



## Summit split on I-70 coalition funding

**BY BOB BERWYN**  
**summit daily news**  
November 13, 2005

BRECKENRIDGE - Summit County's towns are split when it comes to the question of future funding for the I-70 Mountain Corridor Coalition.

At a recent town council work session, Breckenridge Mayor Ernie Blake suggested his town won't pay \$7,500 to hire an executive director for the group.

But Frisco Mayor Bernie Zurbruggen thinks it's important to have someone in place who "eats, sleeps and breathes" I-70 during the next year, as the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) finalizes a programmatic impact study for a planned slate of improvements to the highway between Golden and Glenwood Springs.

The coalition consists of about 30 towns and counties along and near I-70 that joined together to develop a common vision for addressing future transportation solutions in the corridor.

At issue is a tentative plan by the coalition to create an executive director's position at a cost of about \$75,000 to \$100,000. The idea is to get the various entities to share that cost. The proposal will undergo detailed discussion at a coalition meeting Nov. 17, but for now, Blake said it may not be the right time to pony up additional dollars.

"I don't see why we should pay for ... Clear Creek, for people I disagree with," Blake said during Tuesday's discussion, recounting a discussion he had with other Summit County officials at a meeting of mayors and town managers.

Blake's comments illustrated some of the fundamental differences that could drive a deep wedge into the group. Clear Creek County residents and their elected officials are generally opposed to extensive highway widening through their communities, while Summit County's towns and resorts have expressed a desire to widen some of the choke points in Clear Creek County to ease access for tourists and skiers.

Those differences were patched over to some degree in the compromise coalition alternative for I-70 improvements, but they clearly are still simmering beneath the surface.

Most of the other Breckenridge council members deferred to Blake on the question of funding for an executive director.

Blake questioned whether it's fair for Clear Creek to be represented with two votes on the coalition's various committees but not contribute to the cost of hiring an executive director, and he wondered whether the timing is right to hire someone for the position, given that most of the action currently is behind the scenes as CDOT "grinds out" its preferred alternative.

He pointed out that the coalition previously achieved its aims by using available staff to form technical committees, and said that model could continue to work.

Left mostly unspoken was the fear that Clear Creek County will veto any alternative that includes highway widening through Idaho Springs and Georgetown. The ultimate threat of a Clear Creek lawsuit to block

implementation of whatever alternative is finally chosen could delay I-70 improvements for years beyond the anticipated schedule.

"There's a question about who is going to ante up," said Zurbriggen. "I think we need somebody to be involved, work with CDOT and be up to speed. It's amazing that we were able to get everyone moving in the same direction," he said, adding that an executive director could help provide continuity and ensure that the coalition's momentum isn't lost.

Zurbriggen said the coalition should be sensitive to the fact that Clear Creek County will bear the brunt of many of the planned improvements.

The funding question remains up in the air as the coalition also considers alternative models, including one scenario based on the Northwest Colorado Council of Governments membership arrangement, by which various entities pay based on factors such as population.

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