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Federal Boulevard Framework Plan Health Impact Assessment Executive Summary

ADAMS COUNTY

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These individuals were key contributors to developing the HIA content and creating the recommendations (* denotes HIA Team).

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These individuals were stakeholders or community members who provided guidance on the HIA process, the review of HIA findings, recruitment for community activities and the HIA recommendations.

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Disclaimer

The authors of this report are responsible for the facts and accuracy of the information presented. The views expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of Kaiser Permanente Colorado, the Health Impact Project, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation or The Pew Charitable Trusts.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Tri-County Health Department (TCHD) embarked on a process in partnership with Adams County Planning and Development Department in 2013 to conduct a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) in close coordination with the Federal Boulevard Framework Plan. The purpose of the HIA was to assess the potential impact that the plan’s policies would have on health and to provide recommendations to maximize positive health outcomes through the planning process. We consulted existing data, collected new community data and conducted a literature review to come up with recommendations to improve health outcomes. This summary report provides a brief overview of what we learned from this work and includes recommendations for amending the Federal Boulevard Framework Plan’s twenty Plan Recommendations to incorporate health considerations.

Why Health with a Corridor Framework Plan?

Health is a universal value that is linked to our quality of life. Over the last several decades, our nation has seen a shift in the greatest threats to our health – from infectious diseases to chronic diseases, long-lasting preventable conditions that lead to lifelong disability and compromised quality of life. In Adams County, the leading causes of death in 2013 were cancer and heart disease.¹ As a nation, 75% of our health care dollars go to treatment of chronic diseases.²

The land use and planning policies that we adopt define the physical environments that allow and promote healthy activities. Adams County is eager to plan for future economic and community development opportunities along the Federal Boulevard corridor. The new transit investment in the Federal Boulevard Framework Plan study area of two new rail stations, as a part of the Denver Regional Transportation District (RTD) FasTracks Program, is anticipated to bring change along the corridor. By considering health in this early stage of the community planning process we will not only begin to tackle the huge financial burden of our current health challenges, we will create communities where all people thrive.

Existing Conditions of the Federal Boulevard Study Area

Information about the existing conditions was obtained using data from the census, the Colorado Departments of Transportation and Education, Adams County Code Enforcement, the existing business inventory and existing pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure inventory. All estimates have been rounded for ease of reading.

The study area is located between 52nd and 72nd Avenues and bounded west to east by Lowell Boulevard and Zuni Street respectively. **More than half (53%) of the individuals are lower income and live below 200% of the poverty level**, higher than Adams County (34%) or Colorado (30%).³ Almost all children (93%) attending Fairview, F.M. Day, Francis Hodgkins, or Skyline Vista schools are eligible for free and reduced lunch, higher than other schools in Adams County School District 50.⁴

“The land use and planning policies that we adopt define the physical environments that allow and promote healthy activities.”



Motor vehicle crashes along the corridor are not uncommon and a higher proportion result in injury when compared to the rest of Adams County. From 2009-2013, 771 crashes occurred (includes bicycle and pedestrian).⁵ During 2009-2011, 17% of all crashes in the corridor resulted in injury compared to 9% of other crashes on Adams County state highways.⁶

This section of Federal Boulevard is not safe for pedestrians or bicyclists. From 2009-2013, 17 pedestrians were involved in a crash, 8 (47%) were injured, and 3 (18%) killed. There were 13 bicycle crashes, and five bicyclists were injured (39%).⁵ The pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure inventory showed that 59% of the corridor does not have sidewalks.

Many residents in this community may need to use alternative methods of transportation such as biking and walking or transit to get where they need to go. Twenty-five percent of the residents in the community are younger than 18 years of age, and 12% of residents are age 65 or older. In census tracts 96.06, 97.51, and 97.52, about 8% of the residents do not have a vehicle to use, which is higher than Adams County (5%) or Colorado (6%). On average, 5% of all the residents use public transit to get to work, which is slightly higher than Adams County (4%) or Colorado (3%).²

Blight in the form of trash and/or weeds is found throughout the corridor. The code enforcement office received complaints of trash and/or weeds on 500 parcels of land in the study area from 2011-2013.⁷ Graffiti was reported on 12 properties.

The businesses along the corridor do not cater to walkers and cyclists. Currently the corridor is dominated by automotive-related businesses such as auto sales, auto parts sales, auto repair, and car wash (37 out of 102 businesses). There are 18 retail services which include banks, dollar stores, convenience stores, and thrift shops. Five establishments along Federal Boulevard sell liquor, and there are four sexually-oriented businesses.⁸

Aria Development is a mixed income development of approximately 450 housing units going in between 52nd and 54th bounded by Federal Boulevard on the East side to Zuni Street on the west. In anticipation that the new residents will be interested in walking to the new rail station and future businesses located at 60th Street and Federal Boulevard, the developer plans to build a 10-foot sidewalk on their property along Federal Boulevard to facilitate pedestrian movement.

