



I-70 coalition seeks incentives to ease congestion

BY BOB BERWYN
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SUMMIT COUNTY - Even as the Colorado Department of Transportation finalizes a long-range plan for the I-70 corridor, due for release in September, the mountain corridor coalition is moving ahead with ambitious plans to try and address highway congestion in the short term.

The focus this summer is on transportation demand management, as the coalition recently released a draft plan that calls for a slew of incentive-based measures intended to address peak-time congestion in the corridor. Some of the ideas floated in the draft include free close-in parking at ski areas for carpoolers, or coupons for discounted goods and services for visitors willing to adjust their travel times to outside peak hours.

Additionally, the plan calls for implementation of a high-tech traffic monitoring and notification system, which could be implemented in a pilot phase as soon as this summer, according to coalition director Flo Raitano.

It's not clear to what degree such measures could actually alleviate the crushing peak loads on the highway. The potential beneficial effect hasn't been quantified, Raitano said. But similar measures have been tried - with mixed success - in other areas, notably in some of the long-distance travel corridors along the Eastern Seaboard.

"The goal is spread out the traffic and numbers we have now," Raitano said, adding that the organization is looking for some public feedback on the measures outlined in the draft plan, available online at <http://www.i-70coalition.org>.

"We'd like to hear from people who are in the traffic on I-70," she said. The idea is to try and find out if some of the incentives would actually be effective in changing travel habits.

"Would you change your travel times if you got free close-in parking at the resorts and a coupon for a free latte? Would free season-long ski storage be an incentive to carpool?" Raitano said. Other incentives could include "mountain money" for early and late arrivals, and for visitors willing to carpool.

The I-70 Mountain Corridor Coalition is made up of towns and counties from Idaho Springs to Garfield County and beyond. Most recently, several private sector entities, including Vail Resorts and Intrawest joined the group. Since the resorts are the winter destinations along the corridor, their participation is seen as a critical step toward finding a plan with support from all stakeholders.

The coalition last year submitted its own alternative for highway improvements to the state highway department, which include a travel demand component to address slow-moving vehicles and a mountain corridor parking plan.

Summit County Commissioner Bill Wallace, chair of the coalition, said other measures could include preferential parking for overnight guests, and a tiered parking rate structure based on vehicle occupancy.

Wallace also acknowledged that no one knows how effective such measures could be. At best, they might slow the rate of increasing congestion, as the Front Range population, and with it the demand for mountain recreation, continue to grow.

Wallace said he'd like to see the coalition pick one of the items outlined in the draft travel demand management plan and focus on implementing just that. Even if the highway gurus aren't able to pinpoint the effectiveness of the techniques, Wallace said the idea is to start a shift in people's attitudes about traveling the I-70 corridor.

Even when physical improvements are made to the highway - and that day could still be 10 years away - changing travel patterns will have to be part of the long-term solution, Wallace said.

For more information on the I-70 corridor, visit <http://www.i70mtncorridor.com>.

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