



Denver City Council

Public Works Committee Meeting Summary

Date: March 14, 2007 **Time:** 10:30 a.m. **Location:** Room 391

Members Present: Johnson, Brown, Mackenzie, Montero, Robb

Members Absent: Lehmann

Other Members Present: Linkhart

1. **Strategic Transportation Plan: Protecting the Present and Planning/Building for the Future**

Committee Action

The Committee asked for more information on the assumption about the public's "acceptable delay" regarding level of congestion.

Summary of Discussion

Bill Vidal, Manager, Public Works Department, discussed the Strategic Transportation Plan (STP), illustrated by the attached PowerPoint presentation. Major points included the following.

Infrastructure Priorities Task Force

- Deferred maintenance of the transportation system, growth in miles traveled relative to system growth, and projected population growth (therefore more trips) indicate a "looming crisis".
- Annual funding for transportation infrastructure is \$17-\$20 M; annual need is for an additional \$16-\$19 M.
- One-time infusion of \$188 M is needed just to get system to "acceptable standards".
- Infrastructure Priorities Task Force is charged with developing a strategic financial plan to fund regular maintenance and replacement.

STP Model Assumption

- Blueprint Denver defined the City's land use & transportation vision; STP is the detailed model that will help implement the vision.
- STP is revolutionary in that its focus is on "person trips" rather than the traditional "vehicle trips". We are planning how we will move people, not just vehicles.
- This reflects the community's value of developing a multi-modal system, not just wider roads.
- STP is based on "travel sheds" rather than traditional corridors to better understand how people move through various areas of the city.
- Projections agree with Denver Regional Council of Governments & CO Dept. of Transportation.
- Planning includes 3 timeframes:
 - 2005 – understand current system needs;
 - 2015 – to understand needs at full FasTracks build-out; and
 - 2030 – traditional 20-year planning horizon.

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- Projected 2015 growth handled by the SE corridor improvements and FasTracks.
- 2030 projections: population growth projected = 23%; person trips increase = 35%.
 - Lane miles projected to remain about the same.
 - Bus hours projected to increase slightly, but buses travel in the congested traffic lanes.
 - Rail hours projected at this time to remain at 2015 level.
- This means that by 2030, hours of vehicle delay will nearly double; 85% of roads will be critically congested.
- The region must start work now on the next transit piece = “NexTracks”.

STP Products

- Plans an integrated, multi-modal system by 2030 that relies mostly on increased transit and bus service.
- Identifies 12 travel sheds for analysis.
- Projects the travel demand and delay ratio (see below).
- Identifies types of strategies to apply as ratio increases (see below).
- Identifies specific improvements needed within each shed.
- Identifies financial resources needed to implement the plan.
- Priorities the projects to feed into the City’s Capital Improvement Program process.

Travel Sheds

• East Central	• East Colfax
• Speer/Leetsdale	• South West
• East Side	• Gateway
• Hampden	• Downtown
• West Side	• North West
• Central Denver	• River North

“Acceptable Delay”

- “Delay” = the ratio of number of person trips to system capacity (PT/C)
- Higher ratio means higher delay per person trip.
- Highest ratio (worst level of congestion) on the system today is 1.2, in East Central and Speer/Leetsdale, and has been deemed “acceptable”.
- By 2015, Hampden and West Side will be approaching 1.2.
- By 2013, five of the sheds will exceed 1.2 and two others will be approaching it.
- The Committee questioned that 1.2 was in fact the “acceptable delay” level and asked that more be done to determine if this is a realistic expectation of the public.

Improvement Strategies

- Physical - all travel sheds require strategies in this category:
 - Capital maintenance
 - Full systems build-out for all modes
 - Development requirements
- Operational - sheds with higher person trips need some of:
 - Lane balancing & spot intersection improvements
 - Signal timing, signing & marking
 - Enforcement

- Behaviora - needed system-wide regardless of congestion:
 - Encourage increased use of transit, biking, walking by providing or enhancing pedestrian amenities and access.
 - Encourage multi-purpose trips, partly with land use strategies.
 - Encourage telecommuting.
- Hierarchy of physical strategies (all but behavioral) forms a pyramid (see page 16 of attachment):
 - Maintenance: basic maintenance, filling gaps in bike/pedestrian systems, etc; at the base of the pyramid for travel sheds below ratio of 1.5; all sheds require some of these.
 - Program Investment: lane balancing, intersection improvements; for travel sheds between 1.5 and 2.5.
 - Major Investment: transit & roadway improvements, "NEPA-like" studies; for sheds above 2.5.

