



SAM NEWBERG

# Ten Denver TODs

**An ambitious expansion of Denver's transit network has opened up a host of opportunities for transit-oriented development.**

IN NOVEMBER 2004, Colorado voters approved a sixth-tenths-of-a-cent sales tax increase to generate \$4.7 billion for rail transit improvements in the Denver area over the next ten years. Known as FasTracks, 119 miles (190 km) of new light rail, commuter rail, and bus rapid transit will be constructed by 2016. When built out, FasTracks will connect downtown Denver's Union Station with points in all directions of the metropolitan area. Over 50 new stations will take shape along the new tracks, creating a huge opportunity for transit-oriented developments (TODs) to emerge across the area.

FasTracks has been a boon for developers, landowners, and planners, and a flurry of TODs are being planned along existing and future rail lines. The Regional Transportation District (RTD), the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG), and numerous municipalities are partnering with the private sector to take advantage of these TOD opportunities. The city of Denver has even created a new "transit mixed-use" (TMU) zoning code to allow for increased densities around station areas. It permits a floor/area ratio (FAR) of five and allows for heights of up to 220 feet (67 m), or 18 to 20 stories, thus encouraging the type of densities that some transit station areas can support.

Currently, light rail in Denver serves downtown, the Welton Corridor immediately to its northeast, and the suburbs of Englewood and Littleton to the south along the southwest corridor. A spur also serves the Pepsi Center and Union Station in Lower Downtown, or LoDo, on the northwest edge of downtown. Though not

part of FasTracks, the southeast corridor light-rail service will open in late 2006 as part of the T-REX project that is also upgrading Interstate 25. Light-rail lines built as part of FasTracks will include the Gold Line and the west corridor to the western suburbs of Denver, the I-225 corridor through Aurora in the east part of the metropolitan area, and extensions of both the southeast and southwest corridors. Three commuter-rail lines will serve Boulder and Longmont, the north metropolitan area (east of I-25), and Denver International Airport. A bus rapid transit line will run along Highway 36 to Boulder.

ULI Colorado has formed a TOD Best Practices Committee to help bring together local jurisdictions, RTD, the private sector, and national TOD experts such as the Center for Transit-Oriented Development (CTOD), based in Oakland, California. According to Marilee Utter, a TOD expert and chair of ULI Colorado, "Transit only works when it takes you places you want to go." Thus, a TOD can be deemed as successful if it increases ridership, provides economic benefits to the local jurisdiction, creates affordable housing, or simply adds transportation or lifestyle choices for residents and employees. ULI Colorado hopes to be part of the solution to achieve the all-important goal of appropriate development around stations.

Transit-oriented development is not a one-size-fits-all scenario. TODs can be extremely dense and consist primarily of office towers and residential high rises, or they can be much more geared to park-and-rides with less-dense residential concentrations. Rail stations can also be a huge

asset to employment centers, campuses, and stadiums.

But challenges abound. Many cities do not have zoning that allows for or encourages the type of density TOD can achieve. There is ongoing debate at many station areas about whether nearby sites are used for development, parking, or both, and striking a balance between the two can be difficult, especially as interests vary across various government jurisdictions and landowners. As well, many of Denver's rail stations are located alongside or in the median of a freeway, which creates barriers to development.

A few TODs already exist along light-rail lines in Denver, most notably Englewood City Center along the southwest corridor. Dozens of others are planned for the system in the coming years, and represent a huge opportunity to provide transportation and lifestyle choices for residents of the Denver area, and to provide better access to jobs.

The following ten examples of TOD are either existing or planned across the Denver metropolitan area that represent a cross section of the urban transect, with some in the urban core and others in suburban areas.

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### ULI 2006 FALL MEETING IN DENVER

Two mobile workshops will allow fall meeting attendees to explore existing TODs along Denver's southeast and southwest corridors on Tuesday, October 17. Learn more at [www.uli.org/meetings](http://www.uli.org/meetings).



## 1. Englewood City Center

**Developers:** City of Englewood, Miller Weingarten, RTD, Trammell Crow Residential, Wal-Mart  
**Architects:** David Owen Tryba Architects, Kaufman Meeks and Partners, Inc.  
**Area plan:** Calthorpe Associates

The first major transit-oriented development to be developed in the Denver area, Englewood City Center is frequently visited by practitioners seeking to understand TOD as a concept. Encompassing 55 acres (22.3 ha), it is a public/private development that was completed in 2002 to replace an aging shopping center. It includes 438 residential units, 700,000 square feet (65,116 sq m) of retail space (including a Wal-Mart), the Englewood municipal offices and library, and a large civic open space.

