufactured. They will be installed prior to the start of light rail service.

Innovation: The lower level warning bell, in the configuration that was agreed upon, has never been used before in a transit environment. The compromise solution allows neighborhood residents to retain a peaceful environment while providing safety and warning to pedestrians crossing the future West Rail Line light rail trackway.

Achievement: The goal of developing a compromise with the parties concerned about noise levels (the neighborhood) and the parties concerned about safety (the PUC, RTD, the blind community, the school districts and the neighborhoods) was reached with everyone pleased with the results.

Transferable: This solution could easily be transferred to other transit agencies or other rail corridors in Denver with similar concerns.

Cooperation: The cooperation in this instance was overwhelming working with the neighbors directly along the line, the neighborhood organizations, various agencies/schools for the blind, the Public Utilities Commission, various departments at RTD including safety, legal, light rail operations, and light rail construction.

Summary: A collaborative effort between the neighborhoods, the blind community, the transit agency and the Public Utilities Commission to reach a compromise regarding the noise level of bells on gates where light rail and pedestrians interact. ●



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