

MODERN METRO DENVER'S "HEART AND SOUL" WILL DEPEND ON TRANSPORTATION THAT PEOPLE LOVE

By: Kathleen Osher, Executive Director, Transit Alliance

There is a wave of change about to sweep over metro Denver.

Once it washes across the Rockies we will see new pools of population settle near our upcoming planned 50-plus transit stations. These new population pools will be brimming with seniors, singles, couples and minorities clamoring for affordable ways to work and live near rail.

They will want dense, mixed-use communities that serve their unique needs.

Will this wave of change wash away the things that we know?

On the contrary, the advent of FasTracks will make many suburbs more exciting, providing them with the opportunity to plan new urban centers that provide revenue, cultural and community opportunities.

However, to gain from FasTracks, we must all get involved.

We need a community dialogue far beyond anything yet undertaken in metro Denver. People across metro Denver need to know more about rail and the other transportation choices we will need to make in order to create and sustain more people-oriented places in Colorado.

First came wagons and trains.

Then came the automobile and air travel.

Now we have light rail, but, we also will need commuter rail, bus rapid transit, suburb-to-suburb interconnects, as well as people-friendly bike paths and sidewalks, if we are to move our growing population effectively.

Like it or not, much of metro Denver was designed when the automobile was king and suburbs were bedrooms for a daytime downtown area.

Now, we are one metro region and by virtue of a \$4.7 billion mandate issued by voters in the fall of 2004 community planners in the region are scrambling to accommodate an investment on the scale of Denver International Airport.

We will build 50-plus transit stations. On average, it will cost about \$80 million to provide the track, trains, stations, parking and basic infrastructure for each of those locations.

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Every one of those 50-plus transit stations will be under construction simultaneously over the next 10 years or so signaling a profound change in the composition and function of our society.

This build-out of a transit system is the largest since Washington, D.C. began its Metro system in the late 1960s.

That is why Transit Alliance is bringing “placemaking” guru Jan Gehl of Copenhagen to the Colorado Convention Center on Apr. 6, 2006, to discuss with regional leaders the benefits of creating and sustaining “people-oriented places.”

We need to interconnect our FasTracks stations via tracks, but, we also need to interconnect each station to its surrounding neighborhood, region and, believe it or not, the world. Metro Denver is an international city, with an international airport, an international culture and a wave of change bearing down on it that will further alter its demographics and culture.

Are we ready?

There are examples of success developing in our inner-city and all points around the compass and extending into about 20 of our metro municipalities.

That is where we step in.

Metro Denver is about to experience a regional renaissance in people-oriented place creation. To sustain those places we need a balanced multi-modal transportation system that actually provides for the coming needs of our rapidly changing society.

The roots of Transit Alliance run back over nine years.

We were instrumental in the campaign to pass Metro Denver’s FasTracks and provided significant influence from the environmental community. Today, those grassroots remain strong, but, our original membership now works in close partnership with a growing variety of like-minded groups that support a balanced multi-modal transportation system for metro Denver and beyond.

That is why RTD, Denver Regional Council of Governments, Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation and Homebuilders Association of Metro Denver have partnered with us in our Apr. 6 leadership workshop.

This is the beginning of a decades-long dialogue that will provide balanced choices for Colorado and all of its people, another giant step in the direction of creating and sustaining a new “P.O.P.” culture for Colorado; however, in this case pop stands for *“people-oriented places.”*

Visit www.transitalliance.org/POPCulture to register for the event or to learn more about the organization.

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