Front Range Passenger Rail & November Vote

Recent reporting shows that Colorado's long-discussed Front Range Passenger Rail project is moving toward a November ballot question that would ask voters in 13 Front Range counties to approve funding for a starter rail line.

According to coverage summarized from The Denver Post and other outlets, state and regional planners are preparing a 2026 ballot measure that would fund an initial Denver-to-Fort Collins "starter line", with the larger Fort Collins–to–Trinidad system to follow in later phases. The technical planning is largely complete; the remaining challenge is political—how to fund it, how much service to promise, and whether voters will support it.

A separate report notes that the Front Range Passenger Rail District is leaning toward **a 0.5% sales-tax measure** for the 2026 ballot. The district is completing a three-phase readiness plan (technical, public engagement, and project development) to determine whether the measure will officially be referred for the November 2026 election

Comparison of
Smart Skyways vs. Front Range Passenger Rail

Smart Skyways	Front Range Passenger Rail (FRPR)
Elevated, automated, driverless guideway system using lightweight electric vehicles with offline docking.	**Conventional steel-wheel passenger rail** operating on shared or dedicated track.
Point-to-point, on-demand service with no fixed schedules; vehicles depart as soon as passengers board.	**Fixed schedules** with trains running at set intervals regardless of demand.
High throughput due to platooning, short headways, and continuous flow.	**Lower throughput** constrained by train length, station spacing, and track capacity.
Minimal land footprint — 30×30 ft aerial easement; no grade crossings.	**Large land footprint** — requires right-of-way acquisition, track upgrades, and grade-crossing mitigation.
Construction cost per mile is dramatically lower due to lightweight structure and modular components.	**Construction cost per mile is high** due to track, signaling, bridges, stations, and safety systems.

Energy-efficient electric propulsion with regenerative braking and solar-ready guideways.	**Diesel or electrified rail** depending on corridor; electrification adds major cost.
Scales with demand — add more vehicles, not more track.	**Difficult to scale** — capacity increases require more trains, more track, or double-tracking.
Zero congestion interaction — elevated above roads.	**Interacts with freight rail**, requiring negotiations, time-slotting, and dispatch priority issues.
Stations can be small, distributed, and integrated into communities.	**Stations are large, centralized**, and require parking, platforms, and ADA infrastructure.
Ideal for short, medium, and distributed trips (1–30 miles).	**Ideal for long-distance, intercity trips** (20–200 miles).
Supports freight-light logistics at night using the same guideway.	**Primarily passenger-focused**; freight rail is separate and often incompatible.
Fully compatible with your Smart Infrastructure Corridor — shares the digital backbone, clean-energy layer, and AI-operations layer.	**Partially compatible** — rail is a standalone system with limited integration into digital or AI-media revenue engines.
Financed through revenue bonds tied to corridor performance; no long-term public operating subsidy.	**Requires ongoing public subsidy** for operations, maintenance, and capital replacement.
30-year public ownership model with surplus-revenue sharing.	**Public ownership with long-term operating obligations** and limited surplus potential.

Conclusion

Taken together, the comparison makes the strategic distinction clear: **Smart Skyways is a flexible, scalable, digitally integrated mobility layer**, while **Front Range Passenger Rail is a traditional, capital-intensive, schedule-bound system** designed for a different era and a different trip pattern. Both have roles, but they do not solve the same problem. Skyways is an east west orientation and FRPR is a north south orientation. Skyways has tracks in both directions and docks off-line and FRPR has a single track at the moment and docks on-line.

Skyways aligns with **Colorado's future-facing goals**—clean energy, distributed access, AI-enabled operations, and corridor-based economic development—while FRPR aligns with **legacy intercity rail models** that require ongoing subsidy like the .5 cent sales tax and offer limited integration with emerging infrastructure.

By weighing cost, scalability, land impact, digital compatibility, and long-term public benefit, the preferred direction becomes evident: **the system that grows with the region, not against it, is the one that delivers the greatest return for Colorado's people, economy, and future.**