

Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad Commission
Minutes of the Regular Meeting August 15, 2026
9:00am

Location

Old Fire Station Meeting Room, 312 Main Street, Antonito, CO

The regular meeting of the Commission of the Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Railroad was called to order at 9:05am by Chairman Graybill.

Present at Meeting: Commissioner Billy Elbrock, Commissioner Ken Bitten, Commissioner Kim Smith Casford, Commissioner Mark Graybill.

Approval of Agenda: The agenda for the meeting was distributed. A motion was made by Commissioner Smith Casford to approve the agenda as presented. Seconded by Commissioner Bitten. Approved 4/0.

Approval of Minutes from May 7, 2026, Special Meeting: The minutes of May 7, 2026 Special Commission Meeting were distributed via email. A motion was made by Commissioner Bitten to approve the minutes of the May 7, 2026 Special Meeting and seconded by Commissioner Elbrock. Approved 4/0.

Approval of Minutes of May 18, 2026, Emergency Commission Meeting: The minutes of May 18, 2026, Emergency Commission Meeting was distributed via email. A motion was made by Commissioner Smith Casford to approve the minutes of the May 18, 2026, Emergency Commission Meeting and seconded by Commissioner Bitten. Approved 4/0

President's Report: Attached as Addendum A

Operations Manager's Report: Attached as Addendum B

Financial Report: Attached as Addendum C

Marketing Report: Attached as Addendum D

Local Affairs Report: Attached as Addendum E

Capital Projects Report: Attached as Addendum F

Tracks Across Borders Byway Report: No report presented

Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad Report: Attached as Addendum G

New Business:

- a. A motion to approve the FY 28 NM OpBud request was made by Commissioner Smith Casford and seconded by Commissioner Bitten. Roll call vote: Commissioner Elbrock: yes; Commissioner Bitten: yes; Commissioner Smith Casford: yes; Commissioner Graybill: yes. Motion passed unanimously.
- b. A motion to approve The Capstone Group, LLC contract was made by Commissioner Bitten and seconded by Commissioner Elbrock. Roll call vote: Commissioner Elbrock yes; Commissioner Bitten: yes; Commissioner Smith Casford: yes; Commissioner Graybill: yes. Motion passed unanimously.
- c. A motion to approve Lease of Property: Village of Chama was made by Commissioner Elbrock and seconded by Commissioner Bitten. Roll call vote: Commissioner Elbrock yes; Commissioner Bitten: yes; Commissioner Smith Casford: yes; Commissioner Graybill: yes. Motion passed unanimously.
- d. A motion to approve CY2027 Preliminary Operating Schedule was made by Commissioner Bitten and seconded by Commissioner Smith Casford. Roll call vote: Commissioner Elbrock: yes; Commissioner Bitten: yes; Commissioner Smith Casford: yes; Commissioner Graybill: yes. Motion passed unanimously.
- e. A motion to approve Resolution 2026-003: A Resolution to Amend Financial Documents to Reflect Current Commissioners was made by Commissioner Elbrock and seconded by Commissioner Smith Casford. Roll call vote: Commissioner Elbrock: yes; Commissioner Bitten: abstain; Commissioner Smith Casford: yes; Commissioner Graybill: yes. Motion passed unanimously.

Old Business: None presented

Executive Session: Chairman Graybill announced there was no need for an Executive Session

Actions following Executive Session: no Executive Session

Motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Bitten, seconded by Commissioner Elbrock. Approved 4/0. Meeting adjourned at 10:01 am.

The next regular meeting will be held on Saturday, November 7, 2026 at 9am at the Village of Chama Council Chamber.

Ken Bitten, Secretary

President's Report: Marvin Casias

Marvin began by acknowledging that his return as president of the RR would be a challenge. He noted, however, that he has a strong team to work with and that everyone has been busy completing as much work as possible while working around the weather conditions.

The RR has faced several significant challenges, particularly the ongoing dryness. Despite these conditions, the railroad has been able to obtain water from its own sources and has remained self-sufficient in meeting its operational needs. The trains have been running well, although ridership has varied and some trains have not been full. Overall, customers have received the trips promised, with very few mishaps.

Construction of the new parlor car is continuing and is approximately halfway complete. Some materials are still awaiting delivery. The track department has replaced nearly 1,000 ties, and the track crew has also provided backup support when needed. Right-of-way (ROW) cleanup is underway to help reduce fire danger. On days when double-heading is required out of Chama, Steven has allowed the helper engine to be used for ROW work in the afternoon, which also allows additional ballast to be placed. A significant amount of cinder buildup in the Chama yard has also been cleaned up.

