

South Downtown Rail Underpass Reconstruction Project

Community Advisory Committee – Meeting # 1
Wednesday, June 28, 2023, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Introduction

The City of Colorado Springs invited community stakeholders to attend a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) kick-off for the South Downtown Rail Underpass Reconstruction (SDRUR) Project. Diverse community leaders were invited to join the committee to act as a sounding board for project materials and encourage collaboration on specific project elements.

The meeting objectives were to create a common understanding of the following:

- Project goals and objectives; Draft Purpose & Need
- Evolution of the alternative analysis process to where we are today
- Stakeholder engagement process
- Roles and expectations of the CAC
- Project schedule and major technical milestones

The meeting began with introductions and a review of the agenda, meeting purpose, and meeting guidelines. Participants introduced themselves, their organization, their role, and one goal they have for the SDRUR project. Additionally, participants were encouraged to participate in an icebreaker poll question about which travel mode they recently used to travel downtown. Appendix A includes a table of meeting participants and invited CAC members.

Poll Question # 1

When you last visited Downtown Colorado Springs, what travel mode did you use?

Participants answers included personal vehicles, pedestrian (walking), and bicycle. The results of the word cloud are depicted in Appendix B.

Gayle Sturdivant (City of Colorado Springs) and Zach Stone (City of Colorado Springs) welcomed CAC members and thanked them for their time and commitment as part of this process. Additionally, Gayle provided a preview of the project's evolution and history as the current effort builds upon the 2018- 2020 alternatives analysis study to focus now on preliminary design and engineering.

Key Themes

The meeting had various opportunities for participants to provide feedback and ask questions of the project team. Key themes expressed throughout the meeting are summarized below.

Multimodal Connectivity

- Connect Tejon Street and Nevada Avenue for all modes of travel.
- Connect the Legacy Loop at Shooks Run.
- Explore if there are any trail resources from abandoned rail lines.
- Enhance multimodal infrastructure.
- Design roadways for the future based on safety and multimodal considerations.

Project Objectives

- Understand the environmental justice impacts of this project.
- Understand the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant process.
- Understand how Shooks Run was incorporated into this project through the previous alternatives analysis study.
- Ensure the project considers making infrastructure accessible for everyone.
- Understand how the project may impact emergency response services.

Engagement

- Share more information about the Technical Advisory Committee's (TAC) role and composition.
- Understand how community organizations can play a role in the project.
- Learn more about how to disseminate accurate and updated information to the community.
- Consider sharing the Federal Rail Administration (FRA) grant application with stakeholders.¹
- Consider engaging with additional social services, community organizations, and developers within the project area.
- Attend upcoming nearby community events, such as summer concert series or local non-profit events.

Project Overview

Zach Stone elaborated on the project's history and evolution to describe the catalyst for these efforts, the South Tejon Street and South Nevada railroad bridges. Both bridges were originally built in 1902 and 1948, respectively, and are currently in poor condition with vertical clearance issues and limited width under the bridges. The City conducted a planning study and alternative analysis, identifying a preferred alternative. In 2021, the City applied for and received a CRISI grant through the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to complete the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process (or environmental clearance process) and preliminary design and engineering.

The City is analyzing existing conditions, beginning the environmental clearance process, coordinating with railroads, conducting stakeholder engagement, and developing environmental documentation and design plans. The project anticipates finalizing the design in 2024, subject to funding. And the earliest possible start of construction is 2025, which is also subject to funding. The City applied for another CRISI grant to finalize design and begin construction. The City expects to be notified if the CRISI grant was awarded this summer.

Lance Sweenhart (HDR) then provided additional context on the project area (see Figure 1).

¹ After the meeting, the Grant Application and Benefit Cost Analysis information was shared with a CAC member that requested the information.

