South Central 2045 Regional Transportation Plan Adopted September 2020





## South Central



Counties: Huerfano, Las Animas

La Veta and West Spanish Peak Photo Credit: Dave Hattan



This Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) is the long-range transportation document that guides the continuing development of a multimodal transportation system for the South Central Transportation Planning Region (TPR). The Plan recognizes current needs and identifies solutions to address changing conditions. The Plan communicates the South Central TPR's transportation needs and priorities to the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) and Colorado's Transportation Commission. This Plan reflects the TPR members' input, data and background information, and public sentiment. It extends out 25 years to 2045 but has a particular focus on the first 10 years, allowing decision-makers to consider transportation investments in South Central Colorado today, tomorrow, and in the future.

The South Central TPR is a large region along Colorado's southern border with New Mexico and includes Huerfano and Las Animas Counties. The TPR is primarily served by the I-25 and US 160 corridors. The TPR consists of rolling plains, high mountain peaks, and small towns. Communities are located far from each other, often resulting in long travel distances for employment, medical services, and shopping. Residents of the South Central TPR value their rural and small-town way of life, and the Region has seen an uptick in retirees moving to the area. The Region's recreational opportunities are increasing and include the Highway of Legends, Santa Fe Trail, national grasslands, as well as Colorado's newest state park, Fisher's Peak.

### Dear Neighbor,

As administrator of the South Central TPR, representing Las Animas and Huerfano counties, it is my responsibility to ensure that our area's transportation needs and priorities are recognized, made easily accessible, and communicated to the public and key transportation decisionmakers. This RTP accomplishes this; it recognizes our region's current needs and priorities, while formulating solutions to keep pace with regional growth and changing conditions.

This document is the reflection of TPR member input, various types of data and information, and public sentiment. An RTP that reflects the overall priorities and needs for our area is vital at a time of limited funding for transportation. This plan is integrated into the Statewide Transportation Plan, demonstrating the important role that transportation in the South Central region plays in the overall state transportation system. This RTP will help inform decisions CDOT makes about the state's transportation system.

This plan is intended to be a living, useful document that is referred to when transportation decisions are being made and as the TPR implements projects and strategic actions documented herein. This RTP will be revisited periodically to ensure that we are on the right path toward accomplishing its vision and goals.

Your familiarity with our region's transportation needs, our transportation priorities, and the challenges that we face in meeting those needs is important now and into the future. I invite you to review this plan and become more engaged in the South Central Region's transportation future.

Sincerely,

Water 7 Bould

Walt Boulden South Central TPR Chair

## South Central TPR Members

Composed of elected and appointed officials, the TPR is responsible for establishing regional priorities and needs, developing the multimodal RTP, and ongoing planning coordination with CDOT.

Members include:

- Huerfano County
- Las Animas County
- Aguilar
- Kim

٠

**& FEDERAL** 

STATE

REQUIREMENT

- La Veta
- Trinidad
- Walsenburg
- South Central Council of Governments

Legislation at both the state (\$43-1-1103, C.R.S.) and federal (CFR 450.206) levels, as well as state transportation planning rules (2 CCR 601-22), requires the development of a comprehensive, long-range Statewide Transportation Plan that encompasses at least a 20-year period and incorporates the priorities and needs of the TPRs across the state. The state and federal requirements have been followed in the creation of this Plan.

Every four to five years, CDOT updates the Colorado Statewide Transportation Plan (Your Transportation Plan), which serves as a long-range planning tool and identifies regional and statewide trends and issues. RTPs are developed to inform the Statewide Transportation Plan and to prioritize transportation projects in the region.

## **Plan Development Process**

This 2045 RTP was developed over approximately one year and included three primary phases: identification of transportation needs, development of projects, and plan creation. The TPR and public input, along with a data-driven analysis, was critical to plan development. The Coordinated Public Transit and Human Services Transportation Plan was developed concurrently and can be found in Appendix A.

