

November 18, 2025

Dear Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) Commissioners and Colorado Transportation Investment Office (CTIO) Board Directors,

As you determine Colorado's funding priorities for the next decade of transportation investments, we urge you to prioritize projects that expand transportation options beyond driving to reduce congestion, vehicle miles traveled (VMT), and pollution, improve safety and save lives, and repair and maintain existing roads and bridges. These are the top three priorities in CDOT's Policy Directive 14 – the guiding principles for the 10 Year Plan – and they directly address the most pressing concerns and challenges for Coloradans around affordability, safety, health, and sustainability. Our true policy is not in these aspirational goals, but in our budget, so we ask you to align the new 10-Year Plan with [these goals and performance targets](#).

Colorado's Car-Dependent System Is Costly and Inequitable

Car-dependence is a policy choice. Over decades, Colorado has invested heavily in highways, resulting in a transportation system where driving is often the only practical option for many. Driving is also the most expensive way to get around. [A CDOT study](#) found that reducing per-capita driving by 10% would save Coloradans \$25 billion over the next decade, mostly from less spending on vehicle ownership and fewer crashes. A household that shifts from two cars to one can save over \$12,000 annually. We should make this a possibility for more Coloradans, and we know it's possible - from 2017 to 2023, [Seattle](#) added about 80,000 residents and 35,000 households, but only 3,300 additional cars. We need to build a system that offers people more options, especially the [nearly 30% of Colorado residents](#) who don't rely on personal vehicles to get around, either because they're too young, too old, have a disability, or can't afford it.

Highway Expansion Will Not Solve Congestion

We understand the need to improve and repair our highways - many are in rough shape. But we also can't ignore the evidence that we can't build our way out of congestion. [Decades of research](#) show that highway widenings invite more driving on our roads, generating more traffic and increasing both VMT and GHGs. Within 3–5 years, traffic typically returns to pre-construction levels. When we make it easier to drive, more people choose to do it. This isn't just true on the expanded road, but at the regional level. According to a 2020 report, [the Congestion Con](#), between 1993 and 2017, U.S. governments spent over \$500 billion on highway projects, yet congestion grew by 144%, far outpacing population growth. Regions that expanded roads the most experienced the greatest increases in congestion.

[CDOT's own analysis](#) from 2021 assumes that for every 10% increase in highway lane capacity, VMT rises by about 6.7%. The I-25 TREX project in South Denver is a recent example of this, and other new highway widenings along the Front Range are likely to follow a similar pattern. According to a [California Air Resources Board policy brief](#), this is also true for new Express Lanes: "The empirical evidence suggests that managed lanes might have similar induced travel effects as general-purpose lane expansions." That's why we're skeptical that expanding roads like I-270 will permanently keep truck traffic out of nearby

neighborhoods as suggested. It may help temporarily, but without more creative strategies, congestion and the resulting impacts on neighborhoods will likely return.

Traffic-generating projects contradict CDOT goals to reduce VMT and GHGs as well as state goals to double the share of total trips completed by transit, biking, and walking from 10% to 20% in the next decade. In addition, [Senate Bill 24-184](#) directs the Colorado Transportation Improvement Office (CTIO) to develop a multimodal strategic plan that aligns with CDOT's GHG reduction targets and expands public transit.

[The evidence](#) also suggests that widening highways do not actually improve safety, and may result in more serious crashes. Therefore, CDOT should focus on more targeted safety fixes such as adding shoulders and redesigning on- and off-ramps without adding capacity. In 2022, CDOT and DRCOG decided to remove the highway widening component of the [I-25 Valley project in central Denver](#). To be clear, it didn't abandon the project altogether, but redesigned it to address the major safety concerns without adding lanes. As a result, the region was able to repurpose hundreds of millions of dollars to other deserving projects in the pipeline.

“Fix it First” Instead of Highway Widenings

Highway widening projects have ballooned from the hundreds of millions into the billions of dollars, pulling investment away from other, more pressing needs. Every dollar spent on new lane miles is a dollar not spent on “fix-it-first” maintenance projects that repair roads, fill potholes, and save people money on car repairs. [Colorado currently ranks 28th](#) in pavement condition on urban interstates and 47th on rural interstates. Driving on rough roads costs the average Colorado driver [\\$831 annually](#) in additional vehicle operating costs – a total of \$3.7 billion statewide. While CDOT has reduced the share of interstate pavement in [poor condition](#) in recent years, the overall backlog remains. In addition, every mile of new highway lane adds a long-term maintenance obligation of over [\\$24,000 per mile per year](#).

Coloradans Want More Transportation Options Beyond Driving

Public opinion strongly supports better transit and non-driving travel choices. In CDOT's statewide [budget allocation survey](#), transit, biking, and walking received nearly three times the support of highway expansion (37% vs. 13%), while 33% prioritized pavement repair. [A 2025 poll](#) found that 55% of respondents prefer expanding public transportation over building more roads. Coloradans are asking for the opportunity to opt-out of traffic rather than double-down on more driving.

A Better Path Forward Than Highway Widening: Expanding Transportation Options

Colorado has the opportunity to invest in transportation solutions that move people more efficiently rather than cars more quickly. Instead of adding new lanes, we can reduce congestion by managing demand on existing roads and providing robust alternatives to driving.

This planning process comes down to priorities. Consider: we could complete all seven unfunded Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) projects identified in [DRCOG's Regional Transportation Plan](#) – more than 82 miles of fast, reliable BRT – for less than the cost of one typical highway widening project. The Denver region has

over \$3 billion in transit, complete streets, and multi-use trail projects pushed into “out-years” beyond 2035, despite being well-positioned to deliver improved mobility today.

Across the [Denver metro area](#), we should prioritize investments in key transit corridors such as Hampden/Havana, Broadway/Lincoln, and 38th/Park. Safety and multimodal upgrades are also needed along Quebec, Wadsworth, Alameda, and Pecos, along with trail network improvements on the South Platte, Clear Creek, and Cherry Creek paths. Similar projects across Colorado await funding, including the Nevada Avenue Streetcar/BRT and Austin Bluffs Pkwy/Garden of the Gods multimodal upgrades in the [Pikes Peak Area](#), the MAX West Elizabeth Line in Fort Collins, and North Avenue corridor improvements with a mobility hub in Grand Junction. Refer to our new Storymap, [Recalibrating Colorado's Transportation System](#), for more project examples. When combined with compact, mixed use development and affordable housing, these projects advance the [state's strategic growth goals](#) to support more sustainable, equitable, and fiscally-responsible growth around existing infrastructure.

Demand-management strategies can also help improve travel times on existing highways without expanding lane capacity. CDOT should study the alternative option for I-270 of using congestion pricing to manage demand on the existing travel lanes - rather than adding new lanes - with a pricing structure that prioritizes access for freight, transit, and local residents, and using the toll revenues to fund improvements to the regional transit network through this area.

Together, frequent transit, active transportation improvements, and more robust transportation demand management offer a much more cost-effective, equitable, and environmentally responsible strategy than expanding highways.

Thank you for your commitment to building a safer, more affordable, and more sustainable transportation system for Colorado. We look forward to working with you to achieve these shared goals.

Sincerely,

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