Marvin expressed appreciation for the team and joked that he feels sorry for Alysia because he has been continually asking her for additional funding to get more work completed. Overall, he is pleased with how things are progressing.

Commissioner Mark Graybill noted that it was a difficult way to begin the season, particularly because the RR had to delay its opening by two weeks due to dangerous fire conditions along the ROW. Two trains in June were also annulled because of fire danger. The loss of 12 operating days had a significant financial impact.

Mark noted that there was also some lingering effect from the announcement of the delayed opening. It took time for reservations to gain momentum. Because of the RR's location, most reservations are made well in advance, with relatively few last-minute bookings.

Operations have been consistent throughout the season. While some trains have been light, there have also been several occasions when double-heading was necessary out of Chama. The commissioners continue to monitor reservation and ridership trends closely. Activity was slow in June and through the middle of July, but conditions now appear to be normalizing, which is encouraging.

Marvin and Mark both commented positively on the strength of the team currently in place and the work being accomplished.

Partially transcribed by Sam Seiber

Operations Manager's Report: Steven Butler

The season started off rough, with a delayed opening and the annulment of trains on June 30 and July 1 due to fire danger. The RR monitors its Points of Ignition (POIs) daily to determine whether conditions are safe for train operations. Temperature and humidity are among the factors considered in that assessment.

Most trains departing Chama are followed by two fire patrols, including trains powered by oil-burning locomotives, as even an oil burner can potentially start a fire. During the first few weeks of the season, there were several hot-box issues involving train cars, tenders, and new wheels as they were being broken in. That issue has largely been resolved.

Diesel locomotive 114 has been used once so far this season to operate a train while another locomotive was taken out of service for inspection. Locomotives 487 and 489 have handled most of the summer trains. When moisture has been present in the area, coal-burning locomotives 488 and 463 have also been placed into service.

Since July, most Tuesdays have been double-headed because an additional coach was added. Some Thursdays and Saturdays have also required double-heading. Operations are expected to slow through the end of September, after which more double-headed trains will return. Steven monitors the booking site closely to determine future service needs.

A Dark Sky Train is scheduled for the evening of this meeting, and a geology train will operate at the end of August. Beginning August 30, the RR will return to its normal schedule of two trains per day for the remainder of the season.

Several special events are planned for the fall:

- * September 12: Dinner train
- * September 26: Wagon train featuring a local musician and cowboy poet
- * September 27: Fundraiser train for locomotive 315, honoring Thomas Artzberger, former Chief Mechanical Engineer of the DRHS
- * September 28: Locomotives 168 and 315 will double-head from Antonito to Osier and return as a fundraiser for locomotive 492
- * October: Oktoberfest train out of Chama
- * End of season: Photo charters for Pete Lerro featuring locomotives 315 and 487

The special fundraising trips are priced at \$500 per person.

Maintenance and Mechanical

Operating one train per day during portions of the season has provided additional time for work trains to complete maintenance projects. Crews have made significant progress cleaning up ballast and removing cinders from the Chama yard.

On the mechanical side, locomotive 168 is currently in service. It operated for the 150th anniversary of Colorado and is scheduled to run again on September 28.

Addendum B

Locomotive 315 returned to the RR in July. Its annual Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) inspection has recently been completed, with DRHS members performing most of the work at the Chama shop. Locomotive 315 is scheduled to operate September 27 and 28 and again on October 27.

Locomotive 484 is out of service for its 1,472-day inspection. Once 492 enters service, work will begin on 484, with materials to be ordered as the inspection date approaches.

Locomotive 487 has operated throughout the summer. Work has been completed on its drafting system, resulting in significantly less smoke while operating on the railroad.

Locomotive 488 is temporarily out of service because a leak was discovered in an older repair. Materials for the repair are currently being tested to determine the best solution. Testing is expected to be completed within approximately two weeks, after which the repair should progress relatively quickly.

Locomotive 489 recently returned from its boiler wash and has been operating almost daily throughout the summer.

Work on locomotive 492's boiler has been on hold over the summer in Antonito. Its running gear has been removed in Chama, leaving the locomotive as a bare frame with cylinders. Cleanup work is underway, and several older frame repairs will need to be addressed. New parts are currently being fabricated.

All three diesel locomotives are currently in service.

