

INC Transportation Committee Meeting Notes – January 8, 2015

by Joel Noble

At our meeting on January 8th from 6 to 8 p.m., we had a very full audience in the wonderful party room at 1201 Williams Street. Thank you for extending your hospitality to our committee, Michael Henry!

Denver Public Works Transportation Philosophy, 2014 Accomplishments and 2015 Programs and Plans — Jose Cornejo, Executive Director

Our first presenter was Jose Cornejo, Executive Director of Denver Public Works. Mr. Cornejo last spoke to the INC Transportation Committee when the committee was just starting in its current form, which was also just as he began in his position. Joining Jose was Director of Transportation Crissy Fanganello, City Traffic Engineer Michael Finocchio, Parking Program Manager Cindy Patton, Director of Traffic Operations Steve Hersey, and Director of Street Maintenance Kelly Duffy.

Mr. Cornejo first set the stage with some of Public Works' philosophy. He said that having a planner as Director of Transportation with the Director of Traffic Operations, an engineer, report to her reflects an intention to keep a broad focus on quality of life in making mobility investments and decisions on how our limited right-of-way is allocated. Public Works believes the right-of-way design and planning has to be multi-modal, has to be a reflection of the community values, and has to create places that are safe, efficient, and reliable for all regardless of age, income, and personal abilities. The goal is to create a healthier and more livable city. By bringing the skills of planners into leadership in the traditionally engineering-led department, Public Works can go beyond applying standards like AASHTO and instead look at the human dimension when facing the challenges of a growing city.

The philosophy of Public Works is reflected in [SMART Denver](#) – a strategic action plan published late last year, which will be updated again in 2015. It serves as a guidebook for Public Works, and a key communications document with the public. SMART Denver includes two-year action plans across all Public Works areas.

In the Transportation section, three major objectives are identified:

- Create a livable city that offers its residents and visitors a variety of transportation options
- Make it easier for people to get around town – whether they drive, bike, walk or use transit
- Improve roads, bike and pedestrian infrastructure, using all available funding sources, including federal, state, and local funding.

Pedestrian objectives include providing a safe and reliable pedestrian network for all ages, achieving a combined 15% walk/bike commute mode share by 2020 (as of 2012, the walk commute mode share was at 5%), reducing physical barriers for connectivity and placemaking, implementing the [Pedestrian Master Plan](#), enhancing the Complete Streets policy to include new ideas and proven approaches from other cities, and achieving Gold status as a [Walk Friendly Community](#) (achieved in 2014).

On the topic of **transit**, Mr. Cornejo says that RTD's system serves regional connections quite well, but local connections could be much better. Primary objectives in Public Works for transit include building partnerships with RTD, and for Denver to take a more active role in planning transit in order to increase transit service and frequency. Additionally, improving transit stop amenities has been identified as important to make bus and rail more convenient and attractive mobility options. Transit mode share is relatively static in Denver at about 7% (2012), comparable with its level prior to the economic downturn, but about 2% less than at the height of the recession.

For **bicycle** mobility, the overall goal is to build a bicycle network that integrates the on-street and trail

systems to provide safe, comfortable corridors for Denver residents and visitors of all ages and abilities to connect to a variety of destinations by incorporating national best practices. Objectives identified are to achieve Gold status as a [Bicycle Friendly Community](#) as determined by the League of American Bicyclists, achieve a 15% walk/bike commute mode share by 2020, and implement the 311 miles of facilities called for in the Denver Moves plan so that a high-ease-of-use bike facility is within a quarter-mile of every household in Denver. Bicycle commute mode share is clearly on the increase, growing from 0.6% in 2008 to 2.9% in 2012.

The goal in the **traffic** category is to maintain and operate the overall traffic control system and balance demand, utilizing innovative technology to maximize efficiency and flexibility of the street network for all users. The identified objectives are to manage traffic in a way that creates a safe and reliable system, and to enhance the education program around sharing the right-of-way.

