



Community Planning & Permitting

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Boulder to Erie Regional Trail (BERT) Plan Public Hearing

BOCC PUBLIC HEARING

TO: Boulder County Board of County Commissioners
FROM: Tonya Luebbert, Regional Trails Planner
FOR: BOCC Public Hearing 9:00 a.m., Thursday, October 24, 2024
RE: Boulder to Erie Regional Trail (BERT) Plan
MEMO DATE: October 17, 2024

Action Requested

Staff request that the Boulder County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) adopt the Boulder to Erie Regional Trail (BERT) Plan document and support the Preferred Alignment 1B. Alignment 1B is recommended for its safety, user experience, and minimal impact on adjacent properties and cultural resources.

The Plan represents over five years of technical analysis and community engagement to reach this set of recommendations and serves as the foundation for next steps. The study's preferred alignment is the starting point for detailed engineering and in-depth technical analysis, and there will be additional opportunities for community and BOCC input. If the BOCC adopts the study and the project moves forward, the project will be subject to the guidelines and requirements of the 1041 Land Use Review process.

Plan Purpose

The Boulder to Erie Regional Trail (BERT) planning process was led by Boulder County's Community Planning & Permitting Department and included representation from multiple Boulder County departments and agency partners. The BERT Plan evaluates conceptual alignments and identifies a preferred alignment for further consideration for an east-west multi-use trail connection between 61st Street in Boulder and East County Line Road in Erie.

An out-of-service rail line formerly owned by Union Pacific Railroad and now owned by the Regional Transportation District (RTD) is where the concept for this trail connection originated from local agencies and community members. Due to the unique opportunity for an east-west trail connection that this out-of-service rail corridor provides, this trail connection between Boulder and Erie has been included in multiple planning documents including: the Boulder County Comprehensive Plan, Boulder County Transportation Master Plan, Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan, and the City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) Visitor Master Plan.

There is currently no bike and pedestrian route that provides safe, east-west connectivity between eastern Boulder County and the City of Boulder. Currently, only strong and fearless cyclists ride along the shoulders of Isabelle Road and Valmont Road between Boulder and Erie/Lafayette. And safety is still a major concern for that type of cyclist—especially along Isabelle Road and where Isabelle crosses Hwy US287.

The BERT is a proposed 8.5 mile long, 10-foot-wide trail which would connect into multiple existing and proposed trail systems in Boulder, Erie, and rural eastern Boulder County. The proposed BERT connection would provide separation for cyclists and pedestrians (and other types of trail users) from motorized traffic between 61st Street in Boulder and East County Line Road in Erie.

The Project will be regionally transformative by connecting Erie (one of the fastest growing communities in Colorado) to Boulder, a major regional destination, providing critical safety improvements for people using all modes of travel. The BERT will also provide an opportunity to advance Boulder County's Strategic Priority to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by providing a multi-modal connection between the Town of Erie and the City of Boulder.

Summary of Findings

Based on public input, steering committee input, and in-depth technical analysis, Alignment 1B, located within the RTD right-of-way (ROW) is recommended as the preferred alignment for further consideration. Alignment 1B was selected for its safety, user experience, and minimal impact on adjacent properties and cultural resources. The BERT will be a 10' wide soft surface trail except where crossing the existing railroad tracks, roadways, or proposed bridges and underpasses. Other materials or treatments may be proposed as part of final design. The BERT will connect to the City of Boulder and Town of Erie trail systems at each end and will intersect the Teller/White Rocks Trail system between 75th and 95th. Specific design, construction, and management considerations will be coordinated with the appropriate agencies as part of future project phases.

While alignment 1B is the preferred alignment because it best meets the overall project goals, there are still environmental concerns as high-value ecological resources adjacent to the alignment require careful consideration and protection. If the plan is approved, environmental impact minimization and mitigation opportunities will continue to be evaluated in coordination with CPW and open space agencies during the next phases of the BERT project.

