

Call for Statements of Interest and Qualifications for Federally-Led Regional Rail Planning Projects

WHAT IS FRA DOING AND WHY?

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) invites groups of states to submit Statements of Interest and Qualifications (also referred to as “the Statement”) for participating in an FRA-led regional rail planning process. Many recent Federal and state passenger rail planning activities have focused on either (1) individual corridors between major cities or (2) comprehensive rail planning in individual states. Developing rail plans in the context of a broader regional framework, however, can yield more cost-effective investments that are responsive to the economically interdependent market needs of communities across a region. A more coordinated, multi-state approach to planning, construction, and operations of regional rail networks is needed to establish regional priorities and to optimize service and operations. Planning regionally facilitates the integration of rail projects with other transportation modes; promotes greater involvement by stakeholders; and identifies priorities for limited Federal funding. FRA is seeking to advance practices for regional rail planning and to further the development of regional plans.

Statements of Interest and Qualifications submitted by groups of states will assist FRA in determining which region(s) to potentially study. Because each region of the country has unique needs and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to regional rail planning, FRA reserves the right to study regions that do not respond to this request. For clarification, this Call for Statements of Interest and Qualifications ***is not*** a grant or funding opportunity, rather it is an invitation to submit a statement of interest for FRA-led studies, which will be carried out in partnership with

stakeholders. FRA is utilizing authority provided under the FY14 Omnibus Appropriations Act (Public Law 113-76) to lead this multi-state planning process.

WHAT IS FRA'S PLANNING FRAMEWORK?

FRA has developed a planning framework to guide the development of high-performance rail networks and services from conceptual vision to project development and implementation.

FRA's proposed planning framework, from more general to specific, includes:

- National rail planning – criteria, guidance, and tools to help support local decision-makers
- Regional rail plans (Multi-state) – the subject of this solicitation
- State rail plans – FRA guidance available at <http://www.fra.dot.gov/Page/P0511>
- Passenger rail corridor investment plans (which include a Service Development Plan and Tier I NEPA study)
- Project environmental studies and Tier II NEPA studies
- Project design, construction, and operations

In 2011, FRA initiated a national planning effort to develop a toolkit for the conceptual planning of high-performance rail networks at the regional level¹. With the eventual goal of developing guidance for regional rail plans and determining their role in regards to State Rail Plans and Service Development Plans, this national planning effort helped define the elements of a regional rail plan. The national planning effort was composed of two key parts: A pilot regional rail plan

¹ Undertaken in support of section 307 of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008, Pub. L. No 110-432, 122 Stat. 4953-4954.

and the development of a planning tool to aid in the determination of conceptual cost, ridership, and performance information for rail corridors and networks.

The pilot regional rail plan – the “Southwest Study” (which focused on Arizona, California, Nevada, and also included Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah) – was a test case for the guidelines, tools, and performance standards developed in the national planning effort. Stakeholders from key transportation organizations in the Southwest worked through the challenges of developing a regional rail plan and outlined a preliminary, common vision for high-performance rail in the region.

The other output of the national planning effort was the CONNECT (“CONceptual NETwork Connections Tool”) tool. The CONNECT tool estimates – at a coarse, sketch-plan level – the relative impacts of alternative passenger rail network configurations and service plans on future ridership, revenue, capital, operating, and maintenance costs, as well as the overall financial performance of each option. Focusing on markets separated by at least 50 miles, CONNECT is a high-level network analysis tool suitable for sketch planning at the regional, multi-state level and is intended for use at the very outset of conceptual passenger rail planning, before decisions on alignments, service plans and station locations are made. The CONNECT tool can be used to reduce a wide range of options to a smaller subset of reasonable alternatives for more detailed study. This call for Statements of Interest and Qualifications will assist FRA in continuing to refine the CONNECT tool.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE AND STRUCTURE OF A REGIONAL RAIL PLAN?

