



## Southern Mountain Loop Highway 12 Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study



### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Collaborative Planning Process Kicks-off for Road and Trail Improvement Options on Colorado's Scenic Highway of Legends Designed to Spur Tourism**

Southeastern Colorado – The South Central Council of Governments (SCCOG) and the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) are developing options for transportation improvements on Colorado's Scenic Highway of Legends (SHOL) Byway which stretches roughly 82 miles on the corridor between Walsenburg and Trinidad along US 160 and CO 12. This corridor has additionally been identified as the Southern Mountain Loop (SML) of the Colorado Front Range Trail (CFRT) - a planned multi-purpose trail from Wyoming to New Mexico along the Front Range.

“While tourism has had a positive impact to date, our two-county tourism economy has lagged behind other regions within the state,” said Walt Boulden, Executive Director of South Central Council of Governments. “A renewed vision and investment plan for the Corridor, entailing highway safety, bicycle/recreational trail, and byway-related infrastructure improvements, can be a driving force in realizing the full potential of our region.”

The improvement options are being developed through the SML Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study which will produce a comprehensive investment plan to serve visitors and all users. It will integrate highway safety with bicycle/recreational trail and byway-related improvements. This project will work with community stakeholders from Trinidad to Walsenburg to analyze and develop a range of improvements resulting in a blueprint for developing highway safety improvements. The corridor is a primary trail route so the study will also look at the best locations to access other existing hiking and bicycle trails, and will include byway-related tourism improvements. The study will take a closer look at issues that need to be addressed in the course of creating a biking and hiking path along the Corridor.

The public is invited to participate in coffee chats and public open houses over the next 16 months. A public open house meeting is planned to occur this summer before development of study recommendations.

Sign up to receive project information and notices of public open houses by sending an email to [SouthernMountainLoop@gmail.com](mailto:SouthernMountainLoop@gmail.com) or call 719-427-1078. Information will be posted to <https://www.colorado.gov/sccog> in the near future.

# Southern Mountain Loop

Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study

# Final PEL Study Report

July 2020 (DRAFT)



Prepared for:

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## Executive Summary

The Southern Mountain Loop PEL Study, sponsored by the South Central Council of Governments (SCCOG) and the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), has produced a long-term master plan of projects for safety, multi-purpose trail and traveler amenity improvements along the Scenic Highway of Legends Byway located in Colorado's Spanish Peaks Country. Developed in coordination with agencies and communities along the byway, this plan enables CDOT and local agencies to build the plan's projects over time as funding is available. Upon completion, these improvements will fulfill the byway's transportation needs, promote the region, and protect the qualities important to both local residents and visitors to the region.



*The Scenic Highway of Legends Byway is located in the heart of Spanish Peaks Country between Walsenburg and Trinidad, Colorado.*

The Spanish Peaks Country in Southern Colorado is a land of legends and natural wonders. Just as in years long past, people today are drawn to the region for sightseeing and outdoor recreation.

Bearing this legacy, the Scenic Highway of Legends Byway (SHOL), extending from Walsenburg to Trinidad, traverses around the Spanish Peaks over Cucharas Pass and is the primary means of accessing the historical mountain communities and wilderness areas. For many visitors, the byway is also the principal means of experiencing the backcountry. But as a narrow two-lane rural highway, the byway has vehicular safety concerns and does not safely accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists or connect them to the numerous recreational areas and amenities.

Recognizing the scenic, historic and natural qualities of the byway, the Colorado Parks and Wildlife has identified it as the preferred route for a planned multi-use trail extending from Wyoming to New Mexico. As a part of the Colorado Front Range Trail (CFRT), this envisioned trail segment is called the Southern Mountain Loop (SML).

The Southern Mountain Loop Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study is the convergence of these transportation needs and opportunities. Its purpose is to improve safety and provide the SML trail along the byway between Walsenburg and Trinidad (i.e., the Corridor). Through technical and environmental analyses, supported by robust agency and public engagement, it provides an integrated master plan of recommended improvements. This plan provides an overall framework, with guidance and next step actions, for advancing the projects towards construction. With funding, the framework provides the basis for the subsequent more detailed environmental studies, analyses and engineering designs.



## Project Recommendations

The study identified the byway's transportation-related needs and opportunities for the improved safety and accommodation of travelers and recreationalists who live in and visit the region. Based on these needs and through a two-level alternatives evaluation and screening process, a master plan of integrated improvements was recommended. The study's goals of improving safety for all travelers, providing a well-connected multi-use trail, preserving and promoting the region's natural environment and communities, and complementing the byway's continued development provided the basis for these recommendations. This master plan includes:



**Highway Safety Projects** - A program of corridor-wide safety projects entailing upgraded signage and pavement treatments; wider and continuous roadway shoulders; safer roadway alignments and roadside treatments in several local areas; and safer pedestrian crossings within La Veta, Cuchara and Stonewall.



**Multi-use Trail Projects** - A selective and narrow range of trail alternatives to be studied further either fully along the byway or along new routes independent of the byway in local areas. These local off-highway trail alternative routes are along existing railroads, within the San Isabel National Forest, or along portions of the byway too steep to accommodate all bicyclists and pedestrians.



**Byway Amenity Projects** - A program of new or improved byway features including scenic pull-offs, visitor centers with restrooms and traveler information, and interpretive signage to enhance the byway experience for travelers and visitors.