Disproportionately Impacted Communities

Completing a safe connection between the Town of Erie and the City of Boulder supports the BOCC goal of embracing Justice40 principles. On both ends of the proposed trail alignment, there are identified Disproportionately Impacted Communities, as identified in state and federal resources, that would benefit from a multi-use path that can be used for transportation and recreation.

On the eastern side, the proposed BERT alignment connects to the Town of Erie which includes a Census block group in the Weld County portion of the Town of Erie that is a Disproportionately Impacted Community based on the [Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's EnviroScreen](#) score. Within this Census block group, 56% of the population is low-income and 40% of the population are people of color. And this Census block group also includes several mobile home communities (Colorado State Statute considers mobile home parks Disproportionately Impacted Communities).

On the western side of the project, there is another Disproportionately Impacted Community based on the [Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's EnviroScreen](#) score. Within this Census

block group, 63% of the population is low-income, 43% of the population are people of color, and over 51% of the population is housing cost burdened. This Census block group also includes several mobile home communities.

There is another Census block group on the western side of the project that meets the criteria for the [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool \(CEJST\)](#), one of the USDOT's recommended tools for identifying Justice40 populations.

Figure 1 – Map showing the proposed BERT alignment (black line) and Disproportionately Impacted Communities (Colorado EnviroScreen)

