

## South Downtown Rail Underpass Reconstruction Project

Community Advisory Committee – Meeting # 3

Thursday, March 7, 2024, 12 – 1:30 p.m.

### Introduction

The City of Colorado Springs invited community stakeholders to the third Community Advisory Committee (CAC) meeting for the South Downtown Rail Underpass Reconstruction (SDRUR) Project.

The purpose of the meeting was to:

- Share the most recent schedule considerations, including the timing of the proposed BNSF Tejon St Railroad Bridge Replacement.
- Provide an update on the continuation of the environmental clearance process.
- Review potential incremental improvements due to funding realities.
- Share the next steps for Phase II of the project.

The meeting began with introductions and a review of the agenda, meeting purpose, and meeting guidelines. Gayle Sturdivant (City of Colorado Springs) welcomed CAC members, recognized elected officials in attendance, and thanked them for their commitment and support for the SDRUR project.

Angela Jo Woolcott (Kearns & West), the meeting facilitator, invited participants to introduce themselves with their name, role, organization, and what concerns or questions they have been hearing in the community. Stakeholders wanted to understand the current process, how it relates to other planning efforts like front range passenger rail, funding updates, property impacts, and how the BNSF Tejon Street Bridge Replacement affects the SDRUR project. They expressed a desire for more knowledge of these topics to report back to the larger communities or organizations they are a part of. Angela confirmed that during the meeting the project team would address each of the topics to create a shared understanding of the current phase of the SDRUR project.

When discussing property impacts, many stakeholders expressed concern for the project's property impacts, particularly representatives that are in coordination with the Mill Street Neighborhood. They were interested in learning more about how the proposed rail realignment would impact commercial and residential properties in the area. Additionally, many stakeholders encouraged the City to preserve the character and historic nature of the Mill Street Neighborhood.

Additionally, meeting attendees voiced an interest in greater connectivity and multimodal access. They reiterated the importance of the Legacy Loop as an ongoing effort to provide greater connectivity to adjacent neighborhoods and broader trail networks. There was also an emphasis on multimodal access from the south downtown area to maintain or enhance emergency vehicle access to the project area.

A table of participants and the roster of CAC members is included in Appendix A.

## Process Update

Zach Stone (City of Colorado Springs) welcomed the group and described the project and its four phases. The SDRUR project currently has four phases, which include:

- Phase I: Alternatives Evaluation
- Phase II: Preliminary Engineering & Environmental Review (current phase)
- Phase III: Interim Projects
- Phase IV – Final Design and Construction.

The first phase was conducted from 2018 to 2020 and focused on studying and screening multiple alternatives to recommend the preferred alternative (previously known as the M1 alternative). Through extensive stakeholder engagement, the process received input from various stakeholders and community members, including additional improvements to multimodal safety, rail improvements, and the connection of the Legacy Loop Trail.

Phase II began in 2023 and looks to comply with the current federal grant and environmental clearance process, comparing a preferred alternative build to a “no-build” alternative. As part of this phase, the City has defined the project’s Purpose and Need to improve railroad operations (efficiency and safety) and multimodal access, safety, and connectivity. Engagement in this phase follows the federal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and engages community stakeholders to inform them about the project and collect their feedback. The City will advance preliminary designs far enough to coordinate with the railroads and complete the environmental review requirements. The current phase of the project will not include property acquisition.

Concurrently with the SDRUR’s current phase, BNSF will replace the Tejon Street bridge in its current location. BNSF is replacing the bridge due to railroad operations and will fund the project. The replacement of the Tejon Street bridge represents a change in the no-build condition of the project area, which has opened opportunities to address other community needs in the South Downtown project area.

CAC members asked for clarification on the bridge replacement’s vertical clearance and for an explanation of the funding and why the increased vertical clearance will not comply with standards. BNSF is fully funding the Tejon Street bridge replacement, and they cannot increase the vertical clearance in the bridge’s current location as it would impact thousands of feet of railroad tracks creating technical challenges. The Tejon Street bridge’s condition and clearance were an important part of the Phase I evaluation. Since the proposed replacement does not satisfy the project’s Purpose & Need, the City is continuing with the SDRUR project while identifying interim projects until additional funding can be secured to implement the whole project.

Lance Sweenhart (HDR) reviewed that Phase III, focused on interim projects, is a newly developed stage. This phase will consider smaller interim projects, which provide the City with a different palate to consider improvements. An example of a potential interim improvement includes restriping the roadway and adding sidewalks to increase pedestrian and bicycle connectivity following the BNSF Tejon Bridge replacement. In addition, these projects will allow the community to benefit as the City explores and applies for additional federal funding to meet the needs of the larger SDRUR project.