### Trail Alternatives for More Detailed Study:

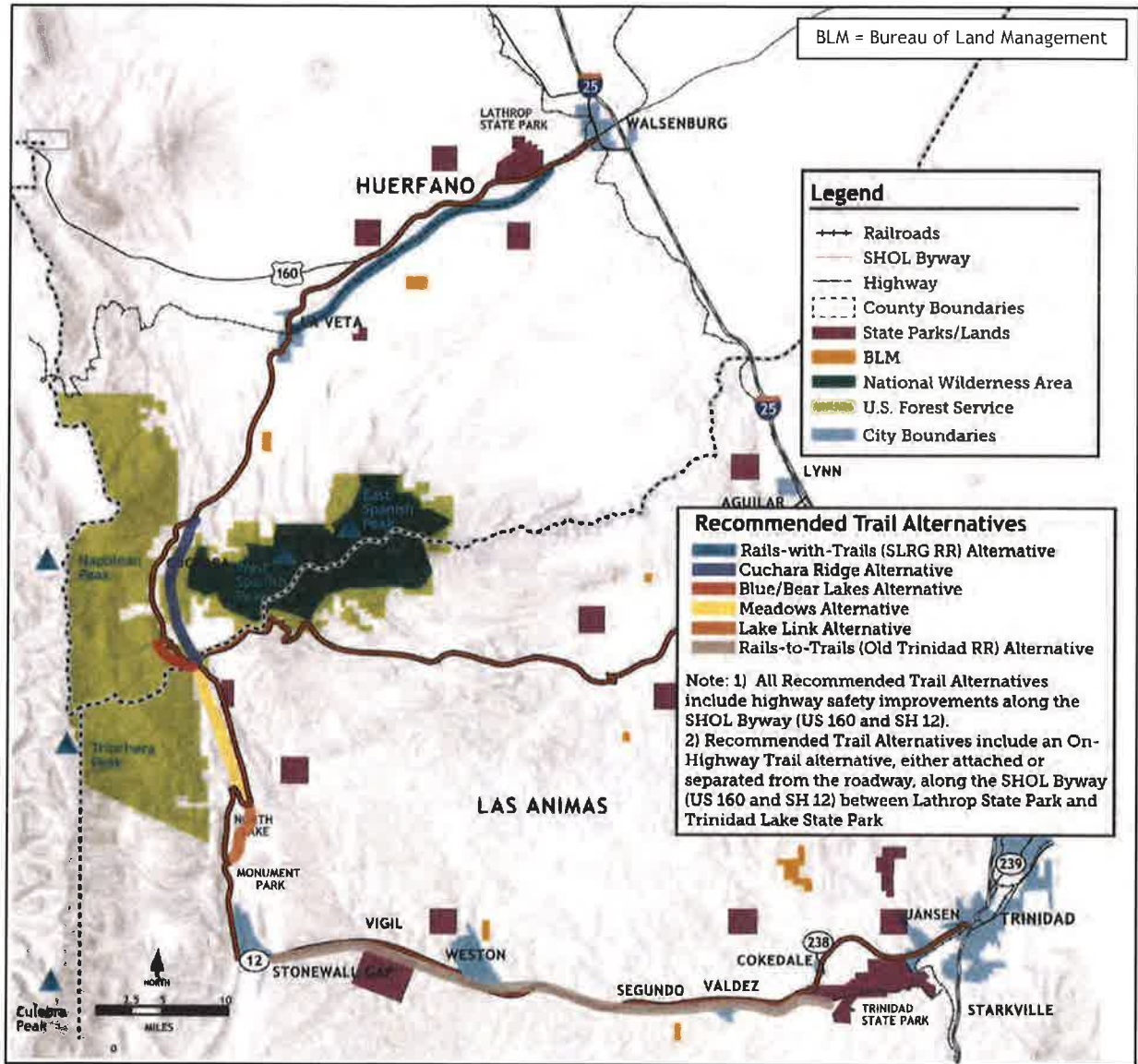
- **No-Build** - Maintain the Corridor in its existing configuration.
- **On-Highway Trail (Attached)** - Provide trail accommodations attached to the byway shoulders, in addition to the shoulder widening, as necessary, for highway safety.
- **On-Highway Trail (Separated)** - Provide a bi-directional trail along the byway separated from the roadway and within the existing CDOT right-of-way.
- **Off-Highway Trail** - Provide a bi-directional trail on an alignment separate from and independent of the byway and existing CDOT right-of-way, including:
  - Rails-with-Trails (San Luis & Rio Grande Railroad) Alternative
  - Cuchara Ridge Alternative
  - Blue/Bear Lakes Alternative
  - Meadows Alternative
  - Lake Link Alternative
  - Rails-to-Trails (Old Trinidad Railroad) Alternative

All trail improvement concepts include a common set of highway safety, byway amenity and technology improvements.



