I-70 Collaborative Effort Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, September 28, 2022

10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Summit County Community and Senior Center, Frisco, CO

Members Present: Co-Chair Greg Hall (Town of Vail), Tamara Pogue (Summit County), Xander Martin (Colorado Ski Country USA), Eva Wilson (Local Transit Provider), Jack Tone (Colorado Rail Passenger Association), Andrew Marsh (Idaho Springs), Margaret Bowes (I-70 Coalition), Mary Jane Loevlie (Corridor Business Representative), Adam Bianchi (U.S. Forest Service), Andy Kerr (Jefferson County), Elizabeth Cramer (FHWA), Matt Scherr (Eagle County), Cindy Neely (Corridor Local Historic Preservation), and John Uban (Headwaters Group).

Alternates Present: Brian Dobling (FHWA), Steve Durian (Jefferson County), Tracy Sakaguchi (Colorado Motor Carriers Association), Ben Gerdes (Eagle County), Becky English (Sierra Club, Rocky Mountain Chapter), Scott Haas (U.S. Forest Service), Erin Bornemann (State Historic Preservation Office), and Jennifer Phillips (CDOT Division of Transit and Rail).

Members Absent: Randy Wheelock (Clear Creek County), Aaron Eilers (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers), Danny Katz (COPIRG), Brendan McGuire (Vail Resorts), Adam Burg (Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce), Ann Rajewski (CASTA), John Martin (Garfield County), Mike Riggs (Automated Guideway System/High Speed Transit), Dennis Royer (Sierra Club, Rocky Mountain Chapter), Tracey MacDonald (Federal Transit Administration), Gary Frey (Colorado Trout Unlimited), Jason Smith (CDOT Region 3 Director), Jessica Myklebust (CDOT Region 1 Director), David Krutsinger (Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, City and County of Denver).

Interested Parties: Eric Mocko, Pat Noyes, Jason Robertson, Sara Cassidy, Rep. Julie McCluskie, Karen Berdoulay, Miller Hudson, Tamara Burke, Wendy Wallach 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.

1. **Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

1. **CE Business**

The meeting agenda and the May 2022 Meeting Minutes were approved by consensus.

Mr. Hall and Mr. Coffin then discussed modifications to the Operating Protocols. The changes included:

* Specifying that unless otherwise noted, all meetings will be in person at the Summit County Community and Senior Center in Frisco;
* Expressing the commitment of CE members to use their best efforts to financially support the CE, while recognizing that whether a member makes a contribution has no impact on every member having an equal voice;.
* Stipulating that an annual budget will be developed and presented to the full CE at its January meeting for consensus approval, with the exception of the 2022 budget that was approved by the Co-Chairs;.
* Elaborating on the role of the Co-Chairs to manage staff and budget; and
* Referencing CE staff throughout and moving several references to CDOT.

Ms. Cramer noted that the revisions replace CDOT staff with CE staff and asked if CDOT had been consulted. Mr. Coffin explained that most of the changes refer to tasks that CDOT has indicated it lacks the resources to implement. Mr. Hall added that the changes relate to the operations of the CE and not specific project-related work, and that CDOT would presumably continue its role with those activities. Ms. Neely expressed the concern that CDOT should still be responsible for convening of the CE because that is what the Record of Decision (ROD) calls for. She suggested that CDOT’s role should be evaluated more carefully because they need to be engaged. Mr. Coffin said he would consult with CDOT and bring the revisions to the Protocols back to the CE at its January meeting.

Mr. Hall then reviewed the 2022 CE budget. The 2023 budget will be presented at the January meeting for consensus approval. He also reviewed the 2022 contributions from CE members. He asked contributing members to consider including a contribution in their 2023 budgets.

Ms. Neely noted that Garfield County is not contributing and yet all other counties that are members of the CE have. Mr. Hall noted that while Garfield County continues to be a member per the ROD, it has not participated in the CE since 2017 or 2018.

Mr. Hall also discussed the fact that Steve Coffin is the staff for 2022 but raised the question whether a committee should be formed to evaluate whether he should continue as staff in 2023 or whether an RFP should be issued to solicit staff. The group felt it was appropriate to form a committee for that purpose. Ms. Loevlie, Ms. Bowes and Ms. Phillips volunteered to serve, and Ms. Cramer noted that if the CE will be considering federal funding, she too should be included.

