I-70 East Corridor Environmental Impact Statement

Introduction
The I-70 East Corridor Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is a joint effort by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) in cooperation with the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), Regional Transportation District (RTD), and the City and County of Denver (Denver). The intent of the EIS is to identify multi-modal transportation improvements along the I-70 East Corridor including rapid transit service between downtown Denver and Denver International Airport (DIA).

The I-70 East Corridor includes I-70 between I-25 and Tower Road and a future rapid transit connection between downtown Denver and DIA. The project area covers established neighborhoods on the west end of the corridor and emerging residential and commercial areas on the east. The project area includes portions of Commerce City, Aurora, Adams County, and several Denver neighborhoods including Five Points, Lower Downtown (LoDo), Whittier, Cole, Clayton, Globeville, Elyria, Swansea, Northeast Park Hill, Stapleton (former Stapleton Airport), Montbello, Green Valley Ranch, Gateway, and DIA.

Corridor Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Denver</th>
<th>Corridor Neighborhoods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent African American</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>5.3 - 68.5^1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Latino</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>16.5 – 83^1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Persons in Poverty</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>3.9 – 31.5^1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent Owner Occupied</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>31.4 – 78.1^2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Single Parents w/Children</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>19.5 – 44.7^3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Annual Household Income</td>
<td>$55,129</td>
<td>$35,519 – $63,401^3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: Piton Foundation
1. Only two neighborhoods below Denver average
2. Only three neighborhoods below Denver average
3. Three neighborhoods above Denver average
4. Only one neighborhood above Denver average

Corridor History
In 1964, I-70 was constructed through the neighborhoods of Elyria and Swansea dividing the community and helping to establish a level of governmental distrust. The construction not only divided the community by placing an elevated bridge in the middle of the neighborhood, but there are stories of residents whose neighbors had eviction notices placed on their doors offering them much less than market value for their properties. Many of the houses that remain lie within feet of the bridge and rarely see sunlight because of their proximity.

In the early 1990s, RTD developed its first transit line in the corridor with a series of compromises in order to get it built. One of those compromises was to provide a single
track section through the Five Points neighborhood to help minimize the impact to local businesses. The single track operation continues today and serves as a bottleneck in RTD’s transit operations in the area. The current line stops in the middle of the Five Points neighborhood because of the inability to develop a consensus on how it would continue east to connect to what used to be the Stapleton International Airport.

The corridor is also home to several freight railroad operations and significant industrial areas including refineries, grocery store distribution centers, and large manufacturers. It is an area that is considered by many as the most polluted zip code in Colorado with a history of environmental cleanup issues and battles between local residents, environmental agencies, and polluting businesses. Several programs have been introduced to address these issues and there are still cleanup efforts underway for a Superfund site located in the corridor.

Outreach Program Goals and Objectives
The combination of the corridor demographics and history presented a challenge to the agencies when they were ready to begin the EIS. In fact, one of the representatives from CDOT emphasized the significance of addressing these issues by stating, “This isn’t your grandfather’s EIS.” One of the keys to the outreach program was to overcome the high level of governmental distrust that exists throughout the corridor and provide opportunities for meaningful public involvement to address environmental justice concerns in the corridor.

The overall goal for outreach was to provide an open, dynamic process that included as many of the residents, businesses, agencies, stakeholders, and community groups as possible. An open process was defined as involving people early and often, and sharing information as it became available even if it was in draft form. It meant reaching out to a wide spectrum of the community interested in improving transportation options.

The mission of this approach was to create an atmosphere of openness and trust with the public in neighborhoods that traditionally do not trust any kind of government by making community input a vital element of the decision making process. Often this element is not treated as well as other environmental factors. Incorporating community outreach into the very fabric of the decision making process creates trust, saves dollars, and builds goodwill that can be sustained through the construction and maintenance phases.

