Metro Vision 2040

A program of the Denver Regional Council of Governments

Local Government Survey

Introduction

The Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) created the Metro Vision 2040 Local Government Survey to gain a better understanding of local growth and development challenges throughout the Denver region. It is intended to be one of many sources of information the DRCOG Board and project staff will use to help guide the process of updating Metro Vision, with the goal of creating a regional vision and plan supportive of local priorities. Metro Vision 2040 is currently scheduled for adoption in November 2014.

This is the first time DRCOG has administered a local government survey to support the development of Metro Vision. The Local Government Survey was an online, voluntary survey. The survey was divided into four topic areas: Population Demographics and Housing Trends; Multimodal Transportation; Growth and Development; and Emerging Issues and Other Topics. Survey respondents were not asked to analyze data in their communities, but rather provide their professional observations. A diverse cross-section of 27 communities throughout the region participated in the survey – communities ranging in size from 600 to more than 600,000 completed the survey. DRCOG received completed surveys from six counties and 21 municipalities, all of which are listed on page 16.

1. Population Demographics and Housing Trends

Population Demographics
Changing demographics throughout the region are presenting opportunities and challenges to DRCOG's member governments. Survey respondents were provided with 12 options to select from regarding challenges or opportunities affecting their communities. The top four demographic challenges and/or opportunities selected are identified below. Number of respondents that selected each demographic challenge and/or opportunities are provided.

- Increase in older adult population (25/27 respondents)
- Increase in low-moderate income households (18/27 respondents)
- Other demographic challenges (13/27 respondents)
- Increase in 5-17 year-old school-aged children (10/27 respondents)

From the list of demographic challenges and opportunities provided, survey respondents were also asked to select the demographic issues that their communities have identified as top priorities. The majority of respondents did not select any demographic issue as a top local priority. Of those that selected a priority, the most common option selected by the respondents who answered this question was "increase in older adult population." Only 10 respondents selected this option, whereas 25 respondents identified this as a key community issue in the first question. Other top priorities identified by multiple jurisdictions included an "increase in 5-17-year-old school-aged children" and "increase in low-moderate income households." Respondents were also given the opportunity to identify other demographic priorities that did not appear on the list of options provided in the survey. Other local priorities identified included:

- Hispanic growth and cultural assimilation
- Decreasing middle- income population
- Accommodating low-moderate income households
- Younger families being priced out of the community

MetroVision 2040
A program of the Denver Regional Council of Governments

Respondents were asked to describe the strategies their communities are using to address their top-identified priorities. Respondents' answers focused on four themes and key strategies:

Top-Priority Strategies	
Transportation	**Accommodating Low-Moderate Income Families**
• Improving sidewalks • Applying for grants for more non-motorized connections between schools, houses, and places of play • Design improvements to increase accessibility to the public transportation system • Creation of transportation plans • Creation of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) places	• Creation of programs to address the quality of rental housing • Offering incentives for market rate housing • Increase in the availability of affordable rental units • Forming partnerships with non-profit organizations to address the needs of low- and moderate-income families
Older Adult Populations	**Economic Development**
• Housing options • Collaboration with other organizations in the community to address the needs of older adults Improvements to infrastructure where adults live • Senior housing goals and policies within the comprehensive plan	• Working to increase job opportunities • Job training • Small and local business development, growth, and maintenance programs • Incentives to stimulate housing construction, including accessory units • Updating plans to identify areas of growth

Housing Trends

Changes in housing preference, the current supply of housing types, and future housing needs are all local and regional concerns. Respondents were asked about household types in their communities and whether they are seeing fewer, more, or no change in the household types. Respondents identified seeing increases in the following household types. Number of respondents that selected each housing type are provided.

