



## REVISED MEETING NOTES

<b>PROJECT:</b>	21685 I-70 West Vail Pass Auxiliary Lanes
<b>PURPOSE:</b>	Project Leadership Team (PLT) Meeting #5
<b>DATE HELD:</b>	March 5, 2020
<b>LOCATION:</b>	Avon Branch Library
<b>ATTENDING:</b>	John Kronholm, Project Manager, CDOT Region 3 Karen Berdoulay, Resident Engineer, CDOT Region 3 Martha Miller, Program Engineer, CDOT Region 3 David Cesark, Environmental Manager, CDOT Region 3 Vanessa Henderson, I-70 Environmental Manager, CDOT Jeff Belen, FHWA Matt Klein, US Forest Service Greg Hall, Town of Vail Dick Cleveland, Vail Community Ben Gerdes, Eagle County Stephanie Gibson, FHWA Tracy Sakaguchi, Colorado Motor Carriers Association Kara Swanson, Consultant Environmental Task Lead, David Evans & Associates JJ Weirema, Wood Matt Figgs, CDOT Region 3
<b>COPIES:</b>	Attendees

### SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION:

#### 1. Introductions & Meeting Purpose

- a. After a round of self-introductions, Karen kicked off the purpose of the meeting.
  - i. She spoke on how at the last PLT meeting, the Project Team heard that they should hold a noise update with residents of East Vail, as well as hold a Technical Team (TT) on the design exception request. The Project Team accomplished those tasks and is back to the PLT to give an update on both.

#### 2. CSS Design Exceptions

##### a. Intent of CSS Design Exception Request Timing

- i. Karen laid out why the Project Team is asking for the design exceptions at this stage in the project. In the I-70 PEIS, it is stated that designated Areas of Special Attention need to have the CSS design exceptions looked at during the planning stage, which the West Vail Pass Aux Lanes project is in.
  - 1. The project won't be able to finalize any design exception during the planning phase, but they do need to be looked at now.
  - 2. Karen added that the group spent a lot of time at the TT meeting talking about the ramifications of the exceptions, and realized that it was not an appropriate time to finalize the design exception decisions.
  - 3. Karen expressed the Project Team's gratefulness that the PLT sent the Team back to the TT as it revealed how complex and difficult it is to make the exact decisions at this time.
  - 4. She stated that CDOT is committing to a design exception Issue Task Force (ITF) that will further look at specific exceptions during the final design process.



**b. Technical Team Feedback**

- i. Kara walked the PLT through the summarized comments from the TT that were sent out to the PLT group prior to the meeting.
  1. She stated that from a high level, most of the discussion was on the level of design for each exception.
  2. CDOT had received follow-up emails from the US Forest Service (USFS) and Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW) that were also summarized in the comments.
    - a. Matt K agreed that the USFS felt the exceptions as presented were balanced and minimized impacts to USFS lands. The USFS will leave it to others to evaluate the exceptions from an engineering perspective, but they are good with what was presented from a resource perspective.
    - b. Kara stated that CPW agreed that minimizing impacts to natural resources and Black Gore Creek were the right approach in all of the design exceptions being requested.
- ii. Stephanie added that the commitment CDOT has made to the design exception ITF through the design process is the appropriate way to handle the situation.
- iii. Greg stated that since this project is at a lower level of design at this stage compared to other CDOT projects, he wonders why parts of the corridor seem to be handled differently.
  1. Vanessa responded that the Floyd Hill project is not being handled much differently than the West Vail Pass Aux Lanes project. Many other CDOT projects are done under Categorical Exclusions rather than Environmental Assessments (EAs), so they are at a much higher level of design at early stages compared to this project.
    - a. She added that the Floyd Hill project has not gone through the design exception process yet and is going to a 20% level of design.
  2. Martha added that the Floyd Hill project is still looking at alternatives and that the two projects have run a bit differently, but this project wanted to focus on identifying Goals and Critical Success Factors before wading too much into design.
  3. Stephanie added that level of complexity of the project and availability of construction funding also leads to differences as to how projects are approached and how much conceptual work needs to take place before final design can occur. A project like Floyd Hill has a lot more conceptual work that is needed. It might be good for future projects to state the level of design that is needed for the EA with the PLT up front so the PLT knows what to expect at the beginning of the process.
  4. Vanessa concurred that the process isn't the same for each project because each project is so different, but the Project Team is on the right page for where this project is currently.
  5. Martha agreed that the small level of funding that was available at the beginning of the project made the Project Team focus more on the conceptual level and the EA rather than progressing too much in design.