Although outreach activities share various elements they were customized to address the individual nature of each community. This customization was critical to demonstrate care, commitment, and a sincere desire to achieve inclusion. In short, the community has been given a real chance to be a part of the process. They receive the information they want, have opportunities to provide input to decisions that could have long-term effects on their communities, and feel confident that their views are considered in future decisions.
This plan ensured that the community would have numerous opportunities to be actively involved in sharing their concerns and participating and responding to the various elements to be evaluated. Specific communication goals contained in the plan included:

- Bringing scientists, planners, engineers and the community into a closer, working partnership
- Working openly with the public as alternatives were identified, examined, eliminated and/or advanced through each stage of evaluation
- Developing a common understanding of environmental elements and how they would be evaluated

Specific outreach goals included:

- Conducting an extensive public outreach effort to gather input from the diverse populations along the project corridor
- Ensuring meaningful public participation for all stakeholders
- Using a grassroots approach for neighborhoods directly affected by transportation improvements
- Employing local residents, business owners, and vendors throughout the community to provide services and support the outreach process
- Informing the public about the work in progress and continually monitoring community concerns
- Providing information in a manner that is easy for the public to access and understand
- Educating the public on the nature of our project and its process
- Working with local businesses, chambers of commerce, community groups, and other organizations to obtain comments from a broad cross-section along the corridor
- Ensuring that federal, state, regional, and local government agencies within the project area are well informed at every stage

The overall objective of all outreach activities was to ensure that the community was supportive of the study and the recommended plan. Based on the aforementioned goals, several principles were developed as the foundation for the community outreach program. These principles included:

- Facilitating early involvement by agency and public stakeholders in identifying corridor issues and opportunities
- Building an understanding of the project and credibility for the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process
- Establishing and maintaining productive partnerships with individuals and organizations who are interested in the project
- Providing project information in English and Spanish
- Providing assistant services at corridor-wide meetings (e.g. translation and child care) so that residents can participate in the process
• Using local vendors for reproduction, catering, child care, and other services as much as possible
• Providing information to the media proactively throughout the EIS process
• Maintaining an administrative record that clearly tracks the public input into the decision-making process

These principals supported the goals of the community outreach and ensured that the decision making process served the public interest.

Outreach Program Tools
Community outreach for the I-70 East Corridor EIS introduced a unique approach that was unprecedented in Colorado. It began with developing project team sensitivity for the community history and culture, and a grassroots approach to develop a credible presence within the neighborhoods. The approach included a variety of techniques that were implemented for the first time on a transportation project, but were necessary to meet the goals and principles mentioned above. Some of these techniques included:

• Hiring outreach specialists from the neighborhoods
• Conducting and requiring extensive training for anyone that will be interacting with the public
• Using flyers to notify residences and businesses of meetings
• Disseminating information about community services in the neighborhoods
• Conducting door-to-door outreach as a first contact in many neighborhoods
• Holding block meetings for neighborhood sub-areas
• Attending neighborhood association meetings and business meetings
• Conducting neighborhood meetings and larger corridor-wide meetings
• Providing translation at meetings
• Providing child care at larger meetings
• Catering meals for meetings
• Developing working groups
• Involving the media in a proactive manner
• Meeting frequently with local and state elected officials
• Providing a variety of means to disseminate information
• Other outreach techniques

Outreach Specialists and Training
To facilitate the community outreach process, outreach specialists were hired from the community to serve as the first point of contact with the neighborhoods. These individuals were residents of the project-area communities and could leverage their existing relationships and community understanding to gain credibility and trust for the process and engage their neighbors to get involved. Once the outreach specialists had been identified, they were required to go through an extensive one-day training program to better understand the study and their role. This training was not only required for the
outreach specialist, but for any member of the project team that would be involved in community outreach.

Training for the outreach specialists and core project team members consisted of a one-day class that focused on the history of the neighborhoods throughout the project corridor and some key techniques for implementing the outreach process that had been developed. A portion of the training included role-playing exercises to create some of the typical situations that may arise during the outreach process, specifically dealing with the door-to-door approach. No person was allowed to participate in the door-to-door outreach unless they had passed the test.

Once the training was complete and the outreach specialists had been hired, team leaders were identified and project apparel was distributed. All outreach specialists were provided yellow shirts with the project logo and a name badge. These were worn at all times during outreach activities.

