

Locals call for business incubators, action on I-70 from Hickenlooper

Transition team to take ideas back to gov.-elect

BY [CADDIE NATH](#)

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FRISCO — Finding uses for beetle-kill trees and keeping Russell George in place as the head of the Colorado Department of Transportation were top priorities for Summit County and area residents who attended Saturday's meeting with Gov.-elect John Hickenlooper's transition team.

To foster economic development, residents also suggested Hickenlooper use his first weeks in office to take action promoting and retaining business in Colorado and focus on opportunities to begin building a well-educated workforce, particularly in bio technology.

"I've always thought that having a solid education infrastructure in Colorado really can be a major economic driver for the state," District 16 Sen. Dan Gibbs said during the meeting.

Many people expressed frustration with the disconnect between the Front Range and mountain communities on issues of water, transportation and economic interests. The susceptibility of the Colorado constitution to changes and amendment and the absence of a dedicated transportation system from Denver International Airport to Vail were also named as important challenges to Colorado's economic development.

Hickenlooper's current economic development plan includes creating regional business plans, working with small businesses to make government programs and regulations easier and more understandable for business owners and branding Colorado as a haven for innovation with a high quality of life.

On transportation, area residents expressed a strong desire to see action on the I-70 corridor.

"We have done enough studies and we have spent enough money to have redone I-70," Tim Davidson, a Frisco business owner said. "We could pave it with the papers. It is time for us to actually do something."

Residents also wanted to see the Interstate-25 and I-70 corridors designated as the 11th high-speed corridor as well as national standards for an advanced guideway system.

The suggestion that the new governor and his team retain George as executive director for CDOT was met with applause from the audience and was strongly supported as the most important opportunity for Hickenlooper to improve transportation in his first 100 days in office.

"Russ George should stay in place," said Maribeth Lewis-Baker, chair of CDOT's efficiency and accountability committee. "If you want to waste time in trying to reinvent the wheel then bring somebody else new in who is not going to be able to get their hands around (the CDOT budget) anytime soon. After four years, Russ has gotten himself in a position where he gets it. He doesn't have an agenda that is urban or rural, he doesn't have anything at stake except wanting to be a good public servant for the state of Colorado."

The two-hour meeting was held at the Summit County Community and Senior Center in Frisco Saturday afternoon, where area residents representing both the public and private sector packed the room. Staff for Hickenlooper's transition team spent the first half of the meeting taking suggestions from citizens on opportunities to foster economic development during Hickenlooper's first 100 days in office and fielding comments on the biggest challenges to economic development currently facing Colorado.

The second half of the meeting was structured similarly and focused on transportation. At the end of each section residents were asked to vote on the most important challenges and opportunities discussed to be relayed back to the future governor as he prepares to take office.

"The real goal is to go around the state and listen to as many diverse voices as we can to get some input into where you want the state to go," transition team staffer Dan Thatcher said at the start of the meeting. "We want to get a menu of five action items that could be taken by the governor, either through executive order or working with the legislature, actual ideas that could be implemented."

Saturday's meeting was one of 11 to be held across the state over the next few weeks.

Discussions during the meeting also focused on ways to brand Colorado to attract new businesses and to entice and enable those businesses to set up shop in mountain communities.

During the transportation segment, there was emphasis from residents on the need for better mass transit systems throughout Colorado.

Area residents who were not able to attend the meeting can submit comments on the transition team's website www.partnersfor

[colorado.com](http://www.partnersforcolorado.com).

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