

Colorado officials near approval for road fixes at Twin Tunnels on I-70, I-25 in Springs

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Finally, state transportation officials appear to be on the verge of spending some real money to address congestion in the Interstate 70 mountain corridor.

At a budget workshop of the Colorado Transportation Commission on Wednesday, there was strong backing for spending \$60 million on a project to widen the eastbound bore of the Twin Tunnels east of Idaho Springs — the site of notorious weekend bottlenecks — as well as expand the highway and smooth out some of its curves in the stretch between the old Clear Creek County mining town and Floyd Hill.

The Colorado Department of Transportation has conducted an extensive environmental study of needed improvements for all of I-70 in the mountains, but it produced an astronomical price tag of up to \$20 billion for a full package of highway and rail enhancements for the corridor.

The Twin Tunnels project is seen as a way to get some congestion relief in the near future by spending a relatively modest amount of money.

CDOT finance chief Ben Stein presented

commissioners with four scenarios for spending about \$229 million in newly found money for state roads, and the \$60 million for the Twin Tunnels was included in all four.

The extra money was collected from a number of sources, including a final distribution of about \$102 million in federal funds. Reconciliation and settlement of other accounts made up the \$127 million balance.

In addition to signaling support for the Twin Tunnels project, commissioners reacted favorably to the scenario in Stein's presentation that would contribute about \$31 million to another phase of the reconstruction of Interstate 25 in Colorado Springs.

The state is hoping that local officials will contribute about \$5 million to the all-important I-25 rebuilding project, said Les Gruen, who represents Colorado Springs on the commission.

The I-25 project would pick up from where the recent reconstruction of the interstate in the Springs — a program called COSMIX — left off at its north end, Gruen said.

COSMIX, which stands for Colorado Springs Metro Interstate Expansion, was a \$150 million program to increase I-25 capacity on the city's



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north side.

Transportation Commission vice chairman Gary Reiff said allotment of the \$91 million for the Twin Tunnels venture and I-25 improvements in El Paso County would begin to deal with two of CDOT's most important projects. Each represents a critical link in the national highway system, he said.

Commissioners are expected to make the final decision on divvying up the extra money, including whether to fund the Twin Tunnels and I-25 projects, at next month's meeting.

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