**Outreach Specialist Shirt and Name Badge**

[Image of Outreach Specialist Shirt and Name Badge]

**Door-to-Door Outreach**

A door-to-door approach was used in neighborhoods that were directly affected by the project. Outreach specialists were divided into two teams and worked in pairs. They used a questionnaire to gather information from the residents as part of the scoping process. A standard dialogue was used to ensure that all of the outreach specialists were communicating the same message to the residents.
Door-to-door outreach was conducted from approximately 12:00 P.M. to 8:00 P.M. Monday through Friday. These times were adjusted to accommodate daylight hours or other activities. Saturday outreach was conducted as necessary to meet the overall schedule.

Two rounds of door knocks at each residence were conducted. The first round was during the early session (12:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M.). If there was no answer, a card was left explaining that the resident can call to set-up a follow-up meeting or that the outreach specialists would be back in the neighborhood within a few days. The second round of knocks typically occurred in the later session (5:00 P.M. to 8:00 P.M.). Again if there was no answer, a card would be left on the door.

If the door was answered and the resident was willing to complete the questionnaire, the outreach specialists would go though the project details and information in the bag. Interviews ranged from 10 to 30 minutes depending on the household. Spanish-speaking outreach specialists were available for translation at residences that did not speak English.
Questionnaires were collected at the end of each day and input into a database to track the results. The information was used to develop a summary of the transportation characteristics and issues within each neighborhood.

Meetings with Formal and Informal Leaders

Individual meetings were scheduled with elected officials and established community groups to introduce them to the EIS process and the I-70 East Corridor Project Team. The goal of these meetings were to:

- Solicit their input on our proposed outreach process
- Let them know that outreach specialists would be going door-to-door in some neighborhoods
- Inform them that the project team would be holding block and neighborhood meetings throughout the corridor, and conducting corridor-wide meetings throughout the process

In addition to soliciting input, meetings with elected officials and community leaders were used to educate them about the EIS process and the need for meaningful involvement, to establish a dialogue with individuals and groups who have lived and worked in specific neighborhoods, to obtain input from them on our outreach methodology, and to solicit their support early in order to help lend credibility to the process.

In addition to the traditional leaders, the project team approached churches in the corridor to allow a member of the project team to address their congregations during their Sunday services to inform them that outreach specialists would be visiting some of their neighborhoods and to encourage them to speak to specialist and become engaged in the EIS process. Failing to obtain permission to address the congregation, the churches were asked if they could insert a flyer in the bulletin. Permission was frequently given for both a flyer and a speaker. Over 20 churches were visited as part of the outreach process.

Flyering

Flyers were used throughout the process preceding door-to-door visits and community meetings and continue to be used for newsletters and meeting notification. The flyers are typically distributed within one or two days of meetings and provided meeting specifics in both English and Spanish. Throughout the outreach process, the community members are asked “How do you want to be contacted about project related activities?” Flyering was the preferred method for the majority of the corridor.
It was critical to brand the project early and help residents feel secure that the outreach specialists could be talked to and that the project was sensitive to the needs of the residents, small business owners, and service organizations in the corridor. Resource canvas bags helped to achieve that goal by offering them to any resident who answered the door. They also acted as an icebreaker to help start a dialogue with the residents. The canvas bags had the project logo on them and contained information about the project and resources within the communities. Resource materials in the bags were tailored to the specific neighborhoods and provided contact information for different service organizations. The purpose of the resource sheets was to assist and inform the community of the many governmental or not-for-profit services available. The information was printed in both English and Spanish.
Meetings

The grassroots approach began with a door to door process in several neighborhoods and then went to block meetings, neighborhood meetings, and finally corridor-wide meetings.

Block meetings were conducted as small, informal gatherings. The purpose of the meetings was to inform residents of the EIS process, to introduce the project team and to provide an intimate setting to develop a better understanding of specific concerns in certain areas. Meetings began with a short presentation by the project team followed by an open forum to answer questions and solicit input. Translation services and meals were provided.