**c. Updates to CSS Design Exception Drawings and Memo**

- i. Kara walked the PLT through the updates to the visual exception drawings that came from the TT meeting.
  1. She noted that CDOT added clarifications to the drawings: the dimensions are not as precise as last presented due to the low level of design, and there



are notes on what items will be determined in final design. The Advanced Guideway System (AGS) alignment is also shown, as well as the approximate existing median widths & proposed wildlife underpasses.

- ii. Kara stated that the design exception memo now has additional comments on purpose and intent, incorporating feedback from the TT (especially in regards to committing to the design ITF). Not much in the tables were changed except for providing existing median widths and making design dimensions approximate.
  1. Karen added that a lot of the general comments from the TT were captured in the updates, but specific design decisions will be made later in final design
    - a. Stephanie wanted clarification that the ITF commitment was stated in the memo.
    - b. The Project Team confirmed that it is included.
  2. Greg pointed out that the Project Team will still need to do the ITF for aesthetic guidance and wondered if that was mentioned in the memo?
    - a. JJ stated yes, it is mentioned on page 5 of the memo.
  3. Greg asked for clarification on when the Project Team goes to the visual exception ITF during final design, can the dimensions in the drawings shown today change?
    - a. Karen responded yes, that's the goal of the ITF. The Project Team will be able to dive into each specific area with the ITF and there won't be constraints on what can change. The Project Team may have to revisit the EA if limits of construction change, which is common for a project of this size at this level of design.
    - b. John added that the maps provided at today's PLT really identify locations that exceptions exist, and the exact details will have to be decided in the future ITF. Those decisions will have to integrate with the aesthetic guidance that is developed.
- iii. **CSS Design Exception ITF Commitment**
  1. Karen asked if the PLT agreed to the ITF commitment and the memo as shown.
    - a. Greg stated that as long as that ITF is done for the whole corridor and not for individual segments.
    - b. Stephanie responded that the SCAP and Aesthetic ITFs will have to be done for the whole corridor, but design exceptions are better evaluated project by project [location by location] as construction funds are available, with the understanding of how those exceptions may affect others adjacent to the phase undergoing design
    - c. Greg agreed that while the Project Team is punting the decision, it will need to balance how far to punt it.
    - d. Martha added that as construction funding levels change, the Project Team doesn't know moving forward how much construction will be done, so there needs to be some flexibility as to how the Project Team tackles the corridor.
    - e. Greg noted that it is important that we commit to items like the SCAP being completed for the whole corridor regardless of financial budgets.
    - f. Kara pointed out that the EA is legally binding and includes a commitment to do the SCAP for the whole corridor.
    - g. Dave stated that design exceptions are normal and that every project will have exceptions.



- h. Stephanie agreed that is true especially on a project of this size with the complexities that this has. Design exceptions for each segment will need to be done before each segment is built.
2. There was consensus from the PLT group, via nodding, on the approach to design exceptions and the design exception ITF commitment as laid out in the memo.

### **3. Public Meeting Regarding East Vail Traffic Noise**

#### **a. Meeting Overview**

- i. Kara gave an overview of the public meeting that was held in East Vail regarding the noise study. The Project Team had approximately 60 attendees with a presentation and then an open house afterwards.
  1. She added that the draft noise model did show that a noise wall is reasonable and feasible for a certain area of the project.

