

MEETING SUMMARY

I-70 East Preferred Alternative Collaborative Team (PACT) Swansea Recreation Center February 10, 2011

OBJECTIVES

- To review interests/suggestions and continue work on evaluation worksheets with regard to economic development interests.
- To review suggestion list – those added to the ‘will’ list, those on the ‘could’ list that would need more refinement following
- To understand the construction impacts of each alignment
- To understand the cost implications and funding strategies

MEETING OVERVIEW

- The PACT received a set of presentations on:
 - Economic impacts and potential for the two alternatives, and thereafter completed its evaluation of the alternatives.
 - Suggested improvements to the highway designs, those that will be included and those that could be included in the design once additional questions have been answered.
 - Costs of construction of the alternatives, including potential funding sources.
 - Construction process itself, including phasing, timing and impacts.
- The PACT shared their initial impressions of which alignment was showing more promise.

MEETING SUMMARY

I. Economic Presentations

Presentations for this and all previous meetings are posted at http://www.i-70east.com/meeting_minutes.html#pactmeetings

David Singer, *CDOT Region 6 Senior Environmental Project Manager* presented the project’s economic impact analysis of impacts to the local and regional economy, covering employment, tax base and public expenditures, property tax revenues, number of businesses impacted by the project or construction, jobs created during construction, relocation of businesses and other elements.

Brittany Morris, *Commerce City Economic Development Director* presented Commerce City’s economic development plan that focuses on business development, supporting existing businesses, infrastructure and workforce needs. The Current Alignment options do not affect Commerce City, while the re-alignment affects Commerce City in various ways:

- Impact on two-dozen businesses, including 7-8 major impacts, employing 2,824 people. The businesses are all types of commercial and service companies, including large freight companies.
- Potential to attract target industries, and allow highway improvements

Jeff Romine, *Business and Housing Services Director and Chief Economist for the City and County of Denver* spoke about the pending uncertainty about the location of I-70 causing a “chilling effect” in this area of Denver, and investors are waiting to see what the decision is before taking action. Denver is interested in improved business, reliable travel, and less congestion. The two alternatives will have different effects in the Denver areas that are affected. Expected impacts include 73 businesses employing

2,230 people, mostly in transportation and distribution. The city also seeks additional information for analysis.

Questions and Answers

- Q. Would CDOT have a public notification system in place during construction, notifying businesses and their customers when there is an access problem?
- A. (CDOT) Yes, CDOT is adopting various communications methods, including social media.
- Q. What information is Denver lacking?
- A. (Denver) Detailed information from the traffic analysis zone (TAZ) level, which would affect economics, build-no-build discussion, travel times.
- Q. The National Western Stock Show (NWSS) FasTracks stop planning is getting detailed; does economic analysis look at that development?
- A. (Denver) Not yet. That's part of detailed analysis that Denver would have to do. Now it's a static design for what the station could look like – an “ideal” version, that does not yet take economics into account. The Denver Office of Economic Development is working with RTD.
- Q. Business investments are made with a 5 to 25 years timeframe. If there is development, how long will this take?
- A. (Denver) We already have some active proposals, such as for affordable housing, for the corridor. The information for the broad level – helping us make a decision – is complete.
- Q. This looks like guesswork – you can only focus on the potential development after the decision is made?
- A. (Denver) You want to optimize something – jobs, neighborhood, those have different approaches, and different outcomes, and would be planned differently. The FasTracks station is specific, but you can't say what's going to happen on a parcel. The answers can be more specific once an alignment choice is made. Modeling at this stage is a gray area.
- C. (CDOT) The PACT is at the point of deciding the alignment at conceptual level. Denver's level is beyond that, I don't think the charge to this group is at that point.
- Q. Is the United Parcel Service area impacted?
- A. (Commerce City) They would need some modification to their site.
- Q. What is the effect of the I-270/Colorado Blvd./Vasquez rebuild? This has to be an additional cost. We can't live without fixing the Colorado Blvd/I-270 interchange. Is the environmental impact statement done? If realignment is chosen, this would have to be included.
- A. (CDOT) It could be included in the Final EIS, or it could be done separately. If the scope of the EIS expands significantly, you have to evaluate it and write a supplemental EIS. We could do it in a separate document outside the EIS process. It may not need an EIS, since it's a new interchange in the existing right-of-way. We do commit that it is part of the big plan. There is a need for improvements in the area, independent of the I-70 East Project.

