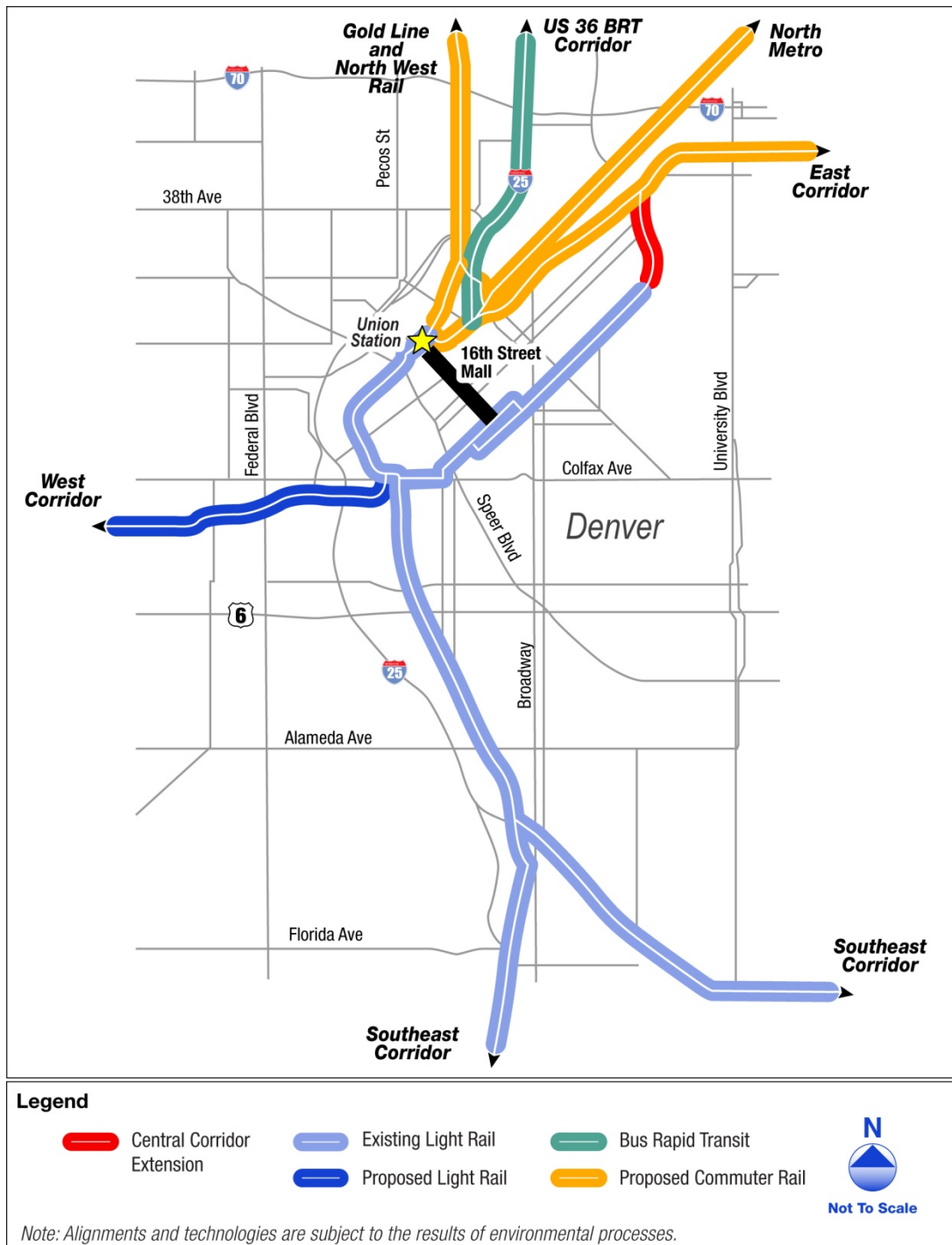


# 1.0 PROJECT PURPOSE AND NEED

The *FasTracks Plan* includes the extension of the Central Corridor from its current terminus at 30th/Downing to a connection to the East Corridor commuter rail service planned between Denver Union Station (DUS) and DIA. The location of the Central Corridor Extension is shown in Figure 1-1.