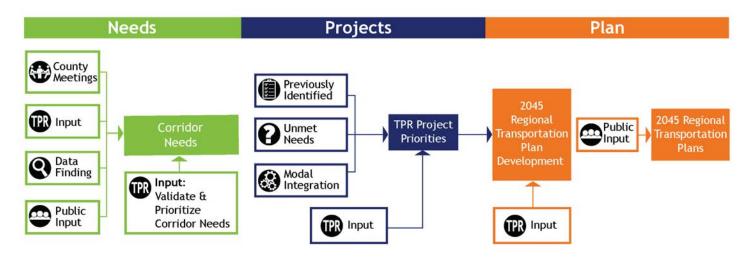




Photo Credit: Felsbura Holt & Ullevia (FHU)

# South Central TPR **Regional Transportation Story**

The Regional Transportation Story provides a snapshot of current and anticipated future conditions in the Region by 2045. The story summarizes the condition of the transportation infrastructure within the Region, how the transportation system is used, and the people relying on the system. Combined, this information shows the uniqueness of the TPR and helps identify the greatest needs in the Region.



## Population & Employment

Although some job growth is expected in the Region, the South Central TPR's population is anticipated to decline by approximately 10 percent.

## Aging Population

Aging adults have unique travel needs; they often need public transportation services as alternatives to driving, as well as roadway improvements such as better signage, striping, and lighting. While the overall number of residents over 65 is expected to slightly decrease in the South Central TPR, older adults will comprise over 25% of the population and require special considerations in transportation planning.

## Vehicle Travel & Congestion

While the total vehicle miles traveled are anticipated to increase by 30 percent in the Region from 2015 to 2045, the travel experience is anticipated to remain at an acceptable level of service with minimal congestion compared to other highways around the state.

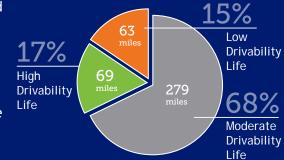
### Vehicle Miles Traveled



Source: CDOT Statewide Travel Demand Model, 2015 and 2045

## Road Conditions

- Drivability life is the remaining "life" of the surface of the road and indicates how long a highway will have acceptable road surface and driving conditions.
- Most of the highways in the South Central TPR have moderate drivability life (4 to 10 years).
- Drivability life is lowest on SH 109 north of Kim and US 160 between Trinidad and SH 389. Highways with low drivability life are often rough on vehicles, create safety issues, and require resurfacing or reconstruction in the near term.



### Source: CDOT Asset Management Database, 2019

### Safety

CDOT's Whole System Whole Safety initiative heightens safety awareness by taking a systematic approach to safety. The goal of the program is to improve the safety of Colorado's transportation network by reducing the rate and severity of crashes, and improve safety conditions for those traveling by all modes. Adding shoulders to major corridors, such as US 160, is one of the greatest safety needs in the Region. Understanding crash patterns helps to identify appropriate safety improvements. For example, wild animal collisions can be mitigated with fencing along the roadway and/or a wildlife bridge/tunnel.

### Colorado Freight Corridors

Colorado Freight Corridors are highway routes in Colorado that are critical for interregional and interstate commercial vehicles to transport goods. These corridors have been identified as the most critical routes to facilitating the movement of goods into, out of, and within Colorado. Together, these corridors cover more than half of all State Highway System lane-miles. Three Colorado Freight Corridors pass through the Region: SH 10, US 160, and I-25.

## Transit

The South Central TPR has a limited number of transit providers. The South Central Council of Governments (SCCOG) provides local, regional, and interregional service; intercity transit is provided by Amtrak, Greyhound, and Los Paisanos Autobuses. The Southern Colorado Developmental Disabilities Services and The Independence Center are the two human services providers serving the Region.

## Airports

The South Central TPR includes two general aviation airports: one in Walsenburg and one in Trinidad.

## Bicycling & Walking

A High Demand Bicycle Corridor is a designation used by CDOT to plan and prioritize bicycle investment and maintenance around the state. Corridors in the Region include SH 12 and US 160 (from La Veta to Walsenburg).

State highways serve as "Main Street" through La Veta (SH 12) and Walsenburg (US 160). These highway sections require additional considerations and should be designed so that people walking, parking, bicycling, accessing transit, and driving can all interact safely. People are more inclined to walk in places that feel safe and inviting.







