

## MEETING SUMMARY

### **I-70 East Preferred Alternative Collaborative Team (PACT) Swansea Recreation Center, Denver November 11, 2010**

#### **OBJECTIVES**

- To receive input from public school districts in the corridor
- To present visualization tools and engineering review on alternative improvement suggestions.
- To evaluate the performance of components of the current and re-alignments relative to the PACT members' interest lists

#### **MEETING OVERVIEW**

- The PACT members heard from representatives of the Denver Public Schools, Adams County School District 14 and the Aurora Public Schools about potential impacts to schools in the corridor.
- The PACT members reviewed visual representations of the alternatives, reviewed their lists of suggested improvements that had been analyzed by the engineering team for viability.
- The PACT members began a comprehensive evaluation of the alternatives relative to how well they satisfied the PACT's collective interests.

#### **ACTION ITEMS**

- Load the "visualization" PowerPoint slides on the I-70East website for PACT members' access and presentation to constituencies.
  - Identify the "will include" suggestions by date so that the PACT can have a running tally of suggestions that are adopted.
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## **MEETING SUMMARY**

### **I. Discussion of Impacts on Public School Districts in the Corridor**

#### ***Denver Public Schools - Allegra "Happy" Haynes, Chief Community Engagement Officer***

Swansea Elementary School will be heavily impacted by all current alignment alternatives. Swansea is a large school for Denver with almost 600 students (624 is capacity), and 80 percent of the school-age children in the school's zone attend the school – the highest rate in Denver for students attending the school in their area. Additional points:

- DPS needs an elementary school in the area north of highway and only if there were a 30 percent drop in populations would DPS consider not having an elementary school;
- Access is a major factor – Swansea is an isolated area;
- If the school had to be acquired as part of the I-70 project, it would be necessary to replace it north of I-70; relocating to the south would be very challenging.
- Enrollment is expected to remain stable, but any community developments that add students may lead to the need to expand Swansea school or add a second school.
- Safety concerns could lead to more transportation of students rather than walking.

#### ***Q&A***

Q. Would DPS consider relocation of Swansea Elementary in any alternative?

A. DPS would not relocate the school due to highway construction. The school is well situated in serving proximate students – a well-established neighborhood and finding an available site would be a challenge. Swansea has the highest capture rates of students in the district, which means that families want their kids attending school close to their homes.

- Q. What is the capacity of Swansea to accommodate more students?
- A. If development brought more children to neighborhood, DPS would look for additional capacity or another school. Swansea serves a large and constrained area. It might be cheaper to build a second school to keep student body at a manageable number.
- Q. What is done about walking through hazards – have seen children crawling underneath trains stopped on the tracks?
- A. DPS has guidelines and criteria for identifying hazards; the response would be to transport the children.
- Q. Of those who choose to go to attend schools other than their appointed school, how much of those decisions were based on the location of the highway?
- A. There is no data on that specifically. Most of the data say choices are about academic opportunity, not physical factors. If a family was uncomfortable with the proximity to the highway, they would move out of the neighborhood for the same reason – like health impacts. DPS has schools near high-traffic-volume streets. DPS would expect CDPHE to analyze the health aspects and determine the risks.
- Q. If I-70 were removed, there would be increased traffic on 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Would that make a difference?
- A. DPS would look at health analyses, probably not traffic. We have schools along high-volume roadways – crossing guards lead children across Colorado Blvd – it’s not necessarily a reason to relocate a school.
- Q. What about increased traffic on 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue where there are schools (Bruce Randolph School)?
- A. Any changes would change transportation patterns. CDOT estimates an increase in traffic on 40<sup>th</sup> with the re-alignment alternative.
- Q. What would your school district need to know to help plan better into the future?
- A. We want to know the criteria for mitigation and want to be part of that conversation to ensure things are made better. Want to understand and have input on walkability issues. DPS facilities people will stay in contact.

***Adams County School District 14 – Sandy Mutchler, Chief Operations Manager***

Impacts to Rose Hill Elementary School, about one-half-mile away, would not be direct, but there could be significant indirect impacts. There are 132 students in the radius of alignment. The district will study the realignment plans and will provide further information in the near future. The district is interested and concerned about:

- The increase in noise, and whether there would be a noise barrier;
- What the increased pollution would be from the re-aligned highway
- Any expected increase in traffic on 56<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Quebec.

