



**COLORADO**  
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TO: Jennifer Schaufele, Executive Director, DRCOG

FROM: Deb Perkins-Smith, Director, Division of Transportation Development *DPS*

DATE: February 10, 2015

RE: I-70 East Project

In light of last month's public hearing on the Draft 2040 Fiscally Constrained Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), I wanted to share some additional information on the status of the Colorado Department of Transportation's (CDOT) I-70 East project. The Draft RTP currently includes corridor improvements along I-70 East from I-25 to I-270; as identified by the ongoing Environmental Impact Statement. A number of issues were raised at last month's public hearing for the Draft RTP and I want to make sure the Board has accurate information.

**Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Background and Current Status**

The EIS for I-70 East was initiated in 2003. Now in its 12th year, this study effort has involved a community outreach and involvement process far exceeding any effort in CDOT history. Because the reconstruction of I-70 East most directly impacts the neighborhoods of Elyria-Swansea and Globeville the bulk of this outreach has focused on the residents, businesses owners and other key stakeholders from these neighborhoods. This effort has included dozens of community meetings, door-to-door outreach throughout impacted neighborhoods and regular attendance at community events.

Through this process CDOT has analyzed over 90 alternatives, including options that would relocate (or reroute) the interstate. Today, three main alternatives remain under consideration. In addition to the "No Action" alternative that would rebuild the viaduct with no additional capacity, two "Build Alternatives" are analyzed: the Revised Viaduct Alternative (with a north or south option) and the Partial Cover Lowered Alternative (the PCL), which proposes to replace the aging viaduct with a lowered and partially covered highway. Since first proposing the PCL alternative in 2012, CDOT has received significant community and stakeholder support, including from the City of Denver and the City of Commerce City and Adams County. In August of 2014 CDOT published a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) which preliminarily identified the Partial Cover Lowered alternative as the preferred alternative. More than 900 comment submissions were received on the SDEIS and CDOT is currently working to respond to these comments as the Department prepares a Final Environmental Impact Statement. A Record of Decision (ROD) is expected in 2016. More information is available at [www.i-70east.com](http://www.i-70east.com).

**Air Quality Analysis**

CDOT recognizes that highway impacts on air quality are a concern of the I-70 East project. An extensive air quality analysis has been conducted for the I-70 East using a methodology that has been reviewed and approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. This analysis, which is documented in the SDEIS, finds that the PCL



alternative does not violate air quality standards; and that overall emissions from the proposed project are similar to the No-Action alternative. Moreover, lowering the highway and providing a 4-acre cover over the highway provides some air quality benefits to adjacent residents. According to a recent presentation given by the Denver Department of Environmental Health “Recent research shows depressed highways (like the PCL) with sound walls result in the lowest near road pollution.” CDOT also has proposed permanent air quality mitigation measures specifically focused on the residents of the Swansea and Elyria and on the students at Swansea Elementary School, including the installation of a new HVAC system, new doors and windows and a reconfigured playground at Swansea Elementary School.

### **Property Relocation**

All alternatives being considered for the I-70 East project, including the No-Action alternative which would provide travel lanes and shoulder widths built to current standards, involve the acquisition of some residences and businesses. Throughout the EIS process CDOT has been very transparent about the relocation impacts of each alternative under consideration and the benefits available to impacted residents and homeowners. All residential acquisitions necessary for the I-70 East project must follow the Federal Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 (Uniform Act). This law was enacted by Congress to make sure that people whose property is acquired, or who move as a result of projects receiving federal funds, will be treated fairly and equitably. The Uniform Act provides some important benefits for homeowners and renters. For example, when residents are unable to purchase comparable replacement housing at price levels equal to what they received from CDOT, the Department is required to make up the difference between the fair market value of a residential property and the cost of active listings of similar properties. Similar benefits apply to renters as well, including benefits designed to aid in the purchase of a home. In fact, one of the purposes of the federal-aid process is to help turn renters into owners.

### **Economic Impact**

According to a recent cost/benefit analysis, I-70 East will generate more than 9,000 construction jobs in Colorado with an economic impact of well over one billion. Most of this impact will be seen in the regional economy. While Federal law prohibits CDOT from requiring that contractors hire from specific neighborhoods, this project will include a robust on-the-job training program along with specific goals for utilizing Colorado’s small and minority-owned businesses.

### **Financing and Project Delivery**

In order to complete the ROD for I-70 East, CDOT must have a feasible financing plan for the first phase of the approved project. The Transportation Commission is currently evaluating funding and project delivery options, including a possible public-private partnership. On February 5, 2015 the Commission held a workshop to discuss the results of a recent Value for Money analysis and is expected to make an initial selection on a delivery method at its February 19, 2015 meeting. This decision will allow the Department to begin engaging industry and is the first step in a lengthy process that will include a continued emphasis on public engagement.

I hope this information helps clarify some important aspects of the I-70 East project and the ongoing EIS study effort. The Department would be more than happy to answer any additional questions from Board members about this project.

