

Denver Moves: Transit (Phase 2) Task Force

Meeting #1 – Summary

April 15, 2021 | 5:30p-7:30p

Welcome, Opening Remarks, and Introductions

- Following a brief welcome from moderator Kaylie Showers (GBSM), Transit Director David Krutsinger (DOTI) provided opening remarks to kick off the meeting. Key points from opening remarks included:
 - Phase 2 of the Transit Plan aims to support the City in achieving its transit goals and for increased coordination efforts throughout the City
 - In January 2021, Denver’s Mayor Michael Hancock announced the creation of the Transit Division and David is the first person to hold the Director position of the Division
 - 189,000 people expected to move to Denver by 2040 and the City needs to accommodate the transit needs of the growing population
 - The City is working with RTD and partners to address major transit investments
 - In 2016 the Transit Plan was created to develop near and long-term transit vision
 - Phase 1 wrapped up in 2019 and major trends from community engagement during the first phase was:
 - Residents, visitors, and commuters want high-quality transit solutions, reliability, frequency, improved access and connections, stops to be safer and more comfortable, more accessible and more equitable
 - Today, 73% of Denver commuters drive alone and 6% of commuters use transit to get to their jobs
 - Denver has a goal to get to 15% of commuters on transit by 2030
 - Overall goal of the transit plan is to create a scenario where transit is the first choice for all types of types of travel to create economic, health, environmental and accessibility benefits to Denver residents and visitors
- After opening remarks, the project team introduced themselves. Transit and Corridors Transit Supervisor and City Project Manager for Phase 2 Ryan Billings (DOTI), Consultant Team Project Manager Tom Brennan (Nelson\Nygaard), and Equity Advisor Naomi Doerner (Nelson\Nygaard). Equity Advisor Dr. Nita Mosby Tyler (The Equity Project) was consulted in the creation of the content of the equity presentation but was unable to attend the kick-off meeting
- Task force members then introduced themselves and were asked to provide one word that they felt best described transit in Denver today (the list of attendees is available at the end of this summary). Their responses included the following:
 - Troubled
 - Injured



- Opportunities
- Volatile
- Unpredictable
- In Transition
- Misunderstood
- Hopeful
- Evolving
- Underfunded (tremendously!)

Overview on Equity and Equitable Investments in Transit

- Naomi presented on equitable investment opportunities in transit to provide the group with the same working knowledge and definitions. Naomi ran through the continuum of work in the spheres of Diversity, Inclusion, Equality, and Equity, and social movements since the Civil Rights Movement
- The following definitions were presented to the group:

Diversity

"Representation of varied identities and differences (race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, tribe, caste, socio-economic status, thinking and communication styles, etc.)." - PolicyLink

Inclusion

"Act or state of including or of being included within a group or structure. More than simply diversity and numerical representation, inclusion involves authentic and empowered participation and a true sense of belonging." - Annie E Casey Foundation

Equity

"Just and fair inclusion into a society in which all, focusing on those who have been harmed and are experiencing the greatest barriers, can participate, prosper, and reach their fullest potential." - PolicyLink

Justice

"Systematic and fair treatment of all people, specifically historically marginalized and oppressed communities. It is the result of self-determination and empowerment of said communities. Racial and social justice goes beyond "anti-racism" and "anti-discrimination. It is not just the absence of discrimination and inequities, but also the presence of deliberate systems and processes that support power shift outcomes such as achievement and the ability to thrive." - Hollins and Govan: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Race

"Socially and politically constructed category based on pseudo science "eugenics" which was assigned upon physical characteristics, such as skin color or hair type. Perceptions of race influence our beliefs, stereotypes, economic opportunities, and everyday experiences." - Hollins and Govan: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

