

Front Range Passenger Rail District Ballot Issue 7A

Colorado Connector (CoCo): 0.333% Sales Tax (\$295M/year) and \$580M in Debt Authorization

Measure type	TABOR tax and debt increase referred by the Front Range Passenger Rail District (FRPR) Board on a 14–1 vote. Decided only by voters in district municipalities. Passes with a simple majority.
Mechanism	Creates a 0.333% district sales tax (about 33 cents on a \$100 purchase). Exempt: gasoline, food, residential electricity and gas, prescription drugs, and medical supplies.
Revenue & debt	About \$295M per year. Authorizes up to \$580M in debt with a maximum repayment cost of \$785M. The tax has no sunset; the campaign describes it as funding “in perpetuity.”
District	About 29–30 municipalities from Fort Collins to Pueblo/Trinidad. Jefferson County municipalities in the district include Arvada, Lakewood and Lakeside , plus the Jeffco portions of Westminster, Littleton and Bow Mar . Golden and unincorporated Jefferson County are not in the district.
Use of funds	Phase 2 full-corridor service from Fort Collins to Pueblo by 2032 (\$1.7B capital; \$40–51M/year operations), later expansion phases, and a “Local Return” program for station-area improvements and first/last-mile connections.
Already funded	Phase 1 starter service (Fort Collins to Denver, 3 daily round trips, 8 stations, by 2029) is funded with existing State (CTIO) and RTD FasTracks dollars (\$332M capital) and proceeds whether or not 7A passes.
Effect on rate	Arvada’s combined sales tax rate would rise from 7.96% to 8.29%, and to 9.29% if AFPD Ballot Issue 6C also passes. Opponents say Denver’s rate would reach about 10%.
Support	Coloradans for CoCo. Presented Oct. 2, 2026 by James Flattum. Endorsed by Arvada Mayor Simpson and mayors of Denver, Boulder, Westminster and Pueblo; six Denver pro sports teams; and several chambers.
Opposition	Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce (Oppose). Presented Oct. 2, 2026 by Leslie Oliver.

1 WHAT IT DOES

7A would fund the build-out and ongoing operation of the Colorado Connector, a new Amtrak-operated passenger rail service along the I-25 corridor that runs on existing freight tracks under an access agreement with the host railroad.

Phased plan

- **Phase 1 (2029, funded):** 3 daily round trips, Fort Collins to Denver, 69 track miles, 80-minute run time (108 max). Stations at Fort Collins, Loveland, Longmont, Boulder, Louisville, Broomfield, Westminster and Denver Union Station.
- **Phase 2 (2032, requires 7A):** extends service south through Littleton, Sterling Ranch and Colorado Springs to Pueblo; 190 track miles and 12–15 stations in total.
- **Phases 3–5 (through 2045):** up to 10 daily round trips north of Denver and 8 to the south, plus infrastructure and rider upgrades, funded by ongoing tax revenue and debt.

Service details (per campaign)

- Estimated 1–1.27 million annual trips in early years, growing past 2 million. Fares of roughly \$0.19 per mile, harmonized with RTD fares inside the RTD area, with student, youth and senior discounts.
- Hybrid diesel/electric Amtrak Airo trainsets with 300–500 seats. No federal funding is assumed for Phases 1 or 2.
- If 7A fails, the legislature has given the district flexibility to fund the northern and southern segments separately.

Jefferson County note

- None of the planned stations is in Jefferson County. Jeffco riders would connect at Westminster, Denver Union Station or Littleton.

2 THE CASE FOR

As presented by Coloradans for CoCo

- Congestion is costly and worsening: 76 hours lost per commuter in 2024 and \$1,718 per commuter per year. DRCOG projects that by 2050, 2 PM traffic will match today's 5 PM.
- Uses existing track rather than building new corridors; the campaign negotiated Phase 1 to \$330M versus a \$750M RTD estimate.
- Cost compares favorably to highways: more than \$4.3B has been invested in Colorado's two largest interstate highways since 2018, versus \$1.7B to bring rail to the full Front Range corridor.
- Economic multiplier: the campaign cites \$5 in economic activity (including \$3 in local sales) for every \$1 invested in rail.
- Station-area growth: about 24,000 new homes within a half-mile of stations by 2045, plus emissions reductions equal to removing about 29,000 cars a year.
- Local Return funds station improvements and connections, with communities keeping local control. Every station municipality has passed a supporting resolution.
- Broad coalition, including Arvada's mayor, I-25 corridor mayors, Boulder and Pueblo chambers, the Colorado Hispanic Chamber, and the Broncos, Nuggets, Avalanche, Rockies, Mammoth and Summit FC.