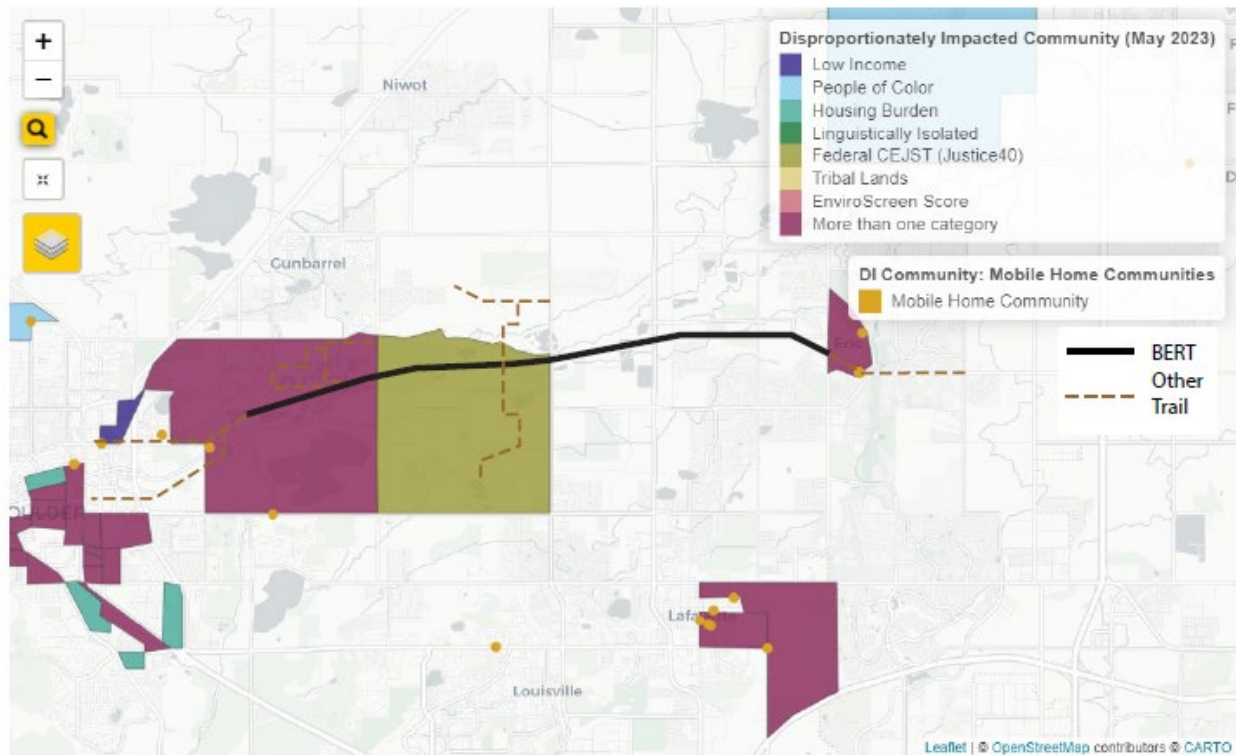
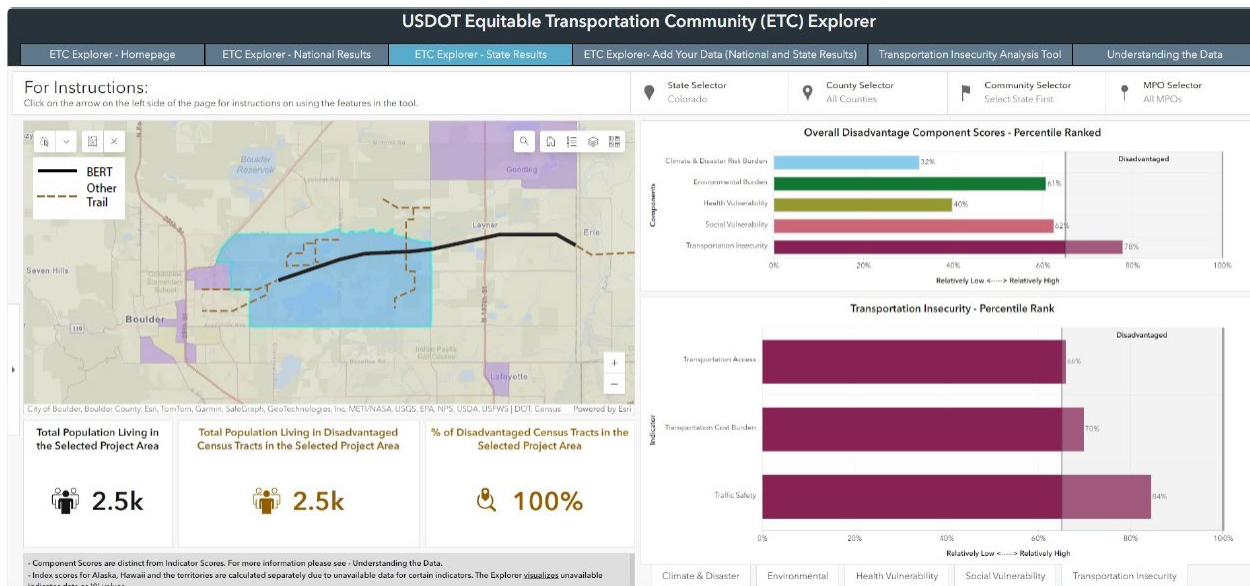


Figure 2 – Map showing the proposed BERT alignment (black line) and communities that are classified as Transportation Insecure (USDOT Equitable Transportation Community Explorer)



In addition, the two Census block groups on the western side of the project are identified as being “Transportation Insecure” based on the [US Department of Transportation’s Equitable Transportation Community Explorer](#), another Justice40 tool identified by the federal government. Transportation insecurity is based on transportation access, transportation cost burden, and traffic safety. Transportation insecurity occurs when people are unable to get to where they need to go to meet the needs of their daily life regularly, reliably, and safely.

BERT Plan Contents

The BERT Plan includes the project technical process and community engagement, data collection, initial conceptual alignment development, technical evaluation of alignments, preferred conceptual alignment, further ecological analysis, opinion of cost, phasing plan, key recommendations and next steps.

Project Timeline

The project began in 2019 with an initial goal to complete the planning process in 2021. It initially focused on the RTD-owned right-of-way for the trail alignment, but the project scope was later expanded to consider and evaluate additional alignments outside the rail corridor with the goal of minimizing environmental impacts.

