

An evaluation of the El Rancho Park-n-Ride lot and bus stops 2022 closure on the RTD EV bus route

This document provides background information and summarizes available information regarding the circumstances surrounding the closure of the El Rancho Park-n-Ride and removal of associated bus stops from the RTD EV bus route in August 2022. It references portions of the following:

RTD compiled emails 2021-2022.pdf

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TepDcDgv0tAhrUZcbsu17haKsOzRCXVT/view?usp=drive_link

RTD ElRancho closure Memorandum 1-19-2022.pdf

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yz1jutWlxYl_66tyYOYrf9somnDXSHXe/view?usp=drive_link

RTD PnR Task Force Meeting Minutes 6-15-2022.pdf

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FTD0IAyAcGNJeykXgMW2CHx9vYkncm8l/view?usp=drive_link

RTD response re El Rancho closure 9-15-2022.pdf

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zYc9N4qfJip1jLy3L5X7ZJOBfqOzTgde/view?usp=drive_link

CDOT reply re Park-n-Ride 3-3-2023.pdf

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GHsX5cTYwr2k3kM3hZlm1dRSJqIMHRgu/view?usp=drive_link

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What reasons were given for the closure decision?

The determination to abandon the El Rancho PnR and bus stops was made in September 2021. In various communications after the fact, RTD cited the speed limit and other safety concerns, ADA compliance, maintenance costs, and a survey of registered addresses of the cars parked at the El Rancho lot. Notably, these same criteria were not evaluated for other lots at the same time; the search for excuses was targeted at the El Rancho facilities alone. The public-facing excuse was “low ridership.”

Was “low ridership” really the issue?

The service change notice for the EV route on 8/21/2022 said: "Route will no longer serve El Rancho Park-n-Ride due to low ridership" (<https://www.rtd-denver.com/service-changes/august-2022#EV>). The El Rancho lot was “closed” on that date with a sandwich board posted conspicuously at the entrance, citing “low ridership” and informing users to park at other lots.

I requested ridership data from May 2017 through Aug 2022, but was provided with “average weekday ridership” for varying time spans instead. These are, thus, not actual counts, but do reflect ridership in terms that are comparable between stops at any given time step. As of Aug 2022:

- The stops associated with park-n-ride lots ranked consistently in terms of average weekday ridership across this time period, both pre- and post-pandemic, in this order: (1) Bergen Park, (2) Evergreen, (3) El Rancho, (4) Paradise Hills, (5) Genesee.
- Ridership plummeted during the pandemic shutdown period and has not since recovered. Each PnR-associated stop continued to experience low levels of ridership. Genesee showed zero avg weekday ridership at every post-pandemic time-step since 4/19/2020. Paradise Hills experienced zero avg weekday ridership once, at the most recent time-step (5/29 to 8/20/2022).
- As a proportion of pre-pandemic average weekday ridership, Evergreen and Paradise Hills had each recovered to about half the pre-pandemic average; El Rancho had recovered to about 40% of the pre-pandemic average; and Bergen Park has recovered to about 20% of the pre-pandemic average.
- As a ratio of number of spaces to the avg of avg pre-pandemic weekday ridership, the lots rank as follows: Evergreen (0.8), El Rancho (1.5), Paradise Hills (1.8), Bergen Park (2.1), Genesee (3.0).
- The bus stops associated with the El Rancho Park-n-Ride lot have performed favorably (ranked middle or higher) both pre-and post-pandemic relative to the other four foothills lots. Those stops associated with the Genesee Park-n-Ride lot have consistently ranked last.

If ridership was a criterion, it was unevenly applied and in some cases entirely ignored. No other stops on this route, and no other lots, were closed.

Are the El Rancho bus stops dangerous?

The bus stops at the pedestrian islands are far-side pullout stops. In 11 years of crash data, 2010-2020, there were zero (0) incidents involving an RTD bus, with or without another vehicle, at the intersection of Hwy 74 and U.S. 40 (CDOT Crash data, 2010-2020, <https://www.codot.gov/safety/traffic-safety/data-analysis/crash-data>, extracted for Hwy 40B MP 276.5-277 and State Hwy 74A MP 0-0.5, for incidents categorized as “at intersection” or “intersection-related”).