*The recommended trail improvements accommodate all abilities and provide new opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy and experience the Spanish Peaks Country.*





### Community and Agency Coordination

Essential to an effective and meaningful action plan is the engagement and support of those affected by and responsible for its implementation. Towards this end, at the outset, an engagement plan was defined to meaningfully receive and incorporate input from all involved. Multiple project teams and working groups were convened including a Study Steering Committee and a Technical/Stakeholder Committee. Committee engagement included the review and comment of study materials and workshops to identify and evaluate potential trail

### Agency and Public Involvement At-a-Glance:

- **Study Steering Committee** - Four meetings with 12 members
- **Study Technical/ Stakeholder Committee** - Four meetings with roughly 75 members
- **Factsheets/eNewsletters** - Published and released four times
- **Events** - Two public meetings, multiple coffee chats and several one-on-one meetings
- **Project Database Contacts** - 410

alternatives. External public communications included stakeholder and public meetings, small informal meetings (coffee chats) and one-on-one meetings. Communication aids supporting and increasing public awareness included: eNewsletters, factsheets and posters (English and Spanish), mailings, posters, postcards, media relations and press releases, a study website, social media tools, and a study email database. As a result, the study's recommendations reflect the values and issues important to both agencies and the local communities.

## Purpose and Need

**Purpose of Study:** To improve highway safety and provide a regional and local multi-use trail, completing the SML segment of the CFRT, along the Scenic Highway of Legends Byway between Walsenburg and Trinidad.

### Needs:

- Reduce wild animal crashes (37 percent of crashes)
- Reduce lane departure crashes
- Reduce areas of high rear-end crashes
- Improve bicycling safety along the byway
- Improve pedestrian crossing safety in La Veta, Cuchara and Stonewall
- Provide accommodations for a multi-use trail along the Corridor
- Connect the amenities with a multi-use trail along the Corridor

The Purpose and Need defines the transportation-related needs within the Corridor and provided the basis for the study's recommendations. It also reflects the broader goals of the region and the communities along the Corridor. While the study's principle purpose is transportation related, the benefits of transportation investments can merge with other independent economic development strategies to accomplish additional and broader regional goals. A renewed vision and improvement plan for the byway, as recommended by the study, can be a driving force and catalyst in realizing the full potential of the region's existing and planned tourism-related assets and fulfilling the region's goals of economic sustainability and vibrancy.

## Environmental Resources Considerations

The existing natural and manmade environment was an important consideration in the evaluation of alternatives. Study recommendations include the future consideration of these resources during the implementation of the recommended projects and further study of the trail alternatives. Moving forward, continued environmental review and agency coordination will ensure that future projects protect the resources that are important to the byway's communities and local residents.

## Implementation Plan

Funding is the key trigger for advancing the recommended projects. However, due to funding limitations, all projects cannot move forward at once. A strategic and itemized approach to delivery is needed - one based on individual project priorities identified through partnerships and by leveraging available opportunities. With this approach, the full build-out of the recommended projects can be accomplished over time while providing incremental benefits to the region as each project is completed.

### Project Implementation:

- **Independent and Integrated** - All projects need to have independent function and purpose, while still being integrated and coordinated with one another.
- **Priorities** - Projects need to be phased logically to address the greatest needs, provide the highest benefits, and connect with one another sequentially.
- **Trail Oversight** - A coordinated approach between all partnering agencies is needed to fund, build, operate and maintain the trail improvements.



Engagement and coordination with the public and local communities will continue to be integral to delivering the recommended projects. The PEL Study is not the final opportunity for local stakeholders to provide input and be engaged. It is the first step in a series of future public involvement opportunities.



*Implementing the PEL Study project recommendations will include additional opportunities for public input and engagement.*

Continued coordination and partnerships with all sponsoring and cooperating agencies will be necessary for securing funding, advancing the projects into planning or design, and maintaining the improvements. It is envisioned that each project, in varying degrees, will entail multi-agency coordination and funding. The next steps would entail:



**Highway Safety Projects** - Under CDOT's leadership, as funding is identified and regional priorities allow, safety projects can move forward into design. Each project would be coordinated with the trail alternatives. In addition to other considerations, which projects advance first could depend on where the safety benefits would be the greatest.



**Multi-use Trail Projects** - Through regional coordination, as funding is secured, additional, more-detailed local planning and environmental studies can be performed for the trail alternatives. Which study moves forward first will depend on the partnerships, the sources and amount of funding, and connecting the trail to communities and byway attractions.



