



May 13, 2001

GARNA LAUNCHES FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR THE PRESERVATION AND USE OF HISTORIC STAGE AND RAILROAD ROUTES: *UPDATE AFTER OPEN HOUSE*

In order to be fair to our participants the summaries below are fairly detailed. For those who just want the "big picture" here are the key points

- There was a good turnout (Approximately 75 people participated in the three open house meetings) and input was generally supportive of the broad vision being studied.
- The need for partnerships and coordinating efforts over such a long distance project was stressed.
- Challenges were pointed out, particularly regarding sensitivity to private land issues and the importance of demonstrating potential for economic benefits if this project moves forward.
- Outside the open houses individual contacts and meetings continue to identify issues such as wildlife concerns, private land owners' views, and land managers' concerns.



May 4th open house, Buena Vista

Read On for Details

Public Open House Summary

The GARNA LSR/MRR Working Group along with planner Jim Houk with Thomas & Thomas conducted public open houses in Leadville, Buena Vista and Salida on May 3-5, 2011 to discuss potential preservation, interpretation and exploration (“PIE”) opportunities associated with the historic Leadville Stage and Midland RR routes through Lake and Chaffee Counties.

Overall there were approximately 75 participants that came out to share their ideas and concerns for the vision and preliminary objectives of this feasibility study. The groups included landowners, residents, open space and trail activists, business owners, the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area Park Manager, Forest Service officials, 4 County Commissioners and the mayor and a Trustee of Buena Vista.

Over the 3 evenings, the Working Group recorded many supportive suggestions as well as some “red flag” concerns regarding next steps and future planning goals. The following summarizes the two types of comments, results of some other individual meetings, and includes preliminary observations made by the Working Group concerning the next steps and overall vision for the project.

Supportive Suggestions and Feedback

- While the majority of participants supported the three primary objectives of Preservation, Interpretation and some level of Exploration, many went further to say they would like to volunteer with future development of a formal master plan and with implementation of the vision if the feasibility study made the recommendation to move forward.
- It was also thought that the historic value and recreational interest of the routes would be of interest to local residents as well as draw people to the area as visitors in the future.
- Participants were happy to support and volunteer to help raise awareness. Possible opportunities included writing press releases, locating stories of historical importance and voicing support for future efforts at the city and county level.
- The Lake County Commissioners indicated that future implementation plans (if found feasible) should focus on identifying “backyard” projects to help residents relate to the project and opportunities in their local area such as additional trails and historic interpretation
- One of the highest priorities suggested by many participants was to raise the level of public awareness about these historical resources and vision. Suggestions included generating more news stories, articles and publications promoting preservation and celebration of the historic routes. People also suggested development of on-site informational signs and interpretive plaques. Following the study, individual counties, municipalities and public land managers should be encouraged to adopt its results and declare the trail alignments along existing county roads or on public lands as appropriate, followed by selection and accurate identification and interpretation of physical sites along the routes.
- The second most-discussed priority was to provide some level of public access to selected portions of the two routes so that people can actually experience a physical route and the stories they represent first-hand. It was recognized that large proportions of the historic routes, especially south of Buena Vista, cannot specifically be identified but rather follow existing county roads and can be used to connect users to local cultural and historic resources.

- Many participants suggested that the study discuss this 60-plus mile concept in terms of sections or phases for possible development, and identify the easiest or most realistic segments to begin with.
- The third most discussed priority was to work with public land managers to preserve the existing railroad and stage road remnants, so that they were not lost through neglect and deterioration could be slowed as part of preservation efforts.
- Others noted that when “next steps” are being considered we should give consideration for utilizing existing parking and access opportunities and minimizing environmental impacts of any physical development or increased visitor use.
- The importance of Partnerships was raised and discussed. Overall, participants felt a partnership approach would be essential, not only to accomplish physical development but to help build community support and a sense of pride and participation. Possible partners included:
 - Biking, hiking and rafting clubs, companies, shops and guides, for *Awareness, Policing and Clean ups*
 - B&B and Motels, for *Awareness and Sponsorships*
 - Schools, for building *youth Awareness, starting stewardship programs and providing Clean ups*
 - Churches, for *Awareness and Clean ups*
 - Trout Unlimited, for *education of fishermen on respecting areas open to fishing, and Clean ups*
 - All could help develop other stewardship programs that help with maintenance and preserve the resources and build relationships with public and private land managers.
 - DOW/U.S. Forest Service, Watchable Wildlife programs for *Awareness*
 - It is thought that a good foundation of partners should foster stewardship programs that would help with maintenance and preserve resources and help build good relationships with public and private land managers.



