

City of Denver & CDOT  
I-70 Community Meeting  
Elyria / Swansea / Globeville Neighborhoods

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Thursday, March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2012  
[5:30 – 7:30 at Swansea Elementary School - 4650 Columbine Street]

Open House - Focus Group Members & City Staff

Steve Charbonneau welcomed everyone, thanked them for coming and introduced Councilwoman Montero, Councilwoman Ortega, Vice President of Board of Education, Arturo Jimenez and Representative Duran. Steve acknowledged that there are different views and opinions regarding I-70 and asked those present to listen, try to understand and be respectful as they expressed their opinions.

Charbonneau then introduced Reza Akhavan and Kirk Webb; saying they will provide a brief overview and background to the I-70 project.

Reza Akhavan, CDOT Region 6 Director spoke to the following.

- We began this project in 2003, along with several others. To date, Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) has invested \$19 million and 9 years of time conducting this study to determine how best to proceed with the necessary improvement of the existing I-70. There have been a large number of public outreach efforts and CDOT has worked transparently throughout this process.
- It is a challenging project with significant implications and will take all of us to figure out what is the best way to proceed.
- There is a long history which began before I was Director and before Don Hunt was executive director. The history can be seen and reviewed at <http://www.i-70east.com>. We started with 90 different alternatives.
- CDOT established a Preferred Alternative Collaborative Team (PACT) who represented the many different interests.<sup>1</sup> This PACT considered the different alignments for I-70.
- The alternative to re-route I-70 north to the present I-270 (realignment alternative) was taken off the option list, as was tunneling I-70 in its present location. Ultimately, the PACT came to full consensus on leaving I-70 where it currently is, and “shifting” approximately 150-200 feet either north or south.
- The City of Denver expressed a clear preference for the “northern shift” and the PACT was unable to reach unanimous consensus regarding either the northern or southern shift.
- In September, 2011; Executive Director Don Hunt and Denver Mayor Michael Hancock attended an Elyria/Swansea and Globeville meeting where there no consensus regarding how to proceed.
- The City of Denver and a number of neighbors asked for additional time to meet with the neighborhood and further discuss the northern option.
- This brings CDOT here this evening. We are committed to moving forward with this project. It is not responsible to let the highway continue to deteriorate and do nothing. The viaduct is aging; we have spent significant repair dollars. However, as time goes on, there is more congestion and the effects which come with an aging highway.

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<sup>1</sup> PACT representation can be seen at <http://www.i-70east.com/pact.html#pactmembers>

- But we don't want to move forward without the neighborhood(s). We are here this evening to listen, to answer questions and to determine how to proceed.

Kirk Webb, Project Manager for CDOT - Project manager for CDOT shared the following:

- The PACT process ended without a consensus.
- Yes, the realignment of I-70 to I-270 was taken off the table for a number of reasons. Residents were concerned about the need for 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue and its ability to handle traffic. Even if we took I-70 away, there is still the volume of traffic on 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue.
- We've also taken into consideration what we have heard. We've lessened the impact to the neighborhoods and will share that with you this evening. We're really here to answer questions and to listen to the neighborhood.

Charbonneau opened it up for questions of CDOT:

