

# I-70 COALITION

*setting the pace for the future*

## **I-70 PEIS Record of Decision Fact Sheet**

Traffic congestion along the I-70 mountain corridor is a long-standing, serious transportation problem facing Colorado. This problem is not going away, since Colorado's population is projected to increase by 47% by 2040.

As the state's only continuous east-west interstate and a virtual "main street" for local residents, severe congestion in the corridor infuriates travelers, harms local communities and small businesses, creates challenges for intrastate and interstate commerce and creates serious safety issues. Scenic mountain terrain, wildlife management and historic cultural sites create additional constraints along the corridor. Furthermore, Colorado's outdoor recreation and tourism industry is a significant economic driver, and mountain resorts account for 30% of Colorado's tourism revenue.

The I-70 mountain corridor has been the subject of extensive analysis in the search for solutions, a search that led to an unprecedented and innovative approach to addressing the problem.

### **The I-70 Coalition**

In January 2004, more than 30 political jurisdictions formalized the I-70 Coalition by adopting an intergovernmental agreement to address transportation issues along the I-70 mountain corridor and to specifically respond to the Draft I-70 Central Mountain Transportation Corridor Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) issued by the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT).

In May 2005, the Coalition unanimously approved a regionally preferred alternative in response to CDOT's PEIS.

### **A Consensus Agreement**

In November 2007, in an effort to break through more than twenty years of gridlock and intense conflict over the future of the I-70 corridor, the Governor, the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) convened a group of **27** diverse local governments, agencies, environmental groups and private-sector interests in what was called the **Collaborative Effort**. This group, after much discussion, debate, and compromise, was able to accomplish the monumental task of setting aside their differences and reaching a set of recommended solutions to I-70 and a way to implement them.

This **Consensus Recommendation** identified a **2050 Vision** that called for a multimodal solution and a **phased approach** in which highway improvements would be evaluated through a process called **adaptive management**. The idea behind this process was simple. Certain areas of I-70 are congestion pinch points. Improvements to relieve congestion at those pinch points would be made and the impact of those improvements evaluated before moving on to the next phase of solutions.

## The Record of Decision (ROD)

In **June 2011** this Consensus Recommendation became the **Preferred Alternative** in the I-70 Mountain Corridor **Record of Decision (ROD)** issued by the FHWA. This ROD was unprecedented in the history of FHWA in three respects:

- It was based on a consensus approach developed by all the stakeholders in the corridor;
- The FHWA, which typically uses a 20-year time horizon for transportation planning, authorized a 50-year horizon specifically for this corridor because of its unique challenges and issues; and
- Its use of adaptive management as the way to proceed with improvements in the corridor.

Another notable provision in the ROD was a commitment by CDOT to work with the Collaborative Effort group to apply the principle of **Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS)** on all projects in the I-70 Mountain Corridor. CSS is “a collaborative, interdisciplinary, holistic approach to the development of transportation projects [that] involves all stakeholders, including community members, elected officials, interest groups, and affected local, state, and federal agencies. It puts project needs and both agency and community values on a level playing field and considers all trade-offs in decision making.” CDOT committed to use CSS for all long range planning, programming, environmental studies, design, construction, operations, and maintenance on the I-70 mountain corridor.

## The Solutions

There are two phases to the solutions within the I-70 Mountain Corridor ROD: A **Minimum Program of Improvements** and a **Maximum Program of Improvements**.

The **Minimum Program** includes:

- An extensive list of non-infrastructure improvements (e.g., Travel Demand Management (TDM) actions, peak period shoulder lanes, increased enforcement, encouraging public transportation, promoting overnight stays and more);
- An evaluation of the feasibility and transportation benefits of an Advanced Guideway System (AGS) in the corridor;
- New tunnel bores at the Eisenhower Tunnels; and
- An extensive list of highway improvements, ranging from a number of auxiliary lanes, widening the highway in certain locations, improving 26 interchanges in the corridor and more.

The **Maximum Program** includes:

- All of the components of the Minimum Program
- Adding a new east-bound and west-bound lane from the Twin Tunnels to the Eisenhower Tunnels;
- Four interchange modifications in the Idaho Springs area; and
- A curve safety modification project at Fall River Road.

Certain triggers would need to be met before the Maximum Program could be implemented.