***Q&A***

- Q. How would students cross the re-alignment?
- A. There doesn’t appear to be any children that would cross from the I-270/I-70 re-alignment to the Rose Hill school area. The key is students living south of 56<sup>th</sup> Avenue to Rose Hill.
- C. There appear to be no houses south of I-270 from which students would cross to go to school. South of 56<sup>th</sup> Avenue may transition into more industrial. Traffic counts drop at I-270 and Dahlia.
- Q. What is the distance from I-270 to Rose Hill and what are the relative impacts?
- A. The school is approximately one-half mile from the realignment. The impact would have to be defined in order to address/improve it.
- Q. What would your school district need to know to help plan better into the future?
- A. Want to know about impacts from pollution and noise.

***Aurora Public Schools –Jaclyn Gorman, Assistant Planner***

In the mile buffer around the I-70 current alignment, there are two schools - Park Lane Elementary, 425 students, and Sable Elementary, 450 students. Other schools nearby mostly transport students by bus. Among considerations, are:

- The active development for Aurora is east of Airport Road Elementary, from whence students are transported along Colfax Avenue and Tower Road and would probably not be impacted by I-70 project;

- Most of the areas around there are industrial so most students are already transported unless they are close enough to walk.

### **Q&A**

Q. What would your school district need to know to help plan better into the future?

A. We're least impacted, would like to know the construction timeline, road and lane closures, impacts to moving around the area.

## **II. Visualization of Elements**

PBSJ presented a series of visual representations of the current alignment and re-alignment that had been requested by the PACT members, in order to aid the PACT in orienting themselves and comprehending how the alignments would look in the Elyria/Swansea area. The visualizations were aimed to stimulate discussion about:

- Walkability – walking and bicycle amenities
- Connectivity in the neighborhood
- Visualization of under-viaduct features and amenities

### **Discussion based on Visualizations**

*Cross-Section Depictions (see presentation posted under Meeting Minutes on [www.i-70east.com](http://www.i-70east.com))*

- Current alignment has six lanes, re-alignment has five lanes – the difference is that with the re-alignment vehicles will use 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue and not continue on the re-alignment.
- Widening 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue – should not result in a wider footprint, unless the plan calls for more features for walking, biking, sidewalks, which could add some area.
- The rebuilt 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue will be slightly wider than the current highway footprint.
- 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue will be designed to accommodate extra traffic (materials provided in second meeting.)
- 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue will become a Denver city street. Responsibility for amenities under the viaduct is to be determined, depending on whether it is highway mitigation (CDOT) or neighborhood improvements.
- Race Street underpass at the railroad will be rebuilt with the re-alignment, not with the current alignment.
- Clayton, in current alignment/current design, would be on fill, but it's possible to extend the viaduct eastward another block in order to allow crossing at Clayton.

### *Photo Illustrations*

- Showing noise walls – usually intended for residential areas, but might be allowed for bike lanes as part of a parkway system. It could be studied.
- Question about the number of houses impacted on 52<sup>nd</sup> Avenue in realignment, where there are 4 or 5 houses on a short block.

### *Connectivity*

- Four streets currently have direct north/south access through Elyria and Swansea neighborhoods – York, Josephine, Columbine and Clayton (Thompson dead ends on the north side at the Colonial Manor)
- Two streets have direct access in the design for current alignment (not Columbine nor Clayton), but it is possible to add those connection by putting the via duct on structure and not fill
- It was noted that Columbine will be dead-ended south of the railroad tracks north of 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

### *Walkability – showed Denver's existing bike/pedestrian routes)*

- Importance of trails, Sand Creek Greenway, S. Platte Greenway
- Bike lanes would be shared lanes if there is no alternative bike route, depending on the width of the street (based on generic Denver planning documents)
- Preference in new construction is separated bike routes.
- If Clayton goes through, bikes could share the facility
- Members expressed appreciation for the visualizations that were produced, and showed how Elyria/Swansea can be connected with other neighborhoods.

### *General Comments*

- Like seeing the potential openness underneath the viaduct in the photos
- Having the highway in Swansea (current alignment) is not great, but seeing it could be better, makes the choices a bit easier
- Keep improvements in mind; we want either option to be better than what we have now
- How much of the improvements will be responsibility of CDOT and how much is left to municipality – need to have some conversation about this and will effect decisions about realignment
- How has CDOT been perceived in other projects with regards to improvements?
  - CDOT did a good job on TREX – on budget on time, satisfied majority of business folks, looks good
  - CDPHE was very happy with CDOT on T-REX; they did what they said they would do.
  - Denver and CDOT have started talking in technical meetings – for I-70; there will be limits on the funding that is made available. There are additional challenges for this part of town that are not part of the project (e.g. Quebec)
  - Finding large financing is hardest that it has ever been, need to do it together

### **III. Initial Response to Suggestions Lists**

The PACT was presented a listing of suggestions that the PACT members have made during the course of their work. The suggestions were categorized by the PBSJ/CDOT staff as items that “will” be incorporated in the design revisions, those that “could” be included if there is more information or new factors taken into account; and those that “won’t” be included because of various reasons. Those suggestions on the “could” list are being discussed in technical meetings Commerce City/CDOT and Denver/CDOT.

