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Fort Collins' Mason project on right path

Residents sometimes criticize government leaders for their lack of vision, reluctance to plan or inability to invest for the future - and rightly so.

But that isn't the case with the Mason Corridor, which has evolved from a project focused primarily on transit to one that offers innovative land-use planning and a significant economic benefit down the road. The corridor that includes rapid bus transit, bike lanes and pedestrian-friendly amenities will run 5 miles, from Cherry Street to the north to Harmony Road on the south end of the city.

Sixty-percent of Fort Collins' jobs exist within walking distance of the corridor area. By connecting the downtown commercial and service centers to Colorado State University and South College Avenue, this is a project with significant opportunities.

Last week, an environmental assessment on the project's MAX Bus Rapid Transit Project reinforced the idea that the corridor will be beneficial to the environment by encouraging alternative transportation. The MAX system also is expected to reduce the burden on College Avenue.

The bulk of the funding for Mason will come from federal (\$60 million) and state (about \$8 million) grants, with the city picking up the nearly \$6 million difference.

That's not to say challenges don't exist. For one, the environmental report found that the historic Public Service Co. building will either have to be moved or demolished. The city also will have to buy 17 acres of land.

And perhaps one of the biggest hurdles is that city officials will have to find \$500,000 to \$700,000 each year for operations and maintenance costs. But City Council members also should consider the economic benefit the Mason Corridor is projected to bring to the city. The \$74.2 million project is expected to net an economic impact of \$100 million to \$120 million in the form of property tax and sales tax revenue as well as construction employment.

If completed as planned, the Mason Corridor could become a role model of how smart transportation planning can enhance economic opportunities and veritably change the social and physical infrastructure of a community.

Participate

> The public has until July 30 to comment on the environment assessment report for the Mason Corridor. Go to, www.fcgov.com/mason.

> A public hearing will be held from 4 to 7 p.m., July 9, at the Fort Collins Senior Center, 1200 Raintree Drive.

> For more information or to comment, visit the city's Web site, or call senior transportation planner Denise Weston at 416-2643 or e-mail dweston@fcgov.com.