**Figure 1-1  
Central Corridor Extension in Relation to other FasTracks Corridors**



The purpose of the Central Corridor Extension is to provide high-quality, fixed-guideway transit that improves transportation access and mobility with connections to the rest of the RTD transit system that is consistent with previous planning efforts, including the *2030 Metro Vision Regional Transportation Plan*, the *FasTracks Plan*, and the associated referendum vote of November 2004.

## 1.1 PROJECT HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The Central Corridor light rail line originally opened in 1994 and was the first segment of light rail in Denver. The rail line was 5.3 miles in length, and extended from I-25 and Broadway to the Denver downtown area, and northeast along Welton Street through the Five Points neighborhood to 30th Avenue and Downing Street. The Central Corridor was connected to the Southwest Corridor light rail line in July 2000, the Central Platte Valley light rail spur in April 2002, and the Southeast Corridor light rail line in November 2006.

Beginning in June 2003, analysis of the Central Corridor Extension was conducted as part of the I-70 East Corridor EIS, a joint effort between RTD, FTA, CDOT, FHWA, and CCD. In June 2006, the highway and transit elements of the I-70 East Corridor EIS were separated into two independent projects because they serve different travel markets, are located in different corridors, and have different funding sources.

The transit elements continued to be analyzed under the East Corridor EIS, while the highway elements were analyzed under the I-70 East EIS. Until early in 2007 the East Corridor EIS, conducted by RTD with FTA as the lead agency, focused on transit improvements for both the East Corridor and the Central Corridor Extension.

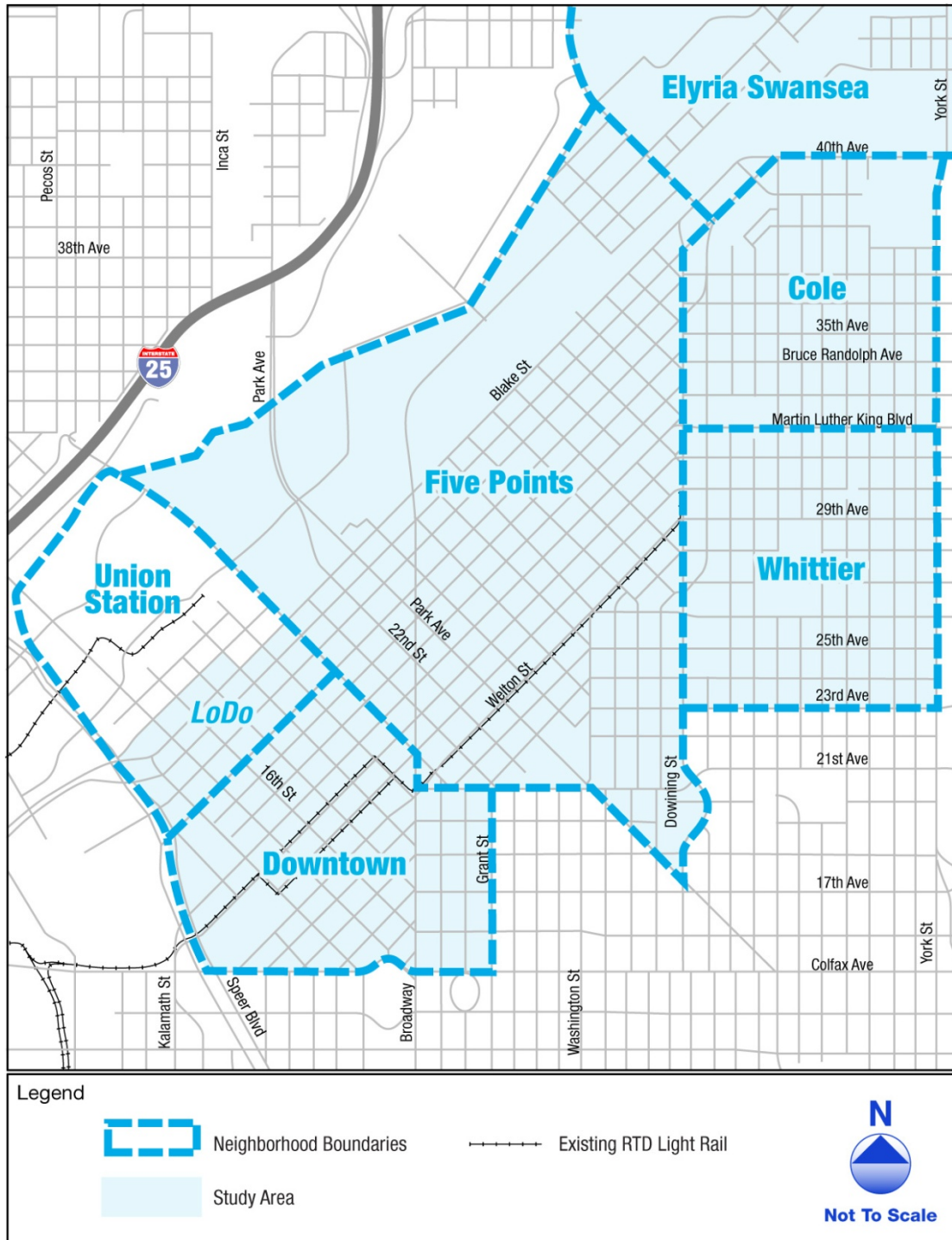
In July 2007, RTD completed the FasTracks 2007 Annual Program Evaluation, an annual assessment and update of the projected planning, funding, and operational aspects of each of the FasTracks corridors, and determined that the Central Corridor Extension improvements would not be submitted for federal funding and would not be included as part of the public-private partnership anticipated for the East Corridor. Based on the absence of federal or private funding, the Central Corridor Extension was removed from the East Corridor EIS project.

