

I-70 Collaborative Effort Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, January 25, 2023
10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Members Present: Co-Chair Randy Wheelock, Co-Chair Greg Hall (Town of Vail), Margaret Bowes (I-70 Coalition), Matt Scherr (Eagle County), Mary Jane Loevlie (Corridor Business Representative), Jack Tone (Colorado Rail Passenger Association), Danny Katz (COPIRG), Cindy Neely (Corridor Local Historic Preservation), Ann Rajewski (CASTA), Eva Wilson (Local Transit Provider), David Krutsinger (Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, City and County of Denver), Elizabeth Cramer (FHWA), Brent Spahn (Summit County), Jason Smith (Region 3), Jessica Myklebust (CDOT Region 1 Director) and Brendan McGuire (Vail Resorts).

Alternates Present: Chuck Harmon (Idaho Springs), Becky English (Sierra Club, Rocky Mountain Chapter), Mike Keleman (CDOT Region 1), Mike Vanatta (Jefferson County), Amy Saxton (Clear Creek County), Matt Marques (State Historic Preservation Office), Steve Greer (Summit County), Dave Cesark (Region 3), Tracy Sakaguchi (Colorado Motor Carriers Association), Brian Dabling (FHWA) Nathan Dreschler (Vail Resorts), and Ben Gerdes (Eagle County).

Members Absent with no Alternate Present: Aaron Eilers (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers), Adam Bianchi (Forest Service), Amber Blake (CDOT Division of Transit and Rail), Adam Burg (Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce), John Martin (Garfield County), John Uban (Headwaters Group), Mike Riggs (Automated Guideway System/High Speed Transit), Tracey MacDonald (Federal Transit Administration), Gary Frey (Colorado Trout Unlimited), and Colorado Ski Country USA (currently a vacant position).

Interested Parties: Eric Mocko, Pat Noyes, Mary Jo Vobejda, Tamra Rollison, Sara Cassidy, Karen Berdoulay, and Mandy Whorton.

Note: this meeting was recorded to assist with creating minutes.

The meeting was called to order at approximately 10:00 a.m.

1. **Introductions**

Following introductions, Mr. Hall called the meeting to order.

2. **Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

3. **CE Business**

The meeting agenda was approved by consensus. The minutes were approved by consensus with the change of David Krustinger's affiliation from the Department of Public Works for Denver to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. Hall discussed member engagement, noting that because the CE only meets three times a year and operates by consensus, it is important to have CE members who are decision-makers;

otherwise, the effectiveness of the CE is marginalized. He also noted that consensus makes it imperative to hear from every member of the CE. Mr. Wheelock added the importance of having consistent attendance by the same person, and that the members should have experience and knowledge of the CE, its history, and the history of the corridor.

Mr. Hall then provided an update on the recently proposed changes to the Operating Protocols. Those revisions shifted much of the responsibility for CE operations from CDOT to CE staff, and a meeting with CDOT to discuss that shift is necessary. That meeting is expected to occur soon, after which the revised Operating Protocols will be brought back to the CE for consideration. Ms. Neely emphasized the importance of clarifying the relationship with the agencies because their ongoing engagement is vital to the future of the CE. Mr. Katz added that having the agencies fully engaged in CE decision-making will avoid having the CE spend time on an issue or project only to have the agencies determine the work needs to be redone. The more the CE is perceived as the official process that includes the agencies, the more likely it will be that it won't duplicate efforts. Mr. Krutsinger agreed.

The CE then reviewed the proposed 2023 budget. The total amount is \$65,000, the same as 2022. Mr. Hall reviewed the amounts that were contributed. Mr. Coffin noted that a proposed change to the Operating Protocols would allow funds to be shifted between projects. Ms. Bowes asked if the funding allocated to subcommittee work was spread evenly over each subcommittee and Mr. Hall responded that the funds are weighted more toward the Capacity and AGS subcommittees. Ms. Neely suggested that the budget show both income and expense on one document in the future. Mr. Hall asked for consensus approval. FHWA abstained but the remaining members approved by consensus.

