



## January, 2020 Newsletter

### Enhancing the region's economy through a long-term infrastructure improvements plan along the Scenic Highway of Legends

In completing the Southern Mountain Loop segment of the Colorado Front Range Trail, the Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study underway seeks to balance the protection and promotion of the Spanish Peaks Country according to local community values and desires.

The purpose of this study undertaken by the South Central Council of Governments and Colorado Department of Transportation is to improve highway safety and provide a regional and local multi-use trail, completing the Southern Mountain Loop (SML) segment of the Colorado Front Range Trail, along the Scenic Highway of Legends Byway Corridor between Walsenburg and Trinidad.



### Understanding the Transportation Problems and Issues within the Corridor

A key first step in delivering transportation improvements is understanding the problems and issues needing to be solved. Specific needs and opportunities within the Corridor have been identified as follows:

- **Wild Animal Crashes** - Localized areas within the Corridor have higher concentrations of wild animal crashes.
- **Roadway Configurations** (Lane Departure Crashes) - Existing roadway configurations, including roadway shoulder widths, are inadequate and contribute to localized areas of higher lane departure crashes.

### STUDY LOCATION



*Extending from Walsenburg to Trinidad, the project Corridor traverses west around the Spanish Peaks and over Cucharas Pass, providing views of the peaks throughout.*

The 82-mile project Corridor begins on the west side of Walsenburg and extends west along US 160 to the SH 12 intersection. From the intersection with US 160, the Corridor continues south along SH 12 and passes through the town of La Veta over Cucharas Pass (elevation 9,938 feet) to the village of Stonewall, and then heads east through multiple small communities, terminating in Trinidad at Interstate 25 (I-25).

### Integrated transportation-related improvements are needed to address:

- **Safety** - Existing roadway alignments and deficient shoulder widths, combined with higher bicycle usage and localized pedestrian areas, create unsafe conditions for vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians along the Corridor.
- **Regional and Local Bicycle/Multi-Use Trail System** - The ability for bicyclists, pedestrians, and other users, both regional and local, to move through and within the Corridor is not adequately accommodated.
- **Connections and Access to Recreational Facilities** - Trail connections to local activity centers and recreational areas do not currently exist and allow for community interactions and access to a range of activity types.

### PEL STUDY SCHEDULE

- Analysis of Alternatives - October 2019 to February 2020
- Coffee Chats/Informal Meetings - January 2020

- **Transition Zones (Rear-end Crashes)** - Transition areas within the Corridor between the rural and urban-like settings have higher incident rates for rear-end crashes in some locations.
- **Bicycling Safety** - Existing roadway shoulder widths and treatments are inadequate for bicyclists.
- **Pedestrian Crossing Safety** - Existing pedestrian crossing movements in La Veta, Cuchara and Stonewall create unsafe conditions.
- **Multi-use Trail Accommodations** - There are currently no accommodations for non-motorized users, of varying abilities, to travel through and within the Corridor.
- **Multi-use Trail Connectivity** - Multi-use trail connections between the Corridor's amenities do not currently exist.

"Safety for locals and visitors is the primary concern with our study," said Walt Boulden, Executive Director of the South Central Council of Governments. "Improving safety while also providing a new trail as part of the Front Range Trail system would benefit both locals and visitors, and would further promote our region as a tourist destination."

- Stakeholder Meetings - February and May 2020
- Public Open House - May 2020

**Study Completion: Summer 2020**

### STEP 1 - Planning and Environment Linkages Study Process

An initial step of the Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study process is to identify and define the existing and anticipated conditions within the Corridor. Clearly identifying the unique transportation, environmental, natural, community and recreational qualities and characteristics of the Corridor informs the identification and assessment of the improvement alternatives. [CLICK HERE](#) to view the Existing Corridor Conditions Report that is presented for this purpose.

### Public Input Helps Identify Options



Informal Coffee Chats meetings were held in Trinidad, Stonewall, Cuchara, La Veta and Walsenburg in August. Local residents were provided opportunities to meet with the study team and share their thoughts about issues and concerns within the SML corridor.



