



CENTRAL CORRIDOR EXTENSION PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY

Date/Time: December 16, 2009/5:00 p.m.

Location: EXDO Event Center, 1399 35th Street, Denver

Attendees:

Carla Madison	Mike Quigley	Randy McDonald
Alice Orth	Shyrel Smith Hosseini	A. E.
Kenny Shepard	Hugh Brown	Judy Schneider
Rhonda Bell	Steve Gordon	Julie Brown
Richard Mulhern	Cormack McCarthy	Diane
Clementina Carmona	Betty Wonder	Cecil Leija
Joe Unser	James Peck	John Hayden
Rich Maginn	Jon Willis	Dick Eckrich
Delores Eckrich	Dave Fischer	Jeff Barosik
Karla Molk	A.C. Kaygi	Patty Kaygi
Amy Harmon	Jeff Richmond	Keith Pryor
Rick Tremmel	James Duncan	Courtland Hyser
David Broglio	Bernadette Jendrusch	Gene Tassin
Troy Russ	Elia Fisher	Joel Noble
Judi Baird	Sam Ibarra	David Wagner
Steve Walsh	Patricia Bielman	Jim Heinbecher
Kimberly Hirst	Juana Gonzalez	Loralie Cole
Guadalupe Ehavarria		

The Regional Transportation District (RTD) Central Corridor Extension (CCE) project team conducted a public meeting on December 16, 2009 to present the findings of the Environmental Evaluation and to solicit comments. The meeting included an open house followed by a presentation and question and answer session.

I. PRESENTATION

1. What is the Central Corridor Extension (CCE)?

The Regional Transportation District (RTD) *FasTracks Plan* identified an extension of the existing Central Corridor from its current end of line at 30th/Downing to a connection with the planned East Corridor commuter rail service.

2. What is an Environmental Evaluation?

All FasTracks corridors require an evaluation of environmental impacts. Federally-funded projects are required to follow the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and locally-funded projects follow an Environmental Evaluation (EE) process. The CCE is expected to be locally-funded, and as a result, it is not subject to the requirements of the NEPA process.

However, the CCE EE will be prepared in accordance with the same RTD guidelines as used for NEPA corridors.

The EE process is similar to the NEPA process and includes:

- A report that identifies a Preferred Alternative
- A determination of environmental impacts and the associated avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures associated with the impacts
- Public involvement and agency coordination throughout the entire process

3. Alternative Screening Process

A four-level screening process was used to reduce the range of alternatives considered to the selection of the Preferred Alternative. Alternatives were evaluated with increasing levels of detailed analysis as the process advanced. The four-level screening process included:

Level One – Transit Alignments: This first level focused on potential alignments to extend the existing light rail transit. A qualitative approach was used to identify the alignments that were more effective at meeting the purpose and need and minimizing impacts.

Level Two – Transit Technologies: The second level was based upon feedback from the community that additional technologies should be evaluated. In response, the streetcar and bus alternatives were considered in addition to light rail.

Level Three – Comparative Screening: For the third screening level, alignments and technologies remaining after the first two screenings were compared and a quantitative (measure-based) analysis was used to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the alternatives.

Level Four – Alternative Refinement: The alternative that was recommended as a result of comparative screening was developed in more detail and further analyzed as part of the alternative refinement screening. This in-depth evaluation was used to determine modifications to the alternative to make it more responsive to the project purpose and need and/or to minimize impacts.

4. Preferred Alternative

The Central Corridor Extension Preferred Alternative includes in-traffic rail transit between the existing 30th/Downing station and the East Corridor station planned at 38th/Blake. Service would be provided by light rail vehicles that complete round trip service between the East Corridor 38th/Blake station and the downtown Denver light rail loop. The trains would operate in traffic on Downing Street and 36th Street (northbound light rail vehicle in the northbound travel lane and the southbound light rail vehicle in the southbound travel lane) between the 38th/Blake station and the existing light rail station at 30th/Downing, then along the existing light rail tracks on Welton Street and into the downtown loop along California and Stout streets. In addition to the stations at 30th/Downing and 38th/Blake, the Preferred Alternative has planned stops at 33rd/Downing and at 35th/Downing. All existing stops along Welton Street would also be used by the proposed light rail service.

The opening day operating plan for the Preferred Alternative would include four trains per hour (15-minute headway) in each direction between the 38th/Blake commuter rail station and the downtown Denver light rail loop.

5. Environmental Resource Evaluation and Impacts
Resources not affected

Due to the urban nature of the corridor, the location of the proposed alignment and stops, and the proposed transit technology, several environmental resources were not analyzed in detail either because they are not located in the project area or the project has no potential for impacting the resource.

Resources not located in the project area include: prime and unique farmlands; wild and scenic rivers; biological resources (including wildlife, vegetation, noxious weeds, and special status species); waters of the U.S. and wetlands; and geology and soils.

