



The Blueprint for Clean Air An Overview of What We Heard

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Blueprint for Clean Air Built on Solid Foundation

Following more than three years of planning and many months of reaching out to area citizens, the Regional Air Quality Council (RAQC) has crafted a plan to ensure cleaner air and clearer views across the metro region, well into the new millennium.

The plan, adopted in January of 1999, is the result of input gathered from numerous subcommittee participants and hundreds of individuals.

After successfully meeting federal air quality requirements in 1996, the RAQC focused on developing the metro area's first long range air quality plan, called the *Blueprint for Clean Air*. The proactive efforts outlined in the *Blueprint for Clean Air* will help the region stay in compliance with federal standards and reduce poor visibility caused by the Brown Cloud as population and vehicle travel in the region continue to grow over the next twenty years.

Extensive Outreach Conducted

One of the most important elements of The *Blueprint for Clean Air* was an extensive effort to seek public input and assess public opinion on strategies to improve air quality in the region.

From the beginning of the *Blueprint* effort in late 1995, the RAQC believed that it was crucial to assess the public's willingness to take additional action to improve air quality, particularly if it meant going beyond federal health requirements to address the region's visual air quality problem, commonly referred to as the Brown Cloud. Assessing public opinion on these issues was a significant undertaking, involving a variety of outreach

approaches to ensure that individuals and organizations with diverse perspectives had input to the plan.

Efforts to seek participation in the plan's early development were promoted in a brochure which read, "When it Comes to Cleaning up Our Air, We're Looking for Some Good Ideas -- Yours". About 4,000 copies of the brochure were distributed during 1996 through Envirotest vehicle inspection sites, libraries, and local government offices.

In the Fall of 1996, the RAQC cast the net wider-- seeking input from more than 40 diverse organizations throughout the metro area. This input occurred through a series of "focus group" discussions involving over 300 people. The sessions began with a slide show on the status of air quality in the region and a description of the *Blueprint for Clean Air* planning process. The slide show was followed by an hour long discussion that gave participants an opportunity to provide input on the extent to which they were concerned about air quality and to relay their ideas on what should be done to improve air quality in the region. The discussions probed for peoples' broad priorities about approaches to air pollution reduction, and gave the RAQC a rough gauge of public sentiment that helped guide the work of the various *Blueprint* subcommittees.

THANK YOU to those who helped to fund these public involvement endeavors:

- CH2M Hill
- Conoco
- Denver West Realty
- Kaiser Hill
- Louisiana-Pacific
- Office of Energy Conservation
- Public Service Co. of Colorado / New Century Energies
- Royal Crest Dairy

These outreach efforts were augmented by communication materials including quarterly newsletters and, later, a web site. A four page overview on air quality and the *Blueprint* process was printed in May of 1997 and distributed to the public through State of Colorado Department of Motor Vehicle offices, Envirotest stations, area libraries, and over 1,000 people on the RAQC mailing list.

In October of 1997, the RAQC launched a private sector fund raising effort with a special reception for members of the business community at the Governor's Mansion. With Governor Romer and Mr. Ralph Peterson, CEO of CH2M Hill as co-hosts, the RAQC invited members of the business community to support the *Blueprint for Clean Air* planning effort. The business community responded favorably to this appeal, and over the following six months the RAQC pulled together funding for a community-wide education and outreach effort to seek input on the draft plan.

In addition to these broad outreach efforts, the work of the *Blueprint* subcommittees provided another opportunity for public involvement in the process. The subcommittees

were open to all interested parties and included representatives from business, industry, environmental and health groups, and state and local governments. The subcommittees met monthly to examine the scientific, economic, and feasibility aspects of various air quality improvement strategies, and ultimately made recommendations on these strategies to the RAQC board. The work of the Transportation and Land Use Subcommittee was informed by an extensive outreach effort to local government officials during the summer of 1997.

By July of 1998, the RAQC had issued its preliminary recommendations for public input and began its final outreach effort. Outreach on the draft plan began with a news conference that was covered extensively by the local media. The news conference was followed by an intensive, five-month outreach effort to get final public input on the plan.

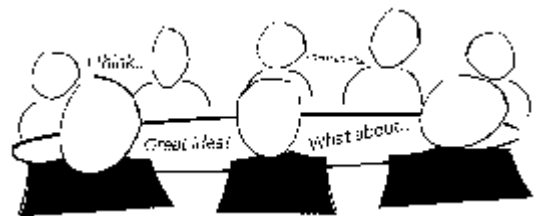
Across all the 1998 outreach efforts, consistent key questions were asked to get a common assessment of public opinion. These questions focused on:

- whether people were concerned about the Brown Cloud and health impacts of air pollution,
- whether they thought we should be taking additional steps to improve air quality,
- whether they believed that the *Blueprint* struck the right balance between costs and air quality benefits and
- if they were willing to pay the costs associated with the clean air strategies proposed in the *Blueprint for Clean Air*.