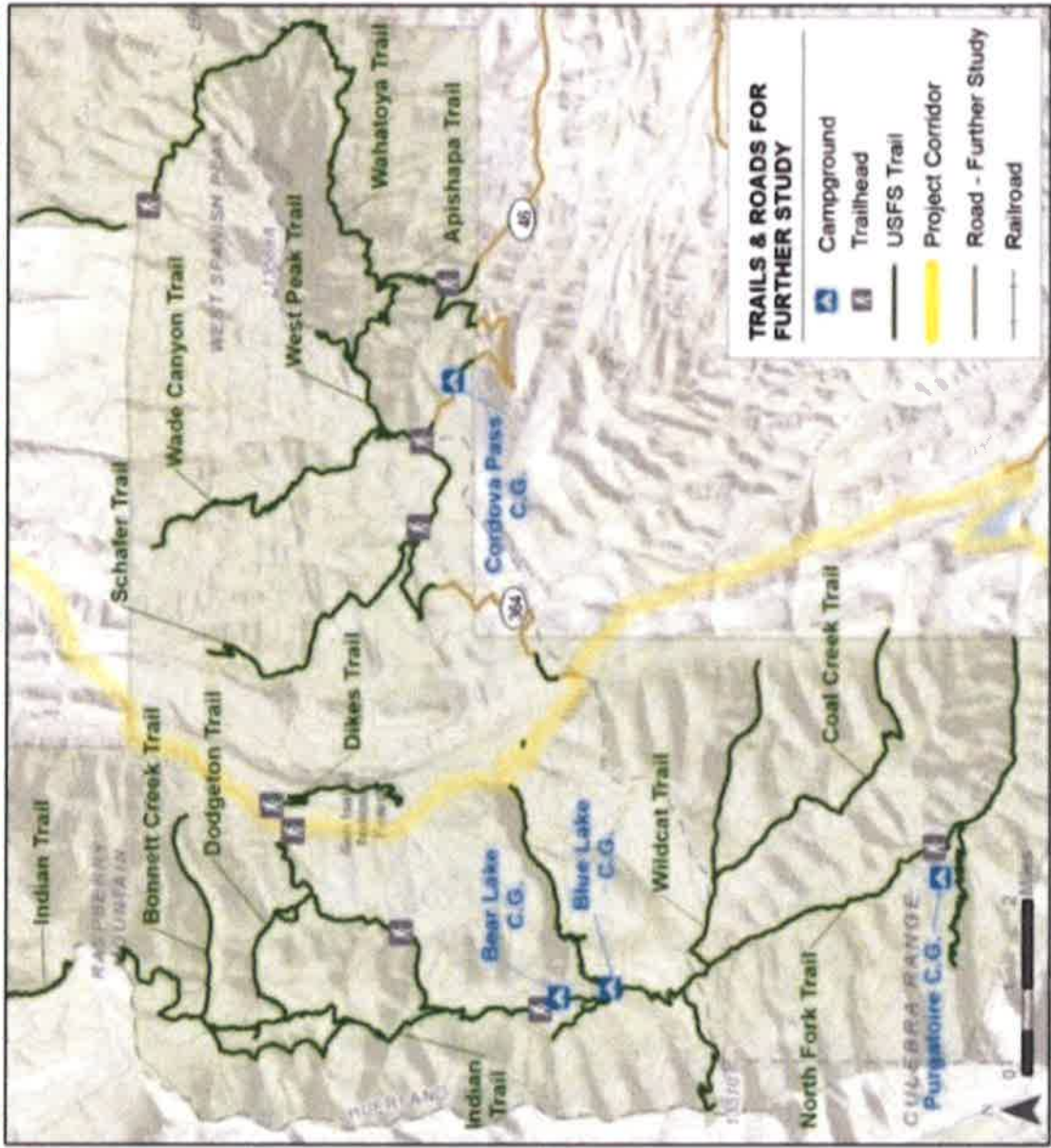
**Byway Amenity Projects** - Led by the Byway Board in coordination with CDOT and others, as funding is secured, individual projects can move forward into design and construction. Byway projects should be prioritized based on incrementally improving the traveler's experience as they are built.



*The recommended trail improvements for more detailed study include On-Highway (Attached or Separated) and multiple Off-Highway Trail Alternatives.*



**Figure 2: Trails, Trailheads, and Campgrounds within the San Isabel National Forest**





### *Byway Amenity Facilities*

There are a number of existing cultural, heritage and eco-tourism amenity facilities along and associated with the byway which attract visitors to the region. These amenities are designed and intended to promote and support the byway travel experience. These facilities include multiple scenic pull-off areas with kiosks and other interpretive signage or related displays associated with other adjacent publically-accessed facilities. Other amenity sites, in partnerships with the local communities and other agencies, include museums and visitor centers, such as at the state parks. Combined with pamphlets and maps, these facilities provide opportunities for travellers to learn about the history of the region as they drive the byway.



*Located at Cucharas Pass, the John B. Farley Memorial Overlook provides visitors scenic views of the Spanish Peaks and the Sangre de Cristo Mountain Range to the west.*

It is important to note however, that the status of the New Elk Mine is uncertain. It may become operational again and ownership has indicated that, if so, resumption of rail operations between the mine and Trinidad would occur. Should the mine reopen, the abandoned railbed would be reclaimed, the rail infrastructure would be reconstructed, and rail operations would commence, making the conceptual use of the old railroad as a trail infeasible.

The status of the mine's operations and ownership's intent relating to the railbed should continue to be monitored following this study. Should ownership not reopen the mine and elect to abandon the former railroad right-of-way and use rights, it is recommended that a rails-to-trails conversion be pursued with the Surface Transportation Board. This would entail coordination and cooperation with other property owners along the railroad right-of-way. This alternative, in part or as a whole, would be contingent upon the railroad abandonment and successful coordination with all involved parties.

### Byway Amenity Recommendations

Understanding traveler characteristics is important for tailoring an amenities improvement plan that is responsive to their desires, attracts travel, and leverages the features of the byway. Surveys show that visitors to Colorado visit state and national parks and enjoy history, culture, and museums - all attributes of the byway. It is also important to understand the nature and dynamics of trip making. Critical to this dynamic is the availability and integration of traveler information and opportunities. Local resident and business owner sentiments and aspirations are also important to effectively deploying and mobilizing an amenities plan.

Significant engagement with the Corridor's stakeholders was performed in the support of the PEL Study and the investigation of the byway improvements plan. Through extensive discussions and public engagement, local stakeholders have affirmed, out of concern for the economic vitality of the region, general support for visitor-oriented improvements on the byway. Furthermore, close coordination with the Byway Governing Board was provided, including coordination with the byway's comprehensive planning.