Source: CDOT Crash Database, 2014-2018

Photo Credit:Huerfano County Government

### Scenic **Bvwavs**

Scenic byways are designated routes that have unique features that do not exist elsewhere in the United States; these byways often promote tourism and economic development adjacent to the corridors.

Scenic byways in the Region include the Santa Fe Trail and the Highway of Legends.

### Economic Vitality

Primary economic generators in the South Central TPR include agriculture, energy development (oil and gas, wind, and solar), tourism, and outdoor recreation.

Transportation allows agricultural goods to leave the TPR and supports visitor access to the TPR for tourism and recreation.

# South Central TPR's **Transportation Focus Areas**

Transportation impacts the lives of residents, employees, and visitors of Colorado in various ways across the state. The TPR members identified the following topics that highlight what is most relevant and unique to the South Central TPR when it comes to transportation.

### Road **Conditions**

Well-maintained roads are essential to the quality of life for residents, employers, and visitors to the South Central TPR. When roads are well maintained in the Region, drivers are safer, the wear and tear on cars, trucks, and heavy vehicles is minimized, goods and services can be provided to the Region, and transit services can reliably be provided. The condition of the road determines the ability of people to get around, whether biking along the highway for recreation or using a wheelchair to cross the highway in a downtown community.

### Tourism

Tourism is a primary economic generator in the South Central TPR. Visitors come to the Region for outdoor recreational activities such as hiking, hunting, camping, cycling, and touring along the scenic byways. The Region is home to the Spanish Peaks, Comanche National Grassland, Trinidad Lake State Park, and what will soon be Colorado's newest state park, Fisher's Peak State Park. Many towns in the Region, such as Cuchara and La Veta, experience seasonal population growth as these recreation destinations attract visitors to the region. The Southern Mountain Loop Trail, adjacent to SH 12 and a portion of US 160 approaching Walsenburg, once completed, is anticipated to be a top tourist destination while also providing opportunities for improved public health in the Region. There are also two scenic byways in the Region, the Highway of Legends and the Santa Fe Trail.

## Interregional Transit

As the population of the South Central TPR continues to age and older adults are unable to drive, the local, regional, and interregional transit services will be increasingly important. Local transit gives residents and visitors access to services such as grocery stores located in downtown areas. Regional and interregional services increase connectivity to larger communities such as Pueblo and provide access to necessary services like medical care and shopping. Providing reliable transit service is one way to maintain the overall health and well-being and quality of life of all residents, especially older adults and people with disabilities.



## Freight and Rail

Freight moves the products and valuables we use on a daily basis. The South Central TPR includes three designated freight corridors: SH 10, US 160, and I-25. Amtrak's Southwest Chief, Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway, San Luis Rio Grande Railroad, and Union Pacific Railroad are located in the South Central TPR. Several critical industries rely on trucks and rail for freight movement in the South Central Region. From the agricultural fields in the South Central TPR to the homes of individuals and families across the state and country, freight is how these valuable products reach their destinations. Agriculture is the primary industry that contributes to goods movement in the Region; however, oil, gas, and alternative energy contribute to the high number of trucks as well. If coal mines in the Region were to reopen, an increase in trucks would be expected on corridors such as SH 12, US 160, and I-25. These industries need a reliable transportation network to get products to market. As Colorado's population and economy grows, there will be an even greater demand for products from these key South Central Region industries.

## Resiliency

Resiliency is the ability of communities to rebound, positively adapt to, or thrive amid changing conditions or challenges - including natural and man-made disasters and climate change - and maintain guality of life, healthy growth, durable systems, and conservation of resources for present and future generations. In 2018, Huerfano County was impacted by the Spring Creek Fire. As a result, burn scars, which are prone to runoff and flooding, now threaten communities in the Cucharas River valley, including the towns of La Veta and Walsenburg. With a heightened risk of flash flooding events, major highways such as US 160 and I-25 are critical as they serve as evacuation routes for residents. Emergency response can be difficult in Regions like the South Central TPR as many emergency responders, such as firefighters, are volunteers, and may have to travel long distances to respond. As extreme weather events increase in occurrence in Colorado, CDOT must evaluate options to reduce risk and implement resilient design solutions.

