

Twin Tunnels Environmental Assessment



Purpose:	Agency Scoping Meeting		
Day:	Monday	Date:	September 26, 2011
Location:	FHWA Office		

Participants:

Attendee	Representing	
Ben Acimovic	CDOT R 1	Y
Carol Anderson	EPA	Y
Chuck Attardo	CDOT R 1	
Rick Beck	Clear Creek Co. Public Works	
Jim Bemelen	CDOT R 1	
Rena Brand	USACE	
Allan Brown	Atkins	Y
Mitch Brown	Clear Creek Co.	Y
Steve Cook	DRCOG	
Bill Copley	Federal Motor Carriers Safety Administration	
Maria D'Andrea	Jefferson Co.	Y
Tony DeVito	CDOT R1	
Jim DiLeo	CDPHE	Y
Janet Gerak	CDOT R 1	Y
Stephanie Gibson	FHWA	Y
Vanessa Henderson	CDOT EPB	Y
Trent Hyatt	Clear Creek Co.	Y
Carol Kruse	USFS	Y

Attendee	Representing	
Gina McAfee	Jacobs	Y
Alison Michael	USFWS	
Amy Pallante	SHPO	
Jeff Peterson	CDOT EPB	Y
Ty Petersburg	Colorado Parks & Wildlife	
Becky Pierce	CDOT EPB	Y
Ron Prater	Colorado State Patrol	
Bob Quinlan	Jacobs	Y
Colleen Roberts	CH2M HILL	Y
Steve Rudy	DRCOG	Y
Tim Russ	EPA	Y
Lisa Schoch	CDOT EPB	Y
David Singer	CDOT R1	Y
Melinda Urban	FHWA	Y
Mandy Whorton	CH2M HILL	Y

Discussion Items

The purpose of the meeting was to review the project background and schedule, the Purpose and Need and Proposed Action, and environmental resources to be considered, and to solicit comments on any of these topics.

Introductions

Participants introduced themselves. Ben Acimovic, CDOT's project manager, welcomed the group and reviewed the agenda for the meeting.

Project Description

Mandy Whorton gave a brief overview of the Twin Tunnels project and the other studies that preceded this project. This is the first Tier 2 NEPA process since the signing of the I-70 Mountain Corridor Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement Record of Decision in June, 2011. She stressed that the schedule is very aggressive and it will benefit from every agency's help to get the decision document signed by September, 2012.

Mandy said that if anyone has comments on any of the topics discussed in this meeting, they could mention them today and they will be noted in the meeting minutes. Written comments can be submitted on the comment form provided or as a letter. The scoping period ends on October 10, 2011.

Purpose and Need

Mandy Whorton reviewed the project Purpose and Need.

The purpose of the Twin Tunnels project is to improve eastbound highway safety, operations and travel time reliability in the Twin Tunnels area of the I-70 Mountain Corridor east of Idaho Springs to address:

- *Safety*
- *Mobility*
- *Operational characteristics that slow travel*

Mandy said the Twin Tunnels are a high crash location due to the tight curves, limited sight distance, and narrow shoulders. Unpredictable travel times due to congestion on Saturday and Sunday afternoons frustrate travelers, and the narrowness of the tunnels results in drivers slowing down and reduces capacity by up to 30%.

Context Statement and Core Values

Mandy reviewed the Context Statement prepared by the Project Leadership Team and Technical Team:

I-70 is Colorado's only east-west Interstate, providing a link over the Continental Divide, interstate commerce and mountain access.

Blasted through a geological feature and contained within a narrow canyon, the Twin Tunnels symbolize Colorado's historic endeavors to improve access to and from the mountains. Currently occupying this canyon are Clear Creek, the Frontage Road, and I-70. The vision for the future includes an Advance Guideway System with these transportation facilities.

The Twin Tunnels are a gateway for arriving and departing the mountains, provide a natural crossing for wildlife and connect local communities to national and regional services. Running parallel to I-70 is Clear Creek, a natural and recreational resource. The tunnels now are a constriction to travel and create a safety problem.