The recommended byway amenities plan is presented in **Table 7**. Based on the noted traveler characteristics, improvement goals, the Corridor's natural and community assets, and the overarching preservation concerns of the stakeholders, these recommendations address the needs, expectations and desires of contemporary byway travelers. This plan presents a comprehensive program of improvements for new or improved infrastructure. To be integrated with the CFRT improvements, it is in concert with an overarching initiative for a renewed informational campaign and sustained operations for the byway. It is also to be coordinated with the local communities and businesses.

#### Byway Amenities Defined:

The Scenic Highway of Legends Byway is a means for travelers to experience the Spanish Peaks Country. In many respects, the byway itself is an amenity. But in addition, amenities are features or sites along the byway for travelers to be more hands-on with nature, geology and history. Features include scenic pull-offs, visitor centers and museums. Each is an opportunity, through interpretive signage and other information, for travelers to learn and engage. Each site is also an opportunity for integration with the CFRT through wayfinding signage and trail access.

As shown, a wide variety of improvements are recommended, with varying degrees of ongoing operational, maintenance and community coordination requirements, as well as joint development opportunities with the CFRT.

**Table 7: Byway Amenity Project Improvements**

Site	Feature	Location and Description	Trail Integration
<b>Vista - Walsenburg to La Veta</b>			
1	Trailhead	Lathrop State Park (Main Entrance) - Byway and CFRT maps and information	Incorporate with CFRT signage and trailhead facilities
2	Wayside Park	US 160/CR 450 - Improve existing kiosk, add picnic tables with shade and prefab toilet	None - located west of SH 12
3	Scenic Pull-off	MP 3.2 (approx.) - Improve existing pull-off for safety; add parking and three-panel kiosk	CFRT connection for On-Highway options
4	Visitor Center	La Veta (Same block as Library/Museum) - Replace existing signage, install bike self-repair and EV (electric vehicle) stations	CFRT to be located along Main Street (SH 12) in front of Visitor Center
<b>Alpine - La Veta to Vigil</b>			
5	Scenic Pull-off	Profile Rock (MP 8.7 approx.) - new pull-off for views of geologic features	CFRT connection
6	Scenic Pull-off	Devil's Staircase (MP 11.0 approx.) - improve existing pull-off with parking and new signage	CFRT connection
7	Visitor Center	Cuchara - Signage and restroom, history of community, recreation, and EV (electric vehicle) charging station	CFRT connection for On-Highway options with spur trail for Off-Highway Ridge option
8	Trailhead	Blue/Bear Lake Trailhead (Existing) - Add signage for SHOL and geology	CFRT connection for On-Highway options with spur trail for Off-Highway Ridge option
9	Scenic Pull-off	Cucharas Pass - Add wayfinding signage and regional USFS information	CFRT connection with spur trail for Farley's Overlook
10	Scenic Pull-off	North Lake (MP 29 approx.) - Refresh and improve existing kiosk; 3 new panels	CFRT connection with On-Highway options and Off-Highway Lake Link option
11	Scenic Pull-off	Monument Lake (MP 33.0 approx.) - Add signage and public access to Park facilities	CFRT connection with On-Highway options and Off-Highway Lake Link option
12	Visitor Center	Stonewall - Add Geological Education Center, restrooms, picnic area, parking and EV (electric vehicle) charging station	CFRT connection
<b>Mining - Vigil to Trinidad</b>			
13	Historic Markers	Add historical markers (coalmining, Hispano, and Native American histories)	CFRT connection for On-Highway options with historic signage for Off-Highway Rails-to-Trails option
14	Scenic Pull-off	Improve current pull-off that serves as entrance to the town of Cokedale	CFRT connection via spur trail with Trinidad Lake State Park
15	Visitor Center	Cokedale - Expand museum with better directional signage from SHOL	CFRT connection via spur trail with Trinidad Lake State Park
16	Trailhead	Trinidad Lake State Park (Main Entrance) - Byway and CFRT maps and information	Incorporate with CFRT signage and trailhead facilities
17	Rest Area	I-25 El Moro Rest Area (Existing) - Add SHOL and CFRT information and maps	None

The recommended byway amenity projects include the installation of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations in each of three communities - La Veta, Cuchara and Stonewall. For EV travelers, these stations would provide fuel assurance (freedom from “range anxiety”) and easy access to local information. For these communities, the new stations would provide expanded opportunities for local businesses to connect with travelers.



FHWA standards for EV Corridor Developments are specified in Section 1413 of the 2016 FAST Act - the current federal funding and authorization bill for surface transportation called Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act. The State of Colorado is working aggressively to accelerate the adoption of EVs to both decrease greenhouse emissions and promote more sustainable travel. The Governor's goal is 100% "renewables" by 2040 and an increase from the 29,000 EVs now on the roads of Colorado to 940,000 EVs. Currently over 1,000 EV charging stations serve the state. The Colorado Energy Office operates Charge Ahead Colorado, a program that funds 80% of construction costs for new qualifying stations. Competitive grants are awarded with priority given to applicants in three categories: work places, multifamily residences, and tourist locations (including Colorado Scenic Byways). The Colorado Tourism Office provides a tool kit on Colorado.com with EV educational materials for community decision makers. Successful participation in these programs can propel the Scenic Highway of Legends to become a part of a rapidly developing national network of EV charging stations.

