



Executive Summary

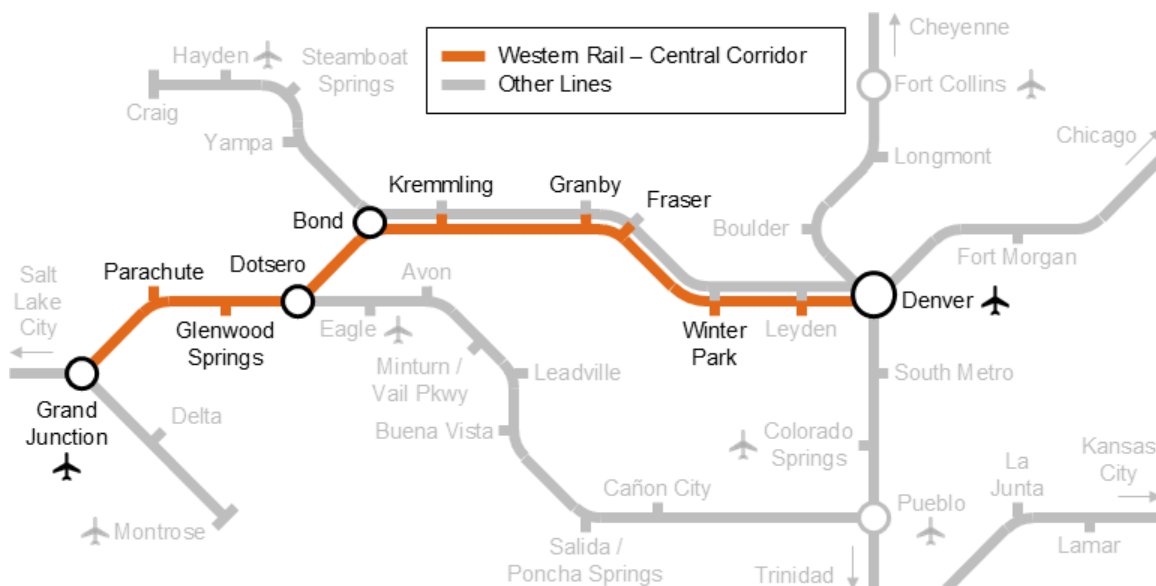
Colorado faces a severe transportation challenge: the safety, reliability, and sustainability of the Interstate 70 (I-70) corridor through the Rocky Mountains. With frequent closures, excessive congestion, and costly maintenance, I-70 has become an economic bottleneck and a hazard to travelers. A pragmatic and cost-effective solution exists.

By leveraging existing rail infrastructure, the State of Colorado can partner with the Union Pacific Railroad (UP) and/or the BNSF Railway to establish a "truck-by-train" system. This roll-on, roll-off rail bridge would remove up to 1,120 semi-trucks, bobtail trucks, and other commercial trucks driven by a CDL driver from the I-70 corridor each day. The I-70 Truck Train would operate on the existing rail corridor between Denver and Grand Junction as a dedicated artery for the transport of commercial trucks over the mountains. For an initial investment of under \$1 billion, the system would become financially self-sustaining within two years.

Benefits to the taxpayers of the State of Colorado will be realized almost immediately.

1. Congestion will decrease along I-70, even within the Denver metro area.
2. Truck exhaust through one of Colorado's most fragile ecosystems will decrease tenfold.
3. Fewer people will be injured or killed in commercial truck-related accidents.
4. The cost of maintaining I-70 will decrease substantially.

No other near-term proposal offers the same scale of impact, speed of implementation, and economic return.



The Problem: A Fragile and Overburdened Corridor

Colorado's mountain economy depends on transportation. The ski industry alone generates \$5 billion annually, supporting 50,000 jobs. Yet access to these economic engines is constrained by I-70's limitations.

In 2024, I-70 experienced 99 closures, costing the state over \$200 million in lost economic activity.



Excluding local service which cannot be removed from I-70, roughly 2,000 slow-moving semi-trucks per day pass through the Denver to Grand Junction section of the I-70 corridor. These trucks disproportionately contribute to traffic, accidents, emissions, and road degradation. The total measurable cost of accommodating these vehicles exceeds \$300 million per year. Left unaddressed, these issues will only worsen as population and freight demands grow.