A regional rail plan serves several purposes: First, it identifies and describes a common, long-term vision for regional passenger rail service and the required infrastructure network based on existing conditions, projections of future travel demand, and the optimal role for rail service in a multi-modal transportation context. An integrated vision for a regional rail network illustrates how links with local transit, aviation, highway, and non-motorized modes can create a seamless, integrated transportation system to carry travelers from origin to destination throughout the region in the most cost-effective manner. Second, it identifies the potential institutional arrangements, financial requirements, and planning and development activities needed to achieve the vision.

A regional rail plan will help the region and FRA determine the priorities, studies, and investment needs to advance projects within a multi-state network context. By planning together, states can optimize the service level design of individual corridor services – more efficiently than planning them in isolation – and outline an implementation strategy that makes development of those corridors more effective. In establishing priorities, a regional rail plan will inform decisions to advance studies of individual corridors following FRA’s recommended development process, from tiered NEPA studies and service development plans to final design and construction. Priorities and needs identified in the regional plan will also inform individual state rail plans, which can help guide decisions at the state level.

Regional rail plans include the following five elements:

1. Baseline Conditions and Market Assessment:

The baseline conditions and market assessment reveals the potential transportation and public benefits of a multi-state rail network. Focused on regional demographics, intercity economic linkages, land development patterns, physical opportunities, and environmental resources, the assessment sets a framework for defining the prospects for high-performance rail success. Among other things, the baseline conditions and market assessment:

- Examines regional multi-modal corridors and connections and evaluates the most cost-effective means for achieving the region's transportation goals and objectives, including the potential for additional or enhanced rail service to address future transportation needs.
- Analyzes the goals, policies, and investment priorities described in transportation plans – including highway and transit plans – developed by states and MPOs within the region.
- Includes a high-level analysis of potential land-use policies near stations and a general description of sensitive environmental and cultural assets in the region that should be considered during conceptual network design and service planning.

2. Network Design and Service Plan Concepts:

Network design and service plan concepts are fundamental components of a regional rail plan. The network design describes the communities to be served by rail and the corridors between them. Service plan concepts describe the range of train services (frequencies, speeds, capacity) connecting markets in the network and the concepts for how those services would operate and interact in the network. These components are

developed in tandem with the goals, policies, and opportunities identified in the baseline conditions and market assessment. The network approach allows regions to identify opportunities for shared service and infrastructure that can provide more travel options to passengers along with more cost-efficient operations and lower infrastructure capital costs for both passenger and freight railroads. In addition to passenger rail opportunities, a regional rail plan identifies plans for cost-effective investment in shared-benefit projects that contribute toward the efficient movement and increased capacity for freight rail operations.

3. Governance Strategies:

While some regions have existing governance frameworks in place for planning or operating rail services – or have conducted research into feasible models – there is no one-size-fits-all governance strategy for every region. Therefore, it is critical that a regional rail plan identify and address the institutional, financial, political, and regulatory structures necessary to develop the envisioned system. A complete regional rail plan includes a proposal to address any gaps in the current institutional and governance structures that will be necessary to develop, operate, and maintain the regional network.

4. Prioritized Corridor Investments and Map:

A regional rail plan also includes a list and map of prioritized corridor investments. The list should identify corridors, potential stations, proposed levels of service (e.g., frequency, average speeds, station spacing, etc.) and a logical phasing of development for segments and corridors that will comprise the regional network. The prioritization list is based on market opportunity and project implementation considerations, including an

analysis of the readiness of specific corridors to proceed for development as evidenced by the completion of service development planning and environmental analyses. While the prioritization may evolve as time goes on, it is a blueprint for the regional network based on analysis and the views of regional stakeholders.

5. Costs, Benefits, and Funding:

Finally, a regional rail plan includes a range of conceptual cost and financial analyses. These include a total capital cost estimate for developing the regional network, operating financial forecasts (including high-level ridership and revenue estimates), and a preliminary benefit-cost analysis. The regional rail plan also includes a discussion of potential funding and finance strategies, including potential Federal and non-Federal funding sources as well as consideration of anticipated private sector participation.

