Winter 2007

All you wanted to know about the

Entrance to Aspen

and more!

Photo by Paul Conrad

Thanks for taking the time to read this information about the Entrance to Aspen. The City of Aspen looks forward to engaging the community on this issue. We know it's a complex one with difficult technical aspects to comprehend, a long history to unravel, and social and political implications that run deep through this valley. We hope that 2007 can be the year when community consensus can be reached and a definitive decision made. We look forward to engaging you on this issue, hearing your ideas, suggestions and concerns and getting significant input that brings us toward resolution on this difficult issue.

Sincerely,

The City's Entrance to Aspen Team

Steve Barwick, City Manager
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We welcome your comments and questions. Please address them to Mitzi Rapkin, mitzir@ci.aspen.co.us or 920-5082.

SO, BEFORE YOU READ MORE, YOU MIGHT WANT TO GET CAUGHT UP ON THE JARGON…

GLOSSARY

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) - In a variety of forms BRT, is used in many cities around the world. It is a collection of elements that, when blended properly, will provide more effective transit service and comfortable facilities while meeting increased ridership demands. The concept behind BRT is to create a bus system that acts more like a rail system but at a lower cost. It is more timely, convenient and comfortable for passengers. BRT provides shorter and more reliable travel time for passengers. The proposed valley-wide BRT project is a system of guideways, vehicle stations, service route structure, and intelligent transportation elements that work together to make a bus system function more like a rail system.

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) - A detailed written report that provides full and fair discussion of significant environmental impacts and informs decision-makers and the public of the reasonable alternatives which would meet the purpose of and the need for a project or other actions, and would avoid or minimize adverse impacts or enhance the quality of the human environment.

The Draft EIS (DEIS) - Documents the purpose and need for action, evaluates a range of reasonable alternatives and their associated impacts and presents a preferred alternative if one option is clearly favored above the others. The Draft EIS is circulated among agencies and the public for comment. Following a public hearing held during the comment period to formally record comments on the Draft, a Final EIS (FEIS) is prepared incorporating public and agency input and recommending a preferred alternative.

Light Rail Transit - An electric railway system characterized by its ability to operate single cars or short trains along exclusive right-of-way at ground level and to allow passengers to board and disembark at track or car floor level.

Preferred Alternative - The alternative selected from a comprehensive evaluation of all alternatives. In the case of the Entrance to Aspen it is the preferred alternative as identified by CDOT and FWHA in the 1998 Record of Decision based on community input and environmental analysis.

Record of Decision (ROD) - A document prepared by the federal and state lead agencies (in this case the Division Office of the Federal Highway Administration and CDOT) that presents the basis for selecting and approving a specific transportation proposal that has been evaluated through the various environmental and engineering studies of the Transportation Project Development Process. Typically, the Record of Decision identifies the alternatives considered, the alternative selected from those fully evaluated in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, measures to minimize harm, monitoring or enforcement programs, and an itemized list of commitments and mitigation measures.

Reevaluation – Required by 23 Code of Federal Regulations 771.129 (c) which states, "After approval of the EIS…the applicant shall consult with the [Federal Highway] Administration prior to requesting any major approvals or grants to establish whether or not the approved environmental document…remains valid for the requested Administration action. These consultations will be documented when determined necessary by the Administration."

The purpose of the reevaluation done last year was to determine whether:

- The project is substantially different or changed since the 1998 approval, resulting in environmental impacts that were not previously identified and evaluated;
- The affected environment has changed in a manner which will result in an impact occurring that was not previously evaluated and/or:
- Regulations or laws have changed, and there are new requirements that were not previously addressed.

WHERE ARE WE NOW WITH THE ENTRANCE TO ASPEN?

The debate over a safer, less congested transportation connection into Aspen has been a near constant in this valley since the late 1960s. Over 26 votes have taken place over 37 years on what to do with the Entrance to Aspen with no definitive outcome. Although changes and improvements to State Highway 82 have been made over the years, the most contentious part of this issue centers around the section of highway between the current roundabout and Main Street.

The last votes that were taken on the subject were in 2002. Past election results over the years have shown voter preference for a variety of Entrance to Aspen solutions, thus the issue is muddled in votes that contradict one another from year to year as well as votes that are split nearly down the middle – that is a preponderance of election questions where voters' preferences revealed a close margin of difference with results at 51% to 49%. (You can see the entire history of election questions and the results at www.sh82.com).

Due to a downturn in the economy after the tragedies of September 11th, traffic counts were down and the issue had less urgency and traction in the community. Now, vehicle trips in and out of Aspen are back at high levels, traffic is a dominant issue in Aspen and the urgency of the issue is clear.

Last year, when the City began to discuss the Entrance to Aspen and potential solutions to the congestion again, the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) in conjunction with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) determined that the last environmental studies done on the Entrance to Aspen in 1997 would need to be reevaluated before any capacity improvements could be made to the existing highway.

