



## **Mason Corridor is Investment in City's Future**

### **Column**

**Oct. 19, 2007**

by Mike Freeman  
Economic Advisor, City of Fort Collins

In a time when the city budget is still strapped, why does the 2008-2009 City Manager's Recommended Budget include funding for the Mason Corridor project? This is one of the most frequently asked questions that we have heard from the public during recent budget conversations. In short, it's because the Mason Corridor is a solid investment in the long-term economic health of our community. For an investment of approximately \$2.5 million in one-time cash, plus \$1.5 million of in-kind contributions, the city of Fort Collins has the opportunity to leverage nearly \$54 million in federal grants and \$8 million in state funding. The Downtown Development Authority is helping to fund the local contribution.

The Mason Corridor Project has been in the works for several years. For a long time, it was viewed only as a transportation project, some going so far as to call it the "empty bus" corridor. In reality, this is much more than a transportation solution. It's a major component of our economic strategy and fundamental to the urban development of Fort Collins. The Mason Corridor has the potential to link the major economic hubs of Fort Collins via trails, transit, and road. A recent economic analysis of the project shows that the city's investment of approximately \$4 million could leverage nearly \$54 million in federal transit funding, as well as generate an estimated \$9.7 million in property tax revenue and \$16.7 million in sales tax revenue over the next 24 years. In total, construction of the Mason Corridor will generate an estimated \$102 million in direct, indirect and induced economic impacts.

In addition to the economic benefit, the Mason Corridor does have an important transportation component. A bus rapid transit service, called MAX, will provide quick and frequent service to connect residential, employment and retail neighborhoods. MAX is similar to light rail, but uses environmentally-friendly, modern rubber-tired vehicles. MAX will link major destinations and activity centers along the Mason Corridor including the downtown commercial, cultural, and business centers, Colorado State University, University Mall, Foothills Mall and South College retail areas. Sixty percent of Fort Collins jobs are within one mile of the Mason Corridor.

MAX provides an important addition to Colorado State University's continuing effort to encourage more students, faculty and staff to use transit. The University will also gain a direct connection between the main campus and both the federal research center and the Veterinary Teaching Hospital.

With its own dedicated roadway, MAX will operate nearly twice as fast as auto travel along College Avenue, and provide high-frequency service every 10 minutes. Stations will incorporate

new high-quality amenities that are similar to light rail, with low floor boarding platforms, sleek rapid transit vehicles, next bus arrival information, and pre-pay fare machine.

The Mason Corridor and MAX vision could soon become reality. The project has been submitted to the Federal Transit Administration to request federal funds which, when coupled with the local and state funding, would allow us to build the project. We will learn the results of the request later this year.

You can learn more about this economic investment at [fcgov.com/mason](http://fcgov.com/mason). It's not everyday that you get to see vision transformed into reality, but we're on the verge of seeing the Mason Corridor transform the future of Fort Collins.