Suggestions may be added through the discussions so that “coulds” may become “wills,” and that there might be new “wills” that are identified. No additional suggestions were made by the PACT during this time, nor were there additional suggestions made during the evaluation of alternatives section of the meeting.

### **IV. Evaluation of Alternatives: Evaluation Matrix**

An evaluation matrix was developed using the PACT’s interests, from their interest list developed in the first two meetings. The interests were grouped into Neighborhood Quality, Transportation, Economic Development and Environmental – listed separately under the appropriate category. This table would be used to judge how well the alternatives satisfied the interests. There was also an evaluation data matrix that showed data or numbers/counts related to different interests. The data was a place to start the discussion and not the final word.

The evaluations will not be the final word or dictate selection. The evaluation is a way to discuss and compare the two alignments before a selection conversation.

This meeting’s presentations and evaluation discussions covered neighborhood quality.

#### **Purpose and Process of the Evaluation Ranking**

The Evaluation Matrix is a tool designed to help the PACT members to begin to evaluate the qualities of the two alignments, in order to discover how well the alignments and suggested improvements satisfy the PACT’s interests. The process:

- Meet in three breakout groups in order to delve more deeply and creatively into the alternatives; record reasons for their evaluations, and prepare to discuss them with the full group;
- Report and share each group’s rankings to the full PACT, compare and contrast the groups’ work and develop a consolidated ranking for the Neighborhood Quality interest category.
- Apply their creativity to generate new possibilities to improve the alternatives.

The 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 - ○

**Breakout Group Evaluation Results**

	N	S	W	E
A	◐+	◐+	◐-	◐-
B	◐	◐	○	○
C	● ○	●	◐ ○	● ○

**Plenary Discussion and Explanations for the Rankings**

*This is a summary of the key issues discussed.*

*Key Elements for Evaluation*

- Swansea Elementary School –
  - In one current alignment it is a fully acquired and in other there are no direct impacts
  - If acquired it creates opportunity for a better school (if a central location can be found without significant houses being acquired)
  - Is it the best benefit to take it out of its central location and move it to the northeast
- Access to the South Platte River
  - Both alignments would allow access to river, while realignment creates a visual barrier – blocks view of the mountains
  - The re-alignment appears to interrupt the connectivity to the west, but access is the same
  - The railroad barrier remains regardless the alignment
- Properties Acquired - No option shows well because of the number of houses acquired
- Everything could be improved; no absolute no's or performs poor (○)
- Each alignment impacts someone
- Broad strategy would include: 1) relocation of a new school - centrally located; 2) opportunities through transit-oriented development; 3) if NWSS leaves then there is a new development opportunity.
- Which is the best opportunity to get to the target of “Maintain quality of life and protect community values?”
- Choose the less expensive option and redirect those funds to community mitigations
- Q - I want to know how many big businesses versus small businesses are impacted.

*Current Alignment*

- Allows an opportunity for those who can’t sell their homes, because they are so close to I-70, to stay in the neighborhood; there may be an opportunity to have new development/houses built (if a comparable home on the market cannot be found first, then it is possible to build a new house)
- South shift supported because it was farther from school, would remove Purina, opportunity to improve connections

- North shift was rated high because of possible improvement/moving the school

#### *Realignment*

- East and West shifts allows development opportunity for Swansea, while has impacts to NWSS, and creates a highway “V” with I-70 and 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue
- East shift – Denver communities have born the brunt of the highway already, willing to share the burden

#### **V. Additional Reports – Colorado Motor Carriers Association**

- Most of the stakeholders at the meeting saw benefits and impacts of all alternatives and options, and were open to all. No fatal flaws.
- With re-alignment a lot of truck traffic might use the current hazardous truck route (westbound I-70 to I-270 to I-76 to I-70) to avoid the mouse-trap.
- No problems with through traffic, it’s problems within the area, loss of access in area.
- Constituents are OK with York Street access going away because of the improvements at other interchanges.
- Need improvements at Colorado and Vasquez
- The traffic models don’t reflect truck traffic specifically, but that there is anecdotal information for that with the realignment.