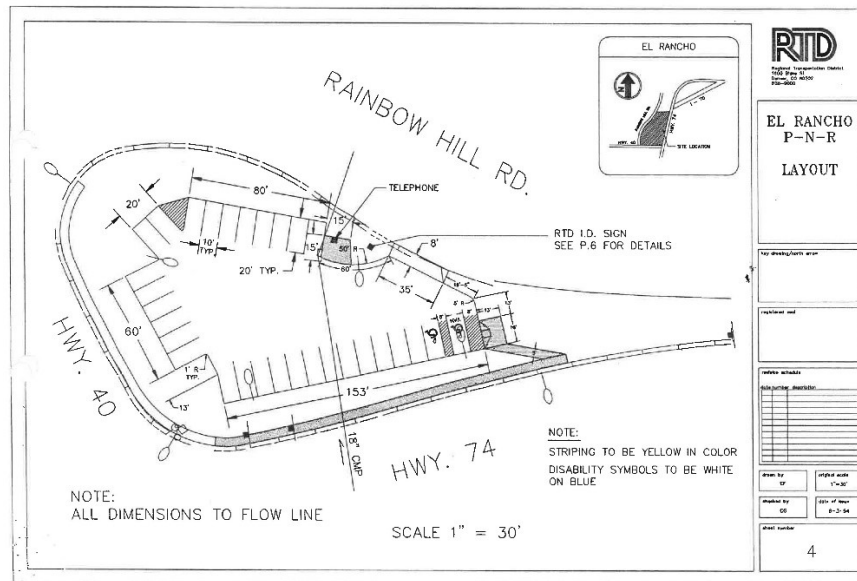
Are the El Rancho transit facilities ADA compliant?

On 9/15/2022, the RTD Board Office remarked among its excuses for abandoning El Rancho, "It was a legacy stop with almost no ADA compliant infrastructure." Neither assertion is true.

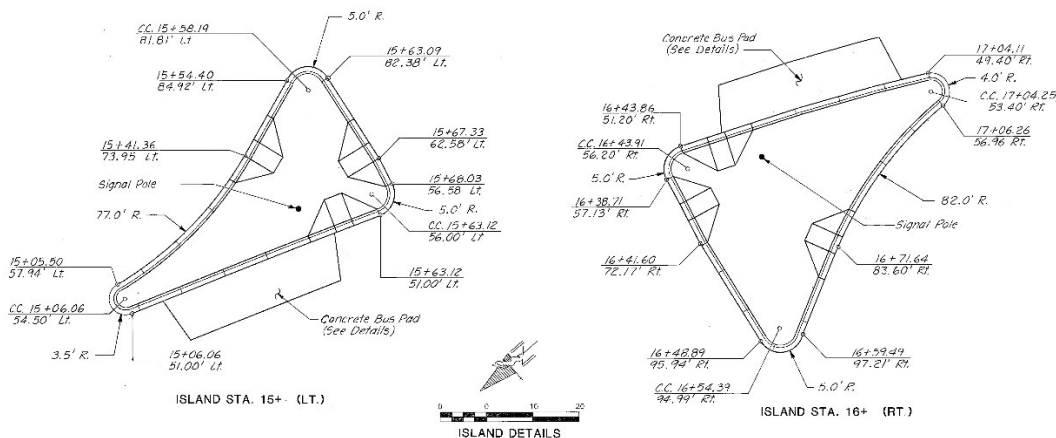
The ADA was passed in 1990. The Evergreen Parkway Interchange, which included constructing the intersection at U.S. 40 and Hwy 74, was built between 1992 and 1994. The El Rancho Park-n-Ride lot was designed and constructed in 1994.

The El Rancho Park-n-Ride lot has two (2) accessible spaces (out of 36 total) located adjacent to a ramp to the 5-ft wide sidewalk leading to the intersection, where every corner has a curbcut and a marked crosswalk. The intersection is fully light-regulated in four directions. The pedestrian islands on Hwy 74 at El Rancho are above street level and have boarding areas larger than 5 ft x 8 ft. They are accessed by low-angle ramps 3 ft wide from 3 directions, with textured panels at the bottom of each ramp.






RTD lease agreement Exhibit C (CDOT lease P-11-002-000, p.8, 7/29/1994)



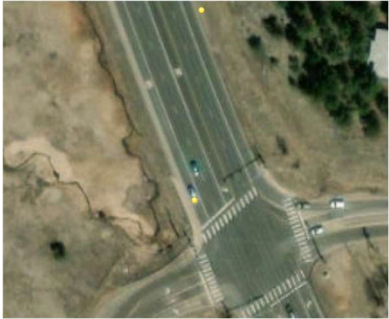

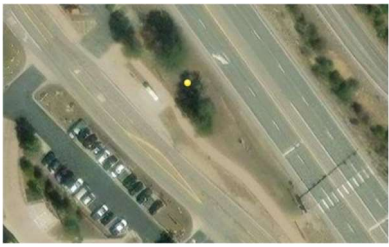


Evergreen Parkway Interchange engineering diagrams for bus stop islands (Geometric Plan-S.H. 74/U.S. 40, IM-NH-IR(CX)070-3(169), sheet 32, 7/29/1994).



