

December 12th, 2025

Dear Denver Regional Council of Government (DRCOG) Regional Transportation Committee Members,

As you finalize the Denver region's funding priorities for the next two plus decades of transportation investments, we urge you to prioritize projects that expand transportation options beyond driving to reduce congestion, vehicle miles traveled (VMT), and pollution; improve safety and save lives; and repair and maintain existing roads and bridges. DRCOG has adopted [meaningful commitments](#) in these areas. However the [current Regional Transportation Plan \(RTP\) project candidate list](#) is frontloaded with roadway widening projects that put these goals beyond reach. While there are many important transit and multimodal projects in consideration, many are unfunded and pushed to the outyears of the plan (2035-2050). Moving these projects into earlier years would allow DRCOG to fulfill its commitments to a healthier, safer, and more sustainable region with greater transportation options.

### **Colorado's Car-Dependent System Is Costly and Inequitable**

According to recent polling, affordability and cost of living are top issues facing Colorado voters. Transportation is the second highest household cost behind housing, and driving is the most expensive way to get around. [A CDOT study](#) found that **reducing per-capita driving by 10% would save Coloradans \$25 billion over the next decade**, mostly through lower vehicle ownership costs and fewer crashes. A household that shifts from two cars to one can save more than \$12,000 per year. We should make this achievable for more Denver metro residents.

We know it's possible. From 2017 to 2023, [Seattle](#) added 80,000 residents and 35,000 households, but only 3,300 cars. Colorado can achieve similar results by investing in alternatives to driving, especially for the [nearly 30% of residents](#) who don't rely on personal vehicles because they're too young, too old, have a disability, or can't afford a car.

In addition, the transportation sector currently accounts for 34% of regional emissions, contributing to climate change and local water and air pollution and making DRCOG home to [one of the most polluted zip codes in America](#), with the Globeville Elyria-Swansea neighborhoods containing over five different highways and interchanges. Continuing to prioritize car movement over people perpetuates these harms while forgoing significant health and climate benefits. Walking and biking improvements already save the region an estimated [\\$3.3 billion annually in health and air quality benefits](#). The sooner we invest in clean transportation, the sooner we'll capture these environmental, economic, and public health dividends.

### **Road Expansion Will Not Solve Congestion**

[Decades of research](#) show that highway widenings invite more driving on our roads, generating more traffic and increasing both VMT and GHGs. [CDOT's own analysis](#) assumes that for every 10% increase in highway lane capacity, long-term VMT rises by about 6.7%, with newly expanded highway traffic returning to pre-construction levels in 3–5 years. The [I-25 TREX project](#) in South Denver is a clear example of this, with traffic returning to pre-construction levels within just two years of completion.

Instead, demand-management strategies can improve travel times on existing highways without adding more lanes. For instance, DRCOG should work with CDOT to study an alternative approach to corridors like I-270 that manages congestion and generates new transportation revenue by **tolling the existing travel lanes instead of adding new and expensive highway lanes**. The pricing structure should prioritize freight, transit, and local resident access, while reinvesting toll revenues in system maintenance and regional transit improvements.

Evidence also suggests that [widening highways does not actually improve safety](#), and may result in more serious crashes. In contrast, a [10% increase in transit mode share is associated with a 1.5% reduction](#) in total (all mode) traffic deaths. Transit crashes (collision events) are also [less frequent, less damaging, and far less lethal](#) than personal vehicle crashes, for occupants and non-occupants alike.

### **Coloradans Want More Transportation Options Beyond Driving**

Public opinion strongly supports better transit and non-driving travel choices. [A 2025 statewide poll](#) found that 55% of respondents prefer expanding public transportation over building more roads and expanding existing roads. Similarly, DRCOG's own [engagement study](#) found that nearly 75% of respondents believe new general-purpose lanes should have no or low funding priority in the RTP. Most respondents instead favor expanding transit service, sidewalks, and bikeways. It's clear that Coloradans are asking for the opportunity to opt-out of traffic, rather than double-down on more driving.

### **A Better Path Forward: Expanding Transportation Options**

Car-dependence is a policy choice, and right now DRCOG has the opportunity to invest in transportation solutions that move people more efficiently, not just cars more quickly. This planning process comes down to priorities. Consider, for the cost of a single highway widening, we could complete all seven unfunded Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) projects identified in [DRCOG's Regional Transportation Plan](#) – more than 82 miles of fast, reliable BRT. The Denver region has over \$3 billion in transit, complete streets, and multi-use trail projects pushed into “out-years” beyond 2035, despite being well-positioned to deliver significant benefits today.

Across the [Denver metro area](#), DRCOG should prioritize investments in key transit corridors such as Hampden/Havana, Broadway/Lincoln, and 38th/Park. Safety and multimodal upgrades are also needed along Quebec, Wadsworth, Alameda, and Pecos, along with trail network improvements on the South Platte, Clear Creek, and Cherry Creek paths. When combined with compact, mixed-use development and affordable housing, these projects advance the [state's strategic growth goals](#) to support more sustainable, equitable, and fiscally-responsible growth around existing infrastructure.

Together, frequent transit, active transportation improvements, and more robust transportation demand management offer a much more cost-effective, equitable, and environmentally responsible strategy than expanding highways.

Thank you for your commitment to building a safer, more affordable, and more sustainable transportation system for Denver metro residents. We look forward to working with you to achieve these shared goals.

Sincerely,

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Alexandra Schluntz, Senior Attorney, Earthjustice

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