- Why aren't we doing more with mass transit? Europe has it, why don't we? There is no reason why don't have adequate mass transit. This would improve our health and require less need for this kind of highway.
  - CDOT - RTD partnered with us initially. They received money for their project and separated so they could go forward and not wait for CDOT. They had a funding source, we did not.
- I don't believe the concern for 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue is good enough reason to take the I-270 option off the table. There are other things which could have been done to manage 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue traffic.
- I don't think our neighborhoods were adequately represented on the PACT. How many neighbors from Elyria/Swansea and Globeville?
  - CDOT - There were three neighborhood representatives from Denver and one from Commerce City. The committee was representative of numerous neighborhoods and municipalities
- Why can't we just take I-70 out completely?
  - CDOT - That idea was taken out at 2006 because of the numerous impacts in other parts of the region.
- Take a look at the future, the highway has to go in before it collapses. How long do we want to sit around and discuss this? Let's deal with reality, it's going to go straight through, look at the opportunity for regrowth in these neighborhoods. Just look at what T-Rex and RTD did to reinvigorate those neighborhoods. Let's just get it done.
- I've lived here since 1952, pollution and in the air is everywhere, why don't they go south instead of going north? We live here comfortably. My house was built in 1952 with good neighbors and comfortable. My opinion is they should go south or some other way.
- I just moved in, I'm in military. CDOT has to do what they have to do. I see the highway coming apart. We should have made a decision about what we need from CDOT. But they shouldn't put up another monstrosity of a highway there. How are you going to do it?
  - CDOT - We wouldn't replace or rebuild the viaduct the same as we did 50 years ago. Highway design is different. Standards are different. It would be a much better highway.
- I'm frustrated with the plan, what kind of benefits does the neighborhood get? You are destroying the neighborhoods. Don't make a decision and then try to tell us what kind of benefits we will get. You are destroying our neighborhood.
- I moved here in 1998. I was on the economic development council. They were going to build a double deck high rise toll road. RTD got the fast tracks with four new stops. There was a 2003 cancer study with eight elevated cancer risks in this neighborhood and they blamed it on us sitting around smoking and bad genes. We asked for a birth defect study and they wouldn't do it. In the 2005 design there was a split level highway, require removing a few homes but the

school could stay and it would be quieter. We've asked CDOT to consider a tunnel. They haven't studied the tunnel option still 10 years later.

- Representative Duran. I'm here to listen to the community. I have not taken a position on this. I'm here to listen to all of you and what you think needs to happen.
- What were the methods of public outreach? How did you attempt to involve the residents?
  - CDOT – We have representatives on these kinds of projects where we do consensus building. We had community representatives for our Mountain Corridor process. In this instance we had people go door to door, with interpreters. We made 20,000 contacts and had significant conversations with over 2,000 individuals. We had block meetings, brought information, and had larger neighborhood that led to corridor-wide meetings in Denver, Commerce City and Aurora. We really have had an extensive communication process.
- You said you went out to the neighborhoods. I never had anyone knock on my door or seen a flyer.
- Now you're saying I-70 is going north, we are fighting for our community.
  - CDOT - Denver prefers the northern shift. That is why we are here tonight, to try and get consensus and to listen.
- I received an email saying the City of Denver would like to see the northern shift because of Purina pays 1 million in taxes and the houses they want to bulldoze doesn't add up to nearly that much money. So really, Denver wants to go north so Purina will stay. It's about the taxes and the money not the people. And I don't think the elementary school should be combined with the rec center. This just opens up the school to problems with pedophiles. And then there are the railroad tracks and the dangers there.
  - City of Denver – Let me clarify the Purina tax issue. The City of Denver does not receive that million dollars, Denver Public Schools receives the money. It goes to education. But it is more than money. There is the increased loss of jobs with the southern shift, connectivity issues, the loss of the ability to get a new school and rec center, improving 46<sup>th</sup> Ave., reducing current, ongoing impacts and many things we talked about in the focus groups.
- I'm a parent with children at this school. It would be a great benefit to move the school, this school isn't sufficient. It is old. We can't fit into the auditorium for rewards night. We really need a new school and here is how we can get one. We can broaden the horizons for our children. Look for the well-being for our kids, don't just think about yourself.

Charbonneau refocused the conversation on the next set of slides which illustrated a revised northern shift, with less impact to the neighborhood.

Carrie Wallis, working with CDOT, discussed the revised northern shift. In the initial northern shift we anticipated taking about 90 residential properties and about 10 commercial properties. It was a huge impact to the neighborhood. We've gone back, as the City of Denver asked, and re-worked the shift. Here is our current design. We pulled the ramps tighter into the highway in the Brighton area and worked in some other design ways. We were able to reduce the number of residential properties to 47. That is a significant reduction in impact to the neighborhood. We were also able to reduce the impact to the commercial properties. We believe we'll only impact 4-6 with this revised shift. We believe this is a great improvement. There are approximately 68 residential properties that have the potential to be impacted on the south side. We have also studied a revision for the southern shift, but the overall savings isn't as significant as the northern.