Finally, Mr. Hall asked if there were volunteer agencies that could take over for Clear Creek County as fiscal agent for the CE. Mr. Scherr, Ms. Pogue and Mr. Hall said they would consider it and asked for an email document explaining what is involved. Mr. Coffin agreed to provide that.

1. **Subcommittee Updates and Discussion**

* 1. Report of Joint AGS/Transit and Capacity Subcommittees Meeting

Mr. Hall reported on the Joint meeting of the AGS/Transit and Capacity Subcommittees which focused on two issues: whether the roles of the two subcommittees are sufficiently similar to warrant combining them into one, and continuation of the discussion about considering corridor capacity from a broader perspective than just meeting travel demand but also the ability of the communities and public lands in the corridor to handle that extra capacity. Mr. Hall reported that the conclusion of the joint subcommittee meeting was capacity should be examined more broadly.

Mr. Coffin added that the joint subcommittee meeting also decided that the two subcommittees should not be combined into one but instead continue to communicate and meet together on as needed basis. A second decision was while the subcommittees will look at this broader capacity issue, that does not mean the AGS/Transit Subcommittee will take its eye off the ball on pursuing AGS. That will continue to be a focus of the group.

* 1. Capacity Subcommittee Report and presentation by Jason Roberts, Director, Recreation,

Lands, Minerals and Volunteers, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region

Ms. Wilson presented the capacity subcommittee report. She explained that she sent Erik Sabina, CDOT’s manager overseeing the development of the new statewide travel demand model, questions that CE members wanted in the survey CDOT will be conducting. Ms. Wilson presented slides summarizing Mr. Sabina’s response on how CDOT will be addressing those requests. Those slides will be posted on the CE website (<https://www.codot.gov/projects/i70mountaincorridor/collaborativeeffort>). She added that the survey would not include out-of-state travelers but CDOT continues to consider how to capture them.

If communities wanted to include additional questions in the survey, Mr. Hall noted they would need to come up with funding to pay for those questions. Ms. Bowes noted that the I-70 Coalition is focused on ensuring the survey includes a good sampling of Front Range residents who travel the corridor on the weekends. Ms. Loevlie asked about the timing of the survey and Ms. Wilson responded that the survey should be in the fall and they need to get both summer and winter seasons.

Ms. Neely and Mr. Scherr both raised the issue of how the CE uses the word “capacity”. In one sense, it is used to describe travel demand and in another, it means the ability of our public lands and communities to handle the volume of visitors. Mr. Scherr noted that the latter is not about capacity; it is about impacts. They suggested the CE be more intentional and deliberate in its use of the term.

Ms. Wilson noted that other groups are looking at how public lands can handle the increased visitor demand, and Steve Coffin explained how a group called NoCo PLACES 2050 is working on that.

Jason Robertson, Director of Recreation, Lands, Minerals and Volunteers for the Rocky Mountain Region of the U.S. Forest Service, then gave a presentation on the state of the forests in the corridor. The presentation will be posted on the CE website (<https://www.codot.gov/projects/i70mountaincorridor/collaborativeeffort>). His presentation discussed the economic impact of the forests in the corridor, changes in visitation and recreation occurring in the forests, Forest Service funding, the health of the forests and other issues related to the capacity of the forests in the corridor.

Ms. English asked about the protection of wildlife corridors and whether there is a directive that will control oil and gas emissions. Mr. Robertson responded that the Forest Service is following EPA’s rules and that he thinks there is recognition that more needs to be done to protect wildlife corridors. He also noted that during the pandemic, there was a massive increase in single occupancy vehicles at trailheads which meant trails became unusable and that hasn’t changed. The Forest Service is not seeing an increase in ridesharing and that is an area we can all work on more.

Ms. Bowes mentioned that many local and regional transit agencies are promoting access to trailheads via their services and asked how the Forest Service can inform their visitors about those opportunities. Mr. Robertson noted that there is increased demand for multi-generational access and what has been successful in serving that demand is stacked loop trail systems that are easily accessed next to highways and parking and that can work to serve more visitors. He added that the Forest Service is just starting to focus on this and recognizes the need to do more.