What the Community Told Us

We gathered information from the community during meetings with residents, stakeholders, and the steering committee, administered a community survey and conducted bike and pedestrian assessments with our partners.

The area lacks an adequate and connected concrete sidewalk system that pedestrians can use effectively for walking and biking. Community Pedestrian and Bicycle Assessments showed that in 24 out of 56 assessment participants (43%) had to walk in the street with cars during the activity because no sidewalks were present.

There are a limited number of safe pedestrian crossings at intersections along Federal Boulevard. People frequently cross Federal Boulevard at mid-block because

“The pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure inventory showed that 59% of the corridor does not have sidewalks”

the distance to the nearest crosswalk is too far away.

Some community members do not feel safe in their community. One question on the Community Outreach survey was “are the streets in your neighborhood a safe place to walk and/or ride a bicycle?” and respondents’ answers were evenly split between “yes”, “no”, and “sometimes.” When asked “What keeps you from walking and/or riding a bicycle in your neighborhood?” respondents selected scary dogs (44%), cars go too fast (44%) and too many cars (31%) as their top three answers. Some specific safety concerns cited during meetings included trails that are dark and isolated, parks that do not feel family-friendly, high traffic of transient people at 60th Street and Federal Boulevard, the number of bars and liquor-related establishments, and sexually oriented businesses.

People are interested in walking around their neighborhood, and do walk, but not often enough. One-third of survey respondents reported walking everyday; two-thirds reported walking 2-3 times a week or less often, which is less than current recommendations.⁹ Eight of the 20 survey respondents with children (40%) reported their children walking to school, but one of those indicated that they are afraid of the traffic. Two more respondents said they would “like to walk to school.” When respondents were asked what places they currently walk to, 50% selected parks, and another 38% indicated that “they would like to walk” to parks in the future.

Community members are also concerned about affordable housing with increased demand for transit-oriented development (TOD), poor air quality, and old landfills in the study area that produce methane gas and create a fire danger if not properly mitigated.

The Connection to Health

The individuals in this community are at risk for having poorer health outcomes because they have lower incomes. Research has shown that individuals with lower incomes are at higher risk for obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart attack and stroke (among other health outcomes), compared to individuals with higher incomes.^{10,11} To optimize the potential for positive health outcomes, there are several health issues that can be addressed through the planning process. Traffic safety, community safety and opportunities for physical activity among other topics can be enhanced by the policies proposed in the Federal Boulevard Framework Plan.

Motor Vehicle Traffic and Health

Higher vehicle speeds have been found to be strongly associated with both a greater likelihood of pedestrian crash occurrence and more serious resulting pedestrian injury.¹² Engineering countermeasures have the potential to improve safety by separating vehicles from pedestrians by space and time.¹³ Another feature of traffic safety to consider is the aging of the population. By 2030, it is estimated that more than one million Colorado adults will be age 65 or older.¹⁴ Older adults may have decreased functional capacity that results in slower walking speed, difficulty walking more quickly, and an increased risk for falling.¹³

Pedestrian Safety and Health

Research has found there are factors that significantly affect a pedestrian’s sense of safety or comfort while walking on a road. A study by the state of Florida showed that

“Higher vehicle speeds have been found to be strongly associated with both a greater likelihood of pedestrian crash occurrence and more serious resulting pedestrian injury”



the lateral separation of the sidewalk relative to the motor vehicle traffic, the frequency of motor vehicles passing pedestrians, and speed of traffic affect a pedestrian's sense of safety or comfort while walking on a road. As lateral separation increases with the presence of on-street parking, a line of trees, or a roadside swale, the pedestrian's comfort or sense of safety also increased. Conversely, increased passing and increased speed were associated with pedestrian discomfort.¹⁵

Physical Activity and Health

Physical activity has a positive influence on health. For adults, physical activity can help manage weight, and lower the risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes, breast and colon cancer, falls and depression.¹⁶ The American Heart Association recommends 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week, and states, "The simplest, positive change you can make to effectively improve your heart health is to start walking."¹⁷ Physical activity also has benefits for children: it can improve bone health, improve cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness, and decrease levels of body fat.¹⁶

Summarizing the comments of one stakeholder, options to increase physical activity through alternative transportation like walking and bicycling are very difficult due to a lack of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, motor vehicle speeds, concerns for safety, and a lack of desirable places to walk to. Scientifically supported strategies to increase walking and bicycling include streetscape design strategies such as Complete Streets policies, traffic calming, mixed-use development, and land use policies. Walking School Bus (<http://www.walkingschoolbus.org/>), and Safe Routes to School (<http://saferoutespartnership.org/state/srts-in-your-state/colorado>) are two-evidence based strategies to increase walking and alternative transportation to school.¹⁸

Community Safety and Health

Neighborhood physical environments have been found to influence adults' readiness to encourage children's use of local playgrounds.¹⁹ Liquor stores²⁰ and sexually oriented businesses²⁰⁻²¹ have been linked to increased violence, and other crimes.

