DENVER – Mayor Michael B. Hancock’s State of the City Address as prepared:

July 15, 2013
Forney Museum of Transportation

Good morning, Denver. Good morning neighbors and families. Good morning business owners and everyone who works to make this the best city in America!

Governor Hickenlooper, Mayors Webb and Vidal, thank you for joining us here today. Denver has been blessed with such bold leaders, and I want to thank you for your constant support and guidance.

To City Council, City Auditor Gallagher, Clerk and Recorder Johnson, District Attorney Morrissey and to all the Mayors and other elected officials from around the region, thank you for your partnership and presence this morning.

We also have with us Pam Ryan, wife of a true Denver champion and our dear friend Paul Ryan, who passed just a few short months ago. Pam, we love you and we will never forget our golf-obsessed, Ralph Carr quoting, three-legged dog loving, phenomenal friend Paul.

Pam joins my family here this morning. I simply couldn’t do this job without their love and support, and I thank all of you.

My lovely wife, Mary Louise, regrets that she could not join us today. Her commitment to the arts is second to none, and she has taken her talents to Florida for a once-in-a-lifetime performance.

I also extend my gratitude to the Forney Museum for hosting us today. Their exhibits pay tribute to the vehicles of our progress, to the connections we have made to one another, and to the rest of the world.

I look around this museum and am reminded of the 19th-century Denverites who pitched in to link our fledgling city to the transcontinental railroad that was passing us by. We had the courage then, the “Denver Spirit,” to invest in ourselves and connect our city with a developing nation.

From horse-drawn carriages to 21st century jet liners, Denver has grown from an isolated mining town to an up-and-coming metropolis. We are a smart, cutting-edge city linked by walking trails, bike paths,
highways, light rail, and nonstop flights that create bridges – connections – that open up a world of opportunities for our children, neighbors and businesses.

Our challenge today is to take bold new steps to connect the city with the world, to connect Denver with its future.

As your Mayor, I stand here today proud of the state of our city. Denver is strong – poised to get stronger – and primed to compete in the global marketplace.

Construction and development are driving our economy forward, positioning Denver as the ideal place to start a business, build a career and raise a family.

Over the past year, Denver’s economy added 15,000 jobs and 1,000 new businesses. Joblessness has dropped two points since 2011 and our housing market is one of the strongest in the nation. On top of that, we’ve created a solid foundation for our city by growing our reserves and maintaining our AAA bond rating.

We will also fulfill our promise to be more transparent. In just a few short days, we will unveil an online tool that will show exactly how the city is spending your money. Through “Transparent Denver,” residents will have real-time access to view the city’s checkbook and so much more.

Last year, I pledged to eliminate the city’s budget deficit, a gap that forced us to slash $500 million in services during the recession.

Thanks to your amazing support of Measure 2A last November, we wiped out our deficit and began restoring essential services such as street paving, park maintenance, library hours and public safety. I want to thank Denver voters for their investment in our great city.

We must also recognize our city employees. By empowering them to innovate through Peak Performance, in just the first six months of this year, they have identified an additional $7 million in savings. We are delivering the highest quality services at the lowest possible cost.

Curt Pesicka, in the Office of Economic Development, embodies this innovative culture. Curt identified savings of more than $730,000 by streamlining processes and putting customers first.

Some 1,500 city employees have gone through training to identify efficiencies and eliminate waste. All our city employees deserve praise for their efforts to make this city great. Thank you!

I also want to thank members of the Good Government Committee, who have spent the past several months poring over the city’s charter and operations to recommend how we create a more nimble, 21st century city government.

President Woodrow Wilson once said, “We are citizens of the world. The tragedy of our times is that we do not know this.”

Denver, we are a global city. Starting tomorrow, we will welcome visitors from across the hemisphere for our second Biennial of the Americas, and today we are honored to welcome to this address nine dignitaries from Kenya.

For nearly 30 years, we worked to secure the new nonstop flight to Tokyo. Now, we are connecting the Rocky Mountain West to the economic opportunities of the Asian continent.
We’ve made great strides expanding international flights at DIA over the past two years by securing five new non-stop connections and three new airlines for tourism and commerce. But we know we must do more in order to compete in the global economy.

