

An aerial photograph of a multi-lane highway winding through a dense forest. Two distinct tunnel entrances are visible on the right side of the road, each with a concrete structure above the opening. The surrounding terrain is covered in green trees and some cleared areas. The text is overlaid on the top left portion of the image.

Twin Tunnels Environmental Assessment Agency Scoping Meeting

September 26, 2011
FHWA, Lakewood, CO



Twin Tunnels Environmental Assessment
Idaho Springs, Clear Creek County

The mission of the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) is to provide the best multimodal transportation system for Colorado that most effectively moves people, goods, and information.

WELCOME

Agenda

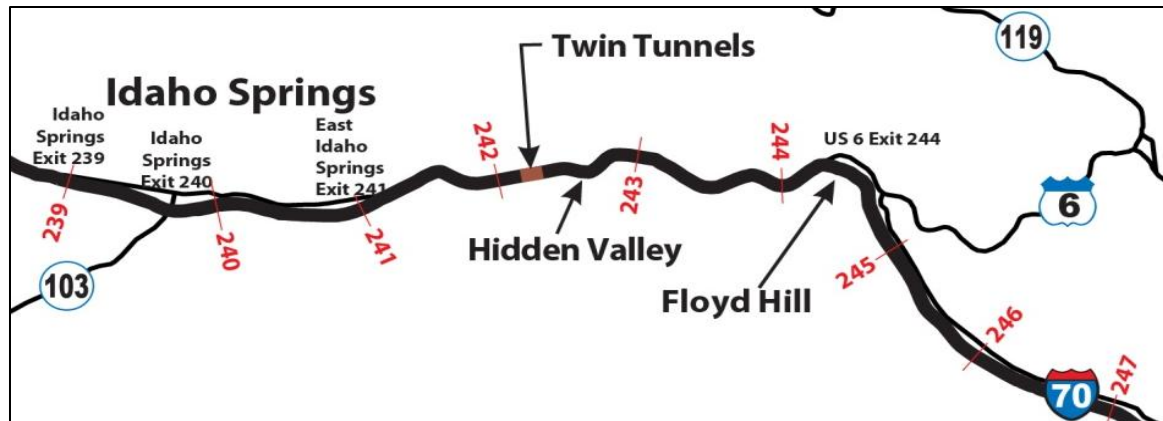


- Project Background and Schedule
- Agency Scoping Comments
- Purpose and Need
- Proposed Action
- Environmental Resources
- Questions

Project Area



- Approximately 3-mile corridor between East Idaho Springs (milepost 241) and the bottom of Floyd Hill (milepost 244)
- Eastbound direction only
- Potential construction detour along a portion of CR 314



