East Colfax Bus Rapid Transit

Small Business Toolkit
A tradition of grit and resilience

Over the past 150 years, the only constant on Colfax Avenue has been change. What started as a route leading miners to the riches of the Rockies gave way to a charming, trolley-lined thoroughfare and eventually a lively, neon hub for tourism and entertainment. While Colfax has experienced many iterations throughout history, there is a golden thread that weaves together the evolution and personality of Denver’s most iconic street – small businesses.

From the cigar stores and grocers that served Denverites in the early 1900s to the family-owned restaurants, motels and drive-ins that defined the 1950s – small businesses have been the life of the party throughout the history of Colfax Avenue. Today, small businesses are still the heart and soul of Colfax – proudly carrying the torch of the street’s storied past.

As Colfax enters its next chapter, things are changing again. Hand in hand with our community, the City and County of Denver is embarking on a transformative project to enhance mobility, efficiency, safety, and public spaces along the famed avenue. A new, center-running Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system is ushering in a future where modern transit supports the historic character and envisioned future of Colfax.

Change rarely comes without a few challenges. But know you’re not facing them alone. You are part of a united front – representing the tradition of grit and resilience of Colfax Avenue. The temporary dust of construction is paving the way for a permanent transformation — one that is more than a milestone. It’s a monumental mark on Colfax’s historic timeline that will preserve its unique, vibrant energy and legacy into the future.
Great Cities Do Stuff Like This

We get it. Construction is heading your way, but the cities of Denver and Aurora and their partner organizations along the East Colfax corridor have a whole host of things designed to help mitigate, and in some cases remove, some common roadblocks that businesses face during large construction projects. Use this toolkit as your go-to for useful resources and information to help you thrive during construction. Through communication and cooperation, we want to help your business remain stable during construction and emerge better equipped to capitalize on opportunities the improved East Colfax Avenue and Bus Rapid Transit will provide.

Is my business ready for construction? .............................................................. p. 4
How can I prepare for construction? ................................................................. p. 5
How can I stay informed of construction news and updates? ...................... p. 9
Is my business ready for construction?

As an East Colfax business owner, how prepared are you to ensure your business thrives during construction of the BRT?

Scan one of the QR codes below to complete this self-assessment to help you think through how your business may be impacted and what you may or may not need to do to prepare.

Yes, we’re asking a lot of questions that may not seem relevant to your business, but they help us identify which businesses could benefit with a little extra support to manage construction.

If you would like us to review your responses and make referrals to various business supports and technical assistance, select “Submit” after you complete the self-assessment. We’ll follow-up with you to discuss your options. If completing the self-assessment has given you a plan and you’re comfortable proceeding without our review and referrals, keep it for your own internal road map.

If you change your mind and would like to know of business supports and resources available, reach out via the contact info.

Not sure about taking the assessment? Here are a few questions to think about:

Are my customers less likely to patronize my business because of construction impacts?  
Solution: enhance marketing and customer outreach.

Are there opportunities to reduce my costs during construction?  
Solution: update your business plan during the period of construction impacts to minimize costs and maximize revenues by right-sizing staffing and inventory levels.

Do I have vendors and other business resources who need to be updated on construction progress and news?  
Solution: encourage them to stay up to date on construction progress to plan deliveries, pick-ups and other logistics by subscribing to East Colfax BRT traffic alerts and construction update emails.

Link to Denver self-assessment

Link to Aurora self-assessment
How can I prepare for construction?

Make a list, check it twice.
Make sure you have an updated list of customer contact information so you can regularly communicate and stay top of mind throughout construction.

Great tools to use:
• Email marketing
• Bulk text message applications
• Snail mail/direct mail pieces

Digital Platforms
Most people check out a business through social media or its website before visiting in person. The way you portray your business online is incredibly important. Customers don’t like feeling neglected in person or online.

• Keep your website updated with your hours, access during the construction, and other relevant information.
• Start promoting your sites by posting signs in your store and adding links in your emails.

Keep a script next to the phone so all employees know what to say when customers ask about directions and construction. Add directions on your outgoing voicemail.