Charbonneau opened it up for comments and questions.

- I certainly respect the hard work of CDOT and city of Denver trying to address a very

complicated and difficult problem. I spent a significant part of my life in public office and now at a distance of nine years out of public office I look at it this way. I believe the mistake was made early on, when the decision was made to eliminate the alternatives (of underground, north to I-270, or other creative solutions) and only consider leaving relatively as it is. I know there were and still are many unanswered questions; like the stock show, the growth of river north, and Brighton Boulevard, to name a few. I think now, as a native, that neither the northern or southern shift, ripping it up and putting it back down are good or acceptable alternatives. We must go back to the starting point and look at better options, at getting the highway out of our City. Every city in the country, like Buffalo, Cleveland and so many others are ripping down their elevated highways and building better. Can we put a stop to this? Can we make it better?

Charbonneau moved to discussing the focus groups. The current process conducted by Denver started in September when we had the neighborhood meeting. There was not consensus. We were approached by neighbors saying, "Can we have a bit more time to consider the alternatives, to understand this better before a final decision is made." We met in November and formed five focus groups; business, school/rec center, mitigation, communication and housing. These focus groups met in December, January and February. They were attended by over 90 residents of the neighborhoods and came back with a number of recommendations. In answer to the question; "Is there an opportunity, a way to get comfortable with the northern shift," the neighbors came up with a number of expectations they would need from the City and CDOT. In February all five groups met to refine and agree upon the list<sup>2</sup>.

Karen Good, City of Denver Public Works I-70 Extended Neighborhood Outreach project manager walked the group through PowerPoint slides identifying the focus group's individual points and answering questions as they were asked. [Here is the slide content.]

Regarding Housing:

1. No net loss of housing to the neighborhoods. [The number of housing units which are taken as a result of I-70 construction or mitigation should be replaced in the neighborhood in the form of single or multi-family housing units.]
2. Housing improvements to mitigate the proximity of I-70 will be available to home owners within close proximity to the new I-70 viaduct. [These improvements may come in the form of landscaping, improved and insulated windows, etc.]
3. CDOT should acquire additional property to ensure an adequate buffer for the neighborhood. [In several of our focus groups community members stated that taking a bit more additional land for a buffer is preferable to leaving homes and highway in close proximity.]

Regarding Swansea Elementary School:

1. Denver Public School will guarantee an elementary school will remain in the Swansea neighborhood. (Note DPS has already provided this)
2. CDOT will fund the building of a new school.
3. The desire of the community is for the new school to remain within walking distance of the present school. [The most probable site is the current Swansea Recreational Center site which will need to be rebuilt along with the school.]
4. The new school will be built to current DPS building standards. [This will resolve many of the physical structure concerns with the present school.]
5. The new school will be completed before any highway construction impacts the existing school.
6. A roadway would be built over or under the railroad at 47<sup>th</sup> or 48<sup>th</sup> eliminating the track crossing at 47<sup>th</sup> & York.
7. Specific consideration will be given to providing barrier walls and buffers so the new school site will not be exposed to dangerous railroad traffic in the case of accident.

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<sup>2</sup> The list of goals or expectations, all agreed upon by the City and CDOT can be found at [http://denvergov.org/Portals/736/documents/Combined%20Focus%20Group%20Summary\\_2-9-12.pdf](http://denvergov.org/Portals/736/documents/Combined%20Focus%20Group%20Summary_2-9-12.pdf). They would of course have to be written into the Record of Decision, if this projects moves forward to ensure their accomplishment.

8. A recreational center may be built in conjunction with the school, enabling shared resources. If this is considered, a number of concerns must be addressed; such as safety for the children, affordability for membership, etc.

