

East Corridor Opportunities and Challenges to TOD [DRAFT July 15, 2013]

The East Corridor Working Group and Stakeholder Committee have identified a number of opportunities and challenges to implementing transit-oriented development within station areas along the corridor. In some station areas, there are major opportunities for new development but infrastructure is lacking. In others, certain amenities such as a grocery store or park are present but others are needed. All stations have connectivity challenges and physical challenges that hinder movement by all modes but especially for pedestrians. Existing land use is primarily industrial or greenfield, and may remain so for the foreseeable future, presenting challenges to implementing the vision in many station areas that call for denser mixed-use development. Parking has also been identified as a challenge because of the likely demand from both transit riders and airport travelers. It also presents an opportunity, however, because surface parking lots can be converted to other types of transit-oriented development in the long term through joint development.

Opportunities

Proximity to Major Destinations. The East Rail Line provides access to downtown Denver, Denver International Airport, and many existing neighborhoods and job centers in between. This proximity makes certain station areas attractive for development and improves access for people living and working along the corridor.

Job Access. Because of the proximity to downtown, the airport, Anschutz/Fitzsimons and other major destinations, many of the existing job centers along the East Rail Line and elsewhere in the region will have improved access via transit. This will provide workers with more commuting options and also reduce the time and cost for some workers.

Connections to Denver International Airport. The East Rail Line will connect residents and workers from throughout the region to the airport, as well as business travelers and tourists coming into the region via air transportation. The easy airport access may also present an opportunity for businesses that require frequent travel to locate along the line. The Denver Mayor's Office has coined the East Rail Line a "Corridor of Opportunity" because of the transportation connections and development opportunities that the new line will provide. The airport will serve as a multimodal hub for surface and air transportation, and the East Rail Line will increase the number of transportation options available to getting to and from the airport from elsewhere in the region.

Proposed Affordable Housing Developments. There are affordable housing developments proposed at three of the East Rail Line station areas: 38th & Blake, 40th & Colorado, and Peoria-Smith, and a proposed development at Central Park. The Urban Land Conservancy, Colorado Coalition for the Homeless and Aurora Housing Authority have all acquired land and committed to building new affordable housing, along with supportive services to serve the residents living there.

Joint Development and Public-Private Partnership Opportunities. RTD owns land at several sites, including surface parking lots that may be suitable for joint development with the public sector and/or private developers. Some of these are longer term opportunities as the station areas are built out and structured parking becomes cost-feasible, while others may be primed for development right now. Denver International Airport also owns land along Pena

Boulevard within the 40th & Airport and 61st & Pena stations that is planned for parking, but may accommodate new development in the long term.

Greenfield Sites Provide Opportunities for Large-Scale Development. Large parcels of land have been acquired in the 40th & Airport, 61st & Pena and several other stations, and plans call for large-scale development of these sites with transit-oriented development in mind, including mixed-use residential and commercial opportunities.

Improved Access to Opportunity for Transit-Dependent Populations. There are many existing residential neighborhoods along the East Rail Line, several of which contain a high percentage of transit-dependent residents, and the line will provide a new connection to jobs, goods and services and other essential destinations.

Parks, Trails and Open Space Amenities. The East Rail Line runs parallel with the Sand Creek Greenway near the Central Park and Peoria-Smith stations, and there are plans to extend the trail toward the 40th & Airport and 61st & Pena stations as well. Plans call for constructing new trail extensions to improve access to the trail from the station areas. In addition, there are several large parks and open spaces, including Central Park and the Rocky Mountain Arsenal that will be accessible via transit once the line opens.

Challenges

Connectivity. Sidewalks and crosswalks are missing in many station areas, and there are natural challenges such as major arterials, highways and railroad tracks that hinder pedestrian and bicycle movement. Last mile connections to existing neighborhoods, businesses and other destinations will be challenging and need to be addressed.

Parking. Ensuring there is enough parking in some station is an issue, especially at stations further east on the line toward the airport, where airport travelers may choose to park to avoid paying higher fees nearer the airport. Denver International Airport estimates needing to double the amount of parking in the next 20-25 years, and owns land along Pena Boulevard near the Airport & 40th and 61st & Pena stations to satisfy some of that demand. Some stations may end up with too much parking as well, and many of these lots will be surface parking, which limits opportunities for new development near the station platform. In the long-term though the surface parking could turn into a major opportunity for new development, especially joint development, as it serves a land banking function in the short term.

