



## **History of the I-70 Coalition**

In 2002, CDOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) released a Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) for the I-70 mountain corridor.

In the fall of 2003, concerned with the limited scope of the draft PEIS and recognizing the importance of the I-70 mountain corridor to the economic well-being of the region, several county and municipal jurisdictions came to together to discuss transportation planning that could meet current and future needs for a 50 year window. The community leaders also desired that the transportation plans minimize environmental impacts, and preserve the unique local character of the counties and towns in the corridor. The needs, desires and values of the communities needed to be reflected in the plans.

In January 2004, numerous local governments formalized the I-70 Coalition by adopting an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA), forming the Interstate 70 Central Mountain Transportation Corridor Coalition (I-70 Coalition.) The IGA outlined the purposes and governance policies of the Coalition:

- To prepare locally preferred alternative transportation plans for the corridor that could be presented to the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT.)
- To determine the locally preferred alternatives to meet the wants and needs of our member communities to better serve them in their transportation needs.
- To attempt to influence the CDOT, the Colorado State Legislature, the Federal Highway Administration, the United States Congress and other Federal and State entities having jurisdiction over the planning, implementation or operation of corridor transportation projects to provide resources to build locally preferred alternatives to meet the transportation goals of the corridor.
- To apply for grants and other funding, through sponsorship of a member agency, from Colorado, Federal and other sources to conduct planning and research on methods to build locally preferred alternatives to improve transportation in the corridor.
- To study the feasibility and pros and cons of becoming an integrated Colorado Department of Transportation Commissioner District, Engineering District and Planning District.
- To advocate for the application of best practices and technologies to the regionally preferred transportation plan.

In May 2004, several of the jurisdictions that signed the IGA solicited the support of NWCOG's Rural Resort Region (RRR) to organize and administer the I-70 Coalition.

In July 2004, the RRR hosted an "interest" meeting in Frisco that is considered the first official meeting of the organization.

In September of 2004 the Coalition unanimously adopted a mission: *To enhance public accessibility and mobility in the I-70 Central Mountain Corridor and adjoining dependent counties and municipalities through the implementation of joint public and private transportation management efforts.*

To accomplish that mission the Coalition adopted the following goals:

- Serve as a collective voice for the I-70 Central Mountain Transportation Corridor and adjoining dependent counties and municipalities in addressing transportation issues.
- Develop a regionally preferred transportation plan with locally accepted solutions.
- Enhance employer, business entity, property and local government participation and investment in transportation services and programs.

In October 2004, the RRR Board of Directors decided that the RRR would focus its efforts in 2005 toward working with the I-70 Coalition to identify and articulate a regionally preferred transportation plan, addressing transportation growth along the I-70 central mountain corridor.

In January 2005, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was executed between the I-70 Coalition and CDOT for purposes of addressing coordination and cooperation in developing a transportation solution for the Interstate 70 corridor between Golden and Glenwood Springs, including consideration of a Regionally Preferred Alternative that may be developed by the Coalition and submitted as comments as part of the on-going I-70 West Corridor Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS). The MOU remained in effect through December 31, 2006. The following are some of the terms of the MOU:

Prior to selection of a preferred alternative and the issuance of a Record of Decision (ROD):

- CDOT shall, at the request of the Coalition, be available to answer questions and provide technical assistance in the Coalition's review of the I-70 West PEIS and the Coalition's development of a Regionally Preferred Alternative.
- CDOT will work to secure funds as early in the public comment period as possible that can be made available to the Coalition to assist with the accomplishment of its goals. *Note: CDOT did provide this funding to the Coalition.*
- A CDOT staff member familiar with the Draft I-70 West PEIS shall attend Coalition outreach meetings whenever possible.
- The Coalition will engage in an outreach effort to develop a Regionally Preferred Alternative for consideration in the I-70 PEIS.
- The Coalition's response does not preclude individual Coalition members from submitting comments specific to themselves.

As part of its obligations under the MOU, the Coalition conducted an extensive outreach process to assist in formulating its response to the PEIS. The Coalition conducted 29 community outreach meetings to educate attendees about the PEIS process and gather input on interests of attendees through a facilitated discussion.

As a result of the I-70 Coalition's adoption of the MOU with CDOT, the PEIS public comment period was extended from March 10, 2005 to May 24, 2005 so that the I-70 Coalition would have sufficient time to implement a consensus building plan among its member jurisdictions.

In May 2005, the Coalition held a two-day retreat at the Silver Creek Lodging and Conference Center in Granby with a primary goal to craft a regionally preferred transportation plan with locally accepted solutions for the I-70 corridor that could be used as a response to the PEIS. There were 76 people and 26 jurisdictions in attendance as well as CDOT representatives.