Locomotive 463 returned to service several weeks ago following a complete running-gear rebuild, including rebuilding its trailing truck this summer. It will provide the power for the upcoming Dark Sky Train.

Once locomotive 488 returns to service, the RR expects to have five operating steam locomotives, in addition to locomotive 315.

Facilities and Equipment

Construction of the new parlor car is progressing well.

Construction has also begun on the new pavilion at Cumbres. The foundation has been excavated, with concrete work expected to begin soon. Completion is anticipated around mid-October. Electrical work can then be completed, allowing the facility to be prepared for the 2027 season.

2027 Operating Schedule

Commissioner Smith Casford asked Steven to comment on the proposed 2027 operating schedule, which was also an action item later in the meeting.

Steven described the schedule as a significant undertaking and noted that it was encouraging to have it completed this early. He credited the effort to himself, Marvin, and Alysia.

The proposed 2027 schedule is:

Memorial Day weekend: Two trains per day

First two weekends of June: One train per day

Mid-June through mid-August: Two trains per day

Mid-August through the end of August: One train per day, reflecting the expected decline in ridership as children return to school and before the fall-color season begins

Fall-color season: Two trains per day

A larger number of special events are also being planned, including beer trains, wine trains, dinner trains, Dark Sky trains, Christmas trains, and potentially pumpkin trains. Details of the special trains will be announced at a later date.

Commissioner Graybill expressed satisfaction that the 2027 schedule is moving closer to the operating patterns used in prior years.

Commissioner Bitten, drawing on his experience as a former CTO member, noted that schedules in the past were often not finalized until near the end of the current operating year. He said it was preferable to establish the following year's schedule much earlier and expressed his appreciation that management had completed the 2027 schedule in record time.

He stated that having the schedule completed this early puts the RR in a strong position and demonstrates the strength of the current management team.

Partially transcribed by Sam Seiber

Financial Report: Alysia Martinez

The CTO has experienced a decline in revenue compared with the prior fiscal year. Management has responded by reducing expenses in line with the lower revenue; however, the reduction in expenses has not been sufficient to fully offset the revenue decline, resulting in lower net operating income (NOI).

Management has done a good job controlling costs in response to current operating conditions. Looking ahead to next year, the increased number of operating days with two trains, together with anticipated revenue from special trains and events, should provide an opportunity to improve both revenue and the CTO's overall financial condition.

The Historic Preservation Account (HPA) has improved compared with the prior year. Historic preservation fee revenue has declined, generally paralleling the reduction in operating activity and ridership. HPA expenses continue to be primarily associated with insurance and contracted services.

The Commission has received its anticipated support from New Mexico. Colorado's funding has not yet been received; however, the Railroad has submitted the invoice to Colorado, and those funds are expected to arrive soon. July Commission expenses were relatively low, which is positive from a cash-flow standpoint.

Several capital projects remain underway, including locomotive work, track improvements, passenger car rehabilitation, and work on Locomotive 492.

On the operating side, the decline in ticket revenue has also affected retail revenue, as the two are closely related. As the Railroad moves into the fall season, ticket sales are expected to strengthen, which should also improve associated retail revenue. Management is hopeful that revenues will begin to normalize as fall ridership increases.

Cash flow remains an area that management is watching closely. While expense reductions have helped mitigate the effects of lower revenue, the Railroad's financial performance remains below expectations. The focus for the remainder of the season will be on maximizing fall and special-train revenue, maintaining expense discipline, and carefully managing available cash.

Partially transcribed by Sam Seiber

Marketing Report: Robert Stefanski

The season had a difficult start following the delayed opening, but there have been encouraging signs of improvement as the summer has progressed. Marketing efforts have focused on rebuilding volume and filling available seats, with particular emphasis on the fall color season, special-event trains, and the upcoming Christmas/Santa trains.

A significant highlight this year was the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad being named Best Scenic Train Ride by USA Today, returning the Railroad to the top spot for the first time in six years. The Colorado 150th anniversary special trains generated approximately \$31,000 in revenue while also providing an opportunity to showcase the Railroad and demonstrate the value of special events in attracting visitors and bringing people together.

Content creators and social media continue to expand the Railroad's reach. July results suggest that this increased exposure is contributing to ticket sales and introducing the Railroad to new audiences. From May through July, Facebook generated approximately 1.3 million views and 80,000 engagements. Instagram recorded approximately 200,000 views with a 6.8% engagement rate, while TikTok generated approximately 1.45 million post views. The Railroad also gained nearly 2,000 new followers across its social media platforms.