Since the additional route options for consideration outside the RTD rail corridor use City of Boulder-owned lands, the County and City of Boulder OSMP developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to gain agreement on the process and additional route options in late 2022.

The planning process included seven phases:

1. Project Kick Off & Initial Data Collection
2. Potential Alignments Study
3. Additional Data Collection & Project Partnerships
4. Evaluation Criteria
5. Conceptual Alignments Development
6. Alignments for Further Consideration Evaluation, Selection, & Refinement; and
7. Final Plan & BOCC Hearing

Project Engagement – Partners and Community Advocacy Groups

Extensive community input went into the creation of the BERT Plan. The project was led by the Community Planning & Permitting Department's Transportation Planning Division, and supported by Otak Inc., the engineering consultant, and two sub-consultants ERO and CDR. The consultant team provided the technical analysis and prepared the document and appendices.

Steering Committee

This effort was led by Boulder County Community Planning & Permitting and the Steering Committee consisted of representatives from Regional Transportation District (RTD), Boulder County Parks & Open Space (BOCO POS), Boulder County Public Works (BOCO PW), City of Boulder OSMP, City of Boulder Transportation & Mobility, Town of Erie Parks & Recreation, Town of Erie Planning & Development, Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW), and Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT).

Community Working Group

Community members volunteered to contribute their time and input to the development of the BERT Plan. Members included adjacent landowners, equestrian users, and representatives from local trails groups, cycling groups, and environmental groups (Boulder County Nature Association and Boulder County Audubon Society).

Native American Consultation

Formal consultation letters and a Cultural Resources report were sent to 14 tribal nations with known interest in the project area. Meetings were also held with Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs (CCIA) and with Right Relationship Boulder.

Public Engagement

Public engagement was a key element to the BERT Plan. Engagement was multi-faceted to reach as many people as possible and for the project team to hear diverse perspectives and suggestions from the community. Ongoing public engagement has occurred during each phase of the BERT planning process, primarily seeking input through public meetings and the project website. Many different groups and individuals have provided input to the project team to assist with the development and evaluation of conceptual trail alignments.

Project Website

The role of the project webpage is to provide information on the project to the community, notify the public of upcoming meetings and events, and collect feedback from community members. Over the course of the project, approximately 250 emails and calls have been received.

Neighborhood Workshops

Postcards were sent to addresses near the RTD rail corridor. Four meetings were held in May 2019—two meetings in Erie and two in Boulder. 67 participants attended across the four meetings.

Public Meetings

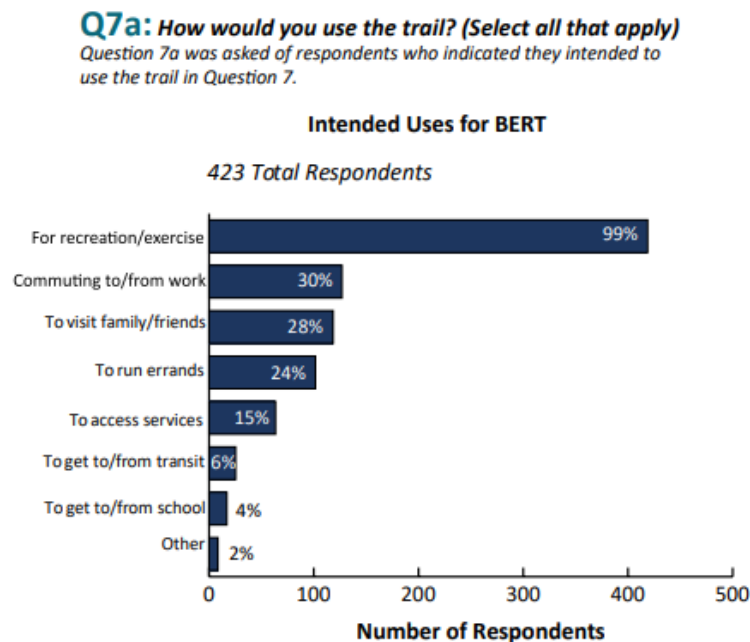
- August 2020: 130+ web/survey participants & 44 Zoom participants
- September 2023: 120+ attendees at a public meeting in Erie
- August 2024: 50+ attendees at a public open house in Boulder

