

## Experts eye options for Silverthorne I-70 interchange

CDOT: Options to be presented to public in July

MAY, 5 2011

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SUMMIT DAILY NEWS

While actual construction is likely still a long way off, the Colorado Department of Transportation is moving forward with plans to improve the Interstate 70/Silverthorne interchange, fleshing out several possible alternatives for the project.

A group of technical experts from the community and CDOT developed the alternatives based on criteria put forward by a leadership team that included local interests.

The alternatives will be presented for public review by mid-summer, CDOT officials said.

"All of (it) will sort of be digested and we'll put together a public meeting for mid to late July," CDOT resident engineer Bill Scheuerman said. "Those options, along with the rating criteria, will be presented to the public for comment."

The four alternatives include an improved version of the existing interchange "diamond" with enhanced ramps and auxiliary lanes and a "single-point urban interchange," which would replace the two standing traffic lights with a single light, improving safety by eliminating a current conflict point, Scheuerman said. Another option is a "diverging diamond" interchange, which is complicated and rare in the U.S., but would improve capacity on the interchange by allowing cars to make turns in certain directions unhindered by oncoming traffic.

A fourth alternative would involve splitting the ramps at the interchange.

The various options would come in at a wide range of costs, which will not be evaluated until the more plausible alternatives are identified.

"We haven't gotten to that level of detail yet," Scheuerman said. "It wouldn't make a lot of sense doing cost evaluations if it doesn't solve the problem."

The Town of Silverthorne is backing the proposed improvements.

"The town is very supportive of CDOT's efforts to improve the interchange, since we deal with it on a daily basis, the traffic back-ups, the confusion by our visitors," Silverthorne public works director Bill Linfield said. "We're very involved in the process on the project leadership team."

The interchange is already a sticky area where traffic tends to get backed up, and the problem is expected to worsen over the next several years to the point where it could potentially interfere with traffic flows on the interstate, according to the project rationale summary in a recently released existing conditions report.

The biggest problems exist around the westbound entrance ramp and the eastbound exit ramp, Scheuerman said.

Hopes are high the interchange project will manage to not only improve safety and mobility through the intersection, but will also accommodate pedestrians and bicycles and enhance access to local businesses without posing a threat to the environment, particularly the nearby Blue River.

"There're really a lot of balls we have in the air we're trying to juggle and come up with the best solutions," Linfield said.

Following the public meeting this summer, CDOT will do a more detailed evaluation of the alternatives that

"rise to the top," of the list to further narrow the options in a feasibility report expected to be presented to the public in the fall. That report will begin to look more closely at costs.

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