### Technology Recommendations

CDOT leverages statewide planning efforts to coordinate statewide priorities for future technologies that save lives and reduce congestion. This PEL Study is an opportunity for that purpose. These opportunities for the consideration of technologies within the Study Corridor, depending on funding and other priorities within the state and region, could include:

- **Fiber Optic Cable** - If possible, in coordination with highway widening and safety improvements or on-highway trail improvements, as appropriate, CDOT should coordinate with local telecommunications providers to consider jointly constructing fiber cable along the US 160 and SH 12 right-of-way.
- **Roadway Weather Information System (RWIS)** - CDOT should evaluate opportunities to utilize sensors within the Corridor to measure weather and pavement conditions and communicate adverse weather alerts to travelers along SH 12 and within the region through roadside variable message signs or other means.

## Implementation Plan

**The Implementation Plan advances the PEL Study recommendations into action. It identifies the next steps for coordination, project identification and priorities for accomplishing the complete vision for highway safety, trail and amenity improvements along the byway. With funding being the essential trigger, it includes guidance for future funding opportunities and local trail administration.**

The PEL Study recommendations include an integrated master plan of highway safety projects, trail alternatives for more study, and byway amenity projects. However, due to funding limitations, all improvements cannot advance at once. A more strategic and itemized approach is needed to advance the projects individually, based on priorities, leading to the full build-out and completion of the study's recommendations - the Implementation Plan. Guiding this plan are overarching goals, including:

- **Independence** - While all projects need to be coordinated for consistency based on the PEL Study's recommendations, projects need to have independent function and utility. As individual projects advance into more detail study, design and construction, project-specific decisions need to avoid impacts or implications on adjoining or interrelated projects within the overall master plan.
- **Priorities** - The plan needs to provide guidance on the suggested phasing or sequencing of the individual project recommendations based on their relative, comparative merits. Qualitative analyses of the implementation goals, by project type, provide the basis for defining project priorities resulting in a logical and effective build-out of the overall master plan over time as funding is secured.
- **Prerequisites** - Underpinning the advancement of the project recommendations are two foundational prerequisites - funding and trail governance. The ability to advance the project recommendations is dependent upon funding and will require the coordination of multiple agencies with varying roles and purviews. Hand-in-hand with funding is the opportunity to organize local agency and regional oversight approaches, in coordination with other agencies, to fund, build, operate and maintain the trail improvements. A menu of coordinated funding opportunities and guidance for trail oversight is needed to guide the master plan implementation.

### Project Coordination

The PEL Study provides a master plan of recommended project improvements. It defines the overall framework of projects upon which subsequent environmental studies, analyses and engineering designs will be based. Securing funding will initiate the advancement of projects. Continued coordination and partnerships with the relevant sponsoring or cooperating agencies and the local communities will be necessary for securing the funding, advancing the projects into design development, and maintaining and operating the improvements. While guidance is provided on project priorities, which projects advance first will depend on these partnerships. Through these partnerships, when funding is identified as shown in **Figure 18**, the next steps for the projects will entail more planning, then engineering design, leading to construction.

## Byway Amenity Projects and Priorities

The recommended improvements include new or improved amenities for the byway. These improvements, or features, are consistent for each recommended trail alternative and can be implemented independently. However, whenever possible, it is desirable for the byway amenities to be developed in coordination with the highway safety improvements and the trail alternatives. At a minimum, the byway improvements should include CFRT provisions and not preclude the future addition of the trail or highway safety improvements.

Based on the byway project recommendations from the PEL Study, and upon securing the necessary funding, additional study and design development is needed for each site. Each site, or project, should be coordinated with the SHOL Comprehensive Plan (Byway Corridor Management Plan) and each can advance independent of one another. The projects should be delivered in coordination with informational, promotional and preservation activities by the byway as contained within the Byway Corridor Management Plan.

The recommended projects consist of a wide variety of improvement types, ranging from interpretive signing to new buildings with supporting public facilities. All projects require a commitment of construction funding while others require an additional sustained funding source for ongoing maintenance and operations. Projects of a similar type with lower construction costs, though geographically dispersed within the Corridor, could be bundled or packaged for procurement and construction efficiencies. Projects with higher construction costs would likely be constructed as standalone projects. Higher cost projects, such as the visitor center improvements, could be delivered in phases in coordination with the local communities as funding is secured.

Many factors will influence which byway projects would be beneficial to advance before another. The timing of the projects will depend on funding. Multiple projects can advance concurrently, based on the goals of partnering agencies and parties.

An important consideration in the phasing of the overall improvements is Wayshowing, which is a collection of signs, maps, brochures and electronic media that have been developed to aid travelers in their journey. This kind of information system is critical to travelers as they first choose a destination, then preplan their itineraries, and finally connect directly with the places and people that can help them realize the experience they have envisioned. Phasing the build-out of the improvements in a way that builds the information system in a logical sequence is important to supporting the traveler experience over time.

### Components of a Wayshowing System:

- **Entrances, Exit and Gateway Signage** - Identification of where to enter and exit a route or byway.
- **Orientation Stops** - Pull-offs, turn-outs and other places for motorists to stop to help them create, refresh and expand their mental maps of the route, its intrinsic qualities, and overarching interpretive theme with exhibits, maps and other means of communication.
- **Repetitive Route Markers** - A sequence of visual cues for motorists to follow along a route, such as the Colorado Byways sign.
- **Directional Signage to Key Destinations** - Signs that alert and guide travelers to featured stops and attractions along a specified route.
- **Portable Map** - A carry-on map of a byway corridor or travel region locating its various attractions and amenities.



