

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The North Metropolitan Industrial Area Connectivity Study (NMIACS) is a collaborative effort among the City and County of Denver (Denver), the City of Commerce City (Commerce City), and Adams County to assess the transportation system for one of the original industrial districts in the Denver Metro Area (Figure 1). As the birthplace of some of Colorado’s oldest working-class neighborhoods, the study area is dotted with islands of heavy industrial uses and warehousing that require access to a web of crisscrossing freight-rail lines and the high-speed road network of Interstate 270 (I-270), Interstate 25 (I-25), Interstate 70 (I-70), and U.S. Highway 85 (US 85). The road and rail connections brought the industrial-intensive land uses to this area, yet these same logistical modes—along with natural features such as the South Platte River and Sand Creek—have created barriers for other needed travel options that have evolved over time. Connecting the dispersed clusters of residential and commercial uses within and outside of the study area has been problematic over the years. Despite these issues and a lack of prior public investment, the area continues to be a core economic driver and significant employment center providing more than 60,000 jobs within the Denver Metro Area.

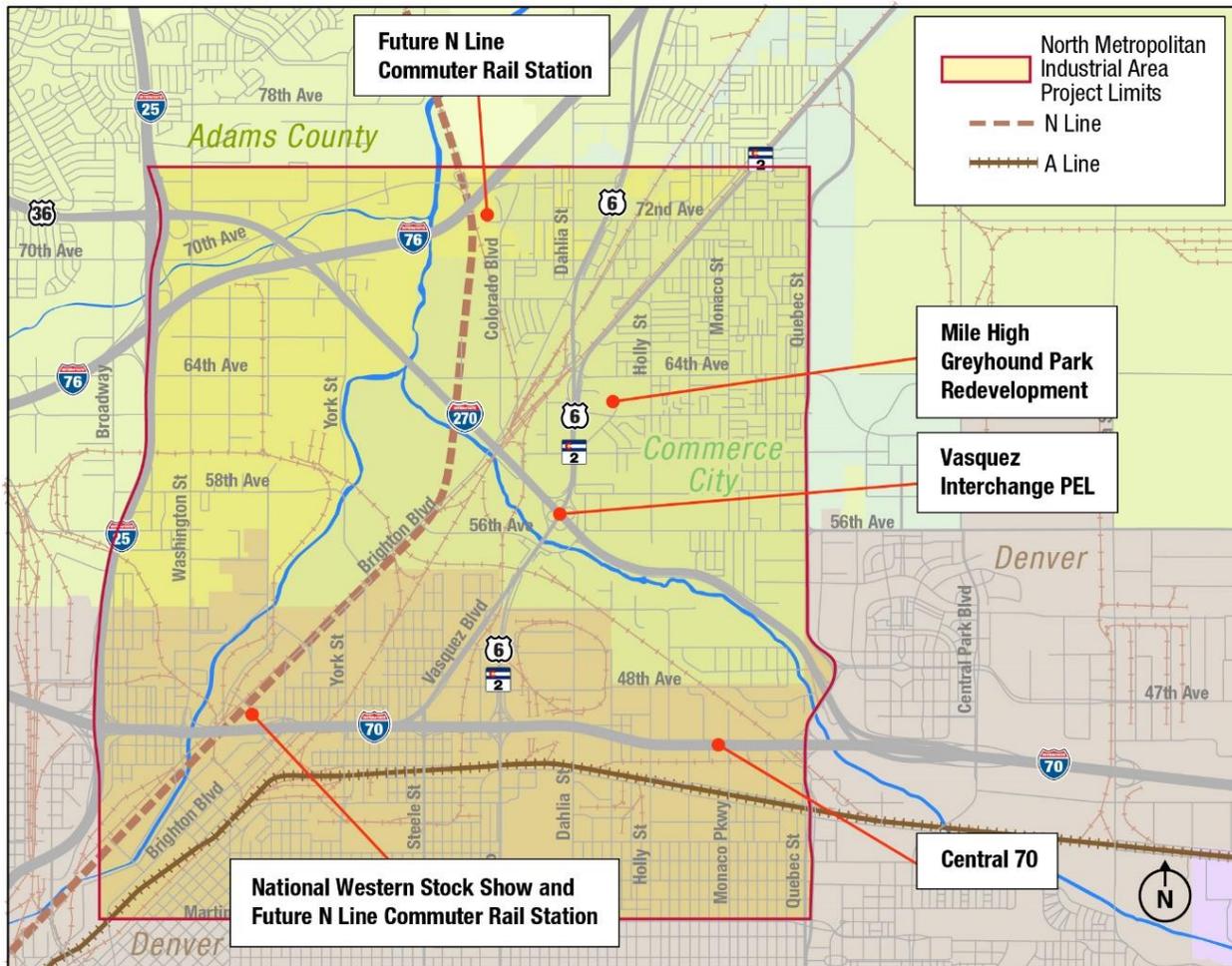
The study area is roughly bounded from west to east by I-25 and Quebec Street, and then from south to north by Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) Boulevard/32nd Avenue and I-270/US 85 on the west side and 72nd Avenue to State Highway 2 (SH 2) on the east side. Figure 1 highlights the study area in yellow and outlines the adjoining jurisdictions of Commerce City, Adams County, and Denver. The local jurisdictions want to retain the logistics focus of the study area, while strategically planning around the catalytic reinvestments of the Regional Transportation District (RTD) A-Line and N-Line commuter rail services, as well as the Central 70, Mile High Greyhound Park Redevelopment, and National Western Center initiatives. With these issues in mind, the overarching goal of the Study is to identify a list of priority projects that would provide local connectivity for all modes of travel, including transit, through the area.

