



# Southern Mountain Loop

## Highway 12 Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study



Fact Sheet No. 3 | April 2020



## Study Overview

The South Central Council of Governments and Colorado Department of Transportation are studying the Scenic Highway of Legends (SHOL) byway, an 82 mile corridor between Walsenburg and Trinidad along US 160 and State Highway 12. The purpose of the project is to improve highway safety and provide a regional and local multi-use trail, completing the Colorado Front Range Trail (CRFT), along the byway. The CRFT is a planned multi-use trail by the Colorado Parks and Wildlife along the Front Range from Wyoming to New Mexico. This study, being conducted as a Planning and Environmental Linkages study, will determine a master plan of future projects to improve highway safety and provide a multi-use trail.

## Recommended Highway Safety Improvements

Providing only highway safety improvements would not fully address the needs of the byway. To fully accommodate all non-motorized users, such as bicyclists and pedestrians of varying abilities, and to provide trail connections to the communities and attractions along the byway, trail improvements are needed in addition. The trail could be located along the byway, either attached to the roadway or separated yet within the CDOT right-of-way. In some locations, it may be advantageous to better fulfill the goals of the CFRT, to locate the trail off the byway. Such instances include along an existing railroad corridor or within the San Isabel National Forest. Regardless, highway safety improvements would be included with the trail to fully meet the needs of the byway.

## Recommended Trail Alternatives Screening

The trail alternatives recommended from the initial screening have been studied in more detail (see Fact Sheet No. 2 for initial screening findings). The alternatives include various combinations of on-highway and off-highway trail options beginning and ending at Lathrop State Park to the north and Trinidad Lake State Park to the south. All trail alternatives include highway safety improvements.

Further analyses of the alternative trail routes were performed regarding terrain, connections to communities and trailheads, and property considerations. Each was then evaluated regarding how well it solves the needs of the byway, its potential impacts to the environment, and its general feasibility for construction. A comparative screening of each alternative's overall benefits and impacts was then performed to form the Recommended Alternatives – those alternatives that address the project needs and have relatively higher benefits and lower impacts. Each Recommended Alternative will move forward into more detailed analyses and review in future studies after the PEL Study is completed.

### THE RECOMMENDED HIGHWAY SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS INCLUDE:

- Improved highway signage, pavement striping, and pavement rumble strips.
- More detailed study of wildlife crossings and crash mitigation at four locations.
- Wider and continuous roadway shoulders.
- Upgraded signage and roadway shoulder at the curve southeast of North Lake.
- Upgraded signage and a curb-and-gutter roadway section within Segundo and Jansen.
- Upgraded signage at the US 160 railroad crossing in Walsenburg.
- Modifications at the Santa Fe/Main Street intersection in Trinidad.
- Sidewalk and pedestrian crossing(s) improvements in La Veta, Cuchara, and Stonewall.

### ALTERNATIVES EVALUATION FACTORS

#### Needs:

- Are the safety problems improved?
- Are trail accommodations for non-motorized users provided?
- Are trail connections to communities and recreational attractions provided?

#### Environmental:

- Are impacts to existing environmental resources avoidable?

#### Implementation:

- Are the trail improvements affordable?
- What is the relative ease of trail construction?



Example amenity site with three interpretive sign panels, shown under construction.