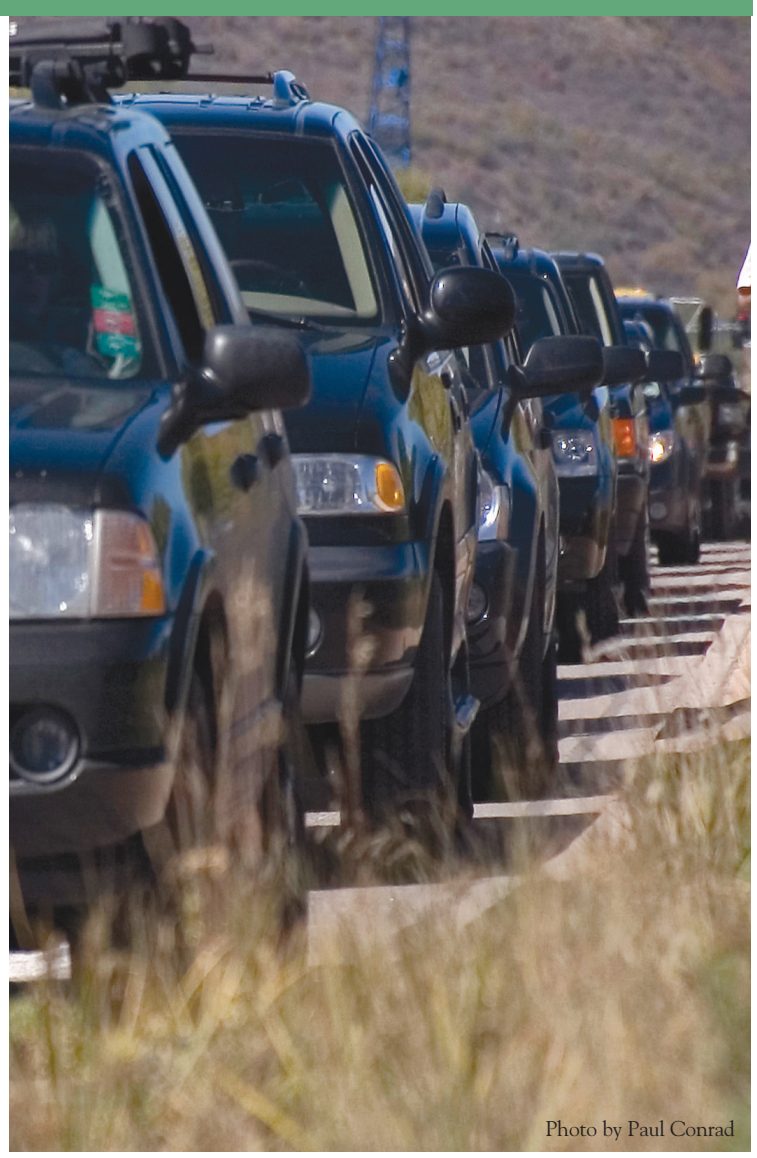


Photo by Paul Conrad

THE PAST WHICH LEADS TO THE PRESENT

In the early 1990's citizens partnered with elected officials to develop The Aspen Area Community Plan (AACP) as a means of determining the future character for the City of Aspen and surrounding areas. The 1993 AACP states, "Avoiding the dilemma of more cars needing more highways and more highways attracting more cars means limiting vehicle trips into Aspen: implementing an efficient valley wide mass transit system, altering land use patterns; and moving people within and around the City of Aspen without automobiles."

Project Need and Intent

In 1995 Aspen, Pitkin County and Snowmass Village elected officials worked with CDOT and FWHA officials to identify the project need and intent for the Entrance to Aspen. They are**:**

Project Need- The capacity of the existing transportation system is insufficient during peak periods. Safety, clean air, the visitor's experience and residents' quality of life are compromised.

Project Intent- To provide a balanced, integrated transportation system for residents, visitors and commuters, that reduces congestion and pollution by reducing and/or managing the number of vehicles on the road system. The system should reflect the character and scale of the Aspen community.