West Side Travel Shed

- A preliminary list of improvements needed in this initial travel shed is attached.
- The attached map of this shed reflects Blueprint Denver's Areas of Change, where most of the density growth should be, and how those relate to the major roadways.
- Identifies needed improvements by category of strategy, form of improvement (operational, physical, behavioral), and implementation timeframe (funds needed by 2015 or 2030).
- Mr. Vidal describes the list as a quiver of arrows rather than a silver bullet.
- Public Works is not only determining the revenue shortfall for these improvements, but is analyzing the pieces Denver should fund and the pieces that others (RTD, CDOT, DRCOG, federal government, neighboring jurisdictions) should fund, noting that 59% of trips in Denver come from outside Denver.

Committee Questions & Comments

- Q: Johnson: Why is so much growth in congestion projected when we are approving so much mixed-use zoning?
- A: Regional growth influences congestion, and the urban growth boundary continues to expand. Studies show we live further and further from where we work.
- Q: Montero: How do we link the work we are doing with the Greenprint plan to build a green, sustainable community and this work?
- A: Greenprint Council was consulted, and its emphasis is on building more bike facilities. But that is not enough to handle the growth. It is a policy question: Out of available funds, how much goes into each category of strategies?
- Q: Linkhart: What is the public process on this work and for the final plan?
- A: This model is being presented to Council today. It will be presented to the STP Advisory Committee (City Council, INC, Planning Board, business owners/developers, RTD, CDOT, etc.) on April 12. If everyone approves of this approach, PW will prepare the same analysis for the other 11 sheds to this level by this fall.

It is important to ensure the model reflects community values, but it must be remembered that this is an integrated approach, balancing all of the needs.

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- Q: Linkhart: These materials make a good presentation of the needs in the West Side. But one-sixth of the total funds are going to one interchange.
- A: This is the list of needed projects. One of the criteria from the Infrastructure Priorities Task Force is project readiness – can the project be completed within 3 or 4 years of issuing debt? That will partially determine the priority order.
- Q: Brown: This is an innovative approach. Did we assume a traditional 8-5 workday?
- A: This analysis doesn't drill down to that level, and patterns and habits are changing. These changes will slightly modify the expected growth in trips, which will help, but will not get us to zero growth. Telecommuting is growing, but we still measure attendance rather than productivity. Numbers indicate that car and van pools are decreasing.
- Q: Brown: Isn't the list of Community Values (page 9) really a wish list?
- A: A common message from the conversations was that people want a multi-modal system.
- Q: Brown: Talk about the category of "transit support strategies".
- A: This is important, proactive work, recognizing that adding lanes is not the only solution. This goes to the type of environment we want. Land use & transportation planning is a critical part of what our environment will be. We must temper our expectations about "solving" congestion. We can decrease congestion by ruining the economy and making people move away, but is that what we really want?
- Q: Robb: Describe "NEPA-like". What is funding source for it:
- A: NEPA is the federal process that is very extensive, very disciplined, looks at all possible alternatives, and involves lots of public input. Projects on city streets are not eligible for federal funds, but there are situations where the city should follow the NEPA model. We always try to obtain federal or state funding if at all possible, but we need to have funds in the City budget for this smaller version of NEPA.
- Q: Robb: How do we balance signal timing to keep traffic flowing but also protect pedestrians?
- A: We must modernize our signals, for example, they should change by time of day. But we have to balance congestion or drivers will go onto the neighborhood streets to escape it.
- Q: MacKenzie: We make discreet land use decisions without consideration of traffic impacts. In one area, we approve a development, then another and another, all of which have a traffic impact but we don't say how to deal with it. How bad is so bad that a proposal should be denied because of traffic congestion, even though it is cumulative?
- A: STP is important on a macro scale. In real time, General Development Plans, now done prior to zoning, will help us discuss infrastructure impacts upfront. Planning gives the City the opportunity to guide development and distribute the costs.

In conclusion, Mr. Vidal said that STP will be the road map but policy will determine funding priorities and levels. The long-range capital budget can be tied back to this planning effort.

STP updates and schedule at www.keepdenvermoving.com

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S:committees/public works/summary