

NORTHWEST COMMUTER RAIL AND US 36 EIS

Northwest Commuter Rail

PROJECT BACKGROUND

As part of the voter-approved FasTracks program, the Northwest Rail environmental evaluation will identify the best way to provide high-quality, reliable transit service for the area while improving travel times and enhancing access to jobs, recreation and entertainment. The environmental study is the next step towards constructing the project, which secured funding through the passage of FasTracks by voters in November 2004. The effort will incorporate the analysis of the rail corridor from Denver to Boulder (which was developed in the first phase of the US 36 EIS) and from Boulder to Longmont (which was developed in the Longmont Rail Feasibility Study and Environmental Evaluation).

In 1998, RTD and CDOT began the US 36 Major Investment Study (MIS). The three-year process included extensive public involvement, including the formation of the Mayors and Commissioners Coalition (MCC) in 2000 - a group of elected representatives from the City of Boulder, Boulder County, City and County of Broomfield, Town of Superior, City of Louisville and City of Westminster dedicated to furthering the goal of achieving transportation funding for the US 36 Corridor.

The MIS resulted in the identification of a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA), which called for a combination of transit and highway improvements to be implemented between Denver and Boulder. In 2003, the Regional Transportation District (RTD) and the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) began a comprehensive planning study of transit alternatives between Denver and Boulder. With the voter approval of RTD's FasTracks program in 2004, RTD was able to secure funding for both of the proposed projects that would link Denver, Boulder and Longmont via commuter rail.

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"javascript:detailsWin('image_viewer.php?img=5§ion=nw','528','456');" }In 2005, RTD also completed a study to determine the feasibility of potential commuter rail implementation in the Longmont Diagonal Corridor. The Longmont Diagonal Rail Feasibility Study area consisted of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad alignment from approximately 30th and Pearl Streets in Boulder to 119th Street and the SH 119 Extension, east of downtown Longmont. In late 2005, RTD began an Environmental Evaluation to further analyze the Longmont Diagonal Rail Study area.

In mid-2006, RTD combined the commuter rail portion of the two studies into one corridor - Northwest Rail - to be studied and implemented separately from the highway improvements planned for US 36. The Northwest Rail environmental study will incorporate the analysis of the rail corridor from Denver to Boulder (which was developed in the first phase of the US 36 EIS) and from Boulder to Longmont (which

was developed in the Longmont Rail Feasibility Study and Environmental Evaluation).
For further information go to { HYPERLINK "http://www.rtd-fastracks.com/nw_3" }

US 36 EIS (Environmental Impact Statement

INTRODUCTION

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA), in cooperation with the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) and the Regional Transportation District (RTD), have jointly prepared a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) to identify and evaluate impacts of multi-modal transportation improvements in the United States Highway 36 (US 36) corridor, between Interstate 25 (I-25) in Adams County and Foothills Parkway/ Table Mesa Drive in Boulder (a distance of approximately 18 miles). This project follows the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA)/404 merger process as agreed upon by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and CDOT. The USACE is a cooperating agency.

THE US 36 CORRIDOR DEIS (Draft Environmental Impact Statement)

NEPA requires an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to be prepared to address impacts that a major transportation project has on the human and natural environment. NEPA requires disclosure of environmental impacts whenever federal funds are used. Preparation of an EIS and preliminary engineering design are necessary first steps for the US 36 corridor project to qualify for federal funds available through the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and other federal programs. The information in the US 36 DEIS is presented to assist with identification of transportation improvements for the US 36 corridor. The packages offer different courses of action for the lead and applicant agencies to pursue in conjunction with local jurisdictions, the public and advisory committees. The DEIS has been prepared to document the benefits and impacts of the packages under consideration. The DEIS does not identify a preferred alternative; the Federal Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) will make that identification.

After consideration of public and agency comments on the DEIS, the lead agencies will identify a preferred alternative in the FEIS. The preferred alternative may be one of the packages of alternatives (including the no action package) described in this document, or a combination of elements from the packages. Following a second comment period on the FEIS, a Record of Decision (ROD) will be developed to document the lead agencies' decision for the project. The length of the corridor and funding availability may require that improvements be built in phases. Therefore, a series of RODs may be issued for this project.

Package 1: No Action

Although it does not meet the Purpose and Need of the project, Package 1 must be considered throughout the NEPA process for comparison purposes to the build packages, pursuant to Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) requirements. Package 1 does not propose any new build elements for US 36. However, the package assumes that committed improvements, like the Northwest Rail project and bus and park-n-Ride improvements from the locally funded FasTracks program, and the 120th Avenue Over-crossing of US 36, would be implemented as planned by others.

Package 2: Express Lanes/Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)

In general, Package 2 would add two express lanes in each direction on US 36. The express lanes would connect to and be an extension of the existing I-25 express lanes that go to and from downtown Denver. The express lanes would be bi-directional, located in the median and separated from the general-purpose lanes by a concrete barrier. BRT stations would be located in the median and connected to adjacent parking via pedestrian bridges or underpasses. A barrier-separated facility is proposed due to the potential for large speed differences between traffic in the general-purpose and express lanes. Access to and from the express lanes would be provided by a combination of drop- and slip-ramps. The drop-ramps would provide access to and from the express lanes at the existing Westminster Boulevard Bridge and a new bridge at Midway Boulevard. The drop-ramps would consist of one or more separate lanes in each direction that would transition from the express lanes up to bridges, allowing access to and from arterial streets. Bypass express lanes would continue on either side of the drop-ramp lanes. Package 2 would include a bikeway facility adjacent to US 36. In general, the bikeway is an off-street separated multi-use path adjacent to US 36. Where appropriate, the bikeway connects to and makes use of existing on-street and off-street facilities. Maintenance of the US 36 bikeway will be subject to negotiations between CDOT and the local jurisdictions at a later date.

(Package 3 has been eliminated.)

Package 4: General-Purpose Lanes, High-Occupancy Vehicle, and Bus Rapid Transit

The basic configuration in Package 4 consists of one additional general-purpose lane and one additional BRT/HOV (High Occupancy Vehicle) lane in each direction. The BRT/HOV lanes would be located in the median of US 36 in a buffer-separated configuration similar to the existing condition between Sheridan Boulevard and Pecos Street, with new median BRT stations connected to adjacent park-n-Rides via pedestrian bridges or underpasses. Rather than exiting the highway to pick up and drop off passengers at park-n-Rides, buses would stop at the median stations for passenger boarding and alighting. Package 4 includes the US 36 bikeway, cross street and interchange improvements, BRT, and Transportation demand Management (TDM) elements as described in Package 2.

For more specific information particular sections of US 36, go to { HYPERLINK "http://www.communicationsmgr.com/projects/US36/docs" }.

