



23982-23929 I-70 West Vail Pass Safety and Operations Improvements Meeting Notes

Date: March 11, 2024

Purpose:

Combined Project Leadership Team (PLT) and Technical Team (TT) Meeting #40

Location:

Online Google Meet Meeting

Attending:

Attendance list:

- Karen Berdoulay, Construction Package (CP) Region 3
- John Kronholm, CDOT Region 3
- Sarah Navarro, CDOT Region 3
- Jennifer Klaetsch, CDOT Region 3 Environmental
- Zebulon White, CDOT Region 3
- Jon Lebya, CDOT Region 3
- Stacia Sellers, CDOT Communications
- Matt Inzeo, CDOT Public Information Officer
- Lisa Schoch, CDOT Historian
- Patrick Chavez, CDOT Maintenance & Operations
- Jared Rapp, Colorado State Patrol
- Michelle Cowardin, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW)
- Marcus Dreux, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
- Stephanie Gibson, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
- Russ Forrest, Town of Vail Mayor
- Dick Cleveland, Town of Vail
- Kathleen Halloran, Town of Vail
- Matt Scherr, Eagle County
- Ben Gerdes, Eagle County
- Robert Jacobs, Summit County
- Justin Hildreth, Eagle River Water & Sanitation District (ERWSD)
- Shannon Anderson, Bicycle Colorado
- Margaret Bowes, I-70 Coalition

- Tracy Sakaguchi, Colorado Motor Carriers
- Mark Gutknecht, Kiewit
- Pete Remington, Kiewit
- Adam Geis, Kiewit
- Randal Lapsley, RS&H
- Sam Stavish, CIG
- Mary Jo Vobejda, Jacobs
- Loretta LaRiviere, Jacobs

Summary of Discussion:

The following is a summary of the subjects discussed during the meeting.

1) Introductions & Meeting Purpose

Mary Jo said today's agenda includes why we called this meeting, an update on Construction Package (CP) #5, status of CP #4 and the schedule and next steps.

2) Why we Called This Meeting

John said at our last meeting in November, we said our next meeting would be in April to give you information about the 2024 construction season. Since our meeting, CDOT advertised CP #4 again for low bid. We sent you an email a few weeks ago to let you know we were unable to award the project because the bids came in too high, and the project scope would have to be modified. We have been working to come up with a preferred scope that would meet the budget we have available, and we want to share that scope with you and get your feedback.

3) CP #5 Update

a) John said CP #5 has been awarded to Kiewit. This package includes the construction of a new eastbound (EB) bridge. Westbound (WB) traffic will be diverted to the new bridge built as part of CP #3. Traffic will be maintained on the existing EB bridge until the new bridge is built offline between the old and new bridges. The new bridge will have a larger radius than the existing bridge, which is a safety improvement. There is a portion of the rec path that will have to be rerouted to flatten out the curve when the old bridge is demolished, and that work will also include the adjacent retaining wall. There will also be some landscaping restoration done on Polk Creek. Throughout the construction, Jacobs will continue environmental tracking to ensure we are complying with the environmental assessment (EA) mitigation commitments.

b) Comments

- Comment #1: Shannon what is the timeline for completion of the retaining wall and if how will that impact trail users.

- Reply #1: Adam said the wall will not have any work done on it during this construction season, but we will be working on it in 2025. As in previous construction packages, we will do our best to minimize impacts to trail users and events.
- Comment #2: Michelle asked if the existing wildlife underpass will be usable during construction, or will it be blocked off?
- Reply #2: John said there will be temporary noise impacts during construction activities, but the wildlife crossing won't be totally blocked off. During that time, the schedule of 4 nights of construction and then 3 nights with none will be used, so the crossing will be usable. This crossing doesn't have as much wildlife activity as the crossing about a 0.5-mile way that is used by hundreds of deer and elk.
- Comment #3: Lisa inquired if the increased radius is something we need to share with State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO).
- Reply #3: John said we're still following all the aesthetic requirements from the EA and any commitments and information that we have already shared with SHPO still applies.

4) CP #4 Status

a) John said the original scope for CP #4 included:

- EB Auxiliary Lane mile post (MP) 185-190
- 6 Wildlife Crossings & Fencing
- EB Remote Closure System MP 180
- Additional Shoulder Widening MP 180-185
- ITS Mainline Improvements MP 185-190
- Variable Speed Limit Signs MP 185-190

Additional scope added and many came with their own funding.

