

# DENVER CENTRAL 70 PROJECT

## History, Pros and Cons (Notes, Talking Points)

compiled by Ed Sadowski  
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### **Brief overview:**

[codot.gov/projects/i70east](http://codot.gov/projects/i70east)

Central 70, between I-25 and Chambers Road, is one of Colorado's economic backbones: home to 1,200 businesses, providing the regional connection to Denver International Airport and carrying upwards of 200,000 vehicles per day. It's time to bring this aging highway into the 21st century and rejoin communities along the way.

The Central 70 project proposes to reconstruct a 10-mile stretch of I-70 east of downtown, add one new Express Lane in each direction, remove the aging 53-year old viaduct, lower the interstate between Brighton and Colorado boulevards, and place a 4-acre cover park over a portion of the lowered interstate. Construction begins in 2018. CDOT has made a number of commitments to the local community as part of the Central 70 Project. These cover a range of issues from mitigating the impacts of construction noise and dust to contributing funding to affordable housing and fresh food access.

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### **HISTORY**

[codot.gov/projects/i70east/projects/i70east/record-of-decision](http://codot.gov/projects/i70east/projects/i70east/record-of-decision)

On Jan. 19, 2017, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) approved the reconstruction of Interstate 70 through central Denver, concluding a 14-year unprecedented outreach and community engagement process.

2003 CDOT and RTD together with the FHWA initiated a joint study effort called the I-70 East Corridor Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

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2006 The highway and transit elements of the Central 70 Corridor were separated into two independent projects, reflecting that they serve different travel markets, are located in different corridors, and have different funding sources.

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2008 CDOT released a Draft Environmental Impact Statement with 4 alternatives (including a realignment of the highway). No preferred alternative was identified due to a lack of support for any of the four alternatives.

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2010 CDOT and FHWA formed the Preferred Alternative Collaborative Team (PACT) consisting of 26 stakeholders from federal and state agencies, local governments, and community and business representatives to help identify a preferred alternative. The PACT met

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13 times over the course of a year, and though consensus was not reached, the process helped CDOT focus on the existing alignment alternative.

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2011 City of Denver led a community outreach process largely focused on finding a different location for Swansea Elementary School. Process found insufficient support for moving the school.

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2012 CDOT re-examined previously considered alternatives and developed the Partial Cover Lowered (PCL) option to address concerns over the school location near the highway. This began a two-year community outreach process to seek input on this new concept. Over 800 people attended a series of corridor-wide meetings over this period. CDOT also initiated monthly community leaders meetings.

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2014 CDOT released the Supplemental Draft EIS (SDEIS) which includes the new PCL alternative.

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Outreach includes three public hearings, the opening of a project office in the neighborhood, and door-to-door contact to reach homes closest to the highway.

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2015 Continued outreach on key elements of the project, including proposed mitigations, cover design, and status of a public-private partnership. Outreach included community leaders meetings, corridor-wide meetings, and door-to-door outreach.

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2016 Release of Final EIS, followed up a 45-day public review period and two public hearings, completing the study process. Continued outreach on aesthetics, cover design and implementation of mitigations. Released three drafts of the Request for Proposals to the four developer teams. Supported the 'duct-work community art project.

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July 2017

[streetsblog.org/2017/07/07/opponents-of-cdots-i-70-widening-file-suit-against-the-federal-highway-administration](http://streetsblog.org/2017/07/07/opponents-of-cdots-i-70-widening-file-suit-against-the-federal-highway-administration)

**Opponents of CDOT's I-70 Widening File Suit Against the Federal Highway Administration**

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**ISSUES**

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[thedenverchannel.com/news/front-range/denver/debate-continues-over-central-70-expansion-project](http://thedenverchannel.com/news/front-range/denver/debate-continues-over-central-70-expansion-project)

**Cons:**

- Transportation officials said the Central 70 project will require displacing people from 56 residential properties and 17 businesses.
- Several other groups argue the project will affect their quality of life. In 2016, the Sierra Club filed a lawsuit challenging air quality standards.
- Another lawsuit was filed by several northeast Denver community members. They claimed the Central 70 project is discriminatory because their neighborhood is 84 percent Latino.
- Many argue the heightened traffic would impact their quality of life and health.

