

CDOT narrows down options for new S'thorne I-70 interchange

Transportation officials reaching out to town, public for feedback

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SILVERTHORNE — With input from the Town of Silverthorne and the public, the Colorado Department of Transportation continues to evaluate and narrow down the options for a makeover of the often-congested Silverthorne/Interstate 70 interchange.

Officials are still evaluating three of an original four possible alternatives for the interchange based on feasibility studies and public input.

"We're still early enough in the process that there're opportunities for people to have input," Silverthorne public works director Bill Linfield said. "We are at the point now where that input can still make a difference."

The four alternatives, which range in price and scope from basic improvements to the existing interchange — which would include replacing the I-70 bridge and allowing additional left turns — to a full restructuring of the interchange with something called a diverging diamond, a complicated formation only seen in a few locations in the United States.

Though the project is still in the very early evaluation stages and no realistic source of construction funding exists, Silverthorne officials, who heard a presentation of the alternatives Wednesday, are considering the options carefully, if not coming out in official support of any particular one yet.

"One of our concerns is a couple of the (alternatives) anticipate eliminating left turns at Stephen's Way," Linfield said, "That would be a major concern to the town. Stephen's Way really serves as a way to avoid traffic to and from Wildernest. It just eliminates an alternative route, and alternative routes are good because they reduce traffic on the main route."

Coming crunch

Which is one of the key points behind the interchange remodel. CDOT officials project that by 2035 traffic on the eastbound off-ramp at Silverthorne will begin to back up on the highway. The intersection currently becomes congested and backed up in town during peak times. It is also frequently the site of accidents, and sharp turn lanes have also caused hazardous material spills from trucks dangerously close to the Blue River.

The issues have the town eyeing the third alternative, a single point urban interchange, as one of the possible favorites.

The alternative would combine the eastbound and westbound ramp intersections into one single-controlled intersection under I-70, according to CDOT project materials. It would reduce the number of traffic lights in the area from two to one, cutting the likely points of collision in half and is the easiest option for large trucks and vehicles carrying trucks and hazardous materials to maneuver. But it is also one of the least efficient options on the table, both in terms of cost and traffic flows.

A public meeting is set for Wednesday, July 20 from 5-7 p.m. at the Silverthorne Pavilion to allow the public to ask questions and weigh in on the alternatives.

"We're taking our initial screening of the concept level back to the public," CDOT project manager Tyler Weldon said. "That's what the meeting's about. After this meeting we're going to continue to the next stage: detail level (evaluation), which is a lot more questions about ... impacts, costs (and) traffic."

Weldon said CDOT hopes to have the evaluation phase complete by this fall, but without money available, a timeline on next steps, including engineering and design, is unclear.

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