Regional Collaboration in Transport Infrastructure Provision: The Case of Denver's FasTracks Rail Transit Program

Final report

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Regional Collaboration in Transport Infrastructure Provision: The Case of Denver's FasTracks Rail Transit Program

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Cities across the United States are grappling with a looming transportation crisis as a result of ever-increasing passenger and freight transport demands and overburdened networks of aging infrastructure. All levels of government, but particularly state and local governments, need to develop innovative financing mechanisms and strong collaborations among stakeholders to maintain and enhance transportation infrastructure. This project examines how regional collaboration was achieved in the case of Denver's FasTracks rail transit program, a 122-mile extension of light and commuter rail in six corridors throughout the Denver metropolitan area to be completed over the next ten or so years (Figure 1-1). An impressive coalition of local governments, state and federal government, metropolitan economic development organizations, the business community, advocacy groups, and the general public was forged to provide financial support for the $6.7 billion project, now underway. The project also assesses conditions for the long-term sustainability of regional collaboration behind the FasTracks program, including whether it could serve as a model for other metropolitan areas confronted by the same issues.

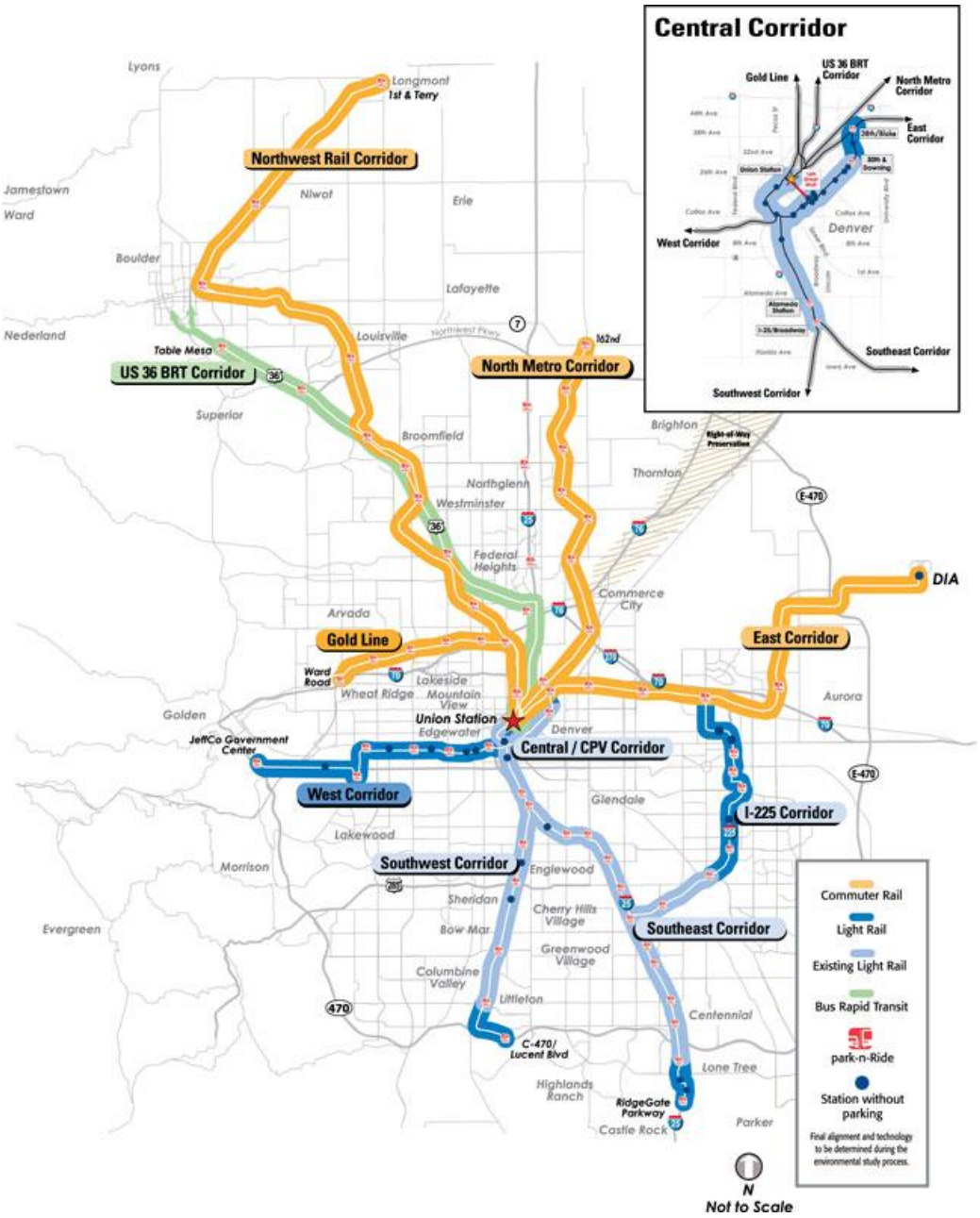

Figure 1-1: The FasTracks Transit Expansion Program (Source: RTD 2010c).

1.3 Project objectives and methods

Through surveys and interviews of key participants in the project, a case study of regional collaboration was conducted, focusing in particular upon mechanisms of inter- and intra-metropolitan co-ordination. The project adopted an historical perspective. It examined the evolution of regional collaboration in Denver through the course of the

twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century. Emphasis was placed on understanding and evaluating the recent period (1990-2010), especially the relationship between regional collaboration and the development and implementation of FasTracks. Interviews with key practitioners from the Denver region were conducted in 2007 and 2009. These included representatives from municipal, county and state government, regional planning and transportation organizations, the business community, regional economic development organizations, and civic groups. A list of topics and questions covered in these interviews is shown in Appendix A. The findings of these interviews are included in the report in the form of brief quotes, which provide contextual depth and detail to the analysis. For ethical reasons, the identity of interviewees has been protected and instead general reference is made to their official roles and positions. Where individuals are named in the report, this information is derived from local newspaper reports. We conducted a systematic review of articles in the *Denver Post* and *Rocky Mountain News*, which have provided extensive coverage of issues of metropolitan growth and planning. We reviewed information in a variety of public documents, annual reports and other resources provided by relevant public and private sector organizations in the region. Finally, members of the research team attended public hearings and meetings held by regional agencies and civic groups, including the Denver Regional Transportation District and Transit Alliance, between 2007 and 2009.

A survey of regional organizations was conducted in order to elicit views on regional collaboration (see Appendix B). This survey was designed to obtain data regarding regional collaboration in transport infrastructure provision in the Denver metropolitan region with emphasis on the FasTracks Rail Transit Program. The survey questionnaire was divided into three broad sections: (1) background information about the responding company/organization; (2) regional collaboration in metro Denver; and (3) regional collaboration around the FasTracks light rail project. In collecting the survey data, an effort was made not only to involve people related to FasTracks planning and construction but also people from different sectors of the economy. After failing to garner sufficient responses to an on-line survey, we distributed hard copies of the same

survey form to individuals in the Denver region. Of the 24 respondents, 18 were government officials or members of quasi-governmental organizations (e.g., mayors, planners, economic development practitioners) and 6 were private sector professionals or representatives of not-for-profit organizations. Hence the perspective of the public sector regarding this topic has been better reflected than that of the private sector (Figure 1.2). However, the views of the private sector were well covered in the face-to-face interviews. Figure 1.3 shows that most of the respondents were from locally-owned or locally-based companies and organizations.

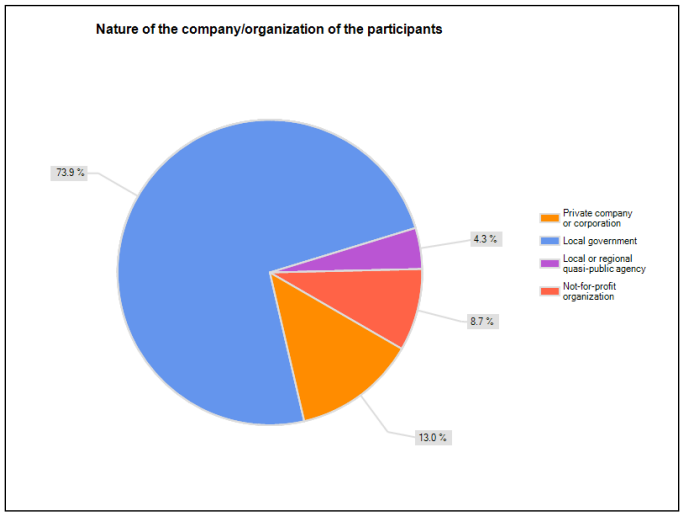

Figure 1.2 Regional collaboration survey respondents by sector

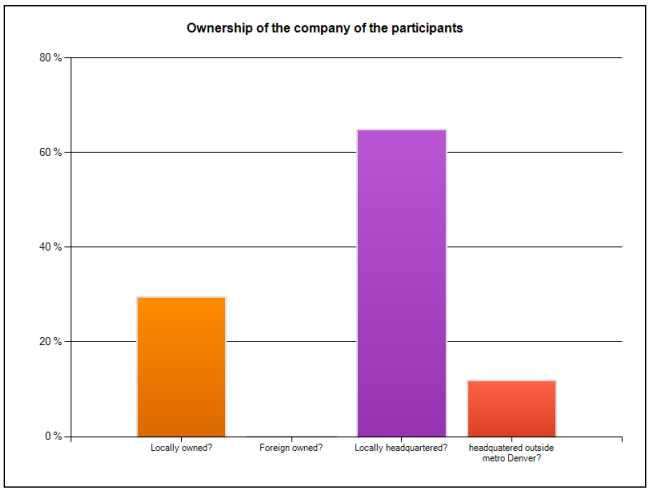

Figure 1.3 Respondent organizations: locally owned, foreign owned, locally headquartered or headquartered outside metro Denver?

1.4 Application of research

This project builds upon other research that has examined how large-scale transportation infrastructure projects are planned, financed, and built. It also builds upon research that analyzes how metropolitan areas forge coalitions and governance arrangements to support economic development and collective provision of infrastructure in general. As federal funding for transport infrastructure has become a smaller share of total outlay, it is incumbent upon states and local governments to develop private and public partnerships and coalitions to address these pressing infrastructure needs. This case study is important because the FasTracks program is one of the largest transportation projects in the U.S.A. currently, and is by far the largest transit buildup of any metropolitan area in the country. It also represents a remarkable convergence of support across many sectors in the local community that resulted in a public referendum that increased the regional sales tax to pay for the system. Other metropolitan areas will want to learn from the Denver approach to regional transport planning. Therefore the report places emphasis on understanding the wider (state and federal) context in which regional collaboration takes place in Denver.

1.5 Key findings

- Regional collaboration around economic development and transportation planning has been a strong feature of the governance landscape in the Denver region since the 1990s;
- Earlier attempts to foster metropolitan and regional planning largely failed due to: (a) the lack of appropriate political, fiscal and economic capacities at the metropolitan scale; (b) competition between municipalities for development, taxes, and new growth; (c) public opposition to major regional projects that involved additional taxes or had negative environmental consequences; and (d) the weakness of existing regional planning organizations and special purpose districts;

- Since the early 1990s, organizations such as the Metro Mayor's Caucus, the Metro Chamber of Commerce and the Alliance for Regional Stewardship have become key players in fostering and maintaining regional collaboration;
- There has been strong support for regional collaboration within the business community and growing support from local mayors, civic groups and environmental organizations;
- Regional collaboration has opened up access to new regional sources of funding for transportation and economic development including the sales taxes and other voter-approved revenues; strong regional collaboration has also contributed to successful requests for increased federal funding from the Federal Transit Adminstration to support some of the component projects;
- The promotion of regional transportation initiatives such as FasTracks is an important reason why Denver has adopted a 'bottom up' approach to regional collaboration;
- Regional collaboration around economic development and transportation infrastructure is stronger than in other areas and sectors such as housing and land use planning;
- Since 2008, a new set of challenges has emerged to test Denver's model of regional collaboration;
- The financial crisis facing FasTracks is a major test of the resiliency of regional collaboration under the existing model;
- Despite federal economic stimulus funds, it is unlikely that a new 'top down' model of regional collaboration will emerge from the current difficult circumstances confronting Denver's regional transportation and infrastructure;
- Adjustments of the FasTracks program such as decisions about line routing and completion should continue to be negotiated through existing regional collaborative arrangements;
- The regional benefits of FasTracks appear to outweigh ongoing concerns about the project such as failure to complete and increased costs.

1.6 Organization of the report

The report is organized into 6 sections including the Introduction. Section 2 examines the national context and discusses the emergence of new approaches to regional collaboration across the United States to deal with issues such as regional economic development and transportation infrastructure provision. These new 'bottom up' approaches can be contrasted with earlier 'top down' federal initiatives around metropolitan planning and political integration. Section 3 documents the history of metropolitan and regional planning in Denver, noting the failure of those regional special purpose districts and planning organizations set up in the 1960s and 1970s to build regional consensus on issues like economic development and transport infrastructure. Section 4 outlines the history of rail transit in Denver and provides some background to the development of the FasTracks program. Section 5 discusses the development of a new approach to regional collaboration in Denver since1990, focusing on economic development and transportation infrastructure. Section 6 offers an evaluation of why and how regional collaboration in Denver has worked and what its future prospects are in relation to the recent financial problems facing the FasTracks program.

2. Regional Collaboration in the United States: The Federal Context

In the United States, regional collaboration often refers to the development of informal institutional arrangements between local government units, business organizations and civic groups across an entire metropolitan area or region spanning several counties and, in a few cases, more than one state. This approach to regional collaboration is quite different in aims and functions to the formal models of regional government and metropolitan planning which were promoted by the federal government and influential national business and civic organizations in the 1960s and 1970s. During that period, federal interest in regional government led to the creation of regional councils of government (COGs) as formal bodies providing fora for resolving tensions between central cities and suburbs. These days the motive for regional collaboration, more often than not, is to build up regional institutions and governance capacities in support of economic development initiatives without recourse to formal regional or metropolitan governmental structures. The informal approach to regional collaboration – what many commentators increasingly refer to as the new regionalism (Hamilton, 2002; Wheeler, 2002) – enables public and private individuals and organizations to engage in regional projects in such a way as to avoid wasteful inter-jurisdictional competition, e.g., around scarce local fiscal resources (Jonas and McCarthy, 2009).

This section considers the history of regionalism and regional collaboration in the United States, providing a wider context for assessing how regional collaboration has evolved in the Denver region over the past 100 years or so.[1] For the sake of brevity, it divides

[1] As described here, regionalism in the United States is quite unlike the European situation where regional political autonomy is often strongly associated with the promotion of nationalism and separate cultural and political identities such as in Catalonia in Spain or Wales in the United Kingdom. This is not to say that there are no noteworthy regional cultural and political differences across the United States (e.g., those based on language, race, ethnicity or cultural identity).

this history into two periods.[2] In the first period, lasting roughly from the 1920s through to the 1970s, formal models of regional planning and government were promoted to address area-wide problems of metropolitan growth and the growing fiscal imbalance between cities and suburbs. The aim was to reduce or mitigate fiscal and social inequalities between suburbs and central cities and to promote strong and well-integrated metropolitan areas as a policy goal in itself. In the second period, which began towards the end of the twentieth century, regionalism has been built around informal models of regional collaboration and governance. These new regionalist structures are geared towards promoting regional economic development, managing suburban sprawl and fostering a strong sense of place. The aim is not to promote regional government *per se* but rather to develop models of regional collaboration which make regions competitive and resilient in the face of wider challenges and changes.

2.1 Twentieth-century regionalism in the United States: the growing federal role

In the early decades of the twentieth century, there was no direct connection between regionalism and the challenges of metropolitan development. However, this began to change with the work of Lewis Mumford and the Regional Plan Association of America (RPAA) (Jonas and Pincetl, 2006). At that time, Progressivism was already influencing the adoption of area-wide approaches to various urban issues and problems. While its objectives were pragmatic and business-led, Progressivism nevertheless sought political solutions through the reform of urban government (Jonas, 2002). As urban development spread into rural areas, rural communities and jurisdictions were not necessarily equipped to cope with the new fiscal and planning challenges of metropolitan growth. Working through the RPAA, Mumford became a proponent of regional land use and fiscal planning as a solution to various urban-related transportation, infrastructure and environmental problems. The RPAA advocated regional planning approaches in states like New York, but its efforts were curtailed by

[2] Wallis (1994a; 1994b) talks of three waves of regionalism in the United States. In this report, we choose to draw a contrast between 'formal' or 'top down' and 'informal' or 'bottom up' regionalism, which divides roughly into two different time periods. In many cases, however, formal and informal regionalist structures co-exist in the same region.

the Depression and the general economic crisis facing the country during the 1930s and 1940s. Nonetheless, metropolitan governmental reform remained on the political agenda in many places well into the 1940s and beyond (Jones, 1942; Jonas, 1991).

After World War II, suburbs and metropolitan areas continued to expand. The proliferation of new municipalities and special purpose districts meant that in many places no single authority was responsible for the delivery of important services across an entire metropolitan area or region (Teaford, 1997). While regional transport and infrastructure districts did emerge in some places, these entities had to negotiate with independent cities and suburbs over issues like annexation, property tax revenues, land use, economic development and services (Cox and Jonas, 1993). In this context, metropolitan political fragmentation and inter-jurisdictional conflict were growing problems demanding comprehensive metropolitan and region-wide solutions.

At the same time, central cities and suburbs became increasingly separated not just in terms of jurisdictional authority but also with respect to their fiscal, racial and social attributes (Danielson, 1976). Profound disparities emerged between those central cities experiencing fiscal and social decline and suburbs where wealth, jobs and resources were concentrated. These disparities ushered in various federal responses. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Advisory Committee for Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) and the Committee for Economic Development (CED) promoted strong forms of metropolitan government to resolve region-wide problems of housing and service inequality (ACIR, 1967; CED, 1970). National business organizations continued to support metropolitan government reform because they hoped it would generate economies of scale in the provision of strategic infrastructure and services (Bish, 1971). Metropolitan solutions were also encouraged by civil rights groups such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Urban League; groups which saw opportunities in opening up the suburbs and suburban school districts to low income households and people of color (Danielson, 1976).

As a result of pressures from these different groups, regions and metropolitan areas pursued annexations, mergers and consolidations, leading in some cases to formalized metropolitan-wide governmental structures (Savitch and Vogel, 2000). Yet in many other cases independent suburbs and local service districts were able to resist such attempts to reform and consolidate metropolitan government (Miller, 1981). In these places, decentralized local government existed and operated alongside more centralized metropolitan and regional service delivery structures (Ostrom et al. 1961). As the federal government began to reduce or withdraw grants and subsidies to urban areas, formal models of regional government and metropolitan planning gave way to models of regionalism built from the 'bottom up' around regional cooperation and governance. These informal models form the basis of what is known as the new regionalism.

2.2 The new regionalism: regional collaboration 'from below'

In the 1980s and 1990s, many regions in the United States faced mounting problems of metropolitan growth, unmanaged suburban sprawl and deteriorating quality of life (Calthorpe and Fulton, 2001). Once again regionalism came to the fore but this time the problems were not simply about the fiscal and social decay of central cities relative to suburban prosperity and growth. Instead entire regions and metropolitan areas faced a range of new challenges and opportunities associated with economic globalization and the decline of their traditional manufacturing base. The new regionalism offered a new approach to the economic development challenges facing many cities and regions across the country (Cisneros, 1995; Orfield, 1997; Wheeler, 2002).

At the same time, geographers and regional planners began to argue that the new geography of economic development seemed to be based around self-organized and competitive metropolitan regions, industrial districts, and clusters (Saxenian, 1994; Scott, 1998; Storper, 1997), and that the nation state (or in the USA, the federal government) seemed to be playing a much more circumscribed role in regulating urban development and subsidizing urban renewal (Brenner, 2002). Global economic

competition called for flexible and devolved modes of territorial governance which could enhance the capacity of metropolitan regions to compete and attract investment. These new regional arrangements were not to be delimited by formal political boundaries but increasingly were to be thought of relationally in respect to networks or processes operating well beyond any single local municipality or county; processes such as attracting inward investment, promoting cluster development, managing technological change, and leveraging funding for strategic infrastructural investments (Pastor et al., 2000; Rusk, 1995). This approach was also reflected in the "new economic geography" espoused by Krugman (1991) and Porter (1990), amongst others, which emphasized the dynamic role of industrial districts and agglomerated clusters in fostering regional economic competitive advantages.

