



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

Date: April 25, 2024

Purpose:

Combined Project Leadership Team (PLT) and Technical Team (TT) Meeting #41

Location:

Online Google Meet Meeting

Attending:

Attendance list:

- Karen Berdoulay, Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) Region 3
- John Kronholm, CDOT Region 3
- David Cesark, CDOT Region 3 Environmental
- Stacia Sellers, CDOT Communications
- Kristin Salamack, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) CDOT Liaison
- Michelle Cowardin, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW)
- Marcus Dreux, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
- Mark Hane, USFS
- Dick Cleveland, Town of Vail
- Greg Hall, Town of Vail/I-70 Coalition
- Margaret Bowes, I-70 Coalition
- Robert Jacobs, Summit County
- Shannon Anderson, Bicycle Colorado
- Justin Hildreth, Eagle River Water & Sanitation District (ERWSD)
- Pete Remington, 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

John said today's agenda includes more information on the phased scope for Construction Package (CP) #4, the USFS parking lot, a preview of the summer construction season activities and a chance to hear feedback from you on the CSS process we have gone through, and the Schedule and Next Steps.

2) Overview of Scope

- a) John reviewed the scope awarded to date on the project. In 2021-2022 season the truck ramp reconstruction and westbound (WB) remote closure system were completed. In 2022, the recreation path was relocated from mile post (MP) 185.7-MP 187. 2022-2023 construction included the replacement of the structurally deficient WB I-70 Bridge F-12-AT and improving the curve radius to be 65 miles per hour, which was one of the safety improvements identified in the environmental assessment (EA). Other work included the recreation path relocation from MP 185-185.5 and the WB I-70 cut wall at MP 187. The construction of new eastbound (EB) I-70 Bridge F-12-AS will start this summer and be completed in 2026.
- b) The phased scope for 2024-2026 will include the eastbound auxiliary lane from MP 187.3-190, five wildlife crossings/underpass & fencing, and the westbound curve reconstruction at MP 188. The third lane will be dropped at the top of the Pass which will give tractor trailer trucks and other slow-moving vehicles the best opportunity to smoothly merge back in the traffic because they'll be going downhill rather than uphill. This work includes all of the mitigation that is required from the EA and has been presented to this stakeholder group.

John said if we built two lanes through the Narrows, we still have the ultimate goal of completing the project to build all three lanes throughout the project and we would wind up with the potential for some throwaway work because we would have to remove part of the large wall in the Narrows which is about 1,600 feet long and 36 feet tall.

John said the proposed construction will address the number one crash rate area on all of I-70 at MP 188 with a curve correction and still allows for safety and operational benefits for an eastbound auxiliary lane. Even though we're not fixing the Narrows at this time, by doing the curve correction, we get the compounding benefits of both the operations in the safety of the third lane and the curve corrections. We agree the Narrows is the next top priority.

Karen said the purpose and need for this project is safety and operational improvements on Vail Pass, and if we were to fully fund the three-lane configuration so we don't have throw-away work, we would not be able to build much of the third lane uphill and it wouldn't end in a logical place. If we funded only the Narrows we'd be looking at safety improvements but not really operational improvements. One of the other reasons we are focused on the scope that we have now for this funded package, is it allows us to build quite a bit of the third lane. We're putting in all of the wildlife crossings and sediment control improvements for the upper section from MP 187.3 to MP 190.

- Comment #1: Greg asked if the curve corrections would be both uphill and downhill.
- Reply #1: John said yes, we are correcting both I-70 east and westbound as part of this project.
- Comment #2: Greg asked if the glare screens in the Narrows will be added in this phase or if it is considered throw-away work.
- Reply #2: John confirmed it would be throw-away work because we are moving the curve.

Karen noted when we put up the barrier in 2011, we made it so it could be modified to add glare screens at a later point. If there are cost savings on CP #4, we could have a list of top priorities like glare screens to add before we can fund the larger project.

John said it is hard to leave the Narrows untouched. There are some known drainage issues that causes hydroplaning that will have to be fixed by adding inlets. This may be throw-away work too, but it will be money well spent to address safety.

- Comment #3: Greg said just before the new bridge coming down the hill, the drainage is worse than before and is dangerous.
- Reply #3: John said he will look into that. We will have construction going on for the next three years and it could be fixed.

- c) The work excluded, and done as a future project, is the completion of the third lane from MP 185.5 - 187.3. This is approximately 1.8 miles and is the Narrows area. Other work to be done in the future project includes the pull-out areas and additional ITS components. This matches ultimate phasing for the larger Vail Pass project by dropping the third lane in the most ideal location.
- d) John said when we prepared our scope for the INFRA Grant in 2020, the construction cost index was averaging about 3.5% per year and it is now compounding at almost 25% annually.



- Comment #4: Margaret said the I-70 Coalition and many of our members are going to continue to advocate for dollars to complete the Narrows and the curve straightening and, therefore, want to be speaking the same language as Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT). Can you confirm if this will be referred to in the future as CP #6 or CP#5 Phase Two?
- Reply #4: Karen said it is part of this project that's yet to be delivered and we are committed to delivering it and CP #6 is the term we are using. There may also be CP #7 for additional future work. I feel fine saying that we're calling the remainder of work CP #6 at this point.
- Comment #5: Greg said we need to finish the complete package, which is what has been approved by the Transportation Planning Organizations (TPR). That's what everyone on this call has been working towards for the past four years. Now we are taking out parts of the project and will have to go back through the planning process from the beginning to reprioritize the Narrows construction funding and will be competing with other projects. CP #4 was over 50% of the entire project and 40% of the climbing lane has been eliminated. That's not value engineering, its significant scope cut. Understanding when it will get completed would be beneficial to a lot of the stakeholders.
- Reply #5: Karen said that is a good point. I think it's something that the TPR really needs to decide, is Vail Pass a top priority through completion. Also, the state needs to decide if it is a top priority for them. We will work on updating the cost estimate for the rest of the project and will share that information with you.
- Comment #6: David said he's wondering if we should go bigger and ask for Phase Two funding that would complete the entire project as well as the phase that we're currently in now. We're committed through the EA to complete the entire project. Is it appropriate at this time to go big on this and go for the whole ball of wax. Other highway projects in the state have been fully funded.
- Reply #6: Karen said right now we need to keep our eyes on the prize of getting the Narrows done.

John said the RS&H team will include the engineering and design for the portion we are omitting in a plan set so we won't lose that knowledge of the phasing for MP 185.5 to MP 187.3. This will also help get a clearer idea of the cost estimate for CP #6.



3) USFS Parking Lot

- a) John said the USFS performed a study to improve safety due to congestion from people parking on the road and bikers coming down the hill quickly at the base of Vail Pass near the trailheads and the campground, and one of the options identified to address the safety issue is to build a parking lot offline.
- b) John said he was part of the committee and suggested if we build this parking lot near the trailhead, you can meet the USFS, need and we can do it as part of the Vail Pass project. There would be no additional cost added to our project, it would be a cost savings of about \$30 per cubic yard for the project because the amount of dirt needed to build the parking lot can be from our construction excavation this year instead of us having to haul it farther away.
 - Comment #1: Greg asked if the parking lot will be paved.
 - Reply #1: John said he's pretty sure the cost savings will allow for paving but not striping.
 - Comment #2: Dick asked if all on-road parking on Vail Pass would be eliminated.
 - Reply #2: John said somehow the forest service will make a modification so street parking would no longer be allowed. The safety aspect of the parking lot is, instead of multiple interaction between vehicles and multiple points of interaction, access would be consolidated into one location.
 - Comment #3: Greg asked if it would be better to put the "turnaround" closer to the campground because there is better sight distance. Also, I don't see anywhere for oversized vehicles like horse trailers or RVs to park so they'll continue to park on the road.
 - Reply #3: John said we did have discussions with the USFS about oversized vehicle parking and proposed to remove the aspen screening and have room for on-street oversize vehicle parking. In the end the forest service team decided that they would rather have the screening from the roadway instead of the parking for the oversized vehicles.
 - Comment #4: Greg said if you moved the turnaround further up the hill you wouldn't have to remove any trees. There is also a lot of fill needed on the downhill grade to the creek in this location and that may be why the other location seems better. We will make that comment to the USFS. I'm assuming this takes USFS approval more than CDOT approval.
 - Reply #4: John said it's a combination approval. We have rolled it into the EA to provide the clearances, but we did coordinate extensively with the USFS and have comment resolution tracking as well. The USFS is considered



the primary stakeholder as they are going to be the end users and will have to maintain it.

- Comment #5: Greg said he has concerns about the grading looking engineered and not undulating like the rest of the Pass.
- Reply #5: John said that's an excellent point. We're looking at an interim condition right now. We do have some benches in the contours, and it is also proposed to receive landscaping to help screen and blend it into the existing topography and terrain. The guard rail would be replaced to conform to the Aesthetic Guidelines.

Karen said some of you may be thinking we should be using these cost savings toward our project, like in the Narrows. I want to make sure no one walks away from this conversation thinking that we should just dump the dirt here and finish the parking lot later and use the cost savings for the Narrows. It's small dollars. John said \$30 per cubic yard, and it's around 5,500 cubic yards that will go to the parking lot which is about \$165,000 that is already included in our current construction project cost.

4) Feedback on CSS Process

- a) Karen said she has heard feedback that we need to improve the CSS process on this project and would like to get your input on what we can do better moving forward. She said that we should have probably met with you before March to give you an update on the financial struggles we were facing with awarding CP #4.
- b) Comments
 - Comment #1: Margaret said this is PLT/TT Meeting #41 so clearly there has been an active CSS process that has worked very well until it didn't, starting early this year. I appreciate that you recognize that it could have been handled a little better. The PLT members felt they were the last to know about financial decisions that had already been made.
 - Comment #2: Greg said stakeholders have voiced their concerns through letters to CDOT leadership and asked if they could come to the table to discuss the funding dilemma and have yet to receive any Reply. This is no reflection on the project team, but it is a source of frustration for the PLT. We've had a number of combined PLT/TT meetings. The PLT is tasked with getting the project done and perhaps it's time to have separate PLT meetings.
 - Reply #2: Karen said she is working with headquarters on the Reply letters, and they should be sent out soon.

Karen said it is good feedback about having separate PLT meetings. The PLT is the leadership of the project and enables decision making. CDOT is the owner and makes the final decisions, but the PLT helps to guide them to make the best decisions possible. We will work to schedule a separate PLT meeting.

- Comment #3: Michelle said it's been a good and long process. There was some confusion on our last call and reaching out sooner would have been better. CPW did have a call afterwards with John and he cleared up our confusion about the wildlife crossings which was appreciated.

5) Construction Scope for Summer 2024

a) John reviewed the key construction dates:

- 4/29/2024 - Construction start-up on CP #5 (EB bridge replacement at MP 185)
- 6/3/2024 - Construction start-up on CP #4 (Roadway)
- 6/3/2024 - Westbound bridge demo begins

b) Impacts include:

- Roadway narrow shoulders
- Roadway intermittent daytime & nighttime lane closures
- EB off ramp at MP 190 closure for 1 week (Monday - Thursday) for drainage improvements
- Intermittent trail holds with flaggers for safety-critical work on the bridge demo
- Variable trail conditions near construction areas

6) Schedule and Next Steps

- a) John said the work for the bridge demo and replacement will continue into 2026. The reason for this is because it is better to remove the in-stream temporary work restoration when the ground is thawed, and the plantings will have a better survival rate. CP #4 work will continue until 2026.
- b) Mary Jo said we had planned to have quarterly combined PLT/TT meetings. As we discussed earlier, we have determined there is a need for a separate PLT meeting to discuss funding, phasing and financing in May, and we will have a combined PLT/TT in July.