



MEETING NOTES

PROJECT:	23982-23929 I-70 West Vail Pass Safety and Operations Improvements
PURPOSE:	106/Aesthetics ITF #3 Meeting
DATE HELD:	February 1, 2021
LOCATION:	Online Google Meet Meeting
ATTENDING:	John Kronholm, Project Manager, CDOT Region 3 Karen Berdoulay, Resident Engineer, CDOT Region 3 Rob Beck, Program Engineer, CDOT Region 3 Matt Figgs, CDOT Region 3 Jen Klaetsch, CDOT Lisa Schoch, CDOT James Proctor, CDOT Bridge Enterprise Tom Fuller, US Forest Service Jared Pierce, US Forest Service Mitchell Schaefer, SHPO Jeff Bellen, FHWA Greg Hall, Town of Vail Todd Oppenheimer, Town of Vail Greg Barrie, Town of Vail Kevin Sharkey, ECO Trails Shannon Anderson, Bicycle Colorado Jim Thomsen, Kiewit Randal Lapsley, R S & H Mary Jo Vobejda, Jacobs Diane Yates, Jacobs Jim Clarke, Jacobs Patti Steinholtz, Jacobs Erin Kraft, Jacobs Loretta LaRiviere, Jacobs
COPIES:	Attendees

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION:

1. Introductions & Meeting Purpose

- a. Karen introduced the attendees at today's meeting.
- b. Mary Jo noted the 106 and Aesthetics are being combined into one ITF. This ITF has a big role because of the eligibility for West Vail Pass historic designation. She then reviewed the purpose and goals for today's meeting:
 - i. Gather feedback on the Aesthetics process to ensure the project is successful. Topics for today's meeting are:
 - ii. Review the EA and INFRA Project status and schedule
 - iii. Review the CSS process
 - iv. Understand all team roles and responsibilities
 - v. EA commitments
 - vi. Gather feedback on methodology for the Aesthetic Guideline development

2. Work Completed

- a. Karen said the Environmental Assessment has been completed for the overall project and the FONSI (**Finding of no Significant Impact**) has been approved by the FHWA and is going through the final signature process. It should be published in the next few weeks.
- b. Mary Jo said a survey was sent to all PLT, TT & Issue Task Force (ITF) members and the purpose was to seek feedback on how the CSS process went during the last few years while developing the EA. The survey focused on the CSS Project Development phase process, not the outcome of the project. The survey questions covered multidisciplinary nature of the teams, regularity of meetings, team effectiveness, reflection of the community's qualities, collaborative discussions, project stakeholder contributions, input through the process, availability of resources, and 2-way communications.
 - i. The survey was sent to 54 participants in the previous process and sixteen responses were received. Overall, the results were 80% positive responses. Some comments suggested more 2-way conversations and more opportunities for feedback as improvements.
 - ii. Mary Jo said if anyone has suggestions on how to improve 2-way conversations and opportunities for more feedback they can email us their suggestions.
- c. Mary Jo said that based on the feedback received from the TT (Technical Team) their meetings will now be monthly and have been scheduled through June. The PLT (Project Leadership Team) will meet quarterly. The TT has met twice and the PLT once. The first SWEEP ITF meeting was Monday, January 25th.
- d. Revisions suggested for the PLT, TT & ITF membership have been incorporated.
- e. The design team is starting to work on the first projects for the INFRA Grant.

3. INFRA (Infrastructure for Rebuilding America) Grant Project Scope

- a. Karen said the overall project is estimated to be \$700M. CDOT was awarded a grant for \$60.7M. Including CDOT matching funds, the first phase is \$140M for design and construction. The reason we chose the scope shown is we want to optimize safety and operations in the eastbound direction.
 - i. A third lane will be added from eastbound MP 185-190 and increasing the inside shoulder from four-feet to six-feet and the outside shoulder to ten-feet.
 - ii. Glare screen barriers will be installed on both the east and westbound medians where they are at the same level.
 - iii. Installing six wildlife underpasses and fencing. The fencing will connect with the bridge at MP 185 and extend up to the top of the pass.
 - iv. The recreation trail will be relocated below or further away from I-70 from MP 185 – MP 187 to make room for the eastbound third lane.

