



Coalition wants to curb rush hour traffic

%]

Brooke Bates
May 29, 2006

EAGLE COUNTY - On a mid-week drive from Denver to Vail, you can take in towering mountains and beautiful scenery.

The same voyage on a Friday evening during ski season may take twice as long, and the bumper-to-bumper traffic in front of you will steal your attention away from the landscape.

Asking for ideas

The coalition is taking public input until June 30. View the Travel Demand Management Recommendations at www.i-70coalition.org or call 970-393-2394. Send comments to info@i-70coalition.org.

A group of mountain communities, acting as the Interstate 70 Mountain Transportation Corridor Coalition, wants to do something about the congestion. The Colorado Department of Transportation is considering a 20-year construction plan to deal with congestion along I-70, but the mountain coalition wants more immediate results.

The proposals

To even the flow of traffic, the coalition is encouraging travelers to hit the road at different times of the day and different days of the week to avoid heavy traffic hours.

Coalition vice-chair Stan Zemler, Vail's town manager, said ski areas and businesses are already on board to offer incentives for skiers who avoid busy traffic times. Travelers who arrive before 7 a.m. or after 11 a.m. or show up midweek could be rewarded with a coupon for a lunch at a local restaurant or a latte at Starbucks. Discounted parking is also being considered.

Highway alliance

The coalition was formed in Jan. 2004 to form a response to the Colorado Department of Transportation's "Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement," which will be released later this year and reveal the state's future plans for I-70.

While the study is the coalition's long-term focus, it is now drafting recommendations to curb rush hour traffic patterns along I-70 from the Front Range to resort communities. The group's efforts come at the request of the transportation department, coalition director Flo Raitano said.

"Even if CDOT proposes something everyone can embrace, it will be at least 15 years before a good solution is put in place. It only makes sense to start managing the traffic flow now," said coalition vice-chair Stan Zemler, who also is Vail's town manger.

One of the coalition's ideas is to cut down the amount of traffic by promoting carpooling and public transportation. Ride-sharing programs, such as skicarpool.com, allow skiers from around the nation to search for others in their area who are heading to a Colorado resort. Carpooling and public transportation are cheaper alternatives, allowing riders to share or avoid gas and parking costs.

"We've put a strong focus on the transit alternative. One of our major goals is to make sure the solution we put in place includes transit as an option," coalition director Flo Raitano said.

The next step

Because it is considering several recommendations, the coalition is seeking public input to help prioritize its goals. It wants to offer short-term solutions to traffic problems on I-70 that will be effective immediately while it waits for the state to finalize a long-term response, Raitano said.

If people adjust their travel habits now, the coalition hopes those changes will carry through into the future, making the transportation department's next move more effective, Zemler said.

Traffic plans

Main goals of the I-70 Coalition's Travel Demand Management Recommendations:

- Shift travel by time of day and day of week
- Convert day trips to overnight trips
- Promote carpooling and public transportation

"There's so much anticipation and eagerness to move forward," Raitano said. "We're not sure what CDOT will recommend, so there's no target for us to shoot at."

However, the coalition is optimistic about the transportation department's response to their recommendations.

"I think they will address some of the important issues of the coalition and give us some room for hope," said Bill Wallace, the coalition's chairman and a Summit County commissioner.

Success will come from the coalition's respect for individual concerns and specific needs for each area, from Golden to Glenwood Springs, Zemler said.

Already, the coalition has unified 35 communities (including counties, cities and towns) affected by I-70 traffic. In the future, the coalition may grow into a statewide initiative, he said.

"We've held together through thick and thin and covered a huge geographic range," Raitano said. "I think that's a good indication that the coalition has legs and a productive future."

Brooke Bates can be reached at vdeditintern@vaildaily.com

Vail, Colorado

[BACK](#) 