

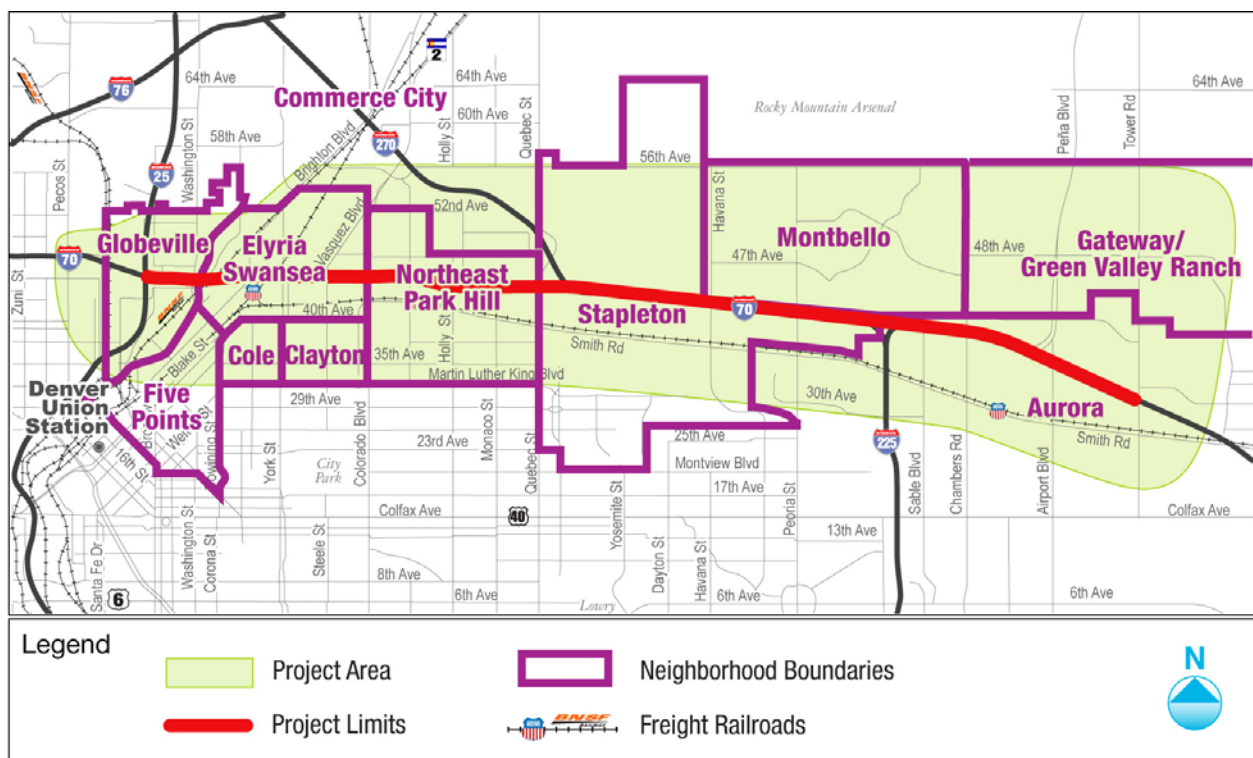
# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) propose improvements to the I-70 Corridor where it traverses northeast Denver, Colorado, from I-25 on the west to Tower Road on the east. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, requires projects that are federally funded and may have an impact on the environment must be analyzed through a rigorous process that allows the public to understand and comment on the benefits and impacts of the project.

As shown in Exhibit 1-1, the project limits extend along I-70 between I-25 and Tower Road and the project area covers established neighborhoods on the west end of the corridor and emerging residential and commercial areas on the east. It includes portions of Denver, Commerce City, Aurora, Adams County, and several Denver neighborhoods including Globeville, Five Points, Elyria and Swansea, Cole, Clayton, Northeast Park Hill, Stapleton, Montbello, Green Valley Ranch, and Gateway.

**Exhibit 1-1  
Project Area**



Existing and forecasted traffic volumes were the main factor in determining the project limits on I-70. Forecasted volumes range from 112,000 to 267,000 vehicles per day between I-25 and Peña Boulevard and decline further east, thus the limits were established at I-25 and Tower Road. An approximate one-mile buffer was created around the project limits to establish the project area. The project area was used to frame the range of transportation solutions and examine existing resource conditions.