New regionalist thinking also began to influence the federal government's approach to urban policy and community redevelopment (Jonas and Ward, 2002; Jonas and McCarthy, 2009). An early champion of the new regionalism in the Clinton Administration was Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Henry Cisneros. As former Mayor of San Antonio, Cisneros was familiar with cities that had used their annexation powers to develop area-wide approaches to land use and infrastructure provision. Drawing on his mayoral experiences, he argued that regionalism should be about regional cooperation both between 'things' (e.g. infrastructure, tax base, etc.) and 'people' (citizens, businesses, public officials) (Cisneros, 1995). Cisneros suggested that new informal models of regional collaboration could be developed which drew people and communities together around projects (i.e. 'things') which in turn could be demonstrated to have a regional impact. This approach echoed the growing view in various economic development literatures that the region was becoming an increasingly important site and scale of economic, social and political organization. As the influential academic, Richard Florida, has argued, regions are "key economic units in the global economy" (Florida, 1995, 531).

In the 1990s and early 2000s, new regionalist thinking spread rapidly throughout the United States through various professional policy networks as well as the activities of

individuals who championed the regionalism cause in their home cities and states. As new regionalist ideas took hold, metropolitan areas and regions adopted different approaches to regional collaboration depending on the challenges they faced and resources available. For example, the California Center for Regional Leadership promoted what it called 'civic regionalism' throughout the State. California's approach to the new regionalism offered a vision of *sustainable* regional economic development built around regional partnerships or Regional Collaborative Initiatives (CRIs). These CRIs were set up deliberately to eschew formal local political boundaries and governmental structures (California Center for Regional Leadership, 2001). Some of these new regionalist arrangements in fact do not coincide at all with established or recognized metropolitan political boundaries. One such case is the Inland Empire Economic Partnership (IEEP) in Southern California, which represents businesses and communities in the western parts of Riverside and San Bernardino counties. This is a region characterized by a loose confederation of independent suburbs and unincorporated areas lacking in a clear political identity and pre-existing regional arrangements such as might be associated with a dominant metropolitan centre or county like neighboring Los Angeles. Nevertheless, the California Center for Regional Leadership selected the IEEP as one of its model CRIs (Jonas and Pincetl, 2006).

In the Denver region, an important proponent of new regionalist thinking has been the Alliance for Regional Stewardship, which is affiliated to the American Chambers of Commerce Executives (http://www.acce.org/ars/about-the-alliance-for-regional-stewardship/); and one of its most active champions – until his untimely death in 2007 – was John Parr of Civic Results. The Alliance published a monograph series on regional stewardship in the early 2000s. These monographs outlined different approaches to regional collaboration, drawing upon models in different regions throughout the United States, such as the MOSES partnership in Detroit described below, as well as Denver's FasTracks project. Figure 2.1 represents the Alliance's approach to regional leadership and is adapted from a figure in one of its monographs. This approach emphasizes the

importance of multi-agency regional collaboration rather than a single jurisdiction/issue traditional leadership model.[3]

Traditional Leadership	*Regional collaboration*
One jurisdiction or organization	Multi-jurisdictional, multi-agency
Specific problem or goal	Integrated regional goals/vision
Leverage individual networks	Bring diverse networks together
Issue specific	Commitment to place/region
Local scale action	Local and regional scales together

Figure 2.1 A model of regional collaboration

(Source: adapted from Alliance for Regional Stewardship (2002), page 4).

It is a key to this approach, and as evidenced by the specific examples discussed above, that new regionalism must be flexible enough to adapt to changing local and regional political and economic circumstances. Indeed an ability to manage and sustain change is one of the key attributes of successful regional collaboration. As the Alliance for Regional Stewardship argued in 2002:

> Creating regional civic institutions and alliances was a new challenge in the 1990s, and remains so for many regions. But the next challenge on the frontier is to renew their focus as times change. We must keep civic institutions vital, refreshed by new leaders and informed by more experienced ones (Alliance for Regional Stewardship, 2002: 11).

[3] Scholars of the new regionalism such as Hamilton (2002) and Mitchell-Weaver et al. (2000) suggest that regional regimes operate as a different level of governance, which exists above and beyond the traditional scope and capacities of urban regimes. However, it is clear that most regional partnerships tap into existing urban regime structures for their resources and networks. Denver's model of regional collaboration is a good example of an attempt to build a regional regime from below, drawing on existing urban and suburban governance capacities.

There are a number of examples of new regionalist organizations which are involved in supporting or developing regional infrastructure across the United States. In Detroit, the Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength (MOSES) was set up in 1997 to bring together religious and civic leaders and activists involved in low-income communities, both in Detroit and surrounding suburbs (see http://www.mosesmi.org/index.html). MOSES has taken the lead on improving regional transportation, believing that this is an issue that cuts across the kinds of jurisdictional, income and racial divisions that have come to characterize metropolitan Detroit. In 1999, MOSES led a campaign to establish a regional transportation authority and to increase regional public transit funds (Alliance for Regional Stewardship, 2003: 17). Organizations like MOSES seek to draw together neighborhoods, cities and suburbs around new mass transit projects that could have benefits for users and producers throughout the entire region.

Other regional organizations have sought to address shortfalls in existing public investment in transport infrastructure. In the I-495 region of Greater Boston, the I-495/MetroWest Corridor Partnership was set up in 2003 to address the region's mounting infrastructure deficit (see http://www.495partnership.org/). This organization grew out of a network of officials from local townships, municipalities and chambers of commerce across the region. The Partnership has tried to speak for those outer parts of Greater Boston where high tech industry has located and expanded but which have felt inadequately represented in recent debates about the funding of transport infrastructure in Massachusetts. Another significant area of concern in the I-495 region is the lack of affordable housing for entry-level workers in key economic sectors. So alongside regional infrastructure, the Partnership has also been an advocate of regional solutions to the production of affordable workforce housing (Jonas, While and Gibbs, 2010).

2.3 Summary and conclusions

There are many examples or models of regional collaboration to be found in metropolitan areas across the United States. Whilst it is difficult to generalize about their

aims, structures and objectives, they do seem to share in common an emphasis on developing informal regional approaches to the challenges of urban growth and community economic development. All are set up in a manner that seeks to overcome the constraints of local jurisdictional (i.e. territorial) boundaries and to reduce levels of inter-jurisdictional conflict. Moreover, they are neither exclusively public nor private sector-led. They have tended to emerge in places and regions where local and regional government capacities are seen to be weak or fragmented and regional policy challenges relating to growth and economic development are severe. These new regional partnerships have agendas that are driven from the 'bottom up'. This makes the new regionalism quite different in aims, motives and organizational structures to an earlier generation of 'top down' federal initiatives with respect to metropolitan planning and regional development.

In the Denver region, both 'formal' (top down) and 'informal' (bottom up) approaches to regionalism have been pursued. However, since the 1990s informal approaches to regional collaboration have proven to be the more effective and preferred model for promoting regional economic development and transportation infrastructure. Denver's approach to regionalism cannot be viewed in isolation; it is an integral part of a wider reform movement that seeks to transform approaches to the governance of regional economic development in cities throughout the US. Actively promoted by organizations like the Alliance for Regional Stewardship, the new regionalism has been a particularly successful vehicle for supporting the development of FasTracks and the related regional economic development projects. Such projects require strong networks of regional collaboration between public and private sector interests.

The remainder of this report will consider some of the changes influencing the evolution of Denver's 'bottom up' approach to regional collaboration. It will show that, in a context where local government and regional planning had failed to deliver, FasTracks was an important reason why Denver adopted its model of regional collaboration in the first instance. Given initial failures, followed by some successes in the early 2000s, the Denver model of regional collaboration was not the only possible approach to

regionalism but it did reflect the specific political and economic circumstances facing the region. As we move into 2010 and beyond, a new set of challenges has emerged potentially to threaten Denver's model of regional collaboration. The question is whether the existing model is either resilient enough to sustain such challenges and changes or a different model of regional collaboration will emerge from the new circumstances confronting Denver's regional transportation and infrastructure.

3. Regional Collaboration in the Denver Area: The Role of State and Local Government

In Section 2, we showed how the U.S. federal government's interest in metropolitan regional issues has waxed and waned since the 1930s. Yet these same issues have played a much more prominent role for state and local governments. As metropolitan areas have grown in both population and land area, they have encompassed an increasing number of local municipalities and counties, thus confronting both state and local governments with concerns about regional cooperation and collaboration. According to the US Census, the Denver-Aurora metropolitan statistical area is composed of 10 counties with a 2008 estimated population of 2.5 million (Figure 3-1). This metropolitan area has grown dramatically especially since the 1950s when it expanded well beyond the city of Denver to include an increasing number of suburban and exurban municipalities and counties. This post-1950 decentralized growth has created numerous governance challenges which have affected every other large metropolitan area in the US during this time. Denver has adopted regional governance strategies that are similar to other US metropolitan areas, but because of Denver's particular geographic, historical, and political circumstances, its experience with regionalism is a unique story.

This section of the report provides some background to the historical development of regionalism in the Denver area. This history can be divided into three periods. In the first period, the early development of Denver saw the expansion of the central city through annexation, the absorption of the surrounding streetcar suburbs into the city, and the eventual consolidation of the City and County of Denver. This was a period of metropolitan consolidation. In the period after World War II, the Denver metropolitan area expanded rapidly and new development spread into neighboring counties. However, this was also a period of growing central city-suburban tensions which were addressed primarily through formal structures of metropolitan and regional planning, many of which were encouraged by the state and federal governments. However, these early 'top down' efforts to foster and promote regional collaboration were not successful

and regional discord ensued, lasting until the end of the 1980s. The third part of this section examines the period 1970-1990 when regional tensions began to strain the relationship between various Denver-based organizations involved in regional economic development and transportation planning.

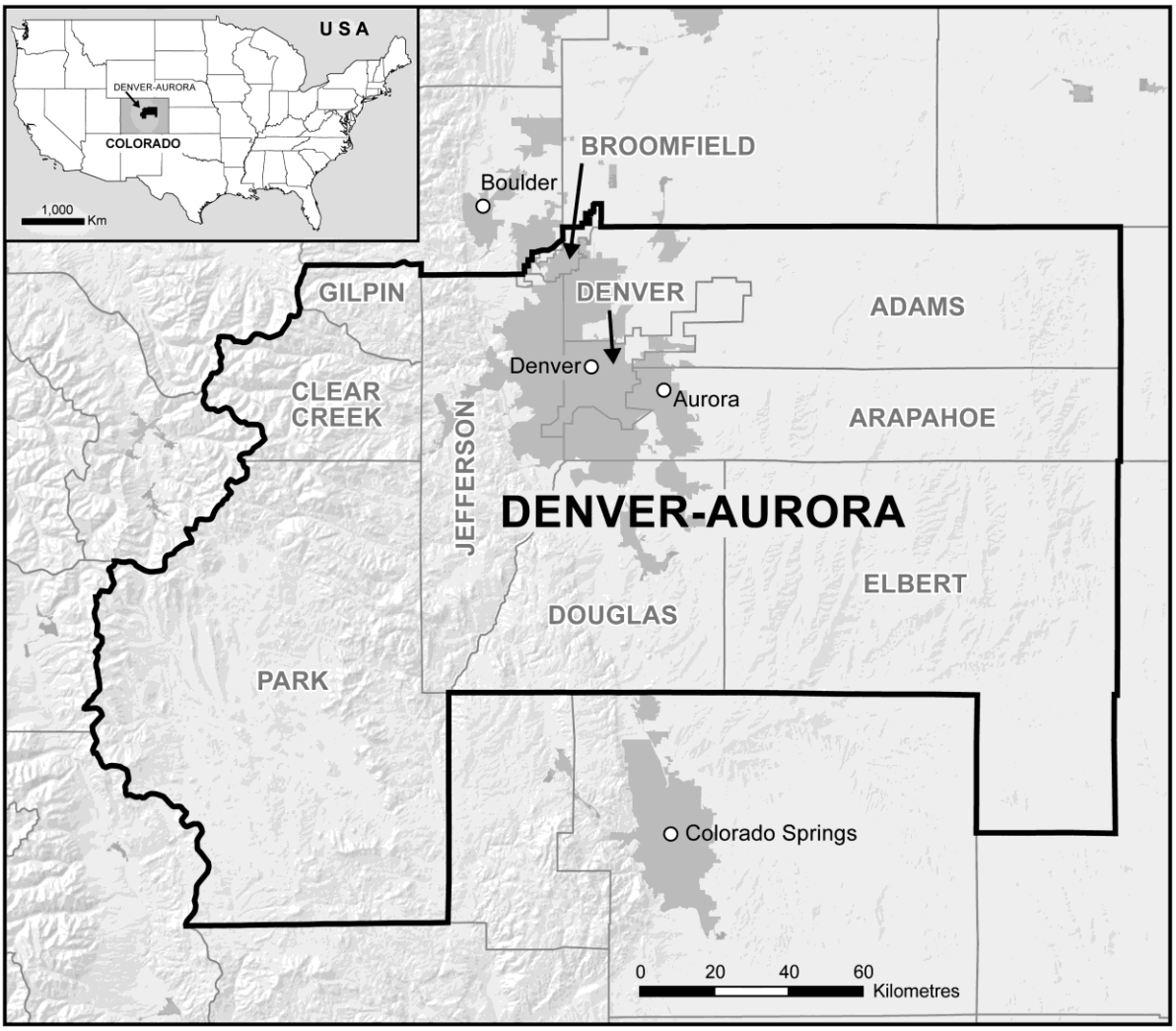

Figure 3-1: The Denver region including the Denver-Aurora metropolitan statistical area

3.1 The early years of metropolitanism in Denver: annexation and consolidation

The City of Denver, Colorado, was founded in 1858 as part of the Pikes Peak gold rush, and grew in its early years due to its role as a gateway, supply, and processing center for the mining industry. Denver was established as a city before Colorado became a

state, initially a part of the Kansas Territory. In fact, the city was named for James W. Denver, who was governor of the Kansas Territory at the time the City of Denver was founded. In 1861, the western part of the Kansas Territory became part of the Colorado Territory, named for the Colorado River. By 1870, Denver was developing as the most important city in the Colorado Territory, due largely to its role as a railroad and mining center. In 1876, the state of Colorado was admitted into the United States, and Denver became its capital city (Leonard and Noel 1990).

Because of its economic linkage with the mining industry, Denver's growth through much of its history has been characterized by boom-bust cyclicality. Gold, silver, and other mineral booms led to rapid influxes of population and economic growth that were eventually followed by busts. Still, Denver's early growth was significant enough to place it as the 25th largest city in the US in 1900 with a population of 133,859.

As Denver grew in population, it also grew outward in spatial extent. Starting from a small settlement near the South Platte River and Cherry Creek near downtown, the city of Denver grew outward annexing other pioneer towns, such as Auraria and Highlands. A number of streetcar suburbs had been created in the 1880s and 1890s, including the mining smelter towns of Argo, Swansea, Elyria, and Globeville, as well as suburban enclaves such as Park Hill, Montclair, Barnum, Valverde, Berkeley, and South Denver. All of these suburbs and other built-up areas nearby were incorporated into Denver by 1902 when the consolidated City and County of Denver was created (Leonard and Noel 1990). As with many other cities at this time, annexation and consolidation were regarded by local businesses and city governments to be crucial for securing the funding and provision of infrastructure, such as water, electricity and sewerage, to new development in unincorporated areas (Jackson 1985; Jonas 1991). Moreover, as cities grew both in terms of population and size of incorporated territory, it became easier for public agencies to raise capital and sell bonds for improved services. Likewise, local businesses, such as banks, retailers and service contractors, benefitted from the expanded customer base that came with new development (Cox and Mair 1988). By the turn of the twentieth century, annexation was regarded as one of the most important

tools in the box of booster tactics deployed by central-city municipal governments throughout the country (Jackson 1985: 144-46), and Denver was no exception in this respect.

In the first half of the 20th century, Denver continued to grow as its economy slowly diversified. Denver became established as a regional medical center and a major destination for many tuberculosis patients and their families who benefited from Denver's dry and relatively warm climate. Both state and federal government activities, including numerous military bases and defense-related industries, became established in the Denver area. With the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains only 30 miles away, Denver also began to grow as a tourism and recreation destination. By 1950, Denver had a population of 415,786, ranking it as the 24th largest city in the US.

While the City and County of Denver continued to annex nearby land, an increasing number of suburban communities, such as Littleton, Englewood, Glendale, and Sheridan in Arapahoe County; Golden, Wheat Ridge, and Arvada in Jefferson County; and Aurora and Westminster in Adams County, resisted annexation and were incorporated separately from Denver (Leonard and Noel 1990). Similar to other metropolitan areas, town leaders and residents perceived the benefits of separate incorporation greater than the benefits of joining the central city. Service considerations aside, Denver, like other US central cities, was perceived by outsiders as congested, dirty, unhealthy, and politically corrupt, with a tendency toward unscrupulous activity, such as drinking, gambling, and prostitution. Even though there were significant economic, political, and service benefits in joining the central city, many suburban towns chose to remain separate. While these towns began to grow more steadily in the 1920-1950 period due in part to the popularity of automobile transportation but also the failure of central cities to extend public mass transit systems, they initiated a pattern whereby the City and County of Denver found it more difficult to grow, either through increased density or land annexation. Property owners in suburban areas, in particular, were increasingly reluctant to incur extra taxes to fund improvements to area-wide services

and Denver was unable to convince its voters of the need to expand mass transit to communities outside its boundaries.

3.2 Denver metropolitan growth and collaboration, 1950-1970

Starting in 1950, the US Census began to record population statistics for metropolitan areas composed of a central city, the central county, and nearby suburban counties. This was a clear reflection of the changing political geography of US cities whereby urban growth was no longer confined just to the central city or county. In 1950, the Denver Standard Metropolitan Area (SMA) had a total population of 563,832 while the City and County of Denver, with a population of 415,786, accounted for 73.7% of the metropolitan total (see Table 3-1). The other components of the Denver SMA were Adams, Arapahoe, and Jefferson counties, and they each were experiencing a higher rate of population growth than Denver. By 1960, the City and County of Denver represented only 53.1% of the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA) total of 929,383, as each of the outer counties, including newly-added Boulder County, had much stronger growth. By 1970, the trend continued as the percentage of population living in the City and County of Denver dropped to 41.9% of the SMSA total, due to slow growth in the city of Denver and rapid growth in the suburban counties.

Growth in the suburban counties between 1950 and 1970 was fueled by the rise of a number of suburban municipalities, which grew prolifically (see Table 3-2). The city of Lakewood, which in 1969 incorporated some of the already urbanized portions of Jefferson County just west of the city of Denver, became the 2nd largest city in the metro area and the 4th largest city in the state by 1970 with a population of 92,787. The city of Aurora, straddling both Adams and Arapahoe counties just east of the city of Denver, grew from a population of 11,421 in 1950 to 74,974 by 1970, ranking it as the 5th largest city in Colorado. The city of Boulder, the county seat of Boulder County and site of the University of Colorado, ranked 6th with a 1970 population of 66,870, while the city of Arvada in Jefferson County was the 7th most populous city in Colorado with 46,814 residents.

TABLE 3-1: POPULATION OF THE DENVER METROPOLITAN AREA, 1950-2008

County	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	1970-2000 %Ch
Denver	415,786	493,887	514,678	492,365	467,610	554,636	7.8%
Adams	40,234	120,296	185,789	245,944	265,038	363,857	95.8%
Arapahoe	52,125	113,426	162,142	293,621	391,511	487,967	200.9%
Boulder	48,296*	74,254	131,889	189,625	225,339	291,288	120.9%
Douglas	*	*	*	25,153	60,391	175,766	1990.7%
Jefferson	55,687	127,520	233,031	371,753	438,430	527,056	126.2%
Total	563,832	929,383	1,227,529	1,620,902	1,848,319	2,400,570	95.6%

*not a part of Denver metro area in these years

County	2000 Pop	%Ch 90-00	2008 Pop (Est)	%Ch 00-08
Denver	554,636	18.6%	598,707	7.9%
Arapahoe	487,967	24.6%	554,282	13.6%
Jefferson	527,056	20.2%	533,339	1.5%
Adams	363,857	37.3%	430,836	18.5%
Boulder	291,288	29.3%	293,161	0.6%
Douglas	175,766	191.0%	280,621	59.7%

Notes:

The U.S. Census Bureau had different names for metropolitan area designations, as follows:
1950: Standard Metropolitan Areas (SMAs)
1960, 1970, 1980: Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSAs)
1990, 2000: Metropolitan Areas (MAs), Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Areas (CMSAs), Primary Metropolitan Statistical Areas (PMSAs)
After 2003: Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSAs)

Much of this growth was fueled by Sunbelt-oriented migration, as many Midwestern and Northeastern residents were drawn to the amenities of the Denver area. Government, military, aerospace, energy, tourism, and recreation were the leading economic sectors that propelled Denver's growth. Increasingly, many of these employment activities chose locations in the suburban outskirts of Denver, including the Federal Center in Lakewood, Martin-Marietta in unincorporated Jefferson County, and the Denver Technological Center in Greenwood Village and unincorporated Arapahoe County.