Stakeholder meetings took place at Monument Lake Lodge September 18. An overview of the alternatives process was presented by the project team and participants collaborated in a workshop setting to identify and discuss possible alternatives. The results from this process assisted the team with improvement ideas.

Later the same day, approximately 50 community members participated in a public open house at Trinidad State College to learn more about the project and provide input about improvements and enhancements to the Corridor. Landowners and participants conveyed concerns about safety. Other participating agencies, including the Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the US Forest Service, attended the events and engaged with the public and stakeholders in discussing issues, concerns and opportunities along the Corridor.

"It was important that we received input from those who live, work and travel this Corridor," said Boulden. "Their input is helping to identify options for transportation improvements along the 82 miles of the Colorado Scenic Highway of Legends Byway between Walsenburg and Trinidad. This was a great opportunity for the public to voice their opinions and help guide this study," he said.

These public events provided meaningful opportunities for the study team to visit one-on-one with local citizens. A number of helpful comments and concerns were provided related to safety, bicycles on the roadway, the need for safety enforcement, and trail improvement ideas.

[CLICK HERE](#) to view Sept. 18 public meeting summary  
[CLICK HERE](#) to view Sept. 18 public meeting PowerPoint presentation  
[CLICK HERE](#) to view Sept. 18 public meeting presentation boards

### WHAT IS A PEL STUDY?

- Planning-level study for transportation issues and environmental concerns along a corridor.
- Decision-making tool for "projects".
- Enables CDOT and local agencies to advance projects into next steps based on priorities and funding.
- Next steps would include funding, NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) Studies, public meetings, design, and permitting, before construction of a project could begin.

### COLORADO FRONT RANGE TRAIL AND LOCAL TRAIL PLANNING

#### CFRT by the Numbers



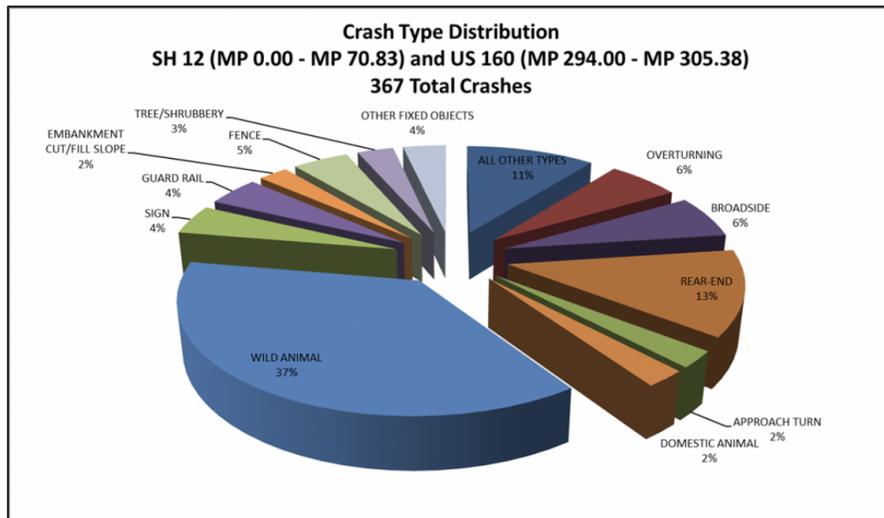
295 Miles of **Completed** Trail  
 93 Miles of **Planned** Trail  
 488 Miles of **Envisioned** Trail

**At Completion:** 876 Trail Miles with 110 Trailheads

Source: Colorado Department of Natural Resources, <https://cdnr.us/#/trail/trail1>

In 2003, Colorado State Parks, with the support of the citizens of Colorado and stakeholders, initiated the Colorado Front Range Trail (CFRT) to promote and connect the Front Range communities and recreational assets. Upon completion, the CFRT will be an 876-mile shared-use trail that stretches from Wyoming to New Mexico along Colorado's Front Range, providing a continuous connection between population centers and existing and planned trail systems. It will serve as a key non-motorized linkage between communities, landscapes, parks and open space, recreation attractions, and other points of interest along the Front Range. As such, it will be an important recreational and transportation resource and will support Colorado's tourism, heritage, health and economy. The CFRT Master Plan and Implementation Plan were completed by Colorado State Parks in 2007.