The findings described above have implications for the Federal Boulevard Framework Plan and recommendations follow in the next section for how to address these findings, while maximizing the health benefits of the plan and minimizing the negative impacts.

The HIA Recommendations to the Federal Boulevard Framework Plan

Tri-County Health Department commends Adams County for commencing a planning process to help guide well-planned change to the Southwest Adams County community. It is clear that the proposed Plan Recommendations in the Federal Boulevard Framework Plan considered a broad range of land use and transportation topics.

The following recommended amendments and additions to the Plan Recommendations were developed through extensive community engagement and supported by data collected during the HIA process. TCHD recommends the Planning Commission amend the Federal Boulevard Framework Plan Recommendations as outlined below to optimize

"...The simplest, positive change you can make to effectively improve your heart health is to start walking."



the potential for positive health outcomes related to traffic safety, community safety, opportunities for physical activity and other concerns voiced by community members. The proposed amendments to the Plan Recommendations grew out of eight HIA recommendation topics. The HIA recommendations are explained in greater detail in the HIA Full Report.

HIA Recommendation Topics

Meaningful and Inclusive Community Engagement

Cross Jurisdictional Collaboration

Education and Information about Future Transportation Improvements

Connectivity Through the Study Area

Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure Improvements for the Area as a Priority in All Planning Activities

Housing Affordability

Neighborhood-Serving Land Uses

Community Safety

The following are the proposed amendments to the Plan Recommendations proposed in the Federal Boulevard Framework Plan. The suggested changes or additions are in boldface type in the Plan Recommendations listed below. Where there is no bold-face type in one of the listed Plan Recommendations, there is no proposed change.

Plan Recommendation #1:

Corridor planning should accommodate north/south traffic volumes to maintain or increase vehicular capacity, while **accommodating safe pedestrian crossings at key intersections and** retaining reasonable access to adjacent commercial properties.

Plan Recommendation #2:

Corridor planning should consider a multitude of zoning mechanisms tailored to the proposed development types that **include neighborhood-serving retail and healthy food retail.**



Plan Recommendation #3:

Corridor planning should preserve and enhance on- and off-ramp access to U.S. 36, I-76 and I-70 interchanges **while providing safe pedestrian connections**, and discourage local street and driveway intersections that reduce their efficiency.

Plan Recommendation #4:

Corridor planning should address further vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian safety measures to improve the balance between vehicular and pedestrian/bicycle modes.

Plan Recommendation #5:

Corridor planning should emphasize and enhance motorized and non-motorized transit connections with the proposed commuter rail stations.

Plan Recommendation #6:

Corridor planning should strengthen pedestrian, bicycle and visual connections with the existing and proposed open spaces and alternative mode transportation corridors to increase their presence, personal safety, and integration with the corridor, in order to decrease personal safety issues and crime.

Plan Recommendation #7:

Corridor planning should **develop strategies for addressing** affordability needs **including the preservation of existing affordable housing and/or ensuring affordability in future developments**. Adams County Housing Authority (ACHA) and others **should be engaged in the process** to make appropriate accommodations for affordable housing within the corridor.

Plan Recommendation #8:

Corridor planning should address potential Federal Boulevard blight conditions, and recommend improvements in visual character. The addition of pedestrian-oriented improvements to the Right-of-Way is critical in providing better accommodations for non-motorized corridor transportation. Additionally, streetscape plantings should be incorporated throughout the corridor with a focus on shade trees along the east and west sides of the roadway due to the utility limitations of the center medians.

Plan Recommendation #9:

Corridor planning should consider an improved identity and brand for the Federal Boulevard corridor that can be emphasized through the coordinated selection of signage, lighting, site furnishings, bus shelters and streetscape plant material. Opportunities may exist to include signage types that include 1950's-era signage typologies and recall the corridor's motels, filling stations and drive-through.

Plan Recommendation #10:

Corridor planning should address potential methods for land assembly for redevelopment,



protection of residential neighborhoods from commercial land use and traffic encroachment, and methods to interconnect the local street grid.