4. Continuation of Capacity Discussion

Mr. Wheelock explained the goals for the discussion are to orient CE members who have not yet been part of the discussion and to advance the idea of looking at different scales of transit and how changing conditions in the corridor's communities and environment can contribute to re-evaluation of need in the ROD, without changing the ROD. Mr. Coffin added that another purpose is to tie this broadened view of capacity to transportation specifically and how it affects transportation improvements. Mr. Hall added that adaptive management is a core principle in the ROD and one of the objectives for the meeting is for the CE to ask whether the capacity discussion requires the CE and the ROD to adapt and if so, how?

Mr. Katz suggested that the capacity concerns be outlined in a single document which would help him and other CE members evaluate the concerns, identify the solutions, and determine whether the concerns warrant a change in the ROD.

Mr. Wheelock noted that the capacity discussion is causing the CE to look at the Purpose and Need of the Preferred Alternative and ask whether the need is adjusting and whether the CE should take an adaptive management approach to managing capacity.

Mr. Coffin then framed the discussion by asking CE members to discuss the capacity issues their communities or organizations are facing from increased demand for outdoor recreation and

visitation, and then to tie those issues back to transportation. Do the members see transportation as a tool that can and should be used to manage those issues?

Eagle County: Mr. Scherr outlined the capacity challenges Eagle County is facing, including increased dog poop on the trails, threats to wildlife and their habitat, impacts to water supply, impacts to ecosystems and pollution from more vehicles. He mentioned that the County has hired a new natural resources staff person who could help develop this list. He added that transportation is a tool that can be used to manage this, but the question is whether and how. This is a different perspective than has typically been taken with transportation which has focused on how many more people can be moved by a project? Now there is the realization that limiting access could be a beneficial thing.

Mr. Scherr further noted that the economics of mountain communities get skewed, where the desire and need for more revenue often overlooks the costs that come with more visitors. A balance is needed. For example, he noted that nearly 40% of the County's housing units are vacant, and yet, the County needs an additional 4,000 housing units behind. That is an example of this economic distortion.

Mr. Katz noted that data that illustrates capacity concerns is helpful to be able to evaluate whether those concerns can be addressed or impacted by transportation. For example, he noted that Eagle County's housing statistics suggest a problem around housing prices and economic distortion, which may not be something that transportation can solve. An example of a capacity concern that transportation could address is the inability of workers being able to live in the community where they work because of the high cost of living and needing mobility to get from where they live to where they work. Mr. Scherr added that the more people driving, the more accidents that can shut down Glenwood Canyon or the road to Leadville.

Ms. Rajewski noted that transit agencies have serious challenges providing transit services in those mountain communities because it is so hard to pay the driver enough so they can find housing within a reasonable distance from where they work. CASTA had a workforce housing discussion recently and the consensus is that you can't provide transit in resort communities unless you have a high percentage of employee housing in place. This dynamic creates a spiral effect; transit agencies need more staff to serve additional tourists which in turn requires more employee housing or more solutions to get employees to their jobs.

Mr. Scherr added that purposeful government actions can drive market behaviors. Intentionally controlling traffic volumes to change market behaviors to achieve specific outcomes is a lever that can be used.

Town of Vail: Mr. Hall noted that COVID accelerated the dramatic increase in visitation in the corridor, causing congested trails, increased parking, and reduced housing. Businesses didn't want to advertise for more business, perhaps because of their inability to find workers. A lot of businesses struggled during COVID. The question is whether the peak is over and visitation has reached a more stable level? He also noted the problem of workers having to live farther and farther away from their jobs and having to work multiple jobs to be able to afford the cost of living in mountain communities. The Vail Town Council has asked what is the community's

carrying capacity? He also noted that the Forest Service is increasingly dependent upon local communities to provide funds to help them manage impacts.