Outreach Activities

RAQC and Corporate Alliance for Better Air (CABA) members presented background information and helped to facilitate the various outreach efforts. Below is a list of the outreach activities the RAQC undertook from July through November of 1998:

- **Professionally facilitated public workshops** in each of the six metro area counties at which citizens used an innovative electronic keypad system that allowed them to register their preferences on the plan and related air issues. The keypads instantaneously tallied the opinions of those participating and the results served as a point of departure for the discussion. These workshops were widely publicized in area newspapers, on the RAQC web site, and in flyers distributed through King Soopers and libraries, and also mailed directly to many homeowner association groups. Although attendance at these workshops averaged only about 15 citizens each, valuable input was received.
- **Round table discussions with targeted interest groups**, such as business, industry, health, and environmental groups. Each round table was hosted by a representative organization from that stakeholder group. This lent credibility to



the process and gave the RAQC entre to a network of members and affiliates to whom invitations were sent.

- **Research on public opinion through a telephone survey** of 615 metro area residents, all registered voters. The margin of error of this research was +/- 4%. Two follow-up focus groups were held with individuals who had been surveyed to allow for in-depth probing as to why people felt or believed the way they did about air quality and the *Blueprint* proposals.
- **An updated web site** with information on the *Blueprint*, scientific findings of the *Blueprint* and related study efforts, an "on-line slide show", and an opportunity for input through a web site survey. The web survey was promoted through radio public service announcements and newsletters.
- **Articles about *Blueprint* public involvement opportunities** and the RAQC web site survey were included in two additions of Public Service Company's bill stuffer newsletter, which is sent to over one million households in the region.
- **An hour-long cable TV program**, called "The Air We Breathe", which was hosted by KCNC Channel 4's Paul Day and simulcast on twenty-four local access cable channels. The program was also replayed by eleven local government stations over a two month period.
- **Presentations on the *Blueprint*** plan at conferences and meetings of interested organizations.

Input and Feedback

Assessing the public's opinion about the choices ahead for air quality has been an important guide for the *Blueprint* plan. The outreach activities facilitated a two-way exchange of information, providing information to the public while simultaneously getting their reactions to the various *Blueprint* proposals.

Similar levels of support and trends of opinion on air issues and specific strategies were found between the phone survey, public workshops, round table discussions and focus groups. Input from the web survey also followed similar trends, although there were far fewer respondents compared to the other outreach activities.

This consistency indicates the trend of public opinion about air quality. Highlights of this input follow.

Across all methods of public input, there was generally an by the public that motor vehicles are the largest source of air pollution in the metro area. Additionally, more than 1/2accurate understanding of the public accurately recognized that the region is in compliance with federal air quality standards.

There is aclear and overwhelming appreciation of clean air , with almost all citizens agreeing that clean air is essential to the quality of life in the metro region. Of those polled in the phone survey, 98% agreed that "clean air is essential to the area's quality of

life", of which 85% "strongly agreed" with that statement. This sentiment was expressed repeatedly through all avenues of public input.

Many people said they were not satisfied with the current level of air quality in the region. Air clarity is a concern for most people-- with over 60% of phone survey respondents stating that they were dissatisfied with the clarity of the air, and over 80% indicating that when the air looks dirty, they feel it is unhealthy. More than 1/2 of the workshop participants expressed similar dissatisfaction. Input from the numerous round table discussions resulted in similar responses. This sentiment was summed up by comments such as: "I don't like to see the air I breathe", or "You feel like the air is bad if you can see it".

Those who felt like we should not do more to address the Brown Cloud saw it as purely an aesthetic problem, or felt that it was not worth doing more because the Brown Cloud would always be with us to a certain extent due to inherent geography of the area.

Almost 3/4 of those polled in the phone survey expressed support for the underlying approach of the Blueprint, which is to take additional voluntary, local actions to further improve air quality and ensure long-term compliance with federal standards. Similarly, 83% of participants at the public workshops indicated that "we should implement air quality programs that go beyond federal requirements if they will reduce the Brown Cloud". While people expressed a concern that the region should work to continue to meet health standards, most wanted to see improvements to the Brown Cloud as well.

The majority of people giving input to the plan believe that the Blueprint strikes the right balance between costs and benefits to air quality. Among workshop participants, a significant number - almost half - expressed the opinion that the strategies of the Blueprint do not go far enough to improve the region's air quality, while 41% said the Blueprint strikes the right balance, commenting that they liked the plan's broad approach and that it doesn't unfairly burden one sector.