#### **b. Comment Summary Review**

- i. Kara noted that the Project Team had sent out a summary of the comments received for the public meeting to the PLT prior to this meeting. The Project Team will be working on responses to comments that asked to be followed up on.
- ii. Kara stated that the biggest concern the Project Team heard was on truck engine brakes, and that the Project Team had sent some information to the PLT that was received from Tracy and Colorado Motor Carriers.
  1. Dick agreed that it has been an ongoing issue in East Vail for many years
  2. Greg stated that the Project Team did a good job handling the meeting
    - a. Dick agreed that he had heard the same thing from members of the community.
  3. Greg added that moving forward, there are some items that the Project Team can construct that are not specific FHWA noise barriers, but would be good to do to help with noise as it falls within the values of Tier 2 projects to meet & exceed values.
    - a. Karen agreed with Greg on this. The Project Team can do things like install concrete barrier rather than guardrail on outside shoulders, which will help with noise. However, these items are not considered FHWA noise mitigation and will not be included in the EA as such.
  4. Stephanie added that she noticed there was a perception that the extra lane will increase speeds on the corridor.
    - a. Kara responded that when the Project Team holds the final EA public meeting, they will have traffic engineer that can answer questions on that specific concern. The speeds would likely only increase for passenger vehicles and not trucks.
- iii. Kara added that there were a few comments on project need, as well as on a few issues outside of the project limits that CDOT will work on outside of the confines of the project.
- iv. Dave stated he heard from one resident that while they're not a fan of truck engine brakes, they are better than having trucks go off the road.

### **4. General Project Status**

- a. Karen gave the PLT a general status update on the project.
  - i. She noted that the Project Team is finalizing environmental tech reports currently which will go to CDOT for review, then to FHWA to review. Then the Team will hold



- the public EA meeting in early fall, and will hopefully have a signed decision document by end of 2020.
- ii. Karen added that CDOT has also applied for a \$140M INFRA grant, which the Project Team will hear about in the summer. The project for this grant would include an auxiliary lane eastbound (EB) from mile marker (MM) 185 to MM 190, curve smoothing at MMs 186 & 188, signing, Variable Speed Limit signs, relocating the bike path, reconstructing the lower truck ramp, an automatic closure system, wildlife fence and crossings, select shoulder widening, and replacement of one bridge at MM 185 (which is Bridge Enterprise [BE] eligible).
    1. Martha commented that the BE bridge helped provide a large state match for the grant. CDOT is asking for \$60M of Federal funding, so there is a large state portion that is contingent on getting the INFRA grant.
    2. Karen mentioned that the Project Team developed a Benefit Cost Analysis (BCA) for the grant which was 1.75; a very good number.
    3. Dick asked if CDOT is awarded the grant, what would the schedule be?
      - a. Karen responded that CDOT committed to starting construction in 2022 with 3 years of construction.
  - iii. Karen stated that the Project Team has also completed the Project Delivery Selection Matrix (PDSM) for this portion of the corridor (the \$140M project), and was just approved to move forward with the Construction Manager/General Contractor (CMGC) delivery method.
    1. Greg commented that he doesn't want to shortchange the design timeline for the sake of getting something on the ground for the grant.
    2. Karen responded that CDOT is looking at a year timeline for each of those specialty ITFs. Also, CMGC will help deliver multiple construction packages to break off easier items to do in 2022 and give more time for design. She agreed with Greg on his statement though.
    3. Martha added that the Project Team was pushed hard to start construction in 2022 by management. The Team will start efforts before the EA to make sure there is enough time for those ITF groups as CDOT does not want to rush them.
  - iv. Karen stated that the Project Team is also applying for a \$50M BUILD grant. The scope of that project is still being fully determined, but it probably won't have any auxiliary lanes as they are very expensive. That grant application will be submitted in May.
    1. She added that if neither grant is awarded, CDOT still has \$16-\$17M for construction. The Project Team doesn't have a scope for that size project yet, but CDOT will be building something on that pass in the near future.
      - a. Greg asked if CDOT submitted any other INFRA grants.
      - b. Karen responded no, Vail Pass was the only CDOT project submitted.
    2. Karen thanked the PLT as many in the room helped write or get letters of local support for the INFRA grant.
      - a. Dave added that CDOT is only picking West Vail Pass for the INFRA grant, and that shows that CDOT is prioritizing the project.
      - b. Karen mentioned that the high BCA shows that this is a valuable project to invest in.
      - c. Martha pointed out that the Team compared West Vail Pass to Straight Creek in grant (which has longer sustained high grades) and how it has less crashes because of the 3<sup>rd</sup> lane, even with nearly 50% more traffic. CDOT didn't want the application dismissed because I-



