



MEETING NOTES

PROJECT:	21685 I-70 West Vail Pass Auxiliary Lanes
PURPOSE:	Recreation Issue Task Force Meeting #1
DATE HELD:	November 6, 2018
LOCATION:	Avon Public Library, 200 Benchmark Road, Avon, CO 81620
ATTENDING:	John Kronholm, Project Manager, CDOT Region 3 Karen Berdoulay, Resident Engineer, CDOT Region 3 Scott Jones, Colorado Snowmobile Association Dick Cleveland, Vail Community Kevin Sharkey, Eagle County Trails Matt Klien, US Forest Service Robert Rodriguez, US Forest Service Ben Bartosz, Vail Pass Task Force Steve Patel, Nova Guides & Vail Pass Task Force Alan Clubb, CDOT Special Events Shannon Anderson, Bicycle Colorado Paula Peterson, US Forest Service Greg Caretto, Nova Guides Lee Moosburger, Colorado Mountain Club Kara Swanson, Consultant Environmental Task Lead, David Evans and Associates Hannah Polow, Transportation Planner, David Evans and Associates Tyler Bowman, Wood Matt Figgs, CDOT Region 3
COPIES:	Attendees

Actions items are shown in italic bold

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION:

1. Introductions

- a. The group did introductions for the first Recreation Issue Task Force (ITF) meeting for the West Vail Pass Auxiliary Lanes project.

2. Agenda

- a. Kara discussed the agenda for today as well as the goals for today’s meeting which is to provide ITF members with an understanding of the project to date, gather feedback on proposed trail alignments, and discuss other recreational area design option considerations.

3. Project Background and Overview

- a. Kara gave a background of the project. This is Tier 2 NEPA project from the I-70 Mountain Corridor Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) which identified auxiliary lanes for West Vail Pass from Mile Markers (MM) 180-190.
- b. She then discussed what this project has done to as part of the Environmental Assessment (EA) that is being worked on. The Project Team has developed Core Values and a vision for the corridor which the Project Team refers back to when



making decisions, a project Purpose & Need, alternative screening criteria, draft alternatives, conducted Level 1 screening (where the draft preferred alternative was identified of auxiliary lanes with full shoulders with curve and ITS improvements), conducted a Project Team design workshop, conducted an on-site trail survey, and met with the US Forest Service (USFS) to discuss the draft proposed recommended alternative.

- i. She discussed that the Project Team only conducted Level 1 screening because only 1 alternative made it through the screening process, so Level 2 screening was not needed. The Project Team has then moved into working through different design options to refine the recommended alternative
 - ii. She added that the USFS is a cooperating agency for this EA as 80% of the project is on Forest Service property through the Highway Easement Deed
 - iii. She pointed to the project website for meeting minutes and more information on the background and progress of the project to date
 1. <https://www.codot.gov/projects/I-70-West-Vail-Auxiliary-Lanes>
- c. Kara spoke to the Purpose & Need of the project which is to improve the safety and operations on Eastbound (EB) & Westbound (WB) I-70 on West Vail Pass. She also pointed to some of the specific issues seen on the pass that have led to developing this project.

4. ITF Responsibilities

- a. John stated that later in the presentation there will be a discussion regarding the winter recreation on the pass. There is also an upcoming CDOT/USFS meeting, and then a subsequent meeting with the winter recreation stakeholders on November 16th to discuss the issues that Scott has brought up to the Project Team regarding winter recreation
- b. Kara spoke to the roles and responsibilities of the ITF for this project. The ITF's role is to work through elements of the identified issue and then provide recommendations to be taken to the Project Leadership Team (PLT), Technical Team (TT), and Project Team
 - i. The ITF is comprised of experts for the specific issue being discussed at that particular ITF meeting.
 - ii. She also pointed out that the ultimate decision making on the project resides with CDOT and FHWA
- c. Kara added that the trail concepts and the discussion held today will be presented to the wildlife (ALIVE) and water quality (SWEEP) ITFs as those issues are involved with any trail relocation work

5. Trail Survey Results

- a. Hannah presented the results of the on-site bike trail survey that was conducted on 8/25/18 at the west trailhead for the Vail Pass Recreation Path. She highlighted a



few of the biggest findings from that survey, but then pointed to the entire survey results which were provided to the ITF in the handouts.