Englewood City Center offers numerous lessons for how to develop TODs. The site is well laid out and walkable, particularly from the station platform. Residential development (whose residents are most likely to use light rail) is located closest to the station, as is the civic center and park. Major retailers are mostly visible from the nearby major roadway. However, all uses are connected on a street grid, and there are pedestrian connections to adjacent neighborhoods.

Public art abounds. In addition to a fountain in the park, there are numerous pieces of public art, mostly sculpture, which are intended to improve the pedestrian realm.

Much of the development is denser than the surrounding area, and mixed-use buildings are common. In one example, a gym is located on the second floor of a retail structure. Many of the residential buildings contain ground-floor retail space, and a couple retail structures have second-story office space.

Wal-Mart was a critical piece of Englewood City Center, and provided the financing for the project to move ahead. The city and developer realized that a big-box store and light rail could both be part of the same project, as long as they were in appropriate locations on the site. However, the Wal-Mart site is also part of the street grid, enabling it to be more easily redeveloped in the event that the store closes.

## 2. I-25/Broadway Station

**Developer:** Cherokee Investment Partners  
**Architect:** 4240 Architecture

Better known as the former Gates Rubber Plant, this 70-acre (28.3-ha) site located immediately south of downtown Denver is regarded as the “crown jewel” among TOD advocates in the area. It is one of the largest TOD sites in the metropolitan area, and its station, I-25/Broadway, is where the southeast and southwest corridors meet. It can therefore take advantage of traffic from two rail lines, and it is hoped that a major office user can be found to locate there. (Interestingly, Gates moved its offices to another transit-adjacent site near Union Station in downtown Denver.)

Cherokee Investment Partners, based in Raleigh, North Carolina, but with a major office in Denver, owns 50 acres (20 ha) of the site (the remaining 20 acres [8 ha] belong to RTD), and the city of Denver has rezoned it to TMU-30 to allow for increased densities. At this time, 6 million square feet (558,139 sq m) of development are planned for the site, but exact uses have not yet been determined, although they will likely include a significant number of residential units (up to 4,000) as well as a substantial amount of office space, ideally with a major tenant. Cherokee would like to incorporate portions of existing buildings as part of the redevelopment, where appropriate. Site cleanup and contamination are also major hurdles.





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## 4. Arvada

**Developer (Water Tower Village):** Concert American Homes

**Architect (Water Tower Village):** JG Johnson Architects

**Area plan:** VMWP

An older suburb northwest of Denver, Arvada will have three stations on the Gold Line, including one in its historic core. A Main Street district, the quaint Historic Olde Town Arvada offers an opportunity for light rail to be incorporated with and bolster the existing walkable fabric, enabling it to be a classic transit district.

A nearby residential project, the 270-unit Water Tower Village, is under construction just to the west of the station area, with a mix of rowhouses and lofts. The plan for the Arvada station area, also designed by VMWP, calls for 750 housing units, 40,000 square feet (3,720 sq m) of additional commercial space, an

## 3. 30th/Pearl—Boulder

**Developer:** City of Boulder

**Planner of Boulder Transit Village site:** Van Meter Williams Pollack (VMWP)

The city of Boulder will have one station along the commuter-rail line that will traverse the Highway 36 corridor and continue north to Longmont. The Boulder TOD will be part of a major redevelopment of the surrounding area, as well as providing bus, bicycle, and pedestrian connections.

Denver-based Van Meter Williams Pollack (VMWP) has designed a plan for the 11-acre (4.5-ha) site immediately adjacent to the transit station that includes an intermodal facility for buses, and will provide connections to the rest of Boulder via the Dash, Hop, Skip, Bound bus system. Also planned for the transit village site are 207 housing units (apartments, townhouses, and live/work units) and 16,000 square feet (6,477 sq m) of retail space.

The city of Boulder is preparing an area plan for 430 acres (174 ha) in the vicinity of the station. Included in this area are several underutilized or aging industrial sites, a newer retail center that could be redeveloped over time, and the nearby Steelyards mixed-use project, which includes rowhouses, live/work units, and retail space. Steelyards serves as an example of the type of development that may be seen in the area in the future.



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intermodal transit plaza with cafés and restaurants, a 450-car structure with ground-floor artists galleries, a new library, and streetscape improvements.

## 5. Belleview

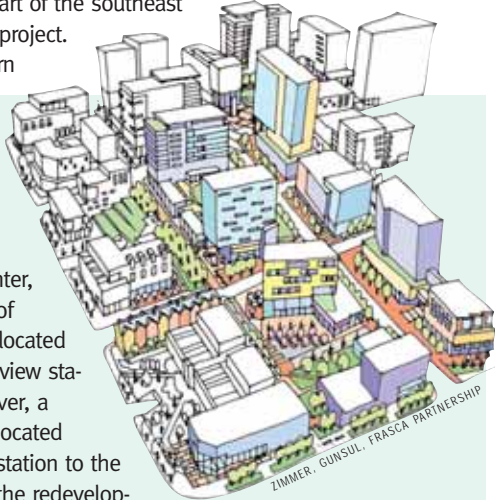
**Developer:** Continuum Partners

**Architect:** Zimmer, Gunsul, Frasca Partnership

Though not part of the FasTracks legislation, the Belleview station will open in 2006 as part of the southeast corridor T-REX light-rail project.