Next, Crissy Fanganello reviewed **major projects completed in 2014**, including:

- The [Peoria Crossing](#) overpass north of 39th Avenue, separating vehicle and ped/bike traffic from passing railroads, making traffic more efficient, while providing a wide sidewalk to access the commuter rail station
- [University/Josephine improvements](#) using Better Denver Bond funds
- [Quebec Alternatives Analysis](#) to increase north-south travel capacity and improve multimodal mobility between 6th Avenue and 26th Avenue, which has identified a preferred alternative for which the city is now seeking funding.
- [Colfax Corridor Connections](#) study which identified Bus Rapid Transit on East Colfax with peak-hour exclusive lanes (where feasible), and including a package of multimodal improvements, as Denver's preferred alternative to handle the increasing needs to move people.
- The [bike program](#) added 28 miles of new bike lanes and sharrows, and installed vertical separation between bikes and cars along the 15th Street Bikeway downtown making it Denver's first protected bikeway and resulting in a significant reduction in sidewalk-riding.
- Annual work programs achievements in paving, signals, accessibility and more were detailed (see presentation slides for specifics).

In 2015, the major transportation goals are to **increase safety for pedestrians, bikes and cars**, to **decrease congestion**, and to **improve air quality**. Public Works recognizes that reducing congestion by increasing person-trip capacity must involve strategic investments in multimodal facilities. Projects in 2015 include:

- Improvements along major corridors including [Brighton](#) and [Broadway](#)
- [Colorado Center Bike/Pedestrian Bridge](#) over I-25 near Evans Ave, connecting the light rail station with adjacent neighborhoods, the bicycle network, and employment/retail centers.
- [35th-36th Street Pedestrian Bridge](#) connecting River North over the railroad tracks to Curtis Park, Cole, and RTD's 38th/Blake commuter rail station which will open in 2016.
- [Inca Street multi-use path & 38th Avenue underpass improvements](#) for pedestrian and bicycle connectivity to the RTD 41st/Fox commuter rail station
- Protected bike lane construction on Lawrence Street from the Auraria Campus to Broadway, and on Arapahoe Street from the Ballpark neighborhood to the Auraria Campus.
- Annual work program will pave 25 alleys and 360 lane-miles of streets, bolstered by 2A funding and with a focus on neighborhood streets in poor condition
- New and updated plans and programs
 - Begin work on Denver Moves: Pedestrians and Trails, an update to the 2004 Pedestrian

Master Plan that will have a greater operational orientation with a network map and strategy for how to fund and maintain pedestrian infrastructure over time

- Begin work on Denver Moves: Transit, a city-wide transit vision to help support Denver's multimodal goals. Key question is to determine what Denver's role should be, while developing a framework to understand high transportation demand in the city, and understanding where development is occurring and is expected, in order to provide a way to organize our goals to keep up with the pace of transportation needs.
- Expand the Area Management Parking Plan program into more neighborhoods struggling with competition for limited on-street parking
- Implement a new traffic safety software tool called Vision Zero Suite to provide predictive, diagnostic, and analytic tools for solving road safety problems.

In an extensive Q&A session, we learned:

- Bike and pedestrian commuter mode share is determined by self-reported responses to the US Census American Commuter Survey, which is used consistently throughout the United States. Additional targeted data is available in areas such as downtown, collected by other organizations.
- As part of the Denver Moves: Pedestrians and Trails plan, Public Works will be working with WalkDenver to learn from the WalkScope data that has been collected. In the future, Denver may have its own reporting tool for the public to use.
- Public Works understands that some very wide pedestrian crossings can be daunting, and approaches to improve usability include increasing pedestrian crossing time in accordance with increasing Federal requirements, and upgrading to "countdown" pedestrian signals which give a better indication of how much time is left than a flashing red hand signal.
- Public Works will be increasingly working in neighborhoods to learn about what is working and isn't, and to come up with ways to implement improvements. Reporting problems can always be done through 3-1-1 or the new pocketgov.com mobile web site.
- Following the completion of the Globeville and Elyria-Swansea neighborhood plans, by 2016 Public Works should have a good idea which street projects will make sense to address in what order, to be most efficient.

This was a great session to bring so many neighborhoods into direct communication with the leadership at Public Works as we continue to work together to manage the transportation needs of our growing city.

See Jose Cornejo's [full presentation slide deck](#) for more details. The Department of Public Works web site can be found at www.DenverGov.org/dpw.

Bridj: Private, On-Demand, Dynamic Express Bus Service — Councilwoman Mary Beth Susman.

