Land Use and Climate in Colorado

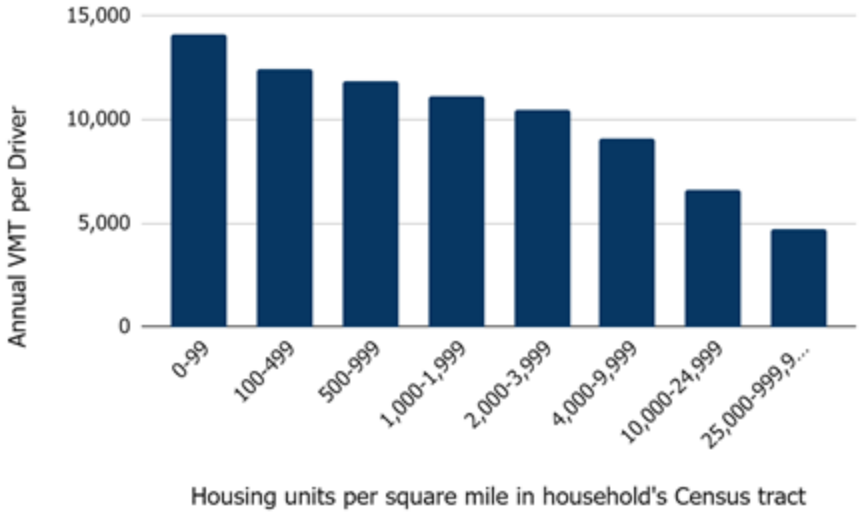
How Strategic Growth Lowers Emissions and Provides Other Co-benefits



Climate, Transportation, and Land Use in CO

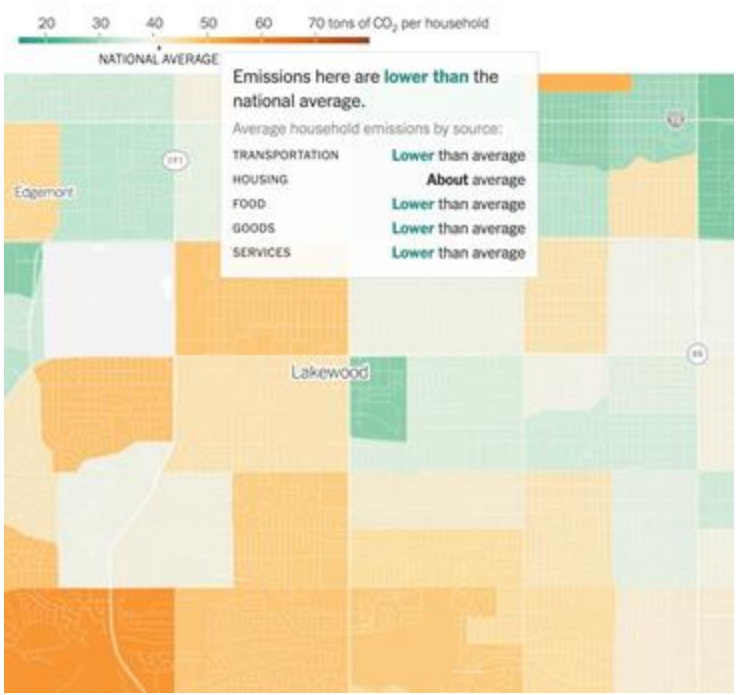
- Colorado's population is estimated to grow by 1.4 million people by 2050
- People who live near work, school, and services are more likely to walk, bike, or take transit, and take shorter trips when vehicles are necessary
- Colorado households in dense areas (15 dwelling units per acre) drive 20% less than the state average, and 40% less than the state average in the densest areas (40 dwelling units per acre) (FHWA)