- v. Because of the high crash rates at the curves at westbound MP 188 and MP 186, the curves will be smoothed to meet current geometry standards to meet driver expectations and increasing the inside shoulder from four-feet to six-feet.
- vi. The bridge at Eastbound MP 185 is in poor condition and is Bridge Enterprise eligible so it will be reconstructed. This is where the auxiliary lane and shoulder widening begins.
- vii. Straightening out the lower truck ramp at westbound MP 182 to meet current truck ramp standards. The current ramp is curved, and many trucks have a hard time accessing it in time and tip over on the highway.
- viii. Installing signage improvements throughout the corridor including a variable speed limit system.
- ix. Installing an automated highway closure system at the bottom and top of the pass with overhead signage and a push-button gate.
- x. Due to the large number of spinouts at MP 184,, we are researching an anti-icing system for the eastbound bridge.

4. Overall Project Design and Construction Schedule

- a. Karen said the project will be using the CMGC (Construction Manager/General Contractor) method. The grant commitment is to start construction this summer of the first package. The first construction package being designed are the highway closure system, and the lower truck ramp reconstruction. The remaining three construction projects are to be determined later.
 - i. The first INFRA construction package will start this summer with a minor project. There is also a scheduled maintenance paving project that will be going on at the same time.
 - ii. The heavy construction will be done between 2022-2024.
 - iii. Karen said the I-70 CSS process with the TT, PLT and ITF is going to be very busy in the first half of this year. The PLT, TT & ITFs will continue to meet throughout construction.
 - iv. Design will be completed by the end of 2022 and construction will be done by the end of 2024.
 - v. The contractor is onboard now to give feedback on the projects and will most likely be chosen to construct the various projects.

5. CSS Process

- a. Mary Jo explained we are now in Life Cycle Phase 3 of the CSS Process: Project Design. This phase will ensure the mitigation commitments are incorporated. The CSS process will continue through design and construction.
- b. The CSS 6 Steps during this Phase remain the same as the other phases but look a little different:



1. Define the Actions (Defined in the EA/Mitigation)
 2. Endorse Process (by TT & PLT)
 3. Establish Criteria (with ITF methodology)
 4. Develop Options (ITF may or may not develop)
 5. Evaluate Options (ITF and TT recommendations)
 6. Document (Environmental Mitigation Tracking)
- c. Mary Jo noted there may be options for some of the ITFs on some of the design but there may only be one because the outcome was decided in the EA. If there are options, the ITF feedback will be taken to the TT.
- d. Mary Jo reviewed the different ITFs and how closely one impacts another. The TT will take the recommendations from the ITFs and find the best balance between them.
- i. 106 / Aesthetics - Design exceptions/Rec Trail/SWEEP/ALIVE
 - ii. SWEEP - Aesthetics/ALIVE
 - iii. ALIVE - Aesthetics/SWEEP
 - iv. Recreation Trail - Aesthetics
 - v. Design Exceptions – Aesthetics
- e. An Emergency Services ITF Meeting will be scheduled in the next few months.
1. Greg Hall said aesthetics was not addressed in the EA, so he feels we are somewhere in between Life Cycle Phase 2 (Project Development) and Phase 3 (Project Design) and there may be some aesthetic options suggested as we progress through Phase 3.
 - i. Mary Jo stated that another meeting of this ITF has been scheduled for March to give you a chance to review the Aesthetic Guidelines that will be used for the truck ramp, so it doesn't hold up the design process.
 - ii. Karen said it is important to remember there are I-70 Corridor CSS Aesthetic Guidelines that are the baseline for what we are trying to do. and the purpose of this ITF is to adjust those guidelines as needed to be Vail Pass specific because of the historic context of the Pass. We have a strong base to work from. We are developing a plan to lay out the framework for the guidelines and prioritizing sections to continue to move the design forward.