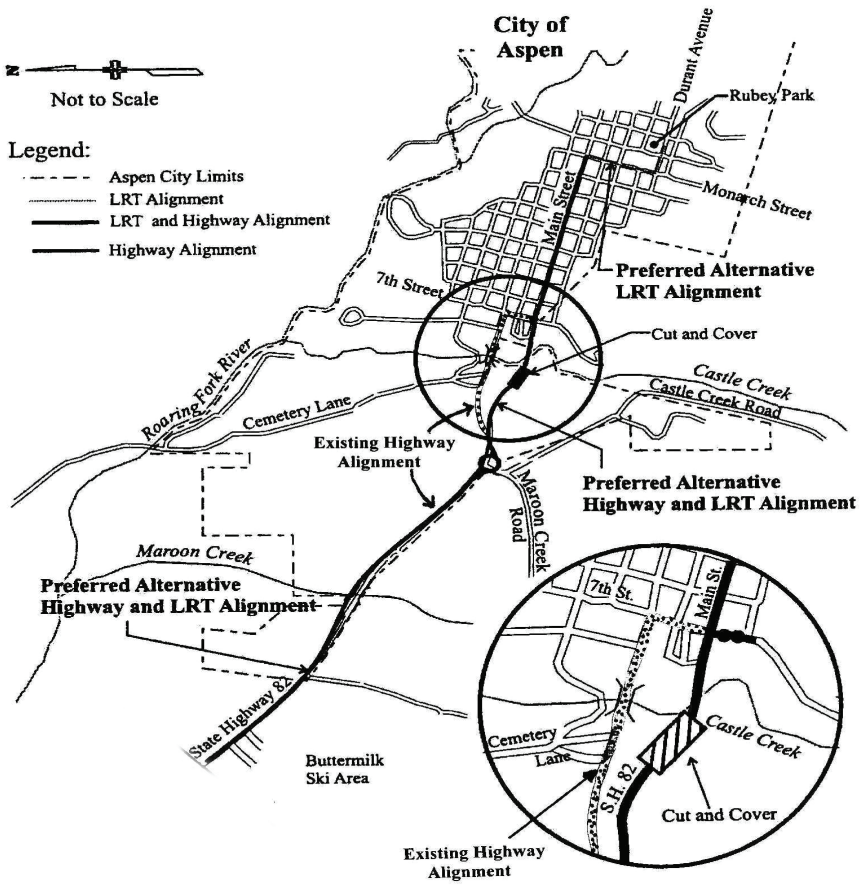
Through a process responsive to community based planning, the EIS shall identify, analyze, select and implement the best transportation alternative for the short and long-term goals of community compatibility, safety, environmental preservation, clean air, quality of life, and transportation capacity. The alternative chosen should be consistent with the Aspen/Snowmass/Pitkin County goal of limiting vehicles in 2015 to levels at or below those of 1994.

Community Objectives

In 1995 Aspen City Council, Pitkin County Commissioners and the Snowmass Village Town Council, CDOT and FHWA representatives, along with input from citizens and a technical advisory committee, established ten project objectives that the Entrance to Aspen solution must accomplish. In 1998, CDOT and FHWA selected the Preferred Alternative as opposed to other solutions because it would meet the project purpose and need as well as the objectives the community identified. These ten objectives are the foundation on which past decisions were made. If the community presses for an Entrance to Aspen solution other than the Preferred Alternative, these community objectives would need to be reconsidered and likely changed. The community objectives are:

1. ***Community Based Planning***. Provide a process which is responsive to local community based planning efforts, including the Aspen to Snowmass Transportation Project and the Aspen Area Community Plan, with special attention focused on limiting vehicle trips into Aspen to create a less congested downtown core.
2. ***Transportation Capacity.*** Provide needed transportation capacity for the forecasted person trips in the year 2015. In doing this, this project will identify a combination of travel modes, alignments and transportation management actions to seek to achieve the stated community goal of limiting the number of vehicles in the year 2015 to levels at or below those of 1994.
3. ***Safety.*** Reduce the high accident rate on State Highway 82 and the existing S-curves at SH82/7th Street/Main Street, and provide safety improvements for bicyclists and pedestrians. Provide safe access for all intersections for all movements.
4. ***Environmentally Sound Alternative.*** Develop an alternative which minimizes and mitigates adverse impacts. A process will be used which follows the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments (CAAA), the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), and all pertinent legislation.
5. ***Community Acceptability.*** Develop an alternative which fits the character of the community and is aesthetically acceptable to the public.
6. ***Financial Limitations.*** Develop an alternative that is financially realistic with respect to current and expected funding levels and programs, while being responsive to both the community's character and prudent expenditures of public funds.
7. ***Clean Air Act Requirements.***** Since the Aspen area is a PM10 non-attainment area, the Preferred Alternative must meet the requirements by the CAAA by demonstrating project conformity. ** Since these objectives were written, Aspen has become a maintenance area for PM10, with an air quality maintenance plan in place.
8. ***Emergency Access.*** Respond to the need for an alternate route for emergency response to incidents inside and outside of Aspen.
9. ***Livable Communities***. Provide a system which reflects the small town character and scale of the Aspen community, and which enhances the quality of life for residents and visitors. The system shall provide more accessible transportation which increases the mobility of the community and therefore provides for a more livable community.
10. ***Phasing.*** Provide an alternative which allows for future transit options and upgrades.

SO WHAT IS THE RECORD OF DECISION ON THE ETA?



What is the 1998 Record of Decision and Preferred Alternative for the Entrance to Aspen?

CDOT began its environmental study of the Entrance to Aspen between Buttermilk and 7th and Main Streets in 1994. That process involved extensive public input and technical studies. Four years later in 1998 CDOT, in conjunction with FHWA, published a Record of Decision (ROD) on the Entrance to Aspen.

The ROD lays out a plan for the Entrance to Aspen, known as the Preferred Alternative. The document says, "CDOT and FHWA have chosen the Preferred Alternative because it meets the local communities' needs and desires, fulfills the project objectives, and provides flexibility in future design decisions." (p.7) The Preferred Alternative is a combination of highway and intersection improvements, a transit system and an incremental transportation management program.

