Changing the ways Denver gets around
Project Shift is a grassroots leadership development program aimed at engaging Denver residents who want to be advocates for a cultural shift toward healthy, active, “car-lite” lifestyles and a new way of thinking about transportation and mobility.

We’re creating a shift by:

- Becoming champions for active transportation options through actions and storytelling.
- Working with peers and mentors to adapt personal travel behaviors to reduce car trips.
- Developing grassroots leadership skills by working together to create and implement a project in Denver.
- Establishing actionable relationships with other leaders in the community and city.
- Creating a positive community for like-minded activism and stewardship.

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With many requests for help in various neighborhoods, we wanted to empower residents to champion walkability and multimodal travel in Denver—in essence expanding our capacity by training residents on how to advocate for their own communities and engage their friends, family, neighbors.

Our approach is based on the idea that individuals who embrace healthy changes in their own lives become powerful advocates for policies that promote healthy living.

Previous research points to the conditions that support long-lasting, durable behavior change, including immediate, positive feedback; competition or peer pressure (information about how your behavior compares to other people’s); social support; and repeatedly engaging in the desired new behavior over a period of several weeks, so it starts becoming automatic.

While our policy focus will always be citywide, our smaller projects are often focused at the neighborhood scale. We do this with the understanding that small changes help make larger shifts a reality.
For our first two cohorts, we targeted area neighborhoods that have traditionally seen underinvestment in walking and biking infrastructure. These areas were also along higher frequency transit lines including light rail and high-frequency bus routes.

Our inaugural cohort focused on West Denver’s Colfax and 6th Avenue corridors. Upon its completion, we made the decision to expand the geographic scope to other central neighborhoods after hearing a lot of interest from residents in those areas. These were people who were passionate about improving multimodal opportunities in their neighborhoods and wanted to be more involved.
“Project Shift has changed my perspective of the city. Everywhere I walk, bike, or take the bus, I’m thinking of ways we can improve the city. Project Shift taught me the skills to engage in the political process and affect change in Denver.”

WILLIAM SCHUMANN  Central Denver
In addition to group work on neighborhood projects, our participants heard guest speakers that included local advocates, subject matter experts, elected officials, and City decision-makers to give them additional resources and information on ways they can make an impact.

Individual travel behavior was tracked throughout the course of the program in order to increase the participants’ awareness of their transportation decisions. This was recorded through travel diaries and surveys at the beginning and the end of the program.

Curriculum

CLASS TEXT  Walkable City by Jeff Speck

SESSION 1  Orientation & Built Environment
SESSION 2  Personal Behavior/Goal Setting, Multimodal Networks
SESSION 3  Tactical Urbanism
SESSION 4  Advocacy & Policy
SESSION 5  Equity & Economics
SESSION 6  Civics & Pathways
SESSION 7  Team Projects
SESSION 8  Mock Town Hall
SESSION 9  Personal Assessment
COHORTS
COHORTS

WEST DENVER
Participants

Sean Brady, Villa Park
Nicole Bush, West Colfax
Brien Darby, Valverde
Keesha Egebrencht, Athmar Park
Lauren Hegge, West Colfax
Karlie Kahl, West Colfax
Stephanie Leonard, Villa Park
Steve Luebke, Athmar Park
Jonathan Lorincz, Jefferson Park
Maureen McCanna, Valverde
Brian Schroder, West Colfax
Rey Sosa, West Colfax
Doug Wooley, Villa Park

CENTRAL DENVER
Participants

Marlo Abramowitz, Virginia Village
Matthew Baker, Highlands
Andrea Bosshardt, Sunnyside
Sarah Franklin, Golden Triangle
Joanna Hanby, Park Hill
Ruffin Kan, Overland
Shelley McMullen, Five Points
Stephani Meyers, Cole
Jill Parsons-St. John, Berkeley
Meghan Perez Darby, Wash Park
Frances Rasker, Boulder
Alana Romans, Highlands
William Schumann, Lakewood
Julia Simhai, Sunnyside
Sam Sunshine DeWitt, Whittier
Elliot Tipton, Union Station
Allison Trembly, Highlands
Phillip Zakrzewski, Sunnyside

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Neighborhood Project Blog Posts

That’s a Wrap
Project Shift in Action
“Denver is making strides in fostering various methods of transportation and has a usable, reliable multi-modal infrastructure in place. My 11-mile daily commute (which includes busing, walking, or biking to the light rail) is proof.

A multi-modal lifestyle is doable in Denver, the tools are there, it simply takes a paradigm shift.”

