Travel Trends & Transit Opportunities in the Union Station/Cherry Creek/Glendale Corridor

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## Acknowledgements

Transportation Solutions authored this report. Its lead authors were Rachael Bronson and Daniel Hutton, Policy Fellows, and it is provided by Rich McClintock, Executive Director.
Executive Summary

This report investigates the travel and visitor patterns along the Denver Union Station/Cherry Creek/City of Glendale corridor in Denver, Colorado, which is a vital passageway connecting downtown Denver Union Station (DUS) and southeast Denver. This corridor is one of the region’s highest-volume transportation passageways, and at nearly 25 miles in length, it is one of the only continuous corridors that connects central Denver with the suburbs to the southeast. The following offers a vision of improved transportation connections between DUS and several key destinations in the southeast Denver area.

The research conducted and the recommendations presented in this report involve the corridor connecting DUS, Cherry Creek and Glendale, which is identified as the Speer/Leetsdale travel shed in the City and County of Denver’s Strategic Transportation Plan, or STP (2008). The travel shed originates in Downtown Denver and runs along Speer Boulevard and Leetsdale Drive to Aurora. The STP confirms the travel shed’s relationship to the City and County of Denver’s strategic connectivity plans, and its general strategy is to move people throughout Denver’s diverse network of neighborhoods via multi-modal options. The alignment for a new line of service, or an enhancement of existing service, largely follows the catchment area as identified as item “K” in Appendix A.

In terms of alignment, historic DUS anchors one end of the corridor and will serve as a new gateway hub for the Denver region upon its reopening in 2014. According to its Master Plan, DUS is a destination of international significance “poised to become a regional transportation hub serving millions of people.” As Denver’s flagship transit-oriented development it will serve a diverse user group to include commuters, students, tourists and visitors connecting from Denver International Airport, and a growing downtown residential population. At an estimated 100,000 travelers per day, DUS will serve as Denver’s central hub for many transportation options including:

- Light rail
- Commuter rail
- Buses
- Taxis
- Shuttles
- Vans
- Limousines
- Bicycles
- Pedestrian travel

There are several important urban centers along this corridor including Downtown Denver, The Denver Convention Center, the Golden Triangle Museum District, Cherry Creek, and the City of Glendale. These destinations offer multiple employment, retail, cultural, and residential opportunities for the region, and require strong multi-modal connections to thrive. Anchoring the southeast end of the corridor is Interstate 225, an area expected to grow significantly in the next 30 years. According to Denver Regional Council of Governments’ (DRCOG) travel projections, Parker Rd at I-225 is expected to see a 57% increase in daily traffic volume by 2035—which is the most significant growth in traffic volume along the entire length of the corridor.

Given the significance of Union Station, the tremendous anticipated growth at I-225, and the important urban centers that are bisected by these two critical destinations, it is essential that travel trends and opportunities for expanding alternative modes be explored along this corridor. As the Denver Metro Region continues to grow to an expected six million people by 2050 as projected by DRCOG, further connectivity to and along this major travel artery is vital to local and regional economic prosperity. Thus, Transportation Solutions, a Transportation Management Association whose service area consists of southeast Denver, developed this report as a way to study the corridor.
Recommendations

Transportation Solutions (TS) makes the following recommendations as an outcome of this study:

1) **That a feasibility study be conducted by RTD to assess the demand for a new connector option between Union Station and the City of Glendale;**
   The primary goal for this study is to determine the feasibility, alignment options, and resource requirements of a new route of service between several high traffic destinations that are currently underserved by existing modes of travel. The alignment to be studied will include Union Station, the Convention Center, the Golden Triangle Museum District, several Capitol Hill Cultural Facilities, the Cherry Creek Shopping District, and the City of Glendale.

2) **That stakeholders with significant interest in the corridor be convened to discuss opportunities for Public-Private Partnerships, as well as private and joint funding options;**
   Stakeholders will include members of the private and public sectors along the aforementioned alignment, to include local governments, districts, businesses, neighborhoods, and associations.