Ms. Loevlie asked if the Forest Service continues to support AGS and the CE’s efforts to promote AGS. Mr. Bianchi responded that the Forest Service continues to support multiple transportation methods. He did note that there is room to talk with the Regional Office about being more engaged with the CE on AGS activities.

Mr. Hall asked if the Forest Service plans to update its land use plans to address the challenges of increased visitation? Mr. Robertson explained that Forest Plan revisions are done every 20 years but they are not keeping up with changes in the region. Mr. Haas added that the schedule for updating the Forest Management Plan is determined by the Washington office and the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forest Manager is intentionally waiting for the work of NoCo PLACES 2050 to play out before updating the plan for that Forest. The last plan for that Forest was done in 1997 and has not kept up with demand and changes. Mr. Bianchi noted that the White River Forest Management Plan was last done in 2002 and there has been some discussion about updating it but there are other Forest Management Plans that are taking higher priority. Mr. Coffin noted that NoCo has begun what it hopes will be a 2-year process to develop a conservation and recreation vision for the NoCo region and is working hand-in-hand with the Forest Service on that.

Ms. Neely noted that because the Forest Service is the permitting agency for ski areas in the corridor, it has a built-in process for managing the 14 million skier visitors, but that a similar management relationship doesn’t exist for the other 20 million people visiting the corridor. As the CE has its discussion about capacity in the corridor, it needs to figure out the mechanics for that management relationship. As an example, she noted that Clear Creek County is overrun by visitors in some places but lacks tools to manage that like the Forest Service has through ski area leases. Mr. Bianchi responded that the Forest Service’s partners include counties, communities and community organizations, and the Forest Service works very closely with those partners to communicate information about trail use, overuse, courtesy and other issues related to increased visitor demand. Ms. Pogue agreed with Mr. Bianchi’s comments, adding that while the Forest Service has a unique relationship with ski resorts, it nonetheless does have the ability to manage access to areas outside the ski resorts through other partners like Summit County.

Ms. Neely clarified that Clear Creek communities have a lot of good contact and relationships with the Forest Service but it tends to be limited to specific issues and not holistic. With a given ski area, there is a mechanism for bringing all those issues together holistically. That is lacking outside the ski resort mechanism.

Mr. Coffin then began the discussion about capacity, picking up from the discussion on this issue at the May meeting. He posed the following questions to the group:

• Should capacity be evaluated from a broader perspective than just how many more people can we move through the corridor? Do we need to balance the capacity from the perspective of travel demand with the ability of communities and public lands in the corridor to handle extra capacity? Is there more information the CE would like to have to answer that question?

• What is the role of the CE, if any, in that broader evaluation of capacity? Mr. Coffin pointed to language in the Consensus Recommendation that stated that the CE needed to develop a long-range corridor vision for transportation, growth and mobility.

Ms. Loevlie noted that the CE did develop that vision when it developed the 2050 vision. She further noted that the CE was directed to re-examine that vision as technology advanced and society changed, something it did with the 2020 Reassessment when it reaffirmed that vision.

Ms. Neely disagreed, noting that what was developed was a vision for transportation, not a vision for the corridor, and the Consensus Recommendation suggested that it was incumbent upon people living in the corridor to develop an accompanying vision to the transportation vision because that accompanying vision could impact the transportation vision. She further noted that the CE is the group that brings all the parties necessary for that discussion. The question is does the CE take the next step in developing that vision?

Mr. Scherr said the answer to the question of whether that broader perspective should be considered is yes.

Ms. Wilson noted that the CE needs to keep transportation as its focus. Its starting point is the I-70 corridor PEIS, and the question is how does the CE look at transportation to affect the natural resources and corridor communities.

Ms. Cramer noted that the Operating Protocols states that the CE was charged with reaching consensus on a recommended transportation solution for the corridor, but that language is not in the ROD. She asked when that changed. What is the role of the CE, has it changed, and when did that happen? She also noted that transportation planning is a process that already exists and the CE should not duplicate that role.

Mr. Hall responded that transportation planning involves looking at land use planning. The capacity question for the CE is whether the thought process on land use planning has changed in a way that could change the transportation plan for the corridor. Have local land use pressures and needs changed because of increased visitation to the corridor?

Ms. Wilson noted that she was thinking along the same lines as Ms. Cramer. She said the CE doesn’t have the capacity to create a corridor-wide vision. It does, however, have a role in creating awareness of the need to balance these capacity needs.