Specifically, the highway component consists of a two-lane highway (one lane in each direction) from Buttermilk that follows the existing alignment up to the Maroon Creek Bridge and through the roundabout. About 900 feet beyond the roundabout the corridor shifts to the southeast to cross the Marolt-Thomas property and passes through a cut-and-cover tunnel 400 feet in length to reach the lower grade of a new Castle Creek bridge. The connection to Main Street occurs at 7th Street. The transit component includes a light rail system on the south side of the highway running between the vicinity of the airport (later changed to Brush Creek Road) and Rubey Park. If local support and/or funding doesn't exist for the light rail, two exclusive bus lanes (that would connect to the proposed valley wide Bus Rapid Transit system) would be allowed in addition to the two lanes for general traffic.

*You can read the Record of Decision at www.sh82.com

What are the elements of Light Rail?

The recently reevaluated Preferred Alternative provides environmental clearance for the community to build exclusive bus lanes OR a light rail transit (LRT) system with sufficient local support and funding. Elected officials have determined the first leg of LRT would need to run from Rubey Park to a Brush Creek Road station, with stops at Monarch Street, 2nd and Main Street, 7th and Main Street, Maroon Creek Road, Buttermilk, the airport, and Brush Creek Road.

What would it cost to implement the Preferred Alternative?

The cost for completing design, construction and right-of-way acquisition for the Preferred Alternative with exclusive bus lanes is approximately $77.7 million (in 2005 dollars). However, funds for the Maroon Creek Roundabout ($6.3 m), the new Maroon Creek Bridge ($17.9 m), and realigned Owl Creek Road ($7.6 m) have already been spent or allocated. The total remaining cost is about $45.9 million to complete the project with bus lanes from Buttermilk to 7th and Main along the alignment outlined in the Preferred Alternative.

The cost of light rail between downtown Aspen and the airport, including design, construction, a maintenance facility, electrification, LRT vehicles, seven stations and related right-of-way issues would be approximately $125.8 million in 2005 dollars. If the rail were to be extended from the airport to Brush Creek Road it would cost an additional $13.5 million in 1997 dollars. (The cost for the LRT segment from the airport to Brush Creek Road was outside the scope of the reevaluation and therefore was not updated to 2005 dollars. If the community decides to pursue LRT on this stretch of the corridor, updated figures would be obtained.) Operating costs for LRT would be approximately $4.17 million a year based on trains scheduled to run every fifteen minutes during peak travel hours and every half hour the rest of the day and evening.

How will any solution be funded?

A variety of funding sources will be necessary to build an improved Entrance to Aspen. Highway improvements and bus lane construction costs can be funded by state and local sources. The state currently has no money allocated to the Entrance, so the project would need to compete for future state transportation funding that may become available. On the local front, the existing ½ cent county-wide transportation tax fund has a cumulative surplus of about $12 million available for transit projects and some capacity for debt service to support a bond issue over the next few years. Other options could include imposing special use taxes, fees, including parking fees, or creating a special tax district.

Why a 400 foot cut-and-cover tunnel?

The relatively short cut-and-cover tunnel, located on the Marolt-Thomas property west of Castle Creek, is meant to maintain more open space acreage and to allow for a bike and pedestrian path to exist in this corridor, as well as a passage for wildlife. It provides for a continuous swath of open space from Aspen Golf Course across Marolt-Thomas property. It is considered in the ROD to minimize visual impacts to Marolt-Thomas property when viewed from Aspen near Castle Creek, the Aspen Golf Course, Bugsy Barnard Park and the remaining portion of existing Highway 82 near Cemetery Lane. It is also designed to minimize impacts to nearby residents. The cut-and-cover option was considered to be a superior profile alternative over the

at-grade solution because of the way it addresses three of the ten project objectives. They are:

- Community Based Planning – considered as superior platform in community surveys, ETA Design Task Force and 1996 ballot question
- Community Acceptability – better fits character of community and considered to be more aesthetically acceptable than at-grade option
- Environmentally Sound Alternative – minimizes and mitigates impacts because:
  - Reduces impact to Marolt-Thomas property due to revegetation of top of cut-and-cover tunnel. Approximately 1.5 acres on top of tunnel are returned to open space.
  - Allows grade-separated trail crossing on top of tunnel
  - Along with alignment it avoids impacts to Holden Smelting and Milling Complex
  - Allows return of some existing highway right-of-way (.8 acres) between Cemetery Lane and the new alignment to be converted to open space

What is in it for the commuter who still drives to Aspen if the Preferred Alternative is implemented?

Engineering studies have shown that traffic lanes plus two transit lanes on the curved alignment would allow traffic to move 50% faster (from 16 mph to 24 mph) between Buttermilk and Aspen. Total driving time would be reduced by 34% (from 9 minutes 21 seconds to 6 minutes, 10 seconds) due to elimination of the S-Curves and removal of buses from pulling in and out of traffic.

In addition, a key component of the Preferred Alternative is public transit. Transit reduces traffic congestion for everyone and lightens the load of single vehicles traveling on the highway.

Because a LRT system is separate from the roadway, automobiles would have exclusive use of the highway under the LRT alternative. LRT typically attracts a higher ridership than buses, and could remove additional drivers from the road. LRT cars hold 150 riders each and could depart every fifteen minutes during peak hours.

