

The Road to an Affordable, Safe, and Clean Transportation System

Colorado Transportation Choices Coalition

As Colorado faces growing congestion, rising transportation costs, and increasing climate and air pollution, the state should prioritize investments that expand transportation choices, improve safety and mobility, and save people money. Transportation is Colorado's leading source of climate pollution, and decades of car-centric transportation and land use planning have resulted in gridlock and car-dependent communities. To create a clean, safe, and affordable transportation system that works for all Coloradans, we should shift investments toward high-quality transit, intercity passenger rail, walking, biking, and transportation demand management – solutions that move more people efficiently while reducing household costs and pollution.

Diversifying transportation options is critical for affordability and cost of living - the top concern for Colorado voters. Transportation is the [second-largest household expense](#) after housing, with Denver metro families spending an average of [\\$15,300 per year](#) on transportation. According to a [CDOT study](#), a 10% reduction in total driving miles would save Coloradans over \$25 billion by 2035, primarily from less spending on vehicle costs like car payments, fuel, insurance, repairs, maintenance, and parking, and by reducing medical bills from fewer traffic crashes, healthier air, and more physical activity. Our current transportation system is also unfair to people who don't drive. [Nearly 30% of Coloradans](#) can't or don't drive because of age, income, or disability.

According to statewide polling conducted in March 2025, a [majority of the public](#) would prefer greater investment in public transit over highway expansion. Similarly, respondents to [CDOT's 2025 telephone town halls](#) called for a more diversified transportation budget, with 37% of CDOT funding dedicated to transit, biking, and walking and just 13% to highway expansion. Yet CDOT's recently updated 10-Year Plan [does the opposite](#), allocating roughly three times more funding to highway expansion than transit and just 2% to active transportation.

Expanding roads and highways is not a durable solution for addressing Colorado's transportation challenges. There's [well-documented evidence](#) that highway expansion increases vehicle miles traveled and congestion returns to pre-construction levels within [5-10 years](#). Giving people the ability to opt out of traffic congestion saves Coloradans time and money, and allows us to prioritize projects that are better aligned with our environmental and social goals.

Transportation pollution is also a major public health and climate challenge. It is the [leading driver of climate change](#) in Colorado and contributes to failing [federal ozone standards](#) across the Denver Metro/North Front Range region. These air-quality impacts disproportionately affect communities of color, low-income residents, older adults, and people with disabilities. Traffic crashes are also a leading cause of preventable death in Colorado, with 718 people killed on Colorado's roadways in 2025.

In addition to transit and active transportation, electric vehicles are a key strategy for reducing emissions and household transportation costs. EVs can save drivers up to [\\$2,200 per year](#) in fuel costs – a significant benefit for low-income households, which spend nearly a third of their income on transportation. As Colorado expands charging infrastructure, it should prioritize Disproportionately Impacted Communities (DICs) to ensure the benefits of electrification reach those who need them most.

To create a clean, safe, and affordable transportation system, Colorado should:

Shift funding toward projects that expand transportation options

The state should shift transportation funding toward projects that expand affordable, safe, and convenient alternatives to driving, while maintaining the infrastructure we already have. Coloradans want more investment in transit, walking, biking, and other transportation options, yet current funding continues to prioritize costly and harmful highway expansion projects.

Recommendations:

1. Continue to enforce, refine, and strengthen Colorado's landmark GHG Planning Standard for transportation - a policy that's shifted funding toward projects that save people money and reduce climate emissions.
2. Establish goals and performance measures to expand transportation options such as VMT reduction, transportation mode share, transit service growth, and level of service for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Align state transportation investments with those goals.
3. Incorporate "accessibility" into transportation planning and project selection to focus on connecting people to destinations rather than increasing vehicle speeds.
4. Support staff in designing to multimodal network standards rather than roadway-only standards. Shift funding away from roadway-only projects and toward projects designed for multiple modes and at a network scale, creating safe and appealing access to jobs, services, and recreation.

Prioritize "Fix It First" and better manage highway capacity

CDOT should prioritize maintaining and repairing existing infrastructure before adding new road capacity. Colorado currently ranks [28th nationally](#) for pavement condition on urban interstates and 47th for rural interstates. CDOT has made progress, reducing the share of interstate pavement in poor condition from [3.9% in 2020 to 2.3% in 2024](#), but a significant maintenance backlog remains. Deteriorated roads cost the average Colorado driver an estimated [\\$831 per year](#) in additional vehicle operating costs, including repairs, tire wear, fuel consumption, and depreciation. Meanwhile, each new highway lane costs more than [\\$24,000 annually to maintain](#). Every dollar spent adding unnecessary road capacity is a dollar that cannot be spent fixing the system we already have.