Block Meeting with Translation
Following the block meetings, neighborhood meetings were conducted to focus on neighborhood issues. The meetings included a summary of the door-to-door outreach including a compilation of the survey questions by neighborhood. These meetings included a short presentation by the project team and an open forum for the community to interact with the project team. Meeting materials were available in both English and Spanish. Translation services, meals, and childcare were provided.
The focused outreach process culminated in corridor-wide meetings that brought together all of the neighborhoods to discuss issues from a larger geographical perspective. The purpose of these corridor-wide meetings is to bring together all of the issues from the various neighborhoods and to provide a corridor-wide understanding of similarities and differences. These meetings began with a short presentation, but typically consist of an open forum or open house for the public to interact with the project team. Meeting materials were available in both English and Spanish. Translation, meals, and child care are provided. Six rounds of corridor wide meetings have been conducted to date and the meeting attendance has ranged from 75 to 250 people.

The traditional audience style format with a presentation and a question, answer and comment period was used for the first two sets of corridor-wide meetings. It became evident that the majority of attendees were confused by the traditional open house format. To address this issue, the project team modified the open house format and added small discussion groups. The modified open house format begins at the sign-in table where the attendee is handed a packet of information that can be reviewed during the meeting or taken home. The next station is the concierge who explains the information that is provided in the open house exhibits and reminds them that people in yellow shirts are there to assist them and encourages them to ask them about the exhibits. Their comments are recorded and posted on comment boards to be reviewed by all participants.
After the attendees have reviewed the exhibit boards and provided comment, the open house empties at the buffet table where a second concierge helps them through the food line while explaining the discussion tables. The discussion tables are issue oriented with some of the topics covering transit, highway, environmental, or maintenance facilities. Each table includes a technical consultant to answer questions and further explain alternatives and options and a scribe to record comments and questions.
Corridor-wide Discussion Tables

**Working Groups**

Issues specific working groups were established after the scoping phase to provide residents, businesses, stakeholders and property owners with an opportunity to continue their participation and to learn more about how the scientists, engineers and planners evaluate specific resources. Opportunities to form working groups were announced at each neighborhood and corridor-wide meeting and were formed based on the topics that were developed by the community. The working groups were used to solicit input, establish a dialogue about specific issues, and educate the attendees.

Creative exercises were developed to help community members better understand the technical issues associated with the project. Some of these exercises included:

- Having attendees use noise monitors on the streets of Denver to get readings on traffic and light rail
- Developing puzzles to help participants understand the process for matching transportation elements like transit stations, technology, and alignments
- Conducting a car-buying exercise to help explain the alternative screening process
- Having attendees serve as project planners to site a new postal facility in minority and low income communities
Working Groups

To date, over 30 working group meetings have been conducted in seven major topic areas including:

- Alternate Routes
- Bike/Pedestrian/Open Space
- Community Impacts
- Economic Development
- Interchanges/Ramps
- Stations
- Trucking/Motor Carriers

Project Office

At the initiation of the study, the project team established a project office within the corridor. Managers and key project staff from CDOT, RTD, and the consultant team are co-located in this office. Day-to-day project management activities are conducted from this office. Facilities suitable for conducting coordination and oversight activities are provided. In addition, the project office is the site for many of the working group meetings.

Additional Outreach Techniques

Other forms of outreach are available to the public to receive information throughout the duration of the study. These techniques include:

- Posters placed at key activity centers throughout the corridor to inform those not reachable through existing community groups or the project’s mailing list or e-mail distribution list
- An external project website (www.i-70eastcorridor.com) in English and Spanish that disseminates information, provides a schedule of events, and includes an online feedback form and automatic update email distribution when new information is posted
- A customized notification process that informs community members of meetings via telephone, e-mail, or direct mail depending on how they have selected to be notified of events
- Bilingual newsletters in advance of each round of corridor-wide meetings
- Advertisements in the weekly newspapers, Denver daily newspapers, and other relevant and local publications to announce meetings and other important study information
- Regular visits to approximately 60 neighborhood and business associations to make presentations or announce meetings

Results
To date, the outreach process has been successful. This highly controversial project has avoided any significant public controversy and has not been on the front page of the paper. Several thousand people have been actively engaged and have participated meaningfully in the project. Community members have developed a better understanding of not only the EIS process, but several of the technical aspects of the analysis. Most importantly, some of the overall governmental distrust issues have been addressed in a way that creates an environment where productive conversations can occur between the project team and the community about project solutions and potential mitigation needs.