6. EA Commitments Related to Section 106

- a. Diane said since this is the first time many have seen her, she wanted to give a little background about herself. She said she has been a landscape architect for 38 years and has spent much of her career focused on transportation projects and many historic highway projects and main street projects such as Idaho Springs, St. Elmo and Breckenridge. She said she also worked on the No Name and Hanging Lake rest areas and trails. Diane also introduced Patti Steinholtz, Jacobs' practice lead for Visual Resources. They have been working together on Visual Assessments for

almost a decade. Erin Kraft is a relatively new member of the Jacobs family and she is working with them on Aesthetic Guidance.

- b. Diane outlined the Section 106 Aesthetic commitments that CDOT is bound to adhere to the mitigation measures laid out in the FONSI and the Programmatic Agreement:
 - i. Creation of an Aesthetic ITF
 - ii. Develop Aesthetic Guidance built on the Crest of the Rockies and other I-70 aesthetic guidance
 - iii. Incorporate Historic Context information of features contributing to the Vail Pass Historic District
 - iv. Design new and rehabilitate existing features in the historic district to honor the original design to the extent possible
 - v. Submit the Aesthetic Guidance to SHPO and the consulting parties for review and comment and hold a meeting to review
 - vi. Submit the Design Plans to SHPO and the consulting parties for review and comment

7. EA Commitments Related to Aesthetic Guidelines

- a. Diane said there are impact mitigation commitments for geological, soil resources, vegetation, and endangered species. The commitments include:
 - i. “Minimize slope excavation of the undisturbed slopes and follow natural topography and slope angle when new cuts are constructed.”
 - ii. “Use excavation and landscaping techniques, such as slope rounding, terracing, and seeding to establish vegetation to minimize soil loss.”
 - iii. “Avoid disturbance of native trees, shrubs, and vegetation to the extent possible. When disturbance is unavoidable, replace native and non-native species with native species....Blend the vegetation with existing vegetation...mimic surrounding native plant densities. Revegetate all disturbed areas with native grass and forb species. Apply seed, mulch, and mulch tackifier in phases throughout construction.”
 - iv. To encourage Canadian lynx to use the new wildlife underpasses, locations such as the chain-up locations will: “Ensure that permanent lighting is ‘dark sky’ compliant and shines only on the area(s) that need to be illuminated.

8. Review Proposed Methodology and Governing Aesthetic Guidelines

- a. Diane said the Aesthetic process will be used for future West Vail Pass projects.
- b. Development of the Aesthetic Guidance will happen concurrently with the early design of the INFRA Grant projects.
 - i. Step One was to review all the relevant documents developed during the PEIS and EA process.
 - ii. We are now asking for your feedback on this methodology and the outline of the Aesthetic Guidance document.



- iii. Diane said they are developing the guidance and concentrating first on the structures and features that are currently be designed for the INFRA Grant project. She noted that about three weeks ago the designers were given a preview of the Aesthetic Guidance. They had concerns about the truck ramp because of the walls and landscaping. Historic context was another concern of the designers. They will refine their design with the first draft of the Aesthetic Guidance document.
- iv. The full draft document will be provided to this ITF, the consulting parties and SHPO in April and June for review and comment.

9. Review Proposed Methodology and Governing Aesthetic Guidelines

- a. Diane reviewed the list of the documents the team has reviewed that influence the Aesthetic Guideline document.
- b. The background and history of Vail Pass documents give us information on the structures and contributing features that were part of the original project:
 - i. Historic Context: Vail Pass Segment of I-70
 - ii. Secretary of Interior – National Parks Service Guidelines for Rehabilitating Cultural Landscape Circulation
 - iii. West Vail Pass – Draft 3rd Supplement to I-70 Section 106 Programmatic Agreement (PA)
 - iv. I-70 in a Mountain Environment: Vail Pass, Colorado (1970s)
- c. The EA documents include the impacts and mitigation commitments:
 - i. The I-70 West Vail Pass Auxiliary Lane EA and Section 4(f) Evaluation
 - ii. EA Tech Report A-7 – Historic Resources Documentation
 - iii. EA Tech Report A-17 Visual Impact Assessment (VA)
- d. Finally, the background Aesthetic Guidance documents previously prepared during the PEIS:
 - i. Crest of the Rockies Aesthetic Guidance
 - ii. I-70 Mountain Corridor Design Criteria
 - iii. Top of Vail Pass – Area of Special Attention (ASA) Report
- e. Diane noted that some of the guidance in the Crest of the Rockies does not apply to West Vail Pass and will not be included in the new Aesthetic Guidelines. They will add guidelines relating to the historic context and features of the Pass.
- f. Diane said the overarching approach to the design are:
 - i. “...honor the aesthetic of the original design in the new design...”
 - ii. Minimize impacts to the environment
 - iii. The guidance will include, but is not limited to aesthetic treatments for structures, materials, colors, planting, site grading forms, and maintenance recommendations.