In January 2008, work on the Central Corridor Extension was suspended pending station and alignment decisions for the East Corridor that were being made through the EIS process. In September 2009, the East Corridor Final EIS was released to the public, which allowed work on the Central Corridor to resume. RTD is completing this EE to document all of the analysis that has been completed for the Central Corridor Extension and to fulfill the RTD Board of Directors' commitment to study the environmental impacts of all FasTracks corridors, whether federally funded or not. The mitigation measures recommended in the final EE have been adopted by the Board of Directors and will be carried out during future engineering design and construction phases of the project.

## 1.2 PROJECT AREA

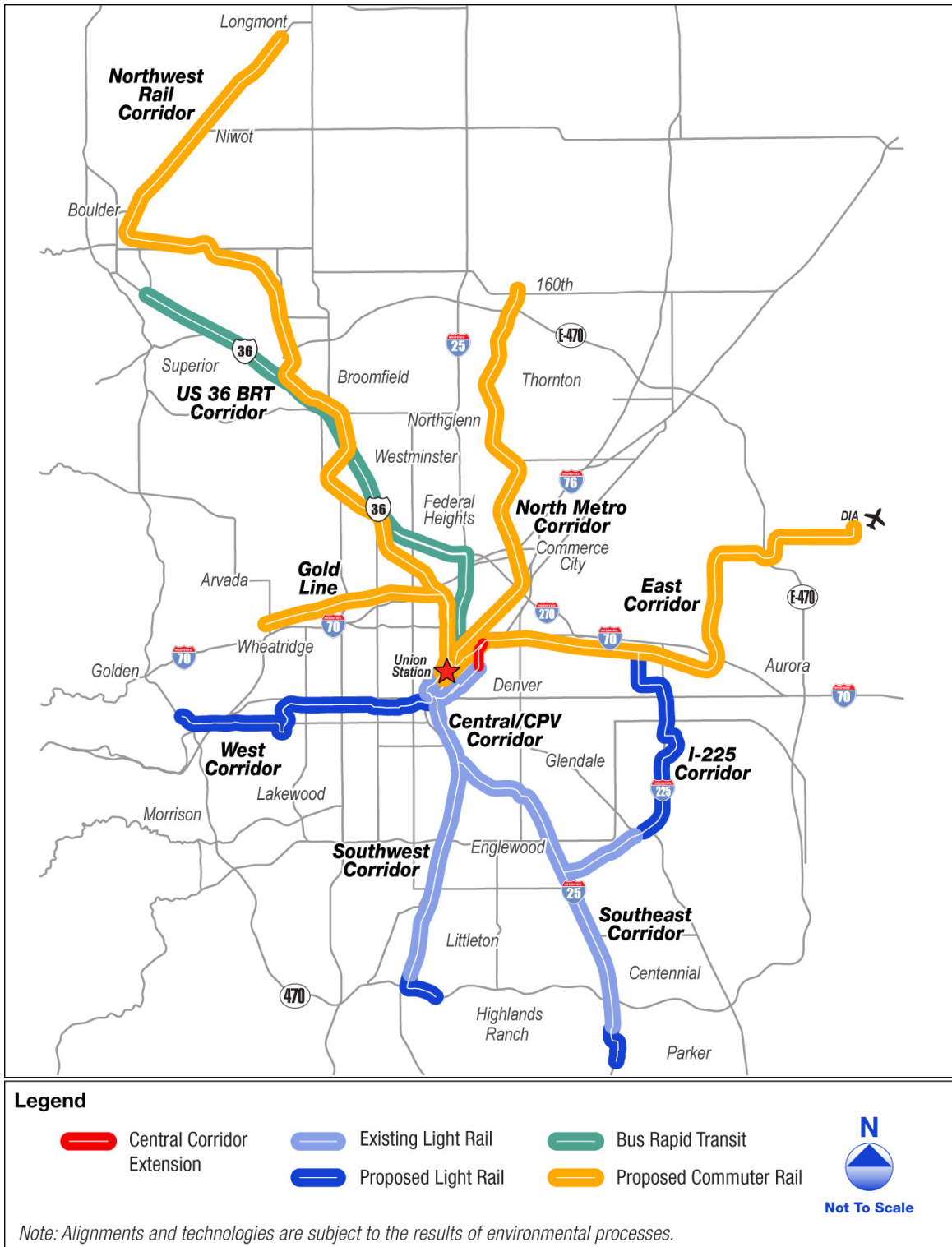
Figure 1-2 shows the project area, which contains established neighborhoods located just north of downtown Denver including Five Points, Downtown, the LoDo area of Union Station, Whittier, Cole, and part of Elyria and Swansea.

**Figure 1-2  
Project Area**



The Central Corridor Extension provides a connection between existing Central Corridor LRT and the proposed East Corridor commuter rail. Figure 1-3 shows the proposed FasTracks rapid transit system including the East Corridor and Central Corridor Extension.

**Figure 1-3  
Proposed FasTracks System**



## 1.3 PLANNING CONTEXT

Several local planning efforts have been conducted focusing on potential changes throughout the project area, including an extension of the Central Corridor. The transportation planning process in the Denver region is guided by DRCOG. DRCOG represents a nine-county area including municipalities and county governments, CDOT, RTD, and other local jurisdictions. Through this process DRCOG develops both short-term and long-term transportation plans for the state, region, and cities/counties. DRCOG also manages and distributes some transportation funding to member agencies. In addition to the documents developed by DRCOG, RTD has adopted a transit plan for the Denver region called the *FasTracks Plan*.

### 1.3.1 Metro Vision 2030 Plan – DRCOG

The *Metro Vision 2030 Plan* (DRCOG, 2005b) is the long-range plan for the Denver region. It provides a vision for the future growth and development of the metropolitan area based on the expectations and desired plans of local governments, RTD, and CDOT and on the views of the public. The plan identifies all needs regardless of available revenues. The plan also outlines the transportation system envisioned for the year 2030 while its companion document, the *DRCOG 2030 Metro Vision Regional Transportation Plan*, provides a vision of the transportation system that is specific to corridors throughout the region.