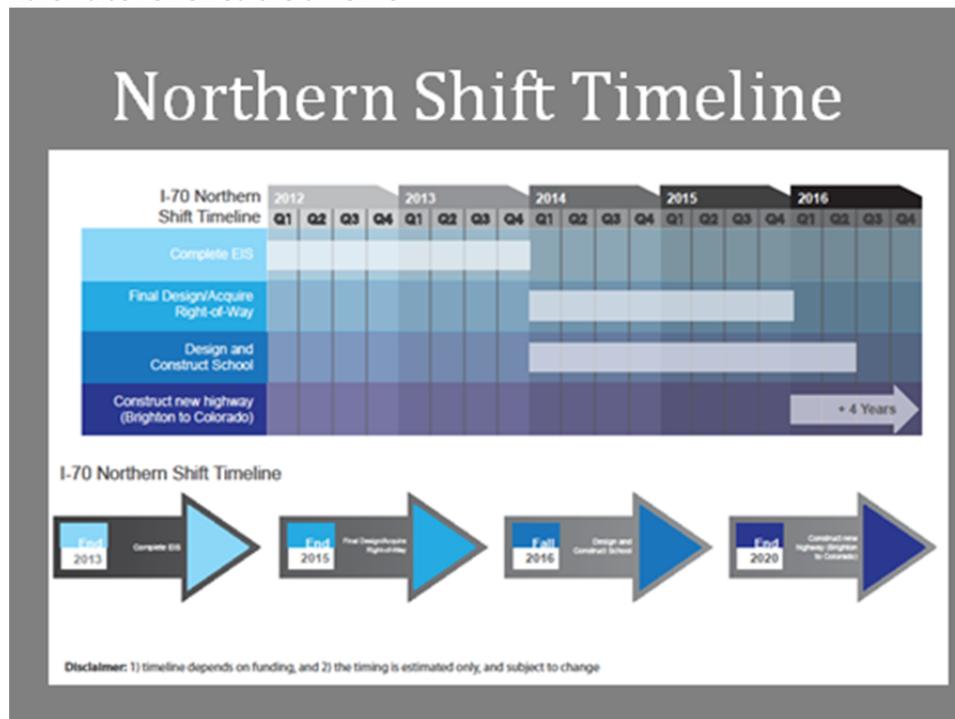
Regarding Mitigation:

1. Identify basic mitigation measures for the neighborhood, both present and potential opportunities. Set aside a “neighborhood mitigation fund” to address neighborhood needs, beginning when specific plans are in place for the northern shift of I-70. Neighborhood needs initially discussed include; curbs, gutters, sidewalks, paving of roads and alleys, improved lighting, reducing impact of railroad noise, improvement of Brighton Boulevard north of I-70, and connections to the river.
2. Design of I-70 and 46<sup>th</sup> under the highway will take into consideration best practices of design, visual and environmental protection for the neighborhood. Initial discussion included; opening the area up to natural light and air, regular maintenance, auto, bike and pedestrian friendly, and alternative uses for excess areas taken during acquisition.
3. Purina will significantly reduce odors. (They have committed to reducing them by 90% or higher.)
4. CDOT will ensure that its contractors follow practices that will reduce impacts of construction effects such as noise, dust and vibration to the neighborhoods.
5. CDOT and its contractors will make every attempt to employ and contract with local businesses and individuals in the reconstruction of I-70.

Regarding Business:

1. No net loss of local businesses as a result of I-70’s northern shift.
2. Ensure highway construction does not place unreasonable burden on existing businesses.
3. Office of Economic Development (OED) and Elyria/Swansea/Globeville neighborhoods develop a specific plan for bringing business<sup>1</sup> into the area.
4. (OED) establish a workforce development presence in the area.
5. Create a business mitigation fund. Ideas for this fund include; identifying possible sites for environmental clean-up and conversion, industrial and Retail Plan, Economic Profile Study, Neighborhood(s) Business Plan, Business Marketing Plan, and implementation of these plans; incentive for “walk-to-work” business proximity, and “Plug and Play” properties for businesses relocating to this area (plug and play means property that is clean, properly sized, easily developed and close to necessary infrastructure).
6. CDOT may consider giving remnant properties, after highway building, to the City for specific uses.

