



Coalition hopes to delay I-70 report

BY JANE STEBBINS

October 31, 2004

SUMMIT COUNTY - A coalition of local officials working on Interstate 70 congestion issues wants more time to study ways to improve traffic flow.

The Interstate 70 Central Mountain Transportation Corridor Coalition (ICMTCC) plans to ask the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) to delay its release of its draft preliminary environmental impact statement for six months.

Those hoping to postpone the release of the draft preliminary impact statement the most are people in Clear Creek County, who arguably would be most affected by any of the alternatives presented in the document.

Other coalition members include officials in Summit, Eagle, Lake, Pitkin, Grand and Garfield counties plus the towns in those counties.

The "preferred" alternatives comprise all those that didn't exceed CDOT's \$4 billion cap, Summit County Commissioner Bob French said.

In Clear Creek County, they include either six-laning or double-decking the interstate through Idaho Springs.

CDOT officials planned to release the impact statement late this year or early next year. In it is a list of alternatives to alleviate traffic congestion along the I-70 corridor from Denver to Glenwood Springs.

"There are folks who feel they hadn't had the opportunity to study the presented alternatives and comment on them," said French, who spent four hours recently studying the document.

"Six-laning through Georgetown or Idaho Springs will be a nightmare for their towns," French said. "We hope the jurisdictions in the coalition will examine the alternatives and see whether a light bulb comes on: 'Hey, we didn't think of this,' or 'the things we're thinking of were things they didn't consider or may have been rejected because the costs were more than \$4 billion.'"

More than 1 million vehicles traveled through the Eisenhower Tunnel in July, making it the busiest month in its 31-year history. Daily tunnel traffic averaged 35,600 vehicles, but that soared to 46,851 on August 1.

The issue has Clear Creek officials particularly alarmed. They cite rock-fall hazards, toxic mineral releases into nearby streams, noise, dust and wildlife migration problems that such alternatives would present.

Clear Creek County Commissioner JoAnn Sorensen said a third of the historic town was lost when the first two lanes of the interstate were built.

Although there might be other options, some of the board members on the coalition believe it might be better to reroute the interstate to the south side of the valley from Floyd Hill to the east side of Idaho Springs.

"CDOT has not considered this," French said. "Their first complaint was that it's way too expensive. That's what they said about Glenwood Canyon: they'd never get the money, the public won't stand for it. And now, people come from all over the world to look how we got that problem solved. I don't know if we need an engineering

marvel to get traffic past Idaho Springs, but it hasn't been considered. None of the alternatives acceptable to CDOT seem to me to work for Clear Creek County."

Idaho Springs Mayor Dennis Lunbery was unavailable for comment Thursday.

Denver-area residents have the choice of leaving the mountains earlier, staying later on Sundays - or not coming at all. It's that "not coming at all" option that has the coalition concerned.

"Most people moved to Colorado because of the recreational opportunities in the mountains," said Trési Houpt, Garfield County Commissioner and chairman of Rural Resort Region, which is helping to administer the Coalition. "It would be tragic if people no longer pursue the very reason that they moved to Colorado for in the first place."

The coalition is slated to hold an executive board meeting Nov. 19 where they hope to encourage the other jurisdictions in the group to start thinking of other ideas in anticipation of a delayed release date.

Jane Stebbins can be reached at (970) 668-3998, ext. 228, or jstebbins@summitdaily.com.

[BACK](#) 