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I-70 traffic bills move

Measures seek to reduce traffic gridlocks

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A Senate committee yesterday backed a bill that could relieve congestion on the I-70 mountain corridor during its busiest hours.

If the plan was found to be safe and feasible, Senate Bill 184 would require the Colorado Department of Transportation to use movable 300-pound barriers to add an extra eastbound lane to the I-70 mountain corridor between Floyd Hill and the Eisenhower-Johnson tunnels. The moveable barriers are expected to help relieve the traffic gridlocks caused by people heading back from the mountains on weekends and holidays.

“The bottom line is that we love those mountains and we live in this state to get access to the mountains, we have gridlocks emerging on our highways and we need to do something different,” said Sen. Chris Romer, D-Denver, one of the bill’s sponsors.

The Colorado Department of Transportation already has the authority to implement the so-called “zipper lanes” and is in the midst of a study to determine whether doing so would be feasible.

“I don’t know that the bill really does anything different than what we could already do,” said CDOT Spokeswoman Stacey Stegman. “I think that it sends a message to CDOT that we want you to seriously consider implementing this quickly.”

Stegman warned against moving too quickly, though, as the steep grades and large amounts of snow make I-70 an “incredibly difficult highway” that brings plenty of challenges.

Additionally, the extra eastbound lane would leave only one lane going westbound, an idea some community members have opposed, according to Stegman. The CDOT study is expected to be completed in approximately two weeks.

The moveable lanes are expected to annually cost \$2-\$2.5 million per year. The senate bill calls for a public-private partnership to help cut down on the cost to the state.

The measure passed out of the Senate Transportation Committee on a bipartisan 6-0 vote.

Other measures addressing I-70 traffic

The Senate Transportation Committee yesterday also passed a bill that would require vehicles in the left lane of the steepest parts of I-70 to go no less than 10 miles per hour below the posted speed limit. Drivers going less than 10 miles per hour below the posted speed limit on stretches of I-70 with 6-percent grade inclines could get a \$19 ticket.

Speakers at yesterday's committee hearing said while the two measures would not be complete solutions to the I-70 traffic problems, they are small steps that could help ease the traffic gridlocks. CDOT has already implemented some short-term solutions, such as expanding the number of chain-up stations and posting the travel times for motorists on I-70.

CDOT's long-term vision for improving the I-70 mountain corridor includes building a rail system through the area. The long-term plan has yet to get federal approval and is expected to cost billions of dollars.

"It's a complicated highway from a transportation perspective, so we have to be really incredibly thoughtful about what we do," said Stegman.

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