A dedicated bus lane also removes buses from the general traffic flow, freeing the general lanes for automobiles only. Although it varies by the size of bus, in general, a full transit vehicle removes approximately 40 cars from the roadways. On average, during peak hours in the winter approximately 80-90 buses cross the Castle Creek Bridge going in and out of Aspen carrying approximately 3,200 passengers. Therefore, an improved transit system that incorporates the principles of BRT would generate increased bus ridership over what we have currently and will equate to fewer cars in mixed traffic and a smoother flow for single occupancy vehicles. Because RFTA's valley ridership peaks during morning and afternoon commute times, the single driver will experience reduced traffic during the most congested hours of the day.

Can any possible solution to the Entrance to Aspen cross the Marolt-Thomas Property?

In a 1996 election, Aspen voters authorized City Council to convey the Right-of-Way across the Marolt and Thomas Properties for a two-lane highway and a corridor for light rail. If the Marolt and Thomas Properties are to be used for any other purpose (four lanes of traffic or two lanes of traffic and two dedicated bus lanes, as examples) then the question must go back to City voters because there is NOT approval to use the open space for anything other than two lanes of highway and light rail.

Why was the Preferred Alternative Chosen?

FWHA and CDOT chose the Preferred Alternative because they found that it best met the project objectives the community and elected officials identified and it fulfilled the project's purpose and need. The Preferred Alternative was chosen after years of analysis which took into account such things as traffic congestion, traffic forecasts, safety, the environment, and cost to name a few.

What has been done since the ROD to improve the transportation system to and from Aspen?

Elements of the Preferred Alternative have been implemented. They include:

- Maroon Creek Roundabout
- Pedestrian overpasses over Maroon Creek Road and Castle Creek Road
- Truscott Intersection (utility, intersection and pedestrian improvements)
- Harmony Road (pedestrian underpasses and intersection improvements)
- Realignment of Owl Creek Road and new signals at SH82 and Buttermilk
- Conveyance of Right-of-Way (Per the terms of the 1996 City of Aspen voter approval, CDOT acquired easement across Marolt for two-lane and light rail ONLY in exchange for Mills Ranch property to be used as open space)
- Maroon Creek Bridge Replacement (underway)
- SH 82 Access Management Plan (traffic study from Smith Way to Cemetery Lane)

In addition, the City of Aspen has implemented additional programs with the intent of increasing the use of alternative modes of transportation. These include:

- Main Street bus lane
- Roaring Fork Valley Vehicles carshare program
- Carpool matching and parking programs
- Transportation Options Program that provides grants and other benefits to employers

Why do CDOT and the FHWA have to be involved?

Because Highway 82 is a State Highway that also receives federal funding, both organizations have to be involved in the decision making process. SH 82 is part of the National Highway System. While City of Aspen voters can veto or accept whatever open space land use ballot issues arise related to the Entrance to Aspen, the State and Federal Governments' process is to produce a Record of Decision with a Preferred Alternative that identifies and mitigates environmental impacts.

Where has the money invested in this issue come from so far?

There are various sources for the money that has so far been invested in transportation and the Entrance to Aspen. In 1993 Pitkin County voters approved a 1/2 cent sales and use tax to fund Mass Transportation improvements. The Elected Officials Transportation Committee (made up of elected officials from Snowmass Village, Aspen and Pitkin County) agreed that the funds from the 1/2 cent tax could be used to increase and improve bus service, for park and ride facilities, to acquire Rights-of-Way for transportation and for additional projects which fit the general framework of financing, constructing, operating or maintaining a mass transportation system in the county. Currently the EOTC has about $12 million in its coffers. The City of Aspen and Pitkin County have also used their funds for various components of the Entrance to Aspen.

What is the plan for the rest of the valley as far as transit goes?

RFTA is currently raising funds and support for a valley wide Bus Rapid Transit project. The BRT project is planned from Glenwood Springs to Buttermilk and would connect to the Entrance to Aspen exclusive bus lanes if they are implemented. BRT consists of a system of dedicated bus lanes, modern vehicles, improved bus stations, faster more efficient service and intelligent transportation elements that work together to make a bus system function more like a rail system. The fact that each of the components can be implemented independently is just one of BRT's many advantages. The cost to implement BRT is estimated to cost $102.5 million (in 2002 dollars) between Glenwood Springs and Buttermilk.

THE REEVALUATION

The 1997 Entrance to Aspen Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) which led to the 1998 Record of Decision (ROD) was reevaluated late last year as required by CDOT and the Federal Highway Administration. This reevaluation was necessary before any further construction or design improvements as laid out in the 1998 ROD could be made. The Engineering firm of HDR Engineering, Inc. completed the reevaluation to assess whether any changes had occurred in the project design concept or scope and/or whether any regulatory or environmental changes had occurred since the FEIS and ROD were published in 1998, and whether those changes would result in any new or additional environmental impacts not previously identified and evaluated in the EIS.

