

Department of Transportation and Infrastructure

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Summary and Assessment

The mission of Denver's Department of Transportation and Infrastructure (DOTI) is to enhance the quality of life in Denver by safely and efficiently delivering effective, high quality, sustainable and equitable public infrastructure and services. Infrastructure is grouped into two core functions—utilities and mobility. Utilities deliver our City's water and waste, as well as green infrastructure and services. Mobility delivers transportation infrastructure, services, and initiatives for all travelers, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, commercial vehicles and drivers. DOTI is the second largest department in the City after Public Safety, and is the largest landowner in the City: the public right-of-way that DOTI is responsible for accounts for approximately half of the land area in Denver.

Key things DOTI is doing well right now, according to feedback from stakeholders:

- **Hiring good staff.** DOTI team members are passionate, dedicated, ambitious, talented, and progressive, with expertise in national best practices and multimodal transportation. This includes more recent hires that bring new expertise in transit.

- **Developing strong, data-driven plans that establish a clear vision and goals.** Of particular note are the recently released [Denver Moves Everyone](#) strategic transportation plan and updated [Vision Zero Action Plan](#) [PDF].
- **Managing a large, complex portfolio of work.** This includes the \$937M [Elevate Denver GO Bond program](#) approved by voters in 2017, which is currently about 50% complete, and the \$260M [RISE Denver GO Bond program](#) approved by voters in 2021, which is currently about 5% complete. Both bond programs are currently on track to be completed in 2027 as planned.
- **Implementation of visible multimodal and street safety improvements.** This includes dedicated bike lanes and transit lanes, better bicycle and pedestrian detours around construction sites, and experimentation with new concepts such as the Shared Streets implemented during the pandemic. Many of these improvements are most visible downtown, and are just the first, incremental steps toward building out complete, multimodal networks that serve all Denver neighborhoods.

Key challenges facing DOTI, according to stakeholders and current employees:

- **Not enough staffing to support DOTI's workload.** There has been a significant loss of key mid-level staff due to burnout and a hot job market, and there's an overall lack of junior staff in the pipeline. Staff turnover is averaging 20% per year. This results in poor morale, overburdened project managers and an overreliance on consultants, which wastes City dollars. DOTI can only address the other challenges identified here if it addresses this fundamental issue.
- **Not enough consistent, dedicated funding to achieve the vision laid out in plans like Denver Moves Everyone and the Vision Zero Action Plan.** While Denver's population and GDP has continued to grow, transportation spending per capita has decreased. Denver currently spends about \$310 per capita annually on transportation, compared to a national average of about \$600 per capita. Peer cities like Seattle, that have made more progress on goals such as reducing traffic fatalities and increasing transit mode share compared to Denver, spend about \$1,000 per capita. Denver's current funding allocations are not always well aligned with the City's goals.
- **Customer service issues, particularly related to permitting.** These include long delays and lack of certainty in permitting processes, which can derail plans that initially had strong buy-in from City leaders and the community, and can discourage both private sector and nonprofit developers, as well as private citizens (home improvements), from pursuing good projects that are aligned with City goals. Transportation and safety issues are difficult to report via the City's current 311 system, and often are not effectively responded to. DOTI's waste management division needs to have a single point of contact for customers needing support, rather than multiple teams.
- **Continuing dominance of "car culture."** The long-standing assumption that the speed and convenience of driving should be prioritized above all else continues to permeate DOTI practices and community conversations, and is reflected in the current design of our streets. While plans like Denver Moves Everyone state an intention to prioritize non-car modes through the construction of complete, safe, well-connected multimodal infrastructure, implementation of these plans has been slow and inconsistent, often not staying true to the vision. We must break free from the dominance of cars and driving to

achieve many of our City's goals embodied in these plans related to climate change, sustainability, safety, equity, and inclusivity. Doing so requires political will from the Mayor's office as well as the DOTI Executive Director. The incumbent City Traffic Engineer and Traffic Engineering office defaults to engineering standards that do not align with the multimodal and Vision Zero goals, needs, and plans of our city.

- **Communications and relationships with community members (particularly from disadvantaged communities), City Council, and private sector partners.** Many stakeholders perceive DOTI as lacking transparency, resistant to true partnership, and held back by a culture of “no” and fear-based decision making. To be successful in its mission, DOTI must address and overcome these perceptions by communicating more openly, meeting people where they are, and more proactively developing strong stakeholder relationships.