Our second speaker for the evening was Councilwoman Mary Beth Susman, who has been looking into the possibilities presented by private mass transit service. In visiting New York, Councilwoman Susman used "Dollar Vans" – a type of [jitney](#) service. That got her to thinking about how group-ride services might be used to fill in the gaps in our public transportation service, particularly to and from some Denver neighborhoods where rail service isn't available and bus service can be infrequent, hard to figure out, and slow to get to your destination. With a preponderance of single-occupant vehicles on the roads in Denver, and facing an increasing population, we're reaching capacity on our street infrastructure. Shared-ride options could help reduce congestion, while reducing total cost for riders.

Keeping her eyes out for what's going on along these lines in the city, she found out about [Bridj](#), a

startup service operating in Boston and Cambridge today. Using clever algorithms and masses of data on where people move to and from, Bridj can identify opportunities for a van or bus “route” to bring people together who are going to and from the same general areas at the same general time, offering express (no intermediate stops) service. Payment is made ahead of time online via a mobile app, guaranteeing a seat – no need to carry cash or make change. In Boston, each trip costs more than regular public transportation, but far less than a taxi, Uber or Lyft, at between \$4 and \$5 per trip. The service does not require any public subsidy.

There are no routes to memorize – you enter your origin and destination, and select the most convenient time to ride. You will be told where to meet the service (no more than a 5-minute walk from your starting point) and where you’ll be dropped off (no more than a 5-minute walk from your destination).

Matt George, CEO of Bridj, has been visiting Denver and meeting with Public Works, CPD, RTD, and others, to see if the service would be a good fit and welcomed, to understand the regulatory requirements in Colorado, and to start getting a sense of the potential demand. If a pilot is pursued, there would be a public information campaign incorporated. Service would likely start with SUV vehicles, and then upgrade to 13-passenger Mercedes Benz vans as ridership increases.

As this is just in an exploration phase, Councilwoman Susman was very interested in getting feedback and questions from the audience. Some of the discussion covered the following topics:

- It’s interesting if it attracts those who are driving single occupancy vehicles today who are able and willing to pay \$4-5 per trip, which could reduce traffic congestion for everyone. However, if it attracts significant numbers of people who are using public transportation today, despite Bridj’s higher cost, it could impact RTD farebox revenue and make it more difficult for RTD to operate existing services. A sit-down meeting with RTD’s General Manager Phil Washington is planned in the near future, but the initial feedback from RTD’s bus operations group didn’t identify any immediate concerns.
- Enthusiastic response from some neighborhoods, including Globeville, where additional transportation options are actively being sought.

The audience was very engaged and asked excellent questions. Some of the questions that Councilwoman Susman didn’t know the answer to and took away for future research included:

- Does Bridj do “peak period” or “surge” pricing? Councilwoman Susman doesn’t think so, but she will verify.
- What hours will Bridj operate? Only during the day or at high-demand times, or would it be available at any time of day and day of week?
- Will sales tax be collected on ticket sales, which helps support the general fund and city transportation infrastructure?
- Is a smartphone necessary to use the service? In 2014, there was also a web interface, but with the rollout of the new mobile application at the beginning of 2015, the app is currently the only way to use the service. Councilwoman Susman believes the web interface will be returning, but will have to verify.
- If RTD finds that Bridj is pulling riders away from their service to a degree that impacts their operations, would it be possible to impose a small fee on Bridj trips which would help offset the impact, so the basic public transportation service doesn’t become impaired?
- Will the service be accessible for the disabled, including those who have wheelchairs? The RTD-affiliated taxi service offers very few compatible cars for wheelchairs, and expanding the options for this community would be of great interest.

- A phone number to call would be of great benefit to those with visual impairments, and a service that is so much less expensive than taxi service would be greatly welcome if they could access it.
- Do any of these disabilities/accessibility support features become requirements if Bridj is classified as a “common carrier” by the PUC?

When Matt George from Bridj comes back to Colorado, Councilwoman Susman will try to arrange for visits to various groups interested in hearing from him and asking questions about the service. She'll let the INC Transportation Committee know about these opportunities

[Councilwoman Susman's full presentation deck](#) has more details. Visit Bridj at www.Bridj.com and [see a video of how Bridj works](#)