

Federal Boulevard

Denver–Adams County–Westminster, Colorado

Multijurisdictional Area Requires Strong Partnerships



Lessons Learned

- » Strong public partnerships are essential when multiple municipalities govern a corridor section.
- » Leadership is critical to coordinate multiple governing bodies: one jurisdiction should assume a leadership role in collaboration with the other jurisdiction(s).

ABOVE: Speeding traffic, strip commercial development, and unsafe infrastructure create many challenges for Federal Boulevard. (James Moore)

ULI Colorado, in conjunction with many local partners and stakeholders, studied a 2.5-mile segment of Federal Boulevard extending from Regis University in Denver, and passing through unincorporated Adams County, to the city of Westminster. A number of public agencies, private owners, and government entities have jurisdiction or ownership along Federal Boulevard and its adjacent land.

The study segment spans three jurisdictions: the city and county of Denver, Adams County, and Westminster. The three jurisdictions have different standards for streets, zoning, and infrastructure. Separate water districts control the already constrained water infrastructure that future development proposals are required to upgrade. Federal Boulevard itself is a state and federal highway under the jurisdiction of the Colorado Department of Transportation.

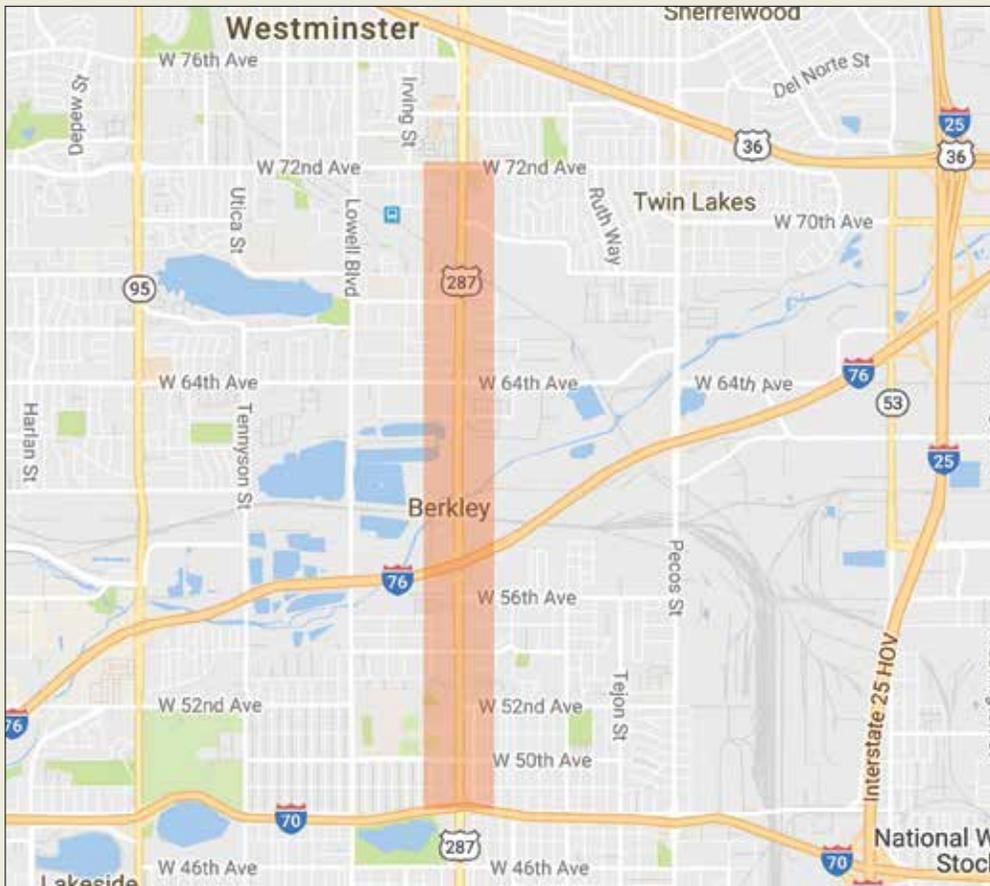
The eight-lane corridor is dominated by strip development (including motels, used-car lots, and fast-food restaurants), lacks safe and continuous sidewalks, and is plagued by fast traffic and high rates of pedestrian crashes and injuries. Five low-income census tracts lie adjacent to the corridor and within the study area. A major greenway,

Clear Creek, runs under Federal Boulevard, but neighborhood connectivity is limited.