- i. She highlighted the user demographics (where they were from and what they use the trail for). Most people were from in state and most use it for cycling. Some users use the trail for other purposes such as walking
 - ii. She pointed to the reasons users like the existing trail which include the scenery and ease of access, as well as what improvements users would like to see which include moving the trail away from I-70, having a physical separation from I-70, more sediment removal, and a wider trail and/or passing lanes.
- b. Hannah then summarized the statements from the trail user survey as well as the TT and USFS meetings regarding the trail. She pointed out that many of the comments received may conflict with each other (i.e. don't move closer to Black Gore Creek but move further away from I-70), so compromises and solutions will need to be formulated within these various constraints
- i. Shannon asked if users commented on the number of guides who drop people at the top of the pass and what the reaction was
 1. Hannah said yes there were responses on this and the responses were mixed. Many were excited for the extra users and the economic benefit of these users, but others were worried about those users not following the rules of the trails and creating dangerous situations
 2. Shannon asked if extra educational signage for bike ethics were installed, who would do that
 - a. Karen replied that CDOT may be able to do that but would have to work with the USFS on it
 - b. Robert added that the USFS has those types of signs in different areas and the project could look at doing something similar to that
 - ii. Shannon then asked if there were any comments on e-bikes
 1. Hannah stated that there were no comments, but the survey group did see some e-bikes on the trail during the survey
 2. John added that while there were no specific comments, there were general comments on differential speeds and the safety hazard created by that issue
 3. Paula said that on per the current Eagle/Holy Cross District travel management plan, motorized vehicles are not allowed in this area so e-bikes aren't supposed to be on this section of trail. It doesn't matter whether it's an electric motor on a bike, the trail would have to designate that as motorized to allow e-bikes



4. Alan responded that the trail was originally built with highway user funds, so with that type of funding e-bikes have a right to be on the trail. There will need to be a discussion on whether those e-bikes are allowed in the future
 5. Kevin added that the e-bike issue is very difficult. The ECO Trail committee has been discussing it and there are tough implications of keeping them off the trail. The project may need to look at solutions for allowing them as it is hard to enforce a ban of e-bikes
- iii. Ben asked the Project Team if they have been able to estimate an annual usage of the trail
1. Hannah replied yes, and it is represented in the survey handout on page 4. Most people use it in the summer and a breakdown is provided
 2. Karen added that CDOT also has data from a previous count that has the overall use of the trail. This older data shows 39,000 annual users with a max daily use of 3,500. ***The Project Team will provide the exact counts and dates of those counts to the ITF members.***
 3. Ben surmised that there is similar, if not higher use of the winter recreation area at the top of the pass in the winter months

6. Trail Alignments Review

- a. Tyler spoke to the section of trail that is being realigned as part of this project. This is only for the section of trail that is being impacted by the roadway widening as the Purpose & Need of the project is not to re-do the trail.
- b. Tyler stated that the Project Team has looked at some options for what to do with the 2-miles of path that are being relocated from about MM 185.5 to 187.5. The proposed alignments have been initially designed at 10 feet wide.
 - i. Three options have initially been developed by the Project Team and those alignments are included in the handouts to the ITF. Option 1 stays close to the realigned I-70, Option 2 crosses onto either side of Black Gore Creek and is close to I-70 in some areas and on the opposite site of Black Gore Creek for others, and Option 3 stays south of Black Gore Creek except for 2 crossing locations.
- c. The Project Team presented a table of pros and cons of each of those alignments as well as design and safety criteria that are part of those options as compared to the existing trail
 - i. Tyler presented design details for all 3 alignments vs. the existing trail. All 3 options have flatter overall grades than existing, but still some steep sections