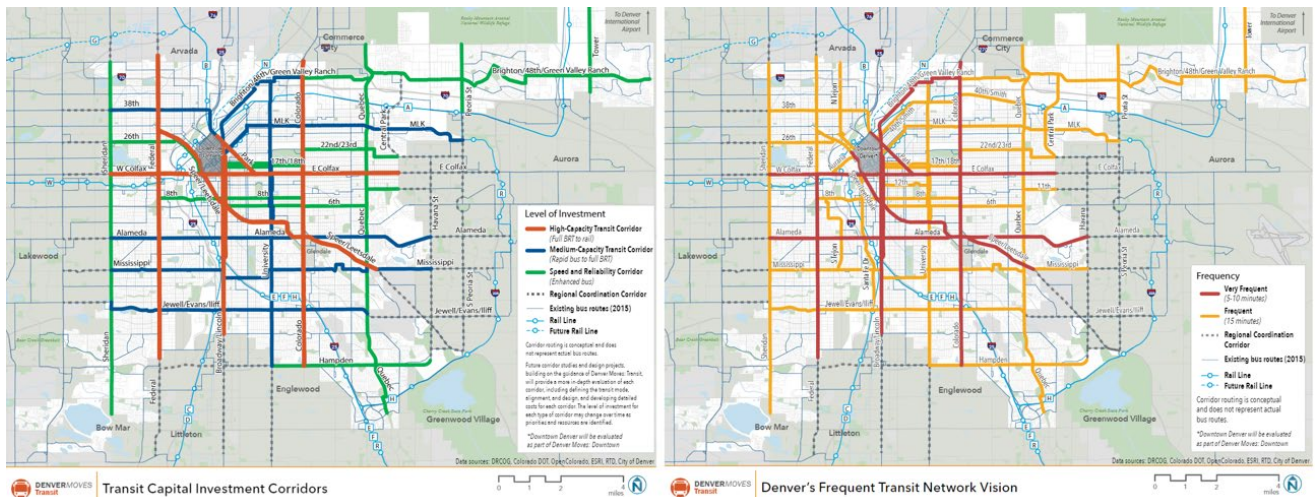
Racism

"The marginalization and oppression of people of color based on a socially constructed racial hierarchy that privileges white people. Racism occurs at the individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural levels, resulting in systemic racism." - Hollins and Govan: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- Naomi then applied these definitions to a racial equity framework to establish the approach that the task force will take to address equitable investments as the City develops the implementation plan, communicates to the community, and remains accountable to the equity goals
- Race and social equity are guiding the approach of the transit plan and new investments in transit
- Naomi and Tom then provided historical context on transit in Denver (from 1886-Today) and how racism and discrimination have led to disparities in accessibility and mobility in Denver. Demographic maps and Transit access maps were shown to highlight limited access for BIPOC and lower-income neighborhoods in Denver. The Denver Moves: Transit Vision map was also presented. The charge is to move the process forward in a way that's equitable, fundable, and provides access to those in Denver who have the greatest need
 - During the presentation on equity and a 10-minute open period/break, task force members offered some comments in the chat and openly to the group which included:
 - Transit being an inherently inclusive and diverse option
 - Disinvestment in core/local systems due to transit dependent riders presumed to have no choice and bus stops lacking investment, thought, or care on the part of transit agencies and others
 - RTD Accountability Committee shifting focus to ridership as a key metric
 - The fact that 144K riders have continued riding throughout the pandemic, including 15/15L maintaining high ridership (14-15K riders per day) throughout the pandemic
 - The need to revisit different service levels/recommendations

Overview on Project

- Tom and Ryan provided an overview on Denver Moves: Transit, how the transit plan fits into the comprehensive planning of Denver, Blueprint Denver, work coming out of Phase 1 of Denver Moves: Transit, including the creation of the Transit Division, and how the plan is moving into Phase 2 and setting up DOTI for important investments in key elements including:
 - Service, infrastructure, improvements, providing more frequent service, improved access, building a sense of place, capital investments, and service investments (i.e. bus priority or speed and reliability, bus stops)
 - Goals for transit that came out of Phase 1: Enhancing transit by making it more appealing, reliable and competitive, Simplifying by making it easier to use, Connecting by making improved inner-city, regional and neighborhood connections, Thriving by recognizing importance of improving community health through access, and remaining financially Sustainable
- Vision maps (below) were presented as aspirational to work off of throughout phase 2, including the Capital Investment Corridor Map and Frequent Transit Network Map



- Ryan provided more details on the work that's been done since 2016 when Denver Moves: Transit phase 1 launched, highlighting the five main segments of the transit program: capital investment corridors, speed and reliability (where City is placing most of its efforts, examples are 15th, 17th, Broadway/Lincoln), passenger amenity, transit service (RTD provides this service, City providing first and last mile micro-service such as in Montbello), transportation demand management (land use) and TDM ordinance that is working through council currently
- Phase 2 will wrap up in August 2021. Goal of working with the task force to ensure the preferred scenario is feasible, equitable, fundable, and addresses the community's need, in order to move forward with an implementation plan
- During the overview, task force members asked questions and offered information in the chat and their sentiments/questions included:
 - RTD has a transit advisory task force which looked at bus stop inventory from an accessibility perspective (TF member will send more information to project team, Ryan will follow up)
 - The desire to get an update on any of the near-term recommendations in DM:T such as Denver maintaining an inventory of bus stops & their features/quality, among others that have been achieved in the past two years
 - City responded that they completed an inventory of all 2850 stops, 57 points of data on each stop
 - Which box would "buying service" (increased frequency, free fares) go into?
 - City responded that buying service is in the transit service "box", both of those will be factors (frequency and free fares) involved in the Phase 2 evaluation (examining pros/cons of buying frequency or reducing fares)
 - Does "improved bus stops" mean just from the rider amenity perspective, or bulb outs for efficiency/not blocking traffic etc., or both/mix?
 - City responded that improved bus stops means getting riders out of the dirt, getting them a proper place to stand away the street, providing seating/shelter from both an amenity perspective and frequency of service



- Are you allowing for ADA standards at the new stops?
 - City responded that yes, the City is following ADA standards, and sidewalk issues in Denver as a whole are driving prioritization