## 1.1 BACKGROUND AND CORRIDOR HISTORY

The project area is a blend of older, established neighborhoods and communities to the west of Quebec Street and newer, expanding communities to the east. These communities are diverse in their character and history, providing a wide variety of residential, commercial, public facility, and institutional land uses. Adding to the complexity of the project area is the presence of the National Western Complex as a major travel destination and the redevelopment of the former Stapleton International Airport as a major mixed-use residential and commercial center. I-70 serves as a major east-west transportation and freight corridor linking the American Midwest, Denver, and Colorado's Rocky Mountains and is the primary access highway to Denver International Airport (DIA).

Planning for I-70 started nearly sixty years ago. As part of the recommendation for the "Valley Highway" (I-25), it was determined that Denver's major east-west thoroughfare should be located along 46th Avenue to the east and 48th Avenue to the west of the Valley Highway. In 1947, Denver formally requested that the 46th/48th Avenue corridor be designated as a state highway from Sheridan Boulevard to Colorado Boulevard. Detailed studies and design efforts continued in the 1950s and 1960s, and I-70 construction was completed in 1964.

### 1.1.1 Previous and Concurrent I-70 Corridor Transportation Studies

This environmental impact statement (EIS) process began in 2003, as part of the I-70 East Corridor EIS. The process was initially a joint effort among several agencies including CDOT, FHWA, the Regional Transportation District (RTD), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and the City and County of Denver (CCD).

In June 2006, however, it was determined that the highway and transit elements of the I-70 East Corridor EIS process serve different travel markets, are located in different corridors, and have different funding sources. Therefore, the highway and transit components of the analysis were separated; this I-70 East EIS focuses on the highway improvements between I-25 and Tower Road and is being conducted by CDOT and FHWA. The EIS for the transit elements of this area (East Corridor EIS) are being completed by RTD and FTA; documents on the transit components will be available for public review in 2009. More information on the transit elements of this corridor is available at [www.eastcorridor.com](http://www.eastcorridor.com).

Several studies have been completed within the project area that have indicated or are considering a need for transportation improvements. The studies and their recommendations are shown in Exhibit 1-2.

**Exhibit 1-2**  
**Previous and Concurrent I-70 Corridor Transportation Studies**

Title (Agency)	Date	Study Summary
I-70 Washington Street to Brighton Boulevard Environmental Assessment (CDOT)	January 1993	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluated improvements necessary to increase capacity and improve safety on I-70, and how the improvements would relate to changes at the I-70/I-25 interchange.</li> <li>• Identified a preferred alternative that included widening I-70 between Washington Street and Brighton Boulevard from the existing six general-purpose lanes to a new ten-lane freeway.</li> <li>• Identified improvements included reconstructing the existing viaduct, construction was completed in 2004.</li> </ul>
East Corridor Major Investment Study (Denver Regional Council of Governments [DRCOG])	July 1997	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identified transportation improvements that would be most effective in improving travel in the corridor within anticipated funding constraints, while considering environmental and community impacts.</li> <li>• Recommended investments on the East Corridor included commuter rail, light rail, highway widening, and transportation management elements.</li> </ul>
I-70 Express Lane Public-Private Initiative (Fluor Daniel, Inc. and Flatiron Structures, Inc.)	July 2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colorado enacted the Public-Private Initiatives Program Act in 1995 to allow private interests to propose alternative means of providing infrastructure improvements.</li> <li>• Public-Private Initiatives Program Act presented to CDOT in July 2000 to address transportation issues along I-70.</li> <li>• Public-Private Initiatives Program Act proposed construction of express lanes along I-70 between I-25 and Peña Boulevard.</li> </ul>
East Corridor EIS (RTD)	2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This EIS, originally combined with the I-70 East EIS, examines transit alternatives and potential impacts due to implementing transportation solutions that improve transportation access and mobility in the corridor with connections to downtown Denver, DIA, and the rest of the RTD transit system.</li> </ul>
Central Park Boulevard Interchange Environmental Assessment (CCD)	Pending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This Environmental Assessment will examine interchange alternatives at Central Park Boulevard and I-70 that could be built with both the current and future I-70 configurations.</li> </ul>