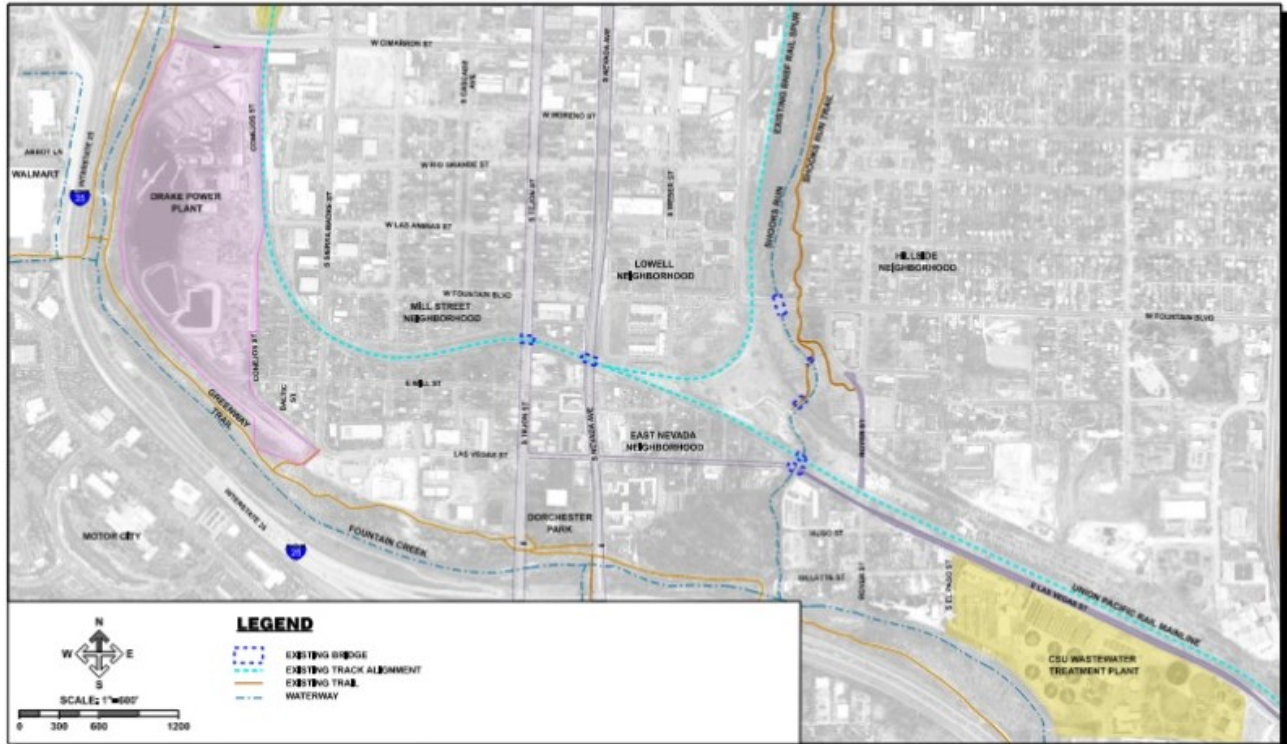


Figure 1. Map of the South Downtown Rail Underpass Reconstruction Project.

Lance also described the SDRUR’s goals and objectives, which include:

- Provide a project that conforms to long-term needs and provides opportunities for this public infrastructure.
- Effectively address railroad operational, maintenance and safety needs.
- Maintain and improve traffic operations on Nevada Ave., Tejon St., and intersecting streets.
- Implement results from the alternatives analysis to create quiet zones.
- Address pedestrian and bicycle connectivity and safety across the railroad tracks.
- Design bridges and associated improvements that are compatible with and improve access to surrounding neighborhoods and land uses and support development opportunities.
- Design bridges and underpasses to be welcoming and attractive.

Poll Question # 3

What needs do you think will resonate most with your constituents?

- **Address pedestrian and bicycle safety (22%)**
- **Address aging bridge infrastructure (22%)**
- Improve vertical clearance at railroad bridges (7%)
- Improve sidewalk network (19%)
- Address roadway width under railroad bridges (11%)
- Provide connection to Legacy Loop at Shooks Run (19%)

Participants could select up to three priorities.

- Address cost effectiveness to construct and maintain the bridges.
- Develop an improvement program and funding strategy to provide financing through a combination of City, regional, federal, state, and railroad sources.
- Develop beneficial internal and external City partnerships.
- Inform the public and engage stakeholders continually through the project.

Lance reiterated that many of the project goals were heard throughout introductions from CAC members, and the City looks forward to continued partnership to understand how the project can best serve the community.

Environmental Clearance

Neal Goffinet (Felsburg, Holt, & Ullevig (FHU)) reviewed the seven-step environmental clearance process, a transparent process conducted in coordination with the FRA. The process involves an initial scoping meeting, environmental surveys, coordination with FRA to confirm the course of action, validation of the preferred alternative, refinement of the alternative, drafting of environmental documentation, and the goal of concluding the process with no significant environmental impacts.

A key component of the environmental clearance process is preparing a Purpose & Need. The Draft Purpose & Need has three purpose statements:

- Improve efficiency, safety, and long-term viability of railroad operations on the only interstate Class 1² rail line extending along Colorado's Front Range.
- Improve access for multimodal (vehicle, transit, pedestrian, and bicyclist) traffic along Nevada Avenue and Tejon Street.
- Improve bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure connectivity across the Union Pacific mainline within the Mill Street neighborhood and the greater Southern Colorado Springs.

The needs identified through this effort center around safety and multimodal deficiencies. The project looks to address pedestrian and bicycle safety, aging bridge infrastructure, vertical clearances at railroad bridges, sidewalk connectivity, roadway widths under

Poll Question # 2

Select your top 3 project objectives that are priorities for you and your organization.

- Building new railroad bridges at Tejon Street and Nevada Avenue (15%)
- **Improving Tejon Street from Fountain Boulevard to Mill Street (18%)**
- Improving Nevada Avenue from Fountain Boulevard to Mill Street (15%)
- Creating quiet zones and improving pedestrian access at Sierra Madre Street and Las Animas (15%)
- Replacing the railroad bridges at Shooks Run (6%)
- Replacing the Las Vegas Street bridge and improving street conditions (12%)
- **Connecting the Legacy Loop Trail (18%)**

Participants could select up to three priorities.