“Federal Boulevard, like many commercial corridors across the country, has economic, social, and built environment conditions that are barriers to improving population health,” said Sheila Lynch, local leadership group member and land use program coordinator at the Tri-County Health Department. “The corridor also has many assets, including residents who already call the area home, a university with strong roots, and many community organizations and agencies that are committed to improving community health.”

In an effort to better understand these barriers to health as well as the corridor’s assets, the Tri-County Health Department completed in 2014 a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) that paralleled an Adams County framework planning process for the majority of the study area. Following an extensive community engagement process and data collection, the HIA provided a set of recommendations to enhance the health perspectives in the framework.

Specifically, the HIA provided 21 recommendations, including recommendations for accommodating safe pedestrian crossings at key



The Federal Boulevard corridor area (shaded) and surroundings. (Google Maps)

Quick Facts

- » **Length of Study Section:** 2.5 miles
- » **Average Number of Lanes:** 6–8 lanes of traffic
- » **Average Posted Vehicle Speed:** 35–40 mph
- » **Available Transit Options:** Bus
- » **Bike Lanes:** 0 miles
- » **Sidewalks:** 59 percent of the corridor is missing sidewalks.
- » **Income Data:** 53 percent of residents are low-income (defined as below 200 percent of the census-defined poverty level).
- » **Corridor Population:** 13,978
- » **Ethnicity:** 61.9 percent Hispanic, 23.6 percent other people of color.
- » **Land Use:** Dominated by strip land uses such as motels, used-car lots, fast-food restaurants, and poorly maintained mobile home parks.
- » **Upcoming Projects:** Regis University campus revitalization; completion of 17.5-acre Aria development; and two transit stations along the corridor: the Gold Line station at 60th and Federal, and the Northwest commuter rail station at 72nd and Federal.
- » **Distinguishing Features:** The Clear Creek Greenway is adjacent but currently inaccessible.

intersections along the corridor; having zoning mechanisms that support mixed-use development, neighborhood-serving retail, and healthy food retail; developing strategies for creating and preserving affordable housing along the corridor; and considering an improved identity and brand for the corridor.

Local Work for Change

New and planned developments point to progress along Federal Boulevard. Two new light-rail stations, which opened in 2016, are spurring adjacent mixed-use development. In addition, Aria—a health-focused, mixed-use development located along Federal Boulevard—has partnered with Regis University and the Colorado Health Foundation on Cultivate Health, a program designed to promote healthier living for area residents.

Federal Boulevard's local leadership group, composed of local experts in health, planning, design, development, and community engagement, analyzed the current situation and planning documents. Those documents included the Adams County Framework Plan, the 2014 HIA conducted by the Tri-County Health Depart-

ment, and a number of distinct development plans for property along the corridor. The group determined that the primary challenge was not to create a plan for the corridor but to stitch together various plans into a comprehensive guide that would create a truly healthy corridor that is walkable and bike-friendly; has access to healthy food; and provides economic opportunities and new, high-quality affordable housing. This effort will require substantial interagency and intergovernmental cooperation.

A local stakeholder workshop was held at Regis University in July 2015. About 40 partners representing various viewpoints and organizations attended a day of presentations and small group activities, including a discussion about the importance of leading with health in redevelopment discussions and a mapping exercise to identify the gaps in services and amenities needed to support existing residents along the corridor.

Three groups of participants worked to identify quick wins at three prominent corridor nodes: 52nd and Federal, 60th and Federal, and 72nd and Federal. Opportunities identified included improving health programming for residents, build-



ing new sidewalks and bike trails to connect the new transit station and the Clear Creek Greenway, making bus stop improvements, allowing pop-up farmers markets on vacant lots, and encouraging improved partnerships between key organizations that are along and govern Federal Boulevard.

The group also brainstormed strategic positioning statements for the inclusion of health within

the corridor redevelopment process, and it identified a set of next steps. The workshop successfully achieved buy-in and engagement of diverse stakeholders and the three political jurisdictions that govern the study section. The focus on health helped engage the health and community development sectors.