It is also at the southern end of the I-225 corridor, which, as part of FasTracks, will serve Aurora, thus making the Belleview station a key transfer point.

The Denver Tech Center, a major concentration of office development, is located to the east of the Belleview station, across I-25. However, a major planned TOD is located nearly adjacent to the station to the west, and will include the redevelopment of the Mountain View Golf Course. Denver-based Continuum Partners is under contract to develop 18 of its 50 acres (7.3 of its 20.2 ha), which is also zoned TMU-30 for high-density development. Preliminary plans call for 2.3 million square feet (213,953 sq m) of development, including 1,900 residential units, 160,000 square feet (14,883 sq m) of retail space, and 600,000 square feet (55,813 sq m) of office space.



## 6. Five Points—The Point

**Developers:** Five Points Business Association, Hope Communities

**Architect:** Van Tilburg, Banvard & Soderburgh

Northeast of downtown Denver, the Five Points neighborhood was historically the African American center of town. Five Points is notable not for any particular project, but for TOD as an organizing principle for redevelopment of the district overall. Light rail operates as more of a streetcar in this area, with several stops over a few short blocks along Welton Street, a commercial corridor.



Recent developments include the Point, a 60-unit low- and moderate-income rental project with ground-floor retail space. Numerous other opportunities exist for new infill development, as well as renovations of existing buildings. Five Points is one example of how neighborhoods evolve over time without being reliant on one single development, but can use transit to spur redevelopment of an entire area.

## 7. Fitzsimons

**Developer:** Fitzsimons Redevelopment Authority

**Architect (Children's Hospital):** H + L Architecture

Located in Aurora, the two Fitzsimons stations (Fitzsimons Commons and Fitzsimons South) will serve the new University of Colorado's Health Sciences Center.

The expanding Health Sciences Center, located on 227 acres (92 ha), will open a new children's hospital in 2007, and be complemented by the adjacent Colorado Bioscience Park, which will contain up to 4,000 jobs when complete. The Health Sciences Center is expected to be a major source of ridership along the I-225 corridor.



## 8. Central Platte Valley—Riverfront Tower, Park Place Lofts, Promenade Lofts

**Developer:** East West Partners

**Architect:** 4240 Architecture

Near Denver's Union Station, the Central Platte Valley is experiencing significant residential development where none existed just five years ago.

One example is across a sweeping foot-bridge from LoDo and Union Station. There, East West Partners, based in Avon, Colorado, has developed the Riverfront Tower, Park Place Lofts, and Promenade Lofts, designed by Denver-based 4240 Architecture, which contain 197 units and more than 30,000 square feet (2,790 sq m) of retail space. The adjacent Commons Park provides a major neighborhood amenity, and the foundation for East West and a variety of other developers to continue development in the area.



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## 9. Brighton Pavilions

**Developers:** Brighton Urban Development Company, LLC; city of Brighton; RTD

**Architect:** Gensler

Adjacent to an existing bus park-and-ride in the northeast Denver metropolitan area, Brighton Pavilions opened in 2005. Designed by Gensler, a Houston-based architecture firm, it includes retail space, restaurants, and a 12-screen movie theater on a 14-acre (5.7-ha) site near downtown Brighton.

Brighton Pavilions is unusual in that it is a TOD based on bus service, not rail service. It is, however, a successful partnership with RTD. The retail stores and park-and-ride are complementary uses, each benefiting from the other, particularly at commuting times. Furthermore, the shared parking facility is used by commuters by day and by patrons of the theater and sit-down restaurants in the evenings.



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## 10. Union Station

**Developer and architect:** not yet selected by city

The central hub for light-rail and commuter-rail lines linking all points in the Denver metropolitan area will be Union Station, located in LoDo.

The station, which dates back to 1881, currently is the terminus of the Central Platte Valley light-rail spur, as well as Amtrak service. Future plans call for all-new commuter and light-rail lines to terminate there (with the exception of the I-225 corridor), and be primarily underground, allowing 1.4 million square feet (130,232 sq m) of additional development around the station to occur. In addition, the nearby RTD bus transit station will be moved to a new underground facility at Union Station. The popular 16th Street Mall free bus will have a stop there as well.

A request for proposals is currently out for the estimated 20-year development of Union Station. Two development teams are in the running to be awarded the project, one that includes Continuum Partners and East West Partners, and the other led by Cherokee Investment Partners. A developer should be chosen by the end of 2006.



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