This goal is challenging given the need to find a balanced process that could diffuse any potential parochial tendencies to overemphasize jurisdiction-specific transportation needs. The best approach to addressing this balance is to evaluate the study area through the lens of a sub-region where goals, objectives, and criteria would focus on local connectivity regardless of jurisdictional boundaries. Two key elements to ensure a balanced evaluation within the sub-region are integrating the 40-plus local plans the jurisdictions collectively developed for land use and transportation needs while overlaying a series of travel sheds throughout the study area.

Travel sheds are transportation study areas defined by geographical boundaries that have characteristics and facilities serving similar travel patterns.

To better assess the issues at play, the study area was divided into nine travel sheds that encapsulate areas of similar land use and travel patterns. The travel sheds allow local connectivity issues within these sub-regions to be identified and form part of the study area-wide assessment. Existing and future land uses are an important part of determining the needs for each travel shed. Travel modes (pedestrian/bicycle, transit, vehicles, and freight) are ranked in terms of priority for each of these travel sheds.

Figure 1. NMIACS Study Area



With these elements in mind, the Study focuses on identifying travel shed users, how they relate to land uses, and where there might be deficiencies. Using travel sheds provides the opportunity to organize all competing mode priorities and highlight already identified improvements from local plans, but from a sub-regional need perspective. The Study prioritizes the projects already identified in local area planning efforts, but does not develop any new projects.

With the overarching goal and framework set, the project team established a comprehensive screening process to evaluate close to 300 projects identified in local plans. Each project has been individually scored, based on approved criteria. The screening tool ensures the jurisdictions remain unbiased to particular projects they deem to be important to the sub-region and rely on the agreed-upon criteria to score each project. These criteria and scores are weighted to ensure the goals and objectives of the Study are represented in project recommendations.

Each project is scored under the following criteria and associated weighting:

- Fits travel shed mode priority (25 percent)
- Provides scale of benefit (25 percent)
- Improves intermodal connectivity (15 percent)
- Reduces conflict between modes (15 percent)
- Offers multijurisdictional benefit (15 percent)
- Improves transit in underserved areas (5 percent)

The outcomes of the Study lead to this Final Report—along with conceptual layouts, implementation strategies, and high-level conceptual costs—for nine multi-modal priority projects that have been identified to improve connectivity throughout the study area. These nine projects, listed below, are successfully identified as priorities that will address transportation needs regardless of jurisdictional boundaries.