Answers to Specific Guiding Questions

- 1. How can DOTI evolve to further prioritize non-car modes of transportation as the City plans for the future, while also catering to the mobility and safety needs of today?**

While cars and driving are and will continue to be part of Denver's transportation system, nearly a century of transportation policies and investments that prioritized cars and driving above all else has created a system that is severely out of balance. Many Denver residents are forced into unnecessary and unsustainable dependency on cars because they have been deprived of viable non-car options. We should not allow this current situation to limit our imagination of what is possible with the right infrastructure and policies. Rather, DOTI should focus on enhancing Denverites' transportation freedom by de-centering cars and building out transit, bicycle, and pedestrian networks that people will actually use (i.e., induce demand) because they are safe, connected, and well-maintained. DOTI can do this by:

- Treating the public health crisis of increasing traffic fatalities and serious injuries that has resulted from our car-centric transportation system with the urgency it deserves, by adopting a bias toward action and a “first responder” culture (i.e., expediting safety and professional interventions where necessary).
- Prioritizing the needs of communities that have been disproportionately impacted by our car-centric transportation system, including low-income households and people of color who are dependent on cars today and stand to benefit the most from more viable non-car options.
- Moving beyond low-hanging fruit and focusing on bigger, more transformational projects, including the citywide buildout of a fast, frequent and reliable public transit system.
- Expediting implementation efforts by radically shifting the community engagement paradigm to solicit the majority of community input after rapid piloting of new designs, using experiential engagement, observational data collection, and fast-moving iterations to ensure that projects achieve the intended outcomes of increased safety and use of non-car modes.

Adequate funding and a mandate from the Mayor's office to prioritize non-car modes, as well as close coordination with other city agencies such as Community Planning and Development, Denver Parks and Recreation, CASR, the Fire Department, DEDO & HOST will be essential for DOTI to successfully achieve this much-needed transformation of Denver's transportation system.

2. How does the RTD operating model need to evolve to ensure future sustainability? How can the City partner with business and community leaders in support of an effective and sustainable transit system?

An effective and sustainable transit system means increased frequency (i.e., buses and trains that come at least every 10 to 15 minutes), speed, and reliability of service (i.e., dedicated transit lanes that prevent buses from getting stuck in congestion). These are key features that will make our transit system actually useful for Denver residents and therefore increase ridership. To achieve this outcome, the City and County of Denver must lead on transit, not wait for RTD or other partners to do so. Denver can do this by:

- Working proactively to develop strong alignment of goals and close working relationships among DOTI, RTD and CDOT (because CDOT owns many of the roads, such as Colfax and Federal, that are priority transit corridors in Denver), from the heads of these agencies down to front-line staff, focused on implementing the full network of bus rapid transit (BRT) envisioned in the Denver Moves Everyone plan. DOTI should also work closely with Community Planning and Development to coordinate BRT investments with increased density along these corridors as envisioned in Blueprint Denver.
- Securing increased funding for transit by using City funds to buy up more frequent transit service from RTD, pursuing Federal funding opportunities, and/or pursuing a regional transit funding initiative. In addition to funding for capital investments in BRT and rail lines, consistent ongoing funding is needed for transit operations.
- Prioritizing equity populations (low-income communities, communities of color, and people with disabilities) by targeting transit improvements in these communities first, and working to understand and elevate the experience of people who currently rely on transit. Planners and decision makers involved in designing our transit system should also have first-hand experience using the system.
- Implementing quick, iterative pilot projects that test and confirm what will actually increase transit access and ridership. These pilot projects should not replace or delay capital-intensive projects such as BRT on major arterials, but serve to help expedite and ensure the success of these bigger projects
- Focusing attention and resources on areas the City has direct control over, including bus stop amenities, first/last mile connections to transit, integration with shared bikes/scooters, and circulators in lower-density areas not well served by fixed-route transit (with the goal of ultimately extending fixed-route service to these areas).
- Supporting regional transit connectivity for people coming into Denver from surrounding communities.

- Working with RTD to address the transit operator shortage, which is the primary barrier to improving service frequency, potentially by offering housing benefits to RTD employees.

3. What are the next steps in creating a network of high comfort bike lanes, and how do we test ideas before making large scale investments?

