

Alternatives

What alternatives are CDOT considering?

Nine potential solutions were identified by participants at public meetings and meetings with local agency staff. These potential solutions were evaluated by CDOT's project team and used to develop two preliminary build alternative themes. The two build alternatives and the mandatory "no-build" (sometimes referred to as "existing plus committed") alternative were presented at the public meeting in November 2005.

The first alternative is the "**no-build**" alternative, which is required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This alternative includes only improvements to the existing roadway that already have been approved for funding by CDOT, local government entities, or private sources. This alternative does not include any improvements that increase the capacity of the highway.

The **Midland Expressway** alternative emphasizes access to local neighborhoods and destinations between the Manitou Avenue interchange and I-25. It would continue to provide for regional travel to and from the mountains, but would give preference to local traffic with lower speeds on US 24 West.

The Midland Expressway alternative expands the highway to six lanes from Manitou Avenue to 26th Street, and to eight lanes between 26th Street and I-25. Access would be provided by intersections at all current cross-streets, and interchanges at Manitou Avenue and I-25/8th Street. One design option being considered would include an interchange at 21st St. instead of an intersection. The posted speed on US 24 would be 40-45 mph.

A transit service package is included in this alternative with express bus service for the commuter market and existing bus service or a future historic trolley for the local and tourist markets. The alternative will be designed to accommodate transit where possible, and preserve the ability to implement future transit service options. Bike and pedestrian facilities, extensions, or improvements would be provided to meet localized corridor needs.

The third alternative is the **US 24 Freeway**. This alternative emphasizes regional mobility between Colorado Springs and the mountains. It would serve local traffic from grade-separated interchanges and would give preference to regional travel with higher speeds on US 24 West.

The US 24 Freeway alternative expands the highway to six lanes from 21st Street to I-25. Access would be provided by interchanges or overpasses at major cross-streets. The posted speed on US 24 would be 50-55 mph.

The transit package for this alternative is the same as in the Midland Expressway alternative.

Who will make the final decision?

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) makes the final decision based on a recommendation from the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT). CDOT's recommendation is the culmination of an inclusive process involving not only the technical aspects of environmental impacts and traffic engineering, but also stakeholder involvement from cities and counties, the business community, residents and corridor users.

Who is paying for the study?

FHWA and CDOT are paying for the study with highway user tax dollars. Construction monies to build any recommended improvements have not been identified or appropriated. Completing the EA puts the project in line for future funding when it becomes available.

What is an Environmental Assessment (EA)?

The project is an Environmental Assessment (EA) of the US 24 Corridor from Manitou Springs to Interstate 25. The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), on behalf of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the lead federal agency, asks for the assistance and opinions of other state and federal agencies, the general public and local governments to participate in the project throughout its development.

An EA is a comprehensive study that evaluates potential impacts, both positive and negative, of alternative actions under consideration. The EA will help agency officials decide which project alternative to approve based on the environmental consequences of each alternative developed.

The information and opinions, along with technical data relating to the use and functions of the US 24 highway, are used to prepare a problem statement called the Purpose and Need, which steers the work for the remainder of the project. Once the Purpose and Need is developed and reviewed by the public, FHWA and CDOT, the team sets out to solve the problems by developing alternatives. These alternatives are evaluated against their ability to solve the problems or to meet the project Purpose and Need.

The team is conducting an EA to ascertain if the impacts of improving US 24 are significant or not. The EA will describe the existing environment, identify environmental consequences of the selected alternative, and recommend mitigation strategies to avoid, minimize and compensate for those consequences.

The EA is completed when CDOT publishes a decision document. If the proposed action will not cause significant impacts after implementing mitigation measures, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is issued. If the EA indicates significant impacts that cannot be mitigated will occur from the proposed action, the decision document will recommend preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).