In recognition of the rapid pace of suburban growth, all levels of government—federal, state, and local—began to pay more attention to issues of regional collaboration and metropolitan governance. As indicated in our earlier discussion of regionalism, the federal government in the postwar era became more involved in urban issues, including slum clearance, urban renewal, interstate highways, mass transportation, housing, environmental pollution, and metropolitan planning. In recognition that many of these issues transcended local governmental boundaries and required a collaborative approach to solving regional problems, the federal government encouraged and supported regional planning efforts. Section 701 of the Housing Act of 1954 provided federal grants in support of regional councils of government and metropolitan planning agencies to promote cooperation in helping to solve regional problems. In 1959, the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) was created “to explore new government structures and policies to address suburban growth problems and improve coordination of federally-aided programs and projects” (NJTPA 2010). The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1962 required the “establishment of a continuing and comprehensive transportation planning process carried out cooperatively by states and local communities” as a condition for receiving federal funds in support of highway projects (NJTPA 2010). This “3-C (continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative) process” became a hallmark of metropolitan transportation planning that still exists today, and underscored the need for a regional approach to planning.

To support transportation and other planning activities, most metropolitan areas began to establish regional planning agencies, councils of governments, or metropolitan special districts. In Colorado, charter members Adams, Arapahoe, and Jefferson counties and the City and County of Denver formed the Inter-County Regional Planning Association (ICRPA) in 1955 “to plan for the development of the metropolitan area...and to meet the common problems that confront the four counties" (DRCOG 2010). The first ICRPA resolution supported a major east-west highway route through the metro area later known as Interstate 70. In 1958, the association’s name was changed to the Inter-County Regional Planning Commission (ICRPC), and the first regional transportation plan was approved. The ICRPC signed the first memorandum of agreement with the

Colorado Department of Highways (CDOH) in 1963 after the Federal-Aid Highway Act established the 3C (continuing, cooperative, comprehensive) planning process (DRCOG 2005). In 1968, its name was changed again to the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) to "signify the responsibility of the core city to its neighbors" (DRCOG 2005). In 1969, DRCOG supported legislation that created the Regional Transportation District (RTD), and in 1971, it entered into a memorandum of agreement with CDOH and RTD to jointly plan the region's transportation facilities (DRCOG 2005). RTD was established as a metropolitan special district by the Colorado legislature in 1969 "to develop, maintain, and operate a mass transportation system" in Denver and all or parts of five surrounding counties (Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Douglas, and Jefferson) (Denver Metropolitan Study 1976). Prior to RTD, the Metropolitan Sewage Disposal District became the region's first metropolitan special district in 1960, created for the purpose of sewage treatment for approximately 75% of the metro area (Denver Metropolitan Study 1976).

Not all efforts at regional collaboration were successful, as many suburban jurisdictions remained wary of the central city and jealously guarded their municipal powers. An effort by the Colorado state legislature in 1961 to create a metropolitan capital improvement district ended when the Colorado Supreme Court ruled that the district violated the Colorado Constitution's home rule provisions (Denver Metropolitan Study 1976). Subsequent plans in 1965, 1967, and 1968 to create an urban super-county to consolidate services were rejected by the state legislature (Leonard and Noel 1990). Many suburbs, including Aurora, Englewood, and Westminster developed their own water systems so as not to be dependent on the Denver Water Department. During a period of frequent droughts and rapid suburbanization in the 1950s, the Denver Water Department established a "Blue Line" around the metropolitan area, beyond which it refused to supply water (Leonard and Noel 1990). Denver was not unusual in this respect for a fast-growing central city retaining its capacity to annex territory. In 1954, the City of Columbus, Ohio, imposed a "freeze" on water and sewerage service extensions to unincorporated areas which refused to annex to the central city. It was only much later that the suburbs surrounding Columbus were able to negotiate growth

areas into which they could annex and receive water and sewerage services from Columbus (Jonas 1991). In Denver, a large number of special water districts and independent water systems were eventually developed to provide water supply to areas outside the Blue Line. In the event, restricted access to the Denver water system, which could have been an important growth management tool, did not inhibit expanded growth throughout the region.

3.3 Regional collaboration and discord, 1970-1990

Growth in the newly-named Denver-Boulder SMSA (in 1980) continued at a very strong pace in the 1970s before an economic slowdown began in the early 1980s. Metro area population grew by 29.8% during the 1970s, with almost all of the growth occurring in Jefferson, Arapahoe, and Adams counties (see Table 3-1). Strong growth occurred in suburban municipalities such as Aurora (Arapahoe/Adams), Arvada (Jefferson), Westminster (Adams), Thornton (Adams), Lakewood (Jefferson), Longmont (Boulder), and Broomfield (Boulder/Adams/Jefferson) (see Table 3-2). The City and County of Denver, by contrast, actually lost population in the 1970s, shrinking from a previous high of 514,678 in 1970 to 492,365 in 1980, to represent only 30.9% of the metro area's population by 1980.

Much of the economic growth in the 1970s was fueled by the high oil prices of the energy "boom" and the increased investment in energy exploration within Colorado and the Rocky Mountain region.[4] Denver became the regional headquarters for many energy companies which expanded oil, gas, and oil shale production throughout the region. Many new office buildings were built in downtown Denver during the 1970s as a result of this demand as well as the formation of the Skyline Urban Renewal District that facilitated downtown redevelopment. But by the early 1980s, oil prices had started to decline, and in 1982, Exxon announced that it was pulling out of its western Colorado oil shale project and its Denver regional headquarters. This led to a stampede of other

[4] Outside of places like Denver and Houston, the energy "boom" was actually an energy "crisis" with high oil prices crippling the US national economy.

energy companies announcing similar pullouts. By the mid-1980s, the office vacancy rate in downtown Denver exceeded 40%, and both the City and County of Denver and the state of Colorado were pursuing vigorous economic development strategies to combat the energy "bust."

TABLE 3-2: POPULATION OF CITIES OVER 10,000 IN THE DENVER METROPOLITAN AREA, 1950-2009

City	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2009 (est)
Denver	415,786	493,887	524,678	492,365	467,610	554,636	610,345
Boulder	19,999	37,718	66,870	76,685	83,312	94,673	100,160
Englewood	16,869	33,398	33,695	30,021	29,387	31,727	32,977
Aurora	11,421	48,548	74,974	158,588	222,103	276,393	324,655
Arvada		19,242	46,814	84,576	89,235	102,153	108,172
Westminster		13,850	19,432	50,211	74,625	100,940	108,850
Littleton		13,670	26,466	28,631	33,685	40,340	41,202
Longmont		11,489	23,209	42,942	51,555	71,093	88,424
Thornton		11,353	13,326	40,343	55,031	82,384	117,003
Lakewood			92,787	112,860	126,481	144,126	141,943
Wheat Ridge			29,795	30,293	29,419	32,913	31,031
Northglenn			27,937	29,847	27,195	31,575	34,556
Commerce City			17,407	16,234	16,466	20,991	43,834
Broomfield				20,730	24,638	38,272	55,990
Brighton				12,773	14,203	20,905	32,120
Golden				12,237	13,116	17,159	17,458
Lafayette					14,548	23,197	26,146
Louisville					12,361	18,937	19,656
Parker						23,558	44,722
Castle Rock						20,224	45,696
Federal Heights						12,065	12,209
Greenwood Village						11,035	14,382
Centennial							100,837
Erie							17,256

Despite the economic slowdown, the metro area's population continued to grow at a slower, but still substantial, 16% rate during the 1980s. The growth was led again by suburban Arapahoe, Jefferson, Boulder, and Adams counties, as well as newly added Douglas County. Aurora, Westminster, Lakewood, Thornton, Lafayette (Boulder), and Louisville (Boulder) were among the fastest growing suburbs. The City and County of Denver's population declined again to 467,610 by 1990, so that by decade's end it only accounted for 25.3% of the metropolitan area population.

Concerns over rapid growth drove efforts at regional collaboration during the 1970s, though regional discord was a more prevalent theme. In 1972, Denver was selected by the International Olympic Committee to host the 1976 Winter Olympic Games, but opposition groups, led by Colorado state representative Richard Lamm, questioned the environmental and financial impacts from the Olympics. Environmental awareness was particularly acute at that time shortly after the promulgation of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the Clean Air Act of 1970, and other environmental legislation. Many residents, drawn to Colorado by the amenities of the natural environment, were loathe to see rampant growth, and its attendant problems of traffic congestion, pollution, and increased infrastructure costs, diminish their quality of life. Furthermore, the Olympics at that time (before corporate sponsorship) were more of a financial liability than a benefit. Thus, in a statewide referendum in 1972, Colorado voters rejected by a 3-2 margin hosting the Winter Olympic Games, the first and only time in history that an already-selected community has rejected the Olympics. This was a major symbolic statement that Denver and Colorado were serious about the negative effects of growth. As one interviewee put it:

> That was the first time they [Denver's economic development promoters] were all pushed back from the grass roots about whether the official decision making really had the right view about the future. But again, in that era, Denver and Colorado were much less urban places and so the audience for that message was smaller and people didn't realize what the reality of time and change, and continued in-migration and growth would really mean. And so in that era whilst people responded to it, in the end it never got a lot of traction, institutionally. But really, with change came the realization that an auto-based future for this whole Front Range is not a future that all people would embrace (Interview with Denver Community Developer, March 2009).

On the heels of this political victory, Representative Lamm ran for and was elected governor of Colorado in 1974. Among his first acts as governor, Lamm stopped plans for a regional beltway around Denver, claiming that such a beltway would encourage sprawling growth and create environmental problems. Lamm vowed to "drive a silver

stake" into the heart of the I-470 beltway project to kill the proposal, though it did spring back to life in the 1980s as the C-470 state highway (Steers 1997).

Concerns over growth did not necessarily translate into metropolitan collaboration among jurisdictions in the region. If anything, regionalism was weakly developed at this time, and this related in part to the way key services and infrastructure were funded:

> **Interviewer**: You've had regional institutions like DRCOG, and you've had the regional transit authority. You've had a [formal] *de jure* regionalism, but not necessarily...
>
> **Interviewee:** Yeah, generally weak regional institutions. Although I think there has always been a core of good government and business support for more regionalism and less parochialism. But in reality, it's also just part of the structural nature of government in Colorado. It's a very locally-based, resident-based revenue … the state does very little ... highways, prisons and education [but for] anything else … there's really a local responsibility (Interview with Denver Community Developer, March 2009).

Such 'parochialism' was reflected in local government attitudes to economic development. When faced with the possibility that the City and County of Denver would annex part of the southeast office park area of Greenwood Plaza, Greenwood Village mayor Harold Patton insisted "we will fight Denver in all ways possible like Poland did when Hitler decided he needed more land. . . . We will fight until they are as bloody as a bull's hock" (Denver Post 1975, quoted in Leonard and Noel 1990, p. 293). In 1974, Colorado voters approved an amendment to the Colorado constitution limiting the ability of counties to annex land from other counties. Previously, only those specific areas to be annexed were required to agree to the annexation. The new Poundstone amendment, named for political lobbyist and future Greenwood Village mayor Freda Poundstone, required voter approval from the entire county from which the area would be annexed. This change in the annexation laws effectively ended the City and County of Denver's ability to annex land outside of its borders because the suburban counties continued to be very hostile to annexations by the central-city county. In fact, there has been only one time that the City and County of Denver annexed land since the installation of the Poundstone amendment, and that was in 1988 when Adams County

voters allowed Denver to annex land to build Denver International Airport (DIA). It should be noted that the Poundstone amendment did not affect municipal annexations in the *suburban* counties. In fact, the suburb of Aurora continued to annex land in Adams and Arapahoe counties to rival the size of Denver, experiencing a 111% growth rate in the 1970s, the fastest of any US city over 100,000 (Leonard and Noel 1990). Aurora City Councilman and future mayor Paul Tauer commented, "I could see us having a twin-city relationship like Minneapolis-St. Paul, with Aurora in the role of Minneapolis and Denver playing St. Paul" (Rocky Mountain News 1984, quoted in Leonard and Noel 1990, p. 358.)

3.4 Summary and conclusions

This section has examined the history of metropolitanism in Denver. The early development of Denver saw the expansion of the central city through annexation, the absorption of the surrounding streetcar suburbs into the City, and the eventual consolidation of the City and County of Denver. In the period after World War II, the Denver metropolitan area expanded rapidly and new development spread into neighboring counties. However, this was also a period of growing central city-suburban tensions which were addressed primarily through formal structures of metropolitan and regional planning. Some of these structures were the products of a stronger federal role in regional planning. These early 'top down' efforts to foster and promote regional collaboration were for the most part not successful and regional discord ensued, lasting until the end of the 1980s. Regional tensions brought strain to the relationship between various Denver-based organizations involved in regional economic development and regional transportation planning over this period. The lengthy time taken to get the FasTracks program from initial idea to concrete reality can be examined in the light of these strains and tensions.

4. The Denver FasTracks Rail Transit Program: History and Background

In November 2004, voters in the Denver metropolitan area approved a 0.4% increase in the regional sales tax to support the FasTracks rail transit program that proposed to add 122 miles of light and commuter rail transit to the existing 35-mile light rail system. FasTracks would expand rail transit into six new corridors (including a line to Denver International Airport), extend three existing lines, build a bus rapid transit line to Boulder, and refurbish Denver Union Station into a multimodal transportation hub for intercity and regional rail and bus service (see Plate 4.1). At a total cost of $6.7 billion, the FasTracks program is the largest urban rail transit construction program in the United States, and one of the largest transportation infrastructure projects in the world. FasTracks has three core goals:

- To provide improved transportation choices and options to the citizens of the RTD, thereby improving quality of life in the Denver region;
- To increase transit mode share during peak travel times and thereby reduce congestion on the region's roads and freeways;
- To establish a proactive plan that balances transit needs with future regional growth, which is predicted to see the region's population increase from 2.6 million in 2005 to 3.39 million in 2025.

Whilst FasTracks is often viewed as a strategic response to the challenges of regional growth, it is important to situate the program in its wider historical and geographical context. This section will therefore include the history of rail transit development in Denver, as well as some background information to explain why the Denver-Aurora metropolitan area, the 21st largest MSA based on 2008 population estimates, is constructing one of the largest rail transit systems in the US. It will show that whilst the origins of FasTracks can be traced back to the 1980s, the issues and challenges of public transportation and rail transit in Denver are much longer standing. Moreover, problems of regional growth and inter-jurisdictional conflict have characterized much of the program's development. As such, the future of FasTracks represents a strong test of regional collaboration.

Plate 4.1 Denver Union Station: multimodal transportation hub (photo © Andy Jonas, September 2007)

4.1 Early history of rail transit in Denver

Denver owes its early growth and prosperity to its role as a regional rail center. The city of Denver was founded in 1858 by miners searching for gold in the area's rivers and creeks, but it was the entrance of the railroad in 1870 which ensured Denver's place as a major regional center. In its early years, Denver entrepreneurs started horse railway services within the city, which eventually were converted to electric streetcars in the 1880s. A number of private companies, such as the Denver City Railway Company; the Denver Electric and Cable Company; the Denver, Lakewood, and Golden Railway; and the Denver and Northwestern Railway started intra- and inter-urban services during the 1885-1901period (RTD 2010b). By 1914, all of these railway companies had been

merged to form the Denver Tramway Company, which operated streetcar service until 1950. This was during a period of progressive reforms, which influenced approaches to the delivery of public services in cities throughout the USA. Often backed by private business interests, urban political reformers called for the provision of efficient and low-cost urban infrastructure (e.g. streetcars, water and sewerage, etc.) on a city-wide basis in order to facilitate the development of manufacturing industries and financial services in the central city and to provide commuter connections to the burgeoning inner-city neighborhoods and suburbs where the workers lived. In some case, special purpose districts were set up on a city or metropolitan wide basis to operate and deliver these services supposedly independent of the direct influence of city politicians and voters. Nonetheless, public transit systems remained vulnerable to wider economic conditions and changing public preferences in respect of transportation options.

From the 1880s through the 1920s, electric streetcars were the dominant form of intra-urban transportation in nearly all large US cities, but from the 1920s onward, private automobiles began to take over a larger percentage of urban travel, and effectively spelled the end for most streetcar systems. Only the very largest cities which had built subway, elevated rail, or metro systems (e.g., New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago) and a few other cities were able to maintain some form of rail transit during the period of automobile dominance. From the 1920s to the 1950s, many cities shut down their streetcar systems, replacing them with motor bus services. Denver was not alone in this regard. By the 1960s, most transit companies were facing financial difficulties, and many of these services were transferred to cities or regional public agencies. In 1971, the bus operations of the Denver Tramway Company were sold to the City and County of Denver. Two years before that, the Colorado General Assembly had created the Regional Transportation District (RTD) to “develop, maintain, and operate a mass transportation system,” and provided RTD with the ability to levy a sales tax for its funding support (Denver Metropolitan Panel Study 1976, p. 11). In 1973, a 0.5% sales tax measure to develop a regional transit system was approved by voters. In 1974, RTD acquired all of the ongoing bus services from the City and County of Denver.

4.2 Organizational structure of RTD

When RTD was created in 1969, a governing board of directors was formed with ten members from the City and County of Denver appointed by the Mayor; two members each from Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, and Jefferson Counties and one member from Douglas County appointed by their county commissioners; and two at-large members appointed by the Board (Denver Metropolitan Study Panel 1976). In 1980, voters in the RTD area approved an initiative to establish an elected Board (RTD 1995). Today, RTD is governed by a 15-member Board of Directors whose members are elected in geographic districts throughout an 8-county region, including all of Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, and Jefferson counties, as well as parts of Adams, Arapahoe, Douglas, and Weld counties (see Figure 4-1). The Board is responsible for "setting District policy, adopting the agency's annual budget, and establishing short and long-range transit goals and plans in concert with local, state, and federal agencies" (RTD 2009, p.12).

The RTD Board oversees the activities of the RTD staff, which is led by the General Manager. The General Manager, in turn, oversees the divisions of bus and rail operations, customer and contracted services, safety security and facilities, planning and development, administration, general counsel, and public affairs (see Figure 4-2). As of 2009, there were over 2400 employees at RTD (RTD 2009).

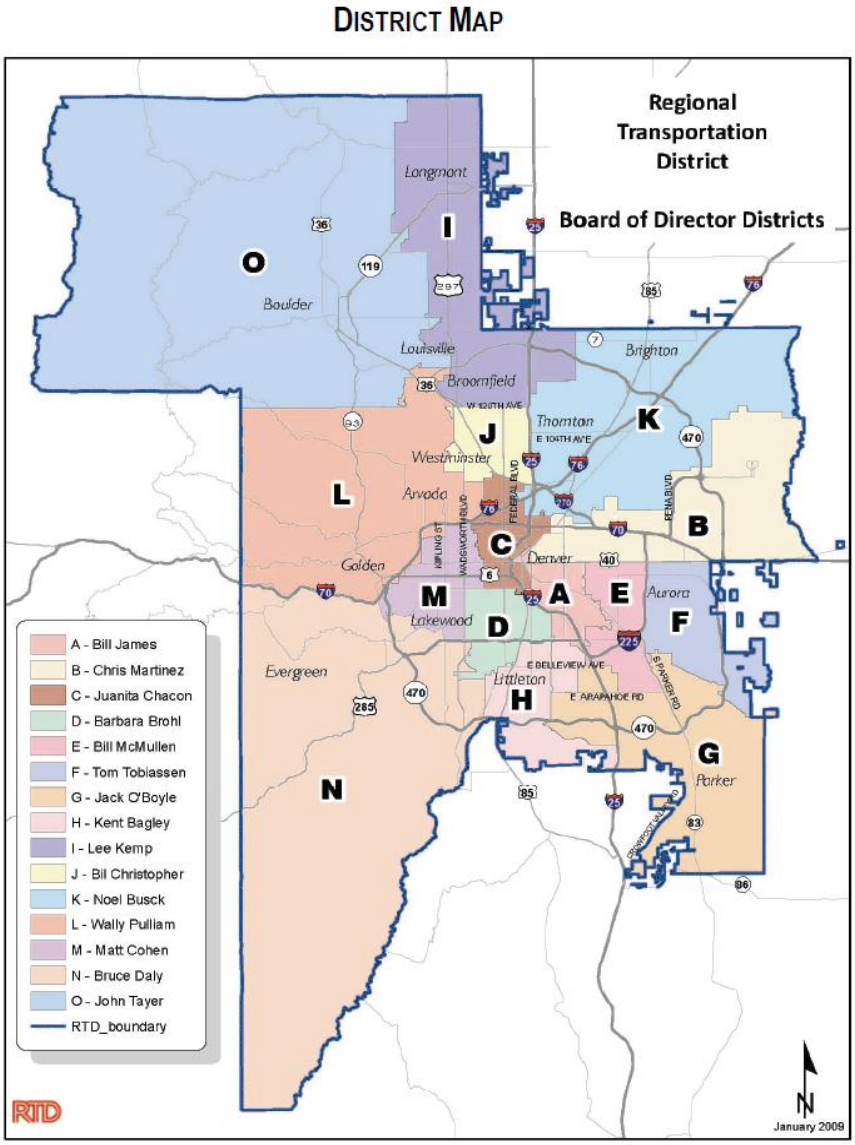

Figure 4-1: RTD Region and Board of Director Districts (Source: RTD 2009, p.13).

