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## **CHAPTER 1.0: BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR ACTION**

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### **1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND**

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 requires that federal agencies prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for any major federal action that may have a significant impact on the environment. In August 2003 the Denver Regional Transportation District (RTD), in coordination with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), completed a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the West Corridor project. That FEIS discussed the potential environmental, social, and economic impacts associated with improvements to transportation in the West Corridor that extends west from RTD's existing Light Rail Transit (LRT) system in downtown Denver, through west Denver, Lakewood, Jefferson County, and Golden. Three alternatives were studied in detail during the NEPA process: the LRT project, the Enhanced Bus, and the No Action Alternatives. The FEIS identified the LRT project as the Preferred Alternative. In April 2004 FTA issued a Record of Decision (ROD) for the West Corridor Study; approval to enter final design was received in August 2005, allowing the LRT project to commence to final design in November 2005.

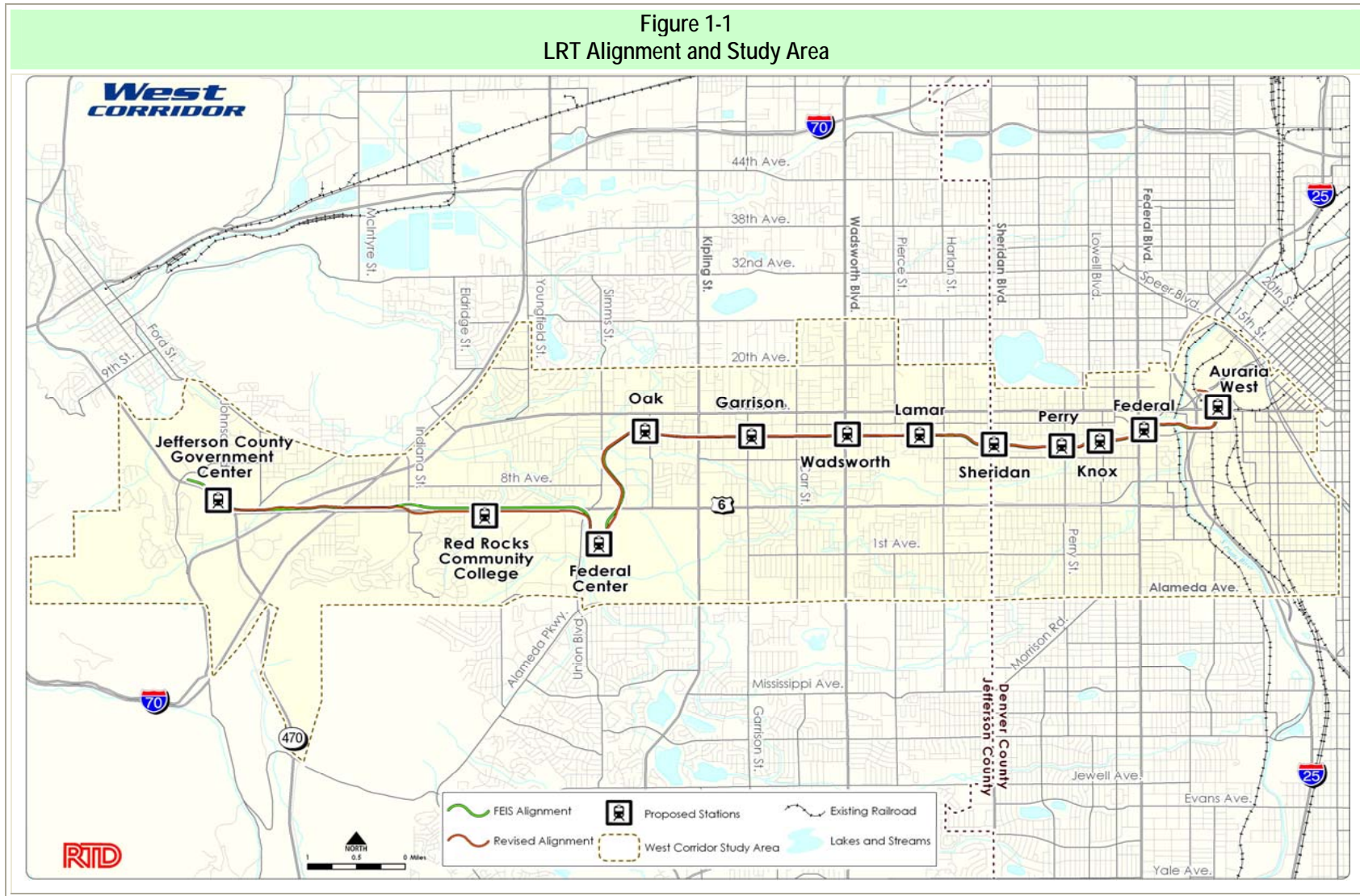
In November 2004 Denver area voters passed a referendum that incorporates this West Corridor project into the overall FasTracks program.