#### **Resources Suggested for Future Meetings**

- Environment and Safety – City of Denver Department of Environmental Health. Agency could provide information on I-70 movement, impacts. Also the Tri-County Health & CDPHE & EPA
- Economic – Denver Urban Renewal Authority (Tracy Huggins), for information about impacts around TODs. Planning is different from econ forecast.
- Real estate data base – get numbers on occupancy – John Lucero working on this

#### **VI. Public Comment Session**

*Jim Mercado, Elyria School Redevelopment* – The school is being redeveloped as a residence and service center for 36 women veterans returning from war. This is an area of change. We are investing \$7 million in this area and looking at energizing the community and Elyria. PACT needs to consider the future growth of the communities. There are not a lot of areas in Denver left that can grow to this degree. You need coordination with RTD station and CDOT. There is a lot of energy in the neighborhood plan and the station plan. Consider what’s going on in Denver and not write this area off. Ask the PACT to look more in depth at economic analysis (job losses, improved revenue, TOD areas.) Denver Urban Renewal Authority (DURA) has done a job-loss study on properties taken and tax increases in keeping properties. What is the impact of 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue in realignment? Who pays and what are the economic impacts? Should look at the positive activities/development in the community and how the project will impact those.

*Berni McNulty, Elyria Resident (Vine St.)* We need to get I-70 right. It wasn’t done right the first time; we might as well do it right now. Realignment takes more gas and money. Thanks for the PACT’s participation and it’s good to have the range of perspectives around the table. It needs to be business friendly. There are good things in the neighborhood. The York grow-house, school redevelopment for veterans, Cross Coalition, churches, it’s an exciting neighborhood.

*Fred McPeck, Elyria Business* – In 1969 I bought the Elyria post office building and expanded across the street. Now there is a Latino convenience store in the area - that demonstrates change. I’ve been to lots of meetings in this community on I-70 starting back in the 1980s, over the years of this study; the question is how did realignment idea get started? It seemed to have just appeared. Realignment got legs on the pretense of Environmental Justice, but the realignment is worse than what is there (in either alignment it

is Environmental Justice). Realignment elevates vehicle miles traveled (VMT) per day and the prevailing wind pattern from Asarco to Swansea (Asarco was a partial remediation). Governor Ritter tasked his air quality team to reduce ozone and specifically decrease VMTs. I-70 divided the communities and was wrong to start with, but dividing them east/west doesn't make it right. It increases air pollution from additional VMTs and would encapsulate the neighborhood. To extend the project would be irresponsible in these economic times.

*Bettie Cram, Elyria resident* – Save Elyria! It's good to see the new options for under the viaduct. The community is growing (new store) and we want more artisans (like River North). We will have a river walk. If we don't get rid of the pollution then we'll walk around with oxygen tents. I'm disappointed that RTD put the north area on hold, that's sad. Tax payers are paying for this new overpass; I want taxpayers' money to go to helping taxpayers. Betty McMillen wrote a book on the history of Elyria and wrote a letter saying - In spite of long history as an important part of Denver, citizens are proud and worked hard to maintain their heritage, as National Western Stock Show and others have encroached on the neighborhood. This cultural history should be considered.” (paraphrased)

### **VIII. Next Steps**

- Develop East Corridor Working Group
- Next Meeting: December 9, amended time: 1 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. National Western Stock Show/National Western Club (details coming later)
- Next Agenda:
  - Continue evaluation of alternatives
  - Follow-up with Adams County School District 14

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Attendance**

Reza Akhavan, Colorado Department of Transportation  
Art Ballah, Colorado Motor Carriers Association  
Doug Bennett, Federal Highway Administration  
Jimmy Burds, Commerce City Business and Professional Association  
Larry Burgess, Denver - Elyria/Swansea/Globeville Business Association  
Shaun Cutting, Federal Highway Administration - Program Delivery Manager  
Jim Dileo, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment  
Drew Dutcher, Denver / Elyria resident  
Paul Garcia, Denver / Swansea resident  
Russ George, Colorado Department of Transportation  
Scott Jaquith, Commerce City resident  
Guillermo Serna, Commerce City resident  
Anthony Thomas, Denver resident  
Lesley Thomas, City of Denver  
Jeanne Shreve, Adams County  
Pat Grant, National Western Stock Show  
Tom Acre, City of Commerce City  
Tricia Allen, Adams County Economic Development (replacing Bill Becker)  
Tony Brake, Aurora resident

### **Members not attending**

Mac Callison, City of Aurora  
Norma Frank, Adams County resident  
Nanette Neelan, City of Commerce City  
Amy Pallante, Colorado State Historic Preservation Office  
Bill Van Meter, Regional Transportation District FasTracks  
Kate Kramer, Sand Creek Regional Greenway Partnership  
John Lucero, Denver Office of Economic Development (replacing Jess Ortiz)