Plan Recommendation #11:

Corridor Planning should develop a complete network of sidewalks and trails to connect the existing community facilities, schools, residential areas, future commercial areas and transit stops. Develop a pedestrian and bicycle connectivity plan for areas generally within one-half mile radius of the two rail stations to identify short-term and long-term pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure to ensure safe and well-designed connections from residential and commercial areas to transit stops. Identify short-term improvements that would have a strong impact on completing the network.

Plan Recommendation #12:

Corridor planning should consider realignment of east side streets to intersect Federal Boulevard at existing west side street locations between 65th Avenue and 67th Avenue to create 4-way, aligned intersections, accommodating safe pedestrian crossing, left turns and providing alternative business access from Federal to side streets.

Plan Recommendation #13:

Corridor planning should **include further analysis of** potential Complete Street (vehicular/ bike/pedestrian) upgrades to parallel, off-corridor, north-south streets, to provide safe alternative, parallel routes for neighborhood bike and pedestrian access to Transit Stations and Federal Boulevard Corridor destinations.

Plan Recommendation #14:

Corridor planning should consider built-in planning flexibility and land use provisions for these blocks, since they may be most vulnerable to changes in market conditions. "Transitional" use designation to allow Multi-Family, Commercial-Retail, Office or mixed use combinations could preserve long range use flexibility, with infrastructure planning sized to accommodate that range of uses. **In the short-term, develop strategies to address land uses that bring activity and business (e.g. a grocery store) that are more conducive to the adjacent residential neighborhoods which are home to many families.**

Plan Recommendation #15:

Corridor planning should evaluate the capacity of existing utilities within and adjacent to the roadway (including the existing Crestview water line north of Interstate 76) to determine if additional investments are required to support future, more-dense, mixed-use development. Federal grants such as Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG); The Department of Transportation's Livable Community Grant and the Federal Transit Administration's SAFETEA-LU grants; and the Environmental Protection Agency's Brownfields Planning Grant.

Plan Recommendation #16:

Corridor planning should seek new opportunities for higher density **and mixed income**



residential development which will be necessary in the corridor to attract and support new commercial retail development.

Plan Recommendation #17:

Corridor planning should consider the preparation of a detailed retail development plan that identifies the desired types and locations of retail uses including strategies for attracting new uses to the corridor.

Plan Recommendation #18:

Corridor planning should consider the adaptive re-use of the historic building adjacent to the future Federal Station as a complimentary use such as a bike/coffee shop that serves station commuters.

Plan Recommendation #19:

Corridor planning should include strategies to minimize impacts on adjacent residential neighborhoods and discourage commercial through traffic. Residential neighborhood gateways should be considered west of Federal; East side Complete Street provides land use transition, non-aligned intersections and streetscape as a use buffer.

Plan Recommendation #20:

The W.64th Avenue / Federal Boulevard intersection holds potential for future redevelopment as the “100% Corner” for Mixed Use Commercial Center redevelopment **that includes best practices for incorporation of safe pedestrian and bicycle connections.** W. 64th Avenue provides the only east-west through traffic connectivity in the corridor. Three (3) of four corners are of sufficient parcel size and configuration to support master planned center development, which may include a Lifestyle Center, Grocery-anchored Neighborhood and supporting retail development.

Plan Recommendation #21:

Enhance the community engagement process during future planning efforts to maximize meaningful participation of area residents and business owners. At a minimum, address barriers related to language, culture and age.

Plan Recommendation #22:

Adams County should initiate work with state, regional and local government entities including municipalities, utility districts, fire districts and emergency services to clarify and coordinate vision and priorities for the corridor. Explore the creation of one or more intergovernmental agreements for coordinated implementation of multi-modal transportation improvements that address and promote alternative modes of travel and not just vehicular movement.

Plan Recommendation #23:

Adams County should work with current and future developments to identify critical project infrastructure improvements that can help facilitate non-motorized



movement to the rail stations and through the neighborhoods for current and future residents.

Plan Recommendation #24:

Park and open space planning should keep in mind the diverse demographics of the area and should plan infrastructure to address their recreational wants and needs.

Plan Recommendation #25:

Adams County should explore the creation of a multi-jurisdiction safety task force to generate strategies to address safety along the trails in this area. Strategies could include neighborhood-based activities to engage residents in the effort.

Plan Recommendation #26:

Adams County should explore funding and programs to help residential and non-residential property owners clean-up and maintain properties, and help commercial property owners make capital improvements, such as updating storefronts and improving pedestrian and bicycle facilities on their properties.

Plan Recommendation #27:

Adams County should develop, promote, and distribute age-targeted and culturally-appropriate community education materials about rail service in partnership with Regional Transit District (RTD), adjacent jurisdictions, and community organizations.



Endnotes

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