Survey

An online survey was administered to residents and landowners near the BERT corridor. A list of 2,823 nearby properties, and associated mailing addresses was obtained from the Boulder County land records office. Each address on the list was mailed a postcard inviting one adult at each address to respond to the online survey, using a unique survey URL provided on the postcard. The online survey was available for completion from October 31 – November 12, 2023.

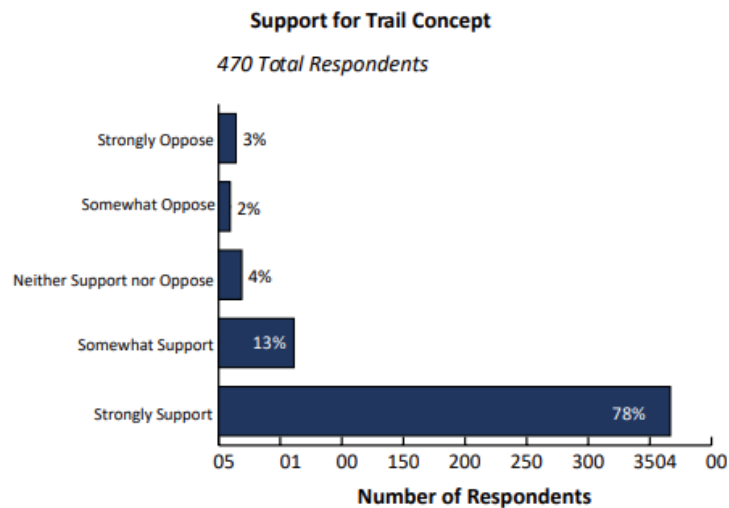
During the 13-day sampling period, 482 respondents participated in the online survey, with a total of 452 respondents completing the survey, meaning survey estimates have a margin of error of +/- 5%. The survey achieved a response rate of 16%.

Figure 3 – Survey results showing support for the trail concept and community intent to use the BERT



Q3: In concept, do you support a trail in the general corridor described above?
(Select one)

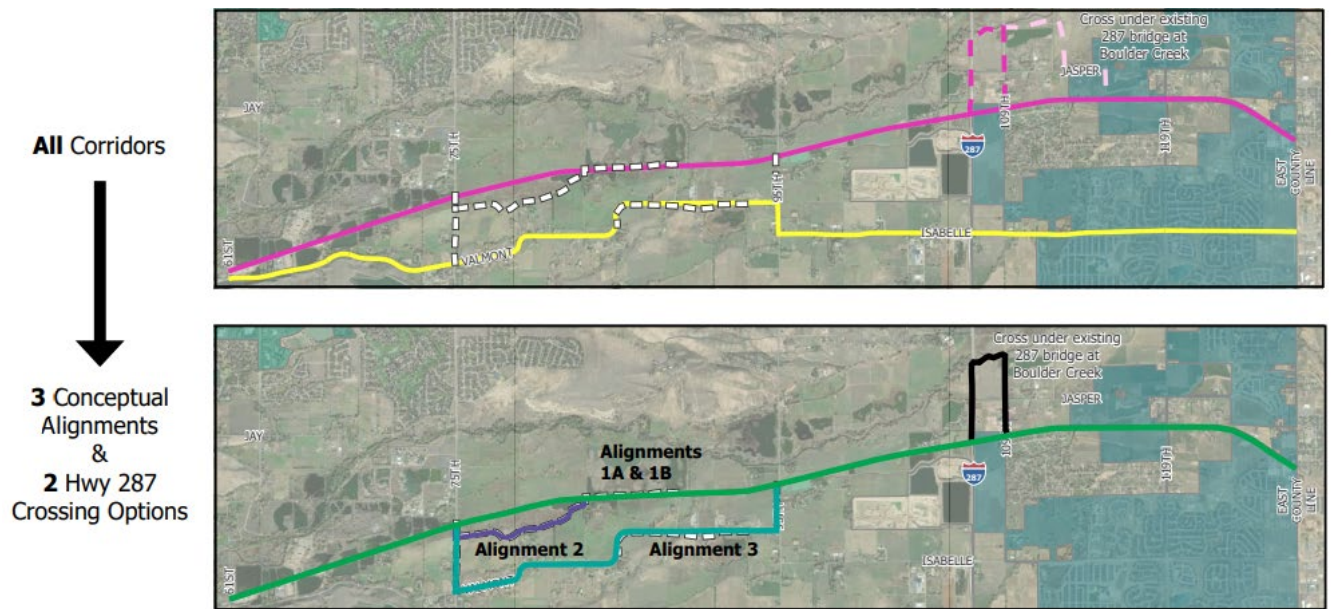
Question 3 was asked of all respondents.