## Environmental Mitigation

Transportation, like all human activities, affects the environment. The rules governing the statewide and regional planning process require CDOT to consider environmental impacts potentially caused by transportation projects. These planning regulations require plans and projects to be coordinated with other local, state, and federal agencies to identify and discuss how to maintain projects and/or restore the environments impacted by the transportation projects. For example, if a project is anticipated to worsen air quality, the project solutions should seek to avoid, minimize, or mitigate this impact. In this case, mitigation measures could include optimizing the traffic signal to improve traffic flow and reduce vehicle emissions. The state and federal requirements pertaining to environmental consultation have been followed in the creation of this Plan.

## Vision & Goals

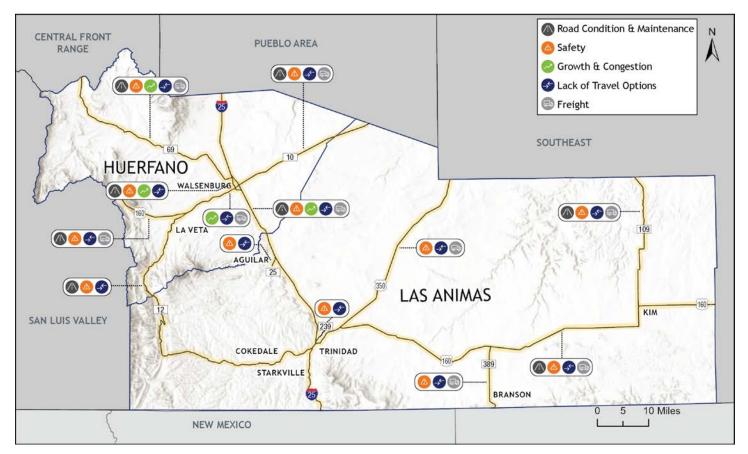
Photo Credit: Sharon Day; US 160 east of Walsenburg

The South Central TPR will provide a safe, reliable, cost-effective, and accessible multimodal transportation system that accommodates and enhances the Region's high quality of life while preserving the environments that make Huerfano and Las Animas Counties great places to live, work, and visit.

- Provide mobility to the traveling public at an acceptable level of service.
- Maintain the transportation system in the most efficient manner possible.
- Provide safe multimodal travel opportunities for residents and visitors.
- Minimize impacts to the Region's air, water, scenic view corridors, cultural resources, and wildlife habitat.
- Function as a complete system with effective connectivity, both within the Region and to the rest of the state.
- Support interconnection with multimodal options and investments that support the multimodal system.
- Preserve and enhance the Region's overall economic health.
- Provide new intermodal access and mobility • options for individuals and commerce.

- Support a safe and an efficient airport system that maximizes existing investments and meets inter-state and intrastate travel and emergency needs while supporting Colorado's diverse economy.
- Identify, evaluate, and prioritize options that enhance travel and can be implemented through existing or reasonably anticipated funding. Include options that are understood and supported by the traveling public.
- Attract new transit passengers while continuing to serve existing passengers.
- Continue to enhance the sustainability of • the transit system.
- Provide efficient, effective, safe, and reliable services.
- Promote the services provided by local, regional, and state transit providers.

## **Corridor Needs Map**



Through a significant public engagement process, we've taken what we heard from county officials, key stakeholders, and the public in the South Central Region and compared it with key data findings (e.g., crash patterns, road condition, congestion points) to identify corridor transportation needs, as shown on the map. The corridor needs were used to develop specific projects to address the greatest needs of each highway. A range of multimodal transportation options were considered to address the corridor needs.