Open house participant in Salida making suggestions on project map.

- Some specific questions/thoughts were expressed about types of uses to be encouraged or permitted and what sort of trail surface would be appropriate. Would a trail be paved or simply natural surfaced or unpaved with a more durable surface allowing year round use?

- It was suggested that future plans consider accessibility needs of users, such those of the aging and disabled populations. The routes and access points should address the Americans With Disabilities Act standards if possible.
- There was a great deal of concern for shared access. Many people favored hiking, biking and horseback riding as the shared uses; some asked about motorized use and expressed concerns about how appropriate this would be on sections not currently open.
- The Statewide Bottom-Up Economic Development Plan is to be completed by May 15, 2011. The questions is can the trail be promoted as a local and regional driver for tourism, recreation, and natural resources conservation, and can the state-wide program help minimize delays with bureaucratic procedures (e.g. getting permission to cross a railroad right of way) which might be valuable in the future?
- The concept did receive expressions of support as a local and regional drive, walk and bike route that highlights tourism, recreation, and natural resource conservation.
- Future plans should provide for the needs of multiple user types, interests and for different levels of experiences. The study should consider local museums, websites, schools, scenic byway partners, friends groups, PBS short stories, colleges and on-site kiosk program...etc. as a way of offering greater exposure for the concept.
- It would be good if GARNA would continue to be a long term stakeholder in future planning and implementation phases.
- It was recommended that future plans coordinate regional connections with other state and county trails, byways, railways and routes (Continental Divide, the Colorado Trail...etc.).
- The study and future plans should have a regional approach, bringing the various planning efforts together under a common vision. "There is power in a regional perspective", said one Chaffee County Commissioner.
- The study should explore/understand county Conservation Funds/funding limitations.
- The study should examine possible economic drivers. The efforts should consider shared benefits of local county and community tax base revenues.
- The study should address private land owners' concerns.
- The historic stories told should identify and celebrate people that used the stage coaches and rails, and those that built the routes.
- The study should explore the new Livability Program under the National Scenic Byway Program (NSBP), and the America's Byways Resource Center (ABRC).
- The study should highlight different route experiences between north and south
- Planning efforts should check with long-time residents along routes for specific knowledge of alignments and family stories and connections



Many sites were suggested for interpretation between Buena Vista and Salida.

“Red Flag” Concerns and Recommendations

- The study should identify strategies that reduce the cost and time invested in environmental studies and permitting by utilizing existing infrastructure and avoiding environmental conflicts. The “next steps” during the study should develop criteria on which decisions can be made. The hope is to find balance in conservation, preservation and access.
- The existing modern railroad right-of-way creates a major barrier and limits access along the routes in many cases. The future plan should not encourage trespassing on RR rights of way.
- Several participants raised property rights, privacy, conflict between trail users and property owners, security, disrespect for private property and animal conflict as important issues to be addressed. It is recognized that many private land owners may be opposed to permitting public access near or across their properties. Several land owners who were not able to attend the open houses, did e-mail similar concerns, and in one case expressed the opinion that the access concept was not particularly worthy of public funding.
- Private property and access may limit development and implementation plans in the near future, but the study should discuss the partnerships, easements and acquisition options to break down barriers in the long term.
- There is overall concern regarding limited funding. The study should provide a list of possible funding alternatives/opportunities in areas of:
 - Historic preservation
 - Watchable Wildlife
 - Fisherman Access
 - State Trails Programs
 - Rails to Trails Support
 - DOT Transportation Enhancement (TE) funds...etc
- There are multiple land management concerns (public and private) and limited management resources. The study should work with private land owners to document their concerns. The plan should also continue to discuss with public land managers the long-range possibilities. Eventually there will need to be a management plan that deals

with issues like detailed development proposals, management responsibilities, maintenance, seasonal closures and policies related to minimizing conflicts.

- Future plans will need to address wildlife conflicts and DOW concerns associated with Big Horn Sheep, fishing habitat and raptor nesting. Plans will need to consider access impacts and potential seasonal closures.



