



I-70 Coalition chair: Don't expect freeway fix, rail anytime soon

By David O. Williams 8/20/09 11:23 AM

The stories from Front Range weekend warriors of typical two-hour drives on Interstate 70 turned into six-hour odysseys by jackknifed semis and brutal mountain weather are legion, but one expert says drivers shouldn't expect any relief till 2015 at the earliest.

In a column in the Summit Daily News, Frisco town manager Michael Penny predicts years and years of additional study but no real action on highway improvements for six more years and no high-speed rail solution until 2020 at the earliest.

Penny is chairman of the I-70 Coalition, a group of public and private-sector stakeholders along the I-70 corridor, which is the main east-west route connecting the state's population centers on the Front Range with the outdoor recreation playgrounds on the Western Slope.

Penny says many of the I-70 Coalition members are also involved with the Rocky Mountain Rail Authority, which is close to finalizing a high-speed rail feasibility study for an east-west route between Denver International Airport and the Eagle County Airport (estimated \$15 billion price tag) and a north-south route between Fort Collins and Pueblo (estimated \$5 billion price tag).

But he adds that highway improvement are more likely to get funded first, although nothing is likely to happen in the State Legislature in 2010 because it's an election year. A big part of the coalition's focus so far in 2009 was getting the FASTER bill passed (increased vehicle registration fees) to create a permanent funding source for basic highway maintenance and critical bridge repairs.

All in all, though, it's not a very encouraging report for frequent users of the state's main mountain artery looking for more meaningful traffic solutions.