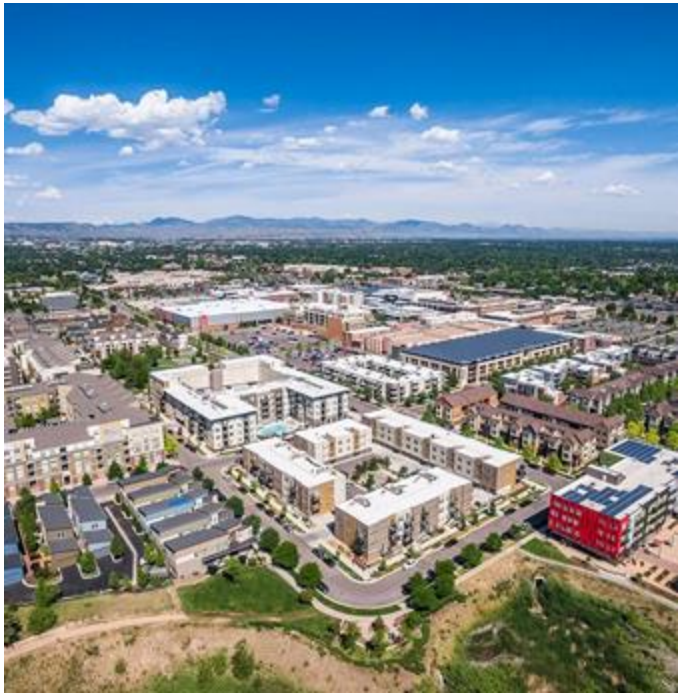
National average annual VMT per driver by population density (FHWA)

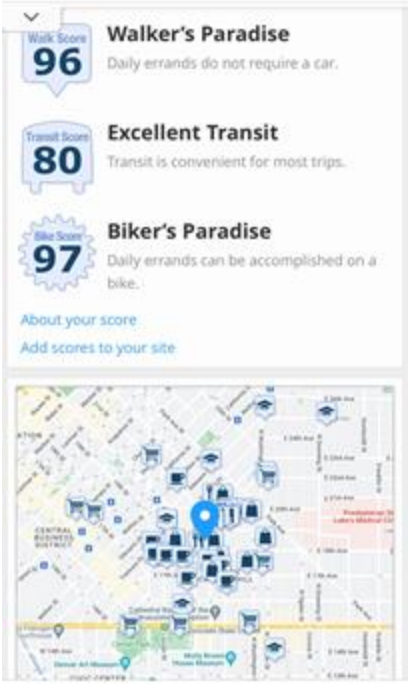


Specific example: Lakewood, CO

In the Belmar development in Lakewood, residents drive 20% below the regional average.







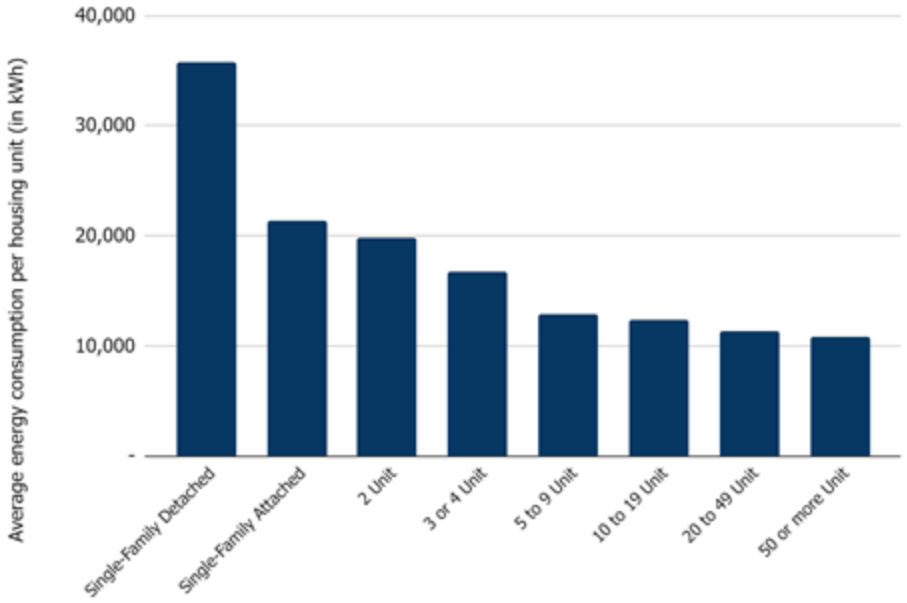
Source: New York Times map of GHGs per household

Land Use and Building Emissions

In Colorado, average household energy demand is 70% less for multifamily housing compared to single-unit detached dwellings (NREL)

More compact residential development with shared walls and smaller unit sizes are more energy efficient, reducing household energy costs.