Existing Development Activity May Not Meet Corridor Needs. While many station areas are already seeing major developments take place, there is a gap between what is being built and what is actually needed along the corridor. There may be an oversupply of commercial or retail space in some station areas but a lack of it in others. A corridor-wide market study may be needed to understand the supply and demand in greater detail.

Placemaking. Many of the East Rail Line station area plans are aspirational—the station areas themselves are not major destinations today (with the exception of Denver Union Station and DIA) and lack the housing, retail and “bones” that are often a prerequisite for TOD. Development is likely to happen incrementally and require significant investments in infrastructure to make these station areas attractive and able to accommodate new residents and jobs.

Lack of Housing. Many station areas are currently industrial or greenfield sites, but plans envision thousands of new housing units. It may take years or decades for some of these areas to see that much housing development. Moreover, ensuring that some of these units remain affordable, as well as offer a variety of different housing types, is an issue, though recent acquisitions with the TOD Fund show that there is already momentum to create new affordable housing along the corridor.

Connections to Low- and Middle-Skills Jobs and Workforce Development. The East Rail Line will provide a new connection to job opportunities throughout the region, especially the airport, Anschutz/Fitzsimons and downtown Denver. Ensuring that the line can act as an economic driver for all people in the region, from low- to high-skill workers, is important and unacknowledged in most existing plans.

Vulnerable Populations. The East Rail Line runs through some of the most economically disadvantaged neighborhoods in both Denver and Aurora, so ensuring the line provides access to greater economic opportunity, and also preventing displacement are top concerns of the residents living there. The East Rail Line lies within the Piton's Foundation's Children's Corridor, an area identified as having high vulnerability and low educational attainment, and the new transit line can help provide greater access to opportunity and achieve many of the goals outlined in the Children's Corridor plan.

Industrial Land Uses & Interim Uses. The areas around the East Rail Line are home to thousands of industrial jobs. Industrial land uses are often in conflict with the goals of TOD because of their low-density land use and heavy truck and freight traffic. Yet these are also major job centers, especially for low- and middle-skill workers in manufacturing, transportation and warehousing and other industrial industries. There is need to balance existing industrial land use with the desire for denser residential and commercial mixed-use development as identified in station area plans. Moreover, development in many station areas may be years or decades away, so planning for appropriate interim uses is needed on some parcels of land, and certain industrial uses can fill the short-term gap without inhibiting future TOD.

Food Access. Except for the Central Park station, there are no nearby full-service grocery stores along the East Rail Line. There are some smaller grocery stores, farmer's markets and convenience stores selling fresh produce, but most have a limited supply and higher costs than larger grocery stores. The neighborhoods surrounding the line are also major food deserts. Building one or two new grocery stores within East Rail Line station areas will provide healthier food options for people living along the corridor than are now available.

Lack of Basic Services and Retail. In addition to a lack of grocery stores, there is also a lack of retail, childcare facilities, and basic services along the corridor. The station areas present new opportunities to build these resources in close proximity to transit.

Stormwater and Floodplain Issues. Some station areas are located in floodplains or have other drainage issues that will hinder development opportunities. Both Denver and Aurora have identified improvements to mitigate these issues but not all the recommendations have been implemented.

Issues and Challenges by Station Area

The following table lists these identified challenges by station area. Connectivity is the most common theme across all station areas.

