



WESTMINSTER

Staff Report

TO: The Mayor and Members of the City Council
DATE: January 7, 2010
SUBJECT: Briefing and Post-City Council Briefing Agenda for January 11, 2010
PREPARED BY: J. Brent McFall, City Manager

Please Note: Study Sessions and Post City Council briefings are open to the public, and individuals are welcome to attend and observe. However, these briefings are not intended to be interactive with the audience, as this time is set aside for City Council to receive information, make inquiries, and provide Staff with policy direction.

Looking ahead to Monday night's Briefing and Post-City Council meeting briefing, the following schedule has been prepared:

Dinner	6:00 P.M.
Council Briefing (<i>The public is welcome to attend.</i>)	6:30 P.M.
CITY COUNCIL MEETING	7:00 P.M.
POST BRIEFING (<i>The public is welcome to attend.</i>)	

PRESENTATIONS

1. Proposed South Westminster Transit Oriented Development (TOD) area land plan and street design

CITY COUNCIL REPORTS

1. Report from Mayor (5 minutes)
2. Reports from City Councillors (10 minutes)

EXECUTIVE SESSION

None at this time

INFORMATION ONLY

None at this time.

Items may come up between now and Monday night. City Council will be apprised of any changes to the post-briefing schedule.

Respectfully submitted,

J. Brent McFall
City Manager



Staff Report

Post City Council Briefing
January 11, 2010



SUBJECT: Proposed South Westminster Transit Oriented Development (TOD) area land plan and street design

PREPARED BY: Mac Cummins, AICP, Planning Manager

Recommended City Council Action:

Provide input regarding the proposed TOD plan. RTD has requested that the City Manager sign a letter detailing the City's desire to accomplish a more intense development pattern around the South Westminster train station area. No formal vote of the City Council is required for this action. Staff will make any changes the Council deems necessary to the plan, and forward the plan to RTD for inclusion into the RFP in late January so that all "would be" bidders (Called "Consessionaires" in the RTD RFP) on the project are aware of the City's future plans for the area.

Summary Statement:

- Following RTD's announcement that the Gold Line would have a spur line included within the Eagle P3 project to South Westminster (Roughly 71st Avenue and Irving Street, in the same location as was shown on the Northwest Rail corridor of FasTracks), staff held several meetings with RTD staff to discuss implementation of the City's future land planning goals for the area. One critical component of this effort is the implementation of a land plan and road network that is conducive to transit oriented development patterns and land uses.
- In the discussion with RTD, several critical path areas of discussion emerged. Notably, RTD (and the City) are primarily concerned at this juncture with the operational characteristics of the train station. These include the location of the train platform, access into and out of the area, requisite number of parking stalls (both on opening day and in the future), bus turning movements and loading/unloading areas, etc. The City's Planning Division has also worked hard to ensure that the new street pattern accomplishes the requisite block configuration and depth such that TOD types of retail and/or ground-level commercial uses can occur with lively street activity. The land plan will accomplish this, and the final design will be done in 2010.
- The Plan effectively creates a street network based on the principle of a radial semi-circle plaza around the platform, with a street hierarchy splintering northerly into the traditional grid system found in that part of the City. This concept will allow for excellent transition from the TOD area into the public gathering node in and around the platform. The platform will be loaded from South of the tracks, so the design is also intentionally done to allow for a smooth transition to the tunnel that will access both the platform and the Little Dry Creek Park area, which is still in design. Each of the streets will be categorized in the hierarchy and designed with varying street widths so that different looks and feels can be accomplished at the pedestrian and/or vehicular level (more analysis below).

Expenditure Required: None at this time. There may or may not be a cost associated with the proposed parking structure. This will be determined in the early part of 2010 as the design is being finished.

Source of Funds: At this point, it is unclear as to whether or not there will be any cost to this project. No decisions regarding financial impact need to be made at tonight's meeting.

Background Information:

The provision of commuter rail service between Denver Union Station (DUS) and Boulder, via Westminster, was enabled by the November 2004 passage of a 0.4% sales tax measure by voters within the Regional Transportation District (RTD). The DUS to Boulder (later extended to Longmont) line, known as the Northwest Rail Corridor, was one of five new railways included in the FasTracks program that was designed to provide radial service between downtown Denver and strategic points around the periphery of the Denver Metro Area. Under the 2004 plan, Northwest Rail Corridor service, which would run along tracks located within the existing Burlington Northern/Santa Fe railroad right-of-way, was to be operational by the year 2017. During the five years following the approval of FasTracks, RTD staff and representatives of the affected Northwest Corridor jurisdictions worked together on the preparation of an Environmental Evaluation to resolve a variety of issues such as the rail technology to be utilized (Diesel Multiple Units) and the final locations of train stations. In Westminster, those stations are to be located at 71st Avenue/Irving Street (a/k/a the "South Westminster" station) and at The Shops at Walnut Creek with a third, potential station in the vicinity of 88th Avenue/Harlan Street.