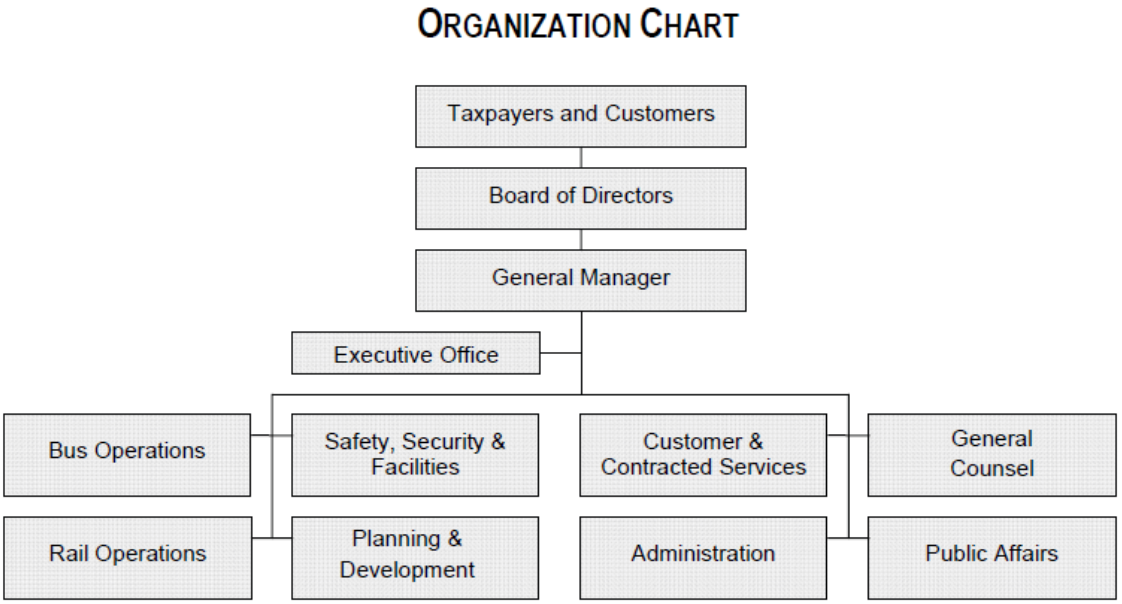

Figure 4-2: RTD Organizational Chart (Source: RTD 2009, p. 15).

4.3 Rail transit planning, 1970-1990

Once RTD became the principal transit operator in the region, early plans were formulated to expand the transit system. In 1972, RTD proposed to build a 98-mile personal rapid transit system. This form of transit technology entailed the use of smaller, 12-person vehicles to run on an aerial track that would provide non-stop, demand-responsive service based on passengers' input regarding choice of destination. Intermediate stops would be bypassed so as to allow for faster origin-to-destination travel times. A funding application for this $1.06 billion (1973 dollars) plan was submitted to the Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA) which subsequently rejected the proposal in 1975. In 1976, RTD re-drafted a plan based on a slightly different automated rapid transit system technology that would feature 80 miles of fixed guideways, not aerial tracks, on which 12-20-passenger vehicles would operate. It would be a combination of fixed-schedule service (during peak hours) and demand-responsive (during off-peak hours). A 22-mile north-south line from Littleton to

downtown Denver along the Santa Fe corridor and north along the Interstate-25 corridor to Northglenn was identified as the initial segment to be built. RTD applied to UMTA for federal funding, but the $1.77 billion plan was rejected. According to UMTA, Denver was seen as "an automobile-dominated city with congestion not yet severe enough to warrant federal investment" (RTD 1995; Ratner 2001, p. 123).

Indeed, since the 1950s, Denver had clearly become an automobile-dominated city that had expanded its urban footprint from 105 square miles in 1950 to 459 square miles by 1990 (Rusk 2003). During that same time period, population in the urbanized area increased from 498,743 to 1,517,917, with much of the increase occurring in suburban areas. In 1950, only 16.6% of the urbanized population lived in suburban areas, while by 1990, nearly 70% lived in suburban areas. Population density dropped from 4,741 people per square mile in 1950 to 3,309 in 1990. This pattern of spread-out, low-density suburban development, caused in part by the establishment of an automobile and highway-oriented transportation system, was not at all well-suited for transit. Transit operates most efficiently in high-density, high-demand corridors during peak periods of rush hour travel. Transit generally does not serve decentralized suburban growth very well. It is not surprising that UMTA rejected RTD's plans for an extensive rail transit system given the urban growth dynamics that characterized the Denver region, as well as the limited federal funding available for new transit systems in the 1970s.

Still, RTD continued to press the case for rail transit. In 1980, RTD put together another regional transit plan that focused on building a light rail line in the Southeast Corridor paralleling Interstate-25 from the Denver CBD south to Arapahoe Road, as part of a 73-mile system. Instead of submitting an application for federal funding, this time the RTD Board decided to place a referendum on the November 1980 ballot to increase the regional sales tax by 0.75% for 14 years in order to build the Southeast Corridor and five other regional corridors. Despite early polls that suggested the measure would be approved, voters ultimately denied the referendum 54% to 46%. At the same time,

voters also approved an initiative that required elections for RTD board members, rather than board appointments by politicians (RTD 1995).

After this stinging defeat, RTD did not initiate any transit referenda during the rest of the 1980s. Instead, several scaled-back plans were drafted that at least kept alive the possibility of rail transit development in the future. But as some political leaders and area businesses expressed their concerns about worsening traffic congestion and air quality, the Colorado General Assembly grew impatient with the lack of action by RTD and, in 1987, promulgated House Bill 1249 that created a private-oriented entity, the Transit Construction Authority (TCA), to design and build a rail transit line between downtown Denver and the Denver Technological Center "edge-city" development along the southeast I-25 corridor. As a part of this bill, the General Assembly directed RTD to develop plans for rapid transit in seven additional corridors. The resulting 60-mile regional system proposed by RTD was called the Fastrack Program, but did not include the TCA's Southeast Corridor. Instead, RTD proposed the Southwest Corridor along Santa Fe Drive as the preferred corridor. Both RTD and TCA applied for federal funding to conduct feasibility analyses of their preferred alternatives, but since federal regulations allowed only one feasibility analysis per metropolitan area at a time, the area's metropolitan planning organization, the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG), was asked to compare the two corridors to determine which one was better suited for transit (Ratner 2001). The resulting *Southeast/Southwest Transit Threshold Analysis* (DRCOG 1989) identified the Southwest Corridor as more cost-effective. TCA folded shortly thereafter, while RTD requested funding from UMTA for an alternatives analysis in the Southwest Corridor, which was granted in 1991. Still concerned about the state of transportation in the region and skeptical of RTD's ability to forge a regional consensus, Colorado Governor Roy Romer and the General Assembly created yet another entity, the Metropolitan Transportation Development Commission," to develop a comprehensive, regional solution to transportation problems plaguing the metropolitan area" (Metropolitan Development Transportation Commission 1990). In addition to suggested roadway improvements, there was a rail transit plan contained in this report that was essentially the same as the RTD plan from 1987.

By the end of the 1980s, there was increasing interest in developing a rail transit system, but infighting between rival agencies and authorities clouded the picture. Some members of the political and business communities had become skeptical of the ability of RTD to develop an effective regional transportation system. Frequent concerns were raised about the elected board members of RTD, with claims that "RTD managed to attract a string of candidates known for personal problems and political gaffes," including several convicted felons and outright opponents of public transit (Hodges 1994, p.1). The RTD Board developed a negative reputation that cast a shadow over everything that RTD tried to do. In 1990, the Colorado General Assembly promulgated Senate Bill 208 (SB 208) which required approval by the relevant metropolitan planning organization of the financing and technology for all proposed fixed guideway projects in the state (RTD 2010a). This was yet another sign of the skepticism which the state legislature had toward RTD's ability to plan and deliver a rail transit system.

4.4 Rail transit planning and construction, 1990-2004

As the 1990s began, the Denver region began to experience another population growth surge, with many new residents arriving especially from California. Traffic congestion and air quality continued to worsen, and demands for regional transportation solutions grew louder. While the decision to build a new airport (Denver International Airport) was ratified in the late 1980s, some observers suggested that a regional rail transit system was actually a more pressing transportation need (Leonard and Noel 1990).

In light of these pressures, RTD continued to explore rail transit alternatives. At the same time that RTD requested federal funding for an alternatives analysis for the Southwest Corridor, they conducted the *Northeast Corridor Alternative Alignment Study* that recommended a 7.5-mile light rail line from downtown Denver to Stapleton Airport. As a result of public input and opposition from neighborhoods in northeast Denver, the proposed line was scaled back to a terminus at 30th and Downing Streets in the Five Points neighborhood just outside of the Denver CBD, instead of Stapleton Airport. The

renamed Metro Area Connection (MAC) line was also proposed to extend south of downtown to Broadway and I-25 to cover a total distance of 5.3 miles. In 1989, the RTD Board had directed that "a separate account be established to receive all funds due RTD from the imposition of the Use Tax, and that all revenues in this fund be set aside for construction of rapid transit" (RTD 1995, p. 22), which was then dedicated to building the MAC line as a demonstration project (Ratner 2001). In 1991, the Board also earmarked $40 million from unrestricted funds of its investment portfolio to the MAC line to allow construction to begin in 1992 subsequent to approval from DRCOG, as part of the SB 208 process (RTD 1995). Soon after construction began, the name of the project was changed to the Central Corridor light rail line to "represent the project's role in a larger, regional system" (RTD 1995, p. 26). On October 7, 1994, the Central Corridor became the first light rail transit line to open in Denver since the era of the electric streetcars (see Figure 4-3).

Meanwhile, planning continued for the Southwest Corridor with the completion of the federally-funded Alternatives Analysis/Major Investment Study in 1994 in which light rail was selected as the preferred alternative. In 1995, the Preliminary Engineering/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was completed, and $3.9 million in federal funds were allocated for final design work, pending approval of the EIS by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). After the EIS was approved, in 1997 the FTA authorized $120 million in a federal full funding grant agreement to construct a light rail line in this corridor.

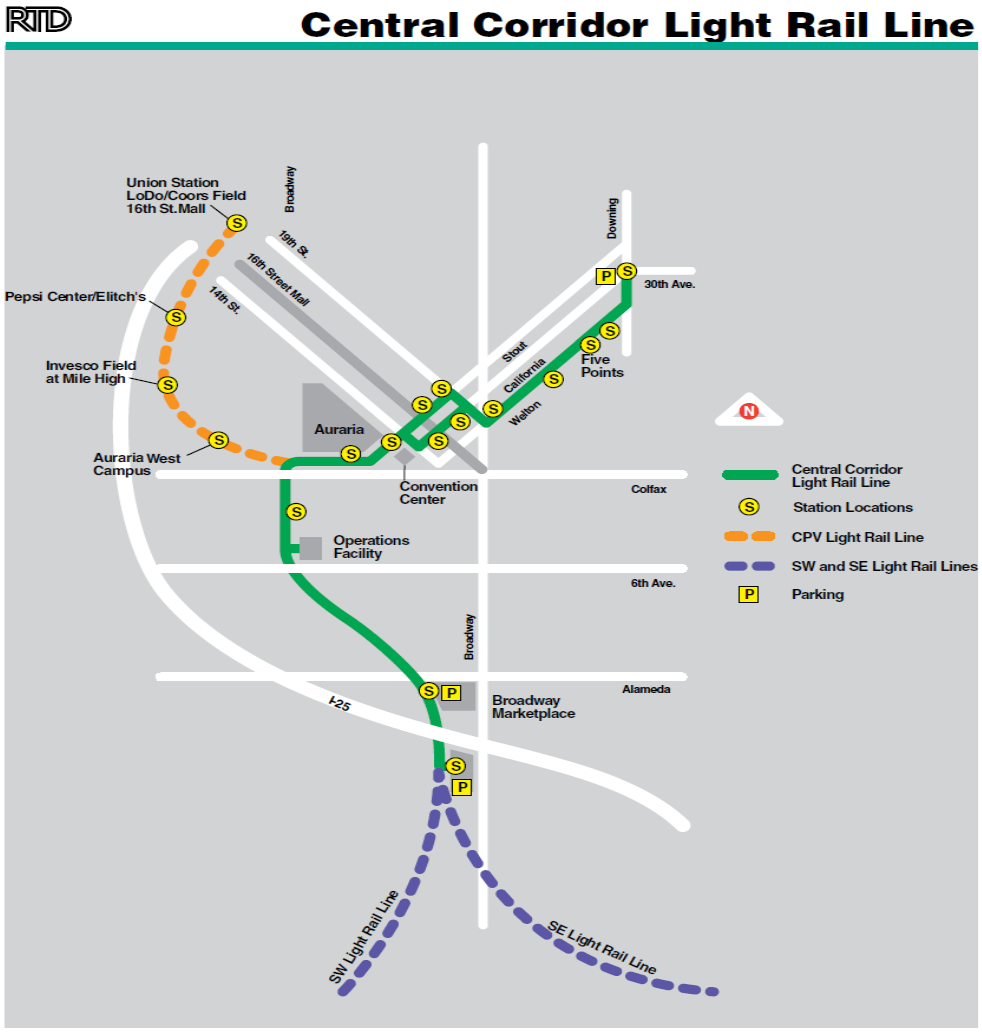

Figure 4-3: Central Corridor Light Rail line with Central Platte Valley spur line (Source: RTD 2010c).

While RTD finally achieved some success with the completion of the Central Corridor and the beginning of the Southwest Corridor light rail lines, planning continued on other corridors previously identified in its regional plan. In 1995, Clarence (Cal) Marsella was hired as general manager of RTD, and he aggressively sought to expand rapid transit in the Denver region. In 1997, Marsella and RTD proposed a long-term comprehensive rapid transit plan called “Guide the Ride” that sought to expand rapid transit service by 100 miles using a combination of light rail, commuter rail, and bus/carpool lanes in the major corridors. The proposed $6 billion plan would be funded by a 0.4% hike in the regional sales tax in a referendum that was presented to voters in November 1997.

While Marsella and the RTD staff received support for the Guide the Ride plan from many political and business leaders in the region, including the Transit ’97 coalition that formed to support the campaign, the RTD Board was sharply divided on the issue. One board member, Jon Caldara, actually led the campaign against Guide the Ride, while board chairman Ben Klein and board member Jack McCroskey actively feuded with other board members, RTD staff, Transit ’97, and each other over a litany of issues (Prendergast 1997). The voting public was once again left with the impression that the RTD Board was split and dysfunctional, and that RTD could not be trusted with $6 billion of public money to build a rapid transit system. Concerns were also expressed that too many ambiguities remained regarding the specific technologies to be employed in each of the corridors. Despite early polls showing public support, the Guide the Ride referendum was defeated 58%-42%.

After the defeat of Guide the Ride in 1997, RTD continued to work on rail transit development in an incremental fashion. After receiving a full funding grant agreement from the FTA in 1997, construction began on the 8.7-mile Southwest Corridor extending along an existing freight railroad right-of-way from the I-25 and Broadway terminus of the Central Corridor south through the suburb of Engelwood to its terminus at Mineral Ave in the suburb of Littleton (see Figure 4-4). This was the first light rail line to extend to some of Denver’s suburbs, and was seen as being a real test case of light rail’s viability. The Southwest Corridor was completed in summer 2000 on-time and within its $177 million budget. Projected to carry 22,000 passengers by 2015, it had already carried 27,400 passengers by 2008.

In 1999, RTD approved a plan to add to the Central Corridor by creating a short spur through the Central Platte Valley from the Auraria station (campus for the University of Colorado at Denver, Metropolitan State College, and Community College of Denver) to Union Station in Lower Downtown (LoDo) Denver (see Figure 4-3). The Central Platte Valley line would connect major sports and entertainment venues such as Invesco Field at Mile High (Denver Broncos football and outdoor concerts), the Pepsi Center (Denver Nuggets basketball, Colorado Avalanche hockey, and indoor concerts), Six Flags Elitch

Gardens Amusement Park, and Coors Field (Colorado Rockies baseball). Public and private funds totaling $47 million were combined to build the 1.8-mile spur. Construction began in 2001 and the spur was completed in 2002.

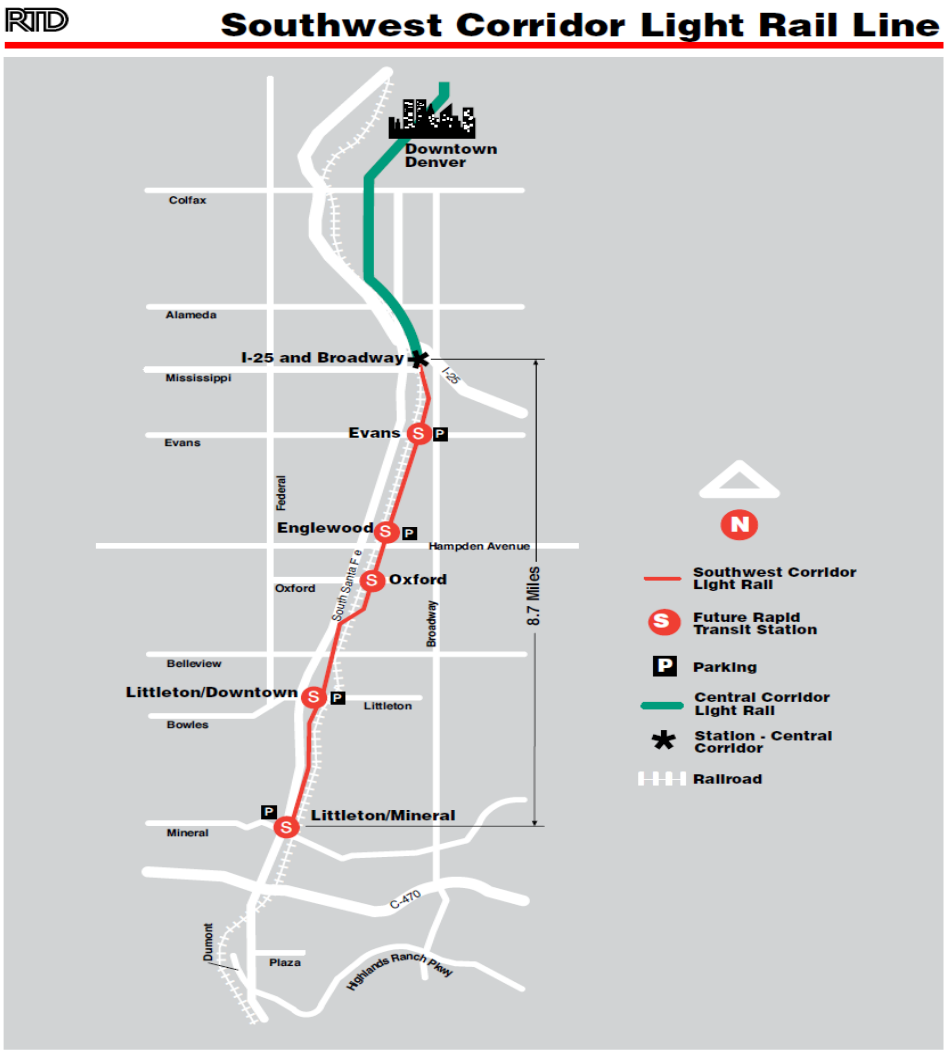

Figure 4-4: Southwest Corridor Light Rail line (Source: RTD 2010c).