1. Shannon pointed out that all three options are steeper than the steepest part of the existing trail and asked how long those sections are
 2. Tyler replied that while this is true, it is only for a shorter distance (only 300-400 feet). The existing trail is extra steep for about 1500 feet
- ii. Tyler presented on the design details regarding retaining walls. He noted that there is only one existing wall today. With the proposed wider roadway, there will need to be additional walls for all three options. The largest amount of square footage of wall exists with Option 1, while the most amount of walls exists with Option 2.
1. John added that fill walls are required for all three options which would create a drop-off over the trail. Those walls would require a barrier for the safety of the users
 2. Paula noted that a trail that has a barrier rides narrower due to the shy distance users have to that barrier
- iii. Tyler presented on the wildlife concerns for the different alignments. Option 1 would be very similar to what currently exists on the trail, while Option 3 would have the largest impacts to wildlife due to the trail being between wildlife and their water source at Black Gore Creek, as well as walls next to the trail
- iv. Tyler then presented on the potential for creek impacts for each option. He explained that the USFS requested the trail stay 100 feet away from Black Gore Creek.
1. For Option 1, there are no crossings of Black Gore Creek and 2,000 feet of path within 100 feet of Black Gore Creek
 2. For Option 2, there are four crossings of Black Gore Creek and 2,700 feet of path within 100 feet of the creek. This option can also eliminate the existing Polk Creek crossing prior to the trail crossing underneath I-70.
 3. For Option 3, there are two crossings of Black Gore Creek and 1,250 feet of path within 100 feet of the creek. This option will also be able to eliminate the existing Polk Creek crossing prior to crossing underneath I-70.
 4. Shannon stated that she felt while there are creek crossings with Option 2 & Option 3, the view for the users would be much better than next to the interstate
 5. Kevin asked to talk about the geometry of Option 1 where it crosses underneath I-70 as it appears to be a sharp curve that is very close to Black Gore Creek



- a. Tyler state that the Project Team could tweak that alignment to provide more sight distance around the sharp curve
 - b. John pointed the ITF group to the trail alignment handout for an example of what the trail would look like for the different options in relation to I-70 and Black Gore Creek as some of the walls are shown
 - c. Shannon asked if Option 3 is more impactful than the other alignments?
 - i. Tyler replied that yes it is as that option would move the entire 2 miles of bike path south of Black Gore Creek.
- v. John stated that the goal for today's meeting would be to walk away with the concepts for the design of the trail to move forward, as well as to receive feedback on what factors may be the most important to consider in the final alignment. The Project Team will have to weigh wildlife concerns, creek impacts, user experience, etc., in order to make a final decision on the alignment of the relocated trail segment.
1. Shannon stated that the Project Team will also have to consider noise due to the trail's proximity to I-70. When the trail is close to traffic, it is hard to hear due to the noise and become a safety concern to users
 - a. Tyler pointed out that the proposed trail alignments next to I-70 are set lower than the roadway so the rider would be below the grade of the interstate and there wouldn't be as much noise
 - b. Ben pointed out this would be similar to the Glenwood Canyon bike trail
 2. Kevin added that if the trail is far enough below I-70, it could be a very nice user experience if the rider can't see I-70 traffic and have a lot of the noise blocked. The Project Team could define a minimum change in elevation from I-70 to the trail to keep that positive user experience
 - a. The Project Team agreed this could be a good concept
 3. Shannon stated that the Team will have to consider the width of the trail and the shy distance if there is a wall on one side and a rail on the other
 - a. Kevin added that there is a 3 foot shy distance standard from walls or barriers for ECO Trails. Two feet may have to be reasonable for this case due to the amount of impacts and cost. The trail is heavily used so having a wider path would