Karen also reviewed the timeline –



Charbonneau opened it up for comments and questions:

- I care about Denver. CDOT, this design idea is not good. You have access to massive amounts of federal funding. You can do better. Shame on Denver. We deserve a new school, regardless of the highway. Why isn't DPS addressing this need? We deserve a new rec center. Why is it attached to acceptance of the highway intrusion? Why doesn't the City take care of these neighborhoods like they should! Look at this room. It is easy to pack a room of neighbors' downtown, but not in this neighborhood. These people care, they are anxious about this decision. They are here! You'd better find a better solution. You have the federal dollars – make this right!
- I have kids that are going to come to this school, what about the people who have houses around this area, they have invested a lot of money in their properties. I don't want to live under a highway.
- The railroad over there, the tank cars on the spur north of York Avenue are mostly empty diesel cars. There aren't tankers sitting there which contain with toxic materials. My son works for the railroad. He asked the yardmaster; anything containing toxic materials has to be stored in the yard, and not left along the track.
- If DPS is aware that there are hazardous trains, why would they want to build the school nearby? Is this really where you want your children there? Don't get too excited about accepting a new school in the wrong place.
- There has been a lot of talk about housing and putting people in houses they can't afford, or them not being able to find a place. I sat on the PACT. CDOT has very specific requirements to follow when relocating people.
  - Kirk (CDOT) briefly explained that there is a very specific legal process<sup>3</sup> which must be followed when relocating anyone. The process is transparent, we'll pay for you to get your own appraisal, we'll negotiate a fair market value price, we'll pay to help relocate you and if you don't own your property and rent, we'll pay to help relocate you.
- We need a new school, no question about it. That's the school board's business not the CDOT's business. Rec center is Denver business, not the highway. You say you've spent 20 million so far, think about what kind of school could have been built with that. The neighborhood is getting pimped out for a bunch of promises they should have had anyway. Purina is violating the law. National Western Stock Show we are going to end up paying for anyway. Get a committee together and get us a new school. I never got a notice of these meetings. I understand that in your mind these neighborhoods don't measure up, tax money vs. \$1 million from Purina. Don't pimp off the neighborhood with a highway. We need the school and rec center and to be improved but those should be done without a highway.
- City wants the north side. We are your constituents. We don't want it to go north.
- All the pollution impacts us; we have a ton of crap that falls on us. We need a master plan. Better transportation, loop bus, a market, all the things we need interplay with each other. Pieces and parts don't fit our needs, we need a big picture.
- There seems to be to be a remarkable lack of planning for this project, specifically with respect to regional planning. This highway has been planned by highway engineers. We need to step back and require a more complete look at the problem and solutions. "Kirk, is opening the process back up to pursue more complete options a possibility?" Why wouldn't the City look at all the best options? Please open these options back up so they can see what they were and what is being reviewed. Is this highway in this configuration really right for the city?

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<sup>3</sup> CDOT has made brochures available to the Housing focus group members. They will make additional materials available at specific locations, or you can go online at <http://denvergov.org/Portals/736/documents/Res%20Relo-Eng.pdf> for English, or <http://denvergov.org/Portals/736/documents/Res%20Relo-Span.pdf> for Spanish.

- Kirk (CDOT) - We are doing a review of the decisions made in the past, not to make different decisions, but because our executive director asked us to review past decisions to make sure we made the right decisions, in anticipation of making the right decisions for the future.
- Can a decision be tied to a regional or master plan?
- I think that is a great thing to do, I've lived in the area for 20 years. There are people here that don't live here and really, you don't care. People will lose things and other people will gain things. I think it will be a great thing for my kids. Sure, we don't want to lose our homes. But this will be a great thing for our neighborhood. It's good for us!
- I came here to build a city. I don't know about a master plan. But we have to build our city. We have to agree to the northern shift. We're going to have a light rail all the way to Longmont. I want the stock show to stay. I have a lot of signatures that support the northern shift and I'm presenting them to CDOT. We want a plan but we got to build a City. Build a river walk and make this a better place, make a frontier city out of it. Let's get this show on the road.