As RTD focused its efforts on the Central and Southwest Corridors, and while the ill-fated TCA effort collapsed in 1990, little attention was given by RTD to the Southeast Corridor along I-25. But in 1995, a major investment study for the Southeast Corridor was begun by the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), and in 1996, the study recommended that a light-rail line was the most appropriate solution. Governor

Roy Romer supported the light rail recommendation, and with the help of the legislature, appropriated state funds for preliminary engineering and environmental impact assessment. He also supported the dedication of $340 million of state funds to help build the line, if $510 million of federal funds could also be obtained (Ratner 2001). But in November 1998, Bill Owens was elected governor of Colorado, and he withdrew the commitment for state light rail funding, instead supporting a highway-widening option for I-25. After considerable discussion and negotiation among the Governor's office, CDOT, RTD, DRCOG, and local municipalities, a new plan was formulated that included both light rail and highway-widening in the Southeast Corridor. The highway widening portion of the project was proposed as one of 28 statewide transportation projects that would be funded through the issuance of Transportation Revenue Anticipation Notes (TRANS bonds) based on future federal transportation dollars. The light rail portion of the project would be funded through bonding from sales tax revenues, federal funds from the FTA, and local matching funds (CDOT & RTD 2006). Both bond initiatives were placed before state voters in November 1999 and, with broad-based political and business support, they were both approved. In 2000, the FTA provided a $525 million full-funding grant agreement for the 19-mile Southeast Corridor light rail line, which would extend from the Broadway and I-25 terminus of the Central Corridor southeast along the I-25 corridor to the I-225 interchange at the Denver Tech Center and terminating at Lincoln Ave in suburban Douglas County. The line would also extend along the I-225 corridor northeast to the Nine Mile station at Parker Rd (see Figure 4-5). In 2001, a consortium of private-sector engineering and construction firms (Southeast Corridor Constructors) was awarded a design-build contract for the project, which was renamed the TRansportation EXpansion (T-REX) project, and construction began shortly thereafter. The T-REX project became one of the largest transportation projects in the US at that time, and was unique because of its design-build feature which allowed the private contractors the flexibility to make small design changes as the project unfolded, thus making the construction process more efficient and saving both time and money. Upon completion in 2006, the $1.67 billion project was 3% under budget, and was finished 22 months ahead of the projected completion date. While initial

passenger estimates called for 33,800 riders per day in 2008, actual daily ridership in 2008 was 38,500.

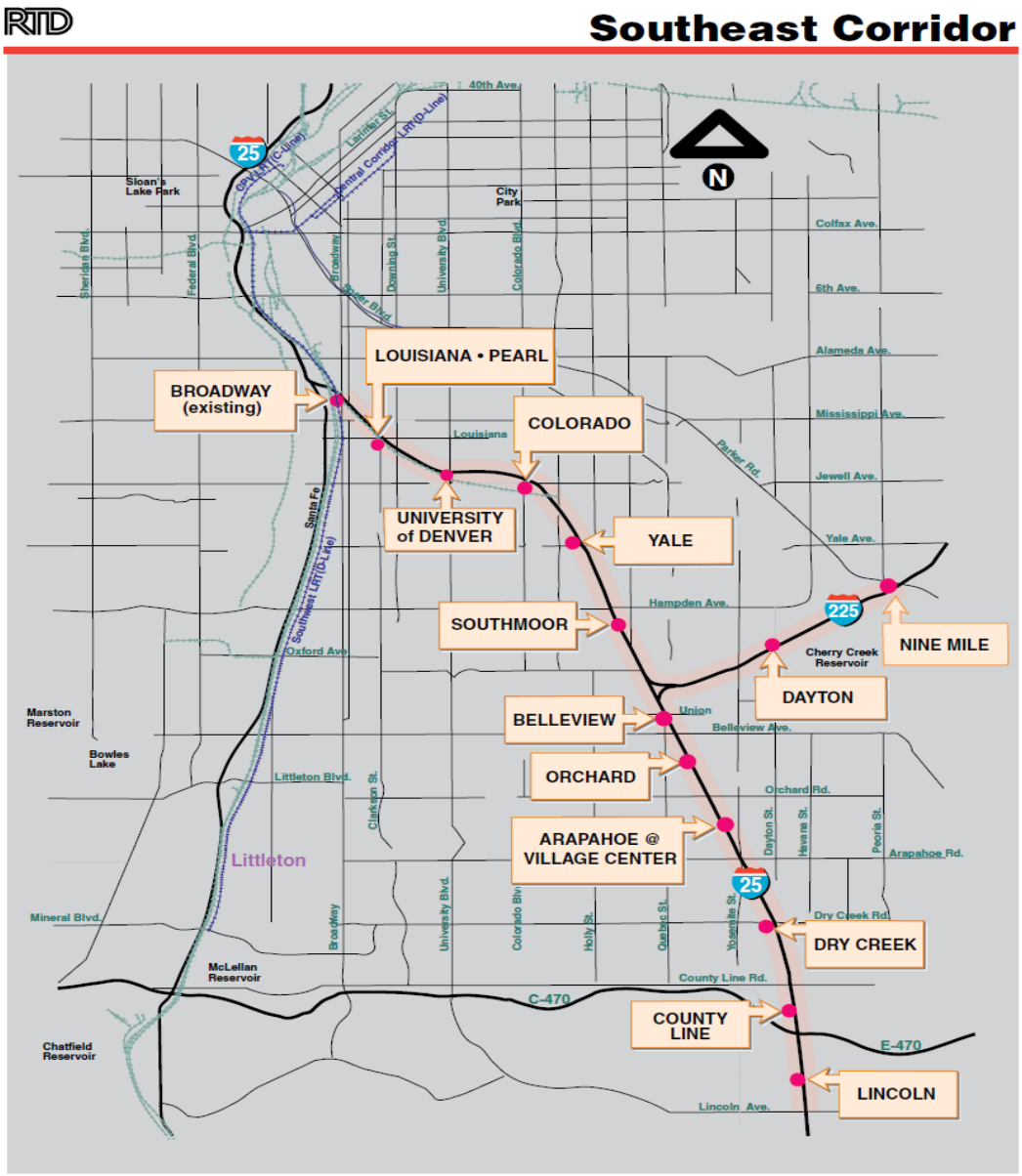

Figure 4-5: Southeast Corridor Light Rail line (Source: RTD 2010c).

In spite of voter disapproval of the Guide the Ride plan in 1997, RTD was nevertheless able to build 35 miles of light rail transit in an incremental fashion from 1994 to 2006 in the form of the Central, Southwest, and Southeast Corridor rail lines (Plate 4.2). Each of these lines was built on-time and within budget, with actual ridership exceeding

projections. Historically skeptical of RTD's ability to build and operate a rail transit system, political and business leaders, as well as the general public, began to change their impression of RTD, and also began to believe in the viability of rail transit in Denver. In the face of continued population and employment growth in Denver, traffic congestion continued to be a major problem. The annual Urban Mobility Report produced by the Texas Transportation Institute found that in the early 2000s Denver was experiencing some of the worst traffic congestion in the country. Increasingly, metro area residents perceived that rail transit could be a useful strategy to address the congestion dilemma.

Plate 4.2 Louisiana-Pearl station on RTD's South East Corridor Light Rail line (photo © Andy Jonas, September 2007).

4.5 Summary and conclusions

The history of rail transit in the Denver area can be categorized into three phases: 1) electric streetcars, 1880s-1950; 2) abandonment, 1950-1994; and 3) rail transit resurgence, 1994-2004. FasTracks is often viewed as a strategic response to the recent challenges of regional growth and environmental sustainability. In fact, the origins of FasTracks can be traced back to the 1980s, when the issues and challenges of public transportation and rail transit in Denver came to the fore. However, at that time, there was little or no political capacity at the regional scale to support the project, and for the most part attempts at regional collaboration around transportation infrastructure failed. Problems of regional growth and inter-jurisdictional conflict characterized much of the program's development even into the 1990s. In the next Section, we show how new approaches to regional collaboration helped to push forward the FasTracks program in the 2000s.

5. Building a New Approach to Regional Collaboration in Denver, 1990-2010

The Denver region continued to experience very strong growth during the 1990s. As of the 2000 U.S. Census, the newly-designated Denver-Boulder-Greeley Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area (CMSA) grew by 30.7% from 1990-2000. The area was paced by strong growth across all counties including a phenomenal 191% growth rate in Douglas County, making it the fastest growing metropolitan county in the U.S. during the 1990s. Responsible for much of that growth was the unincorporated community of Highlands Ranch, started by the Mission Viejo Company in 1981 that grew to over 70,000 residents by 2000. Adams, Boulder, Arapahoe, and Jefferson Counties each had growth rates over 20%, with strong growth in the suburbs of Aurora, Thornton, Westminster, Longmont, and Lakewood (see Tables 3-1 and 3-2). Interestingly, the City and County of Denver reversed its declining population of the previous 20 years by adding 87,000 residents (18.6% increase) during the 1990s. Aggressive economic development strategies of the 1980s as well as increased in-fill and new urbanist development in several Denver neighborhoods spurred the revitalization of the central city.

Growth in the 2000-2010 decade has continued but at a slower pace. Most of the growth occurred in Douglas, Adams, and Arapahoe counties, with the cities of Aurora, Thornton, Commerce City (Adams), Castle Rock (Douglas), and Parker (Douglas) having strong growth (see Tables 3-1 and 3-2). The City and County of Denver continued to grow as well, adding over 55,000 residents between 2000 and 2009. The newly incorporated city of Centennial in Arapahoe County became the 7th largest city in the metropolitan area with a population of 100,837 by 2009 (see Table 3-2). In 2003, the U.S. Census created new metropolitan area definitions, no longer designating CMSAs. The newly-named Denver-Aurora-Broomfield metropolitan statistical area (Boulder and Greeley were designated as separate MSAs) grew by 15% from 2000 to

2008, and was expanded to include Broomfield[5], Elbert, Gilpin, Clear Creek, and Park counties (see Table 3-1). The Denver-Aurora-Boulder Combined Statistical Area registered over 3m people by 2008.

Throughout this period, there have been concerted efforts to foster regional collaboration from the 'bottom up', most notably with the creation of the Metro Mayors Caucus in 1993. The funding of regional transportation and infrastructure has provided the incentive for many of these efforts, with a leading role played by regionally-minded business and civic organizations. This section of the report focuses on regional collaboration in the 1990-2010 period with specific reference to collaboration around (a) economic development and (b) regional transportation planning and FasTracks.

5.1 Regional economic development

By the early 1980s and the collapse of the energy boom, state and local attention shifted to economic development strategies. Counties and municipalities continued to compete against one another to lure retail and other business opportunities to their jurisdictions. But some regional collaboration began to develop as well. In 1984, Aurora and Denver agreed to a revenue-sharing compromise over the Galleria Shopping Center which would be built in Aurora, but close to the Denver city limits. Aurora also agreed to support expansion of the Denver Fire Academy to train firefighters in both Denver and Aurora. And in 1988, Aurora and other municipalities in Adams County supported a ballot measure to allow Denver to annex land for the purpose of building DIA. The expected economic benefits for those jurisdictions close to the new airport were a powerful inducement for collaboration. In fact, the Greater Denver Chamber of Commerce began to play a much more important role in supporting regional economic development projects such as the new airport, and in forging a new regional identity. Chamber President Richard Fleming said in 1990,

[5] Broomfield had been a city within the Denver metropolitan area, but changed its status to a City and County in 2001.

> The world sees Denver as you see it from an airplane—without artificial boundaries. We should treat it that way and deal together on common problems of air pollution, economic development, transportation, and water. We need to market Denver as a five-county metropolis and let prospects see all the alternatives. That's a lot better than having each county try to build itself up by running down the others (Leonard and Noel 1990, p. 473).

Such a change in the approach to regional economic development was given further support by a comment from one of our interviewees:

> We are based on a simple proposition that companies look at regions. They end up in cities or counties within a region but they may not even know who that is until they get down to site specifics. Because we are agnostic on locations, because we don't control any turf, we tend to be more trusted by companies because we are just interested in getting them in the region (Interview with Denver Regional Economic Development Organization, April, 2009).

One of the key regional issues that concerned the Chamber and the major political jurisdictions was air pollution. As a result of the postwar boom in suburban housing and automobile use, vehicle miles traveled increased dramatically and so did air pollution. The problems were particularly severe in Denver due to its geographic site in a river basin with the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains located just 20 miles to the west. This physical setting results in frequent temperature inversions during the winter months whereby colder air drains into the basin and can be trapped by warmer air above, resulting in a potential build-up of particulate matter, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and other pollutants over the city. Through much of the 1970s and 1980s, Denver was infamous for its "brown cloud" problem, and in some years it was exceeded only by Los Angeles for the worst air quality in the country. By the late 1980s, though, concerted efforts by the State of Colorado Air Pollution Control Division, the Regional Air Quality Council, and metropolitan jurisdictions contributed to substantial reductions in air pollution readings. Denver violated the federal carbon monoxide standard only 7 times in 1989, while in 1975 it exceeded that standard 65 times, despite a 57% increase in vehicle miles traveled during that time (DRCOG 1992).

While the beginning of the 1990s featured more discord than collaboration, more examples of regional cooperation began to occur throughout the rest of this period. Skepticism about the ability of agencies such as DRCOG and RTD to conduct regional planning and forge a regional consensus characterized the early 1990s. In response to this concern, other groups such as the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce and the Metro Mayors Caucus began to exert a greater voice on regional issues. The Chamber, composed of over 3,000 metropolitan area businesses, played a leading role in developing regional support for Denver International Airport and other economic development and transportation initiatives in the 1990s and 2000s. The Metro Mayors Caucus (MMC) was formed in 1993 as a voluntary, consensus-based organization of 32 metropolitan area mayors[6] focused on addressing issues of regional importance.[7] The mayors felt there was a need for a more cooperative and collaborative forum to exchange ideas and viewpoints outside of the more traditional and confrontational arenas. One of our interviewees contrasted the approach of MMC with that of the State in reference to the funding of road infrastructure:

> … there is unanimity in the fact that we need more money to build and repair roads in Colorado. But there is no support in how to raise these funds. So that's a problem. Because of the scope and the fact that we have the Caucus allows us to really dive in and do a lot more in-depth discussion and problem-solving. The Mayors Caucus is a non-partisan [organization]; the Mayors are not partisan [unclear]; we are elected as non-partisans. And the Caucus, it's more solution oriented than political-based. When you've got the statehouse, a lot of the issues are more politically-based. It's a huge difference and with its own problems (Interview with suburban Denver mayor, March 2009).

The metro area mayors were also members of the Colorado Municipal League (CML) and DRCOG, but CML had a more state-oriented focus and because DRCOG allocated regional transportation funding, it was characterized by more adversarial relationships between the jurisdictions. The MMC has nevertheless worked closely with both

[6] The Metro Mayors Caucus now includes 39 mayors.

[7] It is interesting to note that the Metro Mayors Caucus holds its meetings at the Metro Denver Chamber of Commerce offices.

DRCOG and CML, and agreements made within the context of MMC have extended to agreements at these other organizations. A good example is the consensus that was forged in support of DRCOG's Metro Vision 2020 plan in 1997 that represented a strong statement in support of smart growth policies for the region.

DRCOG embarked on its Metro Vision planning process due to several growth-related factors that were impacting the Denver region. First, analyses indicated that if development were to expand to the limits allowed within the land use plans of every county and municipality in the region, the composite buildout would exceed 1000 square miles for an area which at that time covered only 500 square miles. Second, as a result of the tightening of air quality restrictions as identified in the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, the Denver region faced significant problems for non-compliance of air quality standards. As mentioned earlier, Denver had a notorious "brown-cloud" air pollution problem in the 1970s and 1980s that was a result of increased particulates and temperature inversion smog especially during the winter months. Third, compounding the air quality problem, both vehicle miles traveled and traffic congestion were increasing much faster than population growth. And finally, the Denver area was still battling over funding and approval for additional suburban beltways. Even though Colorado Governor Lamm had initially stopped the I-470 beltway from being constructed in the 1970s, pieces of the beltway eventually were built. In the 1980s, the state of Colorado built C-470 in the southwestern quadrant of the metropolitan area, and a private tolling authority was moving forward to build E-470 in the eastern half of the metropolitan area. DRCOG realized that a coherent vision of the region's future was necessary.

The resulting Metro Vision 2020 Plan focused on growth and development, the natural environment, and transportation (DRCOG 1997). The counties and municipalities of the DRCOG region agreed to the concept of a voluntary urban growth boundary/area (UGB/A) that was initially set not to exceed 700 square miles.[8] In order to

[8] In the latest Metro Vision 2035 Plan, the urban growth boundary/area was expanded to 921 square miles (DRCOG 2007).

accommodate the expected future growth, there would be a focus on higher-density development in designated urban centers throughout the region. Four outlying communities (Boulder, Longmont, Brighton, and Castle Rock) would remain free-standing communities set apart from the contiguous development of the Denver urbanized area. Special attention was focused on improving air quality in the region by instituting regional clean air programs, including the introduction of ethanol and other oxygenated fuels in area gasoline stations, bans on wood-burning, and more frequent street-sweeping of sand after winter snowstorms. And most significantly, DRCOG agreed that a regional rail transit system should be built as the backbone of an intermodal transportation system to help focus development in designated urban corridors and centers, to help limit traffic congestion, and to improve air quality. However, resolving the air quality problem was not the only factor behind the development of the FasTracks program:

> We … we were voluntarily instrumental in trying to create the RTD as the public transit lines and street car lines went out of business during the 1960s. But realizing long term that if we were going to be a world city then we were going to need alternatives to the car. Part of that was driven by the unique ecological environment in which we live, which is highly susceptible to carbon monoxide and ozone particulates. Transit was a part of answering lots of questions … [but] not a great part by the way (Interview with Denver Regional Economic Development Organization, April, 2009).

In the transportation planning arena, efforts at regional collaboration were proving more difficult (see Section 4). In 1987, unhappy with RTD's lack of progress in developing a rapid transit system, the Colorado state legislature authorized a private sector-led group, the Transit Construction Authority (TCA), to lead efforts to plan and build a light rail line in the southeast corridor between downtown Denver and the Denver Technological Center. The TCA effort collapsed in 1990 after DRCOG selected RTD's southwest corridor instead of TCA's southeast corridor as the preferred alternative to be submitted for federal funding consideration. Also in the late 1980s, concerns were raised about DRCOG's ability to forge a regional approach to transportation and other issues. Former Colorado Governor Richard Lamm said in 1989, "For all the money

we've put into DRCOG, the returns are marginal. When you try to list the dynamic things DRCOG has done, nobody can think of anything" (O'Keefe 1989, quoted in Leonard and Noel 1990, p. 475). Concerns such as these led Governor Roy Romer and the Colorado state legislature in 1990 to create the Metropolitan Transportation Development Commission "to develop a comprehensive, regional solution to transportation problems plaguing the metropolitan area" (Metropolitan Transportation Development Commission 1990). The Commission produced a report that called for a new regional transportation plan, including both highways and rail transit that, according to public surveys, should be managed by a new regional authority. No new authority was created, but changes in the existing transportation agencies had begun to occur. In 1991, the Colorado Department of Highways (CDOH) was re-organized by the state legislature, and changed its name to the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) to reflect the increasingly intermodal character of statewide transportation planning (Goetz 2007). Also in 1991, the US Congress promulgated the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) which restructured planning processes by elevating metropolitan planning organizations (such as DRCOG) to the lead role in regional transportation planning in cooperation with state departments of transportation and regional transit agencies (Goetz, Dempsey, and Larson 2002).

5.2 Regional collaboration and transportation infrastructure: the role of FasTracks

The idea of FasTracks, as mentioned in Section 4, was put forward by RTD in the 1980s. A part of the idea turned into reality when the Southwest corridor opened in 2000 along Santa Fe Drive. The rest of the proposal was put into effect later, when the RTD board of directors approved the FasTracks Plan on 22nd April, 2004, 3 years after the first draft of the plan was sanctioned. But the tedious process of preparing the plan began long before involving citizens, professionals and government officials of the 8 counties lying within the jurisdiction of RTD. A major stimulus for galvanizing a new coalition around FasTracks was the failure of the Guide the Ride program in 1997:

> Following all of that political mess in 1997, the actual founding fathers and mothers sat around the table in November and what they decided was we really needed a coalition of key stakeholders who needed to be what I like to call the three pillars of strength to be on the public-private partnership, you needed a public sector and we get through the participation of various cities and counties around the region. But we needed the private sector and they primarily went after the chambers and the economic development groups. The last pieces we needed were those advocates; the environmental community was really not on board for Guide the Ride, nor were they at the table to start to conceptualize how this would change the landscape of metropolitan Denver and what the contribution would be in how we would rebuild all those objectives as organizations. So we were getting all of that diverse group of interests around the table to start to build a more collaborative plan, a more visionary plan, and some of the other key pieces that you needed to go back to [the public], which we did in seven years time (Interview with regional civic group, April 2007).