1. 52nd Avenue, Brighton Boulevard to Colorado Boulevard, extend across the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR)
2. 56th Avenue to 58th Avenue connection over the South Platte River
3. Brighton Boulevard and Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF RR)—improve clearance, turning angle
4. Brighton Boulevard and York Street intersection, angle improvements to support large truck turns
5. Race Court and BNSF RR and Brighton Boulevard, increase height clearance at underpass
6. Colorado Boulevard from MLK Boulevard to 54th Avenue, improve with enhanced bicycle/pedestrian crossings, improved transit service, streetscaping, and sidewalks
7. 72nd Avenue multi-modal corridor
8. O’Brian Canal loop and connection to South Platte River Trail
9. New Interstate 76 (I-76) interchange ramps, including an additional ramp at SH 224 and I-76

The current estimate of probable costs assesses that the collective sum of these nine projects is in the order of \$172.3 million in 2018 dollars. Individual project implementation timeline estimates for the nine projects range from 36 months to 60 months. A summary of the estimated implementation timeline and probable cost in 2018 dollars for each of the nine projects is outlined in Table 1, below. Further detail on these nine projects can be found in APPENDIX A; conceptual layout and cost estimates can be found in APPENDIX B. Note that concept designs are an interim work product and do not necessarily represent the final configurations or alignments. Further refinement of the designs is necessary to determine the final layouts, improvements, and alignments of all projects.

Table 1. Top Nine Project Summary

	Description	Primary/Secondary Mode Benefitted	Estimated Implementation Timeline	Probable Cost (2018 \$)
1	52nd Avenue Extension, Brighton Boulevard to Vasquez Boulevard	Freight/Vehicle	48 months	\$44,000,000
2	56th Avenue to 58th Avenue Connection at York Street	Freight/Vehicle	48 months	\$22,000,000
3	Brighton Boulevard BNSF Underpass Replacement at York Street	Freight/Vehicle	60 months	\$45,000,000
4	York Street at Brighton Boulevard Intersection Improvements	Freight/Vehicle	36 months	\$3,000,000
5	BNSF and Brighton Boulevard Bridges over Race Court	Freight/Vehicle	48 months	\$30,000,000
6	Colorado Boulevard Pedestrian and Landscaping Improvements	Pedestrian/Bicycle	36 months	\$4,000,000
7	72nd Avenue Redevelopment	Vehicle/Pedestrian	42 months	\$11,000,000
8	O'Brian Canal Loop Trail	Pedestrian/Bicycle	36 months	\$9,000,000
9	I-76 Ramps at 74 th Avenue	Vehicle/Pedestrian	36 months	\$4,300,000

The Study used a consistent process and scoring to develop a priority list of projects that advance regional connectivity. Without public investment, the engine of this critical economic zone will begin to stall, as congestion chokes access to and from the area. In addition, access to neighborhoods, transit stations, community facilities, and regional trails will remain disconnected and substandard.

Jurisdictional partnerships among the local jurisdictions of Adams County, Commerce City, and Denver, which created the Study, must continue to be fostered, collectively advancing implementation strategies that lead to improved regional connections. Each project will require further environmental and engineering analysis.

The NMIACS jurisdictions will collectively:

- Endeavor to incorporate all projects within the DRCOG's 2045 Regional Transportation Plan, appropriately packaging phases or projects to maximize success within the regional prioritization process.
- Strive to include these projects within their respective transportation planning documents and capital improvement and preservation plans, coordinating local funding to advance further environmental and engineering analysis required for each project.

The North Metropolitan Industrial Area contains core regional economic drivers and is home to many well-established residential neighborhoods. Despite this, the area has been neglected in terms of funding and development in recent years. The NMIACS is the first step to an anticipated long-term collaborative partnership among the local jurisdictions of Adams County, Commerce City, and Denver to improve transportation for the area.