How does the transportation infrastructure at El Rancho compare to all other stops on the same route that were not closed?

EV Route Stop	Image	Speed Limit; Roadway	Traffic Control; Crosswalk	Stop position; ADA?	Shelter; Lot (spaces)
U.S. 40 at Exit 256 (Paradise Hills)		35 mph; 2-lane	Stop sign; NO XWALK	WB: shoulder EB: curb ADA NO/YES	NO; YES (26)
U.S. 40 at Lookout Mtn Road		50 mph; 2-lane	NONE; NO XWALK	WB: shoulder EB: shoulder ADA NO	NO; NO
U.S. 40 at Exit 254 (Genesee/ Buffalo Overlook)		35 mph; 2-lane	Stop sign; 2-way XWALK	WB: curb EB: curb ADA YES	NO; YES (21)
Hwy 74 at U.S. 40 (El Rancho) CLOSED 8/21/2022		40 mph; 4-lane divided	4-way light; 4-way XWALK	SB: platform NB: platform ADA YES	YES (before closure); YES (36)
Hwy 74 at Kerr Gulch/ Hidden Valley		40 mph; 4-lane divided	NONE; NO XWALK	SB: shoulder NB: shoulder ADA NO	NO; NO

EV Route Stop	Image	Speed Limit; Roadway	Traffic Control; Crosswalk	Stop position; ADA?	Shelter; Lot (spaces)
Hwy 74 at Cty 65 (Bergen Park)		50 mph; 4-lane divided	4-way light; 4-way XWALK	SB: curb NB: curb ADA YES	YES; YES (160)
Hwy 74 at Brookline Rd (Hiwan)		55 mph; 4-lane	NONE; NO XWALK	SB: shoulder NB: shoulder ADA NO	NO; NO
Hwy 74 at Lewis Ridge Rd		55 mph; 4-lane	4-way light; 4-way XWALK	SB: curb NB: shoulder ADA YES/NO	NO; NO
Hwy 74 at Stagecoach Blvd		45 mph; 4-lane	4-way light; 4-way XWALK	SB: shoulder NB: shoulder ADA NO	NO; NO
Hwy 74 at Evrgn Pkwy Access Rd (CTK Church)		25 mph; 2-lane	(Hwy 74) on-demand light, YES XWALK; (frontage rd) NONE, NO XWALK	SB/NB: curb ADA YES	YES; YES (45)

What role did the proposed development play in the closure decision?

The developer initially contacted RTD in February 2021. In 2021 and through 2022:

- RTD believed, “CDOT had made the determination to sell their property West of Evergreen Parkway, North of US Highway 40 to a developer.” In fact, CDOT had never agreed to any of the proposals submitted by the developer (A.Hogle, CDOT Records, 10/17/2022). Furthermore, CDOT had made clear to the developer that any determination for disposal would follow their procedure and state law, and no properties had been proposed for, reviewed, or determined for disposal at that time or since. The lease agreement between the two agencies allows for either party to initiate termination, and CDOT did not do so. From the beginning and throughout that time, CDOT deferred to RTD; CDOT did not compel RTD to forfeit its lease or relocate the lot.
- RTD also believed, “CDOT, and the local fire and rescue departments are supportive of the reconfiguration.” In fact, CDOT took no position on the development proposal. The fire district had issued a letter of support regarding the potential to receive a new station, and signed an LOI only to pursue discussion regarding relocating the fire station. The developer had not at that time, nor since, presented an actual offer to the fire district and no terms were ever agreed to. The developer has since withdrawn his rezoning application and is no longer pursuing relocating the fire station.
- RTD also believed at that time that the access road “serving the current facilities will be transferred to Jefferson County for ownership and maintenance.” In fact, CDOT had made clear that the transfer of Rainbow Hill Road to the County would be a complex process, that it had no interest in revising the road for its own purposes, and that a request to transfer the road would have to be initiated by the County. At that time, no such request had been made, no resolutions entertained, nor any agreement reached; since that time, Jefferson County has declined to pursue relocation of Rainbow Hill Road.