- g. Diane stated these are the contributing features identified in the Historic Context Report that were part of the original project:
- i. Bridges
 - ii. Walls
 - iii. Truck pull-out lanes
 - iv. Wildlife underpasses
 - v. Landscape
 - vi. Signage
 - vii. Road alignment and shoulders
 - viii. Retaining walls
 - ix. Culverts
 - x. Landscape features
 - xi. Recreation path
 - xii. Runaway truck ramp
 - xiii. Median walls
- h. Diane noted the ITF received a more robust Aesthetic Guidance outline in the information packet sent out last week and hope that everyone has had a chance to review it. For today's meeting, she is just presenting a condensed version of the outline:
- i. Aesthetic Guidelines Purpose and Application
 - ii. Background
 - iii. History of I-70 over Vail Pass
 - iv. Aesthetic Guidance
 - v. Sources (as noted above)
 - vi. Design Strategies include:
 - Bridges
 - Retaining Walls
 - Roadway medians /guardrails/barriers/edge delineation
 - Recreation path
 - Signs
 - Runaway truck ramps
 - Earthwork, embankment, restoration of disturbed areas, cut and fill slopes
 - Rock cuts
 - Wildlife underpasses and fencing
 - Landscape planting, revegetation, and topsoil management
 - Landscape features
 - Color selection and consistency
 - Hydrological and water quality features
 - Sound attenuation
 - Community interface features
 - Lighting and illumination
 - Utilities in the corridor
 - Construction material management

- Truck chain-up station
 - Maintenance yard and building
- i. Diane then showed an example of what the Aesthetic Guidance will look like. This bridge example was given to the designers to give them a preview of what to expect for the twenty features. Each will include prescriptive measures and design strategies for how to honor the design and achieve the mitigation commitments. For consistency, the Vail Pass Aesthetic Guidance will look similar to the Crest of the Rockies Aesthetic Guidance.
 - j. Mary Jo pointed out the Aesthetic Guidance document will have footnotes for which source the guidance came from.
 1. Greg inquired if there was an easy way to find all these documents?
 - i. Karen said most of them are on the CDOT website and we will put together a list of links and send it out to the ITF and include in these meeting minutes.
 - ii. Lisa said the Historic Context Report and Site Form should be at the top of everyone's reading list as it will give you a better understanding of why Vail Pass is significant.
 - k. Mary Jo inquired if we have missed anything, if there were additional comments or concerns and what do you want to ensure we accomplish with the Aesthetic Guidelines?
 1. Greg Hall inquired if sound attenuation is different than sound mitigation, is it truly a sound wall instead of a berm? Landscaping would be preferable than a wall.
 - i. The guidelines will address both, but the mitigation only defines a sound wall.
 2. Greg asked if wetlands are included in Hydrological and Water Quality, live streams and is existing vegetation different than landscape planting?
 - i. Diane said wetlands and water quality, sediment ponds and highway drains underneath or part of a wildlife crossings will be included in the Aesthetic Guidance because they need to be designed to fit the natural environment.
 - ii. Jim noted that there are commitments in the FONSI to minimize and avoid wetland impacts as much as we can. Where there are unavoidable impacts, there are commitments to mitigate on-site and they would be included in the design strategy reviews.
 3. Greg inquired if bridges need to be replaced or lengthened in the future, how will you balance Aesthetics with the project's timeline and budget?
 - i. Karen said the guidelines are being drafted in parallel with some initial design for the truck ramp and highway closure system. We are planning



to come back to you at the March 1st meeting to present the draft guidelines for those items that will be in the first construction package. The remainder of the guidelines will be finished in late spring and the rest of the project will not get to 30% design until September. She also noted we have mitigation commitments that are not flexible, and we have to honor the historic character of the Pass.