Demand has strengthened as the season has progressed, with booking activity through July showing encouraging improvement. July business began to resemble a more normal operating year. Particularly encouraging is that revenue per passenger has increased approximately 13%, largely attributable to increased utilization of premium services.

Website activity is also recovering. July website traffic was approximately 10% higher than July of last year. Digital advertising continues to produce measurable results. The Google advertising campaign has been associated with approximately \$950,000 in sales, while Facebook and Instagram advertising generated approximately 300 purchases totaling roughly \$240,000.

Near-term marketing efforts are focused on opportunities to build ridership during the remainder of the season. Local Appreciation Days run through August 30 and provide a 50% discount on coach-class tickets for All-Aboard and limited excursions to residents within an 80-mile driving radius of the Railroad. Fall color trains and other special-event trains will also receive increased promotion. Lessons learned from this year's campaigns will be incorporated into the 2027 marketing strategy.

The overall trends are encouraging: website traffic is recovering, revenue per passenger is increasing, booking activity has strengthened, and digital marketing campaigns are producing measurable results.

Commissioner Graybill asked about plans for the Santa trains. Robert indicated, from memory, that the trains are anticipated to operate December 5–7 and December 10–12. The Railroad is working to improve the overall experience, and the earlier schedule this year should provide additional time to market the trains and build ridership. Tickets are expected to go on sale soon.

Mark noted that the recent CTO meeting generated a number of ideas for improving the Santa train experience. He also pointed out that C&TSRR's Santa train pricing is considerably lower than comparable holiday train experiences in the region and potentially elsewhere in the country. Maintaining an affordable option may help the Railroad develop a broader and more loyal ridership base.

Robert noted that Santa train ridership has historically been predominantly local, making affordability particularly important. At the same time, the Railroad is considering adding premium classes of service rather than offering coach service exclusively. This could preserve an affordable coach option for local families while providing additional choices for guests seeking an upgraded experience and creating an opportunity for increased revenue.

Attendee Bill Lock commented on the positive publicity the Railroad has recently received, including coverage in the Albuquerque Journal*highlighting special trains such as Oktoberfest and the Wagon Train. He also asked about the effectiveness of recent two-for-one promotions.

The special pricing offered in connection with Colorado 150/America 250 ran for approximately 11 days and generated about \$17,000 in revenue from 257 riders. While these promotions are intended primarily to help fill otherwise available capacity during softer periods, the initial results suggest they can help bridge ridership gaps and generate incremental revenue.

It is still too early to evaluate the Local Appreciation Days promotion. The marketing campaign is underway and will continue to intensify as the promotion progresses.

Overall, the marketing report reflects meaningful improvement following a challenging start to the season. The combination of stronger bookings, higher revenue per passenger, growing digital engagement, effective advertising, special-event revenue, and an increasingly robust fall and holiday program provides encouraging momentum for the remainder of the operating year.

Partially transcribed by Sam Seiber

Local Affairs: Commissioner Smith Casford, Commissioner Elbrock

Commissioner Smith-Casford expressed enthusiasm about several community engagement initiatives discussed at the Friday CTO meeting, particularly those involving the Railroad and the Antonito community.

Antonito has created train silhouette signs that have been installed on light poles throughout town. Local businesses can advertise on the signs, and the signs will ultimately be available for purchase or auction. The project serves as both a fundraiser for the Antonito community and an opportunity to increase the Railroad's visibility throughout town.

Another encouraging example of community involvement is Antonito High School's use of Locomotives 168 and 463 on the design of its wrestling uniforms. Commissioner Smith Casford noted that these types of partnerships help strengthen the relationship between the Railroad and the communities it serves. She emphasized the importance of the Railroad being a good community partner and good citizen particularly in Antonito and Chama.

Commissioner Elbrock provided some perspective on local business activity. He reported that customers coming into his restaurant after riding the train generally appear to be happy with their Railroad experience. His restaurant business is currently down approximately 7–8%. He indicated that the local grocery store is down approximately 15–20%. The decline may be partially attributable to the opening of the new Dollar General in Chama. Gas station business is reportedly down approximately 7–8%, while the gift shop near the depot, across from the bank, is reportedly up approximately 7–8%.

Despite the mixed results among local businesses, Commissioner Elbrock's observations suggest that Railroad guests are generally pleased with their experience.

Commissioner Graybill noted that higher gasoline prices may also be affecting tourism and travel this year, potentially contributing to softer visitation in the region.