- The study and future plans will need to consider non-motorized vs. motorized conflicts. It was understood that the conflict may vary from north to south and from county to county.
- Prior to the meeting in Leadville a former Lake County Commissioner summarized recent county initiatives to categorize infrequently used but 4WD-passable “jeep” routes as “primitive” and “subprimitive” but still open to motorized use as part of the county’s official road system. He gave the opinion the stage road in Lake County was in the subprimitive category. He also felt that if a route is declared public it was impractical to limit use to certain categories, such as hikers and bicyclists only, and that roads open to all users means bringing more support. In the meeting itself, Lake County Commissioners observed that a 1936 Lake County map showing roads has been adopted to guide current county road classification and that may have bearing on the issue of the old stage route as a public road in Lake County.

Other Inputs outside the open houses

In parallel with the open houses, the Planning Team has sought input from recreational interest groups, historic preservation organizations, communities along the route, private land owners and public land managers. Below are notes from some of these; more input will be encouraged.

- Wildlife and fisheries specialists of Colorado Division of Wildlife in Lake and Chaffee Counties have been briefed. There are definitely concerns to be addressed, particularly impact of visitor use in sections where Bighorn sheep are dependent on access to the Arkansas River, or are targeted for medicinal baiting (north and south of Granite); raptor nesting especially in the Gold Camp area is of concern; increased fisherman access where it has been difficult e.g. along the east bank in Hayden Valley may have negative as well as positive consequences, and there is an issue of temptation to fishermen to trespass on river sections not open to public fishing. There is the broader challenge of striking appropriate balance between increased use of the river corridor for recreation and making sure wildlife has adequate habitat or is not displaced to poorer habitats. In some cases the specialists feel these issues might be addressed by seasonal closures, limiting the types of users, avoiding certain critical sections and user education, but a specific DOW response will be based on the study’s conclusions.
- Initial contacts have been made in Granite, where several residents are collecting input from neighbors and have committed to getting back with the Working Group. Since no formal “public meeting” has taken place it is only appropriate to indicate that there are

concerns about privacy, disrespect for private property and the potentially negative impacts of raising interest in Granite as a trailhead or tourism destination without any corresponding upside. On the other hand there is deep interest in increased preservation of the town's historic properties, artifacts and stories and in educating others about Granite's role in early history of the Upper Arkansas. Lines of communication are open and the Working Group looks forward to exploring solutions both to concerns and to opportunities.

- Special effort has been made to meet with entities in Leadville, Buena Vista and Salida concerned with promoting local trails, and how the "PIE" concept for a long distance corridor could be coordinated with town trail systems. BV's Trails Advisory Board and Ark Valley Velo club, Salida's SPOT/Salida Mountain Trails, and Leadville's Cloud City Wheelers have all expressed interest and support but stress the importance of coordinating to maximize the value of connecting to a regional trail system. Some feel that a regional project can help raise municipal support for their systems. Some have suggested that a regional approach could have a huge impact both on residents' quality of life and fitness as well as attractiveness for recreation and heritage experiences, adding real economic benefit to the fishing, rafting, 14er and cultural tourism already thriving.
- Public land managers, particularly the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area, continue to give feedback on what they wish to see addressed. AHRA recently urged the Working Group to clarify the status of the LSR in Lake County (public road or not; which sections are in that status). USDA Forest Service Leadville District has provided many comments and access to maps regarding location and potential future use of lands they manage between Hayden Meadows to Turquoise Lake and north of Buena Vista to Clear Creek.
- As noted above, there have been contacts with private land owners, particularly in the area north of Buena Vista to Clear Creek; their concerns were summarized in the "red flag" section above. Unfortunately it has not been as easy to identify and contact private owners in sections north of Granite to Two Bit Gulch; no one in this category identified themselves in an open house and we must make greater efforts to get their inputs.

Planning Team Observations

- Overall we were pleased to see a good turnout and find there is broad support-at least at this preliminary stage-for the overall vision to preserve, interpret and provide some exploration (the PIE approach) of these two historic routes. Thanks to all of you who came!
- We were pleased to be reminded of the importance of assessing potential economic benefits of alternative tourism options that may be associated with the PIE strategy.
- We appreciate and understand that private land owners near or on a possible interpretive route have valid property rights and access concerns, and as the study progresses we will continue to examine ways that initiatives might be structured to minimize impacts on private land owners. However, it seems fair to observe that owners of private property deep within public lands (as most private parcels along the LSR and Midland are) enjoy substantial benefits from this unique status. These may include protection from major development nearby, elevated land values, access routes not open to the public, a high degree of privacy, and direct access to adjacent public lands not easily accessible to others. Since it is the general public who pays for management of the public lands which provide these benefits it seems reasonable to expect some give and take from land owners in designing a trail, trailhead or interpretive site near or crossing private lands, in recognition of their rather special status. Hopefully our study will encounter more of that give and take and be able to suggest creative solutions.
- In most cases, regardless of whether individuals were opposed to public access in particular areas, people were in support of preserving the routes' story and resources.
- Preliminary thoughts should be given to logos, branding and identifiable structures and information throughout the corridor. This will be a big part of telling the story and raising