- 70 is a mountain pass and there could be a false perception that you can't do anything to fix it.
- d. Kara mentioned the Team also focused on the economic benefits of the project.
3. Stephanie stated that she hasn't seen the application, but on the comparison to Straight Creek, will that be in the EA as part of the justification for this project? It may be helpful to show that it's not standard for an interstate pass to have this level of issues.
    - a. The Project Team thought that was a great idea. That comparison has been mentioned at public meetings, but not in the EA. It will be added.
    - b. Stephanie pointed out that comparison can help against the argument that there's nothing you can do on a pass because closures are all due to weather. The Team heard a few comments as such at the noise meeting, so it will be good to put in the EA.
  4. Greg mentioned that for the BUILD grant, Vail Fire just did a presentation to Vail Town Council about the expected increase in responses on West Vail Pass. That may be good data to add to that grant application.
- v. Greg stated that it may be good to change the nomenclature with these funding scenarios to state that the money is not just for construction but also for design and the ITFs.
    1. Karen replied that is a good distinction. The Project Team is committed on exactly what Greg is stating and will use that suggestion when presenting about the project going forward.
  - vi. Greg asked that the NEPA process needs to be finished in 2 years, how does that apply to the next stages as construction funding becomes available?
    1. Stephanie responded that the next steps after the signed decision document are different than the NEPA process we are in and doesn't have same timelines. Only Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) that started after 2016 have timeline requirements, so that wouldn't affect the West Vail Pass project. The next stages still should be done as timely as possible though.
  - vii. Karen mentioned that if the Project Team doesn't host meetings for a while, newsletters will be sent to the PLT to give updates.
  - viii. Martha asked when will next PLT be?
    1. Kara responded that the next TT meeting will be right after the EA is completed and prior to the public meeting, then a PLT meeting would be held at the end of the project to debrief on the CSS process during the EA process. The PLT will continue to meet during final design.
  - ix. Stephanie asked for the design exception process, is there anything in the memo that defines membership of the ITF? It might be helpful to define who would be a part of that ITF as a minimum.
    1. Greg agreed with this clarification
    2. The Project Team felt this was a good comment and will add that to the memo.
  - x. Greg asked for more explanation as to how the Crest of the Rockies requirements and the historic aesthetic guidelines that will be specifically developed for this project correspond.
    1. John replied that the Project Team is not starting over with the aesthetic guidelines as Vail Pass already has very good guidelines. The Team will take the existing guidelines and update them based on the historic context.





- a. Kara added that the Crest of the Rockies guidelines were based on the federal lands MOU. The Project Team will have to work through the design exception ITF to make sure that those two things don't conflict.
  2. Greg added that it might be worthwhile to explain in the EA what the development of the aesthetic guidelines will produce.
    - a. Kara responded that information will be in the visual tech memo so the public can comment on.
- xi. Greg asked if the reassessment of the PEIS would affect the guidelines the Project Team is developing?
  1. Vanessa commented that it possibly could, but that is unknown at this time.
- xii. Dave informed the PLT that CDOT has also received funding to redo the rest area at the top of Vail Pass. This is a different funding source, and a different process and project, but it is exciting to know that will be done as it is the busiest rest area in the state
  1. John mentioned that the Rest Area Project Team will be going through a very similar CSS process as this project has.
  2. Dave added that CDOT is working closely with USFS on the coordination with the recreation area that is next to the rest area.
    - a. Matt K mentioned that the USFS has appreciated that effort.