- be a huge benefit to this section, especially with differential speeds and the increasing popularity of e-bikes
- i. Tyler replied that the Project Team has looked at doing some stretches of 14-foot wide trail
 - b. Alan added that with the heavy use of the trail, the wider platform would better accommodate the special events and varying user groups. He feels that people would be happier with a wider trail
 - c. Scott commented that the wider and flatter the trail is made, the more desirable this section could be for winter use. No one uses it currently as it is right next to I-70 in several sections. Moving it below I-70 could present a significant recreational opportunity
 - d. John added that the USFS doesn't officially close the trail in the winter
 - e. Dick commented that it's just impractical and dangerous to use the current trail in the winter as it's right next to I-70. He hopes to see the new alignment closed still in the winter due to the impacts to wildlife that increased use would bring
4. Dick then stated that the Project Team needs to consider maintenance with whatever alignment is designed and make sure that the erosion of the slope and trail that takes place today does not take place in the future
 5. Paula mentioned that in the current USFS travel management plan, mountain bikes are restricted from May 21 to Nov 22 on the Eagle/Holy Cross Ranger District, so fat tire bikes would not be allowed during winter months. Winter fat tire biking still needs to be analyzed for the district. To consider a change to the existing travel management plan, an EA would need to be done.
 6. Dick stated that he has never noticed any snowmobile use on this path and asked the group if they felt the same way
 - a. Ben replied has seen snowmobile use, but it is very rare.
 - b. Scott added that it is not a very desirable area to use a snowmobile
 - c. Paula commented that this area is not open to winter motorized use
 - d. Karen asked the ITF if users could cross country ski
 - i. Paula replied that it is allowed and many people do
 - e. John asked if the trail became more friendly to winter recreation users, what activities would be allowed



- a. Shannon replied that she would like to see data or studies that show what impacts Option 2 & Option 3 would have to wildlife
- b. Kara added that in this area there is limited wildlife connectivity due to no bridges existing on the interstate. With the discussions of more wildlife permeability being added to the interstate as part of this project, the Team will need to present these alignments to ALIVE to get their feedback on how these relate to those potential crossings
- c. Scott added that there is a difference in a wildlife barrier presented by a path on a flat grade versus a wall on the trail
- d. Karen asked Dick to clarify if he was more concerned about the barriers to wildlife or if making the trail more user friendly would increase the use of the path and impact wildlife
 - i. Dick replied that he is concerned about both scenarios.
 - ii. John stated that the initial major wildlife crossing locations the Project Team is looking at are outside of the location of this path relocation for the most part. Walls between Black Gore Creek and I-70 would be less of an impact to wildlife as that barrier is already in place and major structures could help with making sure any alignment doesn't become a bigger impact to the wildlife.
 - iii. Matt K added that this discussion shows why it is so important to take the trail alignments to ALIVE and SWEEP groups to answer some of these questions in order to help the Project Team make informed decisions. This is important to the USFS as a cooperating agency on this EA
 - iv. Karen comment that the Team was going to have the different specialists at this ITF, but was requested to bring the alignment of the trail to the ALIVE and SWEEP groups so ITF members didn't have to go to multiple meetings. She added that it is great to hear these different concerns and viewpoints from this group as it is what the Project Team was hoping to hear to make an informed decision
- e. Scott stated that from a purely recreational standpoint, Option 2 or Option 3 are the best. Is that the best solution to the trail alignment though? He was not sure as that still



needs to be considered after talking to the other specialists. If wildlife is not using these areas now, he surmised the public could gain recreational experience in this area. But if there is a lot of wildlife, that would be the bigger concern than opening more areas to recreation.