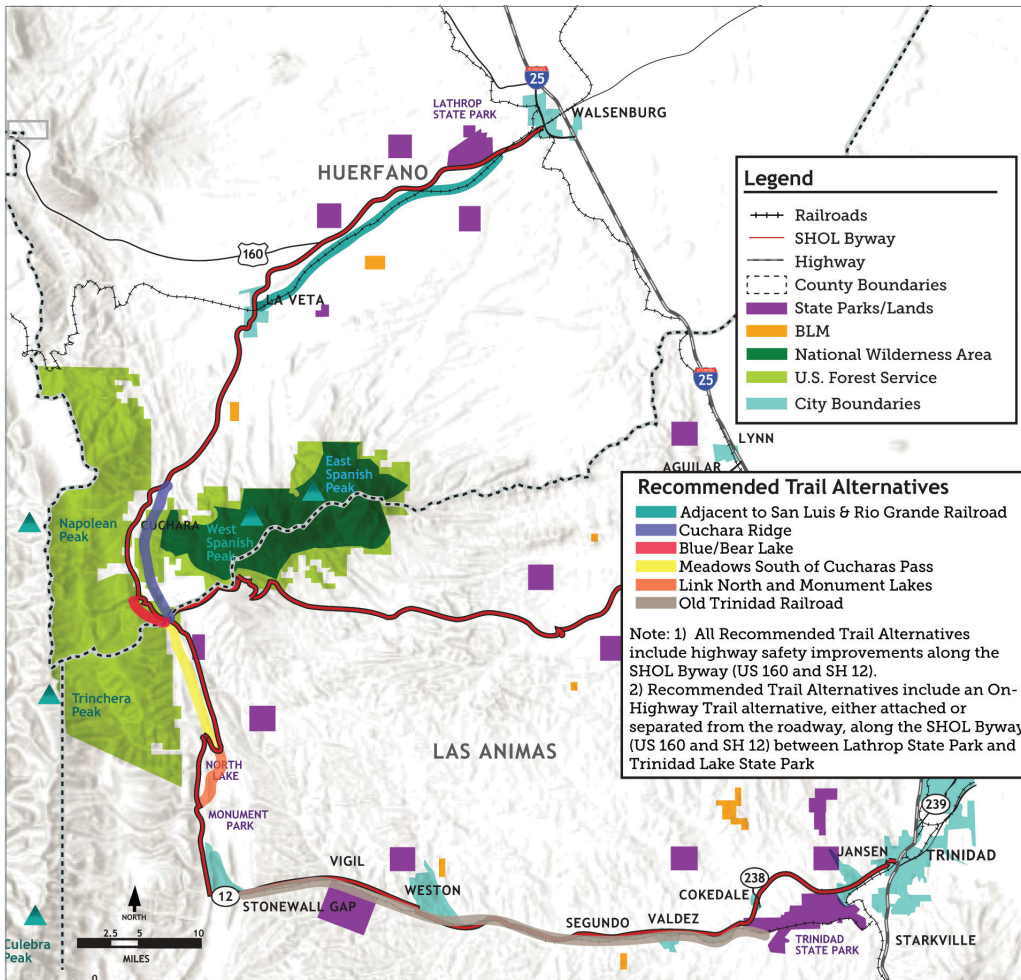
## Scenic Highway of Legends Byway Features

The byway provides visitors, travelers, and local residents the opportunity to learn about the region's rich history, experience its world class geologic landscapes, and make personal connections with nature. For many, enjoying this awe-inspiring landscape depends on amenities such as scenic pull-offs and interpretive signage. One traveler noted, "You can't help but feel something here."

A number of new byway-related features are included in the study's recommendations. These amenities include new scenic pull-offs, restrooms, and visitor centers in La Veta, Cuchara, and Stonewall. Each site will be integrated with the Colorado Front Range Trail and include wayfinding signage, trail information, and in some locations, a bike repair station. A new wayside park with picnic tables, shade shelters and toilets is also recommended along US 160 just west of SH 12.

## What's Next?

The PEL Study will produce a master plan of highway safety, trail, and byway-related projects for more detailed study, design, and with funding, construction. Based on the Recommended Alternatives, the study's next step is to develop an overall Implementation Plan to identify and prioritize the individual projects. This plan will help CDOT and local agencies advance the program of projects towards construction. It will include guidance for sponsoring agencies on trail funding, oversight, and maintenance considerations. The study's recommendations will be presented at a public open house in early summer and documented in a final report to be released to the public. Continue to check the project website for new information about the study.



## How to stay Involved?

Your input is important to us. You can provide comments or be informed of upcoming events by visiting the project website, sending us an email, or giving us a call.

Email: [SouthernMountainLoop@gmail.com](mailto:SouthernMountainLoop@gmail.com)

Website: <https://www.codot.gov/library/studies/co-12-sml-pel>

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### PROJECT CONTACTS:

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## MULTI-USE TRAIL ROUTE ALTERNATIVES (For More Detailed Study Following the PEL Study)

### Vista Segment

(Walsenburg to La Veta)

Along Highway (Attached or Separated)  
Adjacent to Existing SLRG Railroad

### Alpine Segment

(La Veta to Vigil)

Along Highway (Attached or Separated)  
Ridge East of Cuchara to Cucharas Pass  
Blue/Bear Lakes to Cucharas Pass  
Meadows South of Cucharas Pass  
Link North and Monument Lakes

### Mining Segment

(Vigil to Trinidad)

Along Highway (Attached or Separated)  
Along Old Trinidad Rail Line