The Core Values for this project are:

Safety, Mobility, Gateway, Wildlife, Clear Creek, Tourist Destinations and Community Facilities and History.

Mandy noted that the handout provided additional description of the Core Values. She explained the EA would incorporate the context statement and core values to refine the Proposed Action.

Proposed Action

Mandy said the Proposed Action is consistent with the recommendation of the PEIS, and the concept recommendation from the February 2011 Tunnel Visioning workshop provided the basis for the Proposed Action.

Mandy described the Proposed Action. She noted there could be changes based on comments received during the scoping process.

- Add third eastbound travel lane and shoulders between East Idaho Springs interchange and base of Floyd Hill (approximately 3 miles)
- Widen the eastbound tunnel
- Flatten curves, improve sight distance, add median/retaining walls
- Replace the eastbound bridge over Clear Creek just west of Hidden Valley
- Build transitions to and use approximately one-mile segment of CR 314 (frontage road) as potential construction detour

Other considerations that may be included in the proposed action are:

- Peak period pricing
- Accommodate (do not preclude) future Advanced Guideway (transit) System (AGS)
- Improvements to the US 6 exit ramp
- Wildlife fencing
- Enhancements to aquatic/fishery resources
- Permanent water quality BMPs

Allan Brown reviewed a large roll plot of the corridor and explained some of the engineering constraints. He explained the roadway template is limited by the westbound I-70 lanes to the north and Clear Creek to the south.

Environmental

Mandy Whorton reviewed the scoping meetings that have been held so far, including an internal meeting with CDOT and FHWA staff, a meeting with the project's Technical Team (including some of the agencies at the scoping meeting), and field review by resource specialists.

She noted the environmental considerations handout is based on CDOT's standard scoping form, which is used to determine the level of environmental analysis and NEPA documentation

required. It has been modified to reflect input from the various scoping meetings. Mandy explained that the PEIS provided a lot of good data that can be used in this Tier 2 study. She said some of the resource data in the PEIS can be validated and used for this EA, but some resources will require new data collection.

The EA will honor the commitments and agreements of the I-70 Mountain Corridor Context Sensitive Solutions process, the Stream and Wetland Ecological Enhancement Program (SWEEP) and A Landscape Level Inventory of Valued Ecosystem Components (ALIVE) Memoranda of Understanding, and the Section 106 Programmatic Agreement.

Questions

Carol Anderson asked if the project will obtain an individual stormwater permit. Mandy said yes, but the project team discussing the design of permanent water quality BMPs because the project is outside the urban boundary of CDOT's MS4 permit. The status of Clear Creek as an impaired water could require BMPs outside of the MS4 process. The team understands that BMPs may be necessary to address highway-related sediments and other contaminants in stormwater runoff in the project area, including heavy metals from mineralized rocks and previous mining activities.

Jim DiLeo asked if there are any city or county ordinances that relate to dust and air quality. Mitch Brown said the county doesn't have one and they use the State guidelines, but Idaho Springs might. Mandy said the team will research this.

Jim said there will have to be a permit for the tunnel boring. He also noted that the Ozone boundary will not extend to Clear Creek County and only construction emissions will need to be analyzed.

Steve Rudy suggested the Purpose and Need and Proposed Action should be revised to clarify this project is not the ultimate solution but an initial action to address (not solve) an immediate problem. He suggested changing "peak period pricing" to "CDOT is considering tolling" so that CDOT is not limited to either a specific time period for tolling or a specific number of lanes. Steve said that he will provide written comments on his recommendations with these and other issues.

Stephanie Gibson said that the discussion of implementing a single managed lane warrants additional operations considerations and possibly an extension of the environmental and mapping survey area to the west. She noted that typically a managed lane is on the left-hand side. However, the new third lane is proposed to extend from the right-hand auxiliary lane at the east Idaho Springs interchange. This could require a different design or different operational characteristics than currently proposed, and could affect traffic or the project footprint west of the current project limits. Mandy said the team would investigate whether the survey area should be extended to the west.