I am pleased to announce today a new initiative that will strengthen the way we support international business, foreign visitors and immigrant residents. This new endeavor, the International Welcome Center, will open the city’s arms and establish Denver as a global destination for commerce, trade and culture.

The Center, to be housed in the Office of Human Rights and Community Partnerships, will coordinate all departments’ efforts to help foreign entrepreneurs get local businesses off the ground; recruit skilled high-tech workers; strengthen ties with Denver’s Sister Cities and market Denver’s assets to boost tourism and economic development; and build bridges to Denver’s immigrant and refugee communities.

Over the past year, Denver has demonstrated that the value of inclusion is more than rhetoric. We threw open our doors to Denver’s GLBT community and have already issued more than 400 civil union licenses.

We strongly supported the new state law that provides students – no matter how they arrived here – with access to in-state tuition. I applaud our Governor John Hickenlooper, Speaker of the Colorado House of Representatives Mark Ferrandino and the State Legislature for standing up for all our residents.

And today, I challenge the U.S. House of Representatives to pass comprehensive immigration reform that will strengthen our economy and unite our families.

Denver, just as every resident matters, so does every neighborhood. We must better connect neighborhoods to resources and opportunities, particularly those that are underserved and overlooked. By strengthening our neighborhoods, we strengthen our city’s global connectivity.

Remember LoDo before there was a Coors Field or a Wynkoop Brewery? Remember Lo-Hi before the Millennium Bridge and the Confluence Park upgrades? That kind of bold, transformational change occurs when intentional public investment meets broad-based strategic partnerships.

Right here in Elyria, Swansea and Globeville, we will reconnect these historic neighborhoods to a better future.

With a coordinated push on six key projects we will vastly improve the health of the South Platte River; turn Brighton Boulevard into an inviting gateway to downtown; reconstruct I-70 in a way that reconnects these neighborhoods and businesses; deliver more accessibility with new commuter and light rail stations; implement neighborhood revitalization plans; and partner with the National Western Stock Show to create a year-round destination.

I want to thank the National Western Stock Show board, Chairman Ron Williams and CEO Paul Andrews for making a commitment to the Mile High City. We stand with you on this journey.

I also want to welcome Colorado State University, which has agreed to join us in honoring our agricultural heritage while catapulting it into a new, global age.

Thirty FasTracks stations across the region are strengthening our neighborhoods and providing access to jobs, healthcare, parks, culture and healthy foods.
With the opening of the West Rail Line, Denver’s Sun Valley neighborhood is ripe to receive significant investment – investment that will reconnect this area to the rest of the city and rejuvenate our most economically challenged neighborhood with new jobs, housing and riverfront projects.

Soon, FasTracks will connect us all to our international airport. This will light-up development along the 20-mile route, an area you might have heard me call the Corridor of Opportunity and aerotropolis.

I’m excited about the potential along this new line. I am even more excited about leveraging the biggest economic engine in the region to drive job creation and growth on a globally competitive scale.

Whatever you need in order to live a vibrant life should be a quick walk, bike, bus or rail ride away; this includes our international airport, jobs throughout the region and affordable housing.

I have the audacity to believe that anyone who wants to live in the city should not be forced out because of cost. Yet 25,000 families in Denver need more affordable options.

We want to give teachers the ability to live in the communities where they teach, officers the chance to live where they patrol.

Last year, the city helped deliver 500 more units of affordable housing. We also launched two programs to assist people in achieving home ownership. But there are still too many barriers and too few options.

Denver’s Inclusionary Housing Ordinance has failed. Its unbalanced requirement of developers to provide affordable units is plagued with loopholes and inconsistencies.

We have begun to overhaul this broken ordinance, in partnership with the Denver Housing Authority and City Council. I want to thank Denver City Councilwoman Robin Kniech for her leadership on this important project.

To sincerely address this housing gap, we need to build, rehab and preserve at least 600 units per year for the next five years. But we can’t do this alone. I am asking local nonprofits, private sector developers and the financial community to help the city deliver on the goal of three by five: Three thousand workforce units in the next five years.

