



North I-25 Planning and Environmental Linkage Stakeholder Interviews Summary

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This report summarizes the findings of stakeholder interviews conducted by members of the North I-25 Planning Environmental Linkage (PEL) Project Team from the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), Felsburg Holt and Ullevig (FHU), and CDR Associates (CDR). The purpose of the interviews was to document goals, issues and concerns expressed by stakeholders regarding the North I-25 PEL study. Input received does not establish project direction or decisions. The feedback will be incorporated into the study's collaborative visioning efforts among stakeholders and the project team.

This summary captures the themes provided by the following parties and provides points of emphasis for upcoming project visioning efforts. Interviews were conducted with the following entities:

- Adams County
- CDOT Office of Policy and Government Relations
- CDOT Region 4
- CDOT Region 6
- Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG)
- City and County of Broomfield
- City and County of Denver
- City of Northglenn
- City of Thornton
- City of Westminster
- Federal Transit Administration (FTA)
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
- Regional Transit District of Denver (RTD)

The summary is organized into the following two sections

- I. **Highlights of Stakeholder Feedback**
- II. **Detailed Summary**

I. HIGHLIGHTS OF STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Several points were emphasized by multiple stakeholders during the interviews, highlighted as follows:

- The relationship between the PEL and the North I-25 EIS needs to be clearly defined and communicated to the stakeholders and general public.
- The PEL should be a study of the long term vision and near term opportunities to address operations and safety. Some expressed a focus on long-term vision and others focused more on near-term opportunities.
- Park-n-Ride facilities along I-25 need to be upgraded to accommodate significant demand.
- It is important for the study to recognize future projects and plans that local agencies have within the study area and coordinate closely with the respective parties.

- It is important for the PEL to analyze the impacts and consider future improvements to parallel roads. Problems on the highway can cause spillover on the parallel arterials and vice versa.
- The I-25 PEL needs to be coordinated with the State Highway 7 PEL, which is proceeding concurrently.
- Travel Demand Management (TDM) solutions could be implemented in the I-25 corridor to enhance service. It would be beneficial to develop strategies to get more people in buses and carpooling and have the Transportation Management Organization (TMO) support those strategies.
- The North Area Transportation Alliance (NATA) will continue to be very involved in the PEL. It will be helpful to include NATA updates as agenda items for the I-25 PEL Executive Committee (EC)/Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings and for CDOT to periodically provide updates at NATA meetings.

II. DETAILED SUMMARY

The input received during the interview process is organized into the following seven categories:

1. *North I-25 PEL Framework*
2. *Corridor Vision vs. Near-Term Improvements*
3. *Corridor Issues*
4. *Alternatives and Improvements*
5. *Transportation Analysis and Modeling*
6. *Stakeholder Engagement and Public Involvement*
7. *Prioritization, Phasing, and Funding*

The input received is listed within each category followed by a listing of Visioning Emphasis items. The Visioning Emphasis items will form the basis for the upcoming PEL Visioning process.

1. NORTH I-25 PEL FRAMEWORK

The following recommendations and opinions were expressed by stakeholders regarding their desires for the PEL study:

- A framework for this PEL is to identify the transportation needs at a broad perspective, prioritize those needs and then move to fix the most severe problems within the context of the study area. The project should be developed by focusing on the users (customers) of the transportation system. Solutions must be practical, avoiding or minimizing “throw-away” projects, which are projects that would provide a benefit in the near term, but would have to be removed or reconstructed to implement future projects.
- Multiple improvements and strategies will need to be developed that can be implemented independent of one another.
- Multi-modal/transit needs should be addressed, with park-n-Ride (p-n-R) access and capacity to be considered.
- It is important to document the process so that subsequent National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) actions can take advantage of the PEL work without revisiting issues and analysis.
- The PEL should identify projects that can be advanced quickly and efficiently through the NEPA process, preferably using Categorical Exclusions, when appropriate.
- It is important for the EC/ TAC to make project recommendations, but also to allow traffic and engineering data along with funding opportunities to drive the outcomes.
- This study needs to clearly describe the relationship between the I-25 EIS and the PEL. DRCOG first looks to honor the Record of Decision (ROD) commitments from the N. I-25 EIS. Next, DRCOG considers other operational and safety improvements, which may or may not be in the TIP or RTP; and then finally, considers other identified capacity improvements.
- It will be important for this study to coordinate with the SH 7 PEL. The two studies should coordinate to assess the feasibility of ideas along the corridors and for the SH 7/ I-25 interchange.
- The issues associated with specific interchanges should be closely analyzed within this study.

