



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

Date: July 15, 2024

Purpose:

Combined Project Leadership Team (PLT) and Technical Team (TT) Meeting #42

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
- Mark Rogers, CDOT Region 3 Planning
- Zane Znamenacek, CDOT Region 3
- Kristin Salamack, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) CDOT Liaison
- Marcus Dreux, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
- Stephanie Gibson, U.S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
- Danielle Neumann, Colorado Parks & Wildlife
- Heidi Helling, USFS
- Dick Cleveland, Town of Vail
- Greg Hall, Town of Vail/I-70 Coalition
- Margaret Bowes, I-70 Coalition
- Ben Gerdes, Eagle County
- Shannon Anderson, Bicycle Colorado
- Tracy Sakaguchi, Colorado Motor Carriers
- Pete Remington, Kiewit
- Randal Lapsley, RS&H
- Pete Remington, Kiewit
- Sam Stavish, CIG
- Laura Meyer, Jacobs
- Loretta LaRiviere, Jacobs

Summary of Discussion:

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

1) Introductions & Meeting Agenda

Today's agenda includes an update on Construction Package (CP) #6 cost estimate, CP #3,4 & 5 construction updates, upcoming construction work, and a public information and outreach update.

2) CP #6 Cost Estimate

a) There is no funding for CP #6. CDOT recognizes that this is the top priority for stakeholders, and we will keep that in mind as we continue to look for funding opportunities. There are a lot of unknowns. Inflation and cost escalation are high, and we don't know if that will continue at the same pace. We're not sure what delivery method would be used. There are a number of different elements in the package, so may be possible to complete in phases. The current package is estimated at \$60M. Unless the package was delivered CM/GC and added to Kiewit's contract, we would need to look at starting in 2027 to avoid conflicts with Kiewit's current work in the corridor.

- Comment #1 - Shannon said she recently drove over the pass, and it looks like they're planning for a third lane on the eastbound side. Is that just to widen the shoulder?
- Response #1 - In the eastbound direction, about three miles of the climbing lane is being implemented at the top portion of the pass once you get past the Narrows going uphill towards where the ramps start for the milepost 190 interchange. On the west side there's widening for detour pavement to allow traffic to be shifted in some of those areas.
- Comment #2 - Shannon noted she has witnessed issues with drivers trying to get ahead of the trucks before the transition to a single lane, and asked if there's something that can be done to make that safer.
- Response #2 - Sam is leading a public information campaign for the zipper lane, and we're also placing signs encouraging drivers to stay in both lanes up to the actual merge point and alternate to get into that single lane. This helps with safety because if people don't use both lanes, then you can get a really long backup of cars that goes outside of our signage and then we have to adjust our signage for the really long queue.

Long-term this is why it was so important to have the eastbound third lane end at the exit ramp for the top of Vail Pass and then the other two lanes continue. We also moved an existing truck parking near the top of the ramp

further from the interchange because it created a turbulent situation with people getting back on the highway from the truck parking and merging to go to the top of the pass.

- Comment #3 - Suzanne suggested that Sam explain the zipper merge in the newspapers so people understand where the lanes end.
- Response #3 - Good input - thank you.
- Comment #4 - Greg said the signing needs to be accurate. When he drove last week to the I-70 Coalition meeting the right lane closed signs were up, but the lanes were open.
- Response #4 - After the traffic control company takes down the cones and arrow board sign, they have to circle around ten-miles on the pass to take down the other signs. So, hopefully when you saw this they were in the process of circling back. For safety reasons, we do not allow them to use the emergency crossovers.
- Comment #5 - Greg asked about the value of the ITS improvements as part of the overall \$60M estimate for CP #6.
- Response #5 - The other improvements are about 95% of the cost.
- Comment #6 - Greg said the Intermountain TPR meeting is this Friday, and they have our letter on the agenda because someone objected to it. Do you think we need to provide a more updated letter? If we do, that may be an issue because everyone has to approve the letter before we present it. We really want CP #6 to be part of Phase 1 and not go back through the whole planning process because it's already been prioritized, but couldn't be funded. There are some Federal funding sources out there that we'd like to compete for. And if there are discretionary funds, we'd like CP #6 to be in line for those funds.
- Response #6 - Mark doesn't see any problem. CP #6 shouldn't have to go through a planning process again. This is a R3 priority. The other TPRs provided extra money in 2018 and 2019 out of their own budgets for this project so this is without a doubt a regional priority. There are so many priorities and this huge project sits out there in front of others, and everybody is tired of competing with this project. Region 3 will continue to reiterate this project as a priority. It will take about a year to do the Statewide Plan and then we'll be doing quick additional 10-year plan that will be an update to the 2045 plan.
- Comment #7 - Greg said we're being told differently. Margaret was at a meeting with Director Lew and was told we would have to go at back to the beginning and start over. The adopted 2045 plan there is 400 million dollars



identified for Vail Pass. I don't think you have spent 400 million yet but if you had another 60 million dollars, you're probably pretty darn close for Phase 1. There are still three to five more phases, and we understand those will have to compete for, but we don't want CP #6 to go back through the entire process.

Margaret said depending on who we talk to, we are not getting a clear answer on how CP #6 would be prioritized or how the Vail Pass project would stay in the ten-year plan. I am encouraged to hear Mark's comments and we agree that CP #6 is part of Phase 1 that is at the top of the ten-year plan, and it should stay there until it is completed.

3) Construction Update

- a) For CP #3, the westbound bridge deck and girder removal was completed on July 9th. The bridge abutment and pier demolition were completed on 7/11.
- b) For the CP #3 bridge and roadway, the existing westbound asphalt was removed on June 28th, the drilled shafts for new westbound bridge started on July 12th, the column and abutment cast in place concrete starts on July 16th and the roadway excavation for new westbound lanes starts on July 16th. Roadway excavation for the new westbound lane starts on July 16th. We will get all the substructure done this year so when we start up again in the spring, it will be ready to place the girders.
- c) For CP #4 westbound, the temporary barrier on the shoulder is set, the detour excavation & embankment work has started and we are working with Xcel Energy for the duct bank for the joint utility trench for fiber and electric started on July 1st.
- d) For CP #4 eastbound, the temporary barrier on the shoulder is set, the soil nail walls work started on June 18th and should be completed by August 3rd. The MSE wall work will start on August 9th. In late July we are planning to start some of the temporary pavement for the detour widening on the westbound side and then a month later we will have a paving crew up there for most of the rest of the season making sure we can get as much paved as possible.
- e) Next week we will start clearing and grubbing for the US Forest Service parking lot and will start hauling material to the site.
 - Comment #1 - Greg asked how material will be brought to the parking lot.
 - Response #1 - Construction vehicles will either come off of the interstate and/or pull off on the truck ramp and access from that side. It will take about a week to get all the material moved to the site. We will have flaggers and appropriate signage to help manage traffic.

- Comment #2 - Shannon said a friend told her they saw a car parked up at the cul-de-sac and probably spent the night there. They figured he got there by using the truck escape ramp.
- Response #2 - This happens occasionally even though there is a small No Parking sign. Hunters sometimes use it, and Google Maps has routed people onto it because it thinks it is a secondary road. CDOT has been unable to get this fixed on Google Maps. The State Patrol does monitor it and will issue a ticket if they see someone parking there.
- Comment #3 - Greg asked if the upper truck escape ramp is going to be in CP #6.
- Response #3 - It is not designated to be part of the current Phase 1 project, but we technically could upgrade that ramp at any time when more freight funds become available.

4) Public Involvement Update

- a) Sam said they are coordinating with the two construction project teams that are working on the pass to create a unified public information program to consolidate the information from both projects. The majority of the comments we have received have been regarding signage, closures of the road, and trail conditions, which we relay to both project teams.

We are definitely open to suggestions for what we should include in our emails, so thank you, Shannon, for the suggestion about including more information about what's happening with the eastbound auxiliary lane and the zipper merge process. We have been pushing that out through the CoTrip and CDOT's new Lane Reporting system. 9 News recently had a zipper merge campaign as a best practice for drivers.

We have almost 900 people signed up for the weekly emails and are hoping the number will continue to increase as the project continues. The recreation trail is always of big interest to the public.

We continue to communicate with the Vail area recreation providers to let them know what is happening on the trail. The Triple Bypass ride was this weekend, and we will follow up with them to make sure everything went smoothly. The Courage Classic is this weekend, and the Copper Triangle is August 3rd. We will make sure they know that CDOT will have everything in tip-top shape for their rides.

- Comment #1 - Dick said he's no longer receiving email updates and would like to get them again.



- Response #1 - Sam said that MailChimp does have some quirks and he will send Dick the link to sign up again.
- Comment #2 - Returning to the zipper lane topic, Dick noted that I-70 is full of drivers who may not be from Colorado and are unfamiliar with the zipper lane. He suggested that CDOT use signage he has seen in past years that advise drivers to use both lanes to the merge point with an alternate sign at the merge point. Also, can state patrol prevent the truckers from blocking the other lane so people can pass them.
- Response #2 - Kiewit will review current signage and consider changes per Dick's suggestion. John acknowledged that this situation with truckers does happen. This can increase the queue, which increases risk a secondary crash because the queue is so far outside the signage and motorists on a blind curve are not expecting somebody stopped in the road.

5) Schedule Update

John said construction will continue on CP #4 & CP #5 until late 2026.

6) Additional Discussion

- Comment #1 - Greg asked if CDOT has heard anything about a project audit.
- Response #1 - Karen said anytime we make a change to the grant, we have to get the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) approval. We've gone through that with the two amendments to date and the request to reduce scope for CP #6 has been submitted. The initial comments we have received were editorial and now it is with the DOT legal team. We can keep you updated on that process.

