

Momentum to complete beltway picking up speed

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Supporters of finishing Denver's beltway by building a 10-mile toll road through Jefferson County from U.S. 36 south and west to highway 93 say the 40-year-old effort now has the momentum it needs to become reality.

A critical public hearing is scheduled before the Denver Regional Council of Governments in December, as well as a January 2010 vote by DRCOG's board on whether the estimated \$203 million toll road should be added to the region's list of needed projects. The list is formally called "DRCOG's 2035 Metro Vision Regional Transportation Plan, Fiscally-Constrained Plan" — and projects must be on that list in order to progress.

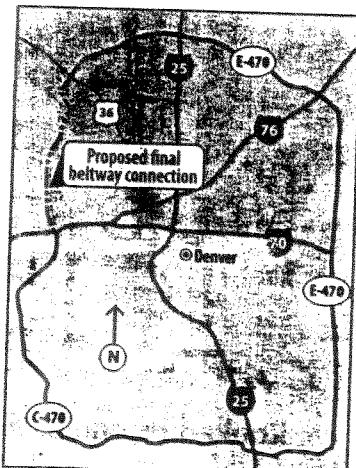
"We're gearing toward DRCOG to get this line [the toll road's proposed route through northern Jefferson County] shown on their fiscally constrained plan," said Preston Gibson, president and CEO of the Jefferson Economic Council. "We absolutely have to have that approval."

However, the city of Golden, which has been a stumbling block to completing the beltway's final leg, remains opposed to the idea.

Steve Rudy, director of DRCOG's transportation planning and operations division, said that making it onto DRCOG's "fiscally constrained" list of transportation projects — a short list of all the projects considered important in the region — is critical because:

- It's a requirement before the federal government will accept any environmental impact studies.

- It means the project has been re-



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viewed for regional air quality impacts and deemed not harmful.

- It's a requirement to get federal funding.

Projects on the list are considered to have metrowide support and a "reasonable anticipation [of getting funding]," Rudy said.

The toll road's backers, and the Jefferson Parkway Public Highway Authority, expect a public-private partnership will pay for the road — without using federal funds. Last spring, more than 20 national and international companies gave the authority written "expressions of interest" in pursuing the project, said Bill Ray, the authority's executive director and deputy city manager of Arvada.

But even if private money pays for build-

ing the toll road, "if it's a big enough project, it needs to be shown on [DRCOG's fiscally constrained list] whether there are federal funds involved or not," Rudy said.

The beltway is currently 86 miles of pavement made up of C-470, a public road

managed by the Colorado Department of Transportation; E-470, a private toll road managed by the E-470 Public Highway Authority; and the Northwest Parkway toll road, managed by an international consortium led by Portugal-based Brisa Auto-Estradas S.A. and Brazilian partner Companhia de Concessões Rodoviárias.

Twenty miles are left unbuilt between roughly U.S. 36 on the north side and I-70 south of Golden. The Jefferson Parkway Public Highway Authority wants to build a 10-mile toll road — which is part of those 20 miles — starting near the Rocky Mountain Metropolitan Airport on the north side and ending at Highway 93 north of Golden.

Supporters say finishing the beltway is necessary in order to offer drivers an easy path around the region's northwestern edge between I-70 and I-25. They're also hoping more businesses will settle along the toll road, creating more jobs in Jefferson County.

Backers of the 10-mile Jefferson Parkway say several recent turning points are evidence that this time, the project will get built.



Preston Gibson says the beltway project needs DRCOG to back the idea.

- The "expressions of interest" garnered last spring from 20 companies that might bid for a design, build, operate, maintain and finance contract.

- A July vote from the Colorado Department of Transportation's board to allow the parkway authority to continue studies on how the toll road would impact state-owned roads where they intersect.

- Votes of support from economic development groups in Denver, Broomfield and Adams County.

"Everyone says that it's time to do this now," said Gibson, president of the Jefferson Economic Council.

But Mike Bestor, Golden's city manager, remains unswerving in his opposition to the toll road — which the city says will dump more traffic onto Highway 93 and divide the town.

"We have been fighting this stupid idea for 15 years," Bestor said. "Because the plans have always been to put major roads through Golden and the U.S. 6 and [Highway] 93 corridor. We've said if you're going to do it, you have to do it right — which is to bury the road and reduce speeds and those kinds of things."

"Our position hasn't changed."

Bestor declined to discuss the town's strategy. Tollway backers say they believe Golden will file a lawsuit to block the plan.

"We've budgeted money every single year for the last 10 years or so to fight this and we'll continue to do that," Bestor said. "Any developer that wants to come in and build the road should not underestimate our determination."