3) **And, that the City of Denver identifies funding to conduct a comprehensive study of the Speer/Leetsdale Travel Shed in 2014 to align with the objectives of the Strategic Transportation Plan of 2008.**
   The study would analyze all modes of travel along the travel shed, including existing transit options, bicycle routes, automobiles, and foot traffic. These modes include enhanced transit opportunities such as new lines of bus service in addition to the 83L.

The following research and data lend support for the above recommendations.

Population & Traffic Growth Projections

In order to understand visitor information for the DUS/Cherry Creek/City of Glendale corridor, Transportation Solutions studied three indicators of current and projected travel: residential population, employment, and retail sales. According to DRCOG modeling, the 2010 total population of the corridor was 59,856, which is projected to increase by about 16% to 69,439 in 2035. The 2010 employment for the corridor was 58,147, which is expected to increase by about 31% to 76,066 in 2035. Below, you will find population, employment, and visitor figures for the three primary urban centers along this corridor.

According to Visit Denver’s (Denver’s tourist and visitor information center) Travel Year 2011 Report, Denver saw 13.2 million overnight visitors in 2011, which was a 4% increase over 2010. The economic impact of tourism to the area, totaling $3.3 billion, was a 10% increase over 2010. Of this $3.3 billion spent, 30% went to accommodations, 26% on transportation, 20% on eating and drinking, 15% on retail, and 9% on recreation. Shopping is a major pastime of visitors to Denver, as 45% of visitors indicated that malls and shopping destinations were on their itinerary. While Denver begins construction on other designated urban centers such as those identified in RTD’s TOD Pilot Program Recommendations (2011), Downtown remains the main central destination and any growth in the metro area will impact trips to and from this desirable location.

Downtown Denver

This report investigates visitor and retail trends first in downtown Denver and then towards the southeast. The Downtown Denver Partnership (DDP), a non-profit business organization that plans, manages, and develops Downtown Denver reports that there are 1,000 retail stores and restaurants in Downtown Denver, and sales downtown account for 7% of the 2010 City and County sales tax revenue.
According to the Visit Denver Travel Year 2011 Report, many downtown shopping destinations were at the top of the most popular attractions for travelers to the City of Denver, including 16th Street Mall (attracted 22% of overnight visitors), Lower Downtown Historic District (11% visitors), and Larimer Square (6% visitors).

The downtown residential population has grown to 12,500 residents (a 61% increase in the last decade), while its workforce has grown to some 110,000 people according to the July 2011 State of Downtown Denver Report. The residential population is projected to grow to 25,000 and the workforce to 145,000 by 2030, indicating an estimated 100% residential and 32% workforce increase over this period.

Cultural Destinations
According to an October 2012 report released by the Colorado Business Committee for the Arts (CBCA), the value of arts and culture in metro Denver is measured at $1.76 billion, an increase of 18.4 percent from 2009. These Denver arts and cultural organizations employed 9,354 people in 2011, a 7 percent increase from 2009. Moreover, 50,460 volunteers supported these destinations, representing a 19% increase from 2009. More than 2.2 million people from outside the metro area attended events and exhibitions in 2011. Additionally, more than 1 million people came to the metro area from outside Colorado in 2011 to visit these attractions. Cultural and arts attractions are significant institutions in Denver, and as a final installment of this report, Transportation Solutions explores several cultural destinations served by the Union Station/Cherry Creek/Glendale corridor.

The Golden Triangle Museum District
The Denver Art Museum is a vital arts institution and architectural landmark in Downtown Denver. It is one of the largest museums between Chicago and the West Coast, with more than 70,000 works of art and a complex that totals more than 350,000 square feet. According to the Denver Art Museum’s 2011 Annual Report, almost 70,000 visitors participated in the Free First Saturday program in 2011. Some 669,437 people visited the museum in 2011. According to the CBCA report this figure represented a three-fold increase over annual 2010 visitors. According to Visit Denver’s Travel Year 2011 Report, 7% of travelers to Denver visit the Art Museum.

In 2012, downtown Denver received its newest cultural attraction with the completion of the History Colorado Center. This vibrant destination appeals to visitors of all ages, providing Colorado history lessons through high-tech and hands-on exhibits and events. History Colorado Marketing Director Kelly Williams anticipates 125,000 visitors by the end of 2012, with 30-50% being out of state visitors. The Center anticipates serving 30,000 students during the same time period. These services are provided through the work of 60 staff and volunteers.