To guide the prioritization of the byway projects, to be determined by the sponsoring agencies, an evaluation of the factors potentially influencing project priorities was performed. To aid the evaluation, project types were categorized and organized based on their funding and agency coordination requirements. The project categories include:

- **Category 1** - Projects which require construction funding primarily within the purview of the byway, as the sponsoring agency, with some coordination requirements with other agencies and third parties. Ongoing maintenance and operations funding would not be required or would be performed voluntarily in coordination with others. These projects typically have lower construction costs and are primarily related to the Wayshowing System, such as entrances and gateway signage, repetitive route markers, and directional signage.
- **Category 2** - Projects which require construction funding with a high degree of agency coordination and joint sponsorship. Ongoing maintenance and operations would be provided by others through interagency agreement. Includes orientation stops, pull-offs and turn-outs.
- **Category 3** - Projects which, in addition to construction funding, require an ongoing funding source for continued operations and maintenance. These projects typically have higher construction costs but could be implemented in phases to defray the full build-out costs. They include interpretive installations in conjunction with visitor centers.

Based on the project categories, an evaluation of the influencing prioritization factors was performed for each project. These include:

- **Existing Facilities** - Project is located within an existing site that could be modified or expanded to include the byway amenity. Public activities currently occur which the byway amenities would complement.
- **CFRT Integration** - Project is located at a primary or secondary CFRT gateway or staging area with opportunities to jointly share trail and byway wayfinding information and maps.
- **Visitor Information** - Project provides opportunities to present and engage the public with more in-depth historic and/or natural (including geologic) information.
- **Public Restrooms** - Project provides new restroom facilities or is located where public restroom facilities currently exist.
- **Phasing** - Project has the ability to be implemented in phases to reduce the initial capital expenditures.

**Table 12** provides a subjective evaluation of the prioritization factors for each trail project. As shown, the byway projects are organized to show the comparative benefits by category.

Table 12: Byway Amenity Project Priority Evaluation

Site	Feature	Location	Category			Existing Facilities	CFRT Integration	Visitor Info	Public Restrooms	Phasing	Average Score
			1	2	3						
1	Trailhead	Lathrop State Park	X			✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓		2.0 ✓
8	Trailhead	Blue/Bear Lake	X			✓	✓	✓	✓		0.8 ✓
10	Scenic Pull-off	North Lake	X			✓✓	✓	✓	✓		1.0 ✓
11	Scenic Pull-off	Monument Lake	X			✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓✓		1.4 ✓
13	Historic Markers	Mining Segment	X			✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	2.0 ✓
16	Trailhead	Trinidad Lake SP	X			✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓		2.2 ✓
17	Rest Area	I-25 El Moro	X			✓✓✓		✓	✓✓✓		1.4 ✓
2	Wayside Park	US 160/CR 450		X		✓✓		✓✓✓	✓	✓✓	1.6 ✓
3	Scenic Pull-off	La Veta Overview		X			✓✓	✓✓			0.8 ✓
5	Scenic Pull-off	Profile Rock		X			✓✓	✓✓			0.8 ✓
6	Scenic Pull-off	Devil's Staircase		X		✓	✓✓	✓✓			1.0 ✓
9	Scenic Pull-off	Cucharas Pass		X		✓	✓✓✓	✓			1.0 ✓
14	Scenic Pull-off	Cokedale		X		✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	2.4 ✓
4	Visitor Center	La Veta			X	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	2.8 ✓
7	Visitor Center	Cuchara			X	✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓	1.8 ✓
12	Visitor Center	Stonewall			X	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	2.2 ✓
15	Visitor Center	Cokedale			X	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	3.0 ✓

Legend: Blank = No measurable comparative benefit  
 ✓ = Minor comparative benefit  
 ✓✓ = Moderate comparative benefit  
 ✓✓✓ = High comparative benefit

As shown, the evaluation supports a short-term strategy of improvements to steadily build the quality of the overall visitor experience, first addressing the hierarchy of visitor needs (safety, information, restrooms, and visitor services). The next group of projects, in this hierarchy, would address the need to add depth and breadth to existing experiences for scenic vistas, outdoor recreation and cultural/heritage attractions. Finally, the long-term strategy would build the collection of five pull-offs and one Geology Education Center (Stonewall Visitor Center) which would be the centerpiece of the byway's future investment in highlighting the national importance of the region's geology.

The recommended phasing plan is summarized in Table 13. Current order-of-magnitude construction cost estimates for each site are included. These planning-level estimates are presented as ranges due to the high degree of uncertainties and variability of the scope of each project at this time. These estimates reflect the relative magnitude of the likely construction cost, ranging from low (less than

\$100,000) to high (more than \$1M). For the purposes of the PEL Study, these estimates are intended to provide guidance for the programming of the projects and the pursuit of funding. Additional programming, scoping and design development for each project would be needed before more precise construction cost estimates can be developed.