- Certain projects within the Minimum Program that were called **Specific Highway Improvements** are complete *and* AGS is functioning from the Front Range to a destination beyond the Continental Divide. The Specific Highway Improvements are:

- An eastbound auxiliary lane from the Eisenhower Tunnel to Herman Gulch;
- A westbound auxiliary lane from Bakerville to the Eisenhower Tunnel;
- A new westbound and eastbound lane would be built from Floyd Hill through the Twin Tunnels, along with a bike trail and frontage roads from Idaho Springs to Hidden Valley and Hidden Valley to US 6; and
- A new interchange would be completed at Empire Junction

OR

- The Specific Highway Improvements are complete **and** AGS studies that address the feasibility, cost, ridership, governance and land use are complete and indicate that an AGS cannot be funded or implemented by 2025 or is otherwise deemed unfeasible to implement

OR

- Global, regional, local trends or events such as peak oil, climate change, technological advances, resource availability, and changing demographics have such unexpected effects on future travel demand and behavior that require additional transportation solutions based on proven need.

### Where We Are Today

Since the ROD was issued in June of 2011, progress has been made on implementing the Minimum Program. In addition to a number of non-infrastructure initiatives, some highway improvements have also been made.

- There are two most notable examples. The first is the expansion of the Twin Tunnels east of Idaho Springs. What was once a significant point of congestion is now moving traffic efficiently, proving the value of the adaptive management approach. With that project complete, the eastbound congestion has moved further west, highlighting the need to take steps to address those congestion points. The second is the eastbound Peak Period Shoulder Lane, an idea that CDOT, Clear Creek County and Idaho Springs have embraced.
- CDOT is adding capacity on existing infrastructure by creating an I-70 Mountain Express Lane eastbound from Empire Junction to the Veterans Memorial Tunnels (formerly the Twin Tunnels) that will address congestion in that location. CDOT, Clear Creek County and Idaho Springs have agreed to pursue building a westbound Peak Period Shoulder Lane along that same stretch.
- CDOT's research on AGS that found it is technically feasible but is not financially feasible at this time. More research, however, is needed to fully determine its feasibility.
- In regards to non-infrastructure improvements, The I-70 Coalition, in partnership with CDOT, continues to identify and implement multiple TDM actions to positively impact congestion in the near term with a goal to decrease traffic volume during peak travel times. This is accomplished through extensive traveler education around traveling at off peak times, encouraging Sunday overnight stays, as well as reducing the number of vehicles on the corridor through ridesharing and transit options. Programs and initiatives that support the above strategies are promoted through resorts, local governments, chambers, the lodging sector, and tourism-based organizations. Businesses are also encouraged to provide incentives for mountain visitors to travel at off peak times. These TDM efforts are closely coordinated with partner organizations such as the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), Colorado Motor Carriers Association (CMCA), and Colorado State Patrol (CSP.)

Much more is to be done. A number of the Minimum Program of Improvements and all of the Specific Highway Improvements are yet to be implemented. Once those are done, we will have a better understanding of what more needs to be done to address one of Colorado's most serious transportation challenges.

*More about the I-70 Coalition: Coalition members, both private and public, are coordinating efforts to implement long-term transportation improvements along the mountain corridor while representing the Coalition's best interests. The Coalition has proven to be a powerful voice for local and regional transportation interests. Coalition members maintain an involved presence on the various leadership teams, task forces, and committees that are working to study and implement the I70 improvements identified in the PEIS.*

**Members:**

**Counties:**

*Clear Creek, Eagle, Jefferson, and Summit.*

**Municipalities:**

*Aspen, Avon, Black Hawk, Breckenridge, Central City, Dillon, Eagle, Empire, Fraser, Frisco, Georgetown, Golden, Grand Lake, Idaho Springs, Leadville, Minturn, Silverthorne, Silver Plume, Vail, and Winter Park.*

**Private Sector Members:**

*Climax Molybdenum Mines, Copper Mountain Resort, Winter Park Resort and Vail Resorts.*

**Associate Members:**

*Atkins, Brynn Grey Partners, Colorado Motor Carriers Association, Denver Regional Council of Governments, HDR, Kiewit Infrastructure Co., Northwest Colorado Council of Governments, Parsons Brinckerhoff, Vail Valley Partnership.*