Recommendations:

1. Fund maintenance and repair improvements on the existing transportation system before adding new highway capacity.
2. Avoid highway expansion, particularly in Disproportionately Impacted Communities that already experience disproportionate health impacts from air pollution.
3. Where additional highway capacity is necessary, build Managed Lanes rather than General Purpose Lanes and use dynamic pricing to manage demand. CDOT's Policy Directive 1603 already encourages Managed Lanes rather than General Purpose Lanes, but the policy should go further. In addition, explore opportunities to convert existing highway lanes to Managed Lanes.
4. Require highway expansion proposals to explicitly account for induced vehicle travel and long-term congestion, climate, and environmental impacts in the modeling, as well as a maintenance plan that identifies long-term funding sources for any project that adds road capacity.
5. Require new or expanded highway interchanges that enable sprawling greenfield development to incorporate strategies to offset congestion impacts through transportation demand management and smart-growth policies.

Expand and improve Colorado's transit system

Colorado should significantly expand transit and rail, so people have viable alternatives to driving. Recent investment in transit is already resulting in strong ridership growth. Over the past several years, CDOT has

[doubled Bustang service](#) on I-25 and tripled it on I-70. Since bottoming out in 2021 due to COVID, annual ridership has increased fivefold – from 70,400 to 353,400 riders. Similarly, [Winter Park Express ridership increased](#) 153% after service expansion, and [90% of Yampa Valley voters](#) supported creating a regional transportation authority, demonstrating statewide support for better transit service.

Recommendations:

1. Explore opportunities to optimize and increase SB21-260 and SB24-230 Enterprises revenues for transit, multimodal, and transportation electrification projects.
2. Establish a long-term vision with reliable, permanent funding for Bustang to increase service. Expand the use of CTIO toll revenues to support Bustang and other nearby transit and multimodal projects that improve mobility and reduce congestion.
3. Advance Front Range Passenger Rail (FRPR) and leverage state funding to support local and regional transit expansion and transit-oriented development around the new stations.
4. Establish a strong partnership between the state and RTD to improve agency performance and ridership. Appoint RTD board members who support a rider-focused vision and service expansion. Support new funding measures, including a potential 2028 ballot measure, to expand service.
5. Prioritize near-term funding for Bus-Rapid Transit (BRT), bus-stop improvements, transit signal priority, queue jumps, mobility hubs, and other projects that improve transit speed and reliability.

Build a connected, safe, and accessible active transportation network

Building on CDOT's 2026 [Active Transportation Plan](#), Colorado should establish a statewide vision for safe, connected multimodal networks that allow people to walk, bike, roll, take transit, drive, and connect to rail safely and comfortably. Active, human-scale transportation is a vital component of our transportation system and should be treated as such. The goal should be zero traffic deaths, with investments focused on preventing deaths and serious injuries, not maximizing vehicle speeds.

Recommendations:

1. Establish a statewide Vision Zero Action Plan to intervene with evidence-based design solutions where the data indicates the need.
2. Develop a vision for connected bike and pedestrian infrastructure that prioritizes connectivity, comfort, and safety - and build it.
3. Establish strong Complete Streets policies and standards for state-owned roads and transform urban arterials and rural main streets into safe, people-friendly, multimodal streets that improve access for all road users and prioritize safety over speed.
4. Identify new funding opportunities for pedestrian and bicycle safety infrastructure to replace recent cuts to the Multimodal Options Fund and Revitalizing Main Streets programs.

Accelerate transit-oriented and compact development

Transportation and land use planning must work together. Colorado should make it easier for people to live near jobs, schools, services, and high-quality transportation by allowing more housing in compact, walkable, transit-rich areas. Coloradans in more compact urban areas drive half as much as those living in the suburbs, and spend half as much on transportation. This is partially because compact neighborhoods tend to have a better mix of residential and commercial land uses, and enough population to support nearby local businesses, so car trips are shorter.

Recommendations:

1. Continue implementing Transit-Oriented Communities near high-frequency transit and continue leveraging state funding to reward local governments that adopt supportive land use policies and enable more housing and mixed-use development in these areas.
2. Align transportation and land use planning by prioritizing transportation projects that support efficient, low-VMT development patterns and discourage car-dependent sprawl. Work with local governments to develop their SB24-174-required Strategic Growth Elements and prioritize infill development on vacant and underutilized land over greenfield development.
3. Pursue policies that allow and encourage more infill development, including middle housing and Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) in existing residential neighborhoods near jobs, schools, shops, and other daily needs.
4. Encourage local governments and transit agencies to remove parking mandates, particularly near transit and other walkable, compact neighborhoods.

The organizations signed on to this Transportation Options Coalition Vision urge the next Colorado administration to take on the challenge posed by harmful transportation emissions in our state. Transitioning to cleaner forms of transportation will lead to a cleaner, healthier, and more affordable transportation system that helps Colorado achieve its climate and transportation goals. To achieve these goals, more ambitious policies are needed. The signatories of this vision have ideas for the best policies that can achieve these goals, and we would appreciate the opportunity to speak with a prospective new governor on what these could look like. **We formally request the opportunity to meet with you and your team to discuss strategies to bring down transportation emissions through transportation options policies in Colorado.**

Sincerely,

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