



- Daily file photo / David Gidley

Record of decision signed for I-70 mountain corridor

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DAILY NEWS STAFF REPORT

DENVER - After more than 20 years of extensive study, the Federal Highway Administration Thursday signed the Record of Decision for the Interstate 70 Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, establishing the framework for implementing major improvements on the I-70 corridor between C-470 and Glenwood Springs.

"The dedication of many stakeholders working together has brought us to this point of having a Tier 1 Record of Decision," said the the Highway Administration's Colorado division administrator John Cater. "We all need to continue working together in this same spirit as we implement future transportation improvements in the mountain corridor."

With Thursday's signing, the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) and the Highway Administration now can initiate smaller, project-specific studies and projects within the corridor, consistent with the decision. These subsequent studies, that now will be referred to as Tier 2 processes, will develop and evaluate specific construction projects within the corridor, if and when funding is available.

Specific highway improvements

- > Six lanes from Floyd Hill through the Twin Tunnels, including a bike trail and frontage roads from Idaho Springs east to Hidden Valley and Hidden Valley to U.S. 6;
- > Empire Junction (U.S. 40/I-70) improvements;
- > Eastbound auxiliary lane from the Eisenhower Tunnel to Herman Gulch; and
- > Westbound auxiliary lane from Bakerville to the tunnel.

The Preferred Alternative within the decision also includes a commitment to evaluate and implement an Advanced Guideway System in the corridor. CDOT begins the study on that this summer.

"This is a significant milestone, not just for the people who live along this corridor but for the citizens of this state," said Les Gruen, chairman of the Colorado Transportation Commission. "I commend everyone for their hard work and dedication to this entire process and for getting us to this point today."

The recommended alternative from the collaborative effort is the "preferred alternative." The 27-member group representing various corridor interests was charged with reaching consensus on a recommended transportation solution that CDOT and the Highway Administration adopted in the Environmental Impact Statement, which is also responsive to comments from the public.

"Implementing the collaborative effort process was crucial and a great example of what can be accomplished when everyone comes together to improve our transportation system," said CDOT executive director Don Hunt. "I want to thank all the individuals involved in this process for their dedication, perseverance and contributions above and beyond their regular responsibilities."

Previous studies have been undertaken over the last couple of decades, seeking strategies to mitigate increasing traffic on I-70 west of Denver. The Major Investment Study was implemented in the 1990s, and the original Draft PEIS was released in 2004. It was exceedingly slow in moving forward due to stakeholder concerns regarding a long-term vision and a funding cap that had been placed on improvements. In response, CDOT and the Highway

Administration began the Collaborative Decision Making process in 2007, in partnership with a variety of stakeholders, including the collaborative effort.

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