“While adding health as a guiding principle to this work initially appears to add complexity to an already multifaceted decision-making process, we found that there are real improvements that come to a redevelopment plan that integrates health with other guiding principles, such as traffic analysis, placemaking, economic development, and demographics,” said Dave Thorpe, managing director of Silverwest Hotels and chair of the Federal Boulevard local leadership group. “We ‘discovered’ that when a place helps people live a healthier life, they likely want to stop there, shop there, work there, live there, and raise their family there.”

Recommendations

Key issues that arose during the local workshop included the need to improve sidewalks and connectivity, enhance opportunities for new retail and services, and upgrade water infrastructure. Once identified, those issues helped frame the questions for the national study visit, held in January 2016.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

- » How can the three jurisdictions work together to promote health?
- » What are the opportunities for new retail along the corridor?
- » What types of funding and partnership strategies would be best?
- » How can concerns about gentrification and displacement be addressed?
- » What is the lead role for each stakeholder entity?

Leveraging Anchor Institutions

Anchor institutions, such as Regis University, are important partners in corridor redevelopment projects due to their resources and reach into communities. “Institutions with longstanding presence in their communities, such as universities, contribute to a vital community by virtue of mission, relationships, and resources,” said Susan Scherer, associate

dean in the Rueckert-Hartman College for Health Professions at Regis. “Regis University and Urban Ventures have developed a strong partnership based on a shared vision for a healthy community along Federal Boulevard, characterized by access to healthy food and active living.”

Urban Ventures, the developer of Aria, partnered with Regis on Cultivate Health, a new program

supported by the Colorado Health Foundation designed to promote healthy living. “We bring different strengths to this partnership,” said Scherer. “Regis has students and faculty who can study and implement community-based programs, while Urban Ventures has the expertise in city infrastructure connections and improvements. Working together, the area ad-

acent to Federal Boulevard now has a community farm, exercise and nutrition programming, and soon will have street improvements to improve walkability. We believe we are all stronger when we work together and include expertise from many different types of community partners.”



Participants in the Federal Boulevard national study visit included experts in planning, design, health, market analysis, and economic development.

Key recommendations included the following:

COALESCE DEVELOPMENT AROUND FOUR ACTIVITY NODES located at key intersections: one in Denver, two in Adams County, and one in Westminster. Those nodes should be places to coordinate public investment and concentrate private development, craft unique identities, improve the retail opportunities along the corridor, and enhance the built environment. Two of the nodes (one in Adams County and one in Westminster) are also the locations of new transit stations.

LEVERAGE EXISTING DEVELOPMENT and anchor institutions, including Regis University, to better serve existing residents.

USE NEW INFRASTRUCTURE—such as medians, an enhanced roadway edge, and new connections to existing trails—to connect neighborhoods across the corridor.

REDUCE TRAFFIC SPEEDS to improve safety.

ADDRESS WATER CAPACITY CONSTRAINTS with a comprehensive approach and upfront capital.

IMPLEMENT A DUAL-LEVEL APPROACH TO PARTNERSHIPS whereby elected officials set policy and a technical group focuses on implementation.

Next Steps

Next steps for the Federal Boulevard Healthy Corridors project include working with Adams County on infrastructure funding and working across the three jurisdictions and with key anchor Regis University to foster an intergovernmental collaboration that supports coordinated and complementary corridor-wide improvements, including pedestrian and bike enhancements. The local leadership group is reviewing the potential of the 2.5-mile section of Federal Boulevard to link the downtown Union Station transit hub, the recently completed light-rail corridors, and the U.S. Route 36 multimodal corridor.

The city of Westminster and Adams County have taken a leadership role to form a coalition of the local organizations and agencies involved in Federal Boulevard redevelopment, with ULI and private developers playing a key role. “There is renewed enthusiasm for collaborative solutions to building a healthy Federal Boulevard,” said Lynch. The goals of the coalition, called the Westminster Invest Health Initiative, include fostering collaboration between the organizations, getting buy-in and support from jurisdictional leadership, and focusing on transportation and safety improvements along Federal Boulevard.

OPPOSITE: At the Federal Boulevard local workshop, stakeholders identified challenges and quick wins along the corridor. *(Sara Hammerschmidt)*

ABOVE: Areas of the corridor with newer development, such as the section adjacent to Aria, have wider sidewalks that cater to pedestrians. *(Sara Hammerschmidt)*