

# Hear Every Voice

## Case Study: I-70 East Environmental Impact Statement



Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) study for Interstate 70 East in the Denver area.

Denver, Colorado

Colorado DOT (CDOT), multiple consultants

### Project Details

### Location

### Organizations

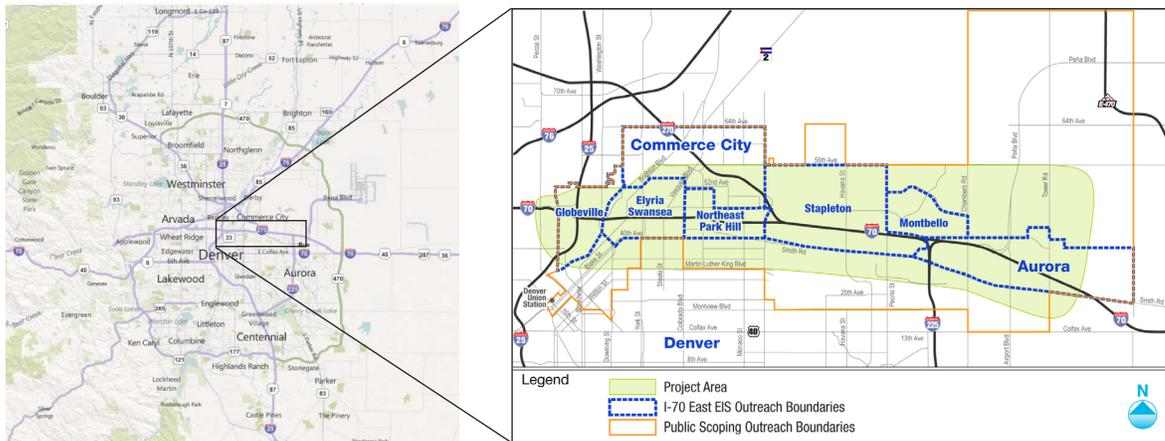
**Context:** The I-70 corridor transects Denver, Colorado east to west and is an important transportation corridor for local and trans-continental traffic. Originally constructed in the 1950s, the corridor divided some of the most ethnically and economically diverse communities in Denver (Posey 2004). In 2003, the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) initiated a five-year Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process to study the feasibility of upgrading the 26-mile corridor and adding a commuter rail line that would parallel the highway. The initial phase of the project, the Draft EIS, was finalized in 2008, and work on the final EIS has continued into 2011 with various planning efforts.

**Public Involvement:** Public involvement has been an integral part of the I-70 East EIS study since the project's initiation in 2003. Given the diversity of the neighborhoods along the I-70 corridor and the historical tensions surrounding the original interstate siting and construction, CDOT and its project consultants knew this initial project phase was an important time to engage with residents and business owners along the corridor. Creating a sense of project ownership early in the project was important to its overall success.

### Case Summary

Internet

Meeting Activity



source: <http://www.bing.com>

source: <http://www.i-70east.com/reports.html>

To engage with residents and businesses along the corridor, CDOT and its project consultants developed an extensive community outreach plan. "The goal of the community outreach effort was to develop a process that

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created an atmosphere of openness and trust with the public” (CDOT 2008, 6-3). As part of the community outreach effort, the project team used multiple methods to encourage residents and businesses to engage in the process.

CDOT recognized the importance of understanding the concerns of neighborhoods and residents prior to launching its community outreach plan, so the project team conducted an in-depth community awareness effort. This awareness effort used public scoping meetings and one-on-one conversations to build the project team’s understanding of neighborhood composition and needs. The community awareness effort produced several recommended practices that “served as the foundation of the overall public involvement protocols, including:

- Providing food and child care at public meetings to make them more accessible.
- Placing meeting announcements in church bulletins and attending church services to address area congregations.
- Providing a translator at all public meetings.
- Having the working group members define topics for the sessions.
- Providing a comment period at the beginning and end of every committee meeting.
- Adding three health experts to the Air Quality Compliance Committee.” (CDOT 2008, 6-4).

The need to set a foundation for a good outreach plan also led to the development of tailored engagement approaches that “allowed the community to develop a sense of project ownership and to discover how they might empower themselves” (Posey 2004).