Average building energy use per housing unit in Colorado (NREL)



Natural and Working Lands Benefits

- Previous development of natural and working lands for housing, infrastructure, and commercial use already releasing a net 78 million tons of CO2 per year nationwide (EPA)
- Preservation also has co-benefits like flood prevention, water quality, wildlife habitat, recreation opportunities, and food production

Colorado Natural and Working Lands (CO DNR)

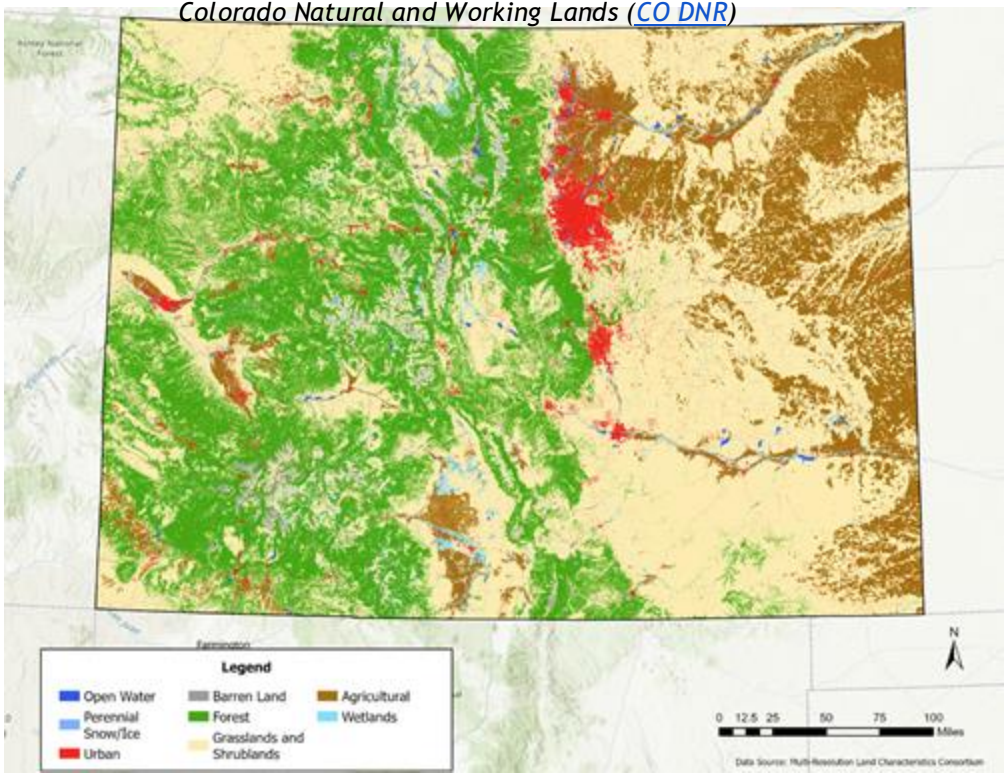
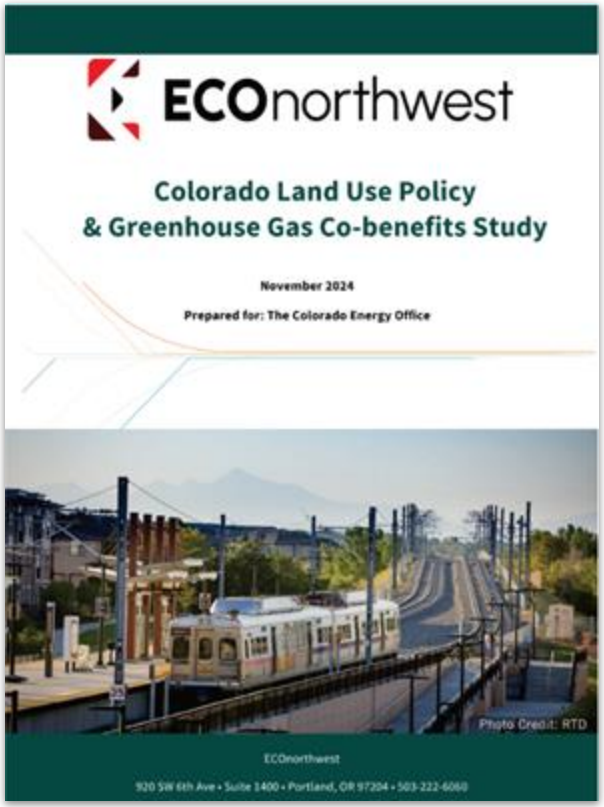
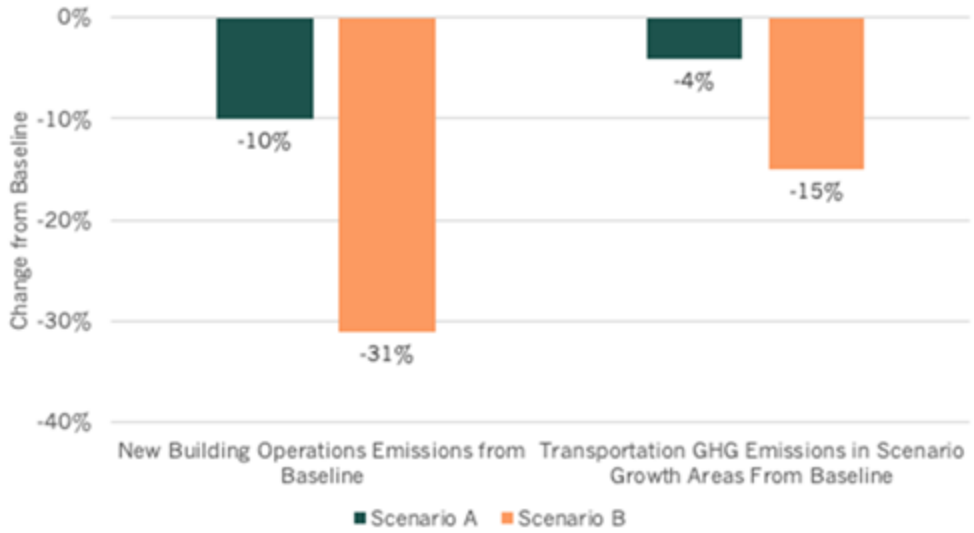