Since 2004, it has become apparent that the 0.4% sales tax that was approved at that time will not be sufficient to fund the entire FasTracks system on the original schedule. Greatly reduced sales tax revenues coupled with rapidly escalating costs of certain construction materials have created a significant funding shortage for the program. While the 2010 Annual Program Evaluation from RTD staff will not be released until approximately January 7, 2010, it appears that the funding mechanisms currently in place would not allow for the full implementation of the Northwest Rail Corridor until the year 2030 or beyond. For this reason, RTD has explored alternative means of funding various portions of the FasTracks system.

One of those alternative funding mechanisms is a public-private partnership known as the Eagle P3 Project. Under this project, RTD will contract with a team of private partners to design, build, finance, operate and maintain the East Corridor (DUS to Denver International Airport), the Gold Line (DUS to southern Arvada), a short segment of the Northwest Rail Corridor (DUS to South Westminster), and a commuter rail maintenance facility. RTD will retain all assets while shifting much of the risk of the implementation of these rail services to the private consortium. In return, RTD will make service payments to the private partner, thus allowing the District to spread out the large upfront costs over a longer period of time. Most importantly to City residents, the Eagle P3 Project will facilitate the provision of rail service to the South Westminster station by 2016 – much sooner than would otherwise be possible under the current funding scenarios.

The inclusion of the short segment of the Northwest Rail Corridor within the Eagle P3 Project comes with certain conditions. First, the construction of the DUS to South Westminster spur is entirely dependent upon RTD's receipt of a \$1 billion federal grant, which RTD officials feel confident will be partially approved later this year. Also, in order to ensure that a maintenance facility for only one type

of rail technology will be necessary, the Northwest Rail spur must initially use Electric Multiple Units rather than Diesel Multiple Units to achieve consistency with the technology of the East Corridor and the Gold Line. Finally, the frequency of rail service to the South Westminster station will likely be less than originally envisioned for the full build-out of the Northwest Corridor. Nonetheless, City staff views the Eagle P3 Project as a positive step forward in the provision of rail service to a portion of Westminster.

Summary of Proposed Plan

The Council has seen a land plan for this area in the past. The main concepts of that plan are still the same, with some modifications based on the RTD platform configuration. The plan the Council is reviewing at this point is effectively a street grid, with primary changes being located in the area south of 71st Avenue to accommodate a parking structure (holding +/- 750 parking stalls), bus capacity and turning movements, and a focal point of public space next to the platform in the form of a plaza. The plan is described below:

Street hierarchy

The street network is specifically designed to implement the current thinking in mixed use, higher density development patterns around transit facilities. A new street would be created at the 69th Avenue alignment and Federal Boulevard, and continues northwesterly following the train tracks until just east of Lowell Boulevard, where the street would turn northerly and intersect 71st Place. This new street would also include a radial semi circle configuration framing the proposed plaza adjacent to the platform location. Irving Street would be brought southerly from 71st Avenue to intersect the new roadway, as would Hooker Street, and a proposed new street along the Craft Way alignment. Each of these street extensions (Irving, Hooker, and Craft Way) south of 71st Avenue, would intersect the new radial / plaza street in such a fashion as to draw the attention to the public realm of the plaza itself. This would be intentional to frame the public space(s) as a primary focal point for the overall development in the area.

The street hierarchy also contemplates the requisite lot and block dimensions for the types of retail and/or commercial uses which typically want to locate in these TOD areas (ie 60-80 feet in actual storefront depth) and room for alley and/or "back of house" operations. Additionally, the plan specifically contemplates the ability to wrap the parking structure in commercial land uses and provides for the necessary depth in the blocks to accommodate TOD development patterns (the final design has not been completed, though staff is confident that the parameters are accurate in the street to street width).

Another point of the design of the street hierarchy is that the primary north/south spine will be Irving, which terminates at 76th Avenue on the north, and the platform plaza on the south. This street will be designed to link the TOD intense uses and the public space within the TOD area to the civic uses north of 72nd Avenue (ie The Swim and Fitness Center, the Irving Street Library, etc.), while the primary east/west streets will be 71st Avenue and the new street at 69th Avenue, based on their location within the TOD area, and their strategic connection ability to the ultimate build-out of the Northgate property to the east of Federal Boulevard.

