

MAKING COMMUNITIES HEALTHIER

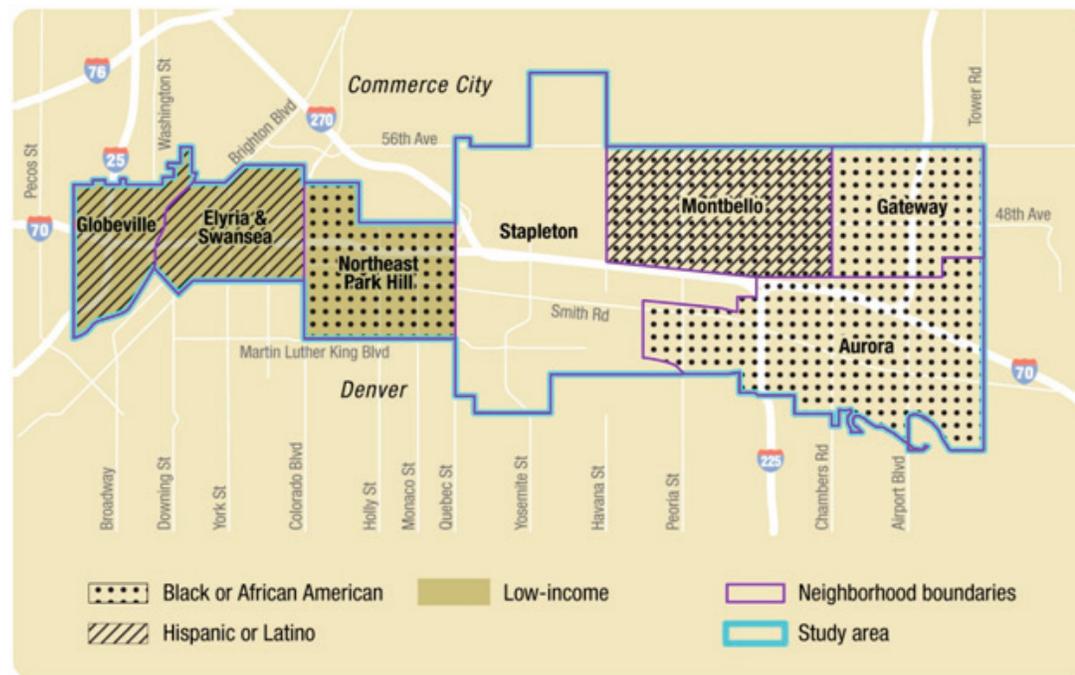
A White Paper

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Health Disparities: The 2013 Report, Exploring Health Equity in Colorado's 10 Winnable Battles, published by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's Office of Health Equity, included the Interstate 70 (I-70) corridor through the Elyria and Swansea Neighborhood (see Exhibit 1), located northeast of downtown Denver, as an area of particular concern for health issues because many of the neighborhood residents live very close to I-70. This follow-up white paper highlights the decade-long effort by the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) to reconstruct the structurally deficient 50-year-old I-70 viaduct, which crosses through the Elyria and Swansea Neighborhood, in a way that brings improvements to the neighborhood and reduces the health impacts of the highway.

Construction of I-70 through Denver was completed in 1964—prior to the passage of the National Environmental Policy Act and several major environmental laws intended to protect public health and the environment. Today, CDOT's efforts to reconstruct the highway—including a proposal to tear down the viaduct that has divided Elyria and Swansea for decades—are being conducted under the full regulation of these laws, along with more recent guidance, to ensure environmental justice principles are maintained. This work also comes at a time of renewed focus on these neighborhoods from the City of Denver leadership, including the recent creation of the North Denver Cornerstone Collaborative.

Exhibit 1. Neighborhoods along the I-70 East project corridor.



The Elyria and Swansea Neighborhood

As noted in the Health Disparities Report, health problems related to air and soil pollutants are of particular concern in residential areas that are very close to a highway. These health conditions (e.g., increased incidence of

asthma) can be similar to those associated with living near heavy industrial activities, which also are present in the Elyria and Swansea Neighborhood. Many of the health conditions found in this neighborhood also can be linked with smoking, poor dietary habits, genetics, and alcohol use. A number of factors used to measure health conditions—such as death, asthma, obesity, diabetes, and cancer—also can be linked to other factors, such as age and income.

Studies show that the communities along the I-70 East corridor are composed of many racial and ethnic minorities and low-income households. The Elyria and Swansea Neighborhood is 83.8 percent Hispanic or Latino. Globeville, Elyria and Swansea, and Northeast Park Hill neighborhoods all have high numbers of low-income households. Exhibit 1, above, shows where low-income and minority populations are located within the neighborhoods along I-70 East.

