



May 8, 2019

Susan Wood
Regional Transportation District
1560 Broadway, Suite 700
Denver, CO 80202

Re: Comment on 16th Street Mall Improvements Environmental Assessment

Dear Ms. Wood,

At its regular meeting of May 6, 2019, the Downtown Denver Partnership's (Partnership) Management Group voted unanimously to support the findings of the 16th Street Mall Improvements Environmental Assessment (EA) and to authorize that this letter be submitted to you as part of the EA public comment process.

The Partnership has been involved in the development, funding, design, and implementation of the 16th Street Mall (Mall) since it was first discussed in the 1970s. Since the Mall opened in 1982, the Partnership, through its management of the Mall Management District and, subsequently, the Downtown Denver Business Improvement District (BID), has also played a central role in the everyday operation and management of the Mall. With all of that history, the Partnership is keenly aware of the social and economic importance of the Mall to both Downtown Denver and the entire metro region.

We are also aware of the challenges the Mall has faced and is facing, particularly in regard to its crumbling, 37 year-old infrastructure. We have worked especially closely with the City of Denver, RTD and the BID in the last 11 years to review and analyze every aspect of the Mall's infrastructure, operations, activation, economic development, safety, and security. All this work has been brought together through the Environmental Clearance process that began in 2017 and has led to the recently issued EA. We have also been deeply involved, both at the staff and the board levels, in the development of the EA and its recommended Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). We are thus very familiar with every aspect of the EA and strongly support its conclusions, including the recommended LPA. In particular, we want to call attention to the following findings and recommendations:

- Although the original design of the Mall has served Downtown well in the last four decades, the granite pavers are failing at an accelerating rate, their surfaces are slick and hazardous, the electrical system is worn out, and the remaining trees are approaching the end of their useful lives. Therefore, we support the LPA recommendation for a complete reconstruction of the Mall in a way that honors the original design intent of I.M. Pei and Olin Partnership, but addresses maintenance problems and establishes a new infrastructure that will be more resilient than the current design. We are especially supportive of providing new granite pavers with a different finish that will be more slip-resistant, a new drainage system that will minimize the freeze-thaw cycles that have caused the paving system to fail, a stormwater management strategy that will enhance water quality, and a new design for the Mall's urban forest that will provide much better growing conditions for the trees and also add 100 new tree locations along the Mall.





Downtown Denver Partnership

- Throughout the development of the EA, the Mall “partners” (the City of Denver, RTD, Federal Transit Administration and the Partnership) have done an excellent and thorough job of engaging the community in envisioning with the next 40 years of the Mall should look like. We commend our partners and the consulting team for both the depth and the variety of community engagement that has been undertaken, from public meetings to in-depth workshops to focus groups to one-on-one meetings, and which has led to what we feel is a community consensus about the future of the Mall, as reflected in this EA and the recommended LPA.
- As the organization responsible for implementing many of the activation strategies in Downtown, from small-scale performances to large events and to multi-day demonstration projects such as Meet in the Street, we strongly support the EA recommendations regarding widening the sidewalks, eliminating the medians, and providing large portions of the Mall that will be curbsless. All of these recommendations will enhance the everyday experience of Mall users, encourage them to stay longer on the Mall, enhance the economic vitality of the adjoining businesses, and provide us the flexibility to program and activate the Mall in a wide variety of ways that will be inclusive and accessible to the entire community throughout the year.

As the Mall Reconstruction project moves into its next phase, we encourage the partners to continue to involve the business community - including property owners, ground floor businesses, Mall vendors, and employers throughout the downtown area – in the reconstruction process. This means meaningful participation in the remaining design decisions, timely notification of all relevant design and construction activities, and appropriate opportunities for all Mall users, from the business community and elsewhere, to express their concerns.

One of those most important concerns will be the negative impacts on existing businesses and properties, including limited access, noise, construction dust, interruption of utilities, and other services and potential conflicts with redevelopment or renovation of Mall-adjacent properties. We encourage all parties to be keenly aware of these disruptions and the negative economic consequences they will cause, and to devise and execute strategies that will mitigate the negative impacts over the next 2 to 4 years of design and construction.

Finally, we want to thank the Federal Transit Administration, the City of Denver, RTD, the 106 Consulting Parties, and the consulting team for the collaboration, vision, and patience they have all shown during this two-year process. The result has been this very thorough and thoughtful EA and the visionary and respectful LPA that is its key recommendation.

We look forward to continuing our deep involvement in the evolution of the Mall as it continues to be the signature iconic place and identity element for Downtown Denver for the next 40 years and beyond.

Sincerely,

Rob Cohen

Chair, Downtown Denver Partnership Management Group