### 1.1.2 Local Planning Studies

Several land use and comprehensive plans have been completed in the project area. These plans were considered in the development and evaluation of alternatives. These plans include:

- *2003 Aurora Comprehensive Plan* (Aurora, 2003)
- *Adams County Comprehensive Plan* (Adams County, 2004)
- *Blueprint Denver* (CCD, 2002a)
- *Comprehensive Plan 2000* (CCD, 2000)
- *Game Plan* (CCD, 2003)
- *Gateway Concept Plan* (CCD Community Planning and Development Office, 1990a)
- *Globeville Neighborhood Plan* (CCD Community Planning and Development Office, 1990b)
- *Elyria/Swansea Neighborhood Plan* (CCD Community Planning and Development Office, 1983)

- *Montbello/Green Valley Ranch Neighborhood Plan* (CCD Community Planning and Development Office, 1991)
- *New Lands Comprehensive Plan* (Commerce City, 1992)
- *Park Hill Neighborhood Plan* (CCD Community Planning and Development Office, 2001a)
- *River North Plan* (CCD Community Planning and Development Office, 2003b)
- *Stapleton Development Plan* (The Green Book) (CCD, 1995)
- *Stapleton Parks and Recreation Master Plan* (CCD, 2002b)
- *Whittier Neighborhood Plan* (CCD Community Planning and Development Office, 2000)

## 1.2 STUDY INTENT AND THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT

The intent of the I-70 East EIS is to identify highway improvements along I-70 and to comply with the policies and procedures under NEPA. Federal agencies are required by NEPA to prepare an EIS for major federal actions that could significantly affect the quality of the human and natural environment. The I-70 East EIS analyzes alternatives that are intended to meet the project purpose and need and details the process through which highway improvement alternatives were developed; discloses foreseeable social, economic, and environmental impacts resulting from the project; provides findings for public review; and outlines mitigation measures to minimize impacts.

This Draft EIS (DEIS) is available for review and comment to interested parties, including state and federal agencies, citizens, and elected officials. During the DEIS review period of 45 days, a public hearing will be held and comments will be recorded.

Following the review period for the DEIS, the next step in the NEPA process is preparation of a Final EIS (FEIS). The FEIS will address the comments received on the DEIS and will identify the preferred alternative for the project, its impacts, and the commitments for mitigation measures. Concurrence from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that the preferred alternative appears to be the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative will be requested at this time, in accordance with the Section 404/NEPA merger process. The FEIS document and Section 404 permit application will be made available to the public for review and comment. During the FEIS review period of 30 days, a public hearing will be held and comments recorded.

The final step in the NEPA process is the preparation of a Record of Decision (ROD) that will document the federal agencies' decision for the project. The ROD will identify funding for the approved action consistent with the fiscally constrained section (*Fiscally Constrained Regional Transportation Plan [RTP]*) of the DRCOG 2035 Metro Vision Regional Transportation Plan (MVRTP) (2007b). The final step in the Section 404/NEPA merger process, issuance of the Section 404 permit and approval of mitigation measures, will occur in conjunction with the ROD.

Funding for the preferred alternative selected in the FEIS has not been identified at this time. During the development of the FEIS, consideration will be given to development of a phased ROD which would allow CDOT to fund and implement elements of the preferred alternative over an extended period of time.