- iii. Karen asked the ITF group if there was any other information they needed to go back to their stakeholders to review the different alignments. The Project Team will add the locations of proposed walls for the trail to the plans and send back out to the group
 1. Paula replied that a typical photo or mockup of what a wall might look like next to the trail would be beneficial
 - a. John stated that the Project Team can look for a similar section of trail that has wall and handrail
 2. Kevin would like to see some more typical sections throughout the corridor
- iv. Tyler then presented a 3D model of the three alignments to the ITF group which better showed the cuts and fills and walls for the alignment options
 1. Alan asked what the widths are of the alignments were as shown
 - a. Tyler replied that it is 10 feet wide with 1 foot shoulder and 2 foot buffer from any walls
 - b. Alan then asked if there were any constraints from preventing the path from being wider
 - i. John replied that cost is a big consideration
 - ii. Karen added that there are other impacts like deforestation that could be constraints
 2. Ben commented that while it doesn't make a difference in the summer, there are some areas where Option 3 goes through that are in mapped avalanche paths where there have been deaths before. If this area is used in the winter, that has to be considered
 3. John added that if the path is between Black Gore Creek and I-70, the user experience could be impacted in areas with the rider next to walls and rail, but there could be a better user experience with Option 2 & Option 3. Those options would have the biggest impacts however.
- v. Kara asked for any other opinions on the trail from the ITF group
 1. Ben asked if there is a potential elevation change of the interstate through the narrows



- a. Tyler responded that the Project Team has tried to keep the elevation of the road generally the same for constructability and to lessen the broader impacts of a flatter alignment
 2. Ben asked if there is an opportunity to have a path similar to Glenwood Canyon where the interstate overhangs the path rather than just next to a vertical wall
 - a. Karen replied that there are opportunities the Project Team can look at, but there also challenges with more snow on West Vail Pass and potential sedimentation issues
 3. Ben asked for a 10-foot wide finished path, how much width of forest would have to be cut to accommodate the trail
 - a. Tyler replied that probably 14-16 feet would be needed to allow for a shoulder on each side of the trail. The design option table handout does have a linear feet of impact to forested areas, so someone could multiply that by this width for a total area of impact
- e. Kara said the Project Team will send out updated plan sheets to the ITF, the comparison table with some adjustments to present more information based on today's meeting and send that out. The Project Team then requests that the ITF members use that additional info to provide comments
 - i. Karen stated that the Project Team will also present the minutes from the ALIVE and SWEEP ITFs to this group
 - ii. Shannon asked when the summary of all the comments on the trail be presented
 1. Kara replied that they would be presented at Technical Team Meeting #8 which is not scheduled yet, but will probably be held in February
 - iii. Shannon asked when this project would be built
 1. Karen stated that there is no identified construction funding for this project at this time. The project is included on both Proposition 109 & 110 lists for a portion of the total construction funding, so if either one of those pass there will be construction funding. The construction project would not start for a few years even in this scenario as the EA would need to be completed and design would need to take place
 - iv. Paula stated that there are other recreation considerations in this area including the Two Elks Trail. The Forest Service is also working with the Air Force on replacing a bridge on the Two Elks Trail in 2021. Air Force Academy engineering students are working on designing several bridges for the USFS in different areas in the state. The USFS would need access for that project, so it is something for the Project Team to be aware of.



1. She added that the USFS also has the Gore Creek campground that is on the reservation system and is the highest occupancy campground on the Eagle/Holy Cross district. This campground can be reserved nearly a year in advance. Planning for any impacts or closures to this campground would have to be done well in advance for reservation considerations and for the concessionaire that operates that campground.
2. Kara mentioned the presentation will get to other recreational considerations later on