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

FRA requests that Statements of Interest and Qualifications be organized around and address the five topics described below. The Statement of Interest and Qualification should be limited to no more than ten (10) pages. In addition to the Statement, applicants may also submit letters of support, maps, and other documentation that they believe would support the FRA decision-making process.

1. Rationale: *Why do stakeholders want FRA to conduct a study in their region?*

A Statement should provide the rationale for conducting a regional rail plan that identifies the transportation challenges that new or enhanced passenger rail service will address and what purpose a comprehensive regional rail plan will serve. A Statement should identify the region to be studied, the states that comprise it, and the topics that need to be addressed. A Statement should also discuss at a high level:

- The potential regional transportation, economic, and public benefits that could be realized from creating a regional passenger rail network;
- The potential to integrate other transportation modes with the regional rail network through this planning effort; and
- The potential of a regional network to promote interconnected livable communities, including complementing local or state efforts to attract development in areas proximate to multi-modal stations.

A Statement should also identify the need for Federal engagement in the planning study, such as specific institutional barriers or operational complexities within the region.

Conditions that may call for a Federal role include multi-state and multi-jurisdictional complexity and/or operational complexity involving multiple operating entities and/or divided property ownership and rights.

2. Stakeholders: *Who will participate in the study?*

Stakeholders should collaborate on the regional plan by sharing and considering information about potential network connections, existing and forecast demographic

trends and travel patterns, economic activity, and noted capacity constraints in the current and future regional transportation network. A Statement should include a list of potential regional plan stakeholders, as well as whether there are any existing regional rail implementation or advocacy groups who could serve as a direct partner to FRA in the study. At a minimum, Statements should identify stakeholders such as: State DOTs, MPOs and other regional or statewide planning organizations, transit operators, as well as potential host railroads and passenger rail operators, both private and public. Additional stakeholders may include: chambers of commerce, economic development authorities, other USDOT modal administrations, non-profit organizations, major employers, and universities.

3. Previous Work: *What Regional or Multi-State Planning has been completed in the region?*

Some regions have previously prepared regional, multi-state rail plans that may have been comprehensive or focused on specific issues, such as service design, governance, or joint procurement of equipment. Many of those previous plans have served their regions well, but stakeholders may see a need to update them or complete additional work in other topic areas. A Statement should identify what regional rail planning work has been completed previously and how this effort could supplement past work.

4. Governance: *What institutional arrangements exist to support planning and rail development in the region?*

Some multi-state regions may have governance models or institutional arrangements in place to support multi-state regional rail planning and development. These arrangements could include interstate compacts, commissions, agreements, or ad-hoc working groups. A Statement should identify any existing interstate institutional arrangements that are in place. A lack of such an arrangement will not necessarily prohibit FRA from studying a particular region.

5. Commitment: *How are the stakeholders willing to support the study?*

A Statement should describe the commitment by the stakeholders to share responsibilities with FRA, including in-kind resources and staff available for this effort, and the relationships and means of coordination among the participating states, potential rail service operators, host railroads, and other stakeholders. A Statement should also discuss the degree to which affected communities, local governments, regional councils and planning organizations, neighboring States, railroads, transportation modal partners, environmental interests, the public, and other stakeholders share the assessment of needs and are committed to participate in planning – early and throughout the process.

HOW TO SUBMIT

Groups of states interested in providing Statements of Interest and Qualifications should identify a lead entity, which must submit the Statement and supporting documentation by email to OfficeofRPD@dot.gov no later than 5:00 p.m. EST, November 12, 2014. Include “Regional Planning Statement” in the subject line. For questions, contact Kyle Gradinger, Office of

Railroad Policy and Development, via phone (202-493-6191) or e-mail
(kyle.gradinger@dot.gov).

WHAT WILL FRA DO WITH THE STATEMENTS?

FRA intends to lead multiple regional rail planning efforts throughout the US as funding and staff resources permit. The information collected through this Call for Statements will be used to focus FRA-led regional rail planning efforts. FRA will publically announce any regional planning studies to be undertaken.