

Honor Award - Student/Recent Graduate Project: RE:Imagine I-70

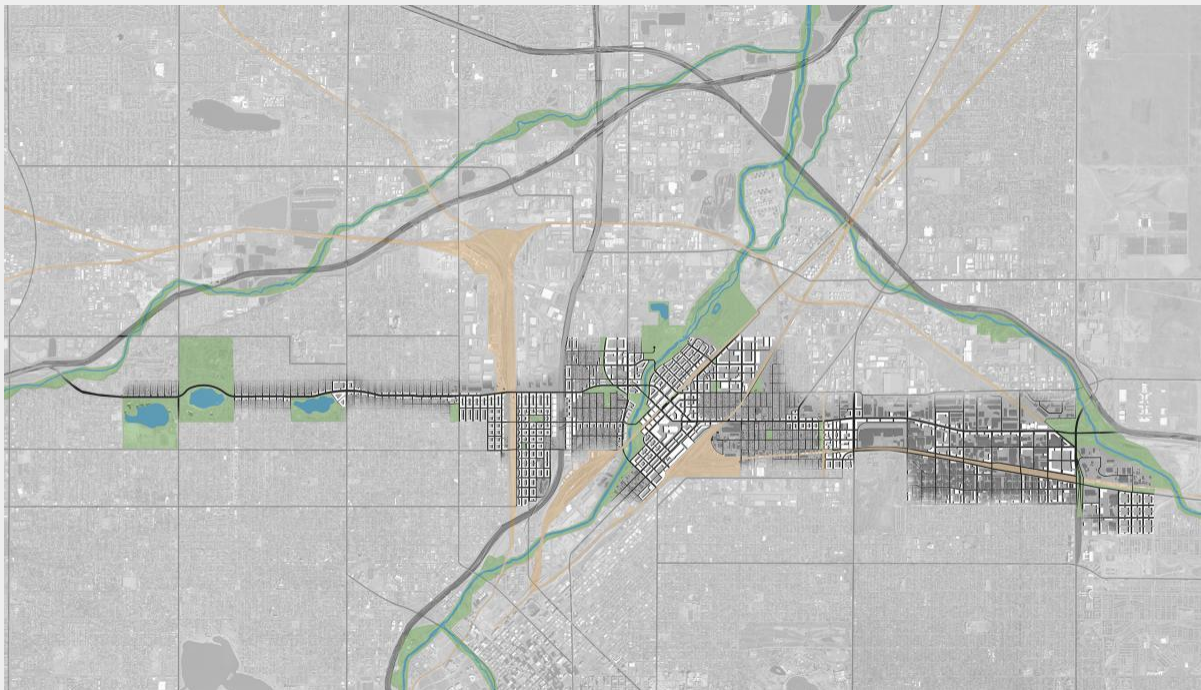


The story of North Denver shares many

familiar and sad elements with that of many other American neighborhoods. A top-level decision led to the

construction of a freeway that effectively barred these neighborhoods from access to the prosperity, growth, and amenities for which Denver has become known. As the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) begins the process of deciding the future for the roadway, this project aims to show the potential of rerouting the interstate along the existing Interstates 270 and 76 and out of the heart of these undervalued neighborhoods. As Interstate 70 (I-70) enters into its phase of planned obsolescence, alongside most of the nation's freeways, the city, state and country finds themselves with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to appraise the value of these intercity highways and decide if the American metropolis and its people are better off with or without these roadways. In that spirit, this project attempted to do what no one had attempted before: to reimagine Denver without its interstate and create a vision for the city's future.