The resources that were reevaluated to assess if significant changes had occurred were:

Social Environment: neighborhood impacts, relocation of right-of-way impacts, recreational impacts, impacts of travel patterns and access, parking impacts, public safety impacts, land use impacts, environmental justice.

Economic Environment: economic base, commercial growth trends, employment, income, housing.

Physical Environment: air quality, water quality, upland and floodplain vegetation, wetlands, fisheries, wildlife, wild and scenic rivers, floodplains, threatened and endangered species, historical resources, archaeological resources, paleontological resources, historic and recreational resources, farmlands, noise and vibration, visual character, potential hazardous waste sites.

There were three possible outcomes that the lead agencies could have determined based on the results of the reevaluation:

1. Existing, previously approved environmental studies and project decisions remain valid and 1998 Record of Decision stands.
2. Some changes had occurred in the environment and an alternative solution for the Entrance to Aspen other than the one selected in the 1998 ROD would be preferred. The alternative found to be the most suitable would have to have been fully evaluated in the Final EIS and a revised ROD would have be prepared and circulated for public view.
3. Significant changes had occurred and an additional environmental impact document would be required to move project forward, meaning the project had substantially changed in ways that would have resulted in new or significant impacts not previously identified. A supplemental EIS could identify additional Entrance to Aspen alternative solutions that were not previously noted.

On November 16th CDOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) confirmed the Preferred Alternative from the 1998 ROD is still valid (option 1 above). The results were announced and discussed at the Elected Officials Transportation Committee meeting on November 16th.

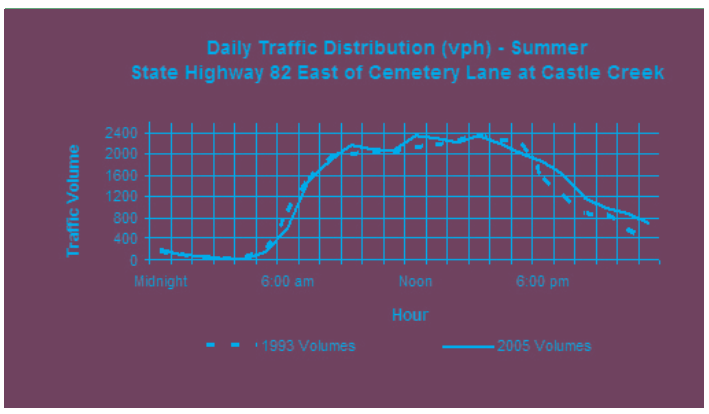
Traffic Statistics and Projections from the Reevaluation

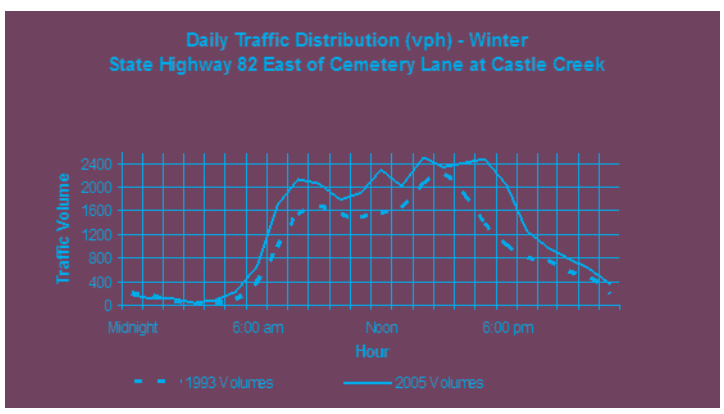
Existing traffic congestion and safety are the primary issues associated with the need for improvement of the Highway 82 transportation corridor. Traffic on Highway 82 has increased consistently, growing at an average annual rate of 4.4 percent between 1980 and 1993, and then leveling off due to the combined effects of limited corridor capacity, and the commitment by the City of Aspen to halt traffic at 1994 levels by implementing an Incremental Transportation Management Program designed to limit auto use while increasing mobility via transit, carpooling, pedestrian and bicycle modes. Elements of the transportation management program that were implemented include: doubling of bus service between Aspen and El Jebel, increased bus service in town and between Aspen and Snowmass Village, expanded park-and-ride facilities throughout the valley, HOV lanes between Basalt and Buttermilk and preferential parking for HOVs , rideshare matching program, in-town parking fees and residential parking permit program, commuter incentive programs, and employer bus passes.

Much of the State Highway 82 corridor was at capacity in 1993. Under already saturated conditions, it is not possible to pass more traffic through the corridor during the peak hour in 2005; instead increases in 2005 traffic volumes have resulted in extended peak hour lines and a longer duration of congestion.

Looking at a future where no changes are made at all to the transportation system or roadway structure, traffic demand in 2030 at Cemetery Lane is expected to reach 44,800 vehicles per day during the summer (about 16,000 more than 2005) and 37,000 vehicles per day during the winter (about 12,000 more than 2005).* Numbers such as these projections will further exceed capacity of the existing highway and will extend the time each day when the highway will operate at a "worst condition" scenario. By 2030, increasing down valley traffic volumes will also have the effect of extending congestion and worsening the traffic flow along the entire down valley corridor.