- Older adults living alone (22/27 respondents)

- Empty-nest households (20/27 respondents)

- Retiree households (20/27 respondents)

- Multi-generational households – typically defined as three or more generations living in one housing unit (16/27 respondents)

Respondents were also asked to evaluate their community's existing stock of available housing in light of changing housing needs. Respondents selected a single option within a range of "existing stock is very unlikely to meet needs" to "existing stock is very likely to meet needs" ability to meet changing housing needs." The table below details the responses received. The majority of respondents were not confident that their community's existing housing stock will meet the changing demands for housing in their community.

Ability to Meet Changing Housing Needs					
Answer Option	**Existing Stock is very UNLIKELY to meet needs**			**Existing stock is very LIKELY to meet needs**	**Not Sure**
Response Count	3	13	8	2	0

Respondents were provided with numerous housing types and selected those housing types where gaps or unmet needs exist in their communities. The list below includes the top third of the housing types identified as having gaps. Number of respondents that selected each housing type are provided.

- Senior housing (19/24 respondents)
- Condominiums and townhouses (17/24 respondents)
- Assisted living (16/24 respondents)
- Affordable housing, market rate (16/24 respondents)
- Multi-family, for rent (12/24 respondents)
- Multi-family, to own (12/24 respondents)
- Housing for persons with disabilities (12/24 respondents)

Some respondents identified additional housing types where their community has identified gaps or unmet needs. Additional housing types identified include:

- Single-family detached with first-floor master bedrooms
- Emergency shelters for homeless persons

- Student housing

Respondents were asked to identify their jurisdiction's top three housing priorities based on their community's most recent housing needs assessment or other planning activities. The table below summarizes top housing priorities identified by respondents.

First Housing Priority	
Other Housing Types	**Affordable Housing**
• Low-density housing • Executive housing • Diversify the housing stock • Housing rehabilitation activities, including existing single-family homes • Improving rental housing quality	• Affordable housing (numerous responses) • Affordable, middle-income workforce housing • Workforce housing in key locations (e.g. targeting key transportation corridors) • Increase rental units below 30% AMI
Older Adult Housing	
• Single-story patio homes • Senior housing options • Affordable senior housing • Senior-friendly	

In addition to the top-ranked local housing priority, respondents provided additional priorities (e.g. second and third priorities). Many of the identified priorities are captured in the previous table. Other unique priorities identified by survey respondents included:

- Reducing vacant (foreclosed) units
- Encouraging housing that serves different life-cycle stages
- Targets for permanently affordable housing for low and moderate income households
- Housing growth in rural communities
- Energy efficient housing options
- Transitional housing

2. Multimodal Transportation

Local and regional connectivity, completing transportation connections, and providing options for all are among the transportation issues facing the region. Respondents were provided with numerous transportation issues and selected those transportation issues most impacting their communities. The list below includes the top third of the transportation issues selected. Number of respondents that selected each transportation issue is provided.

- Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure (24 /27 respondents)
- Older adult transportation options (21/27 respondents)
- Bus corridors (20/27 respondents)
- First and last mile connections to transit (19/27 respondents)

The survey allowed respondents to identify other transportation issues impacting their communities. Additional issues identified include:

- Transit service costs are too high for the service provided
- Transportation connections between communities within DRCOG
- Connections to recreation opportunities within the community and outside the region
- Need to focus on complete streets

Respondents were asked to identify barriers preventing their community from including a connected transportation system that supports cars, bicycles, pedestrians, and public transit. Respondent's answers focused on the following four themes and components:

Barriers Preventing Multimodal Transportation	
Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure	
• No bicycle or walking trails	• Lack of a bicycle and pedestrian master plan
• Arterial intersections are a barrier to bicyclists and pedestrians	• Limited right-of-way to build bicycle lanes and detached sidewalks
• Deteriorating streets and sidewalks are dangerous for bicyclists and pedestrians	• No secondary network of streets to funnel bicyclists away from major arterials
Funding	
• Lack of funding for infrastructure improvements	• The inflexibility of existing funding sources
• No funding for needed retrofits	• Expensive right-of-way needed for improvements
• Detailed plan in place, but no funding to implement the plan	
Access	
• Lack of pedestrian access to existing light rail stations	• Lack of transit options outside the RTD service area
• Lack of focused city center to focus improvement and connections	• Major barriers to connections (e.g. rail, major roads, etc.)
Coordination	
• City-wide plans lack coordination with surrounding jurisdictions, RTD, and CDOT.	