## What We've Heard:

CDOT officials engaged local and regional stakeholders and community members in the South Central TPR - in person, over the phone, and online. As a result, we heard from many residents throughout the TPR and learned how they travel. Outreach in the **Region included:** 

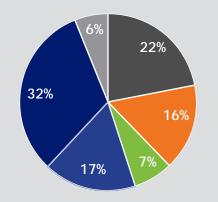
- Meetings with Huerfano and Las Animas Counties
- A booth at Santa Fe Trail Days
- A pop-up booth at the Walsenburg Safeway
- Discussions at the SCCOG Seniors' Lunch
- Regional planning meetings in Walsenburg and Trinidad
- A Telephone Town Hall
- Over 60 online survey responses

Through this stakeholder and public outreach, the highest priority transportation trends and issues in the South Central TPR were identified as:

- Lack of Travel Options
- Road Condition and safety
- Freight

# **Online Map Comments by Category**

Survey respondents were asked to communicate personal transportation challenges on an interactive map. The pie chart shows the breakdown of comments by key categories in the South Central TPR.



Source: Your Transportation Plan MetroQuest Online Survey (2019)

S.





Travel Options: Bicycle & Pedestrian



**Travel Options:** Rail & Transit



Freight

# South Central Transportation Projects

The Region's transportation project list is characterized by a mix of intersection/ interchange, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian projects. The list also includes safety-related projects that address shoulder deficiencies, passing lanes, and other safety improvements like wildlife mitigation. The project list was developed by first aligning previously identified projects with the known corridor needs and then adding new projects to address unmet needs. The full project list includes the projects best suited to meet the transportation needs of the Region between now and 2045.

The South Central TPR comprehensive project list includes:



The full project list is included in Appendix B.

# Regional Priorities

The Colorado Transportation Commission's guiding principles of Safety, Mobility, Economic Vitality, Asset Management, Strategic Nature, and Regional Priorities are the basis for project selection in Colorado. The South Central TPR established Regional Priorities by ranking projects based on each project's ability to meet the project criteria, as defined specifically for the South Central TPR below.

### Safety



Addressing known safety problems is a top priority. These include geometrics, shoulder deficiencies, and road maintenance. Considerations need to include both data and driver perception/comfort.

### Mobility



Having options for traveling will enhance mobility in the South Central TPR. Passing lanes, pullouts, and real-time highway condition messaging will all contribute to mobility in the Region.

### **Economic Vitality**



Being proactive in promoting recreational and tourism opportunities will best support economic vitality in the South Central TPR. Transportation should support vibrant main streets and the movement of goods and services in and through the Region. Reliable highways and transit services that connect to employment centers will enhance the economic vitality of the Region.

### Asset Management



The South Central TPR will maximize the project opportunities to combine asset management projects with mobility, safety, and other projects. The integration of new technologies will contribute most to asset management in the South Central TPR.

### Strategic Nature



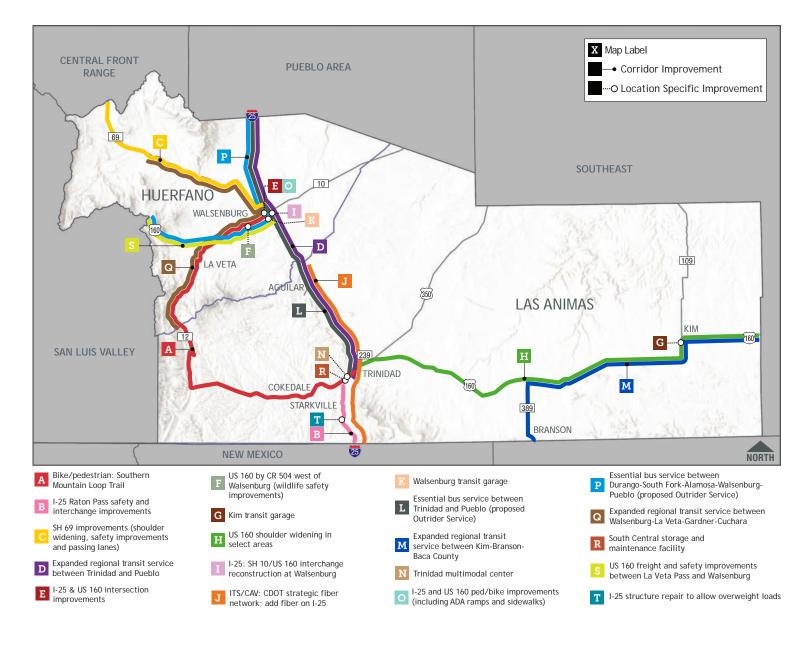
Advancing technologies and ensuring access to recreation are considered the most strategic types of improvements for the Region.