Summit County: Mr. Spahn agreed with the comments of Eagle County and the Town of Vail. He mentioned that that 40% of the county's Public Works Department lives in five other counties because of the cost of living in Summit. The County is experiencing worker shortages, making it difficult to provide essential services. The County doesn't have enough people to work at the landfill which in turn affects the trash haulers, or workers to maintain or plow roads which is particularly problematic where there is an influx of visitors. Parking is another big issue. He noted that Mt. Quandary is inundated with visitors and the shortage of parking results in visitors parking on private property. He also noted the influx of visitors is creating gridlock in getting in and out of communities. The drive between Frisco and Breckenridge on Highway 9 takes approximately 12 minutes but when busy it can be 45 minutes to an hour.

Mr. Uban suggested the importance of considering the impact of visitation on feeder roads and that the capacity discussion needs to consider the whole corridor. That big overview is necessary.

Clear Creek County: Mr. Wheelock observed that Clear Creek too is affected by the economic imbalance mountain communities experience, particularly when it comes to housing and workforce. Clear Creek is different than other mountain corridor counties in that it doesn't have large ski areas that are big economic drivers and its visitors are more dispersed. 65% to 75% of County residents who work travel outside the county to find jobs that pay enough to allow them to work in the County. Of those who work in the county, 70% to 75% commute from outside the County because they can't afford the cost of living. Businesses in the County primarily serve those coming through on the highway and those who come to recreate in the County. Visitors to the County also have significant impacts on public lands. Clear Creek is overwhelmed with the number of people visiting and traveling through the County.

City of Idaho Springs: Mr. Harmon agreed with the issues cited by Mr. Wheelock and added another impact in Idaho Springs is air pollution during busy seasonal weekends from cars idling in a steep, narrow valley with nowhere for gasses to go. Adding capacity to the interstate will just produce more idling cars. The City has begun to measure pollution so it can quantify the issue, and it is promoting a transportation hub that will encourage people to take mass transit and encourage electrification. Regarding housing, Mr. Harmon has been promoting placing permanent deed restrictions on undeveloped land that the City owns so affordable housing can be built there and people can both live and work in the community.

Jefferson County: Mr. Vanatta noted that his County also struggles with congestion on I-70. It is working to improve mobility within the county through multi-modal systems in the county. It also faces housing challenges, but they are different than those in mountain counties. Budget constraints from Tabor and workforce are also big concerns in the county. Snowplow operations are currently short 34 staff which results in a large percentage of the population not getting roads plowed as fast as they would like.

City and County of Denver: Mr. Krutsinger cited three different perspectives on the capacity concerns facing the City. The Parks and Rec Department is concerned about not having enough

restrooms and parking at Denver mountain parks, not having alternative means other than driving of getting visitors to trailheads, and not having enough trash removal and receptacles to keep waste out of streams. Capacity issues are causing harmful impacts to ecosystems and wildlife, congested trails, and user conflicts, particularly between mountain bikers and hikers. The second perspective is from Winter Park. It too is facing workforce shortages. It can't find enough drivers to drive buses or snowplows. The third perspective is from the City's transportation and development perspective. Denver has reached the limits of what it can do with road capacity so it is pushing to increase the percentage of people who use transit, bicycles or walking as a mode of transportation from 12% today to 30% in the next decade.

Vail Resorts: Mr. McGuire noted that Vail Resorts is still aligned with the ROD. The issues that led to the ROD such as safety and efficiency are still important today. He observed that the capacity issues the corridor is experiencing are not unique to Colorado – they are happening around the country. Mr. Dreschler added that the Epic Mountain Express has not recovered from COVID and is still facing workforce shortages, and that it is benefitting from increased capacity on the interstate brought about by the express lanes but that will soon be countered by congestion from construction projects on the interstate.

Mr. Katz asked for Vail Resorts' perspective on capacity; has it reached the point where it has no additional capacity like Mt. Quandary? Mr. McGuire responded that Mt. Quandary has capacity, just not at peak times, and the same is true for Vail Resorts. Vail Resorts is trying to increase customers when there is capacity – e.g., in shoulder seasons and down weeks. He advised the CE that it should consider this notion of capacity being available on non-peak times as it pursues this capacity discussion.

