



From its modest beginnings in 1955, the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) has worked behind the scenes and in the lead of the region's major policy issues.

In 50 years, DRCOG's contributions are evident. The face of the Denver metropolitan area has changed significantly because local governments have collaborated to solve problems. In speaking with "one voice," local governments have guided the region's development. It's true that DRCOG can't lay claim to all major transportation, growth and development projects that have happened in the region in the past 50 years, but the organization can take credit for being the catalyst on issues. DRCOG identifies and frames the issues that need attention, brings decisionmakers together, provides unbiased information for making decisions, sets the tone and explores the trends.

DRCOG has fulfilled its founders' goals to create a united front to address common problems.

Setting the Stage

In 1955, the Denver region was booming. Remembering the area's natural beauty and mild climate from their tours of duty, many former military personnel had returned to raise their families or to visit. Growth was spilling outside the limits of the City and County of Denver and the region's suburban communities were born. This population growth spurred a leap in both the region's manufacturing businesses and tourism industry. As the major metro area in the largest of the Rocky Mountain region's states, the Denver area was emerging as a financial, administrative and distribution center.

Growing pains throughout the region brought officials of Denver, Adams, Arapahoe and Jefferson counties together in February 1955 to discuss their shared concerns.

They created the Inter-County Regional Planning Association, now known as DRCOG, which became one of the nation's first regional planning commissions.

Major Milestones of the First 50 Years

No retrospective would be complete without a review of the major projects guided by DRCOG and some of the region's major events.

One of the first actions of the Inter-County Regional Planning Association was to issue a resolution of support for an Interstate-70 route through the metro area. Two years later, the Bureau of Public Roads approved I-70 west of Denver. In 1957, the organization called for a circumferential freeway around the metropolitan area.

The Valley Highway (now I-25) opened in 1958, the same year the region's first transportation plan was approved by the Inter-County Regional Planning Commission (ICRPC), the organization's new name. Six years later, I-70 east of the Valley Highway opened.

As the region's principal planning agency, ICRPC conducted a metropolitan sewage treatment study (1956) that eventually led to the formation of the Metropolitan Denver Sewage Disposal District (1960s). In 1959, it studied airport needs north of Westminster and in Arapahoe County to relieve private aviation congestion at Stapleton. ICRPC signed the first memorandum of agreement with the Colorado Department of Highways (CDOH) in 1963 after the Federal-aid Highway act established the 3C (continuing, cooperative, comprehensive) planning process.

During this period, the organization withstood the painful comings and goings of member governments. Its existence was shaky due to fiscal problems, board composition and member disagreements with policies.

But, the organization survived and took a new name. After considering other names such as the Denver Area Association of Governments and the Denver Area Council of Governments, the organization adopted its new name -- the Denver Regional Council of Governments -- in 1968. The inclusion of Denver in the name was meant to signify the responsibility of the core city to its neighbors.

DRCOG assumed a lead role in environmental planning in the late 1960s and 1970s. In this time period, nationally the Clean Air Act was adopted (1970), and locally the Section 208 Clean Water Plan and the regional element of the Carbon Monoxide and Ozone State Implementation Plan (1978) were adopted. These environmental plans

exist today, even stronger than the original plans, and the Clean Water Plan continues to be coordinated by DRCOG. Local governments continue to play a strong role in air quality planning through the Regional Air Quality Council, created through a memorandum of agreement.

In 1969, DRCOG supported legislation creating the Regional Transportation District (RTD) and hosted RTD's organizational meeting. As early as 1971, DRCOG and the Colorado Department of Highways signed the first agreement with RTD to jointly plan the region's transportation facilities. Subsequent transportation plans included transit and roadways and DRCOG has worked hard to improve transportation systems by developing the region's comprehensive, multimodal 20-year transportation plan.

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In 1973, DRCOG was designated the Area Agency on Aging under the Older Americans Act. Equally important to older Coloradans was the creation of a Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (1987) to safeguard the health and well-being of residents of long-term care facilities. Today, a small staff and a large group of dedicated volunteers visit each of the region's more than 300 facilities monthly.

DRCOG's most publicly visible program, carpool matching, began in 1975 after the oil embargo created gas shortages. Since then, under the umbrella of Transportation Demand Management (TDM), DRCOG has expanded its alternative transportation programs to include vanpools, schoolpools and teleworking, as well as carpools. Following Boulder's example, DRCOG established a regionwide promotion in 1996 called Bike to Work Day. In 2004, Bike to Work Day's 17,000 participants significantly reduced vehicle miles traveled.

In the past 20 years, a number of important projects were studied by DRCOG to provide technical information to decisionmakers. These studies/plans are representative of DRCOG's behind-the-scenes accomplishments:

- ▶ The Metro Airport Study (1979-1983) examined several sites for a new commercial airport, ultimately identifying two locations -- one at the current site of DIA and the other as an expansion onto the Rocky Mountain Arsenal. Denver and Adams County negotiated on a mutually acceptable site.
- ▶ A task force illustrated need for the Metropolitan Corrections Diagnostic Center and a site study helped decide its location. The facility opened in 1990.

