



I-70 transit option gets funding boost through grant

BY BOB BERWYN
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SUMMIT COUNTY - Long-range planning for mass transit in the Interstate 70 corridor got a boost Sept. 20, as the Colorado Transportation Commission approved a \$500,000 grant that will help define local land-use issues associated with a transit system.

"It's an important step to identify transit options that not be within the I-70 corridor," said County Commissioner Bill Wallace, referring to possible routes that might not necessarily follow the interstate for the entire corridor, extending from C-470 in Golden all the way to Glenwood Springs.

"There obviously have to be some land-use decisions in place before building a transit system," Wallace said. The grant could help identify any potential roadblocks in the process, he added.

The Northwest Colorado Council of Governments applied for the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) money on behalf of the I-70 Mountain Corridor Coalition, the multi-jurisdictional group that is partnering with CDOT on the ambitious goal of easing travel and improving safety along the heavily traveled highway. CDOT is preparing an extensive environmental study on the corridor that should be released sometime early next year.

Among other things, the coalition is working to come up with a transportation demand management concept, shifting travel time with incentives and using other techniques to maximize the capacity of the existing lanes. But for the long haul, the coalition is keen to incorporate a transit component, based on the recognition that there is a finite limit to highway widening.

Coalition director Flo Raitano said the grant will be used to work with towns and counties along the corridor on planning to accommodate transit. That includes the potential alignment of transit corridors through the various jurisdictions, as well as the concept of transit-oriented development. That means making local development plans mesh with a future transit system - for example, siting residential areas and tourist-oriented business near transit stops.

Raitano said Frisco's existing transit center is perfect example for that type of planning. The transit center, located near Wal-Mart, has long been envisioned as a link in a regional system.

Another element of the grant application has to do with site-specific feasibility analyses.

"We need to start talking with the counties and towns and figuring out where they want what," Raitano said. "We want to be proactive and ready, in case there's a funding windfall," she said.

The CDOT grant requires a 20 percent (\$100,000) match, which coalition members have already committed to, Raitano said. Exactly how the money will be used hasn't been determined yet, but it will likely be one of the coalition's first major projects and will involve some consultants working with the local jurisdictions in the corridor.

A regional transit system needs some degree of standardization, Raitano explained, so that is why the planning study will be centralized rather than farmed out to the various jurisdictions.

"Now that we've grabbed the tiger by the tail, we've got to figure out what to do with it," Raitano said.

The coalition website is at <http://www.i70mtncorridor.com>.

For more info on transit options, go to <http://www.i70mountaintransit.org>.

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