Corridor Business Representative: Ms. Loevlie reiterated the capacity concerns expressed by Idaho Springs and Clear Creek County. Workforce and affordable housing for workforce are capacity concerns facing business in the corridor. She noted that the Loveland ski area has 4 buses a day that transports employees from the Front Range. She added that mobility and moving people that last mile is still a huge issue. Trash is another concern. She is concerned about latent demand, which is one of the reasons the corridor has stood firm on not widening – if more lanes are built, they will fill up. Pollution from emissions is another serious problem.

Colorado Motor Carriers Association: Ms. Sakaguchi noted that I-70 is important to the trucking industry on a local as well as national level. Trucks not only get product into the state but also service local communities with materials and services they need, ranging from clothing to medical supplies to food. Many mountain communities are running out of space for storage, which results in more trucks being needed to bring more goods to these communities, particularly when demand is increased because of increased visitation. Another capacity concern is driver fatigue and safety issues caused by increased congestion.

Federal Highways Administration: Ms. Cramer explained that FHWA looks at capacity through the lens of the Preferred Alternative and doesn't officially agree or disagree with the comments made. The capacity discussion is good context for the community values that get considered as part of the process for project development and that is how she is observing the discussion.

Colorado Department of Transportation Region 1: Ms. Myklebust acknowledged there are a lot of challenges facing the corridor and there are not solutions to all of them. She noted that it is helpful to hear the capacity concerns while looking at them through the lens of the mission, vision and values of CDOT which intertwines with some of the capacity issues raised while other capacity issues are best left to local communities. There are, however, several places where there is overlap. She went on to note several things CDOT is doing to address these capacity issues, including the mobility hub in Idaho Springs, Snowstang, Pegasus, peak period shoulder lanes, Floyd Hill improvements, and education campaigns. She noted CDOT is also having difficulty attracting and recruiting staff, particularly at the Eisenhower Johnson Memorial Tunnels. One of the reasons is housing, so they have created a carpool that takes employees from the US 6/40 interchange up to the tunnels. It is also building a new patrol facility on the west side of the tunnels that includes beds so in inclement weather employees can stay there. Finally, she noted the human feces problem in the corridor and that CDOT installed some restrooms for visitors and truckers.

Colorado Department of Transportation Region 3: Mr. Smith said Region 3 is facing a lot of the same issues as Region 1. He noted that several projects have been completed in that region to improve capacity and safety and work is underway on the Vail Pass auxiliary lanes.

Ms. Neely asked CDOT how this capacity issue affects the future of transportation in the corridor. Does CDOT have any feelings how this discussion might affect what is being planned for the future? Do the agencies see adjustments to how we move forward in the future based on the capacity discussion? From Region 3's perspective, Mr. Smith didn't see any major adjustment. That region is working on projects identified in the 10-year plan but it might be opportunity in the 20-year plan to impact funding and project identification. Ms. Myklebust added that the 10-year plan is CDOT's north star for how it makes decisions and the plan goes through 2027, after which it will re-evaluate progress and fiscal constraints. At least in the interim as far as construction goes, she did not see major adjustments to the list of project priorities in the 10-year plan. She added that some of the capacity discussion is outside CDOT's purview but the agency is staying at the table for the conversation.

I-70 Coalition: Ms. Bowes noted that the MPO and TPR processes are where this capacity discussion can effect change in projects going forward, such as shifting funds from capacity projects to transit and transit hubs. That is where these conversations need to take place. From a corridor wide view, she is seeing interesting patterns in traffic volume and levels. In January, weekend travel patterns were being seen on Wednesdays and Thursdays. A goal of the Coalition was to shift people from peak periods and this is happening. We are also trying less of a shoulder season and a lot more traffic in September and October so a lot of the impacts are becoming year-long challenges. She is interested in getting to the next point of the discussion where we discuss how policy can change this capacity predicament.

In concluding the discussion, Mr. Wheelock agreed that there have been quite a few projects and a lot of money spent in the corridor. He added that these capacity discussions need to lead to a discussion of potential policy changes. The CE is a consensus organization and this discussion is not about telling the agencies what to do because they are part of the consensus. We need to see if this discussion stimulates us to decide to pursue a process to make

adjustments and what that process looks like. It requires consensus that is ROD compliant and NEPA compliant, whether that is CSS process or some other process that could lead to an outcome that the agencies embrace and incorporate into their project decision-making.