- ▶ A Convention Center Metropolitan Financing Task Force convened by DRCOG recommended state financial support for a new convention center. The Colorado Convention Center opened in 1990 with state financial support.

Equally important has been the state legislation requiring DRCOG to assess each major rapid transit proposal before it is built for its financial feasibility and technology. The first time DRCOG discharged this role was in 1991 for the Central Corridor light rail line from Auraria to Five Points. Each proposed corridor has been reviewed since, most recently the entire FasTracks system approved by voters in November 2004.

Shaping the Region

With One Voice

The strength of DRCOG as a collaborative organization has grown over time. Periods of major population growth and job creation have connected member governments in their efforts to guide growth responsibly.

Recognition of the need to work together has resulted in new partnerships, especially those in economic development. Neighboring governments are sharing responsibility for water supply and wastewater treatment, among others. These cooperative arrangements have become the foundation for a mutual vision of the region. It is this shared vision that has given the DRCOG member governments "one voice."

Regional planning

In the areas of growth planning, DRCOG's member governments have seen success. One of the Inter-County Regional Planning Commission's first major work efforts, and reason for its creation, was the Metro Growth Plan of 1961. It set forth a guide for growth, and suggested ways to implement and finance the public structures needed to accommodate that growth. The plan was comprehensive, with its roots in five years of work, and laid the foundation for the other regional plans the organization would produce through the years. The most recent of these is Metro Vision.

In 1997, after two years of committee work and public meetings, DRCOG adopted Metro Vision 2020, a long-range plan to manage growth within the Denver area. Metro Vision's goal is to protect the quality of life that makes our region such an attractive place to live and work.

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Shaping the Region With One Voice

Since August 2000, cities and counties in the region have abided by the Mile High Compact, the first city- and county-led agreement of its kind in the nation. The compact is an intergovernmental agreement that binds communities to work together to guide growth using Metro Vision. To date, 38 of the region's local governments, representing nearly 83 percent of the region's population, have signed on to the compact.

In 2005, Metro Vision 2030, with many of the same visionary components of the 2020 plan, was adopted. The 2030 plan celebrates the region's urban centers -- pedestrian-oriented location offering a range of retail, business, civic, cultural, service, employment and residential opportunities in a compact environment. The transportation element of the 2030 plan is significantly stronger than the 2020 plan, particularly along transit corridors where RTD will build rapid transit systems totaling \$4.8 billion over the next 12 years.

Transportation Funding

Finding enough revenue to build the transportation infrastructure the region needs has been a problem for decades and DRCOG has led efforts to call attention to that dilemma. Successes along the way have been the TREX project to widen South I-25 and build a light rail line alongside. When confronted with little money to build transportation systems to alleviate congestion, member governments have turned through the years to DRCOG to ensure that whatever funding is available is distributed equitably. DRCOG has established a fair and objective project selection process for federal, state and regional transportation funding. The process also has enabled local governments to work together to address the region's transportation priorities.

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Changing the Face of the Region

All the collaboration and debate around important regional issues over the past 50 years have surely had an impact on the nine-county region that is DRCOG. One of DRCOG's strongest roles through the years is that of convener. DRCOG brings the region's communities together to work on common problems and the end result is often a sharing of experiences. Communities share their own successes with their peers around the table, and these successful projects and activities are often replicated. The collaboration also is vital. When a community works with its neighbor

on future development options for urban centers and urban corridors, shared experiences shape vision and provide guidance. DRCOG also has responded to its member governments' needs by establishing shared service programs, such as centralized recruitment and testing of public safety personnel, circuit rider managers, elevator/escalator inspection services and technical planning assistance, among others. This cooperation has done much to determine the shape of development in the metro area.

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Transportation Provides Major Physical Change

If one were to compile a list of the region's transportation projects over the past 50 years and their impact, the list would be a long one. Some highlights follow.

- ▶ The Interstate system forever changed the Denver area into a large, fast-growing metropolis.
- ▶ The addition of light rail to the transit system showed an orientation to the future.
- ▶ The local government-financed toll road network now links suburban communities, north and south, creating economic development along the way.
- ▶ A new light rail network is on the horizon.

All of these projects have brought neighboring cities and counties together. The metro area is now one large community where residents freely move about the region for work and recreation. DRCOG's traffic signal timing program works with local governments to coordinate the signals on roadways that pass through several communities to save travel time for commuters, and decrease pollution emissions and fuel consumption.

Growth and Development Have Guided Planning Concepts

Throughout DRCOG's existence, the region's rapid growth has motivated community leaders and planning professionals to work together to find ways to develop without increasing land consumption. Building infrastructure for new development became

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more costly and the transportation system became more congested. Infill development and the creation of urban centers have dominated planning discussions for more than 15 years. These centers are best described as pedestrian-oriented with a wide range of services and housing in a compact area.

