

Front Range Passenger Rail plan takes center stage at summit

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Dana Cadey

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Longmont Mayor, Joan Peck, speaks during the eighth Sustainable Transportation Summit. (Cliff Grassmick/Staff Photographer)



By [Dana Cadey](mailto:dcadey@prairiemountainmedia.com) | dcadey@prairiemountainmedia.com | Longmont Times-Call

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Public transportation enthusiasts shared their hopes and dreams for passenger rail on the Front Range at the eighth Sustainable Transportation Summit, organized by [Commuting Solutions](#).



The summit, held Tuesday at the Longmont Museum, brought together elected officials, transportation planners and members of the public. Speakers took the museum stage throughout the morning to discuss the future of the state's passenger and commuter rail systems.

Gov. Jared Polis and Shoshana Lew, executive director of the Colorado Department of Transportation, talked about two key bills passed by the state legislature since [last year's summit](#). Senate Bill 230 increased state funding to local transit projects and Senate Bill 184 allocated state funding to [Front Range Passenger Rail](#) – a commuter line that would stretch from Fort Collins to Pueblo.

“I imagine many of us didn't foresee just how much would happen over the course of the last year, and how momentous it would be for setting the foundation for statewide investments in transit,” Lew said. “The process to kick off the governance discussion around the northern portion of the Front Range Passenger Rail is well underway.”

Polis said one of the “early wins” of these bills is the expansion of passenger rail into mountain communities. Polis said that a mountain rail line would mitigate traffic congestion on Interstate 70 to destinations such as Aspen and Vail.

“That's really a win-win for the entire mountain community and those of us who like to access the high country,” Polis said.

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Polis also stressed the importance of putting affordable housing close to job centers, preventing the need for long commutes. He commended Longmont for recently abolishing [minimum parking requirements](#) for future developments.



Gov. Jared Polis answers questions during the eighth Sustainable Transportation Summit at the Longmont Museum on Tuesday. (Cliff Grassmick/Staff Photographer)

“We really envision an interconnected and more affordable Colorado,” said Polis.

Rep. Joe Neguse, a Lafayette Democrat, applauded the Boulder County partners who helped develop the Front Range Passenger Rail vision.

“As our cities and towns continue to grow rapidly, it is imperative that we continue to invest in passenger rail,” Neguse said. “We still have a lot of work to do to ultimately make this come to fruition. But we are getting closer each and every day.”

Longmont mayor Joan Peck brought up the Regional Transportation District’s work on the “long-awaited” Northwest Rail line, a commuter train corridor that would connect Longmont to Union Station in Denver. Peck also spoke on Longmont’s new partnership with RTD on a microtransit system.

“Local, on-demand shuttles will start running in our city in September, just a couple of weeks away,” Peck said. “Microtransit bridges the gap between traditional public transportation and private car ownership, providing a sustainable option for our community.”

Debra Johnson, general manager and chief executive officer of the Regional Transportation District, said that RTD is on the cusp of finishing the Northwest Rail Peak Service Study, which looks at the feasibility of the Denver-Longmont rail connection, but the team is still waiting on information from an existing freight railroad company.

“We’re going to have that study done, and that’s the basis for us going forward,” Johnson said.

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U.S. Rep. Joe Neguse (D-Lafayette), speaks during the eighth Sustainable Transportation Summit at the Longmont Museum. (Cliff Grassmick/Staff Photographer)