

## MEETING SUMMARY

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

#### **Objectives:**

- To review the summary of the pro/cons from the evaluation meetings
- To begin to address concerns on the perceived leaning toward an alignment
- To decide an alignment (a leaning) to focus on at the April and May meetings

#### **Meeting Overview**

The PACT agreed to work on the Current Alignment alternatives in April and May before making a final decision in June or July. The next meeting will focus on a leaning for the Current Alignment, North or South Shift, to identify the positive and negative elements of each.

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#### **I. Welcome, Introductions**

Don Hunt, newly appointed Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Transportation, attended the PACT meeting. He thanked the PACT members for their efforts. He committed to participate in the collaborative process that is under way, and to work on seeking funding to implement the reconstruction of I-70.

#### **II. Reports and Documents**

- Summation of Evaluations – the PACT was given a summary document of the pros/cons from their evaluation of alternatives meeting summaries in the areas of Neighborhood Quality, Transportation, Environment and Economic Development.
- PACT Working Group, Swansea Elementary School Relocation Options if Current Alignment North were Chosen – a team of PACT members met with representatives of Denver Public Schools and Swansea Elementary School to discuss potential relocation options for Swansea Elementary School in the event that the PACT selects the northern shift of the Current Alignment. Participants who attended the meeting and other PACT members offered their observations:
  - The DPS/CDOT/PACT group looked at about a dozen sites, and focused on two potential areas in particular: The site now occupied by the Swansea Recreation Center, Lady of Grace Catholic Church, and the Cross Community Coalition Building; and a current industrial site west of the Union Pacific Railroad tracks, around 48th Avenue. Both options had significant challenges. A grade separated crossing of the Union Pacific (48<sup>th</sup> was suggested) would be required for the option to the west and it may open up other opportunities.
  - DPS and School's desire is to move the school farther away from the highway.
  - A new school could be built under a "functional replacement" method that rebuilds the school following higher building standards.

### **III. Leaning Going into April and May**

The PACT members agreed to focus on the Current Alignment in April and May. The leaning does not indicate a final decision, rather that most of the PACT members believe that the Current Alignment options hold more promise to address the most interests of the members.

The focus on the Current Alignment also includes the understanding of the trade-offs that are presented by the North Shift and the South Shift.

The PACT will focus on the North Shift versus the South Shift at its April meeting. The two shifts have different effects and will be central to the PACT's recommendations.

#### **A. Key elements for leaning toward the Current Alignment include:**

##### **▪ Transportation**

- The Current Alignment maintains two highways in the area (I-70 and I-270), which would minimize backups on both and provide redundant emergency access.

##### **▪ Neighborhood Quality / Environment / School**

- The Current Alignment contributes less air pollution from the viaduct than the realignment would with the at-grade widened 46<sup>th</sup> avenue with increased traffic. Although there are other contributing factors to air pollution in the neighborhood; nearby factories and plants contribute more air pollution in Swansea and Elyria than cars and trucks.
- The Current Alignment (north shift) provides greater potential for rebuilding or building a new Swansea Elementary School. Denver Public Schools is committed to keeping a school in the neighborhood, possibly in conjunction within a campus with a library, community center, and other amenities.
- The Current Alignment allows for more unrestricted (visually or physically) development around the National Western FasTracks station on the North Metro line which the community feels will potentially enhance the neighborhood.

##### **▪ Economic Development**

- The Current Alignment preserves the maximum potential for transit-oriented development (TOD) around the NWSS FasTracks station, to anchor overall development in the area. The Pecos Street FasTracks station is a model for a successful TOD in a transitional/low-income community, which also includes substantial local government infrastructure investment, that could be applied at NWSS/Elyria.
- The Current Alignment is less of a visual barrier than Realignment to the South Platte River, which is a known asset and a strong driver of development.
- The Current Alignment leaves intact the entire National Western Stock Show property, which would allow improvement and operability of the facility, or in the event that NWSS is relocated voluntarily, would add a 90-acre block of developable land. The Realignment alternatives would effectively render NWSS unable to operate (west shift), or severely limit operations (east shift).

- The Current Alignment retains the Brighton Blvd. alignment; this and the proximity of downtown Denver makes development more likely in the area.

**B. Questions and areas of concern with the Current Alignment to be addressed and improved include:**

- **Transportation**

- Consideration of a mix of North and South shifts to the Current Alignment east of Colorado Blvd. in order to minimize impact in some areas
- Effects of the Current Alignment on the Colorado FasTracks station and related transit-oriented development

- **Neighborhood Quality / Environment / School**

- There is no guarantee that Denver Public Schools will make a particular decision on relocating / rebuilding Swansea Elementary School, based on the PACT's recommendation
- A major contributor of noise, emissions and odors in the neighborhood - The Current Alignment North Shift preserves the Nestle-Purina factory
- Long-term health and safety problems attributed to the highway and industry, railroad, refinery, falling objects from the roadway, would not be completely eliminated.
- State and local agencies have a poor record of maintaining the existing highway area for trash, weeds and debris.
- TOD's typically result in higher real-estate prices, which can make properties unaffordable for some.