4. Todd asked if design exception allowances been put in place and is the criteria outlined anywhere?
 - i. Mary Jo noted there is I-70 CSS Engineering Design Criteria and I-70 CSS Aesthetic Guidance and asked Todd if his question is about design criteria where there would be a design exception, or is it related to aesthetics? Todd replied his question is regarding aesthetics.
 - ii. Karen said the Vail Pass Aesthetic Guidelines just like the I-70 CSS Guidelines would be implemented like the I-70 CSS Aesthetic Guidelines across the corridor. These are guidelines and not requirements. Since our project is historic, there are contributing features, and some are required to be implemented. She pointed out the footnotes in the I-70 Vail Pass guidelines are important because it will indicate which ones need to be done because they are part of the historic mitigation. We will strive to attain the i-70 Vail Pass guidelines, but they may not be attainable.
 - iii. Mary Jo explained Aesthetic Guidelines do not require a Design Exception. The I-70 CSS Engineering Design Criteria (*The Engineering Design Guideline for the I-70 Mountain Corridor*) was done during the PEIS because the team recognized there needed to be corridor wide design criteria. These include things that are looked at early in the design process such as wall heights and placement. Variation from the I-70 CSS Design Criteria would require a design exception. There is a prescribed methodology for requesting a design exception.
5. Greg commented that since Aesthetics wasn't addressed in the EA there are now guidelines instead of requirements. Design Exceptions may be more palatable if there was more emphasis on aesthetics.
 - i. Jim said a lot of the I-70 CSS Engineering Design Exceptions associated with this project were identified in the EA process. If something is identified during design as not meeting the design criteria and needs a design exception, it would still have to go through an aesthetics review to ensure we are meeting the 106 mitigation commitments. There are also aesthetic guidelines that are optional, but each design element will be looked at closely and making sure the guidelines are being applied to meet the overarching aesthetic goals.
 - ii. Jim reminded the group the mitigation commitment is a requirement: construction of all new structures and features including bridges, and



retaining walls will honor the scale, mass, materials, and workmanship to the extent possible.

- iii. Karen said that majority of the design elements in the project will have to follow the commitment.
6. Tom said including wildlife fencing could possibly be considered an adverse effect because it is adding a new feature.
- i. Lisa said the entire historic district has been identified as having an adverse effect due to the overall project and that is why we are doing mitigation under 106 PA and 4(f) which are separate from the EA.
 - ii. John reminded the group the purpose of the project is to improve safety and operations by implementing the new features but still honor the historic context.
 - iii. John said the wildlife fencing is a great example of the application of a new safety feature. The EA committed to installing wildlife fencing because 5.4% of the crashes on Vail Pass are wildlife/vehicle collisions. We're still in the early design but there will be a balance in locating the fencing for wildlife safety and ease of maintenance as well as aesthetics.
7. Greg inquired if the choice was between ease of maintenance or aesthetics for the wildlife fencing, would maintenance be more important?
- i. Mary Jo said that will be determined and we will continue to try to strike a balance moving forward.
- l. Mary Jo reminded the group the purpose of this ITF is primarily to guide the development of the Aesthetic Guidelines to support the overarching goals of the project. Items like the fencing will have lots of elements which will overlap with other ITFs and feedback on balancing the overlaps will be made by the TT.
- m. Karen said they are starting to look at the walls for the truck ramp and are evaluating the aesthetics and what makes the dominant visual features of the walls special and how and where the new walls can be placed to minimize impacts to the environment. This will be the main topic for the March 1st meeting.
- n. The group discussed that it's important to share that we are in the very beginning of design, but it is starting to occur concurrently. Mary Jo noted that people may fear now that the design is underway, it will be designed in the fastest and cheapest way to build it without considering aesthetics or design exceptions. She assured the group this will not happen because building it cheaper is not a valid justification given our commitments. The caveat is we may not get everything we want because there has to be a balance.
- o. Lisa noted this project is unique because the entire project is the historic resource. We usually don't have projects where we are in the historic resource.