PAGE 10

# South Central TPR's Top 20 **Project Priorities**

The top 20 projects for the South Central TPR are estimated to cost approximately \$190 million. The top project is the completion of the bicycle and pedestrian trail, the Southern Mountain Loop Trail, adjacent to SH 12 and a portion of US 160 approaching Walsenburg. The Planning and Environmental Linkages study for the trail is currently underway. Other top projects include improvements at multiple interchanges along I-25, the expansion of local, regional, and interregional transit services - such as providing increased connections to Pueblo - and the expansion of the state fiber network on major corridors such as I-25 and US 160. The project list reflects the Region's top priority projects, all of which are currently unfunded. The timing for project completion will depend on transportation funding availability. The full project list can be found in Appendix B.



## South Central TPR Priority Project List

Map Label	Planning Project ID	Highway(s)	Project Name	Cost (\$M)	Primary Project Type	Additional Project Benefits	SWP Goal Areas	
А	1039	SH 12, US 160	Bike/Pedestrian: Southern Mountain Loop Trail	\$33.00	<b>()</b>	\$ <b>()</b> <b>()</b>	<b>⊗ (</b> ) ⊘	
В	0013	I-25	I-25 Raton Pass safety and interchange improvements	\$12.00			<b>⚠ ⊘ ⊗</b>	
С	1037	SH 69	SH 69 Improvements (shoulder widening, safety improvements and passing lanes)	\$21.00		st 🖉		
D	1271	I-25	Expanded Regional Transit Service between Trinidad and Pueblo	\$1.15		<b>€</b> (î) €	Normality	
E	1502	I-25	I-25 & US 160 Intersection Improvements	\$4.00		00	� ♠ ⊘	
F	1507	US 160	US 160 by CR 504 West of Walsenburg (Wildlife safety improvements)	\$1.40		Ø		
G	1044	US 160	Kim Transit Garage	\$0.50				
Н	1510	US 160	US 160 shoulder widening in select areas	\$20.00		60		
I	1036	SH 10, US 160, I-25	I-25: US 10/ SH 160 Interchange Reconstruction at Walsenburg	\$50.00		0	(1) 😵 🏈	
J	1042	I-25	ITS/CAV: CDOT Strategic Fiber Network; add fiber on I-25	\$9.00	•		€ 1	
К	1272	I-25	Walsenburg Transit Garage	\$0.67		<i>6</i>		
L	1273	I-25	Essential Bus Service between Trinidad and Pueblo (Proposed Outrider Service)	\$2.16		😪 🚯 🐼	Normality	
Μ	1045	US 160	Expanded Regional Transit Service between Kim-Branson-Baca County	\$0.60		😵 🚯 🐼	<b>N</b>	
Ν	1269	I-25	Trinidad Multimodal Center	\$1.50		🗞 🚯 🚳		
0	1509	US 160	I-25 and US 160 Ped/Bike Improvements (including ADA ramps and sidewalks)	\$2.45	<b>()</b>	😌 🚯 😍		
Ρ	1041	US 160, I-25	Essential Bus Service between Durango- South Fork-Alamosa-Walsenburg-Pueblo (Proposed Outrider Service)	\$5.02	<b></b>	😵 🚯 🐼	Solution	
Q	1038	SH 12, SH 69, US 160	Expanded Regional Transit Service between Walsenburg-La Veta-Gardner-Cuchara	\$1.40		😵 🚯 🐼		
R	1270	I-25	South Central Storage and Maintenance Facility	\$2.63		Ø		
S	1508	US 160	US 160 Freight and Safety Improvements between La Veta Pass and Walsenburg	\$18.00		Ø	▲ 🍪 🏈	
Т	1276	I-25	I-25 structure repair to allow overweight loads	\$1.20	=	Ø	Ø	
	OJECT TYP Pedestriar	n 🔋 Opera			<b>YOUR TRANSPORTATION</b> <b>PLAN GOAL AREAS:</b> Safety			
	Bicycle			ke/Ped		5		
	Safety 📑 Transit			Tourism Resilience		😵 Mobility 🖉 Asset Management		
	Freight							
				J			PAGE 13	