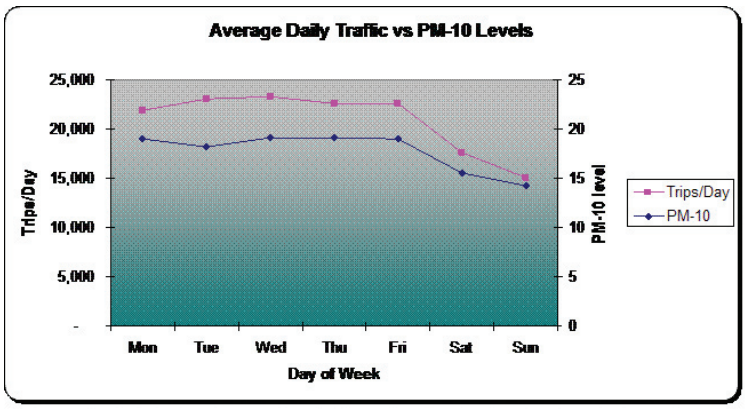
**2030 traffic forecasts for the State Highway 82 corridor were prepared using the CDOT traffic database. The CDOT database incorporates a traffic forecast calculator that uses growth factors developed from trend analysis of current and historic traffic counts included in the data base, including periodic traffic counts, as well as continuous count station data for all state highway system facilities.*





These Daily Traffic Distribution graphs show that the highest volume of traffic in both summer and winter occur between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. in and out of Aspen. The capacity at which the S-Curves can carry traffic with no congestion is approximately 1,600 vehicles per hour. Once the traffic counts surpass that number, the consequence is congestion and longer waits to get in and out of town. The first graph shows that in the winter of 2005 between 6:30 a.m. and 6 p.m., traffic is consistently above the levels that can flow smoothly through the S-Curves.

Section (Mileposts)	1993 Average PM Peak Hour Volume	2005 Average PM Peak Hour Volume	Percent No Passing Zones	Percent Trucks (1993)	Maximum Capacity (Total of both Lanes)
Buttermilk Ski Area to Maroon Creek Bridge (38.5 to 39.2)	1,950	2,370	65%	8%	2,420
Maroon Creek Bridge to Maroon Creek Road (39.2 to 39.8)	2,030	2,380	80%	8%	2,420
Maroon Creek Road to Cemetery Lane (39.8 to 40.1)	2,280	2,400	100%	8%	2,420
Cemetery Lane to 7th Street and Main Street	2,430	2,440	100%	8%	2,260



PM-10, Air Quality and Traffic

Particulate matter pollution consists of small airborne particles. Of greatest concern are the particles small enough to be inhaled into the deepest parts of the lung. These particles are less than 10 microns in diameter and are known as PM-10. Motor vehicles are the major source of PM-10 pollution in the western United States.

The Environmental Protection Agency has set air quality standards for PM-10. Until recently, Aspen was out of compliance with those standards and classified as a non-attainment area. Improved air quality related to reduced sanding of the highway, paid parking in downtown Aspen, reductions in traffic and the increase in transit options resulted in Aspen becoming a maintenance area for PM-10 pollution in July 2003.

PM-10 is among the most harmful of all air pollutants. When inhaled these particles lodge deep in the lungs and can create a number of health problems. PM-10 can increase the number and severity of asthma attacks, cause or aggravate bronchitis and other lung diseases, and reduce the body's ability to fight infections. Studies have found that increases in hospital admission rates, illness rates and death rates correlate to the increase of PM-10 levels, even at "healthy" levels. In Aspen, over 83% of PM-10 comes from traffic when PM-10 levels are high. Because of this, finding a solution to the Entrance to Aspen that does not favor increasing traffic levels is intrinsically linked to air quality and thus our health.

The graph above illustrates that the number of cars coming into Aspen is proportionate to the level of PM-10 in the atmosphere. The figure above represents statistics gathered in 2005. The numbers indicated car trips/day equate to a yearly average of trips in and out of Aspen on a specific day of the week. For instance every single Monday in 2005 had an average of 21,868 trips in and out of town. As this graph shows, PM-10 levels are linked to traffic but increases in PM-10 can also be associated from local wood burning fireplaces and more broadly from windstorms and forest fires.

1993 Average Daily Traffic

Location	Annual	Winter	Summer
Buttermilk to Maroon Creek Bridge	19,900	19,100	22,900
Maroon Crk. Bridge to Maroon Crk. Rd.	19,800	20,700	23,900
Maroon Crk. Rd. to Cemetery Lane	22,300	24,800	28,600
Cemetery Lane to 7th and Main St.	23,800	24,800	28,600

2005 Average Daily Traffic

Location	Annual	Winter	Summer
Buttermilk to Maroon Creek Bridge	23,200	24,100	27,800
Maroon Crk. Bridge to Maroon Crk. Rd.	23,300	24,200	28,000
Maroon Crk. Rd. to Cemetery Lane	23,500	24,600	28,300
Cemetery Lane to 7th and Main St.	23,900	24,900	28,700

