

Legislative Update

This month marks the midway point of the 120 day legislative session. Days at the capitol are filled with meetings and vigorous negotiating and politicking. Colorado Department of Transportation's (CDOT) new Executive Director, Shailen Bhatt has been engaged at the capitol in meetings and policy discussions with legislators prior to his confirmation which is anticipated at the end of the month.

As of the first of March, over 442 bills have been introduced. CDOT is tracking 40 bills with direct and indirect impact on CDOT employees and operations. CDOT's legislative agenda is strong this year. There are a few bills that the Department is running that provide cleanup language in the statutes; 1) Updating CDOT's organizational structure and, 2) Harmonizing some accounting practices at the State level.

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The newly restored Colorado Senate Chamber

Southwest Chief

The Southwest Chief is a passenger rail line that runs over 2,200 miles from Chicago to Los Angeles. The line runs through eight states including, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. Amtrak, which operates the Southwest Chief has threatened to move the line to a different route or eliminate the service if the tracks cannot be maintained to a level that provides an acceptable travel time. The tracks are owned by BNSF Railway. Preliminary estimates for repairs in Southern Colorado and Kansas are approximately \$100 million, not including on-going maintenance costs. As a result of negotiations BNSF Railway has agreed to cover the costs of maintaining newly replaced track. In addition, a partnership between Southern Colorado regional interests along with the state of Kansas secured a \$22 million TIGER grant from the Federal government to help upgrade the line from Southeastern Colorado to Topeka, Kansas. Pueblo County Commissioner Sal Pace is working to re-route the Colorado portion of the line through Pueblo in order to attract more passengers and spur local economic development. The Southwest Chief Commission created by the General Assembly last session is charged with examining potential solutions with the goal of saving the passenger service. The Colorado Department of Transportation is working with our partners on the commission along with our neighbors in Kansas and New Mexico to help find solutions to keep the line open.



The Southwest Chief map of current route and logo

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The Department is also updating the temporary license plate distribution system in Colorado. Currently temporary plates are placed on the inside of the rear windshield and there is a gap of time before a new owner's vehicle is entered into the State's licensing database resulting in a potential loss of toll revenue from automated tolling that relies on license plate data. CDOT is working with the Department of Revenue and other stakeholders to create a more durable temporary plate that fits on the rear license plate holder with an updated licensing system that reduces the information gap to hours instead of days.

In addition to CDOT's legislative agenda, there are plenty of other bills that influence the transportation sector in the state. Funding is of paramount concern this year, on the federal and state level. In Colorado, due to TABOR trigger effects, funding previously dedicated to highway projects will be reduced. CDOT continues to work with legislators and the Governor's office to search for consistent funding for infrastructure throughout the state. Other bills that expand transit lanes, prohibit red light cameras, create felony DUI charges, modify construction contracts, change state rule making, and center on specific corridor projects are all part of the larger transportation conversation this year.

Finally, the Long Bill, i.e. the annual state budget, is set for introduction in a few weeks. This involves a week of debate in the Senate and then the House before the bill is sent to the Governor for his approval. Transportation is part of the larger conversation about where excess TABOR revenues should go and how the state will be able to pay for the \$2 billion investment needed to bring our infrastructure into the 21st Century.

As always, if you have any questions about a specific bill or the department's overall legislative agenda, please review our weekly legislative memos or bill tracking report at this [link](#) or contact Andy Karsian directly at andy.karsian@state.co.us.

Winter Storms

Record breaking winter storms in February across the entire state have kept the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) very busy. For example the February statewide storms CDOT had 684 plows deployed. Here is a regional breakdown of how CDOT functions when our state is faced with major storms.

Denver Metro Area/I-70 Mountain Corridor to Tunnel/CDOT Region 1:

106 plows in the metro area and up to 54 plows available for the I-70 mountain corridor.

CDOT deploys Courtesy Patrol vehicles to help motorists along the I-25 corridor as necessary.

Southeast/CDOT Region 2 As many as 151 plows.

Northwest/CDOT Region 3 As many as 192 plows.

Northwest/CDOT Region 4 Up to 184 plows.

Southwest/CDOT Region 5 As many as 109 plows.

The public can find winter driving tips online at <http://www.coloradodot.info/travel/winter-driving>. CoTrip.org and the CDOT Mobile app offer the most up-to-date, accurate road conditions and travel information.

I-70 motorists can receive real time traffic information from a live audio stream on Saturday and Sunday mornings and afternoons during the peak traffic times, available through www.CoTrip.org and the CDOT Mobile app.