## Existing Conditions in the Corridor



Existing conditions analysis indicates that traffic volumes along the byway are typical for rural highways and the existing roadway has sufficient capacity to serve both existing and future traffic. Current and projected traffic operational issues within the Corridor are primarily related to safety.

Review of the five-year crash history reveals that the Corridor's safety is generally typical of similar rural highways within Colorado. However, while not extraordinary, there are localized areas of higher crash concentrations. Locations where these crashes typically occur are where there are opportunities to improve the highway's safety. A summary of the existing safety and transportation conditions within the Corridor is as follows:

### Wild Animal Crashes

Thirty seven percent of crashes within the Corridor are caused by wild animals. This is the highest crash type within the Corridor. High incident areas include: vicinity of the Walsenburg Reservoir and Lathrop State Park; Cucharas River crossing north of La Veta; Purgatoire River crossing east of Weston; and the Reilly Canyon and Carpios Canyon areas near Trinidad Lake State Park.

### Roadway Configurations (Lane Departure Crashes)

Vehicles leaving the travel lanes can be caused by a combination of factors, including roadway alignment, pavement edge condition, shoulder width, signage and others. These crashes can result in collisions with cut slopes, guard rail, fencing, trees, and other adjacent fixed objects.

In general, the lack of shoulders or insufficient shoulder width can be primary contributors to these crashes throughout the Corridor. A majority of the Corridor has no or very narrow roadway shoulders. In addition, higher concentration areas of lane departure crashes identified in the analysis include:

- Sharp curve just southeast of North Lake.
- A roughly one-mile section near the intersection with County Road 21.6 near Vigil.
- A roughly two-mile section near Segundo.

### Transition Zones (Rear-end Crashes)

Urban areas and transitional zones between rural and urban settings have higher incidence rates for rear-end crashes due to higher traffic volumes and a higher number of access points. Specifically, areas with the highest rate of rear-end crashes include: near and west of Walsenburg; within the Community of Jansen; and within the City of Trinidad at the Santa Fe and Main Street intersection.

### Bicycling Safety

With its beautiful scenery, challenging grades and historic communities, the byway is a popular destination for long-distance recreational cycling. Bicycles are considered vehicles under Colorado vehicle code and are permitted on all segments of the byway. However, there are no designated bicycle facilities (i.e., standard, buffered, or protected bike lanes). Existing shoulder configurations, widths and pavement markings, are inadequate for bicycle use, creating unsafe conditions. There are sporadically placed "Share the Road" signs along the Corridor.

### Pedestrian Crossing Safety

Based on stakeholder comments and observations, existing pedestrian movements posing safety concerns occur in La Veta, Cucharas, and Stonewall. At each of these locations,

This Master Plan envisions the CFRT being located along the Scenic Highway of Legends Byway (i.e., the Corridor) between Walsenburg and Trinidad. In addition to the CFRT Plan, trail and open space plans by Huerfano County, La Veta and Trinidad provide guidance for the consideration of local trail improvements within the Corridor. These plans emphasize the connectivity of local attractions, such as population centers, natural resources, and amenities, by a trail system. Lathrop and Trinidad Lake State Parks have established trail systems and steady visitation. These trails connect to the local trail systems in Walsenburg and Trinidad, respectively.



Located adjacent to Trinidad, the recent acquisition of the Crazy French Ranch property will provide public access to Fisher's Peak and surrounding areas (Photo: User:Xnatedawgx).

The Trinidad Lake State Park trail system is envisioned to connect with the recently acquired Crazy French Ranch - a 30 square-mile conservation area around Fisher's Peak just south of Trinidad. On September 12, 2019, the Governor of Colorado signed an executive order to establish a Colorado State Park on this property.

