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CDOT study puts I-70 improvements at up to \$20 billion

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Colorado officials today released a revised study of potential transportation improvements for the Interstate 70 mountain corridor with a "preferred alternative" that could cost between \$16 billion and \$20 billion over the next 40 years.

The preferred option includes highway widening along key segments of the 118-mile portion of I-70 between the C-470 junction and the Eagle County Regional Airport, as well as a fully elevated "advanced guideway" transit system over that same distance.

The transit guideway would require new tunnel bores at the Twin Tunnels near Idaho Springs and at the Eisenhower-Johnson Memorial Tunnels, according to the revised study.

The document is available at www.i70mtncorridor.com.

The Colorado Department of Transportation, which prepared the environmental study, "does

not have enough available revenue sources to fund the Preferred Alternative improvements," the agency said.

The study cites the expected impact to travel in the I-70 mountain corridor if no improvements are made in coming decades.

While drivers on I-70 between Silverthorne and C-470 typically experience an extra hour of driving time during peak weekend hours, that peak weekend travel time will be about three times higher in 2035 if nothing is done in the corridor, the study said.

Similarly, weekday peak travel times will double if no improvements are made over the same 25-year period, it added.

Separately, CDOT is studying a possible short-term solution for eastbound I-70 congestion on winter Sundays that might involve taking one of the westbound lanes between Empire Junction and Floyd Hill and reversing it for a limited number of hours to an eastbound flow. CDOT's study of the so-called "zipper lane" option found, however, that it could significantly increase travel times in the remaining westbound lane.

The environmental study's preferred alternative points to a number of "high priority" improvements, including adding one lane to I-70 in each direction between Floyd Hill and the Twin Tunnels, while improving "curvature and grade" for the segment as well.

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That segment between Floyd Hill and the tunnels "is where some of the worst weekend congestion occurs," the draft study says.

Other top priority elements, according to the report, include improving Empire Junction, where I-70 meets U.S. 40, and building a westbound auxiliary lane for the seven miles from Bakerville to the Eisenhower-Johnson tunnels.

In 2004, CDOT released an earlier draft of the I-70 environmental study that tilted toward expanding highway capacity in the corridor and downplayed the potential for an advanced guideway train, primarily because of the extremely high cost of such a rail solution.

Another recent study pegged the cost of a train for the I-70 mountain corridor at about \$10 billion.

When some residents and local officials in the corridor balked at an alternative that they believed favored a wider highway over rail, CDOT shifted gears and in 2007 began a "collaborative effort" with numerous entities in the corridor to reach a consensus solution for I-70 congestion.

That consensus view is embedded in the preferred alternative now under review in the revised environmental study.

On Oct. 5, 6 and 7, CDOT and other agencies will hold public hearings on the revised document in Silverthorne, Evergreen and Eagle.


Times and locations are available at i70mtncorridor.com.

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