**Table 13: Byway Amenity Project Priorities**

Site	Feature	Location	Category			Phase				Constr. Cost (\$2020)	Description
			1	2	3	1	2	3	4		
4	Visitor Center	La Veta			X	X				< \$100,000	Welcome center signage and bike repair station - utilize existing facilities
7	Visitor Center	Cuchara			X	X				\$100,000 to \$500,000	Convert existing bldg. with restrooms and signage (outdoor interpretive panel)
12 (1)	Visitor Center	Stonewall			X	X				\$500,000 to \$1,000,000	Convert existing bldg. with restrooms and signage (initial phase)
15	Visitor Center	Cokedale			X	X				\$500,000 to \$1,000,000	Expand existing coal mining exhibits and add new exhibits at museum
1	Trailhead	Lathrop State Park	X				X			< \$100,000	Signage (3-panel kiosk)
2	Wayside Park	US 160/CR 450		X			X			\$100,000 to \$500,000	Signage (3-panel kiosk), picnic tables with shade and restrooms
13	Historic Markers	Mining Segment	X				X			< \$100,000	Four 1-panel monument markers (one per site)
14	Scenic Pull-off	Cokedale		X			X			< \$100,000	Upgrade existing signage
16	Trailhead	Trinidad Lake SP	X				X			< \$100,000	Signage (3-panel kiosk)
17	Rest Area	I-25 El Moro	X				X			< \$100,000	Topographic maps (4 ft. by 4ft.) showing SHOL and amenity sites
3	Scenic Pull-off	La Veta Overview		X				X		\$100,000 to \$500,000	Site development, paved parking and signage (3-panel kiosk)
5	Scenic Pull-off	Profile Rock		X				X		\$100,000 to \$500,000	Site development, paved parking and signage (3-panel kiosk)
6	Scenic Pull-off	Devil's Staircase		X				X		\$100,000 to \$500,000	Upgrade existing site, paved parking and new signage (3-panel kiosk)
8	Trailhead	Blue/Bear Lake	X					X		< \$100,000	Signage (3-panel kiosk)
9	Scenic Pull-off	Cucharas Pass		X				X		\$100,000 to \$500,000	Signage (3-panel kiosk) with structural pergola
10	Scenic Pull-off	North Lake	X					X		< \$100,000	Add three additional panels to existing kiosk
11	Scenic Pull-off	Monument Lake	X					X		< \$100,000	Add public access signage
12 (1)	Visitor Center	Stonewall			X				X	> \$1,000,000	New building with restrooms, geology exhibits, picnic area and parking

Note: (1) Project (Site) 12 is included twice reflecting the phasing of the project.

- **Phase 1 (Immediate Priorities)** - The four visitor centers in La Veta, Cuchara, Stonewall and Cokedale (Projects 4, 7, 12 and 15) scored at or near the highest, with all four projects needed to offer visitor information, restrooms, and CFRT integration. While each is a Category 3 project, phasing of the projects should be considered by leveraging existing facilities to reduce the initial capital costs. All can open for the summer travel season in



existing facilities (via rental or public building), and offer visitor information to a captive audience - visitors on the route whose needs are immediate.

- **Phase 2 (Gateway and Orientation Locations)** - Lathrop State Park and Trinidad Lake State Park (Projects 1 and 16) also scored high with trail connectivity with the CFRT, well maintained restrooms, and front desk staffing. Each site provides direct interactions with travelers. El Moro Rest stop on I-25 (Project 17), a CDOT facility, offers a large bank of restroom facilities, outdoor informational kiosks, and serves 25,000 visitors a month. The US 160/CR 450 Wayside Park (Project 2) in Huerfano County serves as a gateway from US 160 for eastbound traffic. The Cokedale pull-off across from the coke ovens (Project 14) can serve more formally as the gateway location for the historical towns and settlements located in the Mining Segment for traffic entering the byway from the south. This phase would also include installing Historic Markers (Project 13) within the Mining Segment. Within this group of projects, the Category 1 projects could be the higher priority due to the lower construction costs. Project 2 is currently in planning and development by Huerfano County.
- **Phase 3 (Site-Specific Locations)** - Five pull-offs that support the national importance of the geology features include the LaVeta pull-off (Project 3), Devil's Staircase (Project 6), Profile Rock (Project 5), Blue/Bear Lakes turnoff (Project 8), and Farley Overlook at Cucharas Pass (Project 9). Two additional site-specific signage project recommendations are Monument Lake and North Lake (Projects 10 and 11). Within this phase the projects consist of a mix of Category 1 and 2 projects. Due to lower construction costs, the Category 1 projects could be the higher priority.
- **Phase 4 (Geological Education Center)** - This proposed center in Stonewall (Project 12) will serve as an educational center that will interpret four geological features that define the area: the Dakota Wall, the system of Radial Dikes, the K-Pg Boundary, and the Spanish Peaks. While an initial phase of this project could be started in Phase 1, Phase 4 would entail a full build-out of this new facility.

This suggested phasing plan stimulates the growth of tourism within three mountain communities in the Alpine Section (LaVeta, Cuchara, and Stonewall) and positions Cokedale to play a much more active role in establishing a system of information for the Mining Segment. Strengthening the interface with visitors in all four of these communities and increasing the reliability of information will be key to communicating the range of activities and visitor services currently available to visitors. It stimulates new activity in both Huerfano and Las Animas Counties and requires participation from both counties as well as the individual communities. These will require investments in staffing (volunteer or paid) and maintenance of facilities. The establishment and cleaning of restrooms has been a barrier to the development of visitor centers in several of the communities, with the burden of public restrooms currently shifted to small retail establishments.

This phasing sequence also favors the expansion of facilities that are already in use and are maintained by agencies that include the USFS, CDOT, CPW, Huerfano County and Las Animas County. Long established working relationships between the byway and these partner organizations bodes well for accomplishing the planning and joint funding that will be required. Furthermore, the Board of the Scenic Highway of Legends and businesses along the byway are committed to building the infrastructure necessary to create a new focus on the geological assets of the region.