While different round-table stakeholder groups were split on whether or not the Blueprint does enough or needs to go farther, none thought the Blueprint goes too far.

A large variety of concrete suggestions were offered in the workshops, round tables and focus groups as additional measures which should be considered in Blueprint. These included better transit, energy conservation, renewable energy, addressing high polluting vehicles, restrictions on higher polluting small engines, stricter controls to manage growth and greater public education. A few people suggested the plan needed "more teeth".

Those who said the plan goes too far expressed a concern that there are already too many costly mandates from government.

Across all outreach efforts the RAQC posed the question of whether people were willing to pay for the strategies outlined in the Blueprint plan. Consistently, a strong majority of people expressed a willingness to pay the \$10 per year /per person cost for the Blueprint's clean air strategies over the next 15 years . For example, seventy eight percent of phone survey respondents were willing to pay this cost and almost 60% of workshop participants "strongly agreed" that this cost was reasonable for the resulting air quality benefits, while an additional 13% "somewhat agreed" that the cost is reasonable.

The costs of the Blueprint are related to reducing emissions from Public Service Company's coal-fired power plants, street sand emission reductions, and tighter standards on diesel emissions.

More than 60% of phone survey respondents expressed a willingness to pay higher utility bills to achieve cleaner air. The proposal by Public Service Company of Colorado would reduce emissions of sulfur dioxide by more than 70%, and nitrogen oxides by up to 20%, both well beyond what is required by EPA. Those who expressed reservations about higher utility bills wondered why consumers should pay for such a strategy. However, when they learned that the reductions went beyond what is required by federal regulation, and that additional action would not be taken unless the utility company could recoup the cost of their initiatives, most people voiced support for the strategy.

Growth management, sprawl, density and congestion were all topics brought up repeatedly by citizens and elected officials in our outreach discussions, and were discussed with a good deal of emotion. People in the outreach discussion groups generally understood the connection between land use patterns, such as sprawl, and the trend of increasing vehicle miles traveled in the region. Many people voiced their concern that the region does not have the necessary institutions in place to deal with growth or to mitigate growth related impacts. Discussion groups revealed that people frequently wondered if their wishes as "average" citizens would be heard by state and local officials. While many people wanted less growth, others focused on the need for better planned growth but questioned how that would be achieved in the current framework.

The RAQC's Blueprint endorses the Denver Regional Council of Government's MetroVision 2020 plan, which encourages more compact development overall by identifying an urban growth boundary for the region, encouraging mixed use development, and calling for higher density in transit corridors. MetroVision will help to improve air quality by creating land use patterns that are conducive to less driving and by improving the region's transit system.

There was extensive discussion among local government representatives, RAQC members, environmental groups, and others on how best to support the MetroVision 2020 plan. The phone survey showed that the public at large was split on the approach to take with MetroVision 2020, with 14% favoring the idea of incentives, 38% favoring requirements, and 38% favoring a purely voluntary approach. Most local officials, who would be implementing the MetroVision plan, felt strongly that MetroVision should

retain its voluntary emphasis, but that incentives should be developed to encourage implementation. This latter approach was incorporated into the final Blueprint plan.

Many of the outreach efforts explored the public's perceptions of land use and transportation strategies which have positive impacts on air quality. People favored mixed-use development and growth boundaries. Over 58% of the phone survey respondents indicated "strong support" for mixed use development, and another 18% indicated "some support" for mixed use development. Similarly, growth boundaries were supported strongly by 55% of the phone survey respondents and viewed with "some support" by about 14% of those polled.

However, the level of support diminishes for the strategy of dense development along transit corridors. Only 45% of the public who were polled strongly supported such a strategy. Focus group and round table discussions echoed similar reservations about strategies to encourage higher density to better provide for transit. The mention of density was received with distaste by many people, who thought that density would not only diminish a desired quality of life, but may erode air quality too.

Although people questioned if density was a necessary backbone to transit, the great majority of people across all outreach venues expressed high levels of support for transit, especially more convenient, timely transit with expanded services from suburb to suburb. Over 60% of those polled in the phone survey indicated a willingness to pay for transit. Focus group participants explained that the Guide the Ride transit tax vote of 1997 probably failed because it did not clearly identify the suburb to suburb travel, and because of the dissension among the RTD board at the time of election created a lack of confidence in the board and in the proposal itself.