#### *Community Liaisons*

People from the community were hired to assist with outreach activities. “These individuals leveraged their existing relationships and community understanding to gain credibility and trust and engaged their neighbors to get involved in the project” (CDOT 2008, 6-4). Individuals hired as “outreach specialists” attended an immersive, one-day training program to help them understand the project and their roles. The outreach specialists were hired specifically to assist with door-to-door outreach, block meetings, and neighborhood meetings.

#### *Personal Contact*

In neighborhoods directly affected by the project, outreach specialists conducted a door-to-door survey. A standard narrative was developed to ensure the same message was communicated to all residents. Bilingual teams of two outreach specialists conducted the door-to-door surveys, which ensured additional trips to the same household were not necessary and allowed one person to ask questions while the other recorded answers (Posey 2004). The project team provided incentives to encourage completion of the survey; every person who completed the survey received a neighborhood resources canvas bag (CDOT 2008).

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### *Meetings*

Numerous meetings were held throughout the EIS study project. Meeting types and locations varied to best accommodate the anticipated participants. Twenty-eight block meetings were held in neighborhoods where door-to-door outreach was conducted. Block meetings typically included 10-15 people and were conducted in parks or backyards. These meetings focused on informing residents of the EIS process, introducing the project team, and providing a safe setting for residents to voice concerns (CDOT 2008, Posey 2004).

At the conclusion of the block meetings, neighborhood meetings were held to address broader community issues. The neighborhood meetings were held in twelve communities along the corridor and were designed as an open forum where community members could interact with project team members. Summaries of the door-to-door surveys and block group meetings were discussed at neighborhood meetings. Corridor-wide meetings, which followed the neighborhood meetings, provided an opportunity to better understand and discuss similarities and differences in issues or concerns along the entire corridor. Corridor-wide meetings were held at strategic locations along the corridor on a Wednesday and Thursday evening “to make it as convenient as possible for the public to attend” (CDOT 2008, 6-6). Translation services, food, and child care were available at all neighborhood meetings and corridor-wide meetings.

Additionally, more tailored project meetings were held during the project. These stakeholder meetings engaged elected officials and community groups throughout the process. The intent of the stakeholder meetings was to provide another method for input from local groups or representatives and solicit their support early to help lend credibility to the process (CDOT 2008). Topic-specific neighborhood meetings allowed project staff and attendees an opportunity to discuss important issues during the development of alternatives phase of the project.

### *Working Groups*

Following completion of the scoping phase of the project, which included all previous meetings and door-to-door survey work, six working groups were established. Working groups provided “an opportunity for residents, businesses, stakeholders, and property owners to continue their participation and learn more about how the scientists, engineers, and planners would evaluate specific resources” (CDOT 2008, 6-7). Meeting activities such as puzzles engaged working group participants in a meaningful dialogue about project issues, resources, and the impacts of various decisions.

### *Community Outreach Process Forum*

An important part of the community outreach plan was the Community Outreach Process Forum held midway through the project process. This event was held to gather suggestions on how to improve the community outreach. “As a result of the forum, the study team began posting working group minutes on the project website” (CDOT 2008, 6-8), and the project team adapted other aspects of the community outreach effort.

## Communications

In addition to the range of community engagement activities highlighted above, the project team made a concerted effort to communicate with the public early and often. Flyers, posters, newsletters, advertisements in various local publications, and press releases to regional media outlets were helpful in spreading the word on the project and community engagement effort. Additionally, people could sign up for e-mail listservs and telephone notifications, view the project website, or visit the temporary project office along the corridor.

## Community Outreach Details and Timeline



source: <http://www.i-70east.com/reports.html>.

Internet

Meeting Activity

Posey, J. 2004. Public involvement during Interstate 70 project development. Transcription of Transportation Planning Capacity Building Program Peer Exchange Workshop. Retrieved from <http://www.planning.dot.gov/Peer/Atlanta/atlanta.asp>.

Colorado Department of Transportation. 2008. I-70 East Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Retrieved from <http://www.i-70east.com/reports.html>.

Tri-County Transportation District of Oregon. 2004. Capital projects community affairs: Community outreach and involvement. Retrieved from <http://leahgordon.files.wordpress.com/2010/01/title-vi-community-affairs-report.pdf>.

**1. I-70 East Project website:** <http://www.i-70east.com/>

**2. Transportation Planning Capacity Building Program (TPCB) Peer Report case overview:** <http://www.planning.dot.gov/Peer/Atlanta/atlanta.asp>

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## References

## Resources