Integrating Land Use and Transportation in the Denver Region

Text from the poster presented by Bill Johnston from the Denver Regional Council of Governments at the TRB Conference in Denver on August 26, 2007

1. Overview

- This poster summarizes the strategies employed by the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) to integrate land use and transportation planning in the 9-county Denver area.
- These strategies are embodied in policies and implementation measures contained in the regional plan, known as Metro Vision, and other associated documents.
- DRCOG received a Transportation Planning Excellence Award in 2006 for these efforts from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and the American Planning Association.

2. Who is DRCOG?

- An association of 52 member governments.
- A regional planning commission authorized by state statutes.
- The metropolitan planning organization (MPO) authorized by federal statutes.

3. What is Metro Vision?

- The growth and development, transportation and environmental quality plan for the nine-county Denver region.
- Local compliance not mandated by state statutes.
- Voluntary participation through an intergovernmental agreement called the Mile High Compact (44 of 52 members have signed the agreement).
- Nationally recognized by the Local Government Commission and the National Association of Regional Councils.
4. Key Features of the Metro Vision 2030 Plan

- 750 square-mile *urban growth boundary* (promotes infill & redevelopment).
- High density, mixed-use *urban centers* (absorb growth, support transit).
- Four *freestanding communities* (potential to reduce VMT if people can work near where they live).
- A visionary, multi-modal, *highway and transit system* (serves land uses, provides options).

5. Key Interrelationships

- Land use and transportation policies reinforce each other (e.g., urban centers provide density to support transit; transit provides “attraction” for urban centers).
- Local jurisdictions incorporate Metro Vision principles into their land use and transportation plans.
- Metro Vision land use and transportation policies are used to develop population and employment forecasts, which are used in the regional transportation and air-quality models, which in turn are used to evaluate proposed transportation improvements (i.e., models reflect the desired policy outcome, not simply continuation of current trends).

6. Integrated Regional Model (IRM)

- A “leading edge” effort to improve regional modeling capabilities.
- Will utilize a custom application to model land use, and a custom application in combination with TransCAD to model transportation.
- Will improve ability to account for “induced demand.” For instance, do people make more trips if there are more roads? Fewer trips or “time-of-day shifts” if roads are congested?
- Will improve ability to model the benefits of transit-oriented development by accounting for non-motorized modes and “trip chaining.”

7. 2030 Metro Vision Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)

- Based on policies contained in the Metro Vision Plan.
- Establishes the fiscally constrained system.
- Scoring criteria reward projects within the UGB and that serve urban centers.
• Must demonstrate that the system will not adversely affect air quality.
• Establishes eligibility for regional funding (see TIP below).

8. Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

• Mechanism for allocating federal funds for regionally significant projects.
• Developed every two years to determine funding for following six-year period.
• Projects proposed by local jurisdictions, CDOT, RTD and other agencies scored to determine funding priority.
• Scores based on how well the project satisfies certain criteria that reflect Metro Vision transportation policies (i.e., must benefit the system).
• Some criteria also reflect Metro Vision growth and development policies. (16 of 100 possible points are land use related.)
• Conformity analysis is required to demonstrate that programmed facility improvements will not adversely affect air quality standards.
• $2 million set aside to fund transit station area plans.

9. Consideration of alternative growth scenarios

• 2035 update considered several alternative growth scenarios.
• Scenario A assumed no increase in urban area. Scenario B assumed a modest expansion of approximately 70 square miles. Scenario C assumed an unconstrained 140 square mile expansion.
• The compact scenario (A) resulted in less traffic congestion, impact on air quality, and cost associated with constructing new infrastructure.
• Analysis influenced decision-makers to expand the UGB by less than originally anticipated.

10. Challenges

• Growth beyond the DRCOG planning area.
• Local jurisdictions continue to approve development despite overburdened and under funded state transportation facilities. Raises questions about the practical limitations of increasing density.
• New and proposed major transportation facilities could stimulate development. Strategy: The recently completed Northwest Parkway utilized development agreements and open space acquisition to better manage development along that corridor.
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