Safety Issues

State Highway 82 between Buttermilk Ski Area and Aspen has had worse than average accident rates for more than 20 years. Analysis for the 1997 FEIS was based on accident statistics compiled for three years from April 1, 1991 to March 31, 1994. During that period there were 113 total accidents, including 38 injury accidents. Nearly half of the total accidents occurred between Cemetery Lane and the intersection of 7th Street and Main Street (S-curves). The FEIS concluded that many of the accidents that occurred at the S-curves were caused by a combination of poor weather conditions and substandard roadway design. The total accident rate for the Cemetery Lane intersection of 7th Street and Main Street was 4.48 accidents per million vehicle miles traveled. This was 386% of the average rural Colorado rate and 149% of the average urban Colorado rate. The accident rate for State Highway 82 within the project corridor has been well above the state accident rate in the past, a trend that the 1997 FEIS stated is likely to worsen until appropriate improvements are made.

The expectation expressed by the FEIS is borne out by three-year data for the period from April 1, 2000 through March 31, 2003 that exhibits increasing accidents rates in the corridor segments between Maroon Creek Road and 7th Street and Main Street (S-curves). As with the earlier three-year period (1991-1994), accidents that occurred between Cemetery Lane and the intersection of 7th Street and Main Street (S-curves) were half of the total of 200 accidents.

A detailed examination of the accident data for the period from April 1, 2000 through March 31, 2003 showed that over 50% of the accidents occurring on all segments of the corridor were rear-end collisions, symptomatic of traffic congestion. The corridor segment with the greatest share (82%) of rear-end accidents was the down valley segment between the Maroon Creek Road and Buttermilk Ski Area, the segment that has also experienced the highest growth in traffic volumes since 1997. The segment with the second highest share of rear-end accidents (58%) was the up valley segment between Cemetery Lane and the 7th/Main Street intersection (S-Curves). While traffic volumes have remained virtually unchanged on this segment since 1997, this segment continues to experience the highest peak hour volumes as compared to the down valley corridor segments.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Photo by Paul Conrad

So, the question of where to go from here is clearly a big one. The state and federal agencies have authorized the preferred alternative as a viable solution. The issue of the Entrance to Aspen is a personal and philosophical one for most residents of the valley and the City of Aspen respects this. The Entrance touches on people's values, vision and the way they want their community to look and feel. That's why we need your input in constructive dialogue that can move us toward resolution on this issue.

Right now the two options on the table with the most direct courses of action are to go forward with the preferred alternative or to not go forward with it. If the Preferred Alternative does not go forward, and the public supports an option where changes need to be made to Highway 82, even if they are tweaks of the Preferred Alternative, they will require more environmental study as required by the National Environmental Policy Act. Most likely, a look into any other solution besides the preferred alternative would require $2 million and two years time, which would include another public input process.

There is however another option which would deal with part, but not all, of the problem. Given the funding uncertainties, there is a clear need to continue to phase any future improvements, in much the same way as the roundabout, intersection improvements and new bridge have been phased in since completion of the Entrance to Aspen EIS process in 1998. One phasing possibility that could occur with an open space change of use approval by City of Aspen voters is completion of the highway improvements and bus lanes between Buttermilk and the roundabout. Approval and funding for that approximately 1.2 mile long segment would significantly improve transit travel time (by 10 - 15 minutes in the morning and 5 - 10 minutes in the afternoon) and remove buses from mixed traffic. The new Maroon Creek Bridge could open in spring 2008 with bus lanes in place if Aspen voters approve the use of the right-of-way and if funding for the bridge approaches can be identified over the coming months.

Stay informed.

- Go to www.sh82.com and click on Entrance to Aspen Information
- Join the City's e-newsletter. Go to www.aspenpitkin.com and click on SIGN UP FOR CITY E-NEWSLETTER
- Come to Voices on the Entrance Meetings January 31st 5:00 – 9:30 p.m. and/or Feburary 3rd 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. Aspen High School Cafeteria
- Come to our keypad technology meeting April 12th. More information to come.

FURTHER PUBLIC MEETINGS

In the coming months the City of Aspen wants to continue to engage you on this issue. Do you belong to a club or civic group that would like to discuss this issue? We'd be happy to arrange to talk to your club. We are putting together materials so that you can have your own meeting about the Entrance to Aspen if you'd like. The materials will be called "meetings in a box" and you can get your group together, whether it is friends, your book club, a knitting group or just interested citizens, and answer a series of discussion questions that you can record the answers to and send back to the City.

On April 12th the City will hold afternoon and evening keypad voting sessions at the Wheeler. These will be similar to meetings the City held last summer on development issues. The keypad voting allows all meeting attendees to answer questions about their thoughts and opinions on the Entrance to Aspen issue. Results are tallied instantly and displayed on the screen for all to see.

We also need to hear from you. What information do you need to make an informed decision? Are you confused about any background facts? Do you need to know something more technical or a bit more about the history of some aspect of the project? We want to know so you can be as informed as possible when you formulate your opinion.

Contact Mitzi Rapkin, Director of Community Relations at 920-5082 or email at mitzir@ci.aspen.co.us