II. Evaluation of Alternatives – Economic Development

The PACT conducted the fourth of four sessions to evaluate the two alternatives, relative to how well each satisfies the PACT members' underlying interests regardless which alternative is chosen. An evaluation matrix was developed using the PACT's interests developed in the first two meetings. The interests were grouped into Neighborhood Quality, Transportation, Environmental, and Economic Development. The process was designed to start discussions about preferences and does not constitute the selection of an alternative.

Three breakout groups were asked to rank the elements of both alternatives, using a three-tiered bubble, according to how well the alternative satisfies the group's stated interests:

- Performs WELL compared with other alignment to address interests - ●

- Performs FAIR compared with other alignment to address interests- ◐
- Performs POOR compared with other alignment to address interests - ◑

Large Group Report-out and Debrief

The PACT was instructed to evaluate the alternatives for their economic development impact and potential, using the same method that had been used in the three previous meetings covering Neighborhood Quality, Transportation and Environment.

Comments on alternatives are labeled with a (+) to identify reasons why the alternative performs better than the other alternative, and by a (-) to identify reasons why the alternative performs less well than the other alternative.

Economic Development				
	Current Alignment		Re-Alignment	
	N	S	W	E
A	◐+		◐	
B	◑		◑	
C	◑+		◑-	
Evaluation Notes	(+) Fewer opportunities, but works better with the TOD (+) More diverse development (south) by taking out the big boxes, and opens a little room to the north (+) Future of NWSS is better known – allows NWSS to develop property (+) Timing for FasTracks is known (+) Purina plant would be gone (south) opening opportunity \		(+) Commerce City would have another interstate access point (+) 46 th Ave. would still be close to the FasTracks station (--) Current Denver planning doesn't allow for realignment (--) Loss or severe limiting of NWSS (+) NWSS departure would open large bloc of developable land (+) 46 th Avenue would be developable (+) Would open land north of Swansea for cleaner commercial development	

III. Suggestion List – Status of suggestions

Carrie Wallis, *PBSJ*, presented the list of improvements for both alignments suggested by the PACT members. Suggestions were evaluated and segregated into suggestions that “will” be included once an alignment is chosen; those that “could” be implemented once an alignment is recommended and further details are worked out, and those that are not possible. The topics include walkability, aesthetics, environmental issues, connectivity, traffic flow and nearby streets, buffers between the highway and nearby homes and businesses, and overall traffic flow north to south, and east to west.

Questions and Answers

- Q. How far away would the Swansea Elementary School be to the new viaduct with the Current South alignment?
- A. The middle point of the current viaduct will be the north edge of the new structure in a current south alignment scenario (the south edge in the current north alignment).
- Q. What kind of structures or activities would be possible beneath the new viaduct?
- A. FHWA would need to review any proposed buildings and assess them for risk management issues. We must preserve the integrity of the structure and all of its uses. We’ll need to be able to inspect it at any time and can’t allow anything flammable. It’s not a hard set of criteria; it’s evaluated case-by-case. An interstate lease agreement would be needed for any under-viaduct use, and CDOT would have to certify that it’s a CDOT use.
- Q. How far west from Colorado Blvd. could I-270 be improved?
- A. We would improve it as far west as possible.

IV. Cost and Funding

Pam Hutton, *Chief Highway Engineer*, and Mike Cheroutas *High Performance Transportation Enterprise*, presented the costs of building the new I-70 that range from \$1.5 billion to \$2.2 billion, depending on right of way, elevated portions and available right of way. CDOT has a number of funding programs available, each of which would be able to provide some portion of the funding for the I-70 construction. The options include funds from the traditional long range plan, Colorado Bridge Enterprise, Road Safety Surcharge Fee, bonding, federal funds, and contracting incentives. Community support usually leads to higher priority for funding.

The HPTE has been able to fund new construction (U.S. 36) through financing plans that include private investment that is repaid over time, and those options would be available for this project as well.