Ms. Sakaguchi noted that motor carriers need to know who they are going to serve and how are they going to serve them. Motor carriers have limited options to serve communities. The more communities grow, the more needs they have and the more the interstate needs to support motor carriers to meet that need. She does not think it is the job of the CE to plan for that; it should look to other resources on how they plan for that.

Mr. Uban took more of an environmental view of capacity, noting that discussion around transportation tends to focus on just the travel aspects and that improvements to the highway need to be done in ways that go beyond just addressing traffic needs but also include impacts to watersheds and other environmental impacts. Balancing these factors needs the involvement of more than just transportation engineers.

Adam Bianchi noted that from the Forest Service perspective, the issue is the portals of entry and how people get off the highway and interact with public lands. The CE needs to maintain its focus on the I-70 corridor and what improvements, working with CDOT, need to be made at every community level. This is a multi-faceted issue that the CE can’t tackle which is why each community needs to look at this. There are already organizations set up to look at these issues. It is helpful to have the representatives of these communities at the CE to tell us what is happening in communities along the corridor. The CE is not the group to do this broader examination, however. The CE should hear and understand the perspectives of communities and community organizations along the corridor and take that into account in its work.

Mr. Haas added that there is also the opportunity to do a deeper dive when we get into specific projects. We may not be looking at cumulative effects like Ms. Neely suggested but using the Bakerville climbing lane as an example, the Forest Service will be looking at the affects and capacity in that area as it goes through that individual project. He agreed with Mr. Bianchi that there are groups represented at the CE that bring a lot to this discussion and that is why the diverse representation at the CE is so important. He further noted that CDOT and the FHWA do a good job in ensuring that those capacity issues are examined with individual projects and looking at cumulative effects of past projects.

Ms. English noted while she agreed that the CE needs to stay focused on transportation, she also agreed with Mr. Uban that broader issues such as watersheds need to be considered because we need to think about preserving quality of life.

Ms. Neely noted that she participated in the initial creation of the vision for the corridor, a vision that was adopted by the FHWA and CDOT and incorporated into the ROD, and that vision was totally driven by travel demand. She did not think the Consensus Recommendation that the CE create a long-range corridor vision for growth, transportation and mobility is talking about transportation planning but instead about creating a vision of what the corridor should look like in the future. That can and should be done by CE. Transportation projects look at the effects of those specific projects at those specific spots, and how the effects of all those spots add up is the question that should be answered and that is an appropriate issue for the CE to tackle.

Ms. Bowes said she could not imagine how we could not take a broader perspective. The people traveling the corridor are recreating on our public lands and traveling on our local roads, and the CE cannot separate the broader question of capacity from the issues the CE discusses. This is the forum for leaders in the corridor to get input into capacity discussions and how that affects their communities. She said creating a corridor-wide vision is a daunting exercise and the CE may not have the resources, but she also said that if it was not the CE that did this, who would? There is no other group that has the diversity of the CE.

Mr. Tone discussed the traditional transportation planning process that forecasts future population growth and models to address that growth but thinks the CE needs to expand that view to consider holding capacity and recreation trips that were not included in transportation planning historically. The Front Range Passenger Rail Authority is looking at potential ridership on the Front Range, and the CE should do something similar for the mountain corridor.

Mr. Hall thought it was critical that the CE brings this issue to the table. It impacts how the CE meets mobility and that could tweak the final solution. The task is daunting with political and economic development ramifications. It is the CE’s job to ask the question, and the 2050 vision could be different as a result of asking that question. Is the issue of capacity going to change over time or is it just a trend and the corridor adjusts? There are other considerations as well that might impact this vision. Might climate change, for example, cause more people to move to Colorado? He concluded that capacity should be examined from the broader perspective but was unsure who would do that.

Mr. Scherr agreed that capacity needs to be viewed from the broader perspective. Whether it is the CE who does that, he did not know, but he noted that any group that did do this would include much the same membership as the CE.

Mr. Martin shared the concern about the capacity of the CE to undertake this effort and that a number of the ski areas he represents already focus on many of the same capacity-related issues.

Mr. Dobling said he would default to what has already been agreed upon, and while the question is a valid one, he is unsure it will result in improving the result of getting projects done. Staying focused on what we are bound by is what we should continue with, while staying mindful of these broader issues. He also agreed with prior comments that other groups are doing this work now.