JONATHAN LORINCZ  West Denver
Increased walking, biking and transit usage.
The results of Project Shift suggest a substantial decrease in participant driving time. Our post-assessment survey showed that this included walking more, especially on a daily basis, and that they felt more comfortable bicycling as a mode of transportation. We found increased transit usage in their 3-day travel diaries but less in the survey. However, our participants seemed to like transit better in the post-assessment survey—despite acknowledging difficulties with scheduling—and were less likely to view cars as a necessity.

This shows that their awareness of alternative methods of transportation and likelihood of using them had increased.
A video we made about Project Shift.
Increased understanding of transportation issues.
Participants felt they had greatly increased their understanding of the linkages between the built environment and transportation in the post-assessment survey. This included greater awareness of problems related to traffic speed, lighting, and maintenance.

During discussions at the final session, many agreed that because the program curriculum included broader topics such as Vision Zero and built environment design, they were much more knowledgeable of safety issues around street design and were more likely to notice them while walking and biking on city streets.
“Above providing education on reducing the use of a personal vehicle, Project Shift dove deep into advocacy tactics and the power of citizen engagement.”

SHELLEY MCMULLEN Central Denver
Decreased reliance on personal cars.
Attitudes About Driving

Participants indicated that they reduced reliance on their cars to do many of the things they liked to do. Additionally, participants marked a decrease in their preference for driving. Overall, there was a noticeable decline in the feeling that having a car was convenient.

“Traveling by car is convenient.”

“I need a car to do many of the things I like to do.”

“I prefer to take public transportation rather than drive.”

“After my experience with Project Shift, my husband and I decided to become a one-car household. It’s been five months and we don’t miss the second car at all.”

BRIEN DARBY  West Denver
More interest in talking about transportation issues with others.
“Project Shift has created a venue for passionate, like-minded citizens to network and learn. Moreover, Project Shift scaffolded my ability to be a leader in the community and take effective steps to initiating positive change. It empowers community members by giving them the tools, resources, and knowledge to accomplish their goals!”

JOANNA COLEMAN  Central Denver

“How often do you walk in your neighborhood?”

“How often do you talk about mobility with others?”

Additional Findings

While participants were more committed to incorporating walking and biking into their daily lives—and encouraging others to do so—they also became more aware of traffic safety concerns. Participants felt an increased interest in talking about active transportation methods with others.
Establishing connections between neighbors.
As a result of the program, participants were more likely to know their neighbors, reported having friends in the neighborhood, and felt a greater degree of ownership over their neighborhood.

They seemed more aware of the role that citizens and community organizations can play in transportation policies and decision-making as well as a better understanding related to how these decisions might impact the environment and personal health.
“It is my hope that meeting neighbors with a similar passion for improved transit and connectivity will make a lasting impact on my community.”

BRIEN DARBY  West Denver

IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD...

“Speed of traffic is a problem.”

“I feel responsible for what happens.”

“There is a sense of community.”
“I am so grateful to have had this opportunity to challenge myself, become a confident multi-modal commuter, and meet and hear from inspiring participants and mobility experts. The program encouraged me to explore new transportation options and provided resources to do so.

I’ve developed a much deeper understanding of and connection to Denver’s physical environment and the people who live here.”

MAUREEN MCCANNA  West Denver
Moving forth with more knowledge and confidence.
Colorado Health Foundation HEAL

The Colorado Health Foundation requested that we include a set of specific questions related to health and community leadership. Participants seemed to take away strong lessons from Project Shift about their understanding of their own traits as leaders, the skills needed to be a community leader, and their confidence in using those skills to affect positive change in their communities.

I UNDERSTAND...

“What skills I need to be a better leader.”

“The health issues that people in my community face.”

“Who I need to work with to improve health in my community.”
I AM CONFIDENT IN MY ABILITY TO...

“Engage with decision makers to educate them and promote a community health goal.”

“Explain to my family, peers, and/or neighbors the factors that affect health.”

“Mobilize my community around a community health goal.”
We have encouraged our graduates to continue their involvement by:

Attending and providing input at public meetings such as at their local RNO or for multimodal projects in their communities.

Speaking at public hearings in support of citywide multimodal transportation investments.

Participating in planning, leading, or volunteering for local neighborhood projects and events.

Connecting to other local leaders and advocates.

This is not the end for Project Shift. Through these first two cohorts, we have increased our knowledge of how communities view Denver’s transportation issues. Because of this, we have learned about areas that need to be focused on and ways that WalkDenver can continue building support for a shift toward car-lite living in Denver.
be the person your dog thinks you are
What’s Next?

We are partnering with the City & County of Denver on a new Vision Zero program that will assist community members in the planning, design, and implementation of neighborhood projects to promote safer streets for all modes. Using lessons learned through Project Shift, we will continue to create a shift towards a more multimodal, active, and healthy Denver.
To learn more about WalkDenver and Project Shift, or to set up a meeting with our staff, please contact Executive Director Jill Locantore.

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