## COORDINATION WITH OTHER AREA STUDIES

[Colorado Front Range Trail \(CFRT\) Master Plan](#)

[Huerfano County Trails Master Plan 2011](#)

[Byways \(SHOL\) Master Plan](#)

[South Central Regional Transportation Plan](#)

[Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan](#)

[City of Trinidad Comprehensive Plan - 2017](#)

## SCENIC HIGHWAY OF LEGENDS BYWAY INFORMATION

[Colorado Department of Transportation](#)

[Spanish Peaks Country](#)

## FOLLOW THE PROJECT - SIGN-UP FOR SML PEL STUDY ENEWSLETTER

Send an email to [SouthernMountainLoop@gmail.com](mailto:SouthernMountainLoop@gmail.com) and request to be added to the e-newsletter distribution list.

pedestrians are known to cross the highway; however, there are no crosswalks or traffic signal controls.

### Multi-use Trail Accommodations

Much of the Corridor is used by bicyclists and pedestrians for recreation, commuting and special events. In addition, communities along the byway and the Spanish Peaks backcountry areas accessed from the byway are popular recreational and tourism destinations for both visitors and local residents. Some of the more popular recreational activities include bicycling, hiking and camping. These bicycling and pedestrian destinations are dispersed throughout the Corridor with the byway currently providing the principal means of accessing and connecting the uses.



There is a prevailing demand for bicycling activity between La Veta and Stonewall - the more challenging and scenic segment of the byway. The annual *Stonewall Century Ride*, an annual recreational event between La Veta and Weston which draws hundreds of cyclists, is located along this portion of the byway. Existing and potential future commutes within the Corridor could include trips between La Veta and Walsenburg, La Veta and Cuchara, and the multiple communities west of and including Trinidad.



Currently, bicyclists can utilize the byway for travel but there are no designated bicycle facilities along the Corridor (i.e., standard bike lanes, buffered bike lanes). Some segments provide shoulders that accommodate bicyclists, to a limited extent, but a majority of the Corridor provides no or very narrow shoulders, which contributes to a high level of traffic stress for bicyclists. Furthermore, some segments have long, relatively steep grades that prevent or discourage less-accomplished bicyclists from traveling the Corridor. The Corridor does not currently accommodate all cyclist types and abilities. Similarly,

there are currently no designated pedestrian facilities along the Corridor, with limited sidewalk facilities in La Veta along SH 12 (Main Street).

