



December 4, 2023

State of Colorado
Department of Transportation
Transportation Commission

Dear Members of the Transportation Commission:

I am writing to you as the Executive Director of the Kiowa County Economic Development Foundation to express our profound concerns regarding the proposed action to combine the Southeast Colorado Transportation Planning Region (TPR) with the Huerfano and Las Animas County TPR, as well as the proposed splitting of the Mountain Region TPR.

Our primary concern is the potential reallocation of funds within the newly combined region. Although assurances have been given that total funding will remain consistent, there is a growing apprehension that a significant portion of these funds might be redirected towards the I-25 corridor. Such a shift would be detrimental to the Southeast region, particularly affecting vital routes like the Colorado State Highway 287, a crucial segment of the Ports To Plains corridor that diverts truck traffic off I-25, and the Colorado State Highway 50 starting at the Kansas/Colorado State line that brings goods to the front range.

The state highways in the Southeast are already facing significant challenges in terms of maintenance and quality, often falling short compared to the standards observed in other TPR regions. Further reduction in funding and attention could exacerbate these issues, leading to a decline in the safety and efficiency of our transportation infrastructure.

Another pressing issue, and one that cannot be overstated, is the potential loss of representation at the state level. The proposed merging of the Southeast and South Central TPRs is more than just a bureaucratic reshuffling; it represents a further diminution of our already limited voice in state transportation planning. This is a critical platform for advocating for the unique needs and challenges of our region. For too long, Eastern Colorado has been lumped together politically, often represented by a solitary voice in arenas where the rest of the state enjoys robust representation through multiple advocates. This systemic imbalance has consistently led to a disproportionate focus on areas with higher population growth, marginalizing the essential needs and priorities of our region. The current proposal exacerbates this inequity, potentially relegating Eastern Colorado to an even smaller corner in the state's transportation discourse. Such a move not only undermines the democratic principle of fair representation but also risks leaving our communities further behind in an already uneven playing field.

It is argued that Southeast Colorado is projected to experience slower population growth compared to other parts of the state. However, I firmly believe that this is a self-fulfilling prophecy. The continuous reduction in services and support makes our region less appealing for residents and businesses alike. It is imperative to understand that equitable investment in infrastructure and services is crucial to fostering growth and development in all regions, not just those with current population booms.

Lastly, it is worth noting the expectations of visitors and residents who travel through our region. While there is a tendency to prioritize funding for regions with higher populations, it becomes a point of contention when these individuals visit the Southeast and find our services, including emergency and cellular services, as well as road conditions, not meeting their standards. This situation highlights the need for balanced investment and attention across all regions of Colorado.

In light of these concerns, I urge the Transportation Commission to reconsider the proposed restructuring of the TPRs. It is vital that decisions made at the state level consider the long-term impact on all regions, ensuring equitable distribution of resources and representation. We in Southeast Colorado are committed to working alongside the Commission to find solutions that benefit our region and the state as a whole.

Sincerely,

Cindy McLoud

Cindy McLoud
Executive Director

cc: Vince Rogalski, STAC Chair
Terry Hart, TC Representative for SE Colorado
Honorable Senator John Hickenlooper
Honorable Senator Michael Bennet
Honorable Representative Ken Buck
Honorable Senator Rod Pelton, Senate District 35
Honorable Representative Ty Winder, House District 47