Mr. Hall echoed that we are a consensus organization and not dictating our future. What we are trying to determine is whether the concept of adaptive management calls for us to make shifts in the ROD. If we had done the 2020 reassessment two years later, would we have come to the same conclusions? COVID gave us a look at the future and forces us to ask if we are going to be adaptive and change and how do we do that and does that affect policy? Does it affect the minimum and maximum program? As CDOT starts the next 10-year plan, is there a change? What we are trying to determine is whether there is a role for the CE and how do we do that given the adaptive management approach?

Ms. Neely asked whether Mr. Hall was suggesting that the CE needs to re-examine the maximum program in the ROD in light of the capacity impacts in the corridor? Mr. Hall responded that he is asking whether there is enough concern in the corridor to warrant a change in our trajectory vis-à-vis the ROD. How can the ROD adapt, given that adaptive management is a core tenet of the ROD. How does the CE respond and adapt to this capacity issue? It may or may not affect programs and policies.

Mr. Wheelock added that the ROD speaks to the need to incrementally reassess the effect of improvements in the corridor and the need for the maximum program. The direction of the ROD is to utilize adaptive management as it is implemented through 2050, which he emphasized is beyond CDOT's focus on its 10-year plan. It is premature to say the CE is pulling a trigger and moving to the maximum program. The CE is directed by the ROD to establish the need before moving to those additional improvements, which is why this conversation is needed. There is the potential that this capacity discussion will cause us to recommend improvements other than those outlined in the ROD. He added that this discussion was triggered by the 2020 Reassessment, and the impacts of COVID and the dramatic increase in visitation weren't realized until late in that process. If those impacts had happened earlier, the 2020 Reassessment could have been very different.

5. Subcommittee Updates

- a. AGS/Transit Subcommittee: Mr. Wheelock noted that the Front Range Passenger Rail Commission recently held a retreat where access points, funding and other details were the focus. It is clear that to be affordable, it will look at existing infrastructure such as heavy rail which has been ruled out as infeasible for the mountain corridor so interoperability is going to be an issue. That is important for developing a statewide market and not just a Front Range market. The Governor would like a ballot initiative to go to the voters in 2024 to support Front Range passenger rail, an ambitious ask. It is more likely that the initiative will have a narrower scope looking at the northwest corridor.

The AGS Subcommittee is focused on doing research on technologies that are outside of what was considered in the 2014 study, including potentially smaller technologies. It is also discussing long-range funding, the need to find something that is economically feasible, and to establish what the funding requirement is for these other technologies.

- b. Environmental subcommittee: It has not met since the last CE meeting.
- c. Capacity: Ms. Wilson said the subcommittee has not met since the last CE meeting. She explained the statewide travel demand model effort was kicking off its pilot survey in early February. It will be live for 2-3 months with the goal of getting a good response rate so the final survey in the summer of 2023 can be done in a way that produces a total of 20,000 surveys. Regarding whether AGS would be included in the survey, this is a “reveal” survey that will reveal actual travel routes and it will not look at stated preference. Stated preference with reference to AGS could be included in the future survey.

6. Agency Updates

Ms. Cramer said the FONSI on Floyd Hill was completed. Ms. Myklebust thanked those who worked on it. CDOT is looking forward to beginning construction in May. She also mentioned that the new Chief Engineer will be Pete Stefanik, replacing Steve Harrelson who retired.

Mr. Smith noted that they are observing significant back-ups at exits to ski resorts and are having discussions with the resorts about solutions.

Ms. Berdoulay updated the CE on Region 3’s current construction projects.

7. Corridor updates

Ms. Bowes said the I-70 Coalition purchased mobility data from 8000 devices that traveled between DIA and Gypsum over a 3-year period. They merged that data with CDOT data and have created a powerful tool to analyze traffic patterns, including where travelers are starting from and where they are going. Steve Coffin will send out the synopsis of the data.

8. Remaining Business and Adjourn

There was no additional business and the meeting was adjourned.