The Molly Brown House Museum and the Kirkland Museum of Fine and Decorative Art
The Molly Brown House is one of the most visited destinations in Denver’s historic Capitol Hill neighborhood. According to its website, the Molly Brown House averages 45,000 visitors a year and offers guided tours and historical education to locals and tourists alike. Molly Brown was one of Denver’s most revered philanthropists as well as a famed survivor of the Titanic. The Kirkland Museum of Fine and Decorative Art, on the same block as the Molly Brown House Museum, features over 3,500 important art works from the 19th and 20th Centuries. Vance Kirkland (1904-1981) is considered to be one of Colorado’s cultural icons, and the museum showcases many of his pieces.
**Botanic Gardens**
The Denver Botanic Gardens comprises 42 gardens as well as several educational and research facilities. These gardens have been a popular Denver destination for 61 years, and are acknowledged as one of the top gardens in the country. According to the 2011 Denver Botanic Gardens Annual Report, 191 full-time, part-time, and seasonal staff serve the gardens alongside 1,900 volunteers. These individuals provide educational programs to over 34,000 students and 25,000 grade school children. Mary Bradley of the Botanic Gardens reported that in 2011, the number of visitors to the York Street location was just under 300,000, with 261,971 being Colorado residents and 37,665 from out of state. In 2011, a total of 801,276 people visited the Botanic Gardens institution according to information provided to the Denver Business Journal. Moreover, Visit Denver’s Travel Year 2011 Report states that 7% of travelers to Denver visit the Botanic Gardens.

**Cherry Creek**
According to the Visit Denver Travel Year 2011 Report, the Cherry Creek Area attracts 13% of all of the travelers to Denver. Visit Denver describes the Cherry Creek Shopping District as “the largest, most diverse shopping district between Chicago and San Francisco.” Sales in Cherry Creek comprise 5% of the city’s sales tax revenue. The Shopping District is divided into two primary shopping attractions: Cherry Creek North (CCN) and the Cherry Creek Shopping Center. The Cherry Creek Area Plan, developed in 2012, describes the Shopping District as attracting 1.3 million visitors per month. The Cherry Creek Shopping District is a vital source of employment for Denver, offering a wide range of employment opportunities and accounting for over 14,500 jobs.

On the north side of 1st Ave, Cherry Creek North (CCN) is comprised of 320 independently owned businesses, varying from retail stores, boutiques, restaurants, spas, and art galleries. CCN is also becoming a destination for financial institutions, with nearly 30 banks, financial advisors, and financial planning firms already established in the area. Cherry Creek North is also home to the Cherry Creek Arts Festival, which draws 350,000 annual visitors during Fourth of July weekend.

The Cherry Creek Shopping Center lies on the south side of 1st Ave and features over 120 restaurants and stores. Taubman, the company that handles leasing and property management for Cherry Creek Shopping Center, describes the shopping center as a “dominant shopping destination in the six-state region,” and the top tourist destination in the city of Denver.

**City of Glendale**
Just a half-mile southeast of Cherry Creek via Leetsdale Drive is the heart of The City of Glendale. According to the Glendale Chamber of Commerce, the city is home to 4,759 residents, which is expected to grow to 5,142 residents in 2035. Approximately 7,216 people are employed within City limits, a figure expected to grow to 11,041 by 2035. Glendale is home to a total of 434 employers. To better understand the business climate in Glendale, TS investigated the retail sales of four major Glendale businesses that are within the Leetsdale corridor: Target, PetSmart, King Soopers, and Home Depot.

The Glendale Target, built in 1966, is in the top five Target stores nationally for sales volumes. This store averages 2.5 million transactions per year, which includes an average of 6200-6700 transactions during the week and 8000-8500 transactions on an average Saturday. These numbers increase to 12,000+ transactions on a busy Saturday (i.e. during the holidays) according to an October 5, 2012 personal communication with D. Liken, a representative of the company.
Two other top retail locations in Glendale include PetSmart and the King Soopers grocery store. The King Soopers opened in November of 2010, and according to store manager Steve Anger, this store has the highest customer count per week of King Soopers stores in all of Colorado since its opening. The Glendale Home Depot has the second highest volume of sales in the region consisting of Colorado, Arizona, Wyoming, New Mexico, and Nebraska according to an October 19, 2012 personal communication with R. Weston, a representative for King Soopers.

