



Towns reunified on I-70 coalition

BY BOB BERWYN
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SUMMIT COUNTY — Local towns unanimously supported funding an executive director position for the I-70 mountain corridor coalition Thursday, patching over a potential rift that appeared last week, when the Breckenridge Town Council expressed doubts about that funding and timing of the decision.

“I think the coalition is holding together and everybody is getting comfortable with the idea of anteing up something,” said Frisco Mayor Bernie Zurbriggen.

“We’re all working together for a common solution for the I-70 corridor,” said County Commissioner Bill Wallace.

Wallace will co-chair the coalition in 2006 with Clear Creek County Commissioner Hary Dale in symbolic move intended to show the coalition is unified on both sides of the divide.

At stake is the future of transportation in the I-70 corridor between Golden and Glenwood Springs, as the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) finalizes a plan to address safety issues and highway capacity.

The 31-member coalition, including most towns and counties along and near the corridor, submitted a regionally preferred alternative to CDOT, and will continue to press CDOT to consider the interests of the mountain region.

The coalition asked CDOT to fix some of the critical traffic chokepoints and address safety issues while simultaneously planning a long-range transportation solution, including transit, alternate routes and air transportation and traffic demand management.

That may be easier said than done, according to Dale, who said an Oct. 6 meeting between the coalition and CDOT highlighted some of the challenges.

“The only component of our alternative that CDOT is hearing is highway widening,” Dale said, referring to the meeting, when CDOT officials said they would not involve themselves in planning for transit technology. Dale said CDOT officials indicated they are not convinced transit is feasible in the corridor and that they would not pursue planning for alternate routes.

According to Dale, it comes down to a question of economic survival for Clear Creek County, with years of construction in the narrow valley potentially sounding the death knell for small local businesses. Dale said the potential economic impacts are illustrated by the fact that county business revenues dropped 30 percent to 50 percent during the week when rock slides closed the interstate last summer.

Dale said years of construction in the corridor could have similar impacts on businesses in Summit County.

“We should be demanding commitments from CDOT for the development of viable construction alternate routes prior to any I-70 construction. The rock slide proved that frontage roads are not viable as alternate routes,” he concluded.

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[BACK](#) 