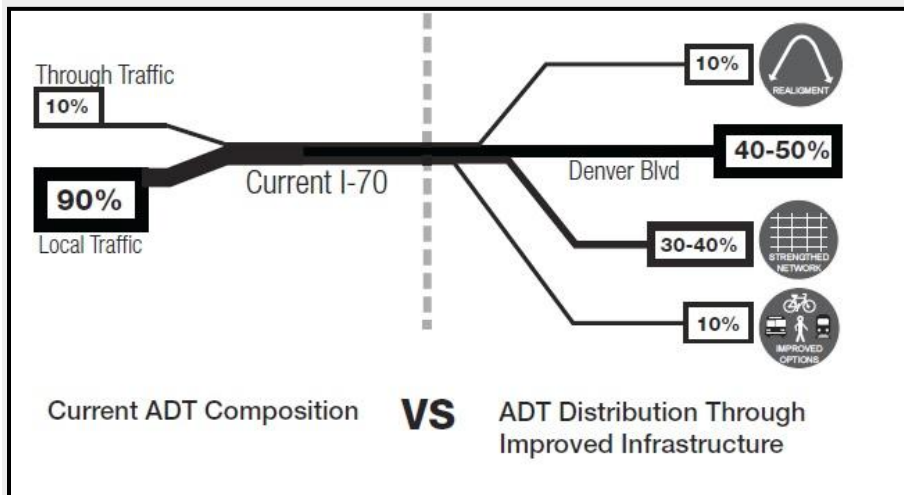
I-70 is one of few east-west connections through central Denver. As a result, the first question many people have considering the removal of the interstate is "where will the cars go?" To answer this question, our team came to the realization that the rerouting of I-70 requires a comprehensive, multi-modal transportation system to serve as the highway's replacement. Compiling data provided by CDOT, Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG), and the City and County of Denver, among other places, we were able to ascertain how much of the existing traffic required an interstate highway to complete their trips. What we found was that only a small fraction of the cars and trucks on the highway used the I-70 for regional trips. To capture the remaining average daily traffic (ADT), we proposed an urban, human-scaled, at-grade boulevard to act as a primary thoroughfare. Additionally, we identified several small links that, if provided, would create a robust street network able to absorb a lot of local trips that currently depend on I-70; demand superficially induced by the disconnected grid caused by I-70 itself. Lastly, we looked to harness the capacity of the two rail lines currently under construction along the corridor to create an integrated transportation solution beyond the scope of a highway reconstruction project.



This project, in addition to solving mobility issues, aimed at understanding the urban design and economic implications for the highways rerouting. In relocating the interstate, we found that the city has the potential of recapturing a huge amount of land that, in the wake of the highways absence, will benefit from newly-found value as extensions of the downtown area and the smaller neighborhoods surrounding the I-70 corridor. This value will come in the form of an expanded tax base and the ability to add acres of park land and other amenities to underserved neighborhoods along the corridor. This concept stands in stark contrast to an expanded interstate, such as CDOT's preferred alternative, that will consume hundreds of acres of residential and retail space in neighborhoods already suffering the impacts of the highway. As an alternative, this project proposes a new boulevard that acts as a main

street for many of the regions communities and aims to re-stitch neighborhoods severed by the highway's introduction decades ago.

The idea of removing entrenched infrastructure – especially urban freeways – is a concept novel not only to Denver and Colorado, but nationally as well. Nearly every American city finds its downtown circumscribed, severed, or bisected by a freeway like I-70. As these roadways come up for renovation or reconstruction, it is crucial that the states and cities influenced by them take advantage of this rare opportunity to discover the alternatives to the urban freeway condition. This project aimed to present a plausible and compelling vision for the city without its highway, a vision previously unseen in Denver. This concept finds its strength and innovation in providing a multi-lateral solution to the complex set of issues that arise following the removal or rerouting of a highway, including a concept for the highest and best land uses for recaptured land, a multimodal proposal for mitigating the growing travel demand in the region, and a glimpse at a potential urban design solution that would turn north Denver neighborhoods from a series of edge conditions into places with a heart to match their unique spirit.



The content of this project was presented to a variety of neighborhood and planning and design professional groups in an effort to create a grassroots movement to reopen the discussion of the interstate's future and present a vision for what Denver could look like in the future. The project was designed to appeal and provoke discussion amongst every level of stakeholder surrounding this issue, including concerned and engaged community members, Department of Transportation engineers and policy makers. It is our hope that the work can help inform the discourse surrounding urban freeways that will be taking place in cities across the United States as the nation's infrastructure becomes obsolete, creating the opportunity for communities to take control of their futures.

The work has transcended the classroom and has been presented several times and otherwise utilized within professional groups (local chapters of AIA, CNU, among others), the effected communities, and municipal and state entities and we believe that this is a testament to the boldness of the concept as wel as the detailed analysis that supports it.



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