Commissioner Bitten commented that, given his relatively recent involvement, it is still too early for him to have developed significant relationships with the surrounding communities. He expressed enthusiasm about becoming more involved and working with the communities as he moves forward in his role.

Overall, the discussion emphasized the importance of maintaining strong relationships between **the Railroad and its gateway communities. Initiatives such as the Antonito train silhouettes and the high school's use of Railroad imagery provide relatively simple but meaningful ways to strengthen community connections, increase Railroad visibility, and reinforce the C&TSRR's role as an important part of the identity and economy of both Antonito and Chama.**

Capital Projects: Commissioner Bitten

As a newly appointed Commissioner, Commissioner Bitten reported that he did not have any capital project updates to provide at this time.

Commissioner Graybill asked Steven for an update on upcoming capital work. Steven reported that the Railroad is beginning preparations for its winter maintenance program, with significant work planned for both locomotives and passenger cars. The objective is to address necessary maintenance during the off-season and have the equipment in good condition for the 2027 operating season.

Work will continue on Locomotive 492. In addition, Locomotive 488 requires running gear work, including the anticipated replacement of at least one axle and installation of new tires. Locomotive 487 is also expected to receive a new smokebox.

Passenger car work will continue as part of the winter program as well.

Overall, the winter maintenance plan will focus on continued rehabilitation of 492, necessary mechanical work on the operating locomotive fleet, passenger car maintenance and rehabilitation, and ensuring that equipment is reliable and ready for the 2027 season.

Partially transcribed by Sam Seiber

The Friends recently completed Session D in Antonito, which included work on Boxcar 3223 and painting of several pieces of equipment.

Henry concluded by reflecting on his experience working with nonprofit organizations throughout the country. He said that he has never encountered an organization quite like the Friends, particularly in terms of the extraordinary commitment and dedication of its volunteers.

Partially transcribed by Sam Seiber

Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad Report

Bill Lock began the Friends report by introducing two individuals who have recently assumed key leadership roles within the organization.

Steve Jorgensen, from the Dallas area, was elected Chairman of the Friends Board in August. Steve has been an active Friends volunteer for nearly two decades and has been particularly involved in historically accurate lettering and restoration work on Railroad equipment. Bill noted Steve's longstanding commitment to preservation and his enthusiasm in taking on leadership of the Board.

Bill also introduced Henry Sandles, the new Executive Director of the Friends. Henry is a longtime Albuquerque resident, grew up in Roswell, and graduated from the University of New Mexico. He brings significant nonprofit experience, including extensive work with young people, as well as a strong interest in fundraising and organizational development. Bill reported that Henry has approached his new position with considerable enthusiasm and has already helped attract new members to the Friends.

Henry then addressed the Commission and provided Commissioners with written materials regarding Friends activities. He reported that he has been in the position for approximately 90 days. When he began, the Friends had approximately 1,605 members. Membership has since increased by approximately 55 members, to roughly 1,661, representing encouraging early growth. Henry also introduced the organization's new office managers and reported that the Friends have added a new IT specialist.

Henry expressed a strong desire to expand the partnership between the Friends and the Railroad. The Friends would like to participate in and help promote some of the special trains discussed earlier in the meeting. The Friends also promote the C&TSRR at the various train shows they attend and would like to become involved with the Santa trains.

A major priority for Henry is youth engagement. He spoke about his own interest in trains as a young person and his longstanding work with youth. One of his goals is to introduce a new generation to both the Friends and the Railroad and create opportunities for young people to become involved in historic preservation.

Henry has begun working with the Mayor and Town Council in Chama and plans to establish a similar relationship with the Mayor and community leadership in Antonito. In addition to attracting younger members, he wants the Friends to become more actively involved in the communities surrounding the Railroad.

Commissioner Bitten noted that he has been actively involved in youth engagement through the Railroad Passenger Car Alliance for more than a decade. He expressed enthusiasm about working with Henry in this area and continuing to strengthen the Commission's relationship with the Friends.

One Friends work session remains this season, Session G, which will include a landscaping project in Antonito. Other preservation and maintenance projects underway or planned include work on RPO 54 and Boxcar 3223 at the CRF in Antonito, repairs to MW02 to return it to operational condition, and organizational work on Friends property in Chama.

RPO 54 is scheduled to receive new side doors. In Colorado Springs, a new platform has been installed at the Friends work site, with preparations underway for a second platform.