

## Rocky Mountain News

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### Rail opening set for 2015 despite study running late

**By Kevin Flynn, Rocky Mountain News**  
**November 8, 2007**

The last new FasTracks corridor to get under way, the \$619 million Interstate 225 light-rail line, kicked off its environmental study far behind schedule Wednesday but with a strategy for catching up.

The Regional Transportation District held two meetings in Aurora to begin gathering public input, but it won't be as wide-ranging as other new corridors' studies have been.

"Now is the time for input from the public," said Nancy Regnier.

The input they got was to get going.

"I have only one thing to say," said Donell Nimmis of Aurora. "I want it finished now."

Planned to start two years ago in the original FasTracks plan's schedule, the environmental study is being done as a lower-level "evaluation" rather than a full-blown environmental impact study.

That means some issues will be considered already settled, including using light rail instead of considering commuter rail or buses.

That, along with use of the design-build contracting method used to accelerate the T-REX project that was completed last year on Interstates 25 and 225, may help RTD recover some of the lost time.

As a result, the opening of the 10 1/2-mile line is still scheduled for 2015.

It is essentially an extension of the T-REX light rail, which now stops at Nine Mile park-n- Ride at Parker Road, making the choice of light rail over other types of transit a no-brainer.

It would run in the I-225 right of way for much of the distance, with jogs east into Aurora Town Center and Aurora City Center, and west into the Fitz-simons campus. It will connect with the FasTracks commuter rail line between downtown Denver and Denver International Airport.

The corridor starts behind schedule in large part because of a long impasse with the Colorado Department of Transportation over RTD's use of state highway land. CDOT wants to preserve enough room for an eventual eight-lane road, which RTD has agreed to.

The project is being managed by Larry Warner, who as a CDOT engineer was in charge of T-REX. He is now a consultant.

*flynnk@RockyMountainNews.com or 303-954-5247*

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