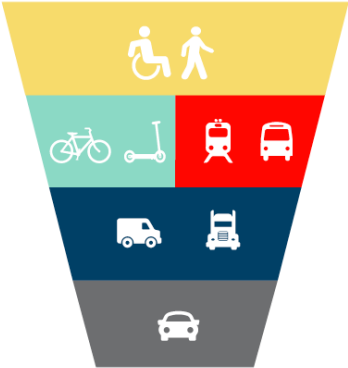
To achieve the intended outcome of increasing the number of trips made by bike, particularly by people who are “interested but concerned” about the safety of biking in Denver, bike facilities must actually be perceived as “high comfort” by users. DOTI can ensure this outcome and complete the buildout of a truly high comfort bike network by:

- Listening to community feedback on the perceived comfort of new facilities. In particular, the community has been calling for more robust traffic calming and restrictions on vehicular access (such as vertical deflection and diverters) along neighborhood bikeways to ensure the speed and volume of vehicular traffic is in fact low enough that people on bikes feel comfortable sharing this street space with cars.
- Shifting the community engagement model to solicit the majority of feedback after low-cost on-street changes are made (using paint, plastic posts, rubber curbs, etc.), and doing multiple, rapid iterations informed by both qualitative feedback and quantitative data, allowing enough time for people to adapt to the changes.
- Deliberately testing on-street changes with target populations including children, older adults, and people with disabilities, with the goal of understanding the experience of both people on bikes and people walking/rolling and accessing transit on these streets. Community members who contribute in this way should be compensated for their time.
- Showcasing data on successful bike facilities to build support for further investments.
- Working with the Fire Department to support street design changes that reduce the need for emergency response by preventing traffic crashes, including right-sizing emergency response vehicles for narrower streets.
- Greenlighting the use of speed tables as an approved treatment citywide.
- Completing the Engineering Design Standards update to be consistent with the [Complete Streets Design Guidelines](#) [PDF]
- Over time, upgrading from low-cost plastic and rubber to more robust concrete and metal treatments, and integrating art, placemaking, and greenery into the designs.

DOTI’s ultimate north star should be the creation of a complete network of high-quality on-street routes (a backbone bike network) on par with off-street trails, including major car-free thoroughfares. Denver can look to other cities for inspiration—such as Market Street in San Francisco—while dreaming big and being a leading city nationally in this area.

Recommended Priorities/Outcomes

Below are top priorities DOTI should address under the new administration. “Key Outcomes” are those outcomes that are critical to the success of the administration. “Other Outcomes” are important goals the administration should work hard to achieve, but which are not strictly critical to the administration’s success.

	Key Outcomes	Comments
1	<p>Achievement of the Vision Zero goal of eliminating traffic deaths and serious injuries by the end of this administration’s term.</p>	<p>DOTI should elevate the priority of this issue with expanded staffing and funding; address the lack of interagency coordination that is creating roadblocks (e.g., with the Fire Department); continually evaluate what’s working; focus on reducing speeds on arterials; integrate Vision Zero into all projects; and empower staff to quickly implement small scale, standard safety improvements with no/minimal community process. Fulfilling the promise of Vision Zero will require partnering with CDOT and RTD to transform major arterial streets like Colfax, Federal, Colorado, Speer, Alameda, etc., into safe and pleasant places to walk, bike, roll, and access high-frequency transit service.</p>
2	<p>Elevation of non-car modes to the top of the pyramid, consistent with the diagram below from Blueprint Denver</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>Pedestrian Priority: Complete multimodal networks prioritize the most efficient modes first. People walking and rolling are the heart of the transportation system as everyone is a pedestrian at some point during their trip.</p>	<p>Achievement of this outcome will enhance the mobility freedom of all Denver residents and reduce our city’s unsustainable dependence on cars as a primary form of transportation. To do so will require adequate, sustainable, funding and staffing that enables DOTI to transition from visioning to implementation and accelerate the build-out of complete, large-scale networks, including backbone bikeways, pedestrian thoroughfares with robust traffic calming, and neighborhood bikeways. The swift and successful implementation of voter-approved Initiative 307, Denver Deserves Sidewalks, will also be essential.</p>