Given the high retail transactions and customer counts for these four Glendale establishments, many of which are regionally and nationally recognized for their retail successes, it is obvious that the City of Glendale is a vital urban center serving a growing demand for the Denver region.

Infinity Park is an events and entertainment venue located in the City of Glendale. It is home to Glendale Rugby, state of the art fitness and events centers, and an eight-acre park. Infinity Park hosted the Churchill Cup International Rugby Tournament, attracting teams from nine different countries and televised to an audience of over 10 million households. Infinity Park is fast becoming a world destination for Rugby fans and the sport’s premier destination in the U.S. According to its 2011 annual report, Infinity Park hosted a total of 26 private events that attracted a total of over 30,000 guests. A total of 25,000 visitors came to 2011 rugby matches, nearly 4,000 people visited the annual movie night events, and more than 250 children participated in various youth rugby programs. Finally, according to the City of Glendale Complete Streets report, 1,600 pedestrians access Infinity Park events.

To complement the proposed “Main Street” updates of Cherry Street in Glendale, a local business initiative has been put in place to be completed by 2016. With groundbreaking slated for 2014, the Glendale Riverwalk development will consist of the land bounded by S Colorado Blvd, E Virginia Ave, S Cherry St, and the Cherry Creek Trail. Through public-private partnership and a proposed BID, this new attraction will serve as the transit hub east of Denver, and provide walkable events and attractions. The BID will target 1,000,000 square feet of retail, hospitality, and office space. Summit Economics, LLC, estimates that the Glendale Riverwalk will induce an additional 1% of Colorado tourists to extend their vacations by at least one night by year three of its operation. Such an increase would amount to approximately 83,000 additional out-of-state and 55,000 in-state day/night visitors.

Vehicular Travel

According to the STP, the Speer Blvd/Leetsdale Drive corridor is an important travel shed in the Denver metro area and is a designated Major Investment Corridor. The STP defines a Major Investment Corridor as a “transportation spine that is vital to community and regional mobility; these generally cross multiple travel sheds and are key connectors” to other areas. Accordingly, it is important to explore the travel trends as well as growth and demand along this corridor. The following table provides such data for three important intersections along the travel shed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intersection</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2035</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Ave &amp; Colorado Blvd</td>
<td>14,258</td>
<td>16,068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Ave &amp; University Blvd</td>
<td>57,596</td>
<td>66,651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parker Rd &amp; I-225</td>
<td>84,617</td>
<td>115,399</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data provided by DRCOG’s Metro Vision 2035 Plan
The 2012 Cherry Creek Area Plan cites DRCOG travel demand forecasting to demonstrate demand where the corridor intersects Cherry Creek shopping and neighborhood districts. There are an estimated 90,000 multi-modal person trips per day along 1st Avenue between University Blvd. and Steele, and forecasts estimate that trips will increase by 15% by 2030.

The Cherry Creek Area Plan also reports that the traffic increases that have occurred in Cherry Creek over the last several decades have been related to regional growth and not to any particular development within the area. The peak hour trips along 1st Ave in Cherry Creek are split nearly in half between local trips and through trips, with 52% of trips starting or finishing in the area and 47% of trips moving through the area.

According to the Glendale Riverwalk Health Impact Assessment (HIA), which cited Colorado Department of Transportation data, 66,236 cars were measured at the intersection of 1st Avenue and Colorado Blvd. Only a few blocks east of Colorado Blvd along Leetsdale Drive is South Cherry Street. According to the Glendale Riverwalk HIA, which again cited CDOT data, an average of 33,115 cars per day pass by this intersection. The largest traffic flows along the corridor occur at Parker Rd and I-225; according to DRCOG map projections provided for this report, 2010 traffic counts at this intersection were 70,950 cars per day. These figures are expected to more than double to 111,159 cars per day in 2035.