The demographics and health disparities faced by the residents of the Elyria and Swansea Neighborhood put increased importance on how I-70 is reconstructed and how residents are involved in CDOT's work.

What CDOT is Doing

CDOT enforces Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to stop discrimination based on national origin and implements Executive Order 13166 to assure access to federally funded programs and activities for people with limited English proficiency. Because I-70 East is located along low-income and minority neighborhoods, CDOT has gone above and beyond state and federal regulations to make sure everyone within the project area receives equal treatment.

To address some of the hardships for the residents of this neighborhood caused by living close to one of the state's busiest highways, CDOT has been working with residents to identify measures to reduce impacts from the highway. CDOT meets with community members once

every month in their neighborhoods to get their input on the project's progress and gather ideas on how to improve the quality of life for residents. Every public meeting includes Spanish interpretation services, and all documents concerning the project are provided in both Spanish and English.

One major commitment resulting from these meetings is CDOT's proposal to remove the viaduct and replace it with a below-ground highway. Further, CDOT has committed to place a cover over the lowered highway between Columbine Street and Clayton Street. In addition to removing visible and psychological community barriers after five decades of being divided by the viaduct, the highway cover also provides opportunities to create community gardens, jogging trails, basketball courts, or other spaces that promote a healthy and active lifestyle. CDOT is working with the community to identify what elements should be included on the cover.

Recognizing the concern about potential impacts to air quality from the I-70 East project, CDOT is performing a detailed study analyzing air quality, both now and over the next 20 years. This study examines 12 air pollutants and mobile source air toxics and looks at emissions levels over time to account for increased traffic volume.

In addition, CDOT will make sure several air quality control measures are implemented during construction, including:

- ▶ Checking air quality to make sure standards are maintained
- ▶ Covering, wetting, compacting, or using chemicals to control dust
- ▶ Using wind barriers and wind screens to prevent the spread of dust from the site
- ▶ Installing gravel pads to prevent dirt from being tracked onto public streets
- ▶ Using street sweepers to remove dirt tracked onto streets
- ▶ Covering all dump trucks leaving sites to keep dirt and dust from spilling onto streets

Because children are especially sensitive to air quality effects, CDOT has committed to protect those who attend Swansea Elementary School, which is located next to the highway. By providing new doors, new windows, and a new heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system, CDOT will help keep the pollution and dust from entering the school building, especially during construction. CDOT is also seeking ways to help the homeowners close to the project area to upgrade their houses with new doors and windows and HVAC systems.

Other measures will be taken to reduce air pollutants in the area after the project is done. These include, but are not limited to:

- ▶ Routine street sweeping to reduce dust
- ▶ Increased street sweeping in the project area after snow storms to reduce the accumulation of particulate matter along the roadways
- ▶ Optimized signal timing at intersections and along arterial streets near the freeway to reduce vehicle delay and tailpipe emissions
- ▶ Congestion pricing and commuter incentive programs that reduce peak-period highway congestion and emissions
- ▶ Transportation demand management options, such as high-occupancy vehicle lanes and agreements with major employers to promote and implement flexible work programs

The Health Disparities Report concludes with a number of recommendations to address negative health outcomes. This case study is intended to highlight an example of how a major infrastructure project can be undertaken in a way that responds to many of these recommendations. In particular, CDOT's commitment to involving the community in deciding the future of the highway, the proposal to remove the viaduct and lower and cover the highway with a park, and the environmental-justice focused mitigations touch on the following recommendations:

- ▶ Engaging communities of color, people with limited English proficiency, the LGBT communities, and other marginalized groups in policy development and implementation to promote health equity and reduce disparities
- ▶ Supporting communities in identifying their assets, leaders, and resources to build strategies based on their strengths
- ▶ Connecting leaders and stakeholders of disenfranchised groups with policy makers and networks to increase their spheres of influence, and to impact policy and decisions that affect their communities
- ▶ Creating healthy neighborhoods, addressing pollution and the built environment itself—access to parks, good public transportation and job opportunities
- ▶ Enforcing new and existing regulations, such as Titles IV and VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Executive Order 13166 issued in 2000, which stop discrimination and ensure access to federally conducted and funded programs and activities for people who have limited proficiency in English

In the coming years, CDOT is committed to working with the City and County of Denver and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment as partners as the study is completed and the project moves into construction.