Zach Stone (City of Colorado Springs) concluded the process update by describing the project's fourth phase for final design and construction. The City is still looking to identify and secure funding for this phase, which will dictate the timing and implementation of the project. The results of this phase will achieve the project's Purpose & Need.

CAC members asked for clarification on how the Legacy Loop connection has been factored in, given the replacement of the Tejon Street bridge and the need to identify future funding. Since the bridge replacement will not meet the project's needs, the City is committed to moving the SDRUR project forward, including the Legacy Loop connection. The City is having ongoing discussions with the railroad to understand the feasibility of connecting the Legacy Loop.

In addition to the Legacy Loop connection, CAC members raised opportunities to work with the railroads around the abandoned spur line and the Old Stone Bridge. The City clarified that the railroads currently plan to continue use of the spur. The City did encourage stakeholders to continue to share opportunities for improvement or community benefit to be considered throughout the process.

## **Preliminary Engineering Update**

Lance Sweenhart (HDR) gave CAC members preliminary engineering and design updates. The City has submitted 10% concept designs to help the team understand the impacts going forward in the NEPA process. In addition, the preliminary designs have allowed the team to work with the railroads to comply with rail standards. The team recently held an internal technical workshop to investigate how the City could implement interim community improvements based on the project area and future improvements as part of the SDRUR project.

Lance Sweenhart (HDR) also shared that site surveying for this project phase is complete. If community members see surveyors in the area, it is unrelated to the SDRUR project.

CAC members asked for clarification on how the replacement of the Tejon Street bridge relates to project funding and the proposed rail alignment. Railroad projects tend to be expensive but not cost-prohibitive. There are several infrastructure acts and grants aimed at freight and passenger rail that could be utilized to fund these types of projects.

## **Outreach and Engagement Update**

Zach Barr (Kearns & West) reviewed that since the last CAC meeting, the City has updated the project website, provided a recorded presentation, developed a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document, and attended the February Mill St. Neighborhood Association (MSNA) meeting.

Throughout the project, the City has been collecting commonly asked or important questions we have been hearing from the community. As a result, the questions cover a wide range of topics; below is a list of the high-level topics and themes:

- About the project
- Property impacts & acquisition
- Funding
- BNSF Tejon Street Bridge Replacement Project
- Right of entry letters

- Public Involvement

Angela Jo Woolcott (Kearns & West) then provided the CAC with a summary of engagement, including 11 one-on-one stakeholder interviews, 3 CAC meetings, 2 MSNA meetings, 600 e-blast subscribers, and 400 mailed bilingual newsletters. A summary of engagement to date is also included on the SDRUR website and will be updated periodically. In addition, the project team is managing the project’s website and materials, the hotline, and a dedicated email address.

CAC members were also given a preview of the upcoming engagement activities related to the engagement continuum. The City will continue to inform and educate the community through website updates, direct mailings, and e-newsletters. The City will also utilize upcoming CAC meetings to consult committee members at important project milestones while consulting with various agencies, including the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). As the environmental clearance process progresses, the team will solicit input and feedback in accordance with NEPA through digital engagement, small group community meetings, and a public hearing and public comment period.

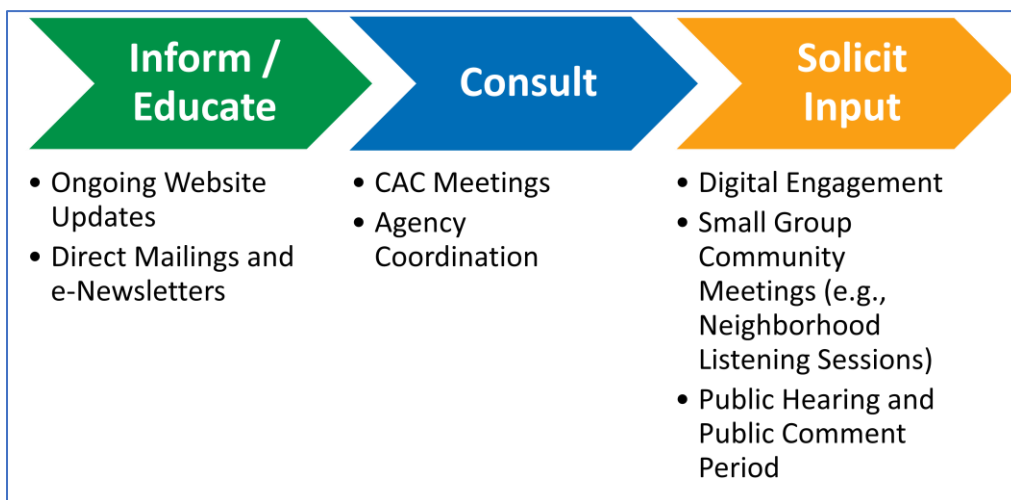


Figure 1: A flowchart shows examples of upcoming outreach activities for the SDRUR project.