3 THE CASE AGAINST

As presented by the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce

- The Denver Metro Chamber has historically supported transit and rail, but says this is not the right time for a permanent sales tax.
- Wait for proof: the starter service is already funded. Voters should see whether its ridership, finances and community benefits hold up before committing to a permanent regional tax.
- Deal not final: there are term sheets for Denver to Fort Collins, but no final contract, and the measure asks for money first.
- Cost per rider: at roughly \$300M a year in tax and ~800,000 riders, the Chamber estimates about \$375 in subsidy per boarding. It also cites projected operating losses exceeding 80%.
- Limited traffic relief: ridership models show no material change in I-25 congestion, and trips are not projected to be faster or more convenient than driving. This is intercity service, not a commuter line.
- Shared freight track creates uncertainty about schedule reliability and about aligning special-event trains with game times.
- No performance requirements, and the tax is paid on everyday purchases regardless of income or whether a person ever rides.

4 BUSINESS IMPACT

Dimension	Implications for Jefferson County employers
Direct cost	- Businesses in district municipalities (including Arvada and Lakewood) collect 0.333% more on taxable sales: about \$3,330 more from customers per \$1M in taxable sales. - Businesses also pay the higher rate on their own taxable purchases. Merchant fees rise with the tax. Card processing fees apply to the full transaction including tax, so businesses absorb roughly \$65–\$100 more a year per \$1M in taxable card sales (at typical 2–3% card rates).
Jeffco-specific effect	- Jefferson County shoppers and businesses in the district would pay the tax with no station in the county. Benefits to Jeffco come through regional connections and economic activity rather than direct access. - Golden and unincorporated Jefferson County are outside the district, so rate differences would emerge between neighboring Jeffco commercial areas.
Workforce & mobility	- Links Jeffco employers and workers to labor markets in Boulder, Fort Collins, Colorado Springs and Pueblo, and offers an alternative to I-25 for business travel. - Service frequency (3 daily round trips at launch, up to 8–10 later) suits intercity trips more than daily commuting.
Economic development	- Station-area housing and development could ease workforce housing pressure along the corridor, though concentrated outside Jefferson County. - A connected Front Range rail system is a regional competitiveness and site selection asset, if it performs as projected.
Fiscal risk	- A permanent tax with \$580M in debt and ongoing operating costs; long-term subsidy needs depend on ridership that has not yet been proven. - Adds to cumulative 2026 asks: in Arvada, 7A plus AFPD 6C would raise the combined rate from 7.96% to 9.29%.
Partner positions	Denver Metro Chamber: Oppose. Boulder Chamber, Greater Pueblo Chamber, Pueblo Latino Chamber and Colorado Hispanic Chamber: Support. Arvada Mayor Simpson: Endorses. Combined committee on Oct. 2: no position yet; KAPS member survey underway.

SOURCES	- Coloradans for CoCo, “Colorado Connector 10-minute Update” presentation, Oct. 2026 (coloradansforcoco.com) - Jefferson County Clerk & Recorder, “On the Ballot” (Ballot Issue 7A ballot title), jeffco.us/4652/On-the-Ballot - Colorado Public Radio, “Ballot Measure 7A: Front Range Passenger Rail District,” Sept. 25, 2026 - Colorado Newslane, “Front Range cities will vote on tax measure to fund Colorado Connector rail service,” Aug. 28, 2026 - Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce, 2026 ballot positions (denverchamber.org) and presentation, Oct. 2, 2026 - Advocacy KAPS Council / JEDC Government Affairs Committee / Olde Town BID meeting notes, Oct. 2, 2026
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