Image Source: Colorado Department of Natural Resources

Land Use GHG Study



Percent Change in Greenhouse Gas Emissions Related to New Housing Development, Relative to the Baseline, 2050



Source: ECOnorthwest

[CEO Land Use Policy and GHGs Study (public).pdf]

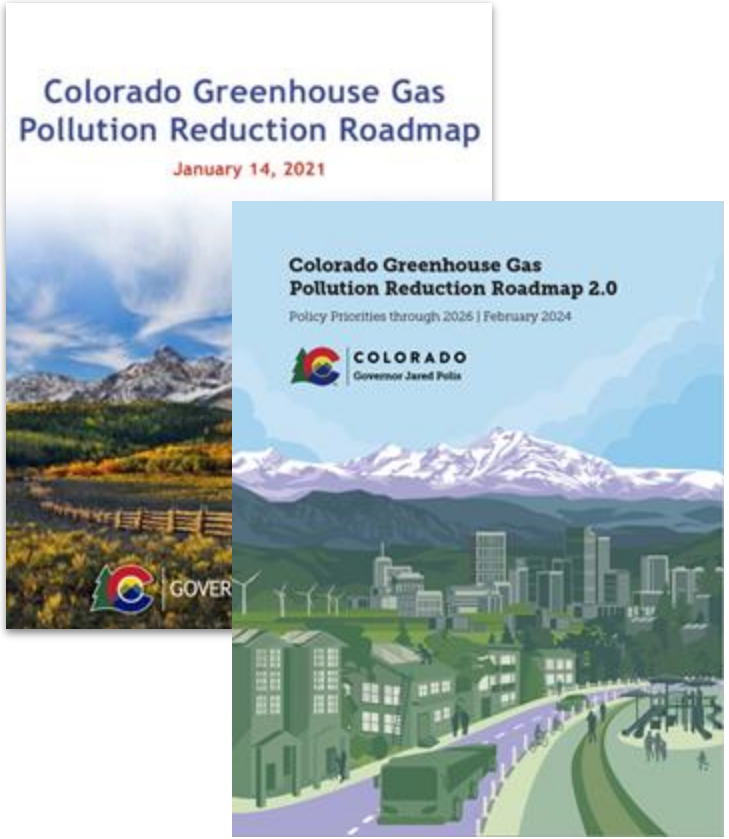
Affordability and Economic benefits

- **Reduced housing costs:** More compact housing types (e.g., townhomes, duplexes, condos/apartments) typically cost less, and added housing supply brings down overall costs.
- **Reduced transportation costs:** Households in metro Denver in compact neighborhoods are estimated to spend ~$2,000 less annually on transportation.[1]
- **Reduced utility costs:** Lower building energy demand also translates into savings.
- **Local government costs:** Compact development can reduce infrastructure costs upfront by one third, and ongoing public service costs by 10%. Also typically generates 10 times more tax revenue per area than low density suburban development.[2]

[1] Center for Neighborhood Technology, Housing+Transportation Affordability Index
[2] Smart Growth America, Building Better Budgets, a National Examination of the Fiscal Benefits of Smart Growth Development.

Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Roadmaps

- First GHG Roadmap published in 2021
  - Directed agencies to work together on land use incentive programs and land use research report
- Current GHG Roadmap released in 2024
  - Has a whole section on “strategic growth”, focused on land use and multi-modal transportation



HB 24-1152: Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

- **Subject Jurisdiction ADU Requirements:** Local governments in urban areas must allow 1 ADU with admin. approval where single-family detached units are allowed. Cannot require parking or owner occupancy or otherwise restrict through design.
- **Grants and financing:** ADU grant program for pre-approved plans, TA, or reducing fees. Also financing for residents through lenders.
- **Implementation to date:**
  - 61% of subject jurisdictions are compliant
  - 82% are compliant or compliance in progress
  - 9 jurisdictions have voluntarily opted in





On June 30, 2025 the law took effect.

HB 24-1304: Parking Minimums

- **Local requirement:** For areas in MPOs and within applicable transit service areas, local governments must not enact/enforce local laws requiring minimum parking for multifamily residential, adaptive reuse for residential, or adaptive reuse for mixed use that includes 50% of use for residential. Limited exception allows up to 1 space per unit requirement, with required reporting to DOLA.
- **Applicability map**: Applicable Transit Service Areas map published by September 30, 2024.
- **Required support**: Best practices and technical assistance materials published by December 31, 2024



On June 30, 2025 the law took effect.

HB24-1313: Transit-Oriented Communities

- **Purpose:** reduce initial barrier (zoning) to encourage more housing density near transit
- **Reasoning:** transit-supportive densities can promote both a functional transportation network and affordable housing projects to "pencil"
- **Approach:** state sets a target (zoning capacity), local jurisdictions decide how to reach it
- **Application:** approximately 30 jurisdictions on the Front Range
- So far, 5 jurisdictions have fully complied, 16



On December 31, 2027 the law takes effect.

Other Strategic Growth Laws

- **C.R.S. § 29-20-111 (HB 24-1007) Residential Occupancy Limits** prohibits local governments from limiting the number of people who may live together in a single dwelling based on the occupants' familial relationship.
- **C.R.S. § 31-15-605 (HB25-1273) Residential Building Stair Modernization** by December 1, 2027, HB25-1273 requires certain large Colorado municipalities to update their building codes to allow multifamily residential buildings up to 5 stories to be served by a single exit stairway if the design of those buildings meets specific fire safety, structural, and design criteria to ensure safe egress in case of fire.
- **HB26-1001 (also known as the "Housing Opportunities Made Easier" or HOME Act)** by December 31, 2027 requires local governments that had a population greater than 2,000 residents at the time of the last Census to offer an administrative approval process for residential development on land owned by qualifying entities (e.g. transit agencies, schools, universities, affordable housing providers).