The following resources were not analyzed because the elements of the project would not result in the potential for any impact on a resource:

- Air Quality – similar to light rail service already in the area, no additional emissions.
- Floodplains and Drainage/Hydrology – built in existing street; therefore, no additional runoff.
- Water Quality – built in existing street; therefore, no additional water pollution.
- Parklands and Recreation Areas – no park or recreation resources are located within 300 feet.
- Archaeological and Paleontological Resources – not surveyed because the majority of the project area has been disturbed by development.

Resources present that don't require mitigation

The following resources were analyzed and impacts were identified which do not require mitigation.

Resource	Impact
Social and community facilities, land use, zoning, and economic development	Benefit from improved access to services/jobs Decreased congestion Potential for transit-oriented development consistent with local and regional plans 137 estimated new jobs directly related and 315 new jobs indirectly related to project construction and operation
Energy	Insignificant consumption estimated at 20.9m British thermal units (BTU) for construction, 8.7m BTU/day for operations.
Parking	Net loss of 25 spaces on Downing Street and 13 spaces on 36th Street; alternative parking options available on nearby side streets.
Historic and cultural resources	Transit addition introduces new visual element but doesn't negatively affect 41 historic properties.

Resources present that do require mitigation

The following resources were analyzed and impacts were identified as requiring mitigation.

Resource	Impact	Mitigation
Social impacts and community facilities	Temporary construction phase disruption – noise, dust, clearing/excavation, traffic detours	Construction mitigation and communication plan
Land acquisition	Temporary construction use	Temporary construction easements and coordination with property owner
Visual and aesthetic qualities	Minor impacts due to new overhead power poles, tracks, other light rail facilities, temporary disturbances during construction	Consider consolidation of street lights, traffic signals, overhead poles during final design; restore ground surfaces to original condition where feasible
Hazardous materials	Potential for encountering soils containing lead and arsenic during construction	Develop management plan prior to construction for remediation and disposal, if needed.
Utilities	Temporary construction impacts to water lines, sanitary/storm sewers, energy lines (electric, steam, gas), fiber optics and communications lines	Avoidance, protection, relocation, and restoration during and after construction.
Traffic/Transportation	Shared use lanes for vehicular and rail transit; conversion of Downing Street to 2-way; elimination of southbound left turn lanes at 36th and 37th avenues.	Provide southbound left turn at Lawrence Street Add traffic signals Add left turn lanes on Downing Street at California.

6. Next Steps

Once the comment period closes, the project team will respond to all comments in preparation for the final EE anticipated to be completed in January 2010. The final EE will be submitted to the RTD Board Directors for adoption in early 2010.

Once the document is adopted and funding is identified, contractor selection, final design, and construction can begin.

II. SUMMARY OF COMMENT SHEETS

The following section details the comments received from the comment sheets distributed at the meeting. These comments are recorded verbatim.

1. Please write your comments below:

- I was surprised to find that light rail will continue and not a new street car system – I think that finding a compromise and not needing to take the 45 properties originally expected is great. I guess time will tell on if the traffic flow won't become too crazy, but it seems like a thoughtful plan. I disagree with blocking left-hand turns from 35th onto southbound Downing. Can you wait and see if that really is difficult? I mean, it's only 2 light rail cars every 15 minutes. That leaves a lot of time with low/no traffic when people can make a left turn to southbound Downing.

- Can you move the stop at 35th and Downing to a business area because is going to cause noise in my property? Is there another option to mitigate noise? I have a concern with the trash that people will leave in front of my property where the stop will be.
- What will be the impact (negative) of this corridor in my neighborhood
- The middle turn lane going down Downing needs to be removed to allow for better sidewalks and the complete streets movement to be implemented. The street cars need to be in the center away from pedestrians and thought needs to be given to all modes, walking bikes and transit not just the car. Get rid of the turn lane – better street scape, bike lanes, and better pedestrian experience.
- I would like to see the tracks move toward the center of Downing allowing for a more comfortable pedestrian experience along the sidewalks. It seems the reason for pushing the tracks to the side is to allow left hand turns. This seems to be putting the car before the pedestrian experience. I'm sure one or two left hand turns might be needed but overall I'd like to see the tracks not running right along the pedestrian sidewalk.
- From a better point of view. I think light rail in Downtown and Downing St rail system it should be underground. This interfere with street traffic, people, street lights and weather. I understand that it cause a lot of money but in the future it would save save time delays traffic and frustration. All lightrail should definitely be underground. Denver's a city like cities along the east and west coast how theres is underground.
- How is Central Corridor going to impact my neighborhood 45th and Sherman.
- I think it's essential that the pedestrian bridge be moved to 36th to connect River North to Cole along 36th. 38th is a very bad street for pedestrians 36th is much better. In the future please consider converting Welton to a 2 way street with a double track down the center. Also consider linking this street car to proposed Colfax Street car along Downing or Park Avenue.
- Get rid of Park and Ride facilities along Welton and at 30th and Downing to turn them into TOD developments
- Thank you. Please start later. It is very difficult to get here in time for presentations

III. SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Following the presentation, the meeting was opened up for comments and questions. The following section provides a summary of the verbal comments and questions from meeting attendees.