Since 1994, RTD had conducted Major Investment Studies for all 6 of the new travel corridors, Environmental Impact Statements for 2 corridors (Southeast and West) and Feasibility Studies for the extensions of the 2 corridors that were already built or under construction. With the help of CDOT and Transit Alliance, RTD reached out to the public and gathered their opinion about the project. A survey was conducted in July 2001 in which 78% of respondents supported improvement of transit facilities in the Denver area. Open houses to publicize the plan and gather comments were held in 2001 and 2003. They had to be conducted in two phases because some changes were made in the first draft of the plan due to a report about lagging sales tax revenue (FasTracks Plan 2004). In the first half of 2003, sales tax receipts were 2.8% lower than the previous year (Leib 2003). Besides these public outreach programs, meetings were also held with elected officials, chamber of commerce, and civic groups. On the basis of the comments gathered in these meetings, changes were made in the final plan.

As indicated in Section 4, the FasTracks project has 3 core goals, namely to provide better transportation choices and options to the people of the district, to increase travel by transit during peak hours, and to establish a plan that will fulfill the transit needs of a growing population in the future. In addition, the project has five component parts:

1) Construction of rail rapid transit along 6 new travel corridors and extension of the 3 existing corridors. The travel corridors will include light rail, commuter rail, and bus rapid transit (see Figure 4-6).
2) Addition of 21,000 new parking spaces. Besides building 31 new park-n-rides, spaces will be added to the existing park-n-rides.
3) Improvement in the overall bus network by adding more feeder buses to the rapid transit stations/stops and by development of "FastConnects". FastConnects will be transit hubs where the transfer time will be reduced by arrival of the buses and trains at the same time.
4) Remodeling the Denver Union Station to a multi-storied plaza. It will not only connect people to all the rapid transit lines but also to regional, express and local buses, 16th Street Mall shuttle, Amtrak, Ski Train, Greyhound and new downtown circulator.
5) Improvement of the facilities and amenities provided to the passengers at the stations/stops and park-n-rides.

In 2004, RTD estimated the cost of implementing the project at $4.7 billion. It suggested that a part of the revenues needed would be collected by raising the sales tax by 0.4%. The rest would come from other sources like the federal government, local government, and TIFIA loans. A schedule was also set up for the implementation of the project and it was estimated that the project would be completed within 12 years (FasTracks Plan 2004).

One of the major challenges faced by RTD while implementing this massive project was to increase the sales tax by 0.4%. At the very beginning even the state transportation officials and Republican Gov. Bill Owens were not in favor of this tax hike (Flynn 09.10.2001) because of its high cost and the potential negative effects on highway funding. Later, Owens reluctantly agreed to allow RTD to put forward the tax hike proposal on the ballot under the condition that FasTracks would be a part of the state's comprehensive transportation plan. RTD accepted the offer promptly as they had to work in collaboration with CDOT which was responsible for improving the highways required to complete the project (Leib 01.16.2002).

The Colorado Senate also supported RTD's effort regarding a sales-tax hike by passing Senate Bill (SB) 167 and rejecting SB 1. SB 167 gave RTD the power to go to voters

with a proposal of a sales-tax increase whenever it wanted, whereas SB 1 allowed RTD to put forward such a proposal just once. If RTD had wanted to propose another sales-tax hike, it would have had to seek the permission of the legislature (Butler 04.02.2002). Even though SB 167 was passed in April 2002, the FasTracks referendum was not put on the ballot until Nov. 2004. RTD could not collect enough petition signatures within the small period of time that they had before the Nov. 2002 ballot. Moreover, Bill Owens did not want the FasTracks referendum to be on the ballot at the same time he was running for re-election (Leib 06.12.2002). In fall 2003, RTD did not put the referendum on the ballot as private polls suggested that it may be rejected by the voters amidst some other issues that were already on the ballot. So the vote was delayed until fall 2004. The only negative impact of the delay was an increase in the construction cost and the overall price tag of the project (Leib 07.08.2002).

From the beginning RTD started spending hefty sums of money to get approval from the voters. RTD officials did not want this project to be rejected as happened in the case of "Guide the Ride" in 1997. In fall 2001, RTD spent $200,000 to advertise about FasTracks and conduct public meetings (Knight 02.10.2002). It was estimated that about $3 million was required to run a strong campaign for the project; most of the money was used to buy television advertisements. CRL Associates Inc., who was hired to execute the FasTracks campaign, collected some of the campaign money from businesses that were supporting FasTracks (Leib 01.23.2004). In May, the Metro Denver Chamber of Commerce contributed $250,000 to the pro-FasTracks campaign (Leib 05.26.2004).

A huge amount of support was provided for the FasTracks project by the business community and the people of the Denver metro area as the date of voting for the project approached. Volunteers collected 60,000 petition signatures so that the tax-hike proposal could be placed on the Nov. 2004 ballot, even though only 35,000 signatures were required (Nicholson 06.22.2004). A poll conducted in October also reflected that 54% of the people supported the FasTracks project (Leib 10.12.2004). The vote finally took place on Nov 2, 2004 and the tax-hike for FasTracks funding (Referendum 4A) was

approved by 57.2% of the voters (Leib 10.27.2004). RTD started collecting the increased tax from January 1st, 2005 (Editorial 01.23.2005). A controversy over the vote emerged in May 2006 when the opponents of FasTracks appealed to the second-highest court of Colorado to nullify the vote because incorrect information was sent to the voters in the ballot summary. The appeal was denied by the court on June 1st 2006 and paved the way towards beginning of FasTracks construction (Pankratz 06.02.2006).

This massive project is not just an undertaking of RTD. The transportation agency is working in collaboration with CDOT and the metropolitan planning organization, DRCOG. CDOT is responsible for all the highway improvements required for the accomplishment of the project. In 2004, RTD and CDOT staff members estimated that about $55 million worth of road improvements would be required to support the FasTracks program. However, CDOT Executive Director Tom Norton believed that the agency had to spend billions of dollars on it and the report prepared by RTD and CDOT staff members also indicated that, in 20 years, more road improvements will be required to maintain the quality of service of FasTracks (Leib 07.08.2003). DRCOG is responsible for evaluating and approving all the plans related to FasTracks. In 2004, DRCOG approved the final FasTracks plan and placed a requirement that RTD had to prepare an annual report regarding the progress and changes about the plan every year. Most recently, DRCOG reviewed the 2009 Annual Report on FasTracks submitted by RTD (RTD 2010).

The Colorado Senate also worked with RTD for the success of the project. First, by approving SB 167, this gave RTD the power to approach voters with an agenda permanently. Second, by passing SB 182, that allowed RTD to purchase a property at half market price if the rest of the property is retained by the owner. However, if the entire property is taken away by RTD then the market value has to be paid (Couch 04.19.2005). Third, by passing SB 219, this resolved the problem between RTD and the Union Pacific and Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) freight railroads. According to the bill, the liability of the freight railroad companies reduces to a great extent if an

accident involving a FasTracks train occurs on their tracks. The liability is minimal even if a freight train is involved (Leib 04.26.2007).

In this project, RTD also had to negotiate with the Union Pacific and BNSF railroads in order to acquire track and land maintained by them. In Nov. 2008, RTD directors approved a sum of $185 million to acquire four FasTracks rail lines from Union Pacific (Leib, 11/07/2008). Later in March 2010, RTD also gave BNSF railroad $144 million for the same purpose (Leib 03.24.2010). Despite these outcomes it cannot be said that the relationship between RTD, Union Pacific and BNSF railroad has always been very comfortable. Both freight rail companies vetoed the operation of light rail cars on their tracks after a severe accident in California in 2005 between a passenger and freight train. The condition was improved after the Senate passed SB 219.
Delay in the construction of FasTracks lead to the increase in the price tag of the plan by as early as 2003. At the same time the economy of Colorado was not doing very well and so RTD started considering the option of scaling back the project. It proposed that:

- West corridor be terminated at the Federal Center instead of Jefferson County administration and courts center in Golden.
- Gold line be terminated at Arvada Olde Town instead of Ward road park-n-ride.
- North Metro line be terminated at 124th Avenue instead of 160th Avenue.
- Northwest corridor be terminated at Boulder instead of Longmont.
- Southwest rail line not be extended (Editorial 08.17.2003)

The scaled-back plan was soon rejected due to enormous public pressure. RTD, however, decided to save money by using fewer rail cars, reducing the frequency of service, constructing fewer parking spaces, and increasing the construction time (Leib 10.8.2003).

The financial crisis became even worse after approval of the plan by the voters in 2004. Construction material costs rose between 2003 and 2006 much faster than RTD had predicted. Furthermore, sales tax revenues were not as large as originally projected, especially after the national recession and global economic crisis began in the 2007-

2008 period. By 2009, the *RTD Annual Report to DRCOG on FasTracks* estimated that $6.7 billion would be required to complete the entire FasTracks project, which was $2 billion more than the initial RTD cost estimate in 2004 (RTD 2010a). Section 6 considers the options now being reviewed for the completion of FasTracks and the implications of the financial crisis for regional collaboration.

5.3 Summary and conclusions

This section examined regional collaboration in the 1990-2010 period with specific reference to collaboration around (a) economic development and (b) regional transportation planning and FasTracks. With respect to (a), the Denver Metro Economic Development Organization claims that the Denver region has:

> ...the nation's first only truly regional economic development entity in which many area economic development groups have joined together to represent, and further, the interests of an entire region. Our partners include 70 cities, counties, and economic development organizations in the seven-county Metro Denver and two-county Northern Colorado region. (Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation: http://www.metrodenver.org/about-metro-denver-edc/, first accessed March 2007).

This section has shown how this impressive level of regional partnership has come about. Notably, various organizations in Denver such as the Alliance for Regional Stewardship, the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce and the Denver Metro Mayors Caucus have actively nurtured regionalism as a vehicle for promoting regional economic development. Denver's approach to regionalism is a response to a history of conflict among the local jurisdictions and regional agencies engaged in development and planning. At the same time, this approach is consistent with the 'bottom up' new regionalist model described in Section 2. In the transportation planning arena (b), efforts at regional collaboration have proven more difficult. However, building on their earlier successes, regional organizations involved in promoting economic development were able to foster public support for the FasTracks program, which was decisive in securing initial funding for the project in 2004.

6. Regional Collaboration in Denver: Some Findings and Conclusions

Like many other metropolitan areas in the United States, the Denver metropolitan area has experienced significant suburban and exurban growth since at least the 1950s which has created challenges for regional governance and collaboration. While the City and County of Denver accounted for nearly 75% of the region's population in 1950, it accounted for only 25% by 1990. Growth in outlying Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Douglas, and Jefferson counties, including the suburban municipalities of Aurora, Lakewood, Thornton, Westminster, Arvada, Centennial, and Boulder has outstripped that of the central city during this time. This shift in regional population has created a need for inter-jurisdictional collaboration across a variety of issues including transportation, land use, air quality, economic development, water supply and treatment, and waste disposal. Despite efforts to address regional problems through regional associations, such as the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) and the Regional Transportation District (RTD), the Denver area historically has been characterized by fragmentation and discord, with only limited successes in establishing regional collaboration.

Since 1990, however, efforts at regional collaboration have been somewhat more successful. The creation of the Metro Mayors Caucus in 1993, and the expanded role of the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce, together with a more effective DRCOG and RTD led directly to progress on regional issues of transportation, land use, economic development, and air quality. DRCOG's Metro Vision 2020 smart growth plan was a major breakthrough that led to the Mile High Compact in which 45 cities and counties have agreed to incorporate regional growth boundary/area limits into their master/comprehensive plans, and to support the development of an intermodal transportation system. Agreement on Metro Vision was an important precursor to the regional support developed for the RTD FasTracks initiative in 2004.

This section of the report draws on the findings of our interviews and surveys of regional organzations to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of Denver's approach to regional collaboration. The section is divided into two parts. The first part examines the role of regional collaboration in economic development. The second part focuses on regional collaboration around FasTracks. We find that while FasTracks has become a strategic focus of regional collaboration, there are growing concerns that divisions and tensions are re-emerging which could threaten Denver's 'bottom up' approach to regionalism.

6.1 Regional collaboration: how and why it has worked thus far

The culture of regional collaboration in metropolitan Denver is arguably far stronger now than it has been at any other point in the region's history. In our survey of companies and organizations in the Denver region, several questions were directed towards understanding the levels of regional collaboration and participation of the private and public agencies in the Denver Metro area in regional issues. Respondents were asked to rank responses (e.g. levels of involvement) on a Likert scale (e.g. very involved; neutral; not very involved, etc.). The first question asked the participants "how involved is your company/organization in regional issues?" The majority of the participants (95.2%) said that their organization is very involved in the regional issues. The rest of the participants felt that their organization was sometimes involved. None of the participants felt that they were rarely involved or not involved at all (Figure 6.1).

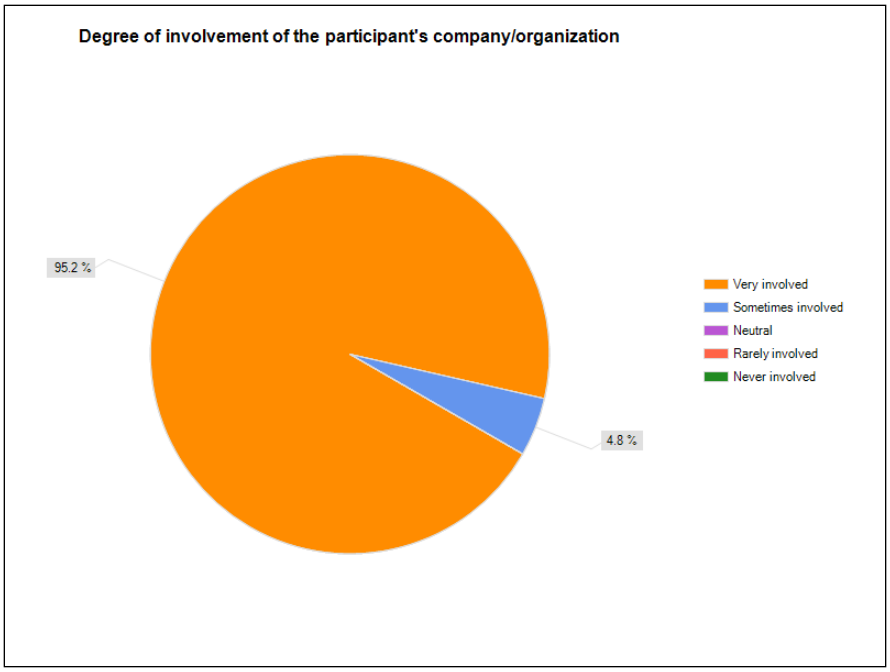

Figure 6.1 How involved in the company/organization in regional issues?

Question 3 in our survey addressed the degree of involvement of different types of organizations in regional collaboration. According to the responses, 85-90% of the participants felt that municipalities, metro planning organizations, regional transportation agencies and local mayors are very involved in regional collaboration (Figure 6.2). The rest either felt that they are sometimes involved or neutral. About 50-60% of the participants felt that counties and economic development organizations are very involved. Most of the other participants felt that they are sometimes involved, neutral or rarely involved. According to 50-60% of the participants, state government agencies, utilities and infrastructure providers, house builders and developers, and local employers are sometimes involved in regional collaboration. However, most respondents thought that federal agencies are only sometimes involved in regional collaboration.

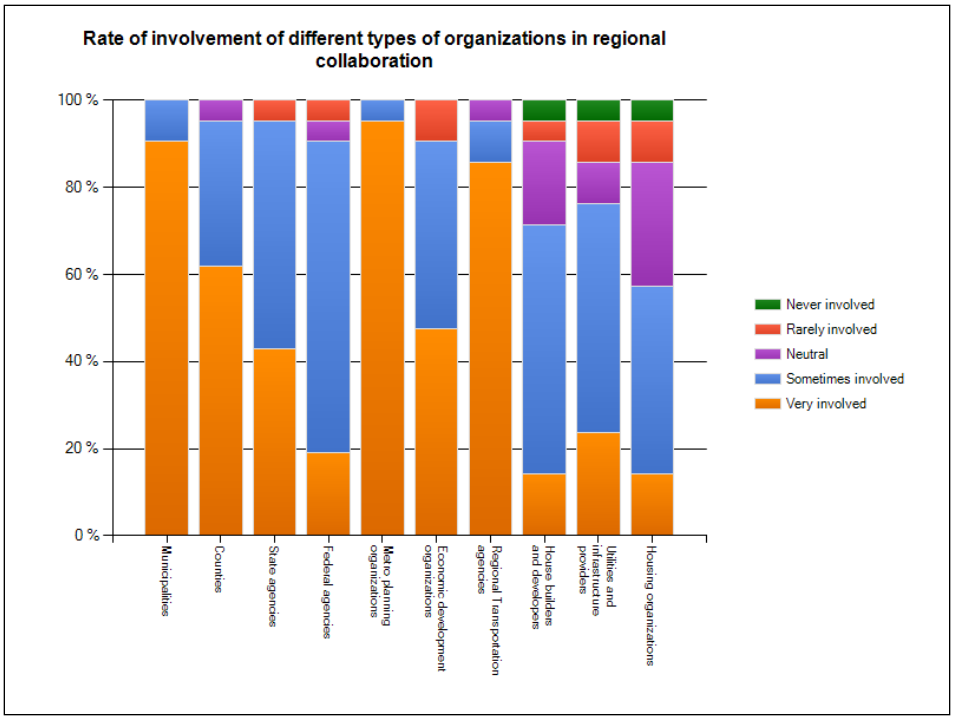

Figure 6.2 Rate of involvement of different organizations in regional collaboration.

The fourth question was regarding the degree of collaboration in different sectors of the economy. Among the respondents, 45-55% thought that the strength of regional collaboration is very high in the transportation and FasTracks sector (Figure 6.3). Most of the participants are of the opinion that it is not that strong in the other sectors such as planning, growth management and land use. For 53-63% of the participants, strong regional collaboration exists in the economic development, infrastructure and inter-governmental relations sectors in comparison to very strong in transportation and FasTracks sector. About 40-50% of respondents think that collaboration is strong in the planning, land use, transit-oriented development and long-term public investment sectors. However, 30-35% of the respondents felt that collaboration is either weak or very weak around taxation/revenue sharing, federal investment and economic recovery, sustainable development, environmental/climate change and growth management.

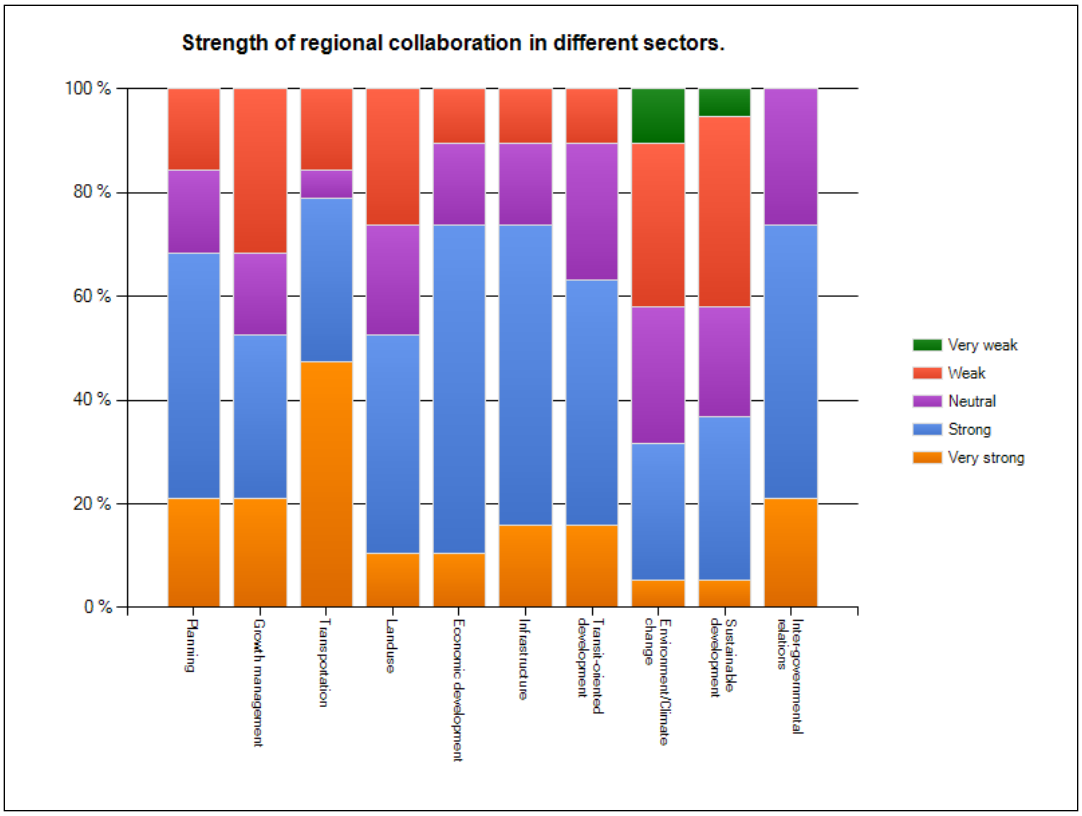

Figure 6.3 Strength of regional collaboration in different sectors.

