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The Voice of Aurora: Light rail sans parking is the fast-track to disaster

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As transportation officials have begun the long, laborious process of planning the long-awaited light rail and Interstate 225 corridor, two issues have crept into discussion that require immediate attention.

Lessons learned from the Nine Mile station may have ultimately been forgotten as parking plans have been relegated to wait-and-see determinations made when facilities near completion.

It would seem that their pragmatic approach may not be the most practical after execution.

Already, development around the proposed light rail stations is beginning to fill in, and room for parking is rapidly dwindling.

A peruse through the Nine Mile station at 8:30 a.m. on any weekday shows demand is high for those wishing to commute to work via the rail. Parking at the nearby Dayton station, is full with overflow parking from commuters left without an option at the Parker garage.

Light rail officials have said that the increased demand was hard to predict, and to better align with the Denver Regional Council of Governors' 2035 plan for metro area transit, the city may be forced to explore other options for coping with the parking crunch that is soon to follow.

It's clear, keeping the metro area and its mass transit system relatively congestion-free is going to take a monumental, far-reaching parking plan.

It would be in FasTracks' and the city's best interest to explore and plan for heavy parking structures as an integral part of the light rail plan, rather than adding costly garages later on.

As neighborhoods in south Aurora boom, transit stations will swell with travelers looking to ride the rail to the airport and into downtown Denver - already apparent at the Nine-Mile parking structure.

RTD officials have said parking structures near East Colfax Avenue and Park-n-Rides near the proposed Iliff, City Center and Peoria stations, are planned to help curb the overwhelming need for parking at these stations. Although officials have started with good intentions, it seems that parking needs to become part of the primary plan of transit officials - not a costly afterthought.

Along with parking struggles, widening Aurora's major arterial highway has seemingly taken backseat as funding has become scarce for the once-vital project in Aurora. After decades, every valid excuse for why I-225 has still not been widened has worn too thin.

Now, as a route for the light rail is finalized, Colorado Department of Transportation officials should recognize the opportunity to widen Interstate 225 and begin work within the corridor to eliminate some of the congestion that plugs the major Aurora route. Such a coordination could save taxpayers millions of dollars and endless headaches.

More lanes southeast of Parker Road has done well to ease flows going toward the interchange with Interstate 25, but now as the former Fitzsimons campus explodes with new growth and more travelers, widening the road north has become imperative.

Representatives from the Colorado Department of Transportation said in a recent story by The Aurora Sentinel that funding issues have created problems in creating a definitive time line for the project.

Though, with RTD's pending massive construction project through the corridor, it would stand to reason that the time would be right to widen the road when construction begins on the light rail.

Considering the success that CDOT and RTD experienced during the TREX construction along Interstate 225, it would only make sense that designers would replicate the success of Denver's project right next door in Aurora.