The Solution: A Truck-by-Train Rail Bridge

The rails of Union Pacific's Central Corridor between Denver and Grand Junction (which BNSF has trackage rights to operate on) run at only 25% capacity - an underutilized asset ideally suited for heavy freight transport. By shifting 1,120 trucks per day from I-70 onto the rails, Colorado can immediately alleviate congestion.

Key components of the plan include:

- **Dedicated Rail Service:** 16 trains per day (8 in each direction), each carrying up to 70 trucks.
- **Operational Efficiency:** Trains will be equipped with Tier 4 low-emission locomotives and pull modified 85' flatcars.
- **Driver Integration:** Truck drivers can either swap/hand off vehicles at terminals or ride in onboard sleeper accommodations. This would fulfill DOT-required 8-hour rest periods while freight remains in-motion.
- **Strategic Infrastructure:** Two loading terminals (west of Grand Junction and east of Denver) featuring a train car deck situated level with automated bridge plates allowing seamless roll-on, roll-off truck loading to be constructed alongside a train maintenance facility.

Trains would operate every three hours, covering the mountainous route in approximately nine hours. By rail, trucks completely avoid the congestion of the Denver metro area and I-70. The system would be run by UP/ BNSF crews under a public-private framework ensuring seamless integration with existing freight operations.

Financial Model: A Sustainable Investment

The total capital cost projected is **under \$1 billion**, covering rolling stock, terminals, track upgrades, and infrastructure improvements. Revenues from the operation will be a motivator for the railroads to give priority dispatching to the "truck-by-train" service:

Cost for 9 Train Sets (in millions \$USD)	Unit Cost	Total Cost
27 Tier 4 Locomotives	\$7	\$189
650 Flatcars	\$.05	\$32.5
18 Sleeper Cars	\$4	\$72
2 Terminals	\$150	\$300
Maintenance Facility	\$100	\$100
Highway Interchange Improvements	\$150	\$150
UP Track Upgrades / Crew Training	\$125	\$125
Total		\$896.5

Colorado taxpayers will have to agree to cover the up-front capital cost needed to create the new service. A bond issue can be put before the voters to determine if it is a project they deem worthy.



Projected Costs and Revenues:

- **Revenue Potential:** \$200 million annually
 - Assumes a \$500 fare per-truck
- **Operating Costs:** ~\$60 million annually covering crews, fuel, maintenance, insurance, taxes, etc.
 - Assumes \$10 thousand per train run, 16 runs per day, 5,840 runs per year
- **Total Profit:** ~\$90 million in annual profit
 - Assuming 75% capacity utilization, and a loss of 240 runs per year for track maintenance (focused in May when congestion on I-70 is lighter)
- **Profit Split:** 1/3 to the State of Colorado (~\$30 million annually), 2/3 to the freight railroads (~\$60 million annually)

With this revenue model, the state's initial investment can be repaid within 30 years without additional taxpayer burden. Freight rail companies will expand revenue without loss of any existing business, but with existing operations benefitting from track and other right-of-way improvements. This does not account for the additional benefits to I-70 or Colorado residents in terms of alleviated traffic, less wear and tear on I-70, and driver safety.

Incentives for Trucking Industry Participation

For trucking companies, the service is both cost-effective and operationally advantageous:

- **Lower Costs:**
 - Negates fuel expenses
 - Reduces wear and tear on equipment
 - Reduction in insurance premiums/claims by removing possibility of accidents
- **Efficiency Gains:**
 - Improved delivery schedules
 - Drivers can legally rest while their trucks remain in motion
 - Avoids hotel expenses and / or overnight idling at truck stops
- **Driver / Carrier Incentives:**
 - Avoid the worst of I-70
 - Drivers won't need to worry about snow, chains, or traffic

Conclusion: A Smarter Future for Colorado's Transportation

A truck-by-train rail bridge over the Rocky Mountains will relieve congestion, improve safety, cut emissions, and strengthen the state's economy—all while operating on a financially self-sustaining model.

By utilizing existing rail assets, Colorado has the opportunity to implement a transformative solution to its most pressing transportation problem. This is an investment in Colorado's future that pays dividends from day one. The question is not whether we can afford to do it - it's whether we can afford not to.

- **Brad Swartzwelter**, former Amtrak Conductor and Snow Sports Advocate

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