As Parker Rd extends to the southeast, these demands are projected to increase significantly as this corridor is expected to experience significant growth in population and employment. According to the DRCOG 2035 Metro Vision Regional Transportation Plan, population along the Parker Rd corridor (from Havana St to SH-86) is projected to increase by 76%, employment is expected to increase by 50%, and households are expected to increase by 82%. This translates to a projected increase of 61% in travel demand from 2005 – 2035. This tremendous growth will undoubtedly impact congestion along the DUS/Cherry Creek/Glendale corridor, as these residents travel into Denver to jobs, schools, cultural attractions, and more.

Transit Travel
Two primary transit stations, Union Station and Nine Mile Station, anchor the Union Station/Cherry Creek/Glendale/Nine Mile Station travel shed. In addition to this, a regional bus, the 83L, serves the entire corridor. The following section explores each of these transit amenities.

Union Station
When it opens in spring of 2014, Union Station will be the center of the regional transportation system for Denver. In terms of transit, it will serve passenger rail, light rail, and regional buses. The purpose of integrating all transportation facilities to Union Station is to offer an efficient, logical, and safe transportation system for users, thus increasing ridership and better serving transportation demand for the region. According to the Union Station Master Plan, the station is anticipated to serve millions of people through dozens of transportation mode options.

83L
The Regional Transportation District (RTD) services a bus route, the 83L, which runs the extent of the Speer/Leetsdale/Parker corridor and acts as a limited service option between Cherry Creek and Civic Center Station. The 83L experiences high ridership levels due to population, employment, and urban center growth along this corridor. According to the RTD 2010 Service Performance Report, this route experienced 1,109,934 riders for 2010, which is about 43.6 boardings per hour. Moreover, a Spring 2012
RTD Ridecheck Plus report of the 83L averaged 45 boardings per hour over the course of 82 trips, with 35% of trips occurring during off-peak hours. Based upon these ridership figures, the 83L is one of the most frequently travelled bus routes within the RTD Central Business District routes. This increase indicates a rise in ridership for the period studied compared to 2010’s annual total average, exhibiting a need for further study of this line of service.

**Nine Mile Station**

Nine Mile Station, located at Parker Rd and I-225, is presently the last station along the light rail ‘H’ line. Construction to build the ‘H’ line north to Interstate 70 is currently underway with an anticipated completion date in 2016. For the purposes of this report, Nine Mile Station is the southeastern-most destination along the Speer/Leetsdale travel shed.

According to RTD, Nine Mile Station currently services trains to/from downtown Denver, with 15 minute average headways during peak and off-peak times. According to ridership averages during winter 2011, Nine Mile Station was ranked fifth busiest of rail stations in the system for the number of boardings, which totaled 6,315 (the station again had the fifth most boardings in 2010).

The Station also offers a park and ride service to those commuters interested in parking their car or bikes and taking the train to their final destination. The station offers 1225 total parking spaces, 16 bike racks, and 28 bike lockers.
Findings & Recommendations

After review of the residential, travel, and visitor patterns along the DUS/Cherry Creek/City of Glendale corridor in Denver, Glendale, and Aurora, Colorado, it is evident that there is a sizable demand along this corridor with projected increases over the next 20 to 25 years. The considerable tourist and visitor trends to urban centers along this corridor, as well as the economic significance of these destinations, coupled with the projections of population, employment, and traffic volumes all suggest an opportunity to improve transportation service along the corridor.

In order to ensure that the urban centers served by the DUS/Cherry Creek/Glendale corridor remain competitive in the region, Transportation Solutions recommends a new transit connection between downtown Union Station to southeast Denver. This corridor could be well-served by a new bus route to better connect visitors, residents, and employees of downtown Denver, regional cultural destinations, Cherry Creek, and the City of Glendale.

According to research, 45% of visitors to Denver have shopping on their itinerary. Given that downtown and Cherry Creek are the top two visitor destinations to the City of Denver, and are also locations of great shopping appeal, it makes sense to better connect these two retail hot spots. Simultaneously, retail sales at City of Glendale establishments are consistently among the highest regionally and nationally; the needs of visitors and shoppers to this third urban center should be better served. The solution to meet this growing demand is to connect all three destinations through a new bus route that is reliable, appealing, and convenient, thus supporting the retail sales that are critical to the regional Denver economy.

