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Vision for light-rail station takes Evans bridge bouncing in stride

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Ask motorists how they like the bouncing they feel while crossing the Evans Avenue Bridge over Santa Fe Drive and often the response is alarm.

Ask a bridge expert and it's calm.

"We get calls all the time about that bridge," says James Barwick, chief infrastructure engineer for Denver's public works department. "It bounces. It's a perfectly normal phenomenon for that bridge. The girders have to move or they'll crack."

The bridge has become a hot topic of late due to ongoing efforts to create a vision for the area around the Evans Avenue light-rail station over the next 20 to 30 years.

How development unfolds at Evans could be a preview of the way development could go at other light-rail stations, including the University of Denver station on the edge of campus. Each light-rail station's footprint is different, planners allow, but the guiding principles of transit-oriented development are not.

Planning for the Evans station, which sits in the shadow of the bridge, began in January. It will continue through the summer as residents and Denver community planners discuss what aspects of the area ought to change and why.

Among many concerns voiced by residents and business owners is the Evans bridge, which nearly all agree needs help. The bridge makes it tough for people on the west side of Santa Fe Drive to easily reach the light-rail station, and it isn't pedestrian or bicycle friendly to people on either side.

Moreover, many are concerned about the bridge's sufficiency rating, which totaled 85 of 100 points in 2002 and 73 points in 2006. Bridges with scores under 50 are considered in need of replacement, Barwick says. Bridges scoring 50–75 are considered for repair or rehabilitation.

The next rating will occur this year, he adds.

Barwick downplays concerns over the score, pointing out that even new bridges sometimes have scores of 85 due to issues unrelated to worthiness, such as lane widths or functionality. He says that replacing the Evans bridge would be "pretty costly," between \$30 million and \$40 million. However, he says the structure lends itself to modification, which could make using it easier for pedestrians and bicyclists.

City planners say that short-term goals could include improved lighting, street maintenance, safety and



PHOTO BY: Richard Chapman

Most residents and business owners agree that the Evans Avenue Bridge over Santa Fe Drive needs renovation.

comfort, and overall aesthetics.

But the bridge wasn't the only issue that worried residents May 6, when Denver Community Planning and Development conducted its latest public meeting on the plan. Concerns ranged from how high buildings along South Broadway should be to how to keep improved housing affordable.

Other opinions focused on building a pedestrian-bike bridge over Santa Fe Drive, retaining the area's industrial character, attracting an anchor supermarket and retail stores to areas west of Broadway and both north and south of Evans Avenue, expanding light-rail parking without spilling it into surrounding neighborhoods, establishing a circulator bus system to let people shop without use of cars, and improving tree canopy.

Evans plan project manager Barbara Frommell says residents at the meeting seemed to favor targeting Broadway for retail and multistory residential structures and better connecting them to the light-rail station.

Frommell said she anticipates a third public meeting in August and a gathering of the 17-member focus group, which is looking at the Evans plan more intensely, sometime in June or July.

"I am very encouraged by the level of public participation in this planning process," Frommell says.

More than 100 people participated in the public meeting in January and more than 60 attended the one in May.

"Our challenge will be maintain that high level of public engagement through the completion of the plan, and more importantly, throughout the plan's implementation."

For a summary of the planning so far, go to www.denvergov.org/tod (<http://www.denvergov.org/tod>) and click on Evans.

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