Figure 1: Opportunities & Challenges to TOD by Station Areas

Station Area	Opportunities	Challenges	Current Activities
38 th & Blake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity to downtown Denver • Connections to Welton/Downing Corridor • Affordable housing development (Blake TOD – ULC) • Momentum for TOD in this station area • Emerging neighborhoods in River North, Brighton Blvd. and other Northeast Downtown neighborhoods • NDCC activities • Improved access to opportunity for transit-dependent populations • Strong Market and development readiness (according to TOD Strategic Plan) • Potential urban renewal district • Brighton Boulevard streetscape improvements • Blake Street conversion to a two-way street overtime • Large parcels available for development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stormwater management issues (addressed in station area plan, the city's stormwater drainage plan and Next Steps study) • Lack of sidewalks • Connections across South Platte River • Existing state of Brighton Boulevard – lack of sidewalks, gutters, bicycle lanes • Plan identified 13 intermodal conflict points • Land assembly-lots of small parcels in certain areas • Proximity to industrial uses • 38th & Blake intersection (doesn't exist today, safety issues in crossing, replacing bridge is a consideration) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central Corridor Mobility Study (Welton/Downing Corridor) • Brighton Boulevard Access & Cross-Section Design Study • 36th Street Bridge in design phase • Denver/RTD stormwater drainage project • TIP money for sidewalks and other streetscape improvements at 36th to 40th
40 th & Colorado	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing retail • Existing multifamily housing • Quality connections across Colorado Boulevard at 40th Ave. & Smith Road • Proximity to Colorado Blvd. • Existing bus routes along 40th Ave and Colorado Blvd. • Affordable housing developments (ULC, CCH) • NDCC activities • Improved access to opportunity for transit-dependent populations • Bruce Randolph School – education opportunity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighborhood connectivity (to the west) • Connections across Colorado Blvd. at some intersections • Freight railroad tracks • Proximity to a trench • Lighting needs • Inactive railroad spur and other barriers limit access from north, east, and west of the station • Environmental contamination • Proximity to industrial uses • Vacant/underutilized land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

Station Area	Opportunities	Challenges	Current Activities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term joint development opportunity (30-40 acres) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small parcels • Food access (lack of grocery store in station area) • Storm water issues 	
Central Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stapleton redevelopment • Existing retail • Large workforce living nearby – new commuting option • Proximity to parks and open space • Joint development opportunities (e.g., Park-n-Ride with RTD) • Employment opportunities near the station area (and plans for future business center) • Affordable housing proposed in station area plan and Stapleton Master Plan • Proximity to Sand Creek, Central Park, and other recreational areas - potential to connect to Rocky Mountain Arsenal via a shuttle service (Stapleton has completed a Shuttle Feasibility Study) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portions of Smith Road are not pedestrian/bicycle-friendly; there are sections of unimproved roadway • Big box retail (Quebec Square) turns its back to TOD site • Land around station will remain surface parking lot for near-term • Connectivity to existing residential areas • Lack of affordable housing (though there are plans for new units in the station area plan and Stapleton Master Plan) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metro District improvements to Smith Road
Peoria-Smith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity to Anschutz/Fitzsimons Medical Campus • Transfer station between East & I-225 Lines (end of line station for I-225) • Existing employment opportunities in manufacturing and light industrial • Affordable housing development (Aurora Housing Authority) • Joint development opportunities (e.g., Park-n-Ride with RTD) • Peoria Crossing grade separation and other improvements will improve access to the station • Proximity to Hoffman Heights residential neighborhood • Proximity to Sand Creek • Parcels available for development • Access to highways and freeways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freight railroad tracks and new light rail tracks. • Uses incompatible with TOD (INS detention facility, concrete batch plant, jail, etc.) • Food access – far from large, full-service grocery stores (some small stores in the area)Connectivity to existing residential areas (e.g., access to the station for Montbello residents) • Environmental contamination • Long-term parking at the Park-n-Ride for DIA may take away from local Park-n-Ride use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aurora Comprehensive Parking Program is being developed

Station Area	Opportunities	Challenges	Current Activities
40 th & Airport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity to Green Valley Ranch • Large greenfield sites provide opportunities for large-scale development (Pauls Corp.) • DIA owns land for parking – presents long-term joint development opportunity (hotels, office, etc.) if parking demand is met • Freeway access • Potential shuttle connections hotels and restaurants in the area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pena Blvd intersects station area and acts as a natural barrier • 40th Ave a major east-west arterial • Lack of existing amenities near station • Parking needs and costs of charging for parking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
61 st & Pena	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large greenfield sites provide opportunities for large-scale development (380 acres) • Station area plan in process to create a vision for the site, along with GDP and zoning revisions • DIA owns land for parking – presents long-term joint development opportunity (hotels, office, etc.) • Freeway access • Potential end-of-line station • Potential to connect to Rocky Mountain Arsenal via a bike path. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greenfield site – lack of infrastructure • Phasing of development • Distance from existing job and retail centers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Station area planning process underway
Denver International Airport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job access • Multimodal connection between surface and air transportation • Improved access to opportunity for transit-dependent populations working at the airport • Connections outside the region via air and bus • New commuting option to the airport • Airport City • End-of-line station • Retail/concession business opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited connectivity access for pedestrians and bicyclists compared to other stations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans for a Hotel, public transit center • Retail/concession opportunities at the station