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## Firm proposes public-private partnership to improve I-70 mountain corridor

By **Jeffrey Leib**  
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Colorado transportation officials said Wednesday that they have received an unsolicited proposal from a major international engineering and construction firm to form a public-private partnership for making improvements to the Interstate 70 mountain corridor.

The Colorado Department of Transportation has spent tens of millions of dollars on an environmental study of possible improvements for I-70 between C-470 and Eagle County, but the state has very little money available for the highway expansion, interchange enhancements and rail construction identified by the study as solutions to the corridor's congestion.

The Colorado High Performance Transportation Enterprise said that Parsons, the international company, has proposed "a phased program of transportation infrastructure improvements on Interstate 70 between C-470 and Silverthorne initially, and extending to Eagle in the future."

"The proposal includes an innovative finance opportunity that requires little or no public

funding and a construction schedule beginning in mid- to late-2014," said HPTE, which is a unit within CDOT.

CDOT spokeswoman Stacey Stegman said Parsons has insisted that details of its proposal are proprietary and confidential and cannot be released until HPTE evaluates its submission.

Since the Parsons proposal claims to not require much public funding, it undoubtedly includes some elements of tolling as a way to pay for the traffic improvements.

With state transportation budgets strapped for cash, collaborations with private companies are a growing trend, and tolling and other user-fee-based schemes are seen as ways that the public-private ventures can raise revenue.

Congestion in the I-70 mountain corridor has been a vexing problem for CDOT for decades.

For one thing, the congestion is episodic, occurring especially on weekends or holidays, or in inclement weather, when the narrow I-70 mountain right of way is overwhelmed by surging traffic volumes.

HPTE, in a statement, said if it moves ahead with a formal evaluation of the Parsons proposal, the



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state will consider its benefit to Colorado's residents and businesses, and the viability of the company's finance plan.

If all preliminary criteria are met, a decision on whether to proceed with such a proposal would likely not be made until early next year, HPTE said.

The environmental study of the I-70 mountain corridor that CDOT commissioned produced a package of transportation solutions that if implemented in full could cost well over \$10 billion.

It included construction of some sort of rail system through the corridor.

More recently, CDOT has been looking to make incremental improvements to relieve congestion at key bottlenecks along I-70.

The agency, for instance, has examined the possibility of widening the bores of the Twin Tunnels near Idaho Springs, which, along with related highway improvements in the area, would be aimed at speeding the flow of traffic.

Such a project might cost around \$50 million, and CDOT and the Colorado Transportation Commission are examining possible funding sources for such an interim solution.

*Jeffrey Leib: 303-954-1645 or [jleib@denverpost.com](mailto:jleib@denverpost.com)*



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