VISIONING EMPHASIS:

Based on the above opinions expressed during the interviews, the Visioning Workshop should focus on the following topics related to the PEL Framework:

- Further define the relationship between this PEL study and recent and future NEPA processes.

2. CORRIDOR VISION VERSUS INTERIM IMPROVEMENTS

The following recommendations and opinions were expressed by stakeholders regarding their desires for consideration of a corridor vision and nearer interim improvements:

- Success will be achieved by identifying and prioritizing what improvements can be included in the TIP, or in the DRCOG Fiscally Constrained 2040 Plan. The PEL Projects should be implementable by 2020 without precluding the long-term vision. Recommendations should differentiate between needs and desires.
- The ultimate configuration will serve as an umbrella that smaller projects should fit within. The smaller projects should not preclude construction of the ultimate configuration.
- A stakeholder communicated that while discussions can occur with stakeholders regarding the ultimate vision for the corridor, the discussion/analysis does not need to be at the level of detail where it is determined whether a solution is as specific as “adding general purpose lane or managed lanes.” It is sufficient to determine whether or not there are capacity improvements needed, and then the other shorter/low-cost operational and safety improvements can fit into this overall vision.
- However, another stakeholder communicated that, the expected goal of this study is to develop and address the short term (~2016) and long term (2035/2040) needs of the I-25 corridor in the north area. For the short term, the study needs to address current congestion and the safety and operational deficiencies needed now. For the long term, the study needs to identify:
 - How much additional capacity will be needed by 2035/2040;
 - When the HOT/HOV lanes will be needed
 - What improvements are needed for RTD
 - Which TDM/TSM strategies best alleviate traffic congestion
 - Operational and capacity benefits of using the inside shoulders for interim capacity increases
- The traffic issues in this area need to be addressed. It was stated that the greater needs of the area should be clearly understood to help in prioritizing near-term projects.

VISIONING EMPHASIS:

Based on the above opinions expressed during the interviews, the Visioning Workshop should focus on the following topics related to Corridor Vision versus Interim Improvements:

- The project’s consideration of long-term and near-term solutions
 - Clarify expectations for what will be studied and addressed in the PEL and what will not.
- To define the project focus, limitations, and constraints.

3. CORRIDOR ISSUES

The following opinions were expressed by stakeholders regarding issues that need to be addressed or considered along the corridor:

- *Congestion*—Traffic congestion is a major problem within the study area.
- *Northern Colorado Users*—A considerable amount of traffic and users are coming into the corridor from Weld and Larimer Counties; DRCOG regional modeling can shed light on traffic patterns through the area.
- *Parallel Arterials*—Problems on the highway can cause spillover on the parallel arterials and vice versa. There needs to be an analysis of the relationship between the two. Parallel arterials mentioned by interviewees included Huron Street, Pecos Street, Federal Boulevard, and Washington Street.
- There are substantial problems with vehicles that are merging in and out of the managed lane as well as on- and off- ramps.
- The north region has the most capacity constrained p-n-Rs in the RTD system; the Wagon Road p-n-R is the largest in RTD's system and is over capacity. Improvements are needed for the Thornton p-n-R, as well.
- *Accidents, Speeds and Design*—It was stated that I-25 experiences a high rate of accidents related to speed and congestion. Additional details offered by law enforcement personnel included:
 - The majority of accidents happen in the innermost left travel lane
 - The innermost left lane is typically closed off by a crash, and cars involved in an accident are moved to it when an accident occurs to allow traffic to continue to flow. Consideration needs to be given to what will need to happen operationally to the innermost lane for dealing with accidents when there is no longer an inside shoulder. Lane closures typically last about two hours for accident clearance.
- At times, emergency responders avoid using I-25 due to congestion.
- The PEL needs to address speeds and speed differentials which are seen as contributing to incidents; including the association of segment speeds and ramp designs.
- The noise walls (fencing) along I-25 between 106th Ave and 108th Ave are in poor condition and need to be replaced. The wall adjacent at 106th Ave is often struck by vehicles.
- The PEL should understand what drainage improvements have been made along the corridor as well as where utility lines are located. Concern has been expressed about additional drainage impacts along the corridor.