Top Strategies Supported by Citizens

The RAQC's outreach efforts included a brief explanation of various clean air strategies and sought a reaction from the public to each proposal. Clean air strategies identified in the phone survey and public workshops as being "strongly supported" or "top priorities" were:

- Improve transit options;
- Improve diesel inspection & maintenance program;
- Reduce PSCo utility plant emissions;
- Reduce street sanding;
- Improve land use plans and zoning, such as mixed use development and growth boundaries; and,
- Fine smoking vehicles (cars and diesel trucks) and give incentives to retire or repair dirty vehicles.

Strategies Opposed

Among the strategies rejected by the public were those relating to "pricing" strategies to reduce driving -- such as raising gas taxes, increasing the costs of parking, highway tolls, or basing registration fees on the number of miles driven. Across all public outreach efforts, similar trends in opinion were heard. The majority are skeptical of efforts to reduce driving by increasing its costs.

Focus group participants believed that there are not truly viable alternatives to driving for many people, and that pricing mechanisms would not reduce driving until such alternatives were more viable. Consistently, at round tables and workshops the issue of "equity" was brought up and received with nods of agreement by others. This centered on the concern that low income people, or those on a fixed income, may bear a disproportionate burden with such pricing strategies.

Plan Reflects Citizen Priorities

Input from the research and outreach efforts was shared with the RAQC. In response, the *Blueprint* was modified to incorporate input received, particularly relating to curbing smoking vehicles, taking greater action to reduce ozone, recommending more of an incentive approach to encourage MetroVision 2020, and acknowledging the need for continued public outreach and education on air quality.

The Blueprint plan, when combined with current programs and further federal regulation of mobile source emissions, will:

- keep the region in compliance with current federal health standards through 2020;
- reduce fine particulate (PM-2.5) levels by an estimated 20 - 25% and emissions of ozone-forming pollutants by 15 - 20%, providing a margin of safety against future violations of the new federal health standards for these pollutants;
- reduce exceedances of the state's visibility standard for the metro area by 40 - 50%; and
- maintain particulate (PM-10) emissions from motor vehicles at 1995 regulatory levels.

The Regional Air Quality Council's *Blueprint for Clean Air* recommends the strategies listed below to achieve air quality goals over the next 20 years.

Street Sand

Maintain mobile source particulate (PM10) emissions at 1995 levels, even in the face of increased vehicle travel. Emissions can be reduced through increased street sweeping and/or through the use of alternative deicers, which are different than sand.

Vehicle Travel

- Implement the Denver Regional Council of Government's MetroVision 2020 plan, which includes public transit & a regional growth boundary to reduce sprawl.
- Implement local land use measures which allow people to live and work in the same area, and promote transit, bike and pedestrian travel.

Smoking Vehicles

- Improve the vehicle inspection program to reduce emissions from high-emitting vehicles.
- Strengthen enforcement of smoking vehicle laws through greater authority and resources for

local and state government action.

* Seek incentives to repair or retire smoking vehicles, including diesel and off-road equipment.

Vehicle Emissions

Establish a Governor's task force to evaluate the future of the oxygenated fuels program and the light duty vehicle inspection program. Evaluate the cost-effectiveness of potential alternative programs.

Diesel: Improve the diesel emissions inspection program, by incorporating the latest test procedures, and allowing a test exemption for fleets which follow a state-approved vehicle maintenance program.

Evaluate federal proposals to tighten emissions standards for light duty cars, sport utility vehicles, and diesel trucks. Advocate for proposals which make sense for the region.

Focus on Ozone

Take short-term voluntary actions to guard against violations of the new ozone standard. Proactively work with business, industry and the public to prevent falling out of compliance.

Utility Industry Actions

Implement voluntary actions proposed by Public Service Company to reduce metro area power plant emissions by up to 70 % for sulfur dioxide and 20 % for nitrogen oxides, going well beyond what is required by EPA. These measures would be paid for through a utility users rate increase of less than \$1.00 per month per household, over the next 15 years.

General

Incentives: Implement voluntary and incentive programs such as pollution prevention, energy efficiency, renewable energy, and programs which reduce vehicle travel to reduce emissions from all sources. Create partnerships or collaborate with others to fulfill this strategy.

Develop a carbon monoxide (CO) maintenance plan for the region by the year 2000. Once completed, submit a request to EPA to be redesignated to an attainment area by EPA.

Strategies Not Recommended

A number of strategies were evaluated by the RAQC, but were not included in the Blueprint plan because they were not cost-effective, and because they were received minimal support by subcommittee members and by the public. Primarily these involved "pricing" mechanisms for travel reduction. Additionally, controls on industry which are relatively lesser sources of pollution were omitted because of their diminishing benefits at a higher cost.

For further information about the community relations and public involvement activities of the RAQC, contact Meg Deane Franko.

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