- Truck Ramp Haz Mat Collection System
- ITS Fiber Replacement
- Expanded Truck Parking
- Resurfacing EB MP 179 - 185 Right Lane
- Avalanche Mitigation
- Cameras
- Culvert Remediation



- b) Karen said CDOT has been working on this project since 2016 and were awarded the INFRA grant in 2019 and we are delivering the project based on those funds.
- There has been significant value engineering done that has the potential to save the project \$65,540,000 by:
 - Reducing import/export by modifying wall design from mechanically stabilized earth (MSE) to shored MSE.
 - Identifying nearby locations for disposal of excess excavation. The Vail Pass Rest Area embankment took 35,000 cubic yards (CY); the East Vail Berm took 13,000 CY and the truck parking embankment took 36,000 CY.
 - Partnering with the USFS for tree seedlings from area trees that will have a much greater survival rate than tree seedlings taken from another area.
 - From research that John did, we optimized the wildlife crossing size for animals in this area
 - Unique project challenges have also led to increased pricing:
 - The weather & this being a seasonal project.
 - Difficult to get people to work on the project in the mountains due to the high cost of living.
 - There are just two local asphalt and concrete suppliers and one gravel pit. There are a lot of projects in the area and we're all competing for limited supplies.
 - Trucking shortages. Kiewit brought trucks in from the east coast but there are additional costs for paying the drivers.
 - Increased fuel costs.
 - National construction inflation. Annual material pricing has increased 7.08% across the board.
 - Significant groundwater issues persisting through the summer.
 - CDOT twice advertised CP #4 for low bid but was unable to accept bids that were over budget. CDOT has awarded the package to Kiewit using Construction Manager/General Contractor (CM/GC) delivery. Kiewit have been working on this project for three years and know the area and suppliers well.
 - CDOT has also exploring other Value Engineering cost saving ideas.



- CDOT has added \$89M in funding for added scope and an additional \$95M to address cost increases to the grant scope. Items that have their own funding are the ITS cameras and fiber, avalanche mitigation, resurfacing EB right lane from MP 179-185 and small culvert remediation and those funds cannot be used for anything else.

- c) John said the goal of this project is to improve safety and the third lane and curve corrections both have significant safety benefits. CDOT looked at two options:

Fixing the curves and not doing the third lane. If we only fix the curves, we will wind up with a lot of throw-away work when we eventually add the third lane. This option adds considerable cost to the overall project.

The other option which we can afford to build right now is to reduce the length of the third lane to be from MP 187.3 to MP 190. It will include every aesthetic guideline, every wildlife and water quality mitigation that were included within the limits of the entire third lane. This option will also include the:

- Removal of widened pull outs
- Removal of Variable Speed Limit Signs
- Removal of Variable Message Signs
- Keeping new gates at MP 180
- Keeping new cameras
- Keeping extension of electric line and fiber relocation
- Keeping avalanche mitigation
- The wildlife fencing from MP 185 to MP 187.3 and a small wildlife crossing will not be included in this reduced scope.

This second option creates an additional construction package for future construction when funds are available.

Comments

- Comment #1: Michelle said the No-Action Alternative in the EA would still have an impact for wildlife, and it makes the recommendation for the six wildlife crossings. How is that addressed with the reduction of the third lane?
- Reply #1: John said we are still going to install the wildlife crossings and fencing within the third lane limits we are proposing. The wildlife crossing at MP 186 will not be built right now. When future funding is identified, we will extend the third lane and all the mitigation associated with it.
- Comment #2: Michelle said she would like to set up a call with John, the USFS and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to discuss this scope reduction as it is quite a variation from what we agreed upon for required mitigation for

this project. And aren't you required to go back to the ALIVE group to discuss these changes?

- Reply #2: John said we're not proposing to eliminate mitigation, it will all be done in the next phase when we have funding identified.
- Comment #3: Russ asked John for clarification on what you are proposing to eliminate in the Narrows area.
- Reply #3: John said we are proposing to eliminate The Narrows curve smoothing and the extension of third lane from MP 185.5 to MP 187.3.
- Comment #4: Russ said I think from our perspective this would be the most important section to complete from a public safety standpoint. It's our emergency responders that are responding every time we have an incident in that area. Vail has also seen price escalation since 2019 consistent with what you are sharing. But to be honest, I think we've got to talk about how to find the budget to finish this critical section.
- Reply #4: John said even though we've cut The Narrows out that this phase of the project we would still have a significant safety benefit to the traveling public not only with the third lane, but also correcting the curves at MP 187 and MP 188.

When we were originally evaluating Vail Pass for the EA in 2016, the highest crash rates were at MP 185 to MP 186 from 2010 to 2014. More recent data from 2020, it's switched now to MP 187 to MP 188 having the highest crash rates across the entire state.

Patrick said we have proactive closures and safety closures in order to prevent traffic going into those areas when we're trying to deal with an incident. I think the big thing that is starting to work is how we respond to incidents, especially with the traffic incident management program through that area and the other agencies that respond to incidents.