Initial Conceptual Alignments & Alignment Evaluation *(pages 34-119 of the BERT Plan)*

Conceptual alignments were developed within the RTD ROW, along with additional routes along Valmont/Isabelle Roads and on OSMP lands. Multiple options to cross Hwy 287 were also considered. Evaluation criteria were also developed through extensive collaboration with agency partners and community members to serve as a foundation for the evaluation of the alignments and for the selection of a preferred alignment for further consideration.

Figure 4 – Map showing BERT Initial Conceptual Alignments



Preferred Alignment for Further Consideration *(pages 124-159 of the BERT Plan)*

Based on public input, steering committee input, and in-depth technical analysis, Alignment 1B, located within the RTD right-of-way (ROW) was selected as the preferred alignment for further consideration. Alignment 1B was selected for its safety, user experience, and minimal impact on adjacent properties and cultural resources.

Characteristics of Preferred Alignment 1B:

- Completely in the RTD ROW crossing to the north and south of the rail bed as needed
- Off the rail bed, unless there are wet areas or resources avoidance advantage gained by locating on top of the existing railbed for short stretches
- 10 ft wide
- Primarily soft surface
- Crossing 61st, 75th, 95th, 109th and 119th with at-grade crossings
- Crossing Hwy 287 with an underpass

Figure 5 – Map showing the BERT Preferred Alignment 1B



While alignment 1B is the preferred alignment because it best meets the overall project goals, there are still environmental concerns as high-value ecological resources adjacent to the alignment require careful consideration and protection. If the plan is approved, environmental impact minimization and mitigation opportunities will continue to be evaluated in coordination with CPW and open space agencies during the next phases of the BERT project. While environmental resources west of Hwy US287 require more detailed analysis, the project team recognizes the eastern segment of the BERT has fewer environmental concerns and technical complications. In addition, some segments are likely to be constructed as part of planned residential development in Erie.

Additional Ecological Discussion *(pages 160-167 of the BERT Plan)*

The areas adjacent to the RTD ROW where the BERT preferred alignment for further consideration is located provides habitat for numerous nesting raptors and two great blue heron rookeries. CPW is currently recommending seasonal trail closures for three osprey nests, one northern harrier nest, two red-tailed hawk nests, two bald eagle nests, and one great blue heron rookery. These are recommendations, not requirements, and the final decision about whether or not to include use closures will be up to the Boulder County Board of County Commissioners. As such, the project team took a closer look at these nests and their relationship to the proposed BERT in order to understand potential adverse effects and make initial suggestions on ways to minimize and mitigate these potential effects as much as possible. Boulder County staff isn't making specific trail use closure recommendations at this time but will further explore impact minimization and mitigation strategies, and work with project partners in the next phase of the project.