Through CAC member discussion, it was clarified that no additional right-of-entry letters were sent to neighbors in the project area. Additionally, the feedback residents and community stakeholders provided previously about the letters has helped inform the process and ongoing project communications.

## Environmental Review Update

Lance Sweenhart (HDR) provided the environmental review update on behalf of Kevin Maddoux with FHU. He explained that the environmental clearance team has been coordinating with FRA to finalize the project’s Purpose & Need. An excerpt of the draft Purpose and Need was shared with the CAC to define the preliminary purpose of the proposed project which is to:

- Improve efficiency, safety, and long-term viability of railroad operations on the only interstate, Class 1 rail line extending along Colorado’s Front Range.

- Improve access for multimodal (vehicle, transit, pedestrian, and bicyclist) traffic along Nevada Ave and Tejon St.
- Improve bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure connectivity across the UP mainline within the Mill Street neighborhood and the greater southern Colorado Springs area.

Lance Sweenhart (HDR) explained that the environmental clearance team has been busy analyzing many aspects of the project and its impacts. One example of that analysis is examining the noise and vibrations in the area to understand the current noise and how that would be changed with the proposed alternative. Lance Sweenhart (HDR) encouraged CAC members to continue to share their feedback with the project team, as it is helpful to summarize that feedback for FRA, who will receive the final environmental review document.

Discussions with CAC members clarified that the project team, in consultation with the City, will prepare the environmental documentation, including the cumulative impact analysis. Zach Stone (City of Colorado Springs) also clarified that all federal agencies are required to conduct an environmental review process when they act. As a federally funded project, SDRUR is required to conduct this process. But the Federal Railroad Administration ultimately makes the decision to authorize the project.

Additional discussion focused on how SDRUR interacts with future passenger rail in the area, particularly Front Range Passenger Rail (FRPR). Gayle Sturdivant (City of Colorado Springs) shared that the City of Colorado Springs faces constraints along the corridor, requiring ongoing coordination with local stakeholders to advocate for passenger rail in the area. She further clarified that it is not expected that passenger rail would make a direct or early impact on the SDRUR project despite the proposed station location near the project area; however, in the long term, there might be an additional impact on the rail alignment. Freight railroads are becoming more interested in passenger rail and are involved and coordinating with FRPR.

## Next Steps

Zach Stone (City of Colorado Springs) concluded the meeting with his appreciation of the CAC members' time and a review of the next steps for the technical process. The team will work to advance the 10% preliminary engineering designs, which includes refining and advancing design concepts as part of the resubmittal process. In addition, the team will continue coordination with FRA with an anticipated completion of the environmental analysis by Spring 2025. Angela Jo Woolcott (Kearns & West) then closed the meeting and thanked the CAC for participating and sharing their concerns and questions at the beginning of the meeting.

## Appendix A: Meeting Participants

Name	Organization
Devin Camacho	Colorado Springs Chamber & EDC
Michelle Talarico	Colorado Springs City Council, District 3
Steve Smith	Colorado Springs Fire Department
Chelsea Gondeck	Downtown Partnership
Toby Gannett	Draper Commons
Gary Feffer	Fountain Colony Real Estate
Chris Rudnick	Hillside Neighborhood Association
Sam Friesema	Hillside Neighborhood Association
Tim Boddington	Historic Preservation Alliance of Colorado Springs
Jennifer Cecil	Mill Street Neighborhood Association
Jim Godfrey	Pikes Peak Rural Transportation Authority Citizens Advisory Committee
Travis Williams	Springs Rescue Mission
Allen Beauchamp	Trails and Open Space Coalition
Steve Lind	U.S Olympic and Paralympic Museum

### Additional CAC Members:

Name	Organization
Gerald White	Bike Colorado Springs
Chad Wright	Colorado Springs Housing Authority
Sid Santos	Colorado Springs Police Department
Steve Wood	Concrete Couch
Sara Vaas	CONO
Josh Gainey	Hillside Community Center
Tim Seibert	Norwood Development
Jody Barker	Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments – Area Agency on Aging
Cindy Aubrey	Pikes Peak United Way
Paul Spotts	The Independence Center

### Project Team

Name	Organization
Gayle Sturdivant	City of Colorado Springs
Maren McDowell	City of Colorado Springs
Zach Stone	City of Colorado Springs
Lance Sweenhart	HDR
Angela Jo Woolcott	Kearns & West
Caitlin Sheridan	Kearns & West
Zach Barr	Kearns & West