## 1.3 RELATIONSHIP TO THE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS

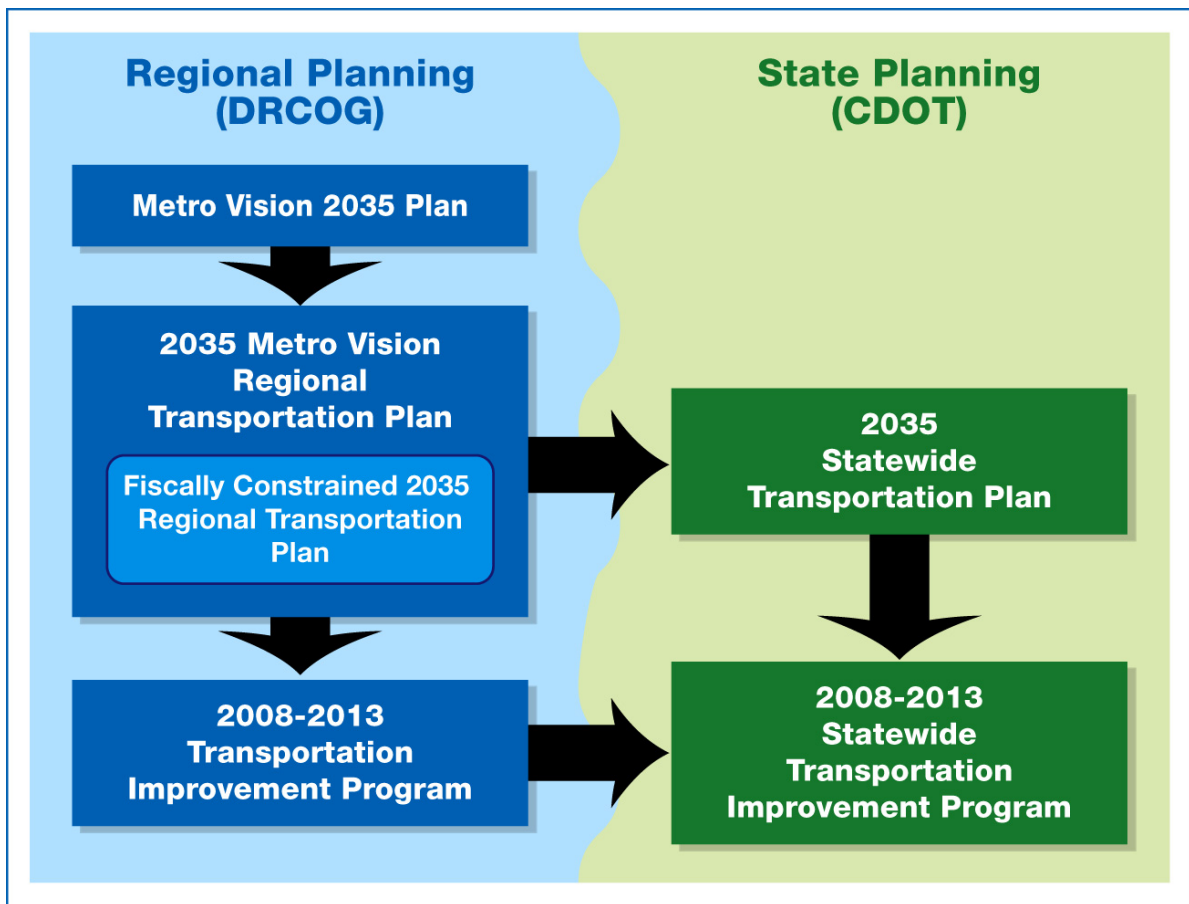
The preferred alternative that will be identified and recommended as part of the I-70 East EIS and ROD is part of a coordinated regional transportation planning process intended to ensure regional air quality conformity and to identify project funding. The transportation planning process in the Denver region is

guided by DRCOG, which serves as the region’s Metropolitan Planning Organization. DRCOG represents a nine-county area including municipalities and county governments, CDOT, RTD, and other local jurisdictions. Through this process, DRCOG develops both short-term and long-term transportation plans for the region.

The planning documents developed by DRCOG and currently used by various state and local agencies to prioritize improvements and identify transportation projects are the *Metro Vision 2035 Plan* (2007a), 2035 MVRTP, and the *2008-2013 Transportation Improvement Program* (TIP) (2008).

In addition to the documents developed by DRCOG, CDOT also produces transportation plans for the state. These have recently included Colorado’s *2035 Statewide Transportation Plan* (STP) (CDOT, 2007a) and the *2008-2013 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program* (STIP) (CDOT, 2007b). Exhibit 1-3 shows the relationship between the planning documents developed by DRCOG and CDOT. Additional information on each of these planning documents and the inclusion of components of the I-70 East EIS is included in the following sections.