- Comment #5: Russ said if my emergency responders were standing right behind me, they would plead for this auxiliary lane to give them that extra level of protection and also to keep I-70 open without doing a full closure. We need to finish these last two miles because they are critical for public safety and reducing the economic impact of closures on I-70.
- Comment #6: Margaret said the I-70 Coalition advocates for mobility and safety improvements. It is our mission and from our perspective the change in scope of CP #4 is very significant. It really takes out some of the elements that I think a lot of the stakeholders really supported. That's what garnered a lot of the support was the auxiliary lane and the curved straightening to the whole scope of the project.



She's really glad to hear that CDOT is still evaluating CP #4 and appreciates that Karen covered the economic and labor challenges and the cost of living, as well as, that CDOT has looked at innovations and design elements that can reduce costs. But from the coalition's perspective, we just feel that these elements that are being proposed to be cut from the scope are very significant. We ask CDOT to continue to look at ways that we can keep those elements in the project design.

d) Mary Jo said that CDOT's next steps for CP #4 are:

- Gather your input over the next week. You can call John Kronholm at 970-306-5395 to discuss your input or to set up a meeting to talk further. Or you can email him any comments you have: john.kronholm@state.co.us
- Incorporate your input
- Finalize scope
- Agree on quantities and costs
- Revise the plans
- Begin construction in early Summer 2024
- Advocate for funding in the next 10-year plan to finish the project's original scope

Comments

- Comment #7: Margaret said she doesn't have any wonderful suggestions but thinks that last bullet advocating for funding in the next 10-year plan and just kicking the can down the road for the lower section of the curve straightening of the third lane is not a solution. We know what the 10-year plan looks like. I don't think we want to start a project that has a 50-year vision, complete it partially and then wait another 10 years or more to complete it. I hope the PLT and CDOT will commit to figuring out the answer so we can deliver this project as it was designed with all the components.
- Comment #8: Matt said that he wonders if this change in scope complies with the NEPA requirements. The change in scope is fundamentally different from the whole idea of the project. There was a lot of stakeholder collaboration and agreement to get to the project and I think a lot of us want to raise the concern about how this followed the CSS process. It seems like the decision has been made at the top and came down to us without asking for our input ahead of time. Also, asking for our feedback over the next week is a very short timeframe.



- Response #8: Karen said she takes full accountability for the lack of communication you have received. We realized right around the holidays we were not going to have a winning low bid and there was a lot of internal discussions in January for the next steps. We couldn't add more money and so in January we decided to start working with Kiewit, our CM/GC contractor, to figure out what our choices were and what could we propose as recommended option moving forward. We just recently received the pricing from them.

There are no options that we have within our ability to deliver the full project right now with the budget we have and set up ourselves for success moving forward. We feel like the recommended option, the memo and the presentation today are laying the groundwork now for that next phase in The Narrows. It would be a great grant project potentially moving forward.

Karen said she's sorry that it feels like a short notice and certainly we're open to getting feedback longer. What's interesting about CM/GC is that it can be delivered in packages, and if the stars align and we deliver this next package and then money becomes available, we can still deliver another package with the same contractor next year.

John said when second low bid for CP #4 came back higher , we saw the impacts of inflation. If we wait another construction season to make a decision inflation could still hit us again, and there could be seven percent less money to spend if there's no more funding discovered. CDOT's urgency for a quick turnaround is to maximize the scope. and deliver the maximum scope for the budget we have now.

Mary Jo said CDOT does need to move forward and keep the conversation moving and to help them make some decisions suggested we use the next week to respond to John. If a week isn't long enough for some of you, let John know that as well.

- Comment #9: Margaret asked if CDOT has considered going to the Transportation Commission to request additional funds to complete this project as designed.
- Comment #10: Suzanne said when I-70 was closed through Glenwood Canyon, Senator Bennet was all over it. Has anyone reached out to someone in the government at that level to see if there is any federal money available?
- Comment #11: Russ said the Town of Vail has begun a dialogue with Senator Bennett and Congressman Neguse's office. The line of communication is open, and we will certainly be an advocate for more budget to get these last two miles done.

- Response: Karen said she appreciates the suggestions, and we can certainly carry them forward as feedback.

5) Schedule and Next Steps

- a) Mary Jo said CDOT construction will restart in the spring for both CP #4 & CP #5 and will continue for about three years to complete everything. Any delay in making decisions will push the schedule out further.

Our next meeting is scheduled for April 15, and we will continue to have quarterly meetings with you because that works with the construction. We can meet individually with PLT/TT members, as needed, to continue this conversation.

