

State Rail Planning Best Practices

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Foreword

State Rail Planning Best Practices, Volume 2 is a companion to *State Rail Planning Best Practices, First Edition*, which was first published in 2009 to provide AASHTO members and the broader rail planning community with practical guidance on how to develop state rail plans that comply with federal guidelines while also accounting for the unique circumstances of each state. Volume 2 complements the First Edition by summarizing states' activity over the last 5 years to develop state rail plans since the enactment of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA). This report draws from the latest generation of state rail plans to document current best practices. The report also summarizes the experiences of states that participated in a state rail planning survey conducted by AASHTO in 2013. The objective of this report is to serve as a resource to inform and improve the development of future state rail plans.

Acknowledgement

The following document *State Rail Planning Best Practices, Volume 2* was developed by Donald B. Ludlow, AICP of Cambridge Systematics, Inc., now of CPCS Transcom, Inc. on behalf of the AASHTO Rail Resource Center and the Standing Committee on Rail Transportation. AASHTO would also like to thank the state departments of transportation rail officials for their participation in the completion of the document.

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Section 1—Introduction

State rail planning activities have changed dramatically since enactment of the landmark rail planning legislation contained in the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (PRIIA). When it was published in November of 2009, State Rail Planning

What is state rail planning?

For the purposes of this report, state rail planning is the activity culminating in the development of a state rail plan—an official document that guides state freight and passenger rail development and policies.

Best Practices provided immediate insight and guidance to state rail agencies and stakeholders as they developed the first generation of post-PRIIA plans. Since 2009, the practice of state rail planning has continued to evolve. The latest generation of post-PRIIA plans features greater orientation toward passenger rail planning and greater focus on project evaluation. Since PRIIA was enacted, the number of states with current state rail plans blossomed from a dozen or so to over 40. During this period of rapid expansion of state rail planning activity, the practice has matured to encompass a wide range of approaches.

1.1 Objective

The primary objective of Best Practices, Volume 2 is to identify best practices from a broad body of recently completed state rail planning work to empower future planners with ideas and examples that will improve the efficacy of their efforts. This guidance will be timely as states contemplate future actions following a flurry of recent state rail planning activity from 2009 to 2015.

1.2 Approach

This report draws from nearly 40 of the most recently completed or nearly completed state rail plans to identify changes in rail planning since 2009, to identify best practices, and to provide guidance on lingering challenges. To support the development of this report, AASHTO conducted a nationwide survey of state rail planning officials in 2013.

The survey gauged the experiences of state DOTs in preparing the latest generation of state rail plans. The findings illuminated some key questions about the state of state rail planning—including the primary motivations for developing a plan, details on who developed it, and how it was developed. One of the most important outcomes of the survey was that it produced a list of persistent challenges that states still face. The report contains three major sections. Section 2 summarizes the state survey, Section 3 describes the latest best practices, and Section 4 identifies lingering gaps in state rail planning and potential improvements.



Figure 1-1. Denver Union Station