**Exhibit 1-3  
Relationship between DRCOG and CDOT Planning Documents**



### 1.3.1 Metro Vision 2035 Plan

The *Metro Vision 2035 Plan* is the long-range plan for the Denver region and provides a vision for the future growth and development of the metropolitan area based on the views of local governments, CDOT, and the public. The plan is the foundation for all of DRCOG's regional planning activities and establishes the need for regional service and facilities. The plan incorporates transportation needs for the year 2035 defined by its companion document, the 2035 MVRTP, providing a vision of the transportation system that is specific to corridors throughout the region.

### 1.3.2 2035 Metro Vision Regional Transportation Plan

The 2035 MVRTP guides the development of the transportation system in the Denver region, and is an element of the *Metro Vision 2035 Plan*. The 2035 MVRTP provides the vision of the transportation system that is needed regardless of available funding. The 2035 MVRTP includes a corridor vision and strategies for I-70. The primary strategies include:

- Reconstructing the viaduct between Brighton Boulevard and Colorado Boulevard.
- Widening I-70 between Colorado Boulevard and E-470.
- Reconstructing interchanges at Quebec Street, Havana Street, Peoria Street, and Chambers Road.
- Widening I-270, I-225, Peña Boulevard, Brighton Boulevard, Vasquez Boulevard, Quebec Street, Central Park Boulevard/Yosemite Street, Chambers Road, and Peoria Street where they cross or connect to I-70.

In addition to defining overall transportation system needs, the 2035 MVRTP includes the *Fiscally Constrained RTP*. The *Fiscally Constrained RTP* includes only those transportation projects from the 2035 MVRTP that can be built by 2035 based on current forecasts for transportation funding. Regionally, significant projects like the highway improvements that are being considered as part of this EIS must be part of the *Fiscally Constrained RTP* and TIP to be eligible for federal funding.

Currently, the only I-70 improvements within the project area that are listed in the *Fiscally Constrained RTP* are a new interchange at Central Park Boulevard, reconstruction of the viaduct from Brighton Boulevard to Colorado Boulevard, and additional travel lanes from I-270 to Havana Street. Along I-270, improvements include widening from Vasquez Boulevard to Quebec Street.

Prior to signing the ROD, all of the elements of the preferred alternative must be shown to be financially feasible and be included in the *Fiscally Constrained RTP*. During development of the FEIS and the ROD, consideration will be given to development of a phased decision document, which would allow CDOT to implement elements of a preferred alternative over an extended period of time. This would in part reflect the results of the financing plan to be developed in the FEIS.

### 1.3.3 2008-2013 Transportation Improvement Program

The 2008-2013 TIP is a six-year implementation program for the *Fiscally Constrained RTP* that is required by federal regulations for metropolitan transportation planning. For projects to be included in the TIP, they must be identified in the *Fiscally Constrained RTP*. The TIP identifies all federally funded transportation projects anticipated for the Denver metropolitan area during fiscal years 2008 to 2013. Within the project area, the TIP includes reconstruction of the I-70 viaduct from Brighton Boulevard to Colorado Boulevard and a new interchange on I-70 at Central Park Boulevard that would be funded with federal and local funds.

### **1.3.4 2035 Statewide Transportation Plan**

The 2035 STP represents CDOT's vision for their transportation system. The corridor visions identified in the STP integrate local land use decisions, community values, and environmental considerations with local and statewide transportation needs. Within each corridor vision, specific improvement strategies are identified that will help achieve that vision. These visions represent an ultimate goal to work toward and are not time-specific.

The corridor visions and strategies included in the STP provide a framework to include and prioritize projects in STIP, the six-year capital-programming document also developed by the state. The corridor vision and strategies in the STP are identical to those included in the 2035 MVRTP.

### **1.3.5 2008-2013 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program**

The STIP is the planning document that identifies the transportation projects CDOT intends to fund over a six-year period. It is prepared in cooperation with local governments throughout the state and is developed concurrently with the TIP. All state and federally funded transportation projects are included in the STIP. Projects included in the STIP are consistent with the STP, the TIP, and should be in conformance with the applicable state air quality implementation plan.

The 2008-2013 STIP includes funding for the development of the I-70 East EIS, repairing portions of the I-70 viaduct from Brighton Boulevard to Colorado Boulevard, and the construction of a new interchange at Central Park Boulevard.

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