## Relation to the Colorado Statewide Transportation Plan

This RTP is a standalone document that identifies transportation needs and priorities for the Region. The Statewide Transportation Plan (Your Transportation Plan) integrates and consolidates the 15 RTPs from around the state, and the RTPs are appendices in Your Transportation Plan. The South Central TPR's project priorities were discussed at a joint meeting with the CDOT Region 2 Regional Transportation Director and the TPR Chairs from the Region. This meeting enabled the South Central TPR Chair to advocate for inclusion of the Region's priority projects in the 10-Year Strategic Project Pipeline, a primary outcome of Your Transportation Plan. This method of planning helps ensure that Your Transportation Plan addresses multiple levels of the transportation network. The RTPs identify contextual solutions that support the statewide vision and initiatives. This approach is key to delivering a comprehensive and cohesive plan customized to the unique needs of each region.



Credit: Jim Lambert; Artocade parade in downtown Trinidad

This approach is key to delivering a comprehensive and cohesive plan customized to the unique needs of each region.

# Transportation Funding

There are three sets of projects that pertain to the South Central TPR:

- Comprehensive list of project needs in the Region (Appendix B)
- TPR's priority projects (pages 12-13)
- South Central projects included in the 10-Year Strategic Project Pipeline

CDOT relies primarily on state (\$0.22 per gallon) and federal (\$0.184 per gallon) fuel taxes for long-term funding, which have not increased since 1991 and 1993, respectively. CDOT also funds transportation improvements with federal and state transportation funds, including state funds established through FASTER legislation in 2009. Stagnant revenue sources, declining purchasing power of the current fuel tax rate, and increasing vehicle fuel efficiency has gradually diminished CDOT's ability to fund the maintenance and improvement of the state's transportation system.

Your Transportation Plan (the Statewide Plan) envisions a long-term investment to build a 10-Year Strategic Project Pipeline. The pipeline reflects a balanced approach to transportation investment that can be acted upon if current funding opportunities from the Colorado Legislature are extended. It also puts Colorado in a good position, with ready projects, in the event of a future economic stimulus package. The 10-year pipeline includes projects in years 1 through 4 that are anticipated to be funded, and projects for years 5 through 10 that are currently unfunded. The aspirational funding for years 5 through 10 would enable an estimated \$81 million for projects in the South Central TPR. This funding level is based on what could reasonably be delivered in that timeframe, recognizing the needs statewide and in other TPRs. The South Central projects in the 10-Year Strategic Project Pipeline were identified through a collaborative effort among CDOT Region 2 and the TPRs within the CDOT Region.

For the longer term, 25-year planning horizon, the South Central TPR will have considerable transportation investment needs (as listed in Appendix B) beyond 2030 and the conclusion of the proposed 10-Year Strategic Project Pipeline. Without the additional funding envisioned in the 10-Year Strategic Project Pipeline, CDOT would continue to focus on maintaining the existing system. Subsequently, funding for roadway, freight, and transit improvements would be greatly reduced.

## South Central TPR's Implementation **Strategies**

The following section contains information about actions that the TPR recommends to implement its RTP. Implementation actions are meant to be near-term, practicable measures related to the South Central TPR's vision, goals, and priority projects.

The following actions have been developed as a way for the TPR members to actively promote the RTP:

- Advocate for full funding of the South Central TPR's top priority projects
- Advocate with elected officials for appropriate weight limits on state highways
- Improve communication among CDOT, cities, counties, and regional transit partners concerning planned transportation improvements
- Partner with CDOT and other federal land management agencies to draw tourists to the Region
- Improve communication between CDOT and State Patrol related to roadway closures and incident management messaging
- Consider opportunities to partner with broadband providers to get fiber installed to advance economic vitality in the Region
- Expand transit service to maintain the quality of life for residents, particularly older residents who desire to age in place and continue to live in the Region





# **TO LEARN MORE:**

YourTransportationPlan.com