

Market drivers

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This week's report that Interstate 70 congestion costs the state almost \$1 billion annually adds significance to the push for a long-term resolution.

As we reported Thursday, leaders in the I-70 coalition said the \$1 billion mark means recouping costs for construction - one of the major hedging points for policymakers - could be only 10-15 years. Indeed, the report explained, a 1 percent decline in tourism spending could impact our region by \$25 million annually in business revenue.

Without a fix, the report summarized: "The threat to Colorado's position as one of the top tourism destinations in the country is very real."

The authors of the report should not be overlooked, either. The Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce has been eyeing this issue for some time, but have yet to publicizing their beliefs that the I-70 corridor's impact reaches statewide. They also connected the dots between Front Range and resort businesses.

Other discoveries:

- Health issues include concern about Front Range residents spending time sitting in traffic, inhaling toxic fumes.
- Metro Denver businesses could see an increase in sales as congestion increases. In 2005, 30 percent or \$2.4 billion of total visitor dollars were spent there.
- Resort area governments are likely to experience a drop in revenue due to I-70 congestion. Travelers stuck on the road are less likely to leave their place on the road, the study said, which could impact resort areas by the millions of dollars.
- Impacts on lodging occupancy are unknown. It could decrease if less people want to travel down I-70. It could increase if visitors stay longer in the High Country to make up time in traffic.

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