



## I-70 mountain group gets to work

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SUMMIT COUNTY - Community leaders along the Interstate 70 corridor have long felt overlooked by the state Department of Transportation.

They believe current highway improvement projects lack vision. They have stated that the Colorado Department of Transportation spends limited funds "just to be doing something."

They feel they aren't heard and that decisions are made before public input is sought. And they don't like the department of transportation's leading plan to reduce traffic congestion by boring a third tunnel in the Continental Divide and paving more lanes of asphalt.

Now, they have formed the I-70 Central Mountain Transportation Corridor Coalition to address those issues and get their voices heard.

"To bring groups together, you don't need a common purpose, you need a common enemy," said state Rep. Gary Lindstrom, who during his tenure as Summit County commissioner was a vocal opponent of the way the department of transportation does things. Lindstrom, a Democrat, is running against Eagle County Republican Heather Lemon for the state House this fall.

"The common enemy is the poor way our roads are managed and how our transportation has been planned," he said.

### Squeaky wheels

At an inaugural meeting earlier this month, the new group of about 35 regional officials began discussing the problems, which run the gamut from insufficient funding to maintaining infrastructure, involving the private sector, traffic noise and traffic jams, and a lack of a unified voice from the mountain community.

Other problems the coalition sees include a lack of mass transit on the interstate, environmental damage and a need for more reliance on a regional airport that could alleviate congestion on the interstate.

Coalition members then decided they will develop their own transit plan, one that will result in moving people and goods along the corridor with the least amount of negative social, economic and environmental impacts.

They believe they can do this if mountain towns, business and residents support the plan, Lindstrom said.

"That's the name of the game," Lindstrom said. "(Being heard) is the reason I-25 is being fixed right now; the part that's being fixed is between the state Capitol and Bill Owen's home in Arapahoe County."

\$20 million

Lindstrom said mountain towns have failed to get what they want on I-70 because they haven't worked together.

"(CDOT director) Tom Norton and (federal Highway Administration director) Doug Jones did not hear our common voice," Lindstrom said. "They heard a lot of people talking, but they didn't hear everyone saying the same thing.

"Idaho Springs said one thing and Eagle County said something else. We need to stand up and say the same thing so we don't get ignored," he said.

The mountain group must also convince those outside the region that its ideas are better than what the department of transportation is proposing and that what benefits the mountains will benefit the entire state.

"CDOT has spent \$20 million so far just for consultants and their answer is adding lanes and tunnels. We felt we should come up with our own alternative," Lindstrom said.

The choice could include alternative transportation, rerouting the highway to avoid environmental damage and encouraging drivers to use the highway when its less busy.

To implement it all, the coalition plans to include in its group people who have strong educational and lobbying skills, develop a marketing plan aimed at locals and Front Range residents and include representatives of the ski industry and the business community.

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