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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Project Overview and Background

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and CDOT are advancing the Interstate 270 (I-270) Corridor Improvements Project (project) to reconstruct and improve the full 6.5-mile stretch of I-270 from the Interstate 25 (I-25)/United States Highway 36 (US 36) interchange to Interstate 70 (I-70) in Adams County, Commerce City, and the City and County of Denver. Citing its significance as a freight corridor, in 2002 CDOT and the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) recommended widening I-270 from four to six lanes by 2025, and the agencies later identified widening I-270 and rebuilding the I-270/Vasquez Boulevard interchange in DRCOG's 2040 Fiscally Constrained Regional Transportation Plan. In early 2020, CDOT included widening I-270 between Interstate 76 (I-76) and I-70 in the first phase of projects of their 10-year vision. The Colorado Transportation Investment Office ranked I-270 fourth among its top priority corridors for Express Lanes, placing it after three sections of I-25 in the Denver metropolitan area.

FHWA and CDOT began the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process in 2020, initially anticipating an Environmental Assessment. Moving into 2023, CDOT determined a more detailed environmental review was needed and requested that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) be prepared. The lead agencies are now preparing an EIS to evaluate potential improvements to the I-270 corridor, which includes evaluating both general-purpose lanes and Express Lanes. The project will tie into the I-25/US 36 and I-70 system interchanges, but improvements to these interchanges are part of projects on I-25 and I-70 and will be designed and approved separately.

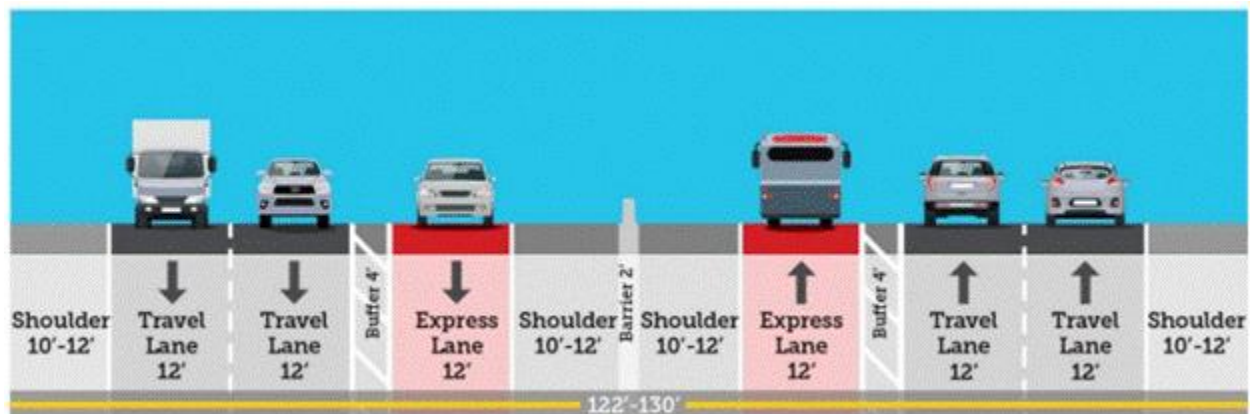
A Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS was published in the Federal Register on August 20, 2024. The NOI begins the two-year timeline to complete the NEPA process as required by 42 United States Code (USC) 4336a(g)(1)(A).

FHWA is the lead federal agency responsible for the NEPA decision, with CDOT serving as joint lead agency. Cooperating agencies for this Final EIS/Record of Decision (ROD) pursuant to 23 USC Section 139(d)(5) include the United States Environmental Protection Agency and United States Army Corps of Engineers. The purpose of this ROD is to document FHWA's final decision, explain the basis for selection, summarize mitigation commitments, and identify any remaining approvals.

I-270 is a key segment of Colorado’s transportation system, part of the Primary Highway Freight System and Strategic Highway Network (STRAHNET) and plays a critical role in moving goods between industrial areas in Commerce City, regional distribution centers, and the greater interstate system. STRAHNET is a network of highways (including the Interstate System) that provides connecting routes to military installations, industries, and resources (e.g., freight distribution centers). It is a subset of the National Highway System and important to the United States' strategic defense policy by providing defense access, continuity, and emergency capabilities for defense purposes. I-270 has a posted speed limit of 55 miles per hour and has two through lanes in each direction, with interchanges at I-76, York Street, Vasquez Boulevard, and Quebec Street.

FHWA and CDOT have identified the Two General-Purpose Lanes and One Express Lane that Accommodates Transit Alternative as the Selected Alternative (see Figure 1-1).

Figure 1-1. Typical Cross Section of the Selected Alternative (Two General-Purpose Lanes and One Express Lane that Accommodates Transit Alternative)