7. Vail Pass Winter Recreation Area

- a. John stated the Project Team is meeting with the USFS tomorrow (11/7/18) to discuss the concerns of the winter recreation area that Scott has brought up. The Team will then have a meeting with the USFS, Scott, and Ben to talk through these concerns more
 - i. Scott wanted to add that the Project Team needs to look at potential increased winter demand in an area that is already limited with finite resources
 - ii. Paula added that there is not much parking at both end of the trails and that should be looked at as well
 - iii. Scott stated that he is more comfortable putting fat tire bikes on paved trails rather than groomed backcountry snowmobile trails
 1. John asked if fat tire bikes use groomed trails
 2. Ben replied that yes they do, even though it's not allowed on the White River National Forest
 - iv. Tyler added that the Project Team is looking at different locations to drop the 3rd lane EB at the top of the pass due to concerns expressed on adding more traffic to the MM 190 exit where there are already circulation issues
- b. John presented the concept to expand the truck parking on EB I-70 at MM 189 to accommodate more trucks. This could help with the congestion issue at the Rest Area exit by removing trucks from that area as they would use this parking location rather than the rest area
 - i. Scott agreed that this idea makes a lot of sense. There would need some signage to inform truckers that the parking is available well in advance of the location. He is concerned though that project could build the best parking lot ever, but the congestion issue at the MM 190 exit would not go away.

8. Additional Recreational Considerations

- a. Tyler presented some comments received from the TT, USFS, and Stakeholder meetings on additional recreation considerations



- i. Karen stated that hunters and other users park on the shoulder of I-70 currently to access National Forest lands. This is an illegal practice and the Team would not consider that use for the design of this project
- ii. Alan asked what the rough construction schedule for this project was. He added that there are 6 or 7 major rides (with 2000+ riders) that use this trail annually so a lot of coordination will be needed to accommodate these rides? The USFS also has information on those major rides that can be provided
 1. Kara replied that the Project Team doesn't know the construction schedule at this time as there is no construction funding at this time. The Team can work those major ride considerations into the EA for mitigation measures though
 2. Karen added that the Project Team is trying to minimize closures to the trail. The Team will know more about impacts to the trail once an alignment is finalized as constructability options are different for each option. This work is likely an early part of the project in order to move the trail prior to moving the roadway
 3. Tyler stated that constructability was a consideration in the alignments that were developed
- iii. Shannon asked if the trail has to be open at all times or if that was just a project goal
 1. Kara replied that this falls under a Section 4f evaluation. That requirement doesn't say you can't close the trail, but there are a lot of factors that go into that decision. The Project Team is working with FHWA on this, but there are still a lot of other stakeholders to consider with this decision
 2. John reiterated the Project Team's goal to keep the trail open as much as possible with whatever alignment is selected
- iv. Matt K stated that it will be important to the USFS to have as much advanced notice as possible and stated that any closures don't just have impacts on individual recreation users, but real impacts to businesses that operate and use the pass from a recreation standpoint
 1. John replied that this is a detail that the Project Team will definitely coordinate moving forward once construction funds are received
 2. Kevin added that he feels he can already tell a magnitude of relative construction impacts for each alignment, and asked if the Project Team could add that to the table that is sent out to this groups as well as present to the other ITF groups
 3. Paula added that closures also don't prevent users from coming but pushes them to other locations that may be at or near capacity already



- v. Paula then added that the USFS also has outfitter guides that lead pack trips to Deluge and Gore Creek trails that use the trailhead off of Bighorn Road, so closures would impact those businesses as well. These are also access trails to the Eagles Nest Wilderness. She stated it is even more reason why the Project Team will need to continue to coordinate with the USFS as schedules and impacts evolve
 - 1. She stated that there is also a pro bike race that uses the path to the cul-de-sac before it crosses under I-70 in the past. There are also other foot races (marathons, ½ marathons, GoPro Games, etc.) that use the path that will need to be considered.

9. Schedule and Next Steps

- a. Kara presented the next steps on the trail alignment
 - i. The Project Team will refine the design over the next 3 months based on the TT and ITF feedback received. CDOT and FHWA will make the final design decisions that will be analyzed in the EA.
 - ii. She asked that any additional comments be received by November 23rd and can be sent to the project's email address
 - 1. John added that the Project Team will always accept comments, but is asking for that deadline to move forward