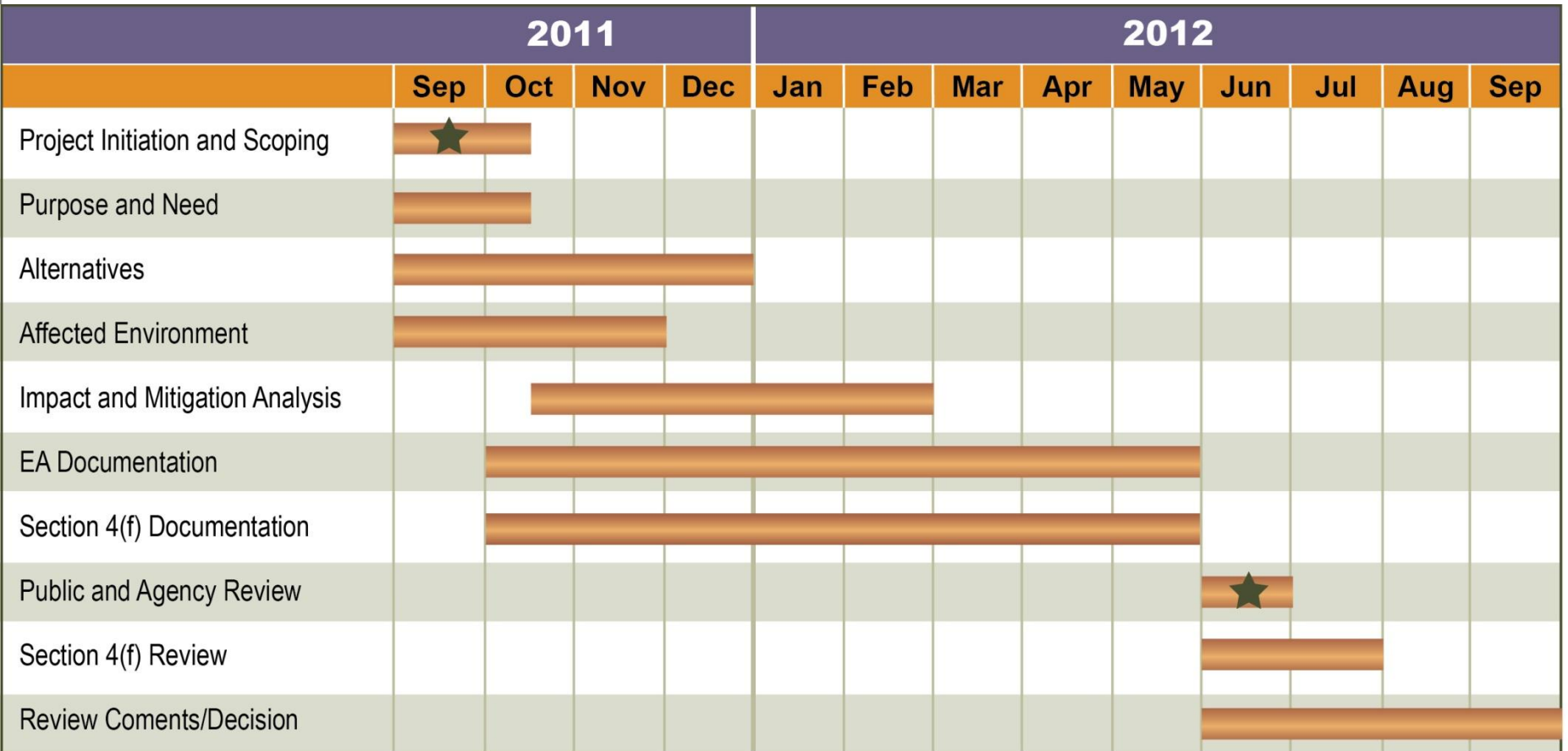
Project Background



- First Tier 2 NEPA process since the signing of the I-70 Mountain Corridor Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement Record of Decision – June 2011
- Other studies contribute to project understanding
 - » CSS Website, August 2011
 - » Twin Tunnels Visioning Design Workshop, February 2011
 - » Reversible Lanes (Zipper Lane) Study, Fall 2010
 - » Idaho Springs Visioning Workshop, May 2010

Schedule

✓ NEPA process to be completed in 1 year



★ = Public Meetings

✓ Goal to implement project quickly

Agency Scoping Comments



- Of particular interest are your thoughts and agreement on:
 - » Purpose and Need
 - » Proposed Action
 - » Scope and Methodologies for Environmental Impact Analyses
 - » Environmental considerations for this project
 - » Processes we could implement to streamline your reviews
- Written comments – comment forms or letter
- Scoping period ends on October 10, 2011

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

Twin Tunnels Context Statement



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, the Twin Tunnels symbolize Colorado's historic endeavors to improve access to and from the mountains. The tunnels now are a constriction to travel and create a safety problem.

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.

Core Values



- Safety
- Mobility
- Gateway
- Wildlife
- Clear Creek
- Tourist destinations and community facilities
- History

Need to Improve Safety



- A high number of crashes occur in the project area related to
 - » tight curves,
 - » poor sight distance,
 - » narrow shoulders, and
 - » congested traffic conditions.

Need to Improve Mobility



- Slow and unpredictable travel times in peak traffic periods (Saturday and Sunday afternoons)
 - » frustrate travelers,
 - » affect economic conditions, and
 - » decrease safety.

Operational Characteristics



- **Operational characteristics** of the tunnels and roadway slow travel.
 - » Capacity in the most congested portion of the I-70 Mountain Corridor east of Georgetown is largely controlled by the Twin Tunnels.
 - Tunnels are a physical constraint.
 - Real and perceived narrowness of the tunnels causes drivers to slow down and reduces capacity by up to 30 percent.
 - » Curves in the project area between the tunnels and Floyd Hill (east of the tunnels) also cause drivers to slow down.

Basics of the Proposed Action



- Add third eastbound travel lane plus 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 for the Proposed Action



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

How does Proposed Action relate to PEIS?



- PEIS approved multimodal improvements in Twin Tunnels area
 - » Three highway lanes from Floyd Hill through the Twin Tunnels
 - » Advanced Guideway System
 - » Frontage Road improvements through Idaho Springs
 - » Third bore through Twin Tunnels to accommodate multi modes
- PEIS-recommended design for the area refined through Tunnel Visioning design workshop

Refinements with Tunnel Visioning



- Weeklong effort similar to a Value Engineering study to refine a specific course of action for the Twin Tunnels
- Involved 54 stakeholders
- Seven concept packages evaluated against critical success factors determined by stakeholders
- Recommended concept forms the basis for this Proposed Action
 - » Eastbound only
 - » Widen existing bore
 - » Provide third lane between East Idaho Springs interchange and existing three-lane section at the base of Floyd Hill

Environmental Resource Considerations



- Internal scoping with CDOT, FHWA, and consultant staff held August 23
- Issues and methodologies discussed with Technical Team on September 8
- Section 106 Consulting Party meeting on September 16
- Field trip conducted with resource specialists on September 21
- Agreement that most resources require detailed evaluation

Environmental Impact Analysis Methodologies



- Tier 2 NEPA processes outlined in PEIS provide basis for evaluation and methodologies
- Tier 2 considerations include compliance with existing laws, regulations, and policies, along with some corridor-specific commitments
- Data available from PEIS
 - » Some can be used/validated as is
 - » Other requires new data collection or methods

Mitigation Strategies



- Project-specific design modifications (reduce footprints)
- Program-level and project-specific commitments outlined in the ROD
- Four important agreements/commitments included in ROD; all are relevant to the Twin Tunnels EA
 - » CSS Process
 - » Stream and Wetland Ecological Enhancement Program (SWEEP)
 - » A Landscape-level Inventory of Valued Ecosystems (ALIVE)
 - » Section 106 Programmatic Agreement

Questions?



- Please submit your comment form or other form of written comments by the end of the scoping period (October 10, 2011)
- Thank you for your participation
- We look forward to hearing from you
 - » Comments on Purpose and Need?
 - » Comments on Proposed Action?
 - » Scope and Methodologies for Environmental Impact Analyses?
 - » Environmental considerations identified to date?
 - » Processes we could implement to streamline your reviews?
 - » Other issues or concerns?