

**Over the next few months the City of Aspen will be presenting facts about the Entrance to Aspen issue in this space, every Thursday. We hope this will present the public with an opportunity to continue to engage in the Entrance to Aspen issue. The information presented here is meant to maintain public dialogue and sustain a flow of information that is essential to informed decision making.**

### **The Preferred Alternative – What is it?**

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 from Buttermilk that follows the existing alignment crosses the new Maroon Creek Bridge and goes through the roundabout. Then the corridor shifts to the southeast to cross the Marolt-Thomas property and passes through a 400' cut-and-cover tunnel to a new Castle Creek bridge that connects to Main Street at 7th Street. The transit component includes a light rail system but if local support and/or funding doesn't exist for that, two exclusive bus lanes would be allowed in addition to the two lanes for general traffic.

### **How did we get to this solution?**

CDOT began its environmental study of the Entrance to Aspen between Buttermilk and 7<sup>th</sup> and Main Streets in 1994. That process considered a myriad of solutions and involved extensive public input and technical studies. In 1995 local elected officials, 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 in the Record of Decision (ROD) because it fulfilled these Project Objectives:

- Provide capacity for forecasted person-trips in 2015, but limit vehicle-trips at or below 1994 levels.
- Reduce above-average high accident rate on S-Curves and establish an alternate route for emergency response.
- Minimize negative impacts on the environment, open space, and historic and recreational resources.
- Reflect small town character and scale of Aspen, and develop an aesthetically acceptable solution.
- Can be phased and funded over time.

The Preferred Alternative is the solution on the table now because it is the only one currently approved by CDOT and FHWA. It was reevaluated in 2006 and was found to remain valid. If the community desires to pursue another solution, that would require another environmental study and about \$2 million.

For more information go to:  
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### **What if the Community Wants to Choose a Solution Other Than the Preferred Alternative?**

In 1998, the Colorado Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration selected the Preferred Alternative over other solutions that were put forth in part because it best met the community objectives established with citizen input. If Aspen were to move forward with a new EIS process, citizens would need to revisit the current community objectives in order to bring forth a new solution. Any solution other than the Preferred Alternative would require a new Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and a new Record of Decision. This process would take approximately two years at an estimated cost of \$2 million.

### **Remind Me: What Do EIS and ROD Mean?**

An Environmental Impact Statement is a detailed 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. A Record of Decision identifies the alternative selected from those fully evaluated in the Environmental Impact Statement, measures to minimize harm, monitoring or enforcement programs, and an itemized list of commitments and mitigation measures.

Because highway 82 is a state road funded partially with federal dollars, any solution to the Entrance to Aspen requires the City to follow state and federal regulations. The City of Aspen's role is to determine community acceptability and vote on issues involving open space.

### **How Would a New EIS Process be Undertaken and Who Would Pay for it?**

The Aspen City Council and Pitkin County Commissioners would request that CDOT and the FHWA allow the EIS process to be reopened. This study would likely need to be funded locally, as the Colorado Department of Transportation does not have funding available for additional Environmental Impact Studies along this corridor. The outreach process that is currently underway is designed to provide City Council with information about the community's stance.

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**Background:** Last year, when the City began to discuss the Entrance to Aspen and potential solutions to the congestion at the Entrance to Aspen, 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. On November 16, 2006 CDOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) confirmed the Preferred Alternative from the 1998 ROD is still valid and that no significant environmental changes had occurred.

**What the City has heard:** The recently-completed reevaluation was focused too narrowly on the Preferred Alternative. Not all the alternatives were reconsidered.

**Clarification:** The Reevaluation was conducted in strict compliance with all federal and state regulations to determine whether or not the approved Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) remains valid. It is a technical analysis of the previously approved Record of Decision, not intended to re-open project planning. A Reevaluation responds to the following questions:

- Is the project substantially different or changed, resulting in environmental impacts that were not previously identified and evaluated?
- Has the affected environment changed, and will an impact occur that was not previously evaluated?
- Have regulations or laws changed, and are there new requirements that were not previously addressed?
- Do changes require additional environmental documentation, or do the Final EIS and resultant project decisions remain valid?



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### **What criteria did the Community, CDOT and the Federal Highway Administration use when considering a solution to the Entrance to Aspen?**

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

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**Community Acceptability.** Develop an alternative which fits the character of the community and is aesthetically acceptable to the public.

**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.

**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 an attainment area for PM10.

**Emergency Access.** Respond to the need for an alternate route for emergency response to incidents inside and outside of Aspen.

**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.

**Phasing.** Provide an alternative which allows for future transit options and upgrades.

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### **Number 5 in the series**

#### **What Can Be Done in the Short Term to Improve Traffic Congestion?**

Any solution for the Entrance to Aspen will take several years to implement. In the meantime, we have heard many citizens ask, “*What can be done now to improve traffic congestion?*” Some improvements have already been made such as the construction of the Maroon Creek Roundabout and the implementation of a Main Street transit lane. Other ideas that have been raised by citizens are outlined below for your information.