Reza Akhavan (CDOT) then spoke. We are trying to look at this globally. There are 64 governmental entities involved at DRCOG. They get together and put together a Metro Vision. They work on land development, etc. They try to create a vision, but we only get so much money. So you take the vision and then make it fiscally reasonable. We began working on a number of projects about ten years ago. Of those projects, US 36 is on its way. Look at I-25 around Santa Fe and the work being done there. We could continue to have arguments, but we have an infrastructure that is aging and we owe it to people to make a decision.

I want this to be collaborative effort. We don't make this extensive effort on all our projects. We are committed to transparency and openness. The EIS is a public disclosure process. We are going to make sure you stay engaged in what we do and we do care. That's why it's taking us so long; we want to take in all the input. But time is running out, money is not abundant. We lost the ability to use \$200 million of Federal money for this project. We're going to identify a preferred alternative. We are losing windows of opportunities for money for this project. We do care and we have slowed down to show we care.

Comments and questions:

- I'm just saying we should have a regional idea. I'm a realist. I know it's about money, it's all money but ten lanes are a lot of lanes.
- We are coming up to the next step. RTD and I-70 split up. RTD got their EIS and money. What are you going to do about this decision? How do we ensure the best outreach for our neighborhoods? This project isn't over. How can we continue to be involved? How do we step it up? What are the next steps to the outreach efforts?
  - Karen (Denver Public Works) This is the last meeting for the extended outreach conducted by the City of Denver. CDOT will have additional outreach as the process moves forward. The next step is for a decision to be made.
- I'm a resident of Swansea; there are always people here from City, from the School. But we need more representation for ourselves. I think this man (Tom) should represent us.
- Regarding the mitigation- promises were made for reducing pollution, but what is the measurement and what is the fine imposed if the promise isn't met?
  - Karen (Denver Public Works) CDOT and their relocation process address the housing concerns. Purina has done air quality tests and they have shared that information. They will continue to do air quality studies and meet their commitment. Purina has committed to reduce the odors by 90%. Air pollution is a regional and state enforced issue. There is no way for the City to enforce the commitment Purina has made, there

are no fines set into the City's agreement with Purina, just a commitment for Purina to address the odor issue.

- I'm not from this area but I think economic consideration regarding the housing market and relocation is important. I don't know where these people are going to live if you give them fair market value. We are adding to homelessness and increased poverty. Everyone should be concerned.
  - Kirk (CDOT) - We don't put people in homes they can't afford. We help them find decent, safe and sound housing. No larger mortgage than they can afford. We will make up the difference if there aren't any houses available with a lower mortgage.
- What about construction pollution?
  - Kirk (CDOT) – we have ongoing, real time air quality monitoring during construction, as we did on the TREX project.
- Just to clarify, there will still be a grade crossing at 47<sup>th</sup> and York. That train will keep blowing its whistle no matter what. The design they came up with will fall on its face. Would you send your children eight hours a day for the school year to the busiest railroad corridor in the state?
- I commend you for the outreach that was done for this meeting. Kirk you have a hard job, I don't envy your position. Karen, you made a statement tonight that the community needs to be involved in the next step. Thank you for that. The site for the school, rec center, needs a community voice. I'm hoping that people want to convene for these conversations. We need to make sure people are held accountable to the conversations we are having. It's about our children's futures. So if the location is the biggest issue for the school, than that's what we need to talk about.

Charbonneau thanked everyone for coming.

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<sup>1</sup> It was requested that the neighborhood be involved in identifying what businesses were most needed within these specific neighborhoods; i.e. grocery store, etc.