- **Economic Development**

- The Current Alignment South Shift results in the loss of Nestle-Purina, which employs many people at its plant.
- Businesses and jobs that are lost to the I-70 reconstruction may not be replaced in the area. It is not known how many people who live in the area also work in the area.
- The Current Alignment North Shift would preserve Nestle-Purina, which is considered a detriment to optimum development in the area.
- The Current Alignment North Shift would result in the loss of the Pilot Travel Center, reducing the number of truck-serving businesses in the Denver area, which are already deemed insufficient.
- There are doubts that that any significant investment in the area would occur, given the long-term contamination in the area.

**C. Key Trade-Off Considerations to be Reconciled**

The Current Alignment poses challenges for the PACT to determine whether the North Shift or the South Shift best supports the PACT members' interests, as initially developed at the start of this collaborative process. Among the trade-offs that are presented are:

- Neighborhood Quality / Environment / Economic Development

- South Shift: A critical tradeoff involves economic interests and neighborhood interests represented by the Nestle-Purina factory, and the Swansea Elementary School.
  - Upside: The elimination of the persistent odors, noise and traffic from Nestle-Purina and the Swansea Elementary School remain in its current location and would be farther away from the highway. Fewer homes would be taken in the South Shift.
  - Downside: The acquisition of Nestle-Purina and Manna Pro, among others, and the loss of those businesses' significant jobs; and these may not be able to relocate in the area. It is not known at this time how many of the plant's employees live in the Swansea/Elyria area.
- North Shift:
  - Upside: The Nestle-Purina plant jobs as well as other businesses along the south side would remain in the neighborhood. The school would be acquired and a new updated school facility would be built further from the highway structure and somewhere in the area. An informal review of potential locations identified locations that could be considered for the relocation, but all of the options had significant limitations.
  - Downside: The Pilot Travel Center would be acquired; it is a significant, but constrained trucking industry facility at Steele Street, the only such facility in the area. Also the Colonial Manor Motel and some small businesses along 46th Avenue and Steavenson Place would be acquired and may/may not be able to relocate in the area. There would be less opportunity to replace industrial development with non-industrial development.

#### **IV. Public Comment**

##### Betty Cram, Elyria resident

- We are concerned for children at the school because of the pollution.
- Commerce City would like to have the highway to go by Dick's Sporting Goods and would build up our local businesses.
- People want to destroy Elyria. It's historic, since 1889, historic churches are still in use. The realignment would destroy our city. We have adequate roads from, Washington to Colorado.
- We want a nice highway, grassy landscaping, a neighborhood with shops and stores, where we can ride bikes, cruise to the South Platte River and Heron Park. This is our dream for the future.

##### Tom Anthony, Elyria Resident

- We support Betty. We have not participated in this process because our option, a tunnel, was not considered.
- Commerce City has figured out how to get people to the Wal-Mart in Commerce City. All of the traffic going up to Commerce City is going to cut services in Denver.
- There is conflict between the realignment and the RTD stop at Brighton and 48th.

##### Fred McPeck, Elyria property owner

- What about the money to build the highway? We were told, don't worry about the money. Russ George said, "You show me a plan I'll show you the money." Is the money available? There is a bill with billions of dollars for transportation.
- The debt reduction commission has met, and money will not be available.

- Senator Udall has a bill that would allocate billions for transportation. Gov. Hickenlooper said Washington is the place to get things done, and it looks like there will be available.
- Gas prices are rising, and that extra distance for commuting (realignment) and any benefit is going to be usurped by the additional cost.

Leo Branstetter, Elyria property owner

- CDOT is spending money to improve I-70 West to benefit skiers by taking out curves. Here we don't need any more curves on the interstate (realignment).
- This is highway project, not a school project. Why didn't they do something about the school in the previous 50 years.

**V. Next Steps**

- Next Meeting: April 14; Noon – 6:30 p.m. Swansea Recreation Center
- Working Group for Public Meeting Messaging (all their work will be reviewed by the whole PACT). Members: Anthony Thomas, Tom Acre, Guillermo Serena, Pat Grant, Roger Mutz/Kristin Fritz
- Don Hunt indicated a desire to walk along the viaduct corridor with some business and community representatives to understand the area better
- Next Meeting: May 12, 2011; Noon – 6:30 p.m. *(Since revised to 3:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.)*
- Public Outreach Effort: May/June 2011 – PACT community workshop, PACT business workshop, PACT public meeting and elected officials briefing

## **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  
Don Hunt, Executive Director, Colorado Department of Transportation.  
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  
Kate Kramer, Sand Creek Regional Greenway Partnership  
Larry Burgess, Denver - Elyria/Swansea/Globeville Business Association  
Lesley Thomas, City of Denver  
Norma Frank, Adams County resident  
Pat Grant, National Western Stock Show  
Paul Garcia, Denver / Swansea resident  
Reza Akhavan, Colorado Department of Transportation  
Shaun Cutting, Federal Highway Administration - Program Delivery Manager  
Tom Acre, City of Commerce City  
Tony Brake, Aurora resident  
Tricia Allen, Adams County Economic Development

### **Members not attending**

Amy Pallante, Colorado State Historic Preservation Office  
Mac Callison, City of Aurora  
Scott Jaquith, Commerce City resident