The *2030 Metro Vision Regional Transportation Plan* includes a federally required component, the *Fiscally Constrained 2030 Regional Transportation Plan*. This component is a fiscally-constrained plan and includes a comprehensive list of transportation programs and projects that are capable of being financed under reasonable revenue projections within the next 20 years. All FasTracks corridors including the Central Corridor Extension are included in the fiscally-constrained plan. The transit system identified in the plan includes an extension of light rail transit along the Central Corridor from 30th Avenue and Downing Street to the East Corridor.

For consistency and continuity with technical analysis that began on the East Corridor, the 2030 planning year is used in the EE analysis. It should be noted that both the *DRCOG Metro Vision 2035 Plan* and the *2035 Metro Vision Regional Transportation Plan* have been completed since the EE began. All FasTracks corridors, including the Central Corridor Extension, are included in the *Fiscally Constrained 2030 and 2035 Regional Transportation Plans*.

### 1.3.2 FasTracks Plan – RTD

As originally conceived, the *FasTracks Plan* is a 12-year comprehensive plan developed by RTD to increase transit service and facilities in the Denver metropolitan area. The *FasTracks Plan* was adopted by the RTD Board of Directors in April 2004 and approved for funding by voters (known as Referendum 4A) in November 2004. The plan identified a light rail extension from 30th Street/Downing Street to the East Corridor. While the FasTracks sales tax provides a funding mechanism for transit improvements in the region, this EE evaluates alternatives, including the Preferred Alternative for the Central Corridor Extension. A preferred alternative is defined as the alternative that best meets the project's purpose and need, while minimizing adverse social, environmental, economic impacts.

As part of the *FasTracks Plan*, RTD has forecast tax revenues based on the voter-approved 0.4-cent sales tax increase to design, construct, and begin operation of the expanded rapid transit system in the Denver metropolitan area. With the original *FasTracks Plan*, RTD committed to the voters in its service area that the transit system would be completed by year 2017. While transit improvements for the Central Corridor Extension were accounted for, there are limitations on the types and nature of the improvements. This EE evaluates a range of rapid

transit improvements that meet the project purpose and need, while identifying an ultimate solution that is best able to be implemented in the *FasTracks Plan* budget and schedule.

### **1.3.3 Role of the Environmental Evaluation in the Project Development Process**

The intent of this EE is to define the future transit service along the Central Corridor Extension. Once identified, any changes from what is currently included in the *2030 Metro Vision Regional Transportation Plan* will be submitted to DRCOG as part of a plan amendment. The information from this EE will also be used during engineering design that could begin as early as 2011.

### **1.3.4 Decision Framework**

This draft EE is being released for public and agency review for a 30-day comment period. RTD will hold one public meeting during the comment period, at which time verbal and written comments will be received.

After completion of the final EE, the document will be submitted to the RTD Board of Directors for adoption, which is the final decision on what action will be taken and the recommended mitigation measures that will be implemented. Once the EE is adopted, RTD may then begin final design and construction of the proposed improvements, pending available funding.

## **1.4 PROJECT PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Central Corridor Extension is to provide high-quality, fixed-guideway transit that improves transportation access and mobility with connections to the rest of the RTD transit system that is consistent with previous planning efforts including, the *2030 Metro Vision Regional Transportation Plan*, the *FasTracks Plan*, and the associated referendum vote of November 2004.

## **1.5 TRANSPORTATION NEED**

The need for this project resulted from the following issues:

- Increased transportation demands
- Limited transportation options for underserved populations
- Completion of the *FasTracks Plan* regional fixed-guideway transit system

### **1.5.1 Increased Transportation Demands**

The project area is experiencing rapid growth and redevelopment. Recent population and employment growth has resulted in increased travel demand in the project area and region. According to *Blueprint Denver*, downtown Denver will add more than 21,000 new housing units and 47,000 new jobs by 2020. This growth and redevelopment will influence transportation and circulation in the project area. The project would help address increased travel demand by providing an additional transit service option.