Questions and Answers

- Q. Can you consider fuel tax increase for this? On a per-mile basis, it’s cheaper than tolling. You could pay up to \$5 per gallon if you paid equivalent in tolls.
- A. CDOT doesn’t have the authority to raise gas taxes, but it is possible.
- Q. Do tolls help fundability?
- A. Yes, it helps the overall package to raise money through tolls.
- Q. How good is CDOT at estimating costs?
- A. FHWA’s process for estimating is pretty good. There are many factors for whether the estimate is accurate in the end. It depends on how quickly you can get financing, how the economy is working, prices for steel, gas, whether phasing is involved, and design-build incentives.
- Q. Would it be built with U.S. money or foreign money?
- A. It can be either. It’s good investment for U.S. pension funds that need to invest lots of money for long period of time. You can structure it any way you want, as a policy matter.

V. Construction – Impacts and Timeframes

Jim Bemelen, *Program Engineer-Region 6 CDOT*, presented construction time-frames, constructability and construction impacts. After the formal FEIS process, which could take up to two years, right-of-way

acquisition and design could take two to three years, and the construction could be completed in four to six years if the funding were in place. The Current Alignment would have to be built in stages, in order to maintain traffic on I-70, whereas much of the Re-Alignment could be built without disrupting traffic.

Questions and Answers

Q. How long will the current viaduct last?

A. There will be signs of fatigue before it would fall. Before that, the weakened structure would require a reduced number of lanes and load restrictions. The useful life will be about 15 years, when we have to be ready to act.

Q. What will it cost in 15 years?

A. It would be much more expensive based on inflation and possibly increase in materials costs.

VI. Check-in on inclination/Leaning

NOTE: Some members left before this point in the agenda.

The PACT members were requested to talk about where they are in terms of favoring one of the alignments and the reasons for it. The session was intended to discern whether the PACT overall is inclined toward either alignment or option that would become the focus of the decision-making process. Members were instructed that this initial orientation would not be binding.

Overall, the PACT appears to be leaning toward the current alignment. However, a number of caveats, conditions and uncertainties were expressed during the round-robin, and several members either declined to state their inclinations or were divided on their orientation, or felt that one alternative did not affect them sufficiently to be supportive or concerned. PACT members made the following observations:

Neighborhood Quality

The Re-alignment would save a large number of homes in South or North Swansea, and Elyria, but would take many homes in another old neighborhood in Elyria, which could be devastating for the overall community. Many families would be affected. Concerns were expressed about shifting an environmental justice problem from one location to another.

Development Potential

The Current Alignment would preserve most of the potential for planning a larger area for transit-oriented development (TOD). The Current Alignment (shifted south) would involve the acquisition of the Nestle-Purina plant, taking out the “big boxes” and opening room to the north.. Much of the development potential might be realized through the TOD that is expected around the NWSS FasTracks Station. The Current Alignment preserves the potential development that the TOD could produce and could be the engine of growth in the future for the Elyria/Swansea area and north Denver.

National Western Stock Show

The Current Alignment would give the National Western Stock Show a better chance to survive and possibly redevelop in its current location. The Current Alignment would not compromise the FasTracks station that is to be built at NWSS. And the Re-alignment could result in multiple, hard-to-manage parcels where it would be difficult, if not impossible, to mitigate the impact.

Highway Alignments / Mobility

The Current Alignment preserves the relatively straight design of I-70, which is statistically safer. Upgrading I-70 along the Current Alignment would leave the area with two major highways in the area, which would offer better emergency routing and multiple choices for mobility.

Conversely, the Re-alignment would lead to improvements on I-270, which are needed, and accelerate the reconstruction of the I-270/Colorado Blvd./ Vasquez Blvd. interchange.

Swansea Elementary School

The Current Alignment offers the opportunity to protect Swansea Elementary by moving the road farther south or replace the school if the highway were shifted to the north. The move of the school could be a catalyst for a community school environment that has proven successful in other places.

Conversely, the Re-Alignment also would protect the school, particularly in light of the difficulty and cost of attempting to build a new school in another location.