8. Shannon asked if there are any plans for interpretive signs at the top of the pass to explain the history.
 - i. Lisa said there is a separate project for the Vail Pass rest area. This project has a mitigation commitment to add a sign at the Vail Pass rest area.
9. Lisa asked Mitch if he was comfortable with the approach laid out at today's meeting for the 106/Aesthetic Guidance?
 - i. Mitch concurred everything looked good so far. He also encouraged the ITF to read the Historic Context Report to have a better understanding of what makes the area historic.
 - ii. Lisa said we won't be able to replace everything in kind so that will make it a little more challenging to determine the best way to honor the way the Pass was originally constructed.
10. Greg inquired if the Vail Pass Rest Area project needs to abide by the Historic Context Report.
 - i. Lisa said she is working on that project. It is being managed by Property Management. They are reconstructing the building and changing the parking. It will be evaluated under the State Register Act which is less rigorous than federal regulations, but they are trying to honor the same sort of guidelines that were put into the original construction. They are looking at view sheds too. There will be consultation with SHPO and interested parties.

10. CSS Schedule

- a. Mary Jo said this ITF was originally scheduled to meet in February, April, and June. We would like to have a meeting March 1st to get input from you on a portion of the Aesthetic Guidelines that will need to be applied as the Truck Ramp design is finalized. This will be a chance for you to see where the Aesthetic Guidelines are headed and a good time to address any concerns you may have. The decision on whether to have the April and June meetings will be made after the March meeting.

11. . Next Steps

- a. Mary Jo outlined the next steps:
 - i. The first round of most ITF meetings will be completed in February
 - ii. TT meets again in February after 1st ITF meetings completed
 - iii. Review the ITF progress
 - iv. Assess overlap among the ITF work
 - Technical Experts develop solutions based on methodology presented
 - Design proceeds
 - 106/Aesthetics ITF meeting in March: Review specific sections of the Guidance
 - v. ITF meetings to present recommendations



1. Greg asked are the technical experts who develop the solutions the ITF Technical Experts or the designers?
 - i. Mary Jo said the technical experts are specific to the ITFs. They have developed their methodology and shared the process and how you will be involved. They will be looking at solutions based on your input of their methodology. In this case, the technical experts are Diane and her team and they are developing solutions and talking with the designers to help them understand what methodology is available now.
 - ii. Mary Jo said the next meeting will give the ITF sections of the draft guidelines to react to.

12. Links for Historical Documents

Colorado Department of Highways. 1978. *I-70 in a Mountain Environment, Vail Pass Colorado*. FHWA-TS-78-208. (will be added to website soon)

Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT). 2020. *I-70 West Vail Pass Auxiliary Lanes Environmental Assessment Appendix A17: Visual Impact Assessment*. March. Prepared by David Evans and Associates, Inc.

https://www.codot.gov/projects/i70westvailauxiliarylanes/assets/ea/appendix-a-supporting-technical-documents/appendix-a17_visual-impact-assessment.pdf.

I-70 West Vail Pass Auxiliary Lanes Environmental Assessment Appendix A7: Historic Resources Documentation. August. Prepared by Mead & Hunt, 2019

https://www.codot.gov/projects/i70westvailauxiliarylanes/assets/ea/appendix-a-supporting-technical-documents/appendix-a7_historic-resources-documentation.pdf

Historic Context Vail Pass Segment of Interstate Highway 70. June. Prepared by Mead & Hunt, 2019 <https://codot.gov/programs/environmental/archaeology-and-history/assets/documents/vail-pass-historic-context.pdf>

Top of Vail Pass - Area of Special Attention Report Crest of the Rockies, Draft. February, 2011 <https://winter.codot.gov/projects/contextsensitivesolutions/assets-1/docs/aesthetics/areas-of-special-attention/crest-asa-top-of-vail-pass.pdf>.

I-70 Mountain Corridor Design Criteria

<https://www.codot.gov/projects/contextsensitivesolutions/assets-1/docs/aesthetics/engineering-design-criteria-and-illustration>.

Crest of the Rockies Design Segment Aesthetic Guidance Index

<https://www.codot.gov/projects/contextsensitivesolutions/assets-1/docs/aesthetics/aesthetics-design-segment-guidance/110331-crest-of-the-rockies.pdf>