1. When will service start?

Answer: We are still in the process of determining funding. We will be submitting updated cost information to the RTD Board for funding in January 2010. The Central Corridor Extension would be operational at the same time as the East Corridor (2016), provided funding is available.

2. What is the formula for lighting especially concerning where people get on and off the train?

Answer: We will use the standard roadway criteria for traffic lights and use the RTD standard lighting criteria for platforms.

3. Since the alignment will be in the streets, what is the start to finish time for clearing up a typical accident? What are the flow impacts?

Answer: The standard response time for any accident is expected for the Central Corridor. The in-traffic rail transit will operate like a bus; cars would be able to get around any accidents involving the train.

4. Will there still be bus running down Downing Street once the streetcar is implemented?

Answer: Yes, Route 7 and 38 would still run on Downing Street. There would be no significant changes to bus service with the implementation of the CCE. Standard service adjustments will be made as they are throughout the district.

5. I'm glad that someone else from Whittier was here tonight. The Whittier neighborhood was having a meeting tonight as well, so I think you should try to have a presentation at their next meeting for those that couldn't be here. As you look at the designs, can you make sure the aesthetics are given serious consideration? What can be done to minimize the visual impacts of the wires. Keep in mind that this is the model for other streetcars in the future.

6. This is a great program. It reminds me of the trolley in San Francisco. I'm concerned with taking away lanes, parking, and adding traffic. What about an underground system?

Answer: An underground system makes more sense for a bigger system. The Central Corridor Extension would not be a long enough line to warrant the expense of an underground system.

7. How can you justify the cost of replacing everything, considering all the money we just spent building it?

Answer: We will be using the existing infrastructure, so no existing rail or catenary system will have to be torn up and replaced.

8. Is this the place to bring up the 38th/Blake station? I was told the platform will be closer to 36th; can we move the platform as close to parking as possible?

Answer: Thank you. We will forward your comment to the East Corridor Project Team.

9. In Denver's 38th & Blake Station Area Plan, it is recommended to look at a stop at 36th which will have users walk between the two platforms to boost, what they hope will be, new development? I encourage you to work with CCD on that arrangement.

Answer: That concept from CCD's 38th and Blake Station Area Plan was evaluated and is included in Chapter 2 of the Draft EE. Having the platforms along 36th instead of Blake Street would force riders transferring between corridors to cross Blake Street which is not only inconvenient, but potentially a safety issue. The space between the East Corridor tracks and Blake Street would also be very narrow and would not have enough space for any transit oriented development between the platforms.

10. There will be a single car on the entire loop to downtown? One car at the same interval doesn't seem like it would be comfortable. Would it make sense to increase the frequency?

Answer: Correct, there would be a single car with 15-minute headways. The frequency is limited because of the single track section along Welton Street.

11. Could you elaborate on the funding and the prospects?

Answer: There is currently a funding gap. We are in the process of cost analyses that will present to the RTD Board in January. Because the Board may consider a tax increase, 2010 will be an important year. The Board will poll people about the tax increase and early next year, the goal is to make a decision about taking the tax increase to the ballots in November 2010.

12. If there is transit oriented development, it would seem there would need to be a method of expanding the system. What is the plan for expansion?

Answer: If there is an increase in capacity, the train size would likely be increased to a two-car train.

13. I am excited about the streetcar as the first of its kind in Denver. With this new pattern, we can rethink other places because we will have a successful streetcar coexisting in traffic on the Central Corridor.

14. Is there a way you could have a contest or something to name the streetcar to get people interested and involved with the project? It would be great for marketing. Also, has there been some sort of prospectus study on the benefits to the increase in traffic to businesses in the area?

Answer: Marketing and route identification is conducted as we get closer to implementation. A detailed study of increases in business based on pedestrian and train traffic is beyond the scope of this project. Studies have been completed on the effect that regional rapid transit routes and stations have on local economies but not typically at the scale of this project.

15. What is the flexibility of the vehicles themselves and how do they compare to the other vehicles?

Answer: The vehicles will be on fixed rail, but the acceleration characteristics will be very similar to cars.

16. Will trains stop at the existing and proposed traffic signals or will they get to go through them?

Answer: The trains will run with traffic and will stop at signals with traffic. There is one dedicated phase at one intersection for the trains to cross, but it will still be part of the traffic signal cycle.

17. How late will the service be?

Answer: The service will run from 4 a.m. to 2 a.m. similar to what is operating today.