



Coalition to CDOT: Transit is a must, and fix the chokepoints

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May 6, 2005

GRAND COUNTY — They're calling it the "minimum-action-on-steroids" alternative, and if the 34 members of the I-70 corridor coalition have anything to say about, the Colorado Department of Transportation will start rebuilding some of the major pinch points along the highway, especially east of the Continental Divide.

The idea is to alleviate some of the peak-day congestion as soon as possible along the route, promising some relief to tourist-hungry towns in Summit County and farther west that see a reliable traffic flow on the crucial artery as economically vital.

"It's gone extremely well," said Frisco Mayor Bernie Zurbriggen, indicating that, by the end of the two-day gathering, the position of "previously opposing corridor citizens" had evolved.

"Clear Creek County has worked very hard. We're not in full agreement, but we're all going to decide together which end of the elephant to start eating," Zurbriggen said, calling for "posthaste" CDOT implementation of its minimal action alternative, along with some additional action items.

In another area of significant agreement, the coalition will likely request CDOT to allocate a chunk of its I-70 budget to preparing for mass transit — perhaps as much as 10 percent. That level of investment would signify tangible support for an evolving vision of alternative transportation.

Clear Creek County had previously taken a strong stance against massive highway widening in the narrow, crumbly Front Range canyon.

And while no one from Idaho Springs seems excited about years of construction, Clear Creek County Commissioner Harry Lane said, "We're not opposed to improvements, but we want to protect our communities. We know there have to be some improvements, but we don't want to see six-lane highway through the entire county."

What's next

- The results of the two-meeting in Grand County will be compiled into a comment document, to be submitted to CDOT as part of the formal comment procedure.
- The facilitators for the coalition will formulate the document by Friday, May 13 and send it back out member jurisdictions for final comments.
- The comments will be up for final approval May 19 at a coalition board meeting in Avon. Comment deadline on the CDOT I-70 PEIS is May 24.

Diligently flip-charting their way through an ambitious agenda, the working tables listed specific sections of highway targeted for upgrades, mentioning most often the stretch between C-470 and the east side of Idaho Springs. Upgrades to the highway near Fall River Road, Georgetown Hill, Floyd Hill and around Empire.

Even some work on along the higher reaches, from Lawson up to the East Portal of the Eisenhower-Johnson Tunnel, would help ease the flow along the route.

"You could do that part pretty quick and get a lot of bang for your buck," a table delegate reported back to the larger session.

"Social-engineering"

Along with the road improvements, the coalition agreed that intensive traffic management needs to be part of the plan, with a concerted effort to change use-patterns with incentives and other mechanisms characterized by some

as “social-engineering” tools.

Jeff Kullman, CDOT region 1 director, said he heard the multi-modal message loud and clear. He encouraged the coalition to pursue formation of a regional transportation management organization (TMO), similar to a group that has successfully worked on the U.S. Highway 36 corridor recently.

Kullman said he didn't think the coalition grappled as hard as it could have with overall growth issues associated with I-70 improvements, acknowledging that its probably the toughest piece to bite off.

The coalition meeting also drew interest from Colorado's congressional delegation, with representatives from Republican Senator Wayne Allard's office, as well as from Democratic Sen. Ken Salazar's and Congressman Mark Udall's office listening closely.

Northwest Colorado Council of Governments director Gary Severson said those elected officials promised support for the corridor coalition if it stays unified. Severson also met with representative from the Denver Mayor's office during a lunch break and lobbied for some metro-area buy-in. The mayor's representative promised to take a close look at the coalition's proposals.

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