New Traffic Signal Locations

One key component of the land plan will be to relocate the existing signal at Federal Boulevard and 70th Avenue to create two (2) signal locations, one at 71st Avenue, and one at the 69th Avenue alignment where the new roadway would be constructed. Staff is working with CDOT to accomplish

this. The creation of these two signals will be important to the land plan/street network and ultimate TOD development in that it will provide for better bus circulation to the train platform (explained below), create more opportunity to get vehicles and/or pedestrians from the TOD area into the Northgate area, and generally create better circulation patterns into and out of the TOD area.

Bus Circulation

Staff has been working with RTD staff on the possible/proposed bus circulation throughout the TOD area. The TOD plan, in its current configuration, allows for bus drop off/pick up to occur along the new street created along the 69th Avenue alignment. The ultimate design has not been completed yet; however, the basic requirement from RTD operational staff is that the bus loading must be visible from the train platform. As such, the most logical location would be southeasterly from the platform, either on street, or in a “saw tooth” design adjacent to the new roadway. A total of six bus loading bays is anticipated as the requirement.

There are two bus routes now that will be affected by the implementation of a new train station, an east-west line along 72nd Avenue and a north-south line along Federal Boulevard. The basic circulation flow, as imagined at this point in time, would be for northbound buses on Federal Boulevard to turn left (westerly) at the new signal at 69th Avenue. Loading and/or idling would either occur on street or after making a “u turn” into a saw tooth loading area. Exiting back onto Federal would occur at either the 69th Avenue signal, or the bus would proceed northerly on Craft Way to 71st Avenue to approach a signal to get back onto Federal Boulevard for northerly travel.

For southbound busses, the bus would travel to the 69th Avenue signal, turn right (westerly) into the TOD area, load in the same configuration as described above for northerly traffic, and then exit the TOD area in the same fashion.

East / West Busses would also access the drop-off / pick-up location via Federal Boulevard, rather than traversing through the TOD area.

At this time, City Staff are not anticipating any bus movements throughout the remainder of the TOD area, with primary (or complete) bus traffic occurring to the east of the proposed parking garage and Craft Way. RTD staff is working with their operational staff to determine that this will work, and have commented that the basic principle appears acceptable to them, pending final design. In any event, the streets within the TOD area will be designed to accommodate bus traffic, should that be necessary. City Staff believe the most likely path will be to utilize access points along Federal, as compared to driving busses on streets designed to have significant pedestrian activity and street life.

Parking Structure

One critical element to the land plan is the provision of a central parking location for transit users that can also be shared and/or utilized by commercial activity in the evening. The original RTD plan includes all surface parking. In general terms, surface parking is not compatible with urban development at or near TOD facilities. By providing the all of the parking in one central location, and designing the street network and land uses to encourage the pedestrian circulation flow the City desires, the overall success of the TOD development effort will be greatly enhanced.

The structure has not yet been designed. RTD Staff have indicated to the City that approximately 300 to 400 parking stalls would be required on opening day, and approximately 900-1100 stalls would be required in the future. The plan the Council is looking at this evening allows for the most flexibility and efficiency in designing a parking structure to accommodate those numbers of stalls.

The City has begun discussions with RTD to allocate the amount of money that RTD “would have” spent on acquiring all of the land necessary for the surface parking, and then constructing a parking garage using those funds. If there is a difference, Staff has begun discussions with RTD about how to close the funding gap. At this point, it is not certain whether any gap will exist. If, however, a gap does exist, the City would need to look at how to fund that difference to accommodate the structure.

Nature of Request

At tonight’s meeting, staff is requesting input from the City Council regarding the proposed TOD Plan. Any changes and/or additions to the plan will be incorporated and sent along with the aforementioned letter to RTD for implementation into the RFP Process.

Next Steps

After tonight’s meeting, staff will work with RTD to make sure the plan is incorporated into the RFP for concessionaires.

During the course of 2010, staff will be refining the major elements of the plan and refining/creating design guidelines for City Council consideration. These elements include street design (including streetscape, landscape features, amenity zones – ie restaurant patios, outdoor retail areas, etc.), architectural design of future buildings, landscape design, public realm opportunities, etc.

Staff will also be working on implementation mechanisms for the plan. These would include possible zoning tools and/or changes to the regulatory scheme in the area so that property owners and developers can accomplish the mixed use, dense TOD development pattern the City desires in the area. The current zoning for the properties within the TOD area does not allow the mix of uses that the City desires; and includes a mix of industrial, commercial, and residential zoning designations, without the ability to mix those uses on the same property. Staff will create a unified zoning proposal for Council consideration in the future to implement this plan.

Finally, staff will begin working with RTD staff on an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) to memorialize the plan and discuss both the City’s and RTD’s roles and responsibilities in implementing the proposed land plan as the project moves into implementation.

Staff will be at the post meeting briefing to answer any questions the City Council may have.

Respectfully submitted,

J. Brent McFall
City Manager

Attachment: TOD Plan