awareness in the future. We will take seriously the specific suggestions about what to interpret, how to better publicize the study and the resources themselves, how to stress partnerships and will insure all of these are addressed in the study.

- The study will need to provide a clear picture of what the private and public land ownership ratio along the routes looks like today.
- The team will work to provide a better list of Frequently Asked Questions for both citizens and private land owners as part of the final report and will post a preliminary list on the www.garna.org web site in the near future.
- We agree that expanding web site information and hosting more historically related stories, pictures and programs as part of an awareness program would be helpful, even as the study is progressing.
- If the study supports moving the project forward, the results should identify several “pilot” segments along the routes (both south and north) where preservation, interpretation and exploration initiatives could begin as soon as possible, demonstrating how things might work and providing successful case studies to encourage other segments to be developed.
- Thomas & Thomas will discuss with CDOT possible access and shoulder improvements along Hwy 24 or 285 in preparation for connections and short segments in the earlier phases of implementation.
- We were glad to meet some potential volunteers either for assistance with the current study or who would line up to help with implementation if that is the decision.
- Finally there was a question from one of the participants about who ultimately decides on the direction of the study and its’ outcome? Right now GARNA is responsible for the completion of the study. As for the next steps, that answer may be a work in progress, but right now we’d say that in a complex long distance vision, involving as it does 2 counties, 3 or 4 towns, 4 or 5 land or resource management agencies, private land owners, recreation groups, the general public and probably others not yet heard from, no single entity will be in a position to say yea or nay to the whole concept. Rather, as in many other such projects, whether or not there is full consensus, the study’s results and recommendations will be accepted as a broad framework within which individual entities responsible for certain aspects can move forward (or not). This might mean with their particular piece of the route or their preservation agenda or their heritage interpretation program, so that eventually-perhaps years down the road, these pieces and programs might eventually be connected in what the framework envisioned.

What’s Next?

- So far as you, the recipients of this summary are concerned, we’d still like to hear from you with additional comments, responses or to point out anything we may not have recorded. Send those to Alan Robinson robinson@chaffee.net or Jim Houk jhouk@ttplan.net
- The planning team will continue to reach out to special interest groups we’ve not yet heard from, and revisit with land managers, to be sure we’re getting their realistic concerns, and we’ll expand our efforts to contact private land owners we’ve missed to date.
- The Thomas & Thomas efforts will now be focused on preparing the first working draft of the feasibility study. Much of the work will be in assessing “pros and cons” of the concept. And the draft will outline preliminary short, mid and long-term objectives and alternatives, which will be tested with the Working Group and stakeholders.
- Once the preliminary objectives and draft report is complete, the planning team will provide the stakeholders and public an opportunity to review and provide additional feedback and suggestions.
- The team will also work to raise awareness of the study in communities along the routes during the next few months.

- The plan is to have a draft report out for review in late July or early August and final wrap up of the study by October 2011.
- The final feasibility study report will list advantages and disadvantages (assets and liabilities) of moving the project into a subsequent “master plan” phase. This would be a separate, subsequent effort resulting in much more detail concerning proposed preservation, interpretation and exploration/access initiatives. The feasibility study itself will not define a specific proposed trail alignment or precisely identify all preservation and interpretation sites on a map but will report on a variety of opportunities to be further explored. Its central focus will be in laying out these opportunities within the context of the broad vision of celebrating the history and character of the two historic routes, and to provide a balanced assessment of the benefits drawbacks of moving the vision forward.
- The final report and recommendations will be presented to the Working Group and the GARNA Board for their consideration. If judged appropriate the GARNA Board would present the report to individual communities, land managers and County representatives for further support of the next steps and funding.

THANKS FOR YOUR CONTINUED INTEREST, COMMENTS AND SUPPORT!