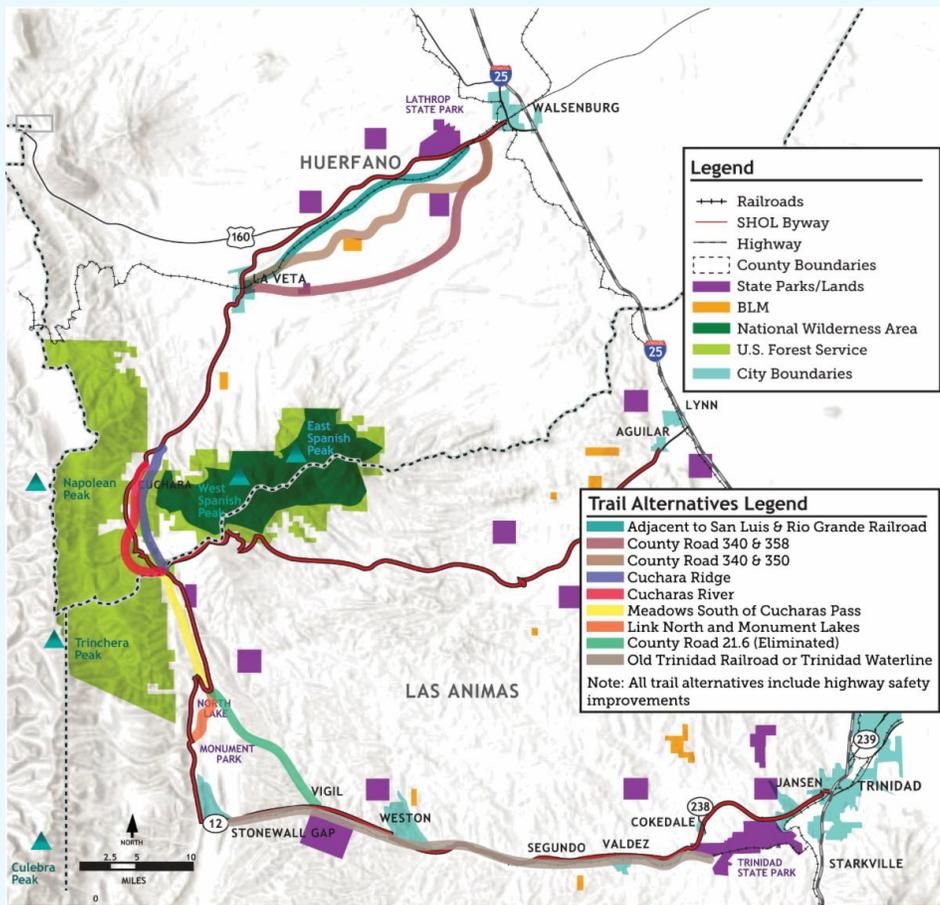
### Multi-use Trail Connectivity

Local trail systems currently exist within Walsenburg, Lathrop State Park, La Veta, Cuchara, Trinidad Lake State Park, and Trinidad. In addition, there are several trailheads, trails, state wildlife areas, national wilderness areas, and campgrounds adjacent to and along the Corridor. However, there are no bicycle or pedestrian facilities that uniformly connect these amenities. Connections to and between these amenities through a multi-use trail would provide an interconnected system better serving current and future users.

## What Improvement Concepts are being Considered as Possible Alternatives?

Improvements being considered as part of this study entail highway safety improvements plus a multi-use trail along the full length of the byway. The safety improvements would include local upgrades plus at least a four- to eight-foot-wide roadway shoulder, depending on location and amount of traffic. A new eight-foot-wide multi-use trail, either along the highway or on a separate route, would connect and end at Lathrop State Park to the north and Trinidad Lake State Park to the south. For areas where the trail would run along the highway, the trail would be integrated into the highway roadside. For areas where off-highway trail routes are being considered, the roadway shoulders would be widened per the minimum safety width recommendations. A number of alternative off-highway trail routes are being considered.

A screening of these alternatives recommended the elimination of the County Road 21.6 route because it would bypass Monument Lake and Stonewall - two important and desirable connections for the new trail. The following table and map present the initial trail routes being considered. Unless there is a compelling reason for its inclusion, the County Road 21.6 route will be eliminated from further consideration as an alternative.



**Multi-use Trail Route Alternatives**

Vista Segment (Walsenburg to La Veta)	Alpine Segment (La Veta to Vigil)	Mining Segment (Vigil to Trinidad)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Along Highway</li> <li>• Adjacent to Existing Railroad</li> <li>• County Road 340 and 358</li> <li>• County Road 340 and 342</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Along Highway</li> <li>• Ridge East of Cuchara</li> <li>• Along Cucharas River Near Cuchara</li> <li>• Meadows South of Cucharas Pass</li> <li>• Link North and Monument Lakes</li> <li>• County Road 21.6 (Eliminated)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Along Highway</li> <li>• Along Old Trinidad Rail Line</li> <li>• Along Trinidad Waterline Route</li> </ul>

**WHAT'S NEXT?**

The study team will be evaluating the improvement alternatives and will share information at upcoming study events. Opportunities to learn about the study, provide comments on the alternatives, or learn about the study's recommendations will include coffee chats in January 2020 and a public open house once the study gets closer to completion this coming summer. Although not official public meetings, the coffee chats provide opportunities to meet and visit with the team in a casual and informal setting. A more formal public open house will be convened following the chats. Look for announcements of these events in the coming months.

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