It’s called “social” media because people want to interact. Post a lot about life in general and a little about your business and the project. Offer detour routes, funny stories and photos, hours of operation, encouraging messages, sales, useful and interesting information, photos of products and staff, and share posts from other users.

Did you know? The average customer must see a piece of advertising 6-7 times before they will act on a purchase. Communicate often.
Alternate Routes & Hours
Inform customers in advance. Keeping your customers informed gives them the ability to maneuver construction and access your business.

- Send directions to alternative access points to your business through your communication channels.
- Make the journey interesting by highlighting a quirky feature your customers can identify as they approach your business.

How about alternate hours? Consider staying open later, after construction stops, to attract the business of project workers. Remember to keep Google, Yelp, Facebook, Bing, TripAdvisor and more updated with your hours!

- Communicate with your suppliers and delivery drivers. If necessary, help your suppliers identify alternate routes to your business and make them aware of differing hours, parking and loading/unloading zones. If you anticipate special accommodations for making or receiving deliveries, please contact the construction project team.

A Little Dust, A Lot of Progress
Allocate more time and money to cleaning. While there’s little you can do to reduce the dust and noise of a construction site, you can focus on keeping your own business as clean as possible.

Alternate Entrance
Access to your business will be maintained. But if you have an alternate entrance, make sure there are signs placed inside your store window, directing your customers to an alternate entrance and consider using it and sprucing it up beforehand.
Right Size

• Use the self-assessment tool links on page 4.
• Make a staffing plan. Leave a position vacant when there is natural attrition.
• Do a cash-flow analysis to establish a plan moving forward. That could include the creation of a dedicated cash reserve to meet fixed operational expenses.
• If you rent, consider talking with your landlord regarding rent abatement or adjustment during construction.
• Inform current lenders of the upcoming project and see if there are opportunities to restructure existing debt and lines of credit in case of diminished revenues.
• Create and evaluate several financial scenarios for your business and plan accordingly.
• Reduce inventory if the scenarios you evaluated call for it.
• If you were considering physical improvements to your business, try timing it so all construction is done at once.

New Markets & Creative Ideas

• Construction workers are potential customers!
• Distribute menus, coupons, or flyers to the project team to post in field offices.
• Add detour maps and coupons into billings or other mailings and communication channels.
• Offer a free delivery service to your customers. Be flexible and consider customer requests.
• Consider wholesaling items previously considered for retailing.
• Restaurants can create “detour route map” placemats/menus.
• Create a “frequent buyer” program or “Hard Hat” discount club; do something above and beyond what you would usually do in your business to attract customers.
Stay Positive - Think Caterpillar into a Butterfly

• Share the facts about the construction situation in an upbeat way. Negativism and voicing concerns about construction will keep customers away. A positive, fun atmosphere will bring them back.

• If approached by the media about construction, maintain a positive angle and give the public a reason to visit your business.

• Keep your positive attitude by reminding your customers - and yourself - about the benefits your area will receive once construction is complete.

Optimism Messaging Ideas:

• Building a Better Tomorrow
• Transforming Denver’s Main Street
• Paving Progress, Preserving Culture
• Colfax’s Newest Chapter
• Experience the Future in Action
Stay Informed

• When your block is under construction, there will be signs to help people access businesses.

• Check updated information on the Route 15 and 15L by visiting app.rtd-denver.com/alerts.

• Contact us if you would like the project team to make a brief presentation to your team so they have all the latest facts and can spread a positive message about construction.

Website: DenverGov.org/ColfaxBRT

Chats on Colfax – visit the website for details

Sign up for weekly email updates about construction

This is our Common Cause:

• Once construction is over, it’s time to focus on recapturing market share and inviting customers to see the changes.

• Consider how the new landscape – the new “canvas” – can be optimized for your business.

• Let customers know East Colfax has a new look and promote the new image and convenience of the completed project.

• Take advantage of the opportunity by holding a ribbon-cutting ceremony and invite the news media to the ceremony. Consider pooling resources with nearby businesses for a grand celebration and/or shared advertising.

• Support other businesses undergoing the BRT construction process. Give them your patronage and provide helpful feedback based on your experiences.