



Mountain communities bracing for more traffic or the cure

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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SILVER PLUME - Mountain communities are bracing for more traffic or the detours that would be needed to ease congestion in mountain corridors amid predictions that over the next 20 years, weekday traffic will be as high as the weekend logjams that have drivers fuming.

People who live in mountain towns along the Interstate 70 corridor as far west as Glenwood Springs are organizing a coalition to prepare for it, insisting that new highway systems, including mass transit, be considered at the same time as widening the interstate highway.

Solutions under consideration by the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) include a third bore at the Eisenhower Tunnel, new interchanges and more lanes.

"Why look at widening this highway, when it will be obsolete before it is done? During the construction, (Clear Creek County) will come to a halt, and businesses will be ruined," said Linda Rizzardi, whose family has lived in Silver Plume for three generations.

Rizzardi said Gov. Bill Owens is focusing on expansion instead of solutions, an allegation rejected by Owens' spokesman, Dan Hopkins. Hopkins said Owens has left highway planning to the Department of Transportation.

Hopkins said Owens will not try to speed up the process before his term ends in 2007.

According to a draft report by CDOT, congestion along the Interstate 70 corridor is hurting economic growth in corridor communities that rely on weekend tourism. The department suggested alternatives, all of which include widening and paving, either for a third lane or for bus lanes.

A coalition of 31 mountain communities from Idaho Springs to Glenwood Springs countered with their own proposals that include mass transit, increased commercial flights, highway improvements, new alternate routes and bicycle trails.

The department has agreed to consider the coalition's plan and issue a report next year.

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