Respondents were asked to identify policies and practices they are implementing to support their community in becoming more multimodal. Respondents' answers focused on the following three themes and components:

Policies and Practices Supporting Multimodal Transportation	
Addressing Multimodal Transportation in Plans	
• Comprehensive plans • New city-wide bicycle plans • Transportation master plans • Trails plans • Capital improvement plans	• Open space and trail corridor plans • Corridor master plans • Neighborhood plans • Station area plans • County-wide transportation plans
Strategic Investment	
• Increased signage on bus routes and trails • Improvements and expansions to Call-n-Ride services • Prioritized list of sidewalk investments, including coordination with the school district • Encourage higher-density, pedestrian-oriented, and mixed-use development along mass transit	• Expansions to trails • Improvements to bicycle facilities and infrastructure at strategic locations • Revised construction standards to include wider sidewalks, bike lanes, etc. • Integrating land use, transportation, and recreational needs in the multimodal/trail system
Policies & Regulations	
• Citywide requirements for new streets to be multimodal	• Adoption of a complete streets policy

3. Growth and Development

The past decade has seen dramatic changes in development of all types. Changes in the market, economic stresses, changes in consumer preferences, and innovative planning policy and practice have influenced the way development is occurring in local communities. The survey sought to gain an understanding of trends in the overall development activity occurring in local communities. The survey asked respondents if their community has experienced an increase in development activity over the past year. The table below details responses related to overall development activity.

Development Activity in the Past Year	
Answer Option	**Response Count**
Yes, a large increase in development activity	15
Yes, a small increase in development activity	11
No change in development activity	1
No, development activity has declined	0

The survey also sought to create a thumbnail sketch of the type of development activity occurring in communities. Respondents were provided with development activities and selected the types of development with increased activity. The list below includes the top third of the development types selected. Number of respondents that selected each development type is provided.

- New development (20/26 respondents)
- Redevelopment (17/26 respondents)
- Previously approved unbuilt projects (15/26 respondents)
- Infill development (15/26 respondents)

The survey also allowed respondents to identify other development activities that have seen an increase in the past year. Additional activities identified included:

- Single-family detached units on smaller lots (5,000 - 6,000 square feet)
- Multi-family and single-family development
- Infrastructure projects, especially oil and gas pipelines
- Recreation and tourism-oriented development
- For sale multi-family housing projects along transportation corridors

Respondents were asked to identify local regulatory practices they consider to be barriers to current development. Respondents' answers focused on the following two themes and components:

Barriers to Current Development
Zoning Code
• Conditional use barriers   • The current code does not allow mixed-use   • Lack of inclusionary housing zoning policy   • Zoning restrictions requiring rezoning or variances   • The current code is decades old   • Existing code does not address small commercial lots   • Drainage requirements are difficult to meet for infill projects   • Euclidean regulatory structure   • Excessive parking requirements   • Lack of mixed-use districts within a half-mile radius of light rail stations   • The code is restrictive regarding location and mixing of uses   • The code does not provide design guidance for high quality compatible development
Fees
• The development and tax fees are too high

The survey also provided an opportunity for respondents to identify existing local regulatory practices that support current development activity in their communities. Respondents' answers focused on the following two themes and components:

Local Regulatory Practices Supporting Current Development
Designated Districts
• Mixed-use districts   • Urban renewal districts   • Zoning districts to support commercial recreation and tourism   • PUD districts   • TOD districts   • County policy to direct urban/suburban development to incorporated areas
Development Review Process
• Revisions and policy updates to the development code to provide a quick and efficient path through the development review process   • A fast and streamlined development review process

The Extent of the Urban Development element of Metro Vision 2035 establishes an urban growth boundary/area (UGB/A) for the Denver region "to promote an orderly, compact and efficient

pattern of future development." The current boundary encompasses 980 square miles of urban development. Respondents were asked whether their community's current UGB/A allocation is adequate to accommodate future growth through 2035. The response counts are provided in the table below.