² A Class 1 Railroad operating revenue is greater than or equal to \$490 million.

railroad bridges, and connection of the Legacy Loop at Shooks Run.

Engagement Overview

The City has established an iterative process amongst stakeholder groups, including a Project Management Team (PMT), a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), a Community Advisory Committee, and the public and agency stakeholders (see Figure 2).

The Community Advisory Committee (CAC) previews project information before it is presented to the public, identifies issues or questions within the community, and provides feedback on specific project elements. For this project, it is anticipated the CAC will convene every other month up to six times throughout the project.

In addition to the PMT, TAC, and CAC, the project team also looks to engage the public, those who live, work, and travel through the project area, and the greater Colorado Springs community.

Angela facilitated a conversation around expected stakeholder roles to encourage members to act as a representative of their community, to share the perspective of their organization and not individual interests, to act as a sounding board for the project team, to vet important project information, to daylight issues and concerns, to bring issues to the group at meetings, to identify an alternate representative, and to participate throughout the process.

Zach Barr (Kearns & West) then provided an engagement update to include an updated project website (www.coloradosprings.gov/sdrur), an established project hotline (719-301-3306), and a summary of the stakeholder interview process.

The project team has conducted thirteen stakeholder interviews to understand awareness of the SDRUR project, discuss priority interests, and reflect on engagement considerations. The



Figure 2. A diagram showing the iterative process of the project's stakeholder engagement.

Poll Question # 4

Are you comfortable with the role we are asking you to commit to?

- Yes (100%)
- No (0%)

conversations and themes from these discussions will inform project messaging and upcoming engagement milestones.

While conducting stakeholder interviews, the project team heard the following themes:

- Increase multimodal and trail connectivity.
- Prioritize pedestrian and multimodal safety.
- Coordinate often and early with local transit.
- Create a future, transparent construction process.
- Mitigate current air and noise pollution.
- Support the implementation of neighborhood quiet zones.
- Coordinate with other area planning efforts.
- Involve the unhoused and social services organizations that operate in the area.
- Design Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) infrastructure.
- Incorporate the railroad's history and settlement of General Palmer.
- Balance affordability of the area with future development.
- Coordinate with organizations and the Mill Street neighborhood.
- Advocate for a transparent engagement process.

Next Steps

The meeting closed with a preview of anticipated next steps, including attending upcoming community events this summer, conducting environmental surveys, beginning preliminary designs, and hosting topical workshops with technical partners. Additionally, the project team anticipates hosting the second CAC meeting in early Fall to share updated technical information, including the 10% design, mitigation analysis, and an update on railroad coordination.

Before adjourning the meeting, Zach Stone shared that BNSF is beginning its process to repair the Tejon Street bridge. Their main concern is maintaining current rail operations, which will require a faster timeline than the SDRUR project. The BNSF effort will not address all elements in this project's scope; therefore, the SDRUR project is planned to continue. The City plans to remain coordinated with BNSF partners and share more detailed information as it becomes available. Zach closed the meeting by thanking all participants for joining the discussion and their dedication to the SDRUR process.

Appendix A: Meeting Participants

Name	Organization
Gerald White	Bike Colorado Springs
Devin Camacho	Colorado Springs Chamber & EDC
Steven Smith	Colorado Springs Fire Department
Wesley Wilkerson	Colorado Springs Police Department
Chelsea Gondeck	Downtown Partnership
William Boddington	Historic Preservation Alliance of Colorado Springs
Jen Cecil	Mill Street Neighborhood Association
Jim Godfrey	Pikes Peak Rural Transportation Authority Citizens Advisory Committee
Paul Spotts	The Independence Center
Allen Beauchamp	Trails and Open Space Coalition
Steve Lind	U.S Olympic and Paralympic Museum

Additional CAC Members:

Name	Organization
Michelle Talarico	Colorado Springs City Council, District 3
Chad Wright	Colorado Springs Housing Authority
Sara Vaas	CONO
Gary Feffer	Fountain Colony Real Estate
Josh Gainey	Hillside Community Center
Tim Seibert	Norwood Development
Terry Anderson	Springs Rescue Mission
Jody Barker	Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments – Area Agency on Aging
Cindy Aubrey	Pikes Peak United Way

Project Team

Name	Organization
Gayle Sturdivant	City of Colorado Springs
Zach Stone	City of Colorado Springs
Catherine Duarte	City of Colorado Springs
Lance Sweenhart	HDR
Neal Goffinet	Felsburg, Holt, & Ullevig (FHU)
Angela Jo Woolcott	Kearns & West
Zach Barr	Kearns & West
Caitlin Sheridan	Kearns & West

Appendix B: Icebreaker Poll Word Cloud

When you last visited Downtown Colorado Springs, what travel mode did you use?