3	Enhanced transit service	DOTI should expedite implementation of planned bus rapid transit (BRT) projects; fund more frequent service on high-priority RTD routes; develop Denver-led service that is complementary/supportive of RTD; and audit ADA compliance of all bus stops and make upgrades as needed. Investments in BRT should be closely coordinated with increased density along these corridors, as envisioned in Blueprint Denver.
4	Adequate, dedicated funding to achieve the above outcomes	The administration must address structural problems with current transportation funding in Denver, including funding sources/levels that are not sustainable and not keeping up with the growth and needs of the City. The administration should do an in depth analysis of current funding sources and allocations, and both pursue new funding sources and identify opportunities to better align existing funding with multimodal and Vision Zero goals, as well as avoid cost inefficiencies. Dedicated funding should allow DOTI staff to plan ahead with certainty, and should not allow allocations for bike, pedestrian, transit, and safe streets improvements to “cannibalize” each other.

	Other Outcomes	Comments
1	DOTI culture that embraces getting to “yes” (Better Customer Service Permitting, Project Delivery)	DOTI should focus on achieving desired, people-centric outcomes (e.g. not just miles of bike lanes, but people using those bike lanes); empower staff to do creative problem solving and be flexible with processes and guidelines; seek opportunities to streamline processes to deliver both internal and external projects faster with higher-quality outcomes and more cost effectively; deepen day-to-day collaboration and open communication with other agencies (CPD, DPR, DFD, CASR), private sector, and community partners; focus on being a good client and providing high quality customer service. All staff should be responsible for and supported in finding ways to deliver planning, permitting and inspection

		services in more predictable and efficient ways within clearly defined timeframes.
2	Radical shift in the community engagement paradigm	DOTI should provide for the majority of community input after the first or second iteration of new design projects; use demonstration projects for observation and data collection, with enough time for users to adjust to new designs; clearly commit to iterative improvements on initial designs; increase the use of stakeholder groups inclusive of priority populations that are often overlooked, as opposed to traditional community meetings; and compensate community members for their time and contributions to the design process. Once projects are identified as a priority in high-level plans, DOTI shouldn't allow projects to be derailed.
3	Implementation of community-initiated projects aligned with Citywide goals.	DOTI should provide full support for and remove barriers to projects that have emerged from years of community-led planning and visioning for how our streets can evolve to better support the health and vitality of Denver's neighborhoods, including the 5280 Trail, 303 ArtWay, Westwood Via Verde, Montbello FreshLo Loop, and redesign of the Colfax/Federal cloverleaf interchange and Colfax viaduct.
4	Integrated management of the full public realm to create beautiful, green, welcoming places throughout the City	Achieving this outcome will require seamless coordination both within DOTI and across agencies (including Community Planning and Development; Denver Arts and Venues; Denver Parks and Recreation; Forestry; Denver Economic Development and Opportunity; and Climate Action, Sustainability, and Resiliency) to support all the different functions that street space/public right-of-way can and does serve beyond mobility, including public seating, green infrastructure and shade, stormwater management, art, placemaking, healthy ecosystems, local commerce, recreation, community gatherings and celebrations, etc. The administration should allocate funding in the City's annual budget explicitly for this purpose, and consider appointing a Chief Public Realm Officer to facilitate the necessary cross-agency collaboration.

5	Expanded Shared Streets Program	DOTI should return to the fast, iterative approach to Shared Streets from the pandemic, with the ultimate goal of creating a network of car-lite or car-free pedestrianized streets throughout the city.
6	Universal access to recycling and compost, with increased waste diversion rates	Full implementation of the Waste No More initiative will be essential to achieving this outcome.
7	Execution of the renewed Franchise Agreement between the City and County of Denver and Xcel Energy	DOTI should continue to focus on strategic electrification, resiliency/reliability, municipal operations (decarbonization of municipal facilities), electric vehicles, and Citywide charging stations.

Proposed 100-Day Action Plan

In the first 100 days, the Johnston Administration and the new DOTI Director should:

1. **Endorse and commit to implementing the recently finalized [Denver Moves Everyone](#) plan**, including the following key goals, and investments in multimodal infrastructure necessary to achieve these goals:
 - Zero traffic fatalities and serious injuries
 - Zero greenhouse gas emissions generated by transportation
 - At least 20% of trips made by transit and 15% of trips made by walking, biking, and rolling
 - Complete pedestrian, bicycle, and transit networks (e.g., implementation of specific projects), including short- and long-term implementation benchmarks

