

A banner image showing a modern multi-story apartment building, a paved walkway with people, and greenery. The text "Denver Region Sustainable Communities Initiative" is overlaid in a stylized font.

Denver Region Sustainable Communities Initiative



Denver Region Sustainable Communities Initiative (SCI)

In a coordinated effort with 86 partner organizations, the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) was successful in securing a \$4.5 million grant for the benefit of the region. The three-year grant from the Sustainable Communities Partnership, a federal collaboration of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the U.S. Department of Transportation and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, will support regional, corridor, and site-level planning and implementation activities.

The Sustainable Communities Initiative (SCI) will support a consortium of municipalities, counties, state agencies, housing authorities, nonprofits, corporate interests, philanthropic and academic organizations working together to further enhance and implement Metro Vision, the region's long-range plan for growth and development, while addressing one of our region's most pressing and exciting challenges: leveraging the region's \$6.7 billion expansion of the FasTracks transit system.

Goals of the SCI:

The consortium's overarching goal is to align investments, programs and policies to maximize the benefits that result from the region's investment in transit. We anticipate a region with greater access to job opportunities across the entire income spectrum, lower combined transportation and housing costs, reduced consumption of fossil fuels, reduced strain on our air and water resources, and ultimately the development of mixed-use, pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly communities along transit lines that allow residents to easily access their daily needs without having to get into a car.

Overview of Grant-Funded Activities:

The SCI is divided into five main activities. The first three represent distinct but interrelated planning levels – regional, corridor and site-specific (catalytic projects). The remaining two – Stakeholder Engagement and Outcomes Assessment and Knowledge Sharing (OAKS) – cut across and support planning efforts at all three levels.

Regional planning activities will focus on further refinements to Metro Vision, particularly the issues of access to housing choices and economic opportunity. Detailed implementation strategies developed at the corridor level will promote comprehensive and holistic thinking about the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead while bringing Metro Vision closer to implementation. Corridor implementation activities will focus on three transit corridors currently under construction as part of the innovative EAGLE P3 public-private partnership (Gold, East, and Northwest rail/US36 BRT). As part of these implementation efforts, each of the three corridors will select a catalytic project at a specific site that offers the potential for transformational changes. The West Line, which recently completed corridor-wide planning, has identified a fourth Catalytic Project at the Sheridan Station.

Overview of SCI Corridor Implementation Activities:

The SCI will build on prior local planning initiatives in each of the three corridors and support an inter-jurisdictional, corridor-level dialogue to identify shared challenges and potential strategies and tools to address them. Several concurrent efforts will assist in developing implementation strategies.

Corridor Working Groups: The overall effort to develop implementation strategies will be led by Working Groups in each corridor. The Corridor Working Groups will be comprised of local governments, housing authorities, anchor institutions and other authorities and/or districts with the resources and capacity to lead and/or contribute to implementation strategies. The Working Groups will collaborate on an overall vision for each corridor and a detailed implementation strategy, building on all the local planning that has already been done. Reconnecting America, a national non-profit focused on the link between transportation and community development, will serve as the Corridor Coordinator and provide technical assistance and guidance to the Corridor Working Groups. Through the SCI funding is also available for additional technical consulting services, which the Working Group will decide how to use. The goal is not only to develop the strategy, but also to build a partnership among key organizations that will last far into the future as the strategy is implemented.

Stakeholder Committee: To ensure all constituents with a stake in the outcome are engaged in the development of implementation strategies, each Working Group will receive input from a broader Stakeholder Committee representing both business and residential interests. DRCOG will staff and support the activities of the Stakeholder Committee.

Citizens' Academy: Transit Alliance will conduct its successful Citizens' Academy for each of the three corridors, customizing the format and curriculum for each corridor. This leadership development program will further build capacity across a broad range of constituencies by engaging participants in understanding the complexities of combining transportation and community development to support regional goals and enhance quality of life.

Outcomes Assessment and Knowledge Sharing (OAKS): The University of Colorado-Denver (CU Denver) will conduct case studies to help the region better understand past efforts and compile lessons learned and best practices that can inform current and future planning and implementation work. These case studies will evaluate the existing light rail corridors in the Denver region (Southeast and Southwest lines) as well as the corridor nearing completion (West Line). CU Denver will develop issue-based reports (e.g. plan implementation, accessibility, housing, etc.) that will assist current and future corridors in their efforts to implement transit-oriented infrastructure and development.

Regional Resource Group: Several organizations with demonstrated subject-matter expertise in housing, transportation, community and economic development, real estate, creative businesses and the arts, public health, environmental issues, urban agriculture, issues relevant to older adults, and stakeholder engagement are committed and available to provide input and assistance to regional, corridor and catalytic planning and implementation efforts. Many members of the Regional Resource Group have committed matching resources and/or offered services at discounted rates.

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