



FANS for Cheesman Park

Friends and Neighbors for Cheesman Park

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At the Annual Meeting of Friends and Neighbors for Cheesman Park on January 26, 2021, the proposed changes to North Franklin Street as part of the South Central Community Transportation Network were discussed, based on information provided by the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure (DOTI). A motion was made to send a letter objecting to the proposed changes, including the closure of Franklin at 14th Avenue to northbound traffic; the motion passed unanimously.

Based on materials provided by DOTI planners in Nov. 2020 and again on Feb. 2, 2021, northbound traffic on Franklin Street would be diverted at 14th Avenue. North (left) turns from 14th Avenue onto northbound Franklin would be prohibited, and northbound traffic on Franklin from 13th Avenue would have to turn east (right) onto 14th Avenue. According to traffic counts on July 7, 2020, there were a total of 166 northbound vehicles in the morning peak hour (61 vehicles turning north from 14th Avenue and 105 continuing north on Franklin), and a total of 89 northbound vehicles in the afternoon peak hour (42 turning north from 14th and 47 continuing north on Franklin). The peak-hour counts for bicyclists and pedestrians on this same day at 14th and Franklin were 9 in the morning and 12 in the afternoon. According to DOTI planners, over a full day, 3,800 vehicles use Franklin south of Colfax; it is assumed that 1,900 vehicles are traveling in each direction, and all of the northbound traffic will be diverted at 14th Avenue to side streets.

DOTI planners have referenced *Denver Moves* and the *East Central Area Plan* in support of their proposed changes. However, neither plan specifically talks about this intersection. The *East Central Area Plan*, which was adopted by City Council on October 5, 2020, only states the following under “Implement and upgrade planned Denver Moves: Bikes bikeways”:

“B. Upgrade existing Denver Moves: Bikes shared roadway to a high comfort bikeway on Franklin St. due to connection between 16th Ave., Cheesman [sic] Park, and the medical campus to the north.

“C. Upgrade entrance to Cheesman Park at Williams St. and 13th Ave., install new signals on Williams St. at 13th and 18th Aves., upgrade progression signal at 14th Ave., upgrade bicycle crossing at Colfax Ave. intersection.”

Further, the *East Central Area Plan* states that the goal is to reduce vehicle traffic by 50 percent, increase bicycle use by 7.5 percent, and increase pedestrian use by 15 percent.

Parking will continue to be allowed on the east side of the 1400 block of Franklin. But to access these parking spaces, planners say that southbound vehicles will have to do a U-turn or an unsafe, three-point turn in the middle of the block to access these parking spaces. When parked cars leave, they will be able

to travel north on Franklin to Colfax. This negates the argument that northbound traffic must be stopped (“diverted”) at 14th and Franklin to make a safer street for bicycling.

What is now a predictable, two-block, straight drive on Franklin Street to get to Colfax and the medical providers and businesses to the north will instead require making multiple turns, driving on narrow side streets, and crossing multiple lanes of traffic on higher-speed 13th Avenue, 14th Avenue, and Colfax.