Military base closures have opened up major parcels of land within the urban footprint. The first, Lowry Air Force Base, has become a new urbanism model, converting old buildings to new uses. The former Fitzsimons Army Medical Center in Aurora has become a major bioscience park and home to the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center.

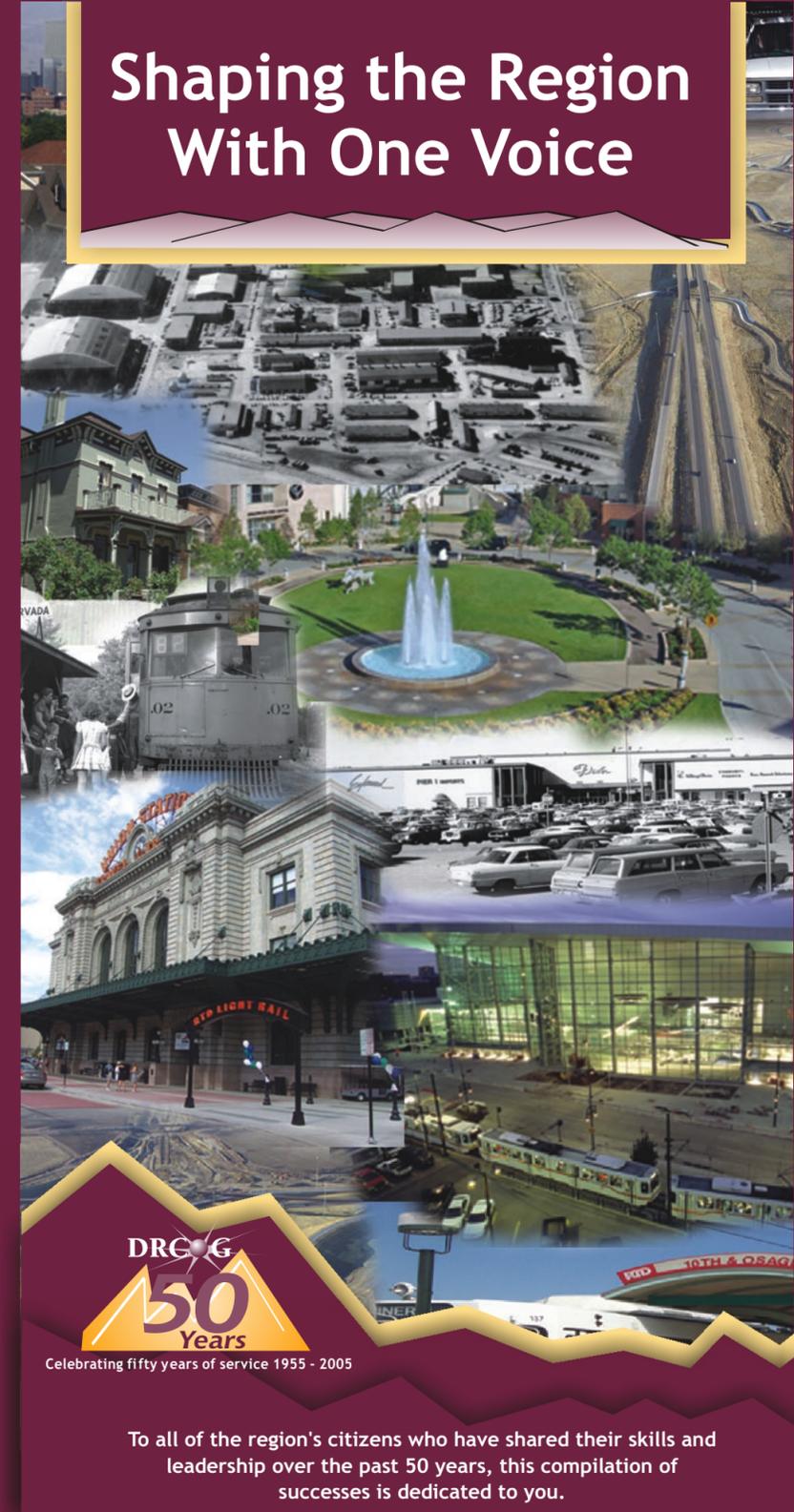
In addition, the relocation of the region's major commercial airport provided a huge opportunity for infill development on the site of the former Stapleton Airport. Forest City Stapleton has received numerous awards for its development plan.

In at least two examples, the redevelopment of worn out shopping center sites has brought significant new housing, business, civic and cultural opportunities -- the Englewood City Center and Belmar in Lakewood. Englewood's City Center is right on the Southwest light rail line and Belmar will be near the FasTracks West Corridor. Both are transit-oriented developments, which support and are supported by transit facilities and services.

The Next 50 Years

As we celebrate 50 years of service to the region, we celebrate not just longevity but real contributions made to enhancing the quality of life in the Denver region. It's clear -- DRCOG makes a difference to the region and to its residents, and will continue to do so in the future.

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To all of the region's citizens who have shared their skills and leadership over the past 50 years, this compilation of successes is dedicated to you.