**Pros (?):**

- Displaced residents will receive relocation assistance and other help under the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Uniform Act.
- The Central 70 project also includes a focus on providing work for local residents. Transportation officials aim to require filling 20 percent of construction jobs on the project with people who live in surrounding neighborhoods.
- A representative with CDOT says the expansion is the best chance to accommodate the metro area's growing population within state funding constraints.

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[sierraclub.org/colorado/blog/2017/07/highway-systemic-injustice-and-why-we-can-t-stay-silent](https://sierraclub.org/colorado/blog/2017/07/highway-systemic-injustice-and-why-we-can-t-stay-silent)

**Alternative idea to project:** “It’s time to remove the aging highway infrastructure from the area, and replace it with a boulevard that knits the decimated neighborhoods back together, while providing a proud northern gateway to the City...CDOT can develop the I-76/270 beltway route instead, just to the north, to carry the increased traffic for a growing metro area”  
-- Colorado Latino Forum board member and Sierra Club member Ean Tafoya

**Cons:**

- The negative health and safety impacts of lowering the clean air standards -- in what is already the most polluted zip code in the nation -- are staggering. Already, residents living along I-70 experience a 50% greater rate of mortality from heart disease and 40% greater frequency of urgent care for children suffering from severe asthma compared to other parts of Denver.
- This is most apparent for the most vulnerable portions of society--for the elderly and children. The neighborhoods of Elyria and Swansea that are going to be most negatively impacted by the project are primarily low income and Latino neighborhoods and have long been victims of environmental injustices.
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- This is most apparent for the most vulnerable portions of society--for the elderly and children. The neighborhoods of Elyria and Swansea that are going to be most negatively impacted by the project are primarily low income and Latino neighborhoods and have long been victims of environmental injustices.
- “I-70 should never have been routed right through Globeville, Elyria and Swansea in the first place, 53 years ago,” said Colorado Latino Forum board member and Sierra Club member Ean Tafoya. “The government chose that route in part because of the institutional racism and systematic exploitation of low income people that was rampant in the early 60s”. Completing, this project however, would be yet another display of how marginalized communities continue to be ignored and told that their well-being and health matters less than others, or at-least less than the price tag of the other options that have been proposed.

- The issues with the plan are almost uncountable. For instance, both the covered highway and the drainage project are in an area that would disrupt a Superfund site-an area that has been identified by the federal government as needing a long term clean-up response due to hazardous waste and material. This would leave the communities at risk to exposure to highly contaminated soils and other pollution, and this is just the beginning.
- CDOT’s analysis of air quality after the proposed expansion of I-70 shows a further degradation of air quality which will exacerbate these health impacts, especially on seniors and children. Furthermore, the expansion would displace at-least 56 households in neighborhoods that have existed for 100 years and will backup to Swansea Elementary School, dumping hazardous pollution directly on our children’s doorstep
- On the project Jim Alexee, Colorado Sierra Club Director said, “It’s incumbent upon state and federal entities to fully appreciate and honor the basic human right to breathe clean, healthful air. Neither the state of Colorado nor the federal government has done so in their planning and approval of Central 70.”
- Ultimately, we have to ask ourselves if the harm of the project is worth its benefits.

**Pro:**

- the added pollution caused by this project would be within legal limits.

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**Cons:**

Lawsuit filed in July, 2017 against the Federal Highway Administration, brought by developer Kyle Zeppelin and other opponents challenges the environmental impact statement (EIS).

FHWA approved and is helping to fund CDOT’s project. The complaint says the agency violated the National Environmental Policy Act by failing to conduct sufficient oversight of the project’s EIS.

The suit takes specific aim at the [agreement Denver reached with CDOT in 2015](#) that put local taxpayers on the hook for a project to funnel stormwater away from the 40-foot ditch the agency plans to dig to widen the freeway. The FHWA approved an EIS that did not account for the flood protection project, and the lawsuit aims to “show that both the City of Denver and

CDOT intentionally hid the connection between the Platte to Park Hill Drainage Project and the Central I-70 project,” according to a press release.

Other lawsuits are still pending against [CDOT’s plan](#) to triple the footprint of I-70, which would generate more traffic and displace people in the mostly low-income, Latino neighborhoods of Elyria, Swansea, and Globeville. Advocates fighting the highway widening are going for a cumulative effect in court.

“Rather than have a single strategy, we’re trying to have a multi-pronged strategy,”  
--Brad Evans, [Ditch the Ditch](#) advocacy group and plaintiff.

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