

OPINION



THE SENTINEL SAYS:

Bill is thinly veiled swipe at slowing RTD progress

Keeping FasTracks on the fast track is a tough job not made any easier by hampering legislation like House Bill 1278.

The bill due for second reading this week has the laudable goal of limiting the use of eminent domain, but is too narrowly focused and limiting to work for the public good.

The title alone suggests the target of its real intent: "Concerning The Exercise Of The Power Of Eminent Domain By The Regional Transportation District."

It singles out RTD for special treatment, but is really aimed at hampering light-rail development in the west corridor to Lakewood.

A hint at the dark side of the bill is the support of the Independence Institute, which is no friend of public transportation. Having opposed the light rail from the start, they continue as a fountain of misinformation about the welcome usage and popular demand for more public transportation.

Similar obstructionism has blocked finishing the E-470 corridor for years.

Public hearings covered in last week's edition of *The Aurora Sentinel* make clear the intense interest citizens have in the improvement of existing RTD services. The demand for parking spaces alone may require creative contracting with private interests.

Aurora is not alone in wanting progress, but it is clear the faster development of the I-225 light-rail corridor occurs, the sooner all citizens can benefit from public transportation connections to the medical center or Colorado at Fitzsimons and ultimately DIA.

If any development supporting RTD facilities included private businesses and the use of eminent domain, it could be blocked by this bill.

While light rail gets much of the ink and attention it is important to remember that the majority of RTD's 315,000 weekday boardings occur on buses. This legislation could hamper something as mundane the private public partnerships providing bus benches.

The Aurora Chamber, certainly a staunch defender of private property rights, sees this bill for what it is — the attempt of a few west side property interests to block progress. At a legislative breakfast briefing last week the majority of Aurora's delegation, even those opposing eminent domain for other purposes like the "big slab" voiced their opposition.

Any legislation that delays the swiftest, and therefore less expensive, build-out of FasTracks is not in the public's interest.

HB 1278 should be amended to allow private public partnerships for the public good or defeated.



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