In March 2013, the DRCOG Board of Directors delayed member requests for additional UGB/A until after the adoption of Metro Vision 2040.

Urban Growth Boundary or Area	
Answer Option	Response Count
Yes	16
No	5
Not Sure	5

4. Emerging Issues and Other Topics

Local communities and the region are experiencing existing and new challenges on a variety of fronts. Some of the challenges are well-known, while others are only recently coming to the forefront. Developing forward-thinking policies, both locally and regionally, relies on the identification of emerging issues and future constraints. Respondents were provided with numerous emerging issues and/or constraints and selected those emerging issues and/or constraints which they have identified as needing further attention in their community. The list below includes the top third of the emerging issues and/or constraints selected. Number of respondents that selected each emerging issue and/ or constraint is provided.

- Infrastructure funding (24/26 respondents)
- Tax revenue (22/26 respondents)
- Aging population (21/26 respondents)
- Locally grown food and urban agriculture (16/26 respondents)
- Water (availability, quality, flow, etc) (14/26 respondents)
- Access to healthy foods (13/26 respondents)

- Oil and gas extraction (11/26 respondents)

Survey respondents also specified other emerging issues and/or constraints including:

- Adverse effects at the local level from regional transportation projects and efforts
- Energy and local utility conflicts
- Medical and recreational marijuana businesses

Innovative Practices

Respondents were asked to share some innovative practices they are using in their communities to address emerging issues and/or constraints. Respondents' answers focused on the following five themes and practices:

Innovative Practices	
Urban Agriculture	**Water Conservation**
• Incorporation into a new zoning ordinance • Revision of regulations • Creation of community gardens	• Creation of policies and regulations • Development of a water bank
Funding	**Addressing Wildfires**
• Alternative funding mechanisms • Priority based budgeting to prioritize expenditures	• Wildfire protection plans • Wildfire regulations
Addressing Oil and Gas Operations	
• Creation of an oil and gas ordinance • A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) process for working with oil and gas projects	

Opportunities for DRCOG

In 2012 a regional Listening Tour was conducted to get feedback from stakeholders, subject matter experts, and residents regarding their vision for the Denver region in 2040. A component of the Listening Tour included an opportunity for participants to provide feedback on DRCOG and their role in regional planning. The Local Government Survey sought to solicit additional feedback from our local planning partners who participated in the survey.

Respondents were asked to share how DRCOG can best work with them to ensure that Metro Vision recognizes and supports their community's local priorities. Respondent's answers focused on the following four themes and suggestions: transportation, urban centers, funding, and specific suggestions for DRCOG's coordination and activities.

Transportation Opportunities

- Increase emphasis on multimodal transportation planning
- Continue and increase outreach on key transportation issues
- Continue support for multimodal travel options including last-mile connections
- Increase support for policies to limit the addition of general-purpose lanes and support the addition of managed and HOV lane use
- Update the arterial roadways standards to include more livable designs
- Initiate discussion concerning the creation of a vision for transit needs beyond FasTracks
- Identify and seek additional resources for transportation that emphasize transit, walking, and bicycle facilities

Urban Centers Opportunities

- Continue to fully support and implement urban centers, including resources
- Reconsider the number and locations of urban centers, including a better understanding of market realities
- Actively implement the existing Metro Vision goal for urban centers – accommodating 50 percent of new housing and 75 percent of new employment in designated urban centers
- Emphasize infill opportunities outside of urban centers
- Designate light rail stations as urban centers

