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RTD, Denver have tentative deal on adding one or two stations on airport train line

By Jeffrey Leib
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RTD and Denver have struck a tentative deal to collectively spend about \$75 million making improvements to the Denver International Airport commuter-train corridor, including track upgrades that should facilitate the addition of one or two additional rail stations in the Peña Boulevard right of way.

The Regional Transportation District's current plan for the \$1.1 billion airport train does not include a station at East 62nd Avenue and Peña, or along East 72nd Avenue just east of Tower Road.

Private developers who own land at both locations, and city and airport officials, have been working with RTD to ensure that the airport train line is built in a way that would most easily and economically accommodate the addition of one or both stations.

The 72nd Avenue station site is close to where a possible 1,500-room Gaylord hotel complex may be located, as well as property being considered as a relocation site for the National Western

Stock Show.

The agreement reached between RTD and Denver calls for the city to provide \$57 million in initial funding, and RTD about \$18 million, to cover the construction of grade separations for the DIA train line at East 48th Avenue and Tower Road, the cost of double-tracking an additional mile of the rail line, and other improvements, including drainage upgrades.

Grade separations typically involve construction of either a bridge or an underpass to separate tracks from roadways.

Double-tracking another mile will allow the addition of one more train station in the Peña Boulevard corridor.

The deal, which still requires approval from the Denver City Council, RTD's board of directors and the Federal Transit Administration, also includes "enabling" work that will support double-tracking more of the Peña corridor — a prerequisite if two stations are to be added.

Mayor Michael Hancock said Denver values the proposed grade separations with the rail line at 48th Avenue and Tower Road as important safety improvements for residents and visitors to the area.



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The deal with RTD is a "smart, common-sense" approach to improving safety in the corridor, he said, adding that it also will help by "keeping trains moving efficiently" and delivering "real economic benefits" from the interplay with the transit improvements.

The complex financial terms of the transaction call for RTD to ultimately pay Denver back about \$27 million of the city's upfront investment in the deal.

RTD will do so, in part, from "contingency funds" if they are left over after completion of the FasTracks project that includes the airport train.

If the contingency fund is empty at the end of the project, an alternate payback formula kicks in, officials said.

Another part of the reimbursement is expected to come from RTD's return to Denver of sales and use taxes paid by contractors building the airport train.

When all accounts are settled, Denver's long-term contribution to the transaction is expected to be \$30 million, while RTD's will be \$45 million, according to a term sheet that outlines the arrangement.

RTD general manager Phil Washington stressed that the transit agency's contribution to the East Corridor rail improvements will not be drawn from other FasTracks corridors.

"We are not doing anything at the expense of partially funded corridors," he said.

RTD is short about \$2.5 billion of what is needed to finish all of FasTracks.

The respective commitments from RTD and Denver are evidence of a "great partnership" between the parties "for a corridor of great regional and national significance," Washington said.

He said the transaction could be a model for what he is promoting as a "public public private partnership," or P-Quad — getting other public entities to contribute money on FasTracks projects with the promise that RTD will pay them back.

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