VISIONING EMPHASIS:

Based on the above opinions expressed during the interviews, the Visioning Workshop should focus on the following topics related to Corridor Issues:

- Define the extent to which parallel arterials will be considered in relationship to I-25. Confirm the issues identified in stakeholder interviews as an appropriate starting point for the corridor assessment.

4. ALTERNATIVES AND IMPROVEMENTS

The following captures suggestions for improving mobility within the study area:

- Key issues of focus should include increasing access and capacity.
- Consider opportunities for implementation of continuous auxiliary or acceleration/ deceleration lanes to better accommodate weaving between interchanges and to keep users off the mainline.
- Optimize metered ramps and provide new ramp metering for existing ramps that don't have it.
- Employ growth management strategies in the corridor and integrate land use plans into that management component. Apply these strategies to the communities to the north as well, and understand what that would mean for the corridor.
- Consider adding General Purpose lanes.
- Explore the possibility of the inside shoulder being designated as a freight/truck-only lane, or a HOV/BRT only lane.
- Look for ways to integrate bicycle and pedestrian facilities, as well as make connections within the study area.
- Consider speed harmonization and using variable speed limits responsive to conditions.
- Consider converting ramps from one-lane to two-lane ramps.
- Consider applications of Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) technology, with particular focus on collecting real-time data.
- Look at the U.S. 36 Construction RFP for examples of TDM solutions that could be implemented in the I-25 corridor to enhance service. It would be beneficial to develop strategies to get more people in buses and carpooling and have the TMO support those strategies.
- It was suggested for the study to have both a mainline and a parallel arterial focus because the issues between the facilities are related. The main issues include not enough capacity, lack of access, ramps backing up on the highway, constrained weaves, sign spacing, "operational killers" and safety impacts.
- I-25/SH 7 Interchange: It is important for this study to closely analyze improvements and anticipated development at this interchange. The following was noted:
 - A Diverging Diamond Interchange (DDI) concept has been developed for this interchange. The design includes a p-n-R and would not need to utilize land area previously designated for a loop ramp. A partial cloverleaf interchange design was also mentioned.
 - Support was expressed for establishing a p-n-R that would serve the interchange and emphasize parking availability with minimum right-of-way impacts.
- A managed lane could improve incident responses by reducing congestion and by providing pullouts as refuge for an accident. Emergency responder and traffic enforcement operations should be taken into account, not only as to what their needs are, but also directions or instructions for how they should operate to optimize and maintain traffic flows.
- In addition to general purpose lanes, managed lanes are needed in order to spread the current levels of congestion by incentivizing carpooling and improving bus service.
- Add capacity for increasing multimodal transit alternatives resulting in fewer single-occupancy vehicle trips.
- Include transit solutions as part of this study.
- Include an educational component to communicate the correct use of buffer separated lanes, if included.