As next steps, Transportation Solutions recommends:

1) That a feasibility study be conducted by RTD to assess the demand for a new connector option between Union Station and the City of Glendale;

The primary goal for this study is to determine the feasibility, alignment options, and resource requirements of a new route of service between several high traffic destinations that are currently underserved by existing modes of travel. According to our research, the 83L already receives very high ridership, and given the projected growth along the corridor the transit system could benefit from another service option that better meets the cultural and tourism appeal that these urban centers offer. Such a transit service would augment the current RTD 83L route, as its primary purpose would be to serve the urban centers of downtown, Cherry Creek, and the City of Glendale, as well as the Golden Triangle Museum District, the Capitol Hill Cultural Facilities, The Denver Botanic Gardens and Infinity Park. It could be marketed and branded to capitalize the tourism, employment, and residential needs of these areas. As such, the feasibility should account for visitors and tourists and additional travel induced by these cultural destinations.

A limitation of the current 83L alignment is that it does not service a downtown route past Civic Center Station, and thus, does not offer direct service to the Convention Center or DUS. The feasibility study is
necessary in assessing this demand given Denver Union Station’s current progress and future role as the regional transit hub, as well as the importance of connectivity to the Convention Center and the high levels of visitors and tourists it brings to the region. Along with an alignment respective of DUS, the Convention Center, the Golden Triangle Museum District, Cherry Creek, and Glendale, this study should also include the analysis of service along 13th & 14th Streets and Josephine & York Streets in order to service the Capitol Hill Cultural Facilities and the Botanic Gardens. The 83L currently services Speer Boulevard but does not cover service to these destinations.

2) That stakeholders with significant interest in the corridor be convened to discuss opportunities for Public-Private Partnerships, as well as private and joint funding options;

For the purposes of the proposed study, the stakeholders will include members of the private and public sectors along the DUS/Cherry Creek/City of Glendale corridor, to include local governments, businesses, neighborhoods, and associations. The stakeholders identified include a consortium of local and regional actors that may help in assessing the demand for service and determine an alignment for the benefit of their customers, guests, neighbors, employees, and constituents. This stakeholder approach will help to ensure that the needs of the community will be addressed and that enhanced connectivity will take priority in the corridor as needed and as determined by the study. Representatives of these stakeholder groups should be convened several times throughout the conducting of the study to express the concerns of their respective groups and determine need through collaborative effort.

3) And, that the City of Denver identifies funding to conduct a comprehensive study of the Speer/Leetsdale Travel Shed in 2014 to align with the objectives of the STP.

The study will analyze all modes of travel along the travel shed, including existing transit options, alternative transit modes, bicycle routes, automobiles, and foot traffic. Considering the 2014 opening of DUS, which is designated as the regional transit hub and Denver’s flagship TOD, the timing for this improved transit service is ideal. It is fitting that transit service be improved in such a way as to support this historic institution and better connect downtown to other destinations of cultural, historic, and economic importance. Connectivity is the key to success for DUS, and the Speer/Leetsdale travel shed acts as a major artery for commuters to and from downtown Denver.

The STP emphasizes the need for studying travel sheds in addition to corridors, and a study of the Speer/Leetsdale travel shed would complement the study of the DUS/Cherry Creek/City of Glendale corridor. In keeping with the main objectives of the STP, the study of such a line of service stands to enhance connectivity, determine transportation choices, and promote alternative public transit modes. With construction at DUS on schedule for a 2014 grand opening, a study as called for in the STP is imperative to regional success. Transportation Solutions suggests a near term feasibility study for enhanced bus service and a long term study of alternative transit modes as proposed in the Strategic Transportation Plan.
References


Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) (2010). *CDOT bike path traffic counts* [Data files]. Retrieved from CDOT staff.


Appendix A
Maps provided by the City and County of Denver’s Strategic Transportation Plan (2008)

Item “K” in greater detail