RTD was under the sway of the developer’s rhetoric, and apparently did not pursue facts or independent assessment (i.e., due diligence) regarding the assertions that had been made about the proposed development. In actuality, the rezoning application was never complete, none of the proposed uses were ever reviewed, and no approvals had been, nor ever were, obtained from any agency at any time.

For six months, RTD negotiated with the developer, but the developer repeatedly would not accommodate the design criteria that RTD stipulated in detail. RTD believed that its only recourse was to abandon the site altogether. This decision worked in the developer’s interest, and subsequently the developer omitted any plan to accommodate public transit at El Rancho while persisting with his intention to destroy the PnR and replace it with a commercial property. The subsequent withdrawal of the original rezoning application and negative County response to relocating Rainbow Hill Road have effectively nullified any remaining ambition to appropriate the PnR for development.

The RTD Board Office said all it needed to when it replied on 9/15/2022: “The other stops and Park-n-Rides on this route were never even brought into consideration because they are not being redeveloped at this time.” The facilities at El Rancho were not neglected or disused. *The abandonment process would not have happened if it had not been for the development proposal.* Every other reason that has been offered was an excuse contrived after the fact.

What is the status of the Park-n-Ride lot?

The RTD Park-n-Ride Task Force recommended on 9/8/2021 that the El Rancho PnR be “permanently closed.” At the 6/15/2022 Task Force meeting, plans to “abandon” the PnR were “still on schedule.” On 9/15/2022, the RTD Board Office indicated that the Task Force had a year earlier “made a recommendation to Senior Management to relinquish our lease on the property,” and indicated, “RTD leased the property at that time and has recently terminated our use.”

On 3/3/2023, the CDOT R1 ROW Manager wrote: “In regards to the RTD site - this site is currently leased by RTD, CDOT has not requested or received a notice of termination of this lease from RTD. When and if CDOT receives a notice of termination for the RTD facility, it would then become part of CDOT inventory and would have to follow the appropriate Disposal process which would offer first right of refusal to the Colorado DPA, then Local Taxing Jurisdictions, so it would not be immediately available for the Developer or any other private entity to acquire.”

RTD unequivocally abandoned the lot. It took down the flags at the stops in August 2022, removed the bus shelter in late September 2022, and ceased maintenance (neither the lot nor the sidewalk was cleared of snow over the winter of 2022-2023). CDOT does not seem to regard the lease as terminated, however they have made clear that they will dispose of the lot if RTD is no longer responsible for it. The rezoning application associated with the development proposal from 2021 has been withdrawn and the PnR is no longer threatened by development. The current (2023) status of this standoff is uncertain.

Does El Rancho deserve to have a bus stop?

The Evergreen Area Plan of the Jefferson County Comprehensive Master Plan advocates for continued and expanded public transit options generally, and specifically identifies the El Rancho Park-n-Ride as an important transportation asset. The Plan also argues that El Rancho should be the site of a transit connection to I-70 mountain shuttle service. It is recognized as a strategic location for public transit at a major crossroads.

El Rancho is an Activity Center in the Evergreen Area Plan. It is on an existing bus route, and supported a stop with ridership for almost 50 years before the stop was removed. It is surrounded by several rural residential neighborhoods. The El Rancho Activity Center is the site of the Jefferson County affordable housing project, Vista El Rancho. Logistically, it should have a bus stop.

Area residents responded to a petition addressing the attempt under the development proposal to remove Community Use assets located at El Rancho (‘Keep El Rancho Community Use’, <https://www.gopetition.com/petitions/keep-el-rancho-community-use.html>). Among comments received from the 119 who signed, several supported the Park-n-Ride lot specifically:

I have been here for over 30 years. I have used the Park n Ride and want it to remain in place where it is.

I am completely against this development and the selling of the RTD lot to developers.

Please do not close this RTD Park -in-ride I use it often because of its ease to hop back on 70.

We do not want to see the Park and Ride at El Rancho discontinued.

The public is already invested in this location and continues to use the PnR in the spirit of pursuing transportation alternatives. The community wants this public transportation resource.

The PnR and bus stops at El Rancho were well designed, well built, and have been well maintained (e.g., the stairway at the PnR was replaced in 2018 for \$45K) at taxpayer expense for 30 years.

Evergreen adds in excess of \$1M in sales taxes annually to RTD's budget, and that amount has grown steadily over time. The commercial district at El Rancho is a significant component of that contribution. That contribution should return to Evergreen in the form of service and facilities.

There is no justifiable reason why the El Rancho Park-n-Ride lot should not be maintained, nor why the associated stops should not be restored.

Compiled and updated August 2023