- Congestion in the corridor supports the need for transit improvements. Improved access to p-n-Rs is important in general, specifically the 88th Avenue and Wagon Road p-n-Rs. There is support for establishing additional RTD service and p-n-Rs (locations for potential consideration include 136th Avenue or State Highway 7). Strong support was also expressed for adding more parking vertically at existing p-n-Rs to reduce the need for a larger footprint.
- Consider integrated infrastructure improvements, such as Transit Oriented Development (TOD), that maximize space to accommodate facilities to benefit RTD service. Suggestions included integrating p-n-R designs into planned developments while minimizing Right of Way impacts, and the extension of the managed lane.
- It was stated that RTD is committed to improving bus service in the I-25 corridor and providing the North Metro rail service. It is important to define how both services integrate and will serve the region. North Metro is considered to be a future reliever of congestion at p-n-Rs along I-25, and its benefits should be considered.
- There are substantial bus improvements included with the implementation of the North Metro line. It was stated that new p-n-R's are planned for SH 7 and for the 136th Avenue or 144th Avenue interchange.
- Focus on highway improvements that help transit.
- Optimize the 88th Avenue p-n-R by creating an in-line station.
- Establish queue jumps for buses.

VISIONING EMPHASIS:

Based on the above opinions expressed during the interviews, the Visioning Workshop should focus on the following topics related to Alternatives and Improvements:

- Explore the types of alternatives to be considered
- Identify which type of alternatives should be the focus of the EC/TAC.
- Define the role of transit within the PEL study
- Define the types of solutions that could be evaluated that involve transit

5. TRANSPORTATION ANALYSIS AND MODELING

The following opinions were expressed by stakeholders regarding the analysis and evaluation of alternatives for the corridor:

- Metrics from the traffic analysis should include travel time index and average speeds. Compare peak to non-peak traffic and how quickly a facility recovers from the peak period.
- Questions to be addressed by the analysis include: “Where is the traffic coming from? Where is it going? What is the cause of the congestion?” Answering these questions will lead to the appropriate solutions for this corridor.
- DynusT is an efficient tool for large areas to get a grasp of the origins and destinations and the operational problems. It is an appropriate tool for the analysis of near-term operational and safety alternatives. The study needs to consider the effects of routes changing beyond Level of Service.
- Consider modeling the effects a managed lane would have to traffic congestion between 120th Avenue and 136th Avenue
- It is important for the PEL to complement analysis that has already been established through the EIS.
- The traffic analysis should address both recurring and non-recurring congestion.

VISIONING EMPHASIS:

Based on the above opinions expressed during the interviews, the Visioning Workshop should focus on the following topics related to Transportation Analysis and Modeling:

- Define the types of questions or information needs that exist for this study.
- Define the analysis and modeling approach for the PEL.
- What about: Describe how the PEL transportation analysis will complement the EIS information

6. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The following opinions and suggestions were expressed by stakeholders regarding the public outreach activities for the study:

- CDOT and FHWA stated that they are very committed to the stakeholder engagement process and will listen closely to the interests and needs of the corridor's local agencies and involve regional partners such as RTD, DRCOG, NATA and others. The better the needs are identified and understood, the easier it is to identify effective strategies to address the issues. Because managing the system is a shared responsibility by the stakeholders, their involvement is critical for reaching out and communicating within their communities to key groups and businesses.
- Input from all the stakeholders must be heard at the EC/TAC meetings for project success. The EC/TAC meetings will be where issues will need to be addressed and agreements confirmed that won't be undone "away from the table."
- While it has been suggested to set aside 15–20 minutes during each TAC meeting for public input and make the public aware of those opportunities, it has also been noted that conversations at TAC meetings often involve material that can be difficult for a non-technical audience to understand. EC meetings where public-policy issues and project recommendations will be discussed may be a more appropriate setting for public comment and participation. It would be helpful for the public to submit their questions in advance so they can be addressed at the meetings.
- NATA will be very influential in this study. There is sufficient representation on the EC and TAC by NATA members to keep NATA informed of the EC/TAC activities and vice versa. It will be helpful to include NATA updates as agenda items for EC/TAC meetings and for CDOT to periodically provide updates at NATA meetings. The Metro North Chamber is important to keep involved. CDOT Transportation Commissioner Heather Berry's "Bagels with Berry" events take place periodically in the corridor, are typically attended by elected officials and the interested public, and can be a place to provide project updates.
- *N I-25 PEL Web Page*—If the project web page is to serve as a primary channel of communicating information it must be updated and provide key project information. The web page will also be a channel for the public to communicate about the project and provide questions and comments.
- *North Metro Transportation Management Organization (TMO)*—The TMO that is being established by NATA is expected to be active by February 2012. It should be utilized to provide information to the project team or to distribute and communicate project announcements to the public and its members, such as area businesses and other private sector stakeholders. The TMO can be used to develop incident management plans, coordinate around implementation of improvements or operational strategies for integrating transit in the corridor.
- *Future Plans, Projects and Coordination*—It is important for the study to recognize future projects and plans that local agencies have within the study area and coordinate closely with the respective parties. Each local agency described unique projects within their boundaries that could affect the corridor.
- It is important to determine how the actions on I-25 will tie into the improvements to the north, the system to the south and improvements that can be made within local jurisdictions.
- Local agencies, along with CDOT and RTD, should regard the system within a regional context to understand what kinds of solutions can be implemented and who would be responsible for doing so, whether it would be to I-25, additional transit service or to local roads and operations. It is important for RTD to contribute funding to potential improvements which would benefit or relate to its service.

VISIONING EMPHASIS:

Based on the above opinions expressed during the interviews, the Visioning Workshop should focus on the following topics related to Stakeholder Engagement and Public Involvement:

- To discuss and understand the roles and responsibilities of each of the parties participating in the PEL and responsibilities for implementing solutions.
- Define how the Project Team will interact and engage with the EC, TAC, and corridor stakeholders.
- Determine what decisions and recommendations will be made, how they will be made and when.
- Define the public outreach responsibilities of all parties.
- Decide upon the appropriate method for public interaction with the EC & TAC and public involvement during those meetings.

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7. PRIORITIZATION, PHASING, AND FUNDING

The following opinions and suggestions were expressed by stakeholders regarding prioritization, phasing and funding of the potential projects that could come out of this study:

- NATA has prioritized improvements on I-25 and the completion of North Metro FasTracks as its top priorities.
- Look for ways to package and prioritize alternatives – if an option is prioritized, determine how it will relate to the other costs and inter-operability of the benefits of other improvements.
- *Phasing and Suggested Sections of Focus*—Consider implementing smaller projects with independent utility (i.e., small projects that are prioritized and can be bundled and implemented as funding allows) that can be done in different sections of the corridor. Suggested sections to target include the section south of 88th Avenue, the section from 88th Avenue to 104th Avenue, a section from 104th Avenue to 120th Avenue and a northernmost section beyond 120th Avenue.
- The long-term goals, desires, and solutions are included in the Metro Vision; however, specific improvements will have to be defined and identified to be included in the fiscally constrained plan.
- Consider factoring tolling revenue from a managed lane into ways in which funding could be identified, and identify what that amount could become available.
- There was support for seeking funding opportunities, once improvements are identified, that would tie in I-25 improvements to those planned for U.S. 36 in order to attract larger federal grants.
- One percent of RTD’s operating budget is available over the life of FasTracks to address priorities for improving operations of bus service. It is possible that outside of existing planned improvements in the North Metro region, there are additional improvements that are developed through the PEL that display the criteria needed to qualify.
- *Identify innovative funding strategies*—look to establish public-private partnerships where possible, such as for the purpose of establishing new p-n-Rs.

VISIONING EMPHASIS:

Based on the above opinions expressed during the interviews, the Visioning Workshop should focus on the following topics related to Prioritization, Phasing, and Funding:

- Discuss the principles for how projects will ultimately be prioritized and implemented.
- Discuss the initial perspectives on phasing strategies for project implementation.
- Address funding questions and issues in the context of regional coordination.
- Explore the process for prioritizing potential solutions in the alternative development process.