Tim Russ said the final decision on the ozone boundary has not yet been made. He anticipates that the ozone boundary will not likely extend to include Clear Creek County, as this was the recent recommendation from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's Air Pollution Control Division. EPA has not made a final decision but expects to in the next 120 days. Tim recommended monitoring the decision to determine if it would affect the EA. He

expects the boundary will not include Clear Creek County, but if it does, additional modeling would be needed for this EA.

Jim DiLeo asked Steve Rudy how comfortable DRCOG is with managed lanes. Steve said he feels the alternatives chapter of the EA should carefully describe the evaluation process for different tolling options and explain why options were eliminated and why CDOT included one option in the Proposed Action. Steve felt three separate tolling options should be described and evaluated: tolling all three eastbound lanes at all times; tolling all three eastbound lanes only during periods of congestion; and tolling only the new capacity (one lane) during periods of congestion.

Stephanie Gibson/FHWA said she agrees with Steve Rudy's comments and feels the alternatives chapter of the EA should have a discussion on tolling and managed lanes.

Carol Anderson/EPA asked why tolling is being considered for this relatively small project. Mandy said CDOT and DRCOG have agreed that new lane capacity should not be provided for free and noted tolling is also recommended for consideration in the PEIS as a funding mechanism. Carol feels including tolling could be a risk to the schedule.

Trent Hyatt/Clear Creek County asked how this project will affect the AGS. Mandy said the project will not preclude AGS and that the EA will acknowledge the CDOT remains committed to the AGS.

Trent Hyatt/Clear Creek County inquired what the design speed of the proposed improvements is. The design speed for the proposed improvements will be 50 mph for the entire project limits. Some curves may currently have a higher design speed than 50 mph and these will be left as is when possible. The goal will be to improve the consistency of the traveled speed.

Trent Hyatt/Clear Creek County inquired how is the proposed project associated with the improvements proposed for the Frontage Road. The proposed Frontage Road improvements are a commitment of the PEIS and ROD and would be completed even if the Twin Tunnel project does not go forward.

The proposed Twin Tunnel project is likely to use the Frontage Road as a detour during tunnel construction. This detour will require connections and may need some improvements to the Frontage Road as necessary to carry interstate traffic. It is expected that the proposed Frontage Road improvements will be completed prior to construction of the proposed Twin Tunnels project and the Frontage Road improvements will be considered an existing condition in the Twin Tunnels EA.

The question was asked if the pacing project will extend farther east. (CDOT is currently testing the effectiveness of using pace cars to set consistent travel speeds between Silverthorne and the Eisenhower-Johnson Memorial tunnels to improve overall travel times during congested periods.) Ben said CDOT Traffic is leading the pacing project, and other traffic management projects in the corridor, and the program will not affect the Twin Tunnels project. Mandy noted that traffic management strategies, like pacing, are approved by the PEIS ROD and are planned to be implemented with other infrastructure improvements.

Lisa Schoch said Amy Pallante from SHPO was unable to attend today's meeting but wanted to pass along that she did attend the Section 106 consulting parties meeting and is pleased with the approach and progress of the Twin Tunnels project.

Carol Kruse/USFS said there are no endangered species in the area but she is concerned about air quality from the additional traffic volumes and making sure that the ALIVE MOU is followed. She will follow up with written comments.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:30.

Considerations for the EA

Based on the verbal discussion at the meeting, CDOT will ensure the following issues are considered in the EA:

- Consideration of permanent water quality BMPs
- Local and state air quality permitting requirements
- Implications of changes in ozone standards and attainment boundaries
- Explanation of tolling strategies considered
- Potential need to expand survey or project area boundaries for tolling options, if included in the EA
- Acknowledgement of CDOT's continued commitment to AGS
- Wildlife-vehicle conflicts along detour route