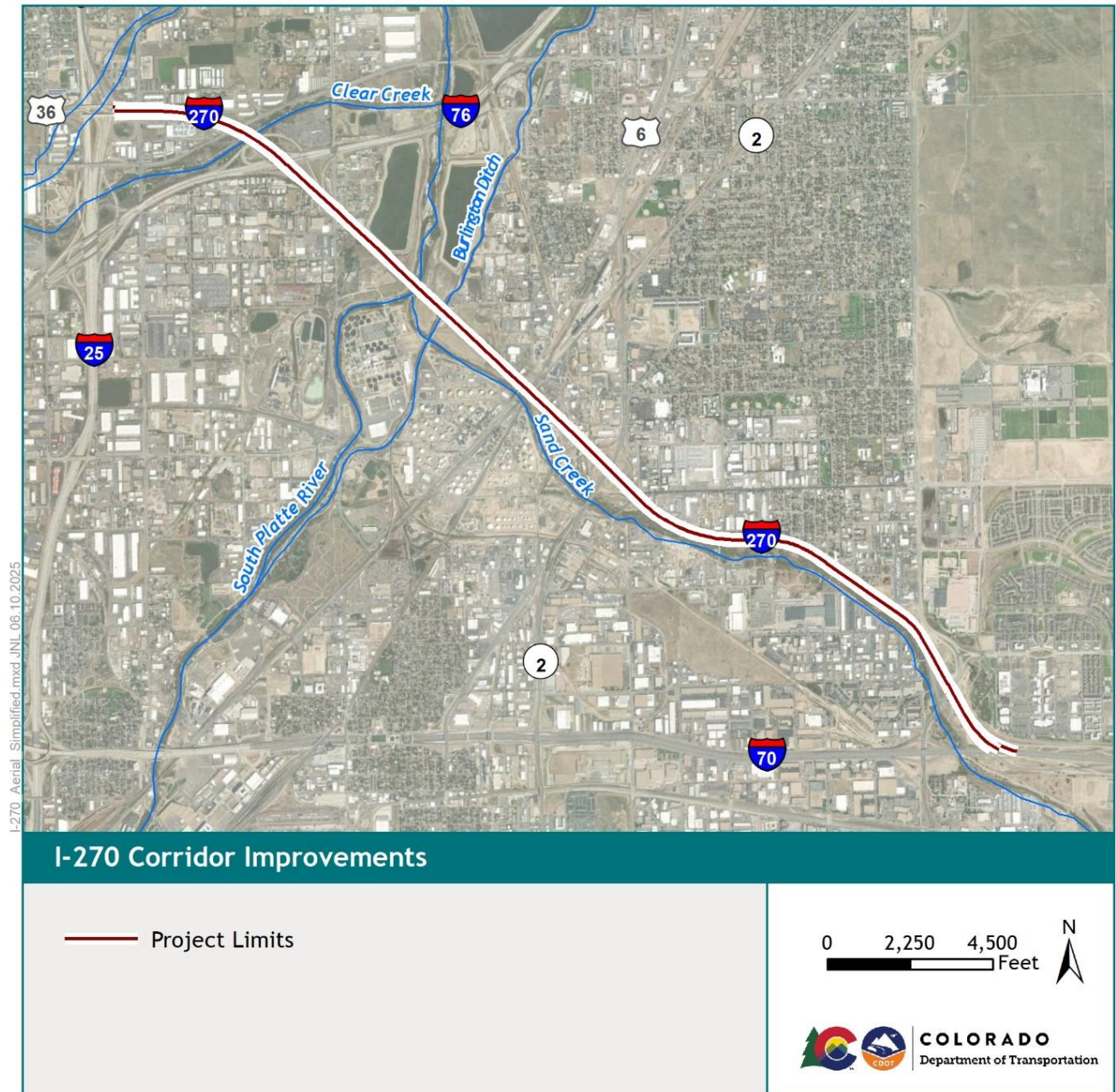


The project would reconstruct the aging I-270 mainline, replace 12 structurally deficient or functionally obsolete bridges, add one new Express Lane in each direction to support transit and improve travel reliability, add one continuous auxiliary lane in each direction between the I-76 and Vasquez Boulevard on-ramps and off-ramps, rebuild the Vasquez Boulevard interchange, construct a new pedestrian overpass, and improve movements at the I-76 interchange. For details about the project, please see Appendix B, Alternatives Development Technical Report, of the Draft EIS, and Appendix B, Alternatives Mapbooks, of the Final EIS. The project location and limits are shown in Figure 1-2. For additional context, an aerial image of the project limits and surrounding area is shown in Figure 1-3.

Figure 1-2. I-270 Corridor Improvements Project Limits



Figure 1-3. I-270 Corridor Improvements Aerial View



1.2 Purpose and Need Summary

The purpose of the project is to implement transportation solutions that modernize the I-270 corridor to accommodate existing and forecasted transportation demands. Chapter 2.0 of the Draft EIS identifies five transportation needs for the corridor:

- **Traveler safety on the corridor (Figure 1-4).** I-270 experiences crash rates significantly higher than comparable four-lane urban freeways in Colorado—about 42 crashes per mile per year—nearly 40 percent higher than similar facilities statewide. Nearly 3,000 crashes occurred from 2014 to 2022, including more than 700 injury crashes and 14 fatal crashes. Frequent crashes lead to sudden congestion and reliability issues, creating safety concerns for freight carriers, employers, and residents.

Figure 1-4. Crash on the Corridor



- **Travel time and reliability on the corridor (Figure 1-5).** Congestion regularly exceeds the roadway's intended capacity. Unpredictable conditions, compounded by crash-related delays, worsen reliability for commuters and freight movement.

Figure 1-5. Congestion on the Corridor



- **Transit on the corridor (Figure 1-6).** Existing transit service in the corridor is limited, and the current facility does not support efficient or reliable transit operations. The corridor lacks infrastructure that enables priority transit treatments or competitive travel times for transit users.

Figure 1-6. Transit on the Corridor



- **Bicycle and pedestrian connectivity across I-270 (Figure 1-7).** I-270 creates a barrier for people walking and biking, with limited and substandard crossings. Improved bicycle and pedestrian connectivity is needed to link neighborhoods, job centers, and local destinations across the corridor.

Figure 1-7. Substandard Bicycle and Pedestrian Crossing Under I-270



- **Freight operations on the corridor (Figure 1-8).** Freight represents 8 to 17 percent of daily traffic on I-270, depending on location. The corridor experiences delays, limited merge/weave areas, and inadequate operational features for modern freight demands.

Figure 1-8. Freight Crash on the Corridor



In addition to addressing project needs, CDOT, FHWA, Cooperating, and Participating Agencies established a key project goal: to minimize environmental and community impacts resulting from the project.