



Public Works Committee Summary

Oct. 6, 2009

10:30 a.m.

Conference Room 391

Committee Members Present: Johnson, Lehmann, Madison, Nevitt

Committee Members Absent: None

Other Council Present: Madison, Robb

Agenda:

1. *Living Streets Initiative-of interest to Greenprint and Blueprint Denver committees*
2. *Towing and booting fee increases*
3. *Smart Meter purchase*

1. Living Streets Initiative – of interest to Greenprint and Blueprint committees

Committee Action

The Committee had no official action, but it requested information on how various cities have funded Living Streets Initiative projects.

Summary of Discussion

The following individuals briefed the Committee on Denver's Living Streets Initiative (LSI).

- Gideon Berger, Community Planning & Development, Senior City Planner
- Crissy Fanganello, Public Works, Director of Policy & Planning
- Cindy Patton, Public Works Policy & Planning, Associate City Planner
- Brad Segal, President, Progressive Urban Management Associates
- Cassie Milestone, Downtown Denver Partnership, Urban Planning Manager
- Bill Sadler, Master's Degree candidate; Community Planning & Development Intern

Denver was one of six cities to be awarded a US Environmental Protection Agency Smart Growth technical assistance grant. In July 2008, a team of experts spent four days in Denver identifying improvements along the Cherry Creek corridor from University to the S. Platte River that would make the corridor more multi-model and sustainable. This exercise kicked off Denver's formal Living Streets Initiative (LSI).

Public engagement is an important part of LSI. The next phase of public engagement includes five public workshops, all held 6:00-8:00 pm:

- Northeast: Oct. 14 at Montbello Recreation Center;
- Southeast: Oct. 15 at Schlessman YMCA;
- Southwest: Oct. 20 at Athmar Recreation Center;
- Northwest: Oct. 21 at Highlands Masonic Center; and
- Central: Oct. 22 at Exdo Event Center (Walnut & 35th).

Some of the goals of the LSI are:

- Increase transportation choices;
- Create active pedestrian zones;
- Relate private development to the street; and
- Support transit where permitted by the existing right-of-way.

Different types of streets offer different opportunities. Not every street can have transit, and some streets are not appropriate for a great deal of pedestrian/bike activity. However, if every project in or adjacent a street were approached with these goals in mind, our streets would become more attractive and safer for pedestrians and bikes. While various departments have some regulations that touch on these concepts, the City should package them into a clear policy so that these goals are included in all decision-making.

Brad Segal, Progressive Urban Management Associates, discussed the economic benefits for cities and private property owners. Cities around the world have discovered the market opportunities created by thinking in terms of green concepts. Currently, the City is considering opportunities along Leetsdale, a vehicular corridor, and Colfax, a corridor developed along a street car line. These two streets present very different situations, but there is public support for LSI ideas along both corridors. Surveys found:

- Leetsdale respondents (1,100) support more pedestrian amenities (69%); support more investment (60%); and answered “yes” or “maybe” regarding support for creation of a special assessment to finance LSI improvements.
- Colfax respondents said “yes” to the idea of a special LSI assessment (65%).

It is important to look at how the corridor street relates to the adjacent neighborhoods. For example, an existing side street with street lights would be appropriate for addition of a bike lane, helping to create an activity node where it intersects the corridor street.

Cassie Milestone said that Council designated Downtown as a Pedestrian Priority Zone, per the Downtown Plan recommendation. The Partnership is working with UCD students who are conducting a pedestrian audit to determine obstacles to pedestrians and wheelchair users.

Bill Sadler said over 50 U.S. cities and 17 states have some form of Living Streets focus, although it is a fairly new idea. In 2006, Seattle voters passed a tax increase to fund street improvements based on LS concepts, guided by a 9-year work plan. New York City adopted a LS strategic plan in 2008 and has instituted Car Free Days and Car Free Times Square. One study indicates that as bike ridership increases, traffic casualties decrease.

In general, policies backed by actual legislation have proven to be stronger than where LS is accorded an executive order. Policies are best implemented at the city, rather than the state, level.

Gideon Berger said the environmental studies for the S. Federal Blvd. reconstruction project started staff thinking about the LSI. They saw opportunities to make S. Federal a more pedestrian and bike friendly corridor.

Crissy Fanganello said historically, cities focus on projects rather than systems as a whole. It is difficult to break out of each department silo. But that is starting to happen in Denver. The Strategic Transportation Plan (STP) is one example of the changed focus. The STP focuses on “person-trips” rather than the traditional transportation planning focus on “vehicle miles traveled”, representing a huge policy shift. The new zoning code puts more priority on accommodating people rather than vehicles, a policy shift from the current code. The American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds are being used for construction of Central Park Blvd., a project which includes LS concepts, as well as for bike lanes Citywide. All staff members working on the LSI raise questions and bring up design issues at every opportunity.

2. Towing and Immobilization release fees

Committee Action

The Committee approved filing a bill setting a cap on fees for towing illegally parked vehicles to lawful positions and for booting vehicles to allow the manager of Public Works to adjust fees to come closer to recouping vendor and internal costs.

Summary of Discussion

Dominic Vaiana, Public Works, explained the proposal.

	Current ordinance	Proposed cap	Initial new fee
Towing	\$50	\$150	\$100
Booting	\$50	\$125	\$100

Public Works is currently charged \$65 by the contract towing company and \$120 by the Sheriff. Approximately 1,912 vehicles are towed to legal locations annually. These so-call “short tows” include towing vehicles around the corner to accommodate street sweeping or snow removal, construction activity, or other conditions.

Immobilization costs include equipment, software, and personnel, including overtime for Sunday boot removal, a new service. Approximately 5,000 vehicles are booted annually.

3. SmartMeter purchase

Committee Action

The Committee approved filing a bill or bills for a 5-year lease-purchase and service agreement for 4,500 SmartMeter parking meter heads and 500 sensors from IPS for approximately the following amounts:

- Capital purchase: \$1,670,000
- Lease-purchase: \$1,170,000
- Service contract: \$ 377,000 annually

Summary of Discussion

Dominic Vaiana, Public Works, said the City issued a Request for Proposals in late 2007 for single-space parking meters. The heads will replace the existing Duncan meter heads, which are hopelessly outdated. SmartMeters accept all coins, tokens, and credit, debit and cash cards. The current Cash Keys will be replaced with SmartCards, which work the same way.

In the future, the meters could be programmed so parkers could pay by cell phone. The meter could call the parker when paid time is about to expire, and, if allowed per the parking time limit, additional time could be added by phone. No more need to run out to feed the meter.

The City installed 150 solar-powered SmartMeters around the Golden Triangle and Downtown area as a pilot program. The pilot was successful, indicating the meters can withstand Denver's climate, the customers were satisfied, parking revenue increased, and fewer citations were issued. The 7.2% decrease in citation revenue is off-set by an approximate 14% increase in meter revenue.

The meters can be programmed for up to five variable rates based on time of day. Programming is done remotely, and the text message on the meter can be changed to explain the current applicable rate. SmartMeters enable collection of data such as rate of turn-over, average length of stay, how long and when spaces are vacant, and other information useful for good parking infrastructure management. Potentially, drivers could receive text messages alerting them to vacant spaces.

The contracts are nearly completed. The Committee agreed that when the contracts are complete, the item can be presented at Mayor/Council without returning to Committee.