



I-70 coalition seeks funding

BY BOB BERWYN
summit daily news
September 7, 2005

SILVERTHORNE - The I-70 mountain corridor coalition will seek \$75,000 from governments and private interests to fund next year's efforts on behalf of its 31 members, Gary Severson said Tuesday, explaining that the intent is to get some executive-level management and permanent structure. There's also been discussion about gaining bona fide lobbying status, he added.

Severson, executive director of the Northwest Colorado Council of Governments, said the coalition's Intergovernmental agreement discusses some potential funding mechanisms, including the ability to do special assessments. The question of money for the group will also likely be part of local town budget discussions this fall.

The funding is crucial to the organization, formed to represent the many diverse interests of communities along the corridor from Golden to Glenwood Springs. Last May, the coalition delivered its own preferred alternative for a corridor transportation plan to state transportation officials, in the midst of planning for major I-70 improvements. Broad-stroke goals include improving safety on the highway, upping capacity and protecting the environment and communities along the way.

A meeting is set for Sept. 15 in Glenwood Springs, where the coalition will "sort out the logistics of its existence," according to Chet Gaede, a Leadville-based facilitator keeping the group on track.

One of the coalition's goals is to form a regional transportation management agency, "an expensive proposition," according to Gaede.

Severson said the future shape of the coalition could be somewhat modeled after a similar group that formed around the Front Range Highway 36 corridor, with local governments and private business interests working together. Along with the major ski resorts, other major I-70 stakeholders include many businesses with a vital interest in the corridor, from Colorado Mountain Express to Kroger's and FedEx, Severson said.

Such an agency could eventually evolve into a regional transportation authority, with ability to take a direct hand in developing and managing transportation systems.

A company called Urban Trans, on-loan from CDOT, will help the coalition move in that direction.

"They specialize in setting up transportation organizations," Severson said.

Severson said CDOT expects to work with the coalition on some specific concerns in the interim between the draft version of the I-70 study, and the final, due in summer, 2006.

Among the most important is guidance for mitigation policy, he said. That includes both economic and social impacts to communities and environmental impacts.

The coalition will help set priorities.

"For example, if CDOT has X number of dollars for environmental mitigation, what should the priorities be:

Sediment, noise, wildlife?" Severson said.

Another key area is big-picture funding, Severson said.

"How do we look at obtaining traditional and nontraditional funds?" Severson said. State and federal budgets are not going to cover the estimated \$4 to \$6 billion dollar costs.

Severson said the current highway funding system is antiquated. Spurring private investments in transportation improvements could hold the ultimate key to successfully addressing the needs of the I-70 corridor, Severson said.

Bob Berwyn can be reached at (970) 668-3998, ext. 228 or at bberwyn@summitdaily.com.

[BACK](#) 