Funding Opportunities

- Prioritize small scale investments to leverage the region's investment in FastTracks
- Inform communities of funding that can be used to improve aging infrastructure
- Continue to encourage TIP funding for planning studies and infrastructure improvements to

advance modes of travel other than the car

- More flexibility for bicycle and pedestrian projects in the TIP project selection criteria
- Place a significant premium on resources directed to urban center planning and implementation

Suggestions for DRCOG

A successful regional plan should establish a shared, regional vision for the future and support local efforts to contribute to the achievement of the vision. The survey aimed to understand key areas where further collaboration is needed to create positive outcomes for our member governments and the region. In addition to the suggestions described previous, survey respondents outlined numerous potential opportunities to be explored during, and after, the process to update Metro Vision.

It was noted that the current plan tends to be urban-oriented and does not have goals and policies that easily translate or apply to edge communities. The process to update the plan should recognize and respond to the development patterns in rural communities, including mountainous areas. Planning and policies that protect rural and natural resources have benefits beyond the affected communities. Additionally, Metro Vision is a tool suburban communities use to become more dense, but the strategies and approaches in the plan should be flexible in order to support more resilient suburban communities.

Survey respondents encourage DRCOG to facilitate Metro Vision Idea Exchanges to bring together staff from local government members and stakeholders from the private sector to share information and learn about best practices to support goals of Metro Vision. Respondents noted the important role DRCOG can play in continuing to educate elected officials and the public on critical regional issues, including affordable housing, transportation options, economic development, drivers of urban form, and the aging of the population.

To strengthen DRCOG's relationship with its local government members, survey respondents would like DRCOG to regularly communicate with planning staff and administration. In particular respondents emphasized the need to for DRCOG to proactively reach out to communities that have not traditionally had adequate staff resources to be active participants in regional planning conversations. Respondents also stressed the need to think about issues that stretch beyond

DRCOG's planning boundaries, including outreach, communication, and coordination with adjacent regional planning agencies.

Survey respondents would also like to see DRCOG foster resilient and dynamic planning and development practices. A key challenge identified was the need for DRCOG to more regularly look inward as an organization to ensure that key efforts and priorities are aligned. Respondents also challenged DRCOG to more fully explore the mechanisms impacting Metro Vision implementation at the local and regional level – creative and innovative regional strategies will be needed to achieve the shared, regional vision.

Next Steps

DRCOG is greatly appreciative of our member communities that took the time to complete the Metro Vision 2040 Local Government Survey.

DRCOG plans to use this feedback, along with input from numerous other sources, to help shape the Metro Vision 2040 plan update and guide future discussions on regional issues. Additional focus groups, interviews, case studies, Idea Exchanges and public forums will help staff gather more input throughout the plan update process. The survey assisted in identifying innovative practices being carried out by local governments and will aid in the development of toolkits for local action. These toolkits will recognize there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to addressing regional issues at the local level. The diversity of innovative plans, programs and policies shared with DRCOG as part of the local government survey will ensure that best practices identified in the toolkits are appropriate in a variety of settings and contexts. Responses from the survey will help DRCOG identify key local and regional issues to explore in updating Metro Vision. For more information about Metro Vision 2040, please visit www.drcog.org/mv2040 or contact Brad Calvert (303-480-6839 or bcalvert@drcog.org). If you would like regular updates on the Metro Vision 2040 planning process, please sign up for he project newsletter (contact Ashley Kaade at akaade@drcog.org). You can also follow DRCOG on Twitter (@DRCOGorg) or Facebook (facebook.com/Denver.Regional.Council.of.Governments).

Metro Vision 2040 Local Government Survey

Participants

Adams County

Arapahoe County

Arvada

Aurora

Boulder

Boulder County

Broomfield

Castle Rock

Cherry Hills

Clear Creek County

Commerce City

Denver

Englewood

Federal Heights

Foxfield

Jefferson County

Lakewood

Littleton

Lone Tree

Longmont

Louisville

Nederland

Northglenn

Parker

Sheridan

Thornton

Wheatridge