Respondents were then asked to provide examples of effective regional collaboration in the metro Denver area. The examples that were provided included (in descending order of importance):

1. FasTracks
2. Metro Mayors Caucus
3. Preparation of Metro Vision, the metro area regional plan
4. Intergovernmental agencies
5. Transit-oriented development under the leadership of DRCOG
6. Metro sewer district.

The results of the survey were corroborated using interviews, which also provided for a more in-depth insight into the motives for regional collaboration. Several of our interviewees seem to agree that regional collaboration in Denver is stronger now than it has been in the past. The following response is quite typical:

Interviewer: Looking back at the history of this Metro area there seems to have been quite a lot antagonism historically between the suburbs, I don't know if [suburb X] is in that category or not .. But now you seem to have a climate of cooperation.

Interviewee: We do.

Interviewer: Is that a fair characterization? Was FasTracks one of the major foci for that?

Interviewee: I think there has always been the DRCOG, the Denver Regional Council of Governments, [and] there was a little bit of a culture of regional cooperation. I think the Metro Mayors' Caucus again helped to crystallize that a little bit and again the way the Caucus is structured is very important. There has to be a consensus and everyone has one vote. You can be [the Mayor of Denver] from the largest city or the Mayor of [small suburb Y]. You are still in the same boat and it really creates the sense of regionalism in that I think it is fairly uncommon around the country. I think that the FasTracks effort in 2004 probably solidified that sense of [regionalism]. There were other things, the Mile High Compact and other efforts through the years, but FasTracks solidified that sense of collaboration, not just amongst the 37 cities that were involved back then, but also the business community and the Regional Transportation District. That was the collaboration that convinced the community that FasTracks was a good idea (Interview with suburban Denver elected official, March 2009).

In terms of motives and reasons, there are a number of factors that could help to explain why regional collaboration has come about. Firstly, several new organizations have been established to work alongside the state, local government, and business and civic organizations so as to nurture regionalism. One key institutional development was the establishment of the Metro Mayors Caucus (MMC) in 1993. Several of our respondents singled out the role of the MMC as providing the necessary political glue with which to join together the different component parts of regionalism:

The Metro Mayors' Caucus was created to be political, DRCOG is essentially an MPO. The Metro Mayors' was created to do things politically that city councils would be divided on individually or if DRCOG didn't want the controversy associated with them. And it's consensus based. If there's not 100% vote then they don't do it. I mean little Foxfield -- a [jurisdiction with a] couple of horse properties and strips of asphalt -- has [in effect] the same votes as John Edgar Hoover [former FBI Director] has, and DRCOG is weighted disproportionately you know; the City of Denver has a disproportionate vote. So everything has to be done by consensus (Interview with Denver Regional Economic Development Organization, April, 2009).

> The business community are talking about the economy, and the enviros and the social activists are talking about community-based regionalism, and the local officials are saying that we don't want to have a Portland Metro but we probably need to. Our argument was that you've got to push these conversations together and then you start to find a common ground. You get these people in the same room which I would argue has happened here (Interview with Regional Civic Organization, September, 2007).

Secondly, the new regionalism has meant that new organizations and institutions such as MMC operate in a fashion that is somewhat removed from the regional agencies and special purpose districts established in the 1960s and 1970s to address specific metropolitan growth problems; agencies such as DRCOG and the RTD. One of the criticisms of a regional organization like DRCOG has been that as a voluntary association it has had limited enforcement mechanisms to implement its plans. In recognition of this shortcoming, DRCOG, along with the Metro Mayors Caucus, spearheaded an effort to create the Mile High Compact that would legally obligate jurisdictions to abide by the elements of the Metro Vision plan. In 2000, 30 cities and counties signed the Mile High Compact thus agreeing to incorporate the principles and components of the regional Metro Vision 2020 Plan into their legally-binding local comprehensive/master plans. By 2010, 45 cities and counties had signed the Compact, representing 89% of the region's population.

> But I think the Mayors Caucus had the most political credibility which could go out and sell this, including the Mayor in Denver. And I think this was probably the difference. It's interesting too if you think about the Regional Council of Governments, it's a formal regional institution, but it played a role, a lesser role than that of the Metro Mayors', which was really an *ad hoc* place that sort of again, jumped outside of the regional structure, because the regional structure wasn't [working]. The way that the COG is set up it is kind of a creature of the federal government's requirements that certain monies flow through a regional body (Interview with Denver Community Developer, March 2009).

The key factor here is that new regionalist organizations like MMC do not *replace* the roles of existing regional and local agencies but rather have enabled those agencies to carry out their functions more effectively on a regional basis:

> Usually people have ended up at the regional level by necessity, either as a practical reality of 29 waste water treatment plants or one or two centralized ones, that kind of drives you in a direction, and there's a practical reality of some of those other things. But by and large, it's still a sort of fragmented world, which is why the alliance of the business community and Metro Mayors. Those people are deciding that they are going to make the region effective despite the way the boundaries are drawn. Making institutions less of an obstacle, rather than trying to reform them all or move to regional government, let's just work over those boundaries and not worry about reforming the institutions so much as getting to where we want to get despite the way we are organized (Interview with Denver Community Developer, March 2009).

So whereas regional agencies have struggled to convince the voters, new regional organizations have nurtured public support for regional projects such as FasTracks:

> We in the west [i.e. western United States], in particular, believe in direct democracy not representative democracy, which means that more and more decisions are going directly to the voters than being dealt with by legislative bodies, for example, the legislature or the city council. So again it takes sort of different mindset if you will, of getting people, transportation planners to think about, you know, "how do you package this [for the voters]?" (Interview with Regional Civic Organization, September, 2007).

Thirdly, the marked level of inter-jurisdictional competition for economic activity which characterized metropolitan Denver in the 1970s and 1980s has diminished and relationships between the City and County of Denver and other metropolitan area jurisdictions have improved over time. Former Denver mayor Wellington Webb was part of the initial group of mayors which started the Metro Mayors Caucus in 1993, and from 2003 to 2010, Denver mayor John Hickenlooper extended the spirit of collaboration throughout the region. Both Webb and Hickenlooper worked with other metro-area mayors on several regional initiatives including economic development, transportation, and sustainability. Other former or current mayors in the metro area, such as Margaret Carpenter of Thornton, Don Parsons of Northglenn, Susan Thornton of Littleton, Nancy Sharpe of Greenwood Village, Chuck Sisk of Louisville, and Linda Morton and Bob Murphy of Lakewood have been instrumental in helping to develop regional collaboration.

A fourth factor, which has been highlighted in several interviews, is the role of trust and reciprocity in maintaining strong ties among disparate public and private bodies across Denver. Two quotes may help to illustrate the importance of trust:

> … these things have happened because you develop relationships of trust and reciprocity and the only way you can do that is by actually working on something with somebody. You can sit around forever and talk about why we've got to work together, what you'll do, what I'll do. But as X said "until you do it, you have no reason to trust the other person and … frankly what you want to trust is that I know how you are going to respond; that when you say you are going to do something, either you do it or you don't do it" and X considers this reciprocity thing as sort of "if you do it, I'm going to respond and I will do what I said I was going to do" (Interview with Regional Civic Organization, September, 2007).

In the second quote, the official refers to the Metro Denver Code of Ethics (see http://www.metrodenver.org/about-metro-denver-edc/code-of-ethics.html):

> The code of ethics is based on a lot of things but by and large it's based on public showing, the most powerful tool in managing social system, using the Mark Twain saying "laws are sand, customers are rock." And what it says you can't sell against each other, because that is zero-sum economic development. You can't steal from each other. You can't go on a raiding party from Weld County into Denver. If the company has to expand out of the City of Denver and they need lower cost land or more land that is available, you have to tell your partner that they're coming and give your partner a chance to save them. You can't run around a deal. So if there's five cities in the region, when we get down to the one and the company says, "okay I'm not interested in Y City anymore", they have to drop out. They can't run around and try to find somebody above the person we are dealing with to try to undo the deal. I've been in this business 36 years and all I have seen is anybody fails when somebody tries it. But what it does it allows that representative of the company to deal in safety and securely, that they're not going to have politics behind them. You have to sell the region first, then community second. If you want to violate that code of ethics, what you are faced with is a sanction, and that sanction can be essentially being kicked out of the family (Interview with Denver Regional Economic Development Organization, April, 2009).
> .

These quotes tend to support a view in the wider regional economic development literature that social networks of trust – or "untraded interdependencies" – play a crucial part in fostering regional competitiveness (Storper 1997). In this respect, the novelty of

the new regionalism lies not so much in remaking government and territory *tout court* but in how territorial collaboration occurs through networks that are not ostensibly 'regional' in terms of serving a specific economic or jurisdictional interest. Nonetheless, these networks do help to produce a consensus on issues that could have 'regional' benefits for a given territory and hence also its constituent economic and political interests.

A fifth factor is the importance attributed to building alliances between organizations that might otherwise in the past have been seen as potential opponents on certain issues. Several business leaders and elected officials in Denver have pointed to the crucial role of building partnerships with environmental groups and labor organizations on common regional issues. Indeed the support of these groups has been crucial to the success of FasTracks at the polls:

> So again part of when we were putting FasTracks together, these business guys, it was very interesting because in a lot of metropolitan areas when you try to do one of these regional transit systems, you get the minority and advocacy groups coming out against you because they believe that money will be taken away from the bus system that serves them. So we spent as much time working with African-American, Latino advocacy groups showing how if we didn't build FasTracks … well most of them wanted to have a fight about their housing and they wanted demand to be in low income housing in those suburbs and we'd say to them, " you know what? You can have that fight." All that's going to do is lose the charm that we love over here, advocacy people (Interview with Regional Civic Organization, September, 2007).

Finally, questions of regional equity do play a part in legitimating regionalism. However, it is debatable to what extent the motives behind regionalism in Denver are socially or environmentally driven to the exclusion of economic development and growth. One interviewee was skeptical about the precise meaning of equity in a context where given a spatial mismatch of jobs and housing there will always be winners and losers:

> I would never use the term regional equity, but it was also with the minority community people, this is the way you are going to get access to those jobs that you currently can't get to. Will there be potentially less bus service in central Denver? Yes, there may be some tradeoffs here but are there new jobs? Where are the new jobs being generated? They would probably be generated in

> the Tech Centre they would tell you. We know the jobs are being generated, so okay, why don't we vote for this? So you have a way to get from where you live out to where the jobs are. Fundamentally in many ways, this is all about access and we spent an awful lot of time in the US as well as other places trying to get people to move back to downtown, you know bring your jobs back and yeah in most places this is not happening. Obviously you are at a distance in Seattle, Denver, Portland, Charlotte, you know; all these downtowns are booming pretty much. But it's … not a lot of entry-level jobs. Obviously [the] service industry have a lot of jobs that those people can do. So anyway, I think one of the reasons why a lot of this stuff has been working here in metro Denver is that … we've sort have been looking for common grounds rather than having these knock down, dragged out fights (Interview with Regional Civic Organization, September, 2007).

> This all makes sense from business standpoint, and you have to go around looking for allies and all of a sudden you find, "geez, the environmental guys, they have got a lot of people who can walk every precinct for you" and they have got an environmental agenda which is kind of your agenda because if you are too polluted, companies don't move here. Certain types of companies can't move here because of the air quality. So it just all kind of fell into place and again, we have gone through a metamorphosis as an organization realizing that you take your partners where you can find them and you don't necessarily draw on those on ideological or other places where you have fought (Interview with Denver Regional Economic Development Organization, April, 2009).

It might be inferred from this that the 'bottom up' model of regionalism that has emerged in Denver has been built not so much around social or environmental idealism as instead with the more instrumental goal of promoting regional economic development. To the extent that FasTracks and other regional projects satisfy the long-term economic growth interests of the region, then they will continue to be a focus for building regional consensus among the disparate organizations regarded as necessary to their success.

6.2 Regional collaboration and the future of FasTracks

The financial crisis has created new challenges for regional collaboration around FasTracks. Several of our survey questions were designed to elicit respondents' views on levels of regional collaboration around transportation including the FasTracks

project. For example, Question 2 asked the participants about their involvement in providing transport infrastructure to the region. 76% of the participants felt that the organization is very involved. Among the rest 14% felt that they are sometimes involved and 9% felt that they rarely get involved. However, it is possible that the respondents are not aware about the role of their organization in other regional collaboration issues (Figure 6.4).

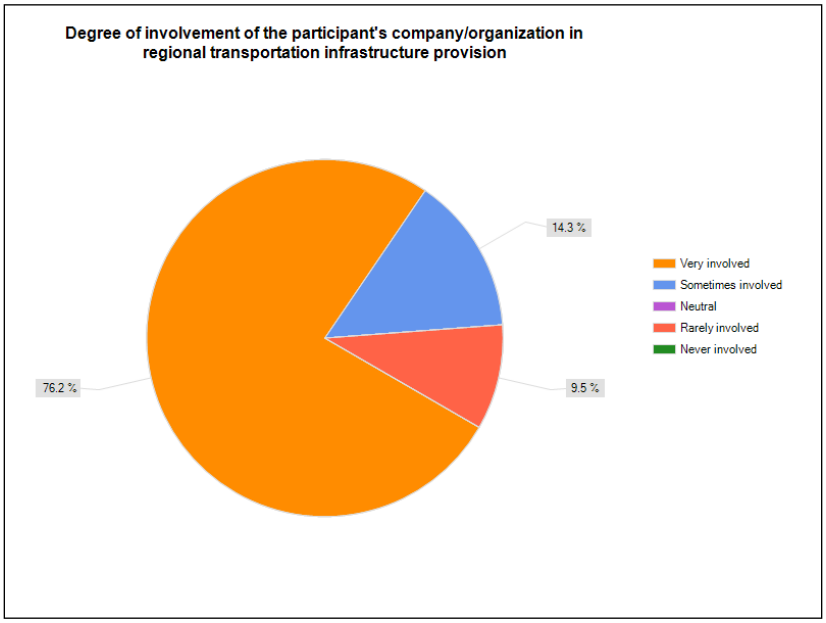

Figure 6.4 How involved is the company/organization in regional transportation infrastructure provision?

Respondents were asked to rank the degree of involvement of their company/organization in the FasTracks light rail project. About half of them said that they are very involved in the project, 31.3% said that they are sometimes involved whereas 18.8% said that they are neutral about the matter (Figure 6.5). This question was skipped by 8 respondents.

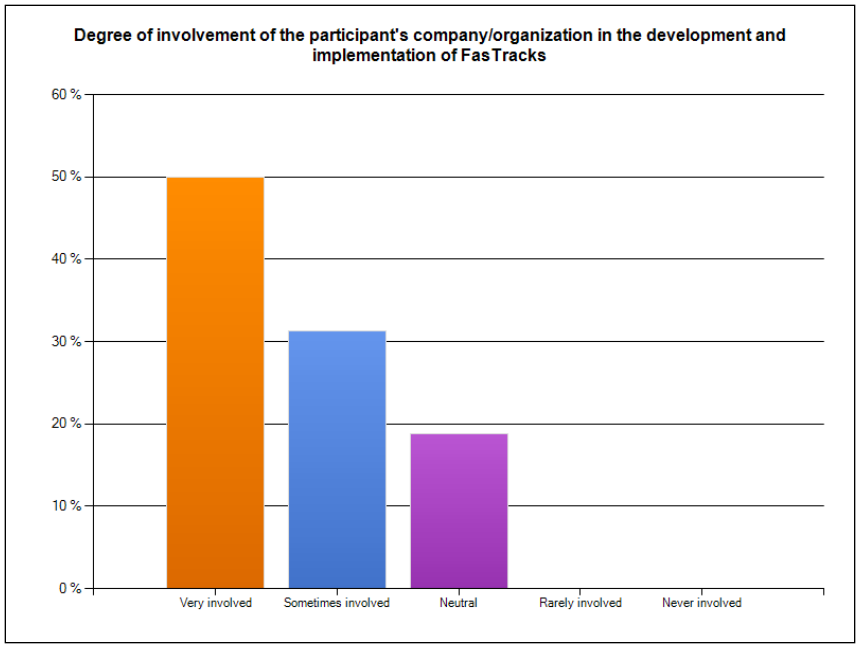

Figure 6.5 Levels of involvement in the development and implementation of FasTracks

In line with the questions about regional collaboration, the participants were asked to rate the involvement of different types of organizations in the FasTracks light rail project. All the participants who answered the question thought that the municipalities are very involved in regional collaboration for FasTracks. More than 60% of the participants thought that state agencies, metro planning organizations, regional transportation agencies and local mayors are also very involved in collaboration. Of the other types of organizations, 56% thought that counties are very involved; 50% thought that other local governmental entities are sometime involved. A majority thought that federal governmental agencies and economic development agencies are either very involved or sometimes involved. A majority also thought that house builders and developers and local employers are either sometimes involved or remain neutral and the rest of the agencies are neutral, rarely or never involved in FasTracks (Figure 6.6).

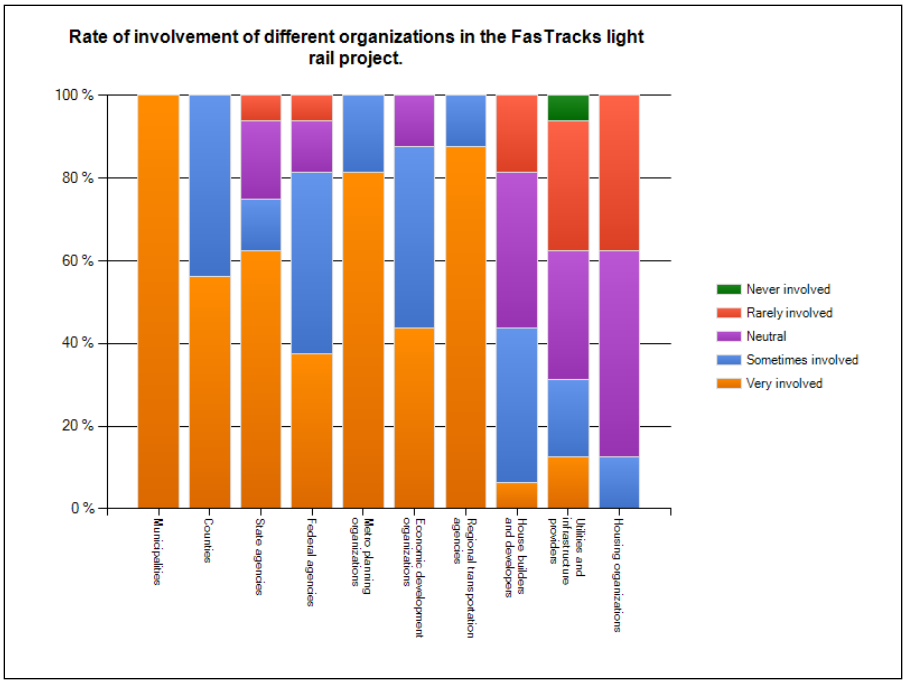

Figure 6.6 Rate of involvement of organizations in the FasTracks light rail project

The participants were asked to agree or disagree with some of statements put forward regarding regional collaboration and FasTracks (Figure 6.7). The first statement was *"The FasTracks light-rail project contributed to regional collaboration"*. 50% of the answering participants strongly agreed with the statement while the rest agreed with it. One participant disagreed with the statement. The second statement was *"FasTracks is an obstacle to regional collaboration in future"* and 66% of the participants disagreed with the statement. However, 26% agreed with it. The third statement was *"Regional collaboration is required for effective implementation of FasTracks"*. Here 81% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement. The fourth statement was that *"FasTracks should not be fully implemented"*. 94% of the respondents disagreed with this statement. The fifth statement said that *"Additional federal subsidy and investment is necessary to implement and complete FasTracks"*; every respondent agreed with it. The sixth statement was that *"Additional local taxes and investment are necessary to implement FasTracks"*. Here 80% agreed with the statement. The penultimate statement was that *"Implementation of FasTracks is more important than regional collaboration"*. Most respondents either disagreed or were neutral; none of the

respondents strongly agreed with the statement. The final statement was that *"FasTracks provides a model of regional collaboration for other metro areas in the country"* and 87% agreed with this statement.