Ms. Loevlie said that the 2020 Reassessment ratified the Purpose and Need and that it is ironic that this question is being raised now. Yes, the CE needs to address the greater community recreational capacity in some way, but the CE should stay focused on the PEIS and transportation improvements in the corridor while taking into account all these other capacity needs.

Mr. Marsh said that the consensus of the group seems to be that capacity should be viewed more broadly. From the perspective of Idaho Springs, they know that more people are going to be coming and there need to be better ways to manage that.

Mr. Kerr agreed that capacity should be viewed more broadly. Even though I-70 is the main way people access the corridor, there are other ways to access these communities and the carrying capacity of the corridor affects not just the interstate but those other means of access.

Ms. Pogue also agreed that capacity should be examined more broadly. When I-70 doesn’t work, Summit County doesn’t work. In answering the question of whether the CE is the right group, she said she was unsure what that would look like. Can one take Summit County’s master plan and overlay it with conversations around I-70? She was not sure what the mechanism would be, and until we know more about that mechanism, we can’t answer that question.

Mr. Hall concluded that there seems to be consensus that capacity should be examined more broadly but it remains an open question who would do that and how. He also noted that this is the beginning of the discussion, and no decisions were being made today. He encouraged the group to consider thinking about what additional information it would like to have.

State Rep. Julie McLuskie mentioned that similar conversations are happening at the state level. She added that while transportation is the focus of the CE, this issue of capacity is key to the future of housing, education, workforce development and other issues important to the state. She further noted that the historical perspective of the CE, coupled with its diverse membership and opinions, suggest that this group can have meaningful impact on these issues.

Ms. Bowes suggested as a next step that it would be valuable to hear from the counties along the corridor on how they are dealing with this capacity issue. Mr. Marsh suggested forming a subcommittee of local land use planners from jurisdictions in the corridor and having them present a comprehensive assessment of how the corridor is responding to this challenge. Ms. Neely reiterated that the PEIS recommendation was for a corridor “vision”, not a plan, and that the CE could benefit from future discussions on how it might develop that vision so the concept.

Mr. Coffin then noted a change to the agenda with the corridor update moved up to be the next item.

1. **Corridor Updates**
   1. Floyd Hill Update

Kurt Kionka, CDOT Floyd Hill Project Director, gave a power point update on the Floyd Hill project. His presentation discussed the project location and history, early projects associated with the project, the schedule for Floyd Hill construction, refinements to the Preferred Alternative and an update on funding for the project. The presentation will be posted on the CE website (https://www.codot.gov/projects/i70mountaincorridor/collaborativeeffort).

* 1. Communications and Outreach

Ms. Bowes mentioned that the a new fact sheet has been included in the new member orientation packet that explains the difference between the CE and the I-70 Coalition. She added that the subcommittee developed a presentation outline for anyone wanting to make a presentation on the ROD and the CE. She said that the subcommittee has completed the tasks it was assigned and will meet as needed going forward.

She then presented the results of the I-70 Coalition’s I-70 Transit Ridership Survey and the I-70 Users Survey. The presentation will be posted on the CE website (<https://www.codot.gov/projects/i70mountaincorridor/collaborativeeffort>). The research results are also posted on the I-70 Coalition website ([Reports/Studies - I-70 Coalition (i70solutions.org)](https://i70solutions.org/reports-studies/)

* 1. AGS/Transit Subcommittee

Mr. Hall presented the report, noting that Randy Wheelock will be doing a doodle poll to get another meeting of the group scheduled. He added that the Front Range Passenger Rail is in the process of forming and there is not a lot to report from that.

* 1. Environmental Subcommittee

Mr. Hall explained that the Environmental Subcommittee did not meet again since the September CE meeting so no report from that subcommittee.

1. Agency Updates

Ms. Berdoulay with CDOT gave an update on CDOT construction. Ms. Cramer with FHWA reported on FHWA staffing changes. Ms. Phillips provided updates on Pegasus and Bustang.

1. Corridor updates

Mr. Hall provided an update on Eagle County’s proposed Regional Transportation Authority.

1. Remaining Business and Adjourn

There was no further business and the meeting adjourned at approximately 2:00 pm.