Through a public-private partnership already underway, we are delivering affordable rentals at Union Station in downtown. This is the kind of collaboration Denver needs to connect every corner of our city.

Downtown now supports more than one-fourth of all Denver jobs and is home to 17,000 residents. By 2015, more than $1 billion in projects will open in this area, including Union Station.

Multimodal transportation, diverse housing options and increased retail are set to draw additional jobs, businesses and visitors to our city core. To keep up the momentum, I have proposed significant investments to open additional access with two-way streets; improve parking accessibility; refurbish the now 30-year-old 16th Street Mall; and deliver a new school and grocery store for families.

Sadly, not every Denver family has a place to call home, and that is simply unacceptable.

Last year, when City Council passed the unauthorized camping ordinance, I signed it into law because we cannot as a civilized society – as a global city – allow men, women and children to sleep on the streets.
Since last year, my team has been working hard to increase services for the homeless. Using Recreation Centers and other city buildings, we provided shelter for an average of 225 men and women on cold winter nights. We also connected 1,200 homeless individuals and families to service providers and resources.

And we are diligently working toward realizing a 24-hour Rest and Resource station offering basic services. In addition, we have proposed an indoor/outdoor courtyard area to also serve the homeless.

I want to thank Councilman Albus Brooks, who has partnered with us to deliver on these projects. We are taking critical steps forward in our plan to stem chronic homelessness and to address the changing face of homelessness that includes children, families and veterans.

Thank you to all our public and private partners who have stood with us as part of Denver's Road Home since 2004. But we can do more. We have to do more.

I call on our entire community, including our regional neighbors, to join us as we work to ensure that every man, woman and child has an alternative to living on the streets.

Denver, we have always faced our challenges head on. In the next 12 months, we will implement Amendment 64. Our challenge is to be more thoughtful than we were with Medical Marijuana.

With planning, preparation and the proper resources to regulate and enforce this new law, we will protect Denver’s children and families and ensure the integrity of our neighborhoods. That is priority No. 1.

We all want to live in a city that encourages community and brings people together. A place that’s connected and sustainable. I’m proud that we are striping our 100th mile of bike lanes this year, we’ve added 31 new B-cycle stations; and we are set to expand Denver’s urban park system by nearly 300 acres within the next five years.

For the first time since 1989, we are working to strengthen Denver’s creative community, which is very much a part of our global competitiveness.

The business of arts, culture and creativity helps define our city. It contributes $1.8 billion annually to our economy. Our commitments to arts and culture will be enhanced by a strategic plan, called Imagine 2020, to be released next year.

Denver’s culture and our heritage should be celebrated. We honor ourselves and our Denver Spirit by remembering those who made our today and our global tomorrow possible.

This year, we’re designating August 3rd-11th as Denver Days. I encourage every Denver resident to get out there to host a block party, remove graffiti, clean our parks and green spaces, or start a neighborhood watch group.

Police Chief White likes to say, “There are 650,000 pairs of eyes and ears to help prevent crime and keep the residents of this great city safe.” Today, violent crime is down 13 percent, and we’re one of the safest feeling cities in the nation.

I salute the chief and manager of safety for recognizing the value of community partnerships as we transform the culture of the police department.
We are refocusing the police force on crime prevention, not just crime fighting. We restructured the department to get more officers out on patrol. We redrew districts to improve response times. We worked with the civil service commission to streamline our discipline process that is timely and fair for all parties. And again, thanks to our voters, for the first time in five years, we will hire 110 new officers.

Denver’s fire department will also be hiring from the most diverse class in its history, and the Sheriff’s Department has implemented programs that are helping Denver inmates transition from jail to stable housing and jobs upon their release.

Regrettably, these steps alone will not stop crime or violence. Five days from now, we will mark the first anniversary of one of the most heinous acts of violence in our nation’s history. We remember the victims of the Aurora theater shootings, embrace their families and recommit to addressing the disconnectedness so many young people feel today.