Specific Concerns

- Franklin Street is a major northbound access for the neighborhood as well as for emergency vehicles to the hospitals and medical clinics between 18th and 21st Avenues, both east and west of Franklin. These include Saint Joseph Hospital at 1375 E 19th Avenue, Kaiser Permanente clinics on 19th Avenue at 1960 N Ogden and 2045 N Franklin, Presbyterian / St. Luke’s at 1719 E 19th Ave, and at least four specialty clinics (Progressive Health, Midtown Surgical Center, Rocky Mountain Women’s Care, and Colorado Kidney Care). The Children’s Hospital Urgent Care Center at 1830 N Franklin is temporarily closed. Access is also important to 1stBank at Franklin and Colfax, as well as UMB Bank at Colfax and Gilpin. Access to the north from eastbound Colfax is already complicated because north (left) turns onto Franklin are prohibited, so drivers must turn north at an intersection to the east and double back to Franklin.
- “Diverting” northbound traffic on Franklin at 14th Avenue will force drivers from the Cheesman Park neighborhood to make unnecessarily complicated local trips to medical providers and businesses north of Colfax because there is no north-south transit system alternative on Franklin (the closest transit routes are on Downing and Colorado Boulevard). Drivers, many of them elderly, will have to take alternate routes on narrow adjacent side streets east of Franklin to get to Colfax so they can turn west (left) onto Colfax and then north (right) onto Franklin. These other intersections on Colfax all have comparable accident ratios. This single traffic diversion will result in drivers having to take senseless, roundabout, and unsafe alternate access routes.
- Drivers will not be able to safely use a street west of Franklin to get north of Colfax without going to Downing Street. Drivers can only make a right turn at Lafayette onto Colfax, but they cannot turn north (left) from Colfax onto Franklin. There is no light at Marion and Colfax, making crossing four lanes of traffic on Colfax tricky. And Downing Street presents its own challenges because it changes from a one-way northbound street to a two-way street at the Park Avenue intersection.
- Forcing drivers to find alternate routes to medical providers and businesses north of Colfax will increase the potential for accidents on side streets as well as local air pollution. This directly contradicts goals for Net Zero deaths and a reduced carbon footprint.
- In a meeting with DOTI planners, they explained that southbound drivers wanting to park on the east side of Franklin (heading north) will have to make a U-turn or execute a complicated three-point turn. This could result in unintended consequence for southbound traffic on Franklin and a greater potential for rear-end accidents (the highest percentage of vehicle accidents — 89 out of 292 — from 1/1/2015 to 12/31/2019). According to DOTI, the peak-hour southbound traffic counts on July 7, 2020, were 124 cars in the morning and 278 cars in the afternoon. Cars forced to stop midblock to wait for a driver to execute a three-point turn or even a U-turn will further increase idling time and air pollution. This will also be dangerous for bicyclists traveling both ways on Franklin as they have to dodge drivers making these complicated turns.

Unintended Consequences

The rationale for diverting traffic patterns on Franklin Street at 14th Avenue is not clear because this street is already an existing mapped bike route, with relatively few problems considering the volume of use. As our concerns make obvious, the proposed changes leave many questionable outcomes and will likely result in the following unintended consequences:

- The uncertainties of new, complex, and unpredictable traffic patterns will create dangers for drivers, bicyclists, pedestrians, law enforcement, and emergency vehicles.
- Direct access to Colfax, now a straight two-block drive, will require multiple turns and crossing up to four lanes of traffic on higher-speed east-west streets. For example, instead of driving straight north on Franklin, a driver will have to turn east (right) on 14th Avenue, travel two blocks east to Williams, turn north (left) on Williams to get to a traffic light on Colfax, turn west (left) on Colfax, and then north (right) on Franklin — traveling five additional blocks and making four additional turns.
- Access to multiple important health care facilities north of Colfax will be delayed for both emergency and private vehicles.
- Access to financial institutions, restaurants, and other businesses north of Colfax will be complicated by circuitous access routes, with potential adverse impacts on businesses.
- Current developer plans include a large residential / business complex at the southeast corner of Colfax and Franklin. Access to this development has apparently not been taken into account in terms of circulation patterns, particularly for future patrons and residents coming from the south side of the city.
- “Diverting” northbound access on Franklin at 14th Avenue will adversely and directly affect access for residents of the 1400 block of Franklin. Residents, guests, and service vehicles wanting to park in this block will have to come south from Colfax and then make U-turns or three-point turns in the middle of the block to park on the east side of the street and interfering with other southbound traffic, as well as bicyclists, while executing these maneuvers.
- Future plans for Bus Rapid Transit on Colfax will increase traffic on 13th and 14th Avenues, further complicating access to medical providers, businesses, and residences north of Colfax.
- “Diverting” northbound traffic on Franklin will also prevent direct access to Park Avenue, which connects to other transportation corridors as well as East and Northwest Denver. North-south travel links are not readily provided by the city’s current east-west mass-transit network to these other areas of the city.
- This plan is not aligned with the city’s adopted plans to ensure Net Zero fatalities or reduced carbon emissions due to complicated and circuitous traffic movements.

Conclusion and Alternative Solution

Northbound access on Franklin Street is critical to neighborhood residents who are trying to get to medical providers and businesses north of Colfax, as well as emergency vehicles. Therefore, we request that no diversion of traffic movements be made at 14th Avenue and North Franklin Street and that all present access patterns / turning movements be maintained. If the goal is to change traffic speed behavior, this could be accomplished with less detrimental options, such as traffic light timing, speed bumps, flashing warning lights, and speed monitoring.

Board of Directors

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