#### **Dedicated Bus Lanes (does not require re-opening EIS)**

A ballot question will be put to Aspen voters on May 8th regarding the construction of two general purpose lanes and two bus lanes between Buttermilk and the Roundabout. During afternoon commute hours, RFTA often experiences 12-17 minute delays between the Roundabout and the AABC. The proposed transit lanes could save RFTA riders 15 minutes during the morning commute and 10 minutes during the afternoon commute. This improvement could increase RFTA ridership, reducing traffic and creating a smoother flow for cars.

#### **Increased Bus Service from Park & Rides (does not require re-opening EIS)**

Many citizens have suggested increasing transit service from Park & Ride locations into Aspen to curb traffic congestion. For example, drivers could be encouraged to park at the Brush Creek Intercept Lot and bus into Aspen on a free shuttle. This type of program was implemented as an experiment last summer with free RFTA service offered between the Brush Creek Intercept Lot and Aspen. The test was unsuccessful but it is possible an alternative like this may be more successful with more frequent bus service and/or dedicated transit lanes.

#### **Other Ideas the City has heard which may or may not require re-opening the EIS**

- Toll Roads
- Changing timing/eliminating traffic lights
- Roundabout at Cemetery Lane
- Roundabout/underpass at Truscott
- Reversible lanes on Castle Creek Bridge during peak traffic
- Free bus service
- Increase in paid parking

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### **Number 6 in the series**

#### **April 10<sup>th</sup> Community Keypad Voting Meeting on the Entrance to Aspen**

**When is this meeting?** April 10<sup>th</sup> from noon – 2 p.m. OR 5:30 – 7:30 p.m. at the Wheeler Opera House. These will start promptly! There are two meetings being held to accommodate the number of people who want to come and also to offer two times that people can chose from. Please come to the one that best fits your schedule.

**What is the purpose and format for this meeting?** This meeting is meant to survey large numbers of people at once about what they think about the Entrance to Aspen issue and where the City should go from here. Each person in attendance will be given an electronic keypad that looks like a remote control. Questions will be flashed on a large screen and using the remote, attendees push the button that best represents their answer. Responses are instantly shown on the screen. The City's hope is that the results will give City Council and staff some of the most focused data on what the community thinks about this issue. The questions for this meeting are being created using feedback garnered at community meetings the City held throughout the winter and spring. The questions will also attempt to discern what sort of solutions the community favors. While these meetings do not represent a scientific sampling of the community, they are the best attempt to hear from the largest number of people at the same time.

**Who can attend?** Anyone! (Our capacity is 400 because that is how many keypads we have).

**What else do I need to know?** There will NOT be meals available at these meetings. We know that two hours of contemplating the Entrance to Aspen can really work up an appetite. PLEASE eat before or after the meeting. There will be light snacks and water available, but they will NOT contain the caloric requirements necessary to power people through this meeting.

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## Number 7 in the series

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The City of Aspen hosted two community keypad voting meetings on the Entrance to Aspen on April 10th at the Wheeler Opera House.

About 190 people attended the meetings and gave valuable feedback to the City of Aspen on how they felt about the Entrance to Aspen and related issues. The City has posted the questions and answers from both sessions on its web site. Go to [www.aspenpitkin.com](http://www.aspenpitkin.com) and click on the link that says, 'Entrance to Aspen Keypad Voting Results' to see the data. In the next week, the City is going to post a link to the questions themselves to offer an opportunity to get feedback from those citizens who were unable to attend the April 10th meetings. Please check back on [www.aspenpitkin.com](http://www.aspenpitkin.com) around April 20th to offer your feedback to the City.

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*The City of Aspen is presenting different facts about the Entrance to Aspen issue in this space on Thursdays. We hope this will present the public with an opportunity to continue to engage in the Entrance to Aspen issue. The information presented here is meant to maintain public dialogue and sustain a flow of information that is essential to informed decision making.*

### **Number 8 in the series**

#### **Results on the Community Keypad Voting Meeting on the Entrance to Aspen**

**When was this meeting?** On April 10<sup>th</sup> the City of Aspen held two keypad voting meetings to survey large numbers of people about what they think about the Entrance to Aspen issue and where the City should go from here. Each person in attendance was given an electronic keypad and voted on about 60 questions.

**What did the City of Aspen hear?** Approximately 170 people attended both sessions. While in the end, it was apparent that the community is still split on which solution to employ to alleviate congestion at the Entrance to Aspen, there was resounding agreement on some of the issues. More than 80% of respondents rated the criteria below as “important” or “very important” considerations when formulating a solution to the entrance problem.

- **A solution that provides ways to get more people into Aspen without having more cars.**
- **A solution that reduces air pollution.**
- **A solution that allows for future transit upgrades/options.**
- **A solution that is aesthetically acceptable to the public.**
- **A solution that preserves the small town scale and character of Aspen.**
- **A solution that includes effective bike/pedestrian routes into town**

In addition, 87% of respondents agreed it was the City of Aspen’s role to take the lead in addressing the problem at the entrance.

**Where can I view all the results?** Go to [www.aspenpitkin.com](http://www.aspenpitkin.com) and click on the link on the homepage that says: Entrance to Aspen Keypad Voting Results.

**I couldn’t attend the meeting on April 10<sup>th</sup>, can I still vote?** Yes. Go to [www.aspenpitkin.com](http://www.aspenpitkin.com) and click on the link on the homepage that says: Couldn’t Make the ETA Keypad Meeting? Vote Here.

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