From Aurora to the wildfires across the state, I cannot express enough the profound thanks we owe our first responders. They selflessly put their lives on the line to keep us all safe. I ask that all of our police officers, sheriffs, firefighters and first responders please stand up and be recognized. Thank you!

Our kids need healthy, safe and engaging activities when school is out. Today more than 90,000 Denver children have free access to recreation centers, pools and libraries with the MY Denver Card.

This is unprecedented support for Denver’s kids. As of yesterday, nearly 26,000 children have signed up for the MY Denver Care in just three short months.

We said we would invest in our children, and that is exactly what we’re doing. From cradle to career, we are there for our kids. Just this past year we enrolled 5,400 preschoolers in the Denver Preschool Program; served 108,000 healthy snacks and meals; placed 2.3 million books and educational materials in the hands of students; registered 300 Denver 3rd- through 5th-graders in a free summer STEM academy; and connected 2,500 Denver youth with jobs.

Unfortunately, all our children do not enter school ready to learn. So next month we will launch, as part of the Denver Education Compact, "Countdown to Kindergarten," with the goal of ensuring that every child gets a smart start.

When we talk about creating a global city – a livable and connected city – we are really talking about the future we want to leave for our children. With your renewed commitment to our children, we are coming together to serve our kids like never before.

I want to recognize some of those partners here today: Mi Casa Resource Center, CH2M Hill, Boys and Girls Club, Revolution Foods, Denver Public Schools, and, of course, our wonderful Parks and Recreation and Library staff.

In addition to preparing our future workforce, we must give our current workforce the skills to meet the demands of a globally connected economy.

Earlier this year, a software startup that launched with 50 employees and $10 million in venture capital chose Denver because of our talent pool and our culture of innovation and productivity. Convercent – software company in the Golden Triangle – expects to double its workforce in the coming year, and they are just one of many such companies thriving here in Denver with the city’s support.

There remains, however, a job-skills gap in high-growth industries. To address this, we are helping to train our workforce to fill those jobs.
As Denver continues to embrace the startup culture, this past year we hosted our first and very successful Denver Start-up Week and recently we launched the 2nd annual JumpStart Biz Plan competition.

Soon, the new U.S. Patent and Trademark Office will open in downtown, bringing with it hundreds of jobs and another $440 million in global and domestic opportunities.

And today, I am proud to announce, in conjunction with the Downtown Denver Partnership and the Colorado Technology Association, that we will be opening a new center for entrepreneurism and technology. This center is an investment in the ideas economy and will support emerging high-growth companies with advisers, short-term leasing, and connections to create jobs and inspire innovation.

With 90 percent of Denver’s companies employing fewer than 25 people, we’re working hard to support small businesses and entrepreneurs.

In the past two years, Denver has created connections to funding with the Denver Capital Matrix; developed a fair contracting process and launched a mentoring program for minority- and women-owned businesses; and thanks again to Denver voters, we doubled the Business Incentive Fund and provided Denver businesses a new tax credit.

Such investments are helping to grow companies like Internet firm Sympoz, which will double its staff, again, to nearly 300 employees. We have Patrick Quinlan and Philip Winterburn from Convercent and Karyn Miller and John Levisay from Sympoz here with us today. Please join me in thanking them for helping to grow our economy.

Denver, this is our city. The place we call home.

I played ball at Skyland Park, survived the Blizzard of ’82, cheered from the South Stands, and, yes, even led the cheers for the Broncos back in the day.

I remember when they called Denver a Cow Town, when Downtown became a Ghost Town at 5 p.m. When the newspaper published weekly catalogs of foreclosures caused by the oil bust, by broken dreams and joblessness.

Take a look around you. Our city has come so far, and our future is as bright as our determination is strong.

In the words of the great Nelson Mandela, “There is no passion to be found playing small. In settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living.”

Together, we have connected ourselves to a world full of possibilities and opportunities for our children, our neighborhoods, our businesses and our city. We have committed to Denver’s prosperity, to Denver’s promise.

The future begins now.

Thank you all for being here. God bless you. And God bless the City and County of Denver.

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