In conjunction with the design phase and in response to increasing costs for construction materials, the RTD project team conducted two value engineering (VE) exercises to identify measures to reduce costs. The VE processes resulted in several changes to the preliminary LRT design developed during the 2003 to 2004 NEPA process. Other changes occurred as a result of greater design and survey detail. These changes, discussed further in Section 2.4, include shifting the LRT alignment in certain locations, moving a station location, single-tracking the western portion of the LRT alignment, eliminating several pedestrian facilities, drainage improvements, and impact reduction measures. See Figure 1-1 for the LRT alignment and study area.

### **1.2 NEED FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (EA)**

The Council on Environmental Quality and FTA regulations require that a Supplemental EIS be prepared whenever changes to a proposed action, or new circumstances or information, may result in significant environmental impacts that were not evaluated in the FEIS. To determine if such changes are significant, the regulations require the development of appropriate environmental studies. For the West Corridor project, FTA and RTD have opted to prepare an EA to determine whether new impacts resulting from the design changes, and not studied in the FEIS, are significant and warrant preparation of a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.

Figure 1-1  
LRT Alignment and Study Area



This West Corridor Revised EA has been developed to include information in the August 28, 2007 EA plus information developed since that time including responses to comments received from the public and local and state agencies during the public review period which ended on October 4, 2007. Specific changes that have been made include:

- ▶ Revised information on existing and impacted wetlands based on recent work performed as part of the Section 404 permit application process.
- ▶ Updating text to include the agreement on *de minimis* impacts to parks.
- ▶ Updating text to include reference to the fully signed revised MOA for historic properties.
- ▶ Clarifications of text to include a possible new pedestrian crossing at Nelson and removal of a pedestrian crossing at Ammons Street.
- ▶ Clarifications of parking amounts planned at different stations during different timeframes.
- ▶ Updating the land use section to reference ongoing planning activities in the La Alma/Lincoln Park neighborhood.
- ▶ Adding text to describe possible indirect effects of noise walls.
- ▶ Providing updated text to identify possible residential relocations.
- ▶ Providing information about analysis of noise and vibration impacts at the 13th Avenue and Osage grade crossing.
- ▶ Providing clarification about cumulative impacts of the change in maintenance facility location.
- ▶ Providing information in the public involvement chapter and in the appendix about comments received and responses to those comments.
- ▶ Providing updated information about changes to street closures.

### **1.3 PURPOSE AND NEED**

The FEIS identified four primary project purposes and related needs for the West Corridor Project that have not changed:

- ▶ Offer Transportation Alternatives to Single-Occupancy Vehicle (SOV) Travel
- ▶ Increase Regional Connectivity and Transit Effectiveness
- ▶ Increase People-Carrying Capacity in the Corridor
- ▶ Support Local and Regional Planning Objectives

Current and projected travel patterns, levels of roadway congestion and growth in population and employment in the region and in the corridor continue to indicate a strong need for additional transportation capacity. A review of updated demographic and traffic forecasts indicates little change in these expected future conditions.

Since completion of the FEIS, continued support and need for the project is demonstrated by the following:

- ▶ The Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) included the West Corridor project in its 2030 Metro Vision Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). It is also included in the 2007-2012 Transportation Improvement Program as adopted in June 2006.
- ▶ The project was included in the FasTracks program which was approved by a public referendum in November 2004.
- ▶ The Denver Region is currently covered by an Early Action Compact for ozone by the Environmental Protection Agency, but increasing growth and higher summertime temperatures put the region at risk for being designated as non-attainment for ozone.
- ▶ FTA approved the project into final design in August 2005, and recommended the project for a Full Funding Grant Agreement to be included in the Fiscal Year 2007 and 2008 President's Budget.

### **1.3.1 Offer Transportation Alternatives to SOV Travel**

As traffic congestion increases, an improved transit system would offer corridor residents, workers, and commuters a reliable and efficient alternative to driving automobiles. This would be especially important for the low-income, elderly, and transit-dependent individuals and families along the corridor.

### **1.3.2 Increase Regional Connectivity and Transit Effectiveness**

RTD operates an extensive bus and light rail system to serve the region, providing access to jobs and economic opportunities. The improvements in the West Corridor would expand this service for current and prospective transit riders, both in the corridor and in the region as a whole.

### **1.3.3 Increase People-Carrying Capacity in the Corridor**

Regional travel demand in the West Denver area will increase and additional capacity will be needed to meet this demand, particularly during peak travel periods. East-west travel patterns include residents from the developing mountain communities and western suburbs traveling to the Denver central business district, Denver Technological Center, and other sub-regional areas. At the same time, Lakewood, Golden, and West Jefferson County continue to develop their economic base, with employment and economic opportunities attracting workers and shoppers from the Denver metropolitan area.

#### **1.3.4 Support Local and Regional Planning Objectives**

The West Corridor has been the subject of transportation improvement studies for more than 25 years. State and regional agencies such as the CDOT, RTD, DRCOG, and local planning and transportation agencies for Denver, Lakewood, Golden, and Jefferson County have stressed the need for additional transportation capacity throughout the corridor.

