



I-70 meeting starts today

BY BOB BERWYN
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SUMMIT COUNTY — If you've ever spent two or three frustrated hours idling in that long metal snake of fenders, bumpers and fumes along Interstate 70, then you've probably wondered: Is there is a better way to move safely and efficiently along this corridor?

Starting today, representatives from 34 towns and counties belonging to the I-70 Mountain Corridor Coalition will try and come to a unanimous answer to that question. However, all those representatives may have caused their own traffic jam as they motor toward a two-day meeting in the Granby area.

Billed as a search for consensus on a regional plan for the stretch of highway between C-470 and Glenwood Springs, the transportation pow-wow is set for the SilverCreek Lodge and Conference Center.

Each jurisdiction sent three-member delegations, including elected officials, community administrators, planners, engineers and business community representatives.

Bringing all those interests under one umbrella could be tough.

In the most optimistic vision, some planners and community activists sense an opportunity to get it right: to tackle the issue with a far-sighted perspective that will be judged kindly by history.

Participants will be asked:

n to envision the I-70 corridor transportation system 50 years from now, and to name the parts that will make it work, including highway, transit, bike and alternative routes;

n and to describe how each of those parts work in individual communities and how they can flow together along the corridor to form an multi-county, integrated transportation system;

n should there be more lanes? If so, where? What role would mass transit play, and how would the communities along the corridor be affected by any changes?

Why a unified plan is important

Delivery of a unified regional plan is the best way to influence the impending decision on I-70, said Silverthorne public works director Bill Linfield, also chairing the coalition's technical committee.

"CDOT and the Federal Highway Administration are going to make a decision, and those of us who live here have an opportunity to have some significant input," Linfield said.

A regional plan with significant buy-in from all stakeholders could also be crucial to garnering more federal funding for the I-70 corridor, said Dan Gibbs, Western Slope field representative for Rep. Mark Udall, who represents Summit County.

Udall's office takes a keen interest in transportation issues, and helped spur formation of the coalition several years ago, suggesting that the I-70 communities use the U.S. Highway 36 (between Denver and Boulder) collaborative planning model as a reference point.

Gibbs said that effort involved a full range of interest groups, including the private sector, and was thus able to leverage private- sector funds.

Business interests in Eagle County have hinted that the private sector could be open to similar discussion regarding I-70, given the concentration of economic value along the I-70 corridor, said Jim Lamont, Vail's first town planner who now serves as executive director of the Vail Village Homeowners Association.

Lamont represents just one of many diverging views along the corridor, not surprising, given that the interests of the communities vary widely.

In Eagle and Summit counties, some towns are utterly dependent on I-70 for the delivery of goods and services, including millions of skiers.

In Clear Creek County, some communities seem to live literally in the shadow of the Interstate, and fear that any expansion of the road would be a death knell.

Communities farther west, in Garfield County, and in some of the outlying communities north and south, are less dependent on I-70 for Front Range visitors, but still in the sphere of influence. Still, those western communities are acutely aware that I-70 is a crucial axis for emerging regional growth. And whatever action occurs on I-70 will affect the outlying towns indirectly. If, for example, more lanes aren't added to I-70, it would likely increase traffic on the few regional alternative east-west routes.

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