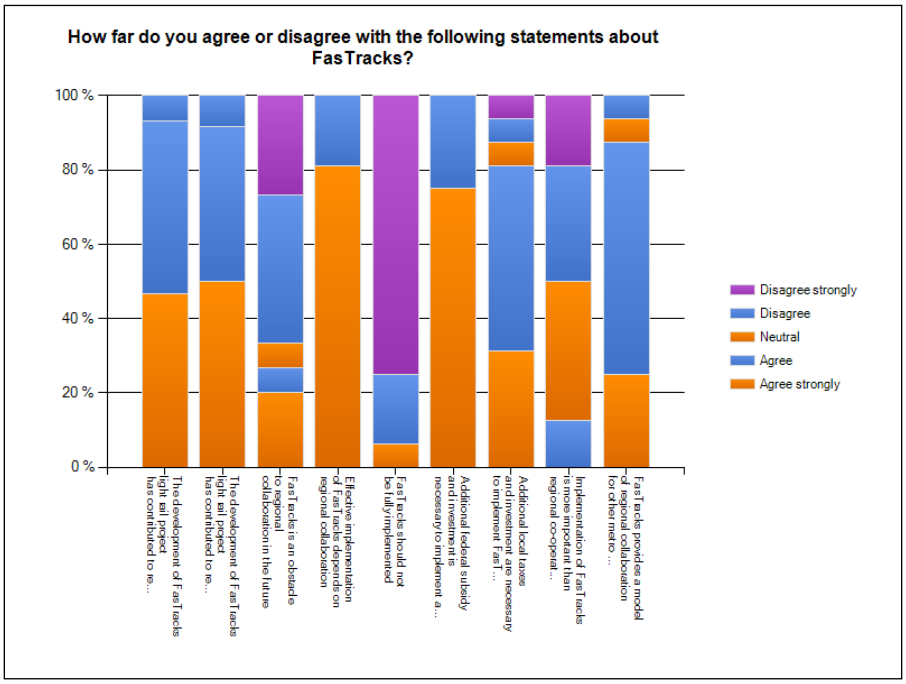

Figure 6.7 How far do you agree or disagree with the statements about FasTracks?

The survey addressed the benefits related to FasTracks. It asked if full implementation of the FasTracks would be beneficial to fulfill some of the regional objectives. Among the participants, 69% thought it would be beneficial to a very large extent for regional planning and transportation goals; and 56% thought it would be beneficial to a very large extent for growth management and transit oriented development. Everybody agreed that it would be beneficial for most of the regional issues, namely, relieve road congestion, promote efficient land use, foster regional social equality and employment generation, reducing commuting time, development of other forms of transportation, competition with other metro areas, economic development, sustainable development, long-term public investment and taking advantage of federal investment. There was, however, variation in the degree to which they thought it would help. Most of the

respondents felt that it would *not* be beneficial for issues like low-cost infrastructure development, taxation sharing and public participation (Figure 6.8).

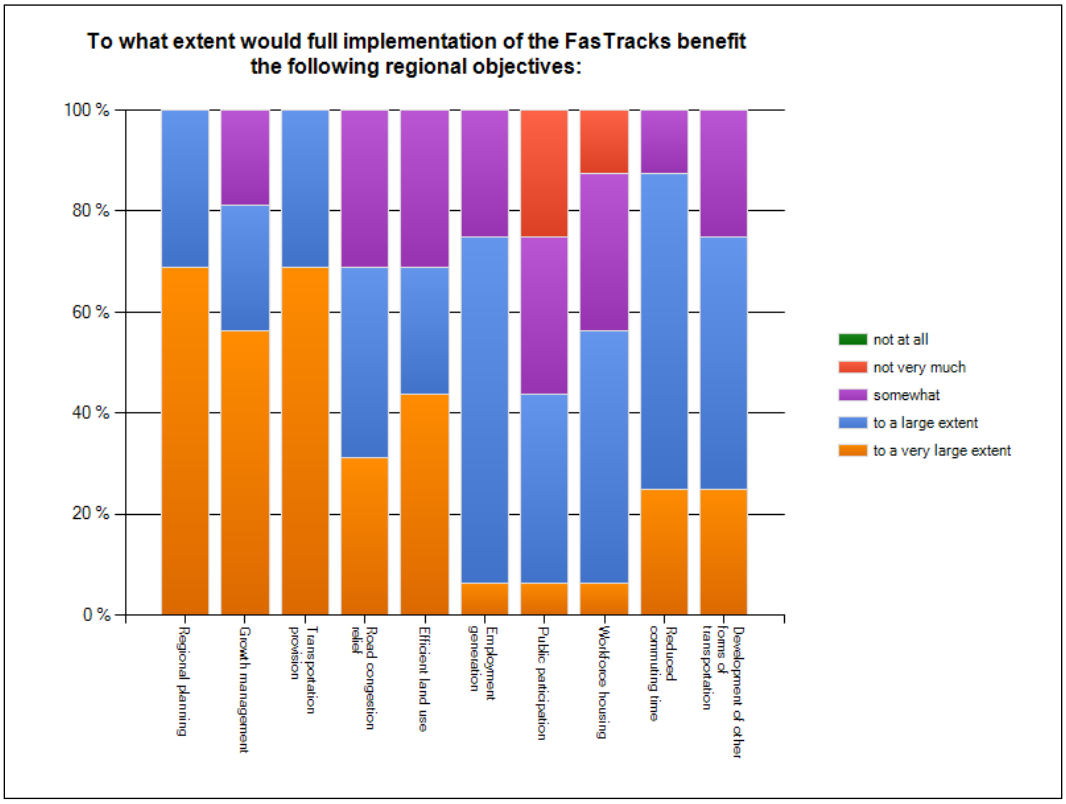

Figure 6.8 To what extent would full implementation of the FasTracks benefit regional objectives?

At the end of the survey respondents were asked to give any other comments that they had about regional collaboration and FasTracks. Only 7 people gave their comments in this section. Most of them commented on the financial crisis. These respondents were concerned that due to the crisis some of the communities will be deprived of getting FasTracks service at the promised time. They felt that this would bring about a breach in the high degree of collaboration as deprived communities would be forced to compete with the receiving communities. Against this backdrop, one person very optimistically stated that it is necessary to plan for the future extensions as the population is

spreading significantly to the east. Another participant also thinks that it is necessary to provide mass transportation to the mountain communities.

As indicated in Section 5, the financial crisis facing FasTracks became even worse after approval of the plan by the voters in 2004 and by 2009, the *RTD Annual Report to DRCOG on FasTracks* estimated that $6.7 billion would be required to complete the entire project, which was $2 billion more than the initial RTD cost estimate in 2004 (RTD 2010a). In response, RTD has continued to consider ways to cut costs. In 2006, RTD suggested that the best way of mitigating the problem would be by finishing construction of the lines as fast as possible before construction costs rise even higher. RTD was also thinking about re-routing some of the lines and reducing the length of the overpasses to decrease cost (Editorial 08.27.2006). The option of re-routing faced some strong criticisms as RTD was planning to run the light-rail lines through neighborhood streets instead of the freight railroad corridors. The cause behind this re-routing was not only cost but also the fact that the Union Pacific and BNSF railroads had vetoed the use of their tracks by RTD after a severe accident in California in 2005 (Leib 10.5.2006). The issue was later resolved with the passage of SB 219. The other alteration plans put forward by RTD also faced criticism like the reduction in storm-drainage work which will make the system incapable of mitigating the heavy storms and only mitigate the regular ones (Leib 02.23.2007).

For a long time RTD has tried to resolve the cost problem by alternating characteristics other than the length of the lines. But in 2008, the crisis became so deep that they again brought up the idea of shortening the lines except the West line and DIA airport line because they were receiving $1.3 billion in FTA funds (Leib 09.23.2008). RTD this time also tried to resolve the problem by increasing the construction time of some of the corridors to 2034. But the idea was vehemently opposed by the mayors. Thornton Mayor Erik Hansen said that if the rail line to serve his area is delayed, then the residents will be paying tax for the construction of rail lines that will serve others, a situation that is not acceptable (Leib 01.21.2009). The possibility of another tax-hike was also proposed. Even though it was initially supported by the mayors, the RTD

Board rejected placing another sales tax increase measure on the November 2010 or November 2011 ballots.

The idea that was actually embraced and put into effect by RTD was the involvement of the private sector in the project. With FTA approval under the so-called Eagle P3 Project, RTD can partner with a private company or a consortium of private companies to Design-Build-Operate-Maintain-Finance the East Corridor, Gold Line, segment 1 of the Northwest rail corridor and Commuter Rail maintenance facilities. On June 15, 2010, after technical and financial evaluations, RTD selected Denver Transit Partners as their first private partner or “Concessionaire” in this project (RTD 2010d).

The FasTracks program represents the most ambitious element of the rail transit resurgence phase, calling for the addition of 122 miles of light and commuter rail transit in six new corridors throughout the Denver metropolitan area. Despite problems with rising costs and declining revenues, the FasTracks program is moving forward, and construction on three of the six new lines, plus Union Station redevelopment, has already begun. Presently construction work is going on in the West Corridor and Denver Union Station. The opponents of the program, especially Jon Caldera of the Independence Institute and Taxpayers Against Congestion, believe that FasTracks will not bring about much relief to road congestion. Instead, opponents believe that building new highways and adding bus lanes would do a better job. On the other hand proponents of the project strongly believe that implementation of the project is absolutely necessary to meet the demand of the future population as expansion of highways cannot go on forever. The true effects of FasTracks will be felt only after the travel corridors are built-out and begin operation.

6.3 Summary and conclusions

The major findings and conclusions of this analysis of regional collaboration in Denver may be summarized as follows:

- Regional collaboration around economic development and transportation planning has been a strong feature of the governance landscape in the Denver region since the 1990s;
- Earlier attempts to foster metropolitan and regional planning largely failed due to: (a) the lack of appropriate political, fiscal and economic capacities at the metropolitan scale; (b) competition between municipalities for development, taxes and new growth; (c) public opposition to major regional projects that involved additional taxes or had negative environmental consequences; and (d) the weakness of existing regional planning organizations and special purpose districts;
- Organizations such as the Metro Mayor's Caucus, the Metro Chamber of Commerce and the Alliance for Regional Stewardship have become key players in fostering and maintaining regional collaboration;
- There has been strong support for regional collaboration within the business community and growing support from local mayors, civic groups and environmental organizations;
- Regional collaboration has opened up access to new regional sources of funding for transportation and economic development including the sales taxes and other voter-approved revenues; strong regional collaboration has also contributed to successful requests for increased federal funding from the Federal Transit Administration to support some of the component projects;
- The promotion of regional transportation initiatives such as FasTracks is an important reason why Denver has adopted a 'bottom up' approach to regional collaboration;
- Regional collaboration around economic development and transportation infrastructure, including FasTracks, is stronger than in other areas and sectors such as housing and land use planning;
- Since 2008, a new set of challenges has emerged to test Denver's model of regional collaboration;

- The financial crisis facing FasTracks is a major test of the resiliency of regional collaboration under the existing model;
- Despite federal economic stimulus funds, it is unlikely that a new ‘top down’ model of regional collaboration will emerge from the current difficult circumstances confronting Denver’s regional transportation and infrastructure;
- Adjustments of the FasTracks program such as decisions about line routing and completion should continue to be negotiated through existing regional collaborative arrangements;
- The regional benefits of FasTracks appear to outweigh ongoing concerns about the project such as failure to complete and increased costs.

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Some useful web links (cltr + click to link)

- Denver Regional Transportation District
- FasTracks
- City and County of Denver
- State of Colorado
- Colorado Office of Smart Growth
- Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce
- Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation
- Denver Metro Mayors Caucus
- Transit Alliance
- Light Rail Now!
- Civic Results
- Stapleton - Community Redevelopment
- Denver International Airport
- Denver Neighborhoods - Denver Tech Center

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APPENDIX A
List of interview questions

The following discussion questions were directed to local economic development practitioners, business representatives, transportation officials, locally elected political leaders, civic groups, and public sector officials.

1. In what capacity and for how long have you been involved in the FasTracks rail transit program?

2. What are the main issues/areas of concern for your organization with regard to the regional provision of transport infrastructure? How does FasTracks address those concerns?

3. In terms of regional transportation, what are the main issues/areas of concern for businesses, consumers and your organization's constituent members (e.g. employers, employees, voters)?How does FasTracks address those concerns?

4. In which transport services and sectors of infrastructure are there significant shortfalls in terms of investment? How is this need determined? In determining this need what sort of arguments help to prioritize issues (e.g., regional cooperation, threat of economic competition, infrastructure deficit, climate change, etc.)

5. How is knowledge about regional transport created and disseminated among local businesses, consumers, voters, etc.? Is the public well informed and involved in these issues?

6. In your view, which organizations in the business, community and/or public sector tend to take the lead in driving forward rail transit and regional transport? What sorts of governance, coalitions and partnerships seem to work in your region from the standpoint of addressing rail transit? Have you learnt from other regions?

7. Would you say that regional collaboration has helped FasTracks to go ahead? Or has FasTracks helped regional collaboration?

8. What government policies, regulatory structures and fiscal solutions have enabled FasTracks to proceed? Comment on the role of policies and resources at the federal, state, regional and local levels.

9. Focusing on the federal level, do you think the Obama administration's interest in infrastructure represents an opportunity for this region? How might this opportunity be exploited?

10. Focusing on the regional level, what is the role of the Mayor's Caucus? What other regional organizations seem to take the lead on infrastructure?

11. How does FasTracks relate to other regional priorities? Comment on this in relation to regional growth management, economic development, housing, planning and land use, and climate change and sustainability.

12. What are the major local fiscal, electoral, regulatory, planning or environmental obstacles to future investment in regional transport infrastructure? Who incurs the cost of new investment? Will greater regional cooperation be necessary?

13. Overall, from an economic development or community perspective would you say that the process of regional collaboration around transportation infrastructure in your region is risky, conflict-driven, or consensus seeking?

14. What are some unresolved issues in relation to FasTracks? How are the costs of (not) resolving these issues transferred to business, taxpayers, places or levels of government?

15. Who else should we interview about these issues in your region?

Thank you very much for your time

APPENDIX B
Regional Collaboration Survey

NCIT
The National Center for Intermodal Transportation
A Partnership between the University of Denver and Mississippi State University

Project title:
Regional Collaboration in Transport Infrastructure Provision: The Case of Denver's FasTracks Rail Transit Program

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On-line survey

We are interested in your views about regional collaboration and the provision of transportation infrastructure in the Denver metropolitan region. Please take a few minutes of your time to answer the following questions. Your responses will be treated in the strictest confidence. Results will be produced in summary form for the Center for Intermodal Transportation at the University of Denver.

Please answer questions from all three sections. If you are unable to answer a question please leave it blank. If you have any comments on the survey or would like to supply additional information, please use the 'comments' box at the end of the survey form. The survey should take no more than 20 minutes to complete.

If you have any questions about this survey form please contact Sutapa Bhattacharjee at Sutapa.Bandyopadhyay@du.edu

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME

PART A: Background information about your company/organization

1. In which sector or business does your company/organization operate?

   _____

2. How many years has your company/organization been operating in Denver?

_____years

3. Which city or community in the Denver metro area is your company/organization's main office (please also provide the zip code if you can)

   _____(city or community)_____(zip code)

4. Which of the following best describes your company/organization? [check all that apply]

	Check any or all that apply
Private company or corporation	
Local government	
Local or regional quasi-public agency	
Not-for-profit organization	
Other organization (specify here)	
Locally owned	
Foreign owned	
Locally headquartered	
Head office outside metro Denver	

5. Please provide the job title/position of the person filling in this survey form:

   _____

PART B: Regional Collaboration in Metro Denver

6. How involved is your company/organization in regional issues? [check one]

Very involved	Sometimes involved	Neutral	Rarely involved	Never involved

7. How involved is your company/organization involved in regional transportation infrastructure provision? [check one]

Very involved	Sometimes involved	Neutral	Rarely involved	Never involved

8. Using the scale shown, rate the involvement of the following organizations in regional collaboration [check one box per organization]:

	Very involved	Sometimes involved	Neutral	Rarely involved	Never involved
Municipalities					
Counties					
Other local government entities					
State agencies					
Federal agencies					
Metro planning organizations					
Metro economic development organizations					
Regional transportation agencies					
House builders and developers					
Regional housing organizations					
Private utilities and infrastructure providers					
Local mayors					
Local employers					

International companies					
Organized labor					
Other organisations (please specify)					

9. Using the scale, please rate the strength of regional collaboration in each of the following sectors [check one box per sector]

	Very strong	Strong	Neutral	Weak	Very weak
Planning					
Growth management					
Transportation					
Light rail/FasTracks					
Land use					
Workforce housing					
Economic development					
Infrastructure					
Transit-orientated development					
Environment/climate change					
Sustainable development					

Intergovernmental relations					
Taxation/revenue sharing					
Long-term public investment					
Federal investment and economic recovery					

10. How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements about regional collaboration in metro Denver? [check one box per statement]

	Agree strongly	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree strongly
Regional collaboration in metro Denver is improving					
Regional institutions in Denver are well established and effective					
The private sector always leads on regional collaboration					
The public sector always leads on regional collaboration					
Regional collaboration involves both public and private sector players					
Regional collaboration is important to economic development					
Regional collaboration is important for transportation provision					
Effective economic recovery requires effective regional collaboration					
Regional collaboration enhances social equity					
Regional collaboration in its current form is not working					

Regional collaboration in metro Denver is strong compared to other metro areas in the country					

11. Please provide an example of *effective* regional collaboration in metro Denver (explain your choice):
    _____
    _____
    _____

12. Please provide an example of the *failure* of regional collaboration in metro Denver (explain your choice):
    _____
    _____
    _____

PART C: Regional collaboration and the FasTracks light rail project

13. How involved is your company/organization involved in the development and implementation of FasTracks? [check one]

Very involved	Sometimes involved	Neutral	Rarely involved	Never involved

14. Using the scale shown, rate the involvement of the following organizations in FasTracks light rail project [check one box per area/sector]:

	Very involved	Sometimes involved	Neutral	Rarely involved	Never involved
Municipalities					
Counties					
Other local government entities					

State agencies					
Federal agencies					
Metro planning organizations					
Economic development organizations					
Regional transportation agencies					
House builders and developers					
Utilities and infrastructure providers					
Housing organizations					
Local mayors					
Local employers					
International companies					
Organized labor					
Other organizations (please specify)					

15. How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements about FasTracks? [check one box per statement]

	Agree strongly	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree strongly
The development of FasTracks light rail project has contributed to regional collaboration					
Without regional collaboration the development FasTracks would not have occurred					
FasTracks is an obstacle to regional collaboration in the future					
Effective implementation of FasTracks depends on regional collaboration					
FasTracks should not be fully implemented					
Additional federal subsidy and investment is necessary to implement and complete FasTracks					
Additional local taxes and investment are necessary to implement FasTracks					
Implementation of FasTracks is more important than regional co-operation and collaboration					
FasTracks provides a model of regional collaboration for other metro areas in the country					

16. Which of the following regional objectives would benefit from full implementation of the FasTracks light rail project?[check all those that apply and rank in terms of most important (=1) to least important]

	Benefits from FasTracks?	Rank in importance
Regional planning		

Growth management		
Transportation provision		
Road congestion relief		
Efficient land use		
Regional social equity		
Employment generation		
Public participation		
Workforce housing		
Reduced commuting time		
Development of other forms of transportation		
Competition with other metro areas for inward investment		
Economic development		
Low-cost infrastructure provision		
Transit-orientated development		
Dealing with the environment/climate change		
Sustainable development		
Intergovernmental		

relations		
Taxation/revenue sharing		
Long-term public investment		
Taking advantage of federal investment and economic recovery funds		
Regional collaboration		

17. In the box below please comment on other issues relating to regional collaboration and FasTracks which you think are relevant. You can also use this box to explain any of your responses above or to comment on the survey:

Now submit your survey by clicking 'here'

Thank you for completing this on-line survey. The survey findings will become available in due course. Please look out for further information on this website.