We strongly encourage the Mayor and DOTI Director to read the full plan document, which includes an in-depth analysis of Denver's current transportation challenges and opportunities, and reflects many years of community input.
2. **Ride/walk/roll with community members along key routes the community has identified as priorities for improved multimodal infrastructure and placemaking**, including:
 - 5280 Trail
 - 303 ArtWay
 - Westwood Via Verde
 - Montbello FreshLo Loop
 - Colfax/Federal cloverleaf interchange and Colfax viaduct.
3. **Establish a cross-agency leadership group** to synchronize efforts and remove barriers that are slowing progress toward overarching, Citywide goals embodied in the City's Comprehensive Plan, Blueprint Denver, and Denver Moves Everyone that require effective collaboration among agencies. The group should include key agencies that, along with DOTI, have a role in both development review and management of Denver's public realm, such as Community Planning and Development, Denver Parks and Recreation, Climate Action Sustainability and Resiliency, DEDO and HOST. The focus of this group should include:
 - Coordinating efforts to create welcoming, inclusive, green public spaces to support a climate friendly, vibrant, and thriving Denver.
 - Coordinating efforts to pursue federal grant funds (see next item)
 - Resolving interdepartmental conflicts related to development and providing customers with time-certain decisions.
 - Creating a substantive plan to significantly reduce the time for issuance of a building permit for all types of projects in the City.
4. **Aggressively pursue both Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL/IIJA) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) federal grant funds** with dedicated resources for grant writing and local match requirements. Grants opportunities that could fund multimodal, pedestrian and bike infrastructure to lower vehicle emissions, and improve air quality across the City with a focus on equity communities, creating up to a 4-1 return on investment, include but are not limited to*:
 - Reconnecting Communities/Neighborhood Access (USDOT)

- Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) (USDOT)
- Thriving Communities (USDOT, EPA, HUD)
- Safer Streets for All (SS4A) (USDOT) - 'Vision Zero'
- Bridge Investment Program (USDOT)
- Transit Oriented Development (USDOT)
- Railroad Crossing Elimination (USDOT)
- INFRA (USDOT)
- SMART grants (USDOT)
- EV Community Grants (USDOT)
- Low/No Emission Bus Grants (USDOT)
- Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation (PROTECT) grant (USDOT)
- Partnership with DPS to seek Low/No Emission School Bus grants (USDOT)
- Environmental Remediation grants (EPA) - cleaning up contaminated city owned sites to be able to deliver associated multimodal improvements.

**Some program NOFOs will be released after the first 100 days. Must plan in advance.*

5. Implement rapid pilot projects focused on creating car-free and car-lite zones, including:

- Pedestrianization of Wynkoop between 17th and 18th in front of Union Station
- Expansion of the Shared Streets network, iterating on what was implemented during the pandemic, with a similar experimental, low-cost, quick-build approach
- Demonstration of a more robust version of a neighborhood bikeway with traffic diverters every three blocks, consistent with what the community has been calling for

6. Implement quick policy and operational changes to improve safety on the most dangerous corridors and locations, such as the “safety zones” and “Tier 1 high injury network streets” identified in the recently updated [Vision Zero Action Plan](#) [PDF] including East Colfax, South Federal, Lincoln, Broadway, and Downtown:

- Declare an emergency at sites where repeated traffic fatalities are happening, to enable expedited corrective action (i.e. a “safety stand down”)
- Reduce speed limits to 25 mph on arterial high injury network roads
- Install speed cameras, paired with highly visible signage and awareness campaigns
- Ban turns on red
- Reclassify city-owned streets downtown, most of which are currently classified as arterials, to better align with the prioritization of non-car modes on these streets
- Greenlight the use of speed tables as an approved treatment citywide
- Complete the Engineering Design Standards update to be consistent with the [Complete Streets Design Guidelines](#) [PDF].

7. Focus on process improvements, including

- Lift the hiring freeze
- Fund an independent report to evaluate the DOTI budget vis-a-vis peer cities
- Evaluate city procurement and permitting processes and create and authorize “fast track” processes

- Review and evaluate all prior Vision Zero site interventions, including with outside experts, to improve interagency coordination and effectiveness in achieving safety outcomes
8. **Establish a clear, actionable plan for prioritizing equity throughout the agency,** ensuring our streets are inclusive as possible, and proactively incorporating anti-displacement efforts into major projects. This should begin with senior leadership, and be a top consideration in the hiring of the new DOTI director.