Facilitated Open Discussion

- The task force was then asked for their feedback, specifically looking at Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, Results, and Environments, along with the opportunity to ask questions to the City and consultant team. The following sentiments and questions were discussed:
 - Fastest growing population is older adults, so should be a big focus of the planning
 - Women's Mayoral Advisory Commission involved in first iteration of Denver: Moves, focus on affordability for women and children and safety at bus stops, applaud for moving forward. Important to evolve mapping to continue focusing on where people are being pushed
 - Following up on that last point about sidewalks - will the funding needs identified include sidewalks and other first/last mile connections?
 - City responded that there are certainly some opportunities, but we'll also need to recognize there are other funding needs for transportation across the city (sidewalks represent a \$1B+ need)
 - Will the planning process include any discussion of equitable transit-oriented development (ETOD/TOD)?
 - City responded that development is not a part of the scope currently, opportunity for discussion as it relates to land use and TOD possibilities
 - Looking at refreshing TOD Strategic plan, kicking off later this year
 - ETOD is essential for addressing systemic injustices
 - Are digital information about buses arriving in real time part of this effort?
 - Typology for bus stops citywide, aspirational desire but also some guidance on when it makes sense to put real-time info at stops
 - Arrival information available on smart phone. Despite digital divide, many riders do have smart phones, so better education on how to do it might help unless/until technology investments for signage needed
 - Maybe use that advertising space at bus stops to get that message out
 - Frequency will help with the technology issues (don't need real-time arrival if it's so frequent)
 - How will this effort intersect with the Climate Taskforce's recommendations, which included free transit? (and echo comments on ETOD)
 - City responded that OCASRs Alana Miller liaison w/project, very involved; pros/cons of "buying" free service vs. increased service
 - 500lb gorilla is RTD (frequency, funding, etc.) - how do you see them as a partner in this effort?



- City responded that where we thought we were from a base standpoint is not where we are now due to pandemic; RTD has to be a partner for this to be successful
- How does RTD BRT strategic plan overlap with this effort?
 - Expectation: prioritize capital investments to get to shovel-ready
- Other Fastracks corridors include Central Rail, but don't see it on the DMT maps - is that a priority?
 - BRT corridors from RTD and CCD align really well, direction on CRE - bring it into Phase 2 and prioritize it along with other corridors
 - If this group wants to address equity and justice we could really make some dent if we would address that part of FastTracks - and please note that there is verbiage in Fastracks that specifically address BRT as an option.
- What will the impact of federal transportation investments be as this transit plan rolls out?
 - How exactly that impacts cities and transit agencies is unclear, but we're paying close attention; chatter at USDOT about scaling back what "shovel-ready" means to get more projects eligible
- Will this plan give Denver some immediate - maybe even pilot - recommendations for shifting service to some frequent corridors?
 - Opportunity for demonstration/proof of concept, DM:T estimated \$60m/yr (back of napkin) to implement the full FTN, but idea of demonstrating improvements on existing corridors can build the case for putting further \$\$ toward that
- Something RTD could contribute immediately towards equity is parking lot land that is not being used or developed in the short term towards safe outdoor space. That model is proving successful and we have a major needs to move people from sidewalks to more meaningful shelter.
- Big focus of federal bill is addressing past racial inequity, could we marry that need for projects like Broadway (which displaced a minority neighborhood in the 20s) to get additional Fed funding?
 - City responded that this is a really interesting idea and City will be looking into this
- Really important to align with RTDs efforts, first/last mile opportunities really important for South Denver

Next Steps

- Reaffirmed commitment to four meetings including three additional meetings over the next three-four months with the end of phase 2 concluding in August
- Project team will send out DoodlePoll to confirm date and time to get on regular cadence and avoid some conflicts that the task force noted during the kick off meeting

- Meeting materials, including a PDF of the presentation and a meeting summary will be shared with the members

Attendees

Task Force: Councilman (District 2) Kevin Flynn, Councilwoman At-Large Robin Kniech, Andrew Iltis (Downtown Denver Partnership), Sheryl Machado (Denver South TMA), Joel Noble (Chair – INC Transportation Committee), Kacie Warner (Athmar Park Active Living), Kate Williams (DRMAC, RTD Board of Directors – District A), Deya Zavala (Mile High Connects, RTD Accountability Committee), Brian Carroll (Mayor’s Bicycle Advisory Committee), Angie Rivera Malpiede (NE Transportation Connections, RTD Board of Directors – Chair, District C), Susan Maxfield (Denver Commission on Aging), April Hansen (Denver Women’s Commission), Stuart Anderson (Transportation Solutions), Jill Locantore (Denver Streets Partnership), and John Hayden (Mayor’s Pedestrian Advisory Committee)

Staff/Consultants: David Krutsinger, Ryan Billings, David Gaspers, Justin Begley, My La, Zack Gambetti-Mendez, Tom Brennan, Jonathan Mosteiro, and Kaylie Showers