Future 46th Avenue / Mobility

The Current Alignment allows neighborhood-level connectivity under the new viaduct, and would retain I-70 as the main east-west thoroughfare, rather than using 46th Avenue. With the Re-alignment, 46th Avenue would change from a low-volume street to a four-lane heavy service road that might impede mobility throughout the Swansea/Elyria area and create additional emissions.

Conversely, the Re-alignment provides potential for new development along 46th Avenue.

Environment

The Current Alignment has only one crossing, expansion of the existing crossing of the Sand Creek Greenway. Sand Creek Greenway is an important resource; it's the only riparian habitat in that area and it's important to try to preserve that.

Unaligned

A bloc of PACT members indicated that they could support both, or that they were not concerned with one or another alignment. Some indicated that their support for one alignment or the other would depend on what other features are yet to be developed or invented by the PACT.

VII. Public Comment Session

Members of the public wishing to speak must sign in. Speakers have up to 2 minutes, depending on the number of speakers. If there is not enough time for everyone, the facilitators will select speakers representing a range of topics.

Betty Cram, Elyria resident

Positive

1. We want the Current Alignment, we're proud of it, with a higher buffer there will be more room underneath to go under it and less pollution.
2. Current Alignment allows people to have their homes, doesn't disturb the wildlife refuge and not destroy businesses.
3. RTD is coming, we're excited about that.
4. Current Alignment will help us rebuild Elyria with new businesses, encourage building new homes, and build a river walk on the Platte. We need grocery stores, laundromats, commuter bus to Grow Haus, artisans.
5. Widening I-70 where it is will be cost effective.

Negative

1. Re-Alignment will bring more pollution into our neighborhood.
2. Re-Alignment will take Williams Street, Post Office, wildlife refuge.
3. Re-Alignment will discourage new businesses and encourage weeds and litter.

4. Re-Alignment will discourage new home and business growth and blight the neighborhood.
5. Re-Alignment will be six miles of ten-land highway costing the taxpayers billions of dollars.

Leo Branstetter – Elyria business owner – The North Metro FasTracks station is the salvation of Swansea, Elyria and Globeville. The highway Re-Alignment would take away all the investment that we've put into this neighborhood. Stick to your guns and your conscience, and leave it where it is.

VIII. Next Steps

- Next Meeting: March 10, 2011; 8:30a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Swansea Recreation Center (details coming later)
- CDOT/PBSJ will conduct technical meetings with Commerce City and Denver
- The Denver representatives and the Commerce City representatives will meet in separate caucuses
- The summary for the I-70-East Corridor Work Group will be finalized and distributed
- A Swansea Elementary School work group will be empanelled to discuss options for relocation of the school within the neighborhood.
- Future PACT meetings will be conducted to address concerns about the Current Alignment, and identify areas of potential consensus.

APPENDIX A

Attendance

Anthony Thomas, Denver resident
Art Ballah, Colorado Motor Carriers Association
Bill Van Meter, Regional Transportation District FasTracks
Brian McBroom, City of Commerce City
Doug Bennett, Federal Highway Administration
Drew Dutcher, Denver / Elyria resident
Guillermo Serna, Commerce City resident
Jeanne Shreve, Adams County
Jim Dileo, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
Jimmy Burds, Commerce City Business and Professional Association
John Lucero, Denver Office of Economic Development (replacing Jess Ortiz)*
Kate Kramer, Sand Creek Regional Greenway Partnership
Larry Burgess, Denver - Elyria/Swansea/Globeville Business Association*
Lesley Thomas, City of Denver*
Pat Grant, National Western Stock Show
Paul Garcia, Denver / Swansea resident
Reza Akhavan, Colorado Department of Transportation
Scott Jaquith, Commerce City resident
Shaun Cutting, Federal Highway Administration - Program Delivery Manager
Tom Acre, City of Commerce City
Tricia Allen, Adams County Economic Development

Members not attending

Amy Pallante, Colorado State Historic Preservation Office
Mac Callison, City of Aurora
Norma Frank, Adams County resident
Tony Brake, Aurora resident

* In addition to member not attending, these members were not present during the check-in on the leaning discussion; Roger Mutz spoke for Denver during this discussion.