### **1.5.2 Limited Transportation Options for Underserved Populations**

Throughout the public outreach process of the East Corridor EIS, it was apparent that there was a strong public demand and need to better serve populations in the Central Corridor Extension project area with improved transit. Transit service would provide access for users in the corridor to regional transit lines proposed in the *FasTracks Plan*. Increased rapid transit service is also important for individuals without access to vehicles and minority, low-income, disabled, and elderly populations in the corridor. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2002a), the project area has 27,101 persons and 10,248 housing units. Figure 1-4 shows the percentage of

minority populations in the census block groups in the project area relative to the Denver Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area (PMSA) and state average. Figure 1-5 shows the availability of vehicles for housing units in the study area for individual neighborhoods.

**Figure 1-4  
Minority and Low-Income Populations within 300 and 1,000 Feet  
of the Central Corridor Extension**

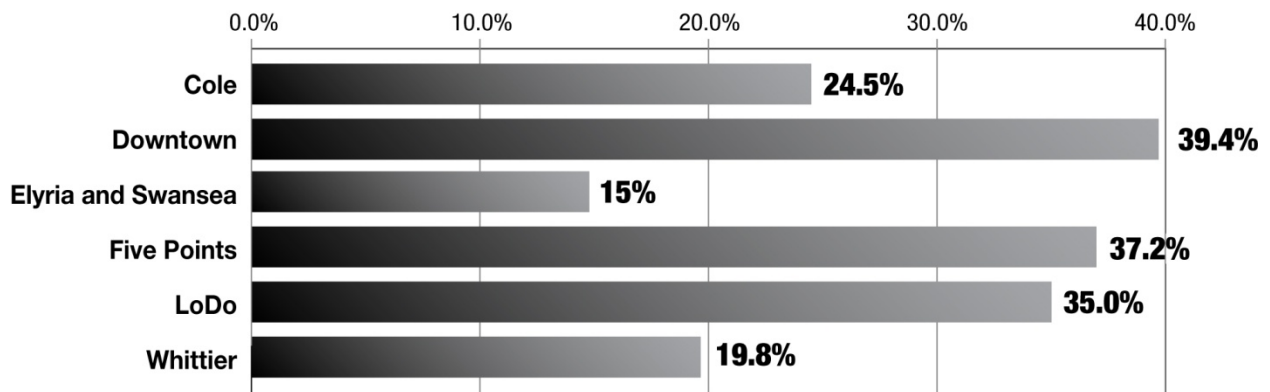


Sources: U.S. Census Bureau (2002a), Summary File 1, P8 (Hispanic or Latino by Race) and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) (2004).

The 0.0 percent - 14.6 percent range for low-income households identifies block groups in which the low-income population percent does not exceed the average for the Denver PMSA, which is 14.6 percent. The 14.6 percent - 14.8 percent range identifies block groups in which the low-income population percent does exceed the average for the Denver PMSA, but does not exceed the average for Colorado (14.8 percent).

The 0.0 percent - 29.6 percent range for minority households identifies block groups in which the minority population percentage does not exceed the average for the Denver PMSA, which is 29.6 percent. These are also block groups in which the minority population percentage does not exceed the average for Colorado (25.5 percent).

**Figure 1-5  
Percentage of Housing Units without a Vehicle Available by Neighborhood**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2002b), Summary File 3, H44 (Tenure by Vehicle Availability).

### 1.5.3 Completion of the FasTracks Regional Fixed-Guideway Transit System

The Central Corridor Extension is part of 122 miles of proposed new rail transit facilities, including light rail, commuter rail, and 18 miles of BRT. These new rail transit facilities would connect with destinations throughout the entire Denver metropolitan area. The Central Corridor Extension would connect the existing downtown light rail to the proposed East Corridor at the 38th/Blake station and provide neighborhood access to all FasTracks corridors. Figure 1-3 shows the proposed FasTracks rapid transit system in its entirety; Figure 1-1 shows the Central Corridor Extension in relation to other FasTracks corridors in more detail.