Opinion of Probable Cost *(pages 170-171 of the BERT Plan)*

An opinion of probable cost for construction has been prepared by the project consultant, Otak. The overall Total Construction Cost of the BERT Trail based on current estimates, is \$23,355,000. Otak estimated that Design Engineering (which would include survey, geotechnical analysis, Subsurface Utility Engineering, and environmental) and Construction Engineering would each be 15% of Total Construction Cost, which would equal about \$7,007,000.00. Together, the total opinion of probable cost for both design and construction of the BERT is \$30,362,000.

Otak used experience with the bid process and construction oversight to develop an opinion of probable cost for each project. For the BERT cost estimate, Otak considered unit pricing from similar trail and open space projects for the soft trail portion of the project including recent projects like the Eagle & Sage Trail and Gunbarrel Hill Trail system completed for City of Boulder OSMP. For the US 287 underpass, Otak considered unit pricing from the CO 119 Bikeway and other similar underpass projects completed in and around Boulder County.

Phasing Plan *(pages 168-169 of the BERT Plan)*

The total approximate length of the BERT Preferred Alignment 1B is 8.5 miles. It is possible that the BERT could be constructed in phases. Survey, 30% design, and construction documents could be completed for the entire corridor with bid packages included in the final construction document set for the four construction phases identified. These proposed phases can be seen below and includes four segments to allow it to be implemented in phases, if needed or as funding allows. The following segments were established:

Phase 1: East County Line Rd to 109th (2.3 Miles)

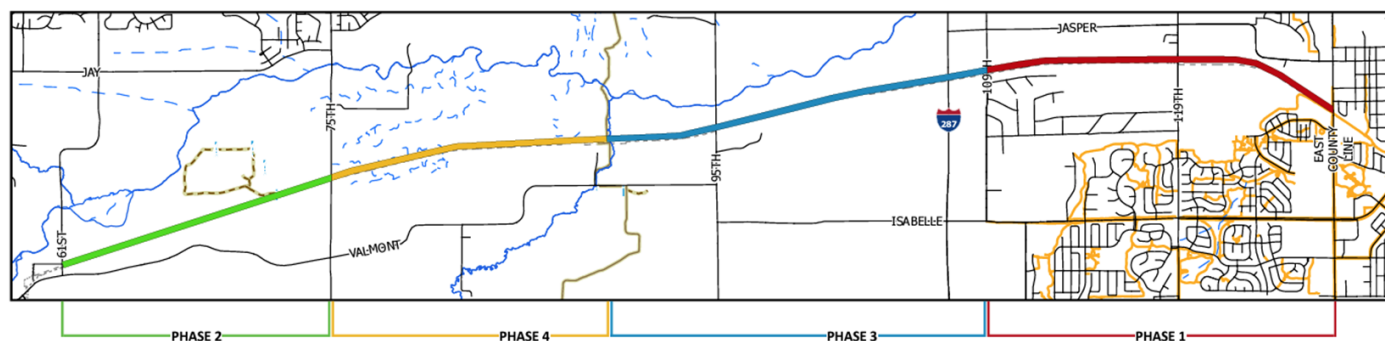
Phase 2: 61st Street to 75th Street (1.85 Miles)

Phase 3: Teller/White Rocks Trail to 109th Street (2.6 Miles)

Phase 4: 75th Street to Teller/White Rocks Trail (1.75 Miles)

Although the goal is to complete the bikeway for the entire corridor length, any of the individual segments could be constructed as stand-alone projects that would provide a valuable facility on its own.

Figure 6 – Map showing the BERT Phasing Plan



Next Steps and Key Recommendations *(pages 173-174 of the BERT Plan)*

If the BOCC adopts the BERT Plan, the following information should be gathered as part of the next phase of the project. The following action items will be required for any of the delivery methods under consideration.

Ongoing Pursuit of Funding: To implement the BERT project through local, regional, state, and federal sources to leverage Boulder County Transportation Sales Tax funding. Potential funding sources include, FHWA's Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program, Great Outdoors Colorado Centennial Program, and USDOT's Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Grant Program.

Property Survey, Topographic Survey, Environmental Delineations and Reports: Wetland delineations for the entire alignment. A threatened and endangered species habitat assessment, including Preble's meadow jumping mouse, cultural resource surveys, and rare plant surveys.

Geotechnical Reports: Soil borings and geotechnical design recommendations will be required for proposed structures, slope grading analysis, and site restoration recommendations.

Subsurface Utility Engineering: This can be completed concurrent with the topographic survey.

1041 Land Use Review: Preliminary design is anticipated to begin in early 2025, contingent upon the 2025 budget request. Preliminary design is estimated to take approximately 12-18 months. Therefore the 1041 Land Use Review process is estimated to occur in mid-2026.

Design Analysis: Continued exploration of US 287 underpass constructability and how to avoid wet areas and other infrastructure and resources.

Ecological Impact Minimization and Mitigation: Continued coordination with USFWS, CPW, and open space agencies to explore opportunities to minimize impacts of the preferred alignment.

Coordination with Agency Partners:

- **RTD:** The BERT preferred alignment is on RTD property. The BERT project team will continue to coordinate with RTD to obtain permission to build the trail facility on RTD property. The BERT project team will also continue to coordinate with RTD on design and construction requirements.
- **CDOT:** The BERT preferred alignment crosses Hwy US287 with an underpass. Therefore, the BERT project team will also continue to coordinate with CDOT on design and construction requirements, and to obtain permission to build a trail underpass under Hwy 287 and within CDOT road ROW.
- **City of Boulder:** Coordination with the Transportation & Mobility Department and OSMP regarding adjacency to open space lands, connections to existing trail facilities, trailhead needs, trail signage, regulations, and management.
- **Town of Erie:** Coordination regarding connections to existing and proposed trail facilities, trailhead needs, trail signage, regulations, and management. Coordination during design will also be critical due to upcoming residential development near the BERT corridor.
- **CPW:** The BERT project team will continue to coordinate with CPW (as well as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and open space agencies) to explore opportunities to mitigate and minimize ecological impacts of the preferred alignment. The project team will also coordinate with CPW on potentially using a small section of the Sawhill Ponds access road for the trail alignment to avoid wet areas.

Internal Coordination: The BERT project team will continue to coordinate with Boulder County Departments, including:

- Public Works on design and construction requirements of the trail crossings of county roads at 61st, 75th, 95th, 109th, and 119th streets.
- Parks and Open Space regarding adjacent open space properties and connections to existing and proposed facilities e.g. Walden Ponds Wildlife Habitat and Prairie Run Open Space.
- CP&P to complete the 1041 process and obtain required permits.

Consultation with Adjacent Property Owners: Continued coordination with adjacent property owners to meet design needs and concerns including, but not limited to existing right-of-way access agreements, existing gates or other access points to be maintained or provided, accommodation of livestock movement across the right-of-way where it intersects grazing operations, and fencing along the corridor to be added or improved as needed.

Utility Coordination: Coordination and agreements with ditch companies and shareholders.

Additional Design Elements: Interpretive opportunities and other amenities like rest areas and scenic lookouts will be explored as part of final design.

Connections to Transit: Continued coordination with RTD, CDOT, and others to explore the potential of connecting the BERT to transit at Hwy US287 and other roadway intersections along the corridor.

Ongoing Community Engagement: During each milestone, the BERT project team will continue to get input from the community. The BERT project team will align future engagement with the anticipated county-wide guidance on community engagement that is expected in 2025.

Acknowledgments

The project team has accomplished important work during this BERT planning process. Community Planning & Permitting (CP&P) and especially the Regional Trails Planner have great appreciation for all the Steering Committee members, Community Working Group members, and the time and energy individuals in the community contributed through their public input. If approved by the Board of County Commissioners, CP&P staff is committed to seek funding to advance next steps.