All members supported the Coalition's Regionally Preferred Alternative and this support became a requirement for membership of the I-70 Coalition. The Coalition's Preferred Alternative is a long-range, multimodal,

sequenced alternative that addresses the transportation concerns of the I-70 corridor for at least the next 50 years. It is designed to align available funding with a sequenced plan to safely increase the long-range capacity of the corridor while addressing the concerns of local communities represented by the Coalition. The Coalition's Preferred Alternative consists of five different modes of transportation: highway, transit, aviation, alternative routes and bicycle/pedestrian. Implementation of the Coalition's Preferred Alternative requires balanced, concurrent planning of each of those modes with constant community and Coalition involvement regarding the schedule, need and mitigation. Concurrent planning for each of these modes should preclude doing any work in the corridor that will have to be replaced to accommodate subsequent actions. In addition, the Coalition Alternative includes steps for the logical reevaluation of the capacity requirements, technological advancements and available financing for the corridor. This reevaluation will help determine the sequencing of subsequent actions. The Coalition's Preferred Alternative envisions Coalition and member involvement for any and all future transportation decisions affecting the I-70 corridor.

In May 2005, the I-70 Coalition submitted comments to the Draft PEIS.

In 2007, it appeared that the PEIS would support the alternative of creating six-lanes along the entire corridor and only plan for 25 years into the future. Also in 2007, Governor Ritter took office and appointed Russell George as the director of CDOT. Russell George recognized the need for broader stakeholder input into the I-70 PEIS process, and created the Collaborative Effort (CE.) The CE is made up of 27 diverse stakeholder groups, and the group was charged with developing a Consensus Recommendation. CDOT and FHWA stated that if consensus could be reached by the CE, that consensus decision would be recognized in the Record of Decision.

In April 2008, the Interstate 70 Mountain Corridor Coalition became an independent 501(C) 6. The Town of Frisco serves as the Coalition's official home, and the Town of Frisco's Finance Director has handled the Coalition's finances since 2008.

In June 2008, the Collaborative Effort developed a consensus recommendation which happened to be identical to the I-70 Coalition's Regionally Preferred Alternative.

In 2009, an innovative project was launched to implement the Coalition's Travel Demand Management program. The Coalition had heard from the traveling public that there was a need for real-time road and traffic information. The Gol70.com project was launched and included a website and blog that featured real time travel info and offered travel tips and strategies for congestion avoidance. At a time when no other entity was doing so, the project "pushed" this travel information out via direct text messaging as well as a social media platform. In recent years, CDOT has greatly expanded its real time information sources, so the Gol70.com project has shifted to away from the real time information and now focuses more heavily on the Coalition's other TDM strategies.

In September 2010, a Revised Draft PEIS was released. The I-70 Coalition's Technical Committee reviewed this Revised Draft of the PEIS and provided comments to CDOT.

In March 2011, a Final PEIS was released and in June 2011, the Record of Decision (ROD) was signed. This ROD is the final step in the Tier 1 NEPA process. It does not authorize any construction or result in direct impacts. Subsequent Tier 2 NEPA processes will be completed to develop and evaluate specific projects consistent with this Tier 1 decision.

From 2011 to current, the I-70 Coalition has had four focus areas: Advocate for Improvements on the I-70 Mountain Corridor, Active Involvement in I-70 Plans and Processes Affecting the I-70 Mountain Corridor, Information Sharing and Outreach, and Travel Demand Management.

In 2013, the I-70 Coalition amended its Bylaws to formally recognize the organization as a Travel Management Organization (TMO.)

The I-70 Coalition continues to seek common ground among diverse interests. The organization has demonstrated the ability to bring varied stakeholders to the table to work out positions that move I-70 solutions towards implementation.

Although not an exhaustive list, in the recent past the Coalition has or does:

- Continue to serve as a collective voice for the I-70 mountain corridor and advocate for improvements along the corridor.
- Foster communications between the state and federal agencies and local jurisdictions.
- Communicate with community, business and municipal boards on the ongoing efforts of the I-70 Coalition.
- Partner and communicate closely with CDOT, Colorado State Patrol and the Colorado Motor Carriers Association on I-70 related issues.
- Participate in multiple studies and processes such as Collaborative Effort, Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) process development, the Rocky Mountain Rail Authority (RMRA) study, High Performance Transportation Enterprise (HPTE), and the Transit & Rail Advisory Committee.
- Serve on CDOT Project Leadership Teams for the Twin Tunnel Project, the Advanced Guideway System (AGS) Study, Interconnectivity Study, Traffic and Revenue Study, Peak Period Shoulder Lanes, and others.
- Educate the traveling public about