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Traffic-pacing tests on I-70 encourage officials, annoy drivers

By *The Summit Daily*

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A pace car leads traffic on I-70 between Silverthorne and the Eisenhower/Johnson Memorial Tunnel on Aug. 13. (THE DENVER POST file | Craig F. Walker)

There are two tests down and one to go in the Colorado Department of Transportation's latest plan to improve the eastbound Interstate 70 drive on peak weekends.

CDOT's latest two trial runs with the rolling speed-harmonization process, also called pacing, seem to have transportation and local law enforcement officials cautiously optimistic that the program will be successful in reducing accidents and metering in peak winter weekend

traffic.

Some drivers aren't as thrilled with the new process.

Though CDOT said the department has received letters of approval from the public, local drivers seem less enthusiastic.

"I actually got caught up in it Sunday," Chris Drake said in an online comment. "I'd have to say it did nothing except congest/pack the drivers together."

The pacing process puts patrol vehicles out in front of traffic with emergency lights on at about five- minute intervals.

Once the law enforcement officer has let the cars behind know that they are not supposed to pass, the patrol leads traffic at a controlled speed, generally about 55 mph in a 60-mph posted area.

Recent tests on a Saturday in August and Sept. 25 were implemented when traffic hit about 1,800 vehicles per hour on the highway.

"I know it sounds a little bit wacky," said CDOT spokeswoman Stacey Stegman. "It's that driver behavior, where everyone's going slow and then

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when traffic breaks, everyone kind of punches it, and then there's an accident.

"So (the idea) was, if we can get the trucks and everybody to go a little bit closer together, you're not going to have that conflict, you won't have all the accidents and then you won't have all these residual delays down the road."

CDOT officials say it will help reduce metering at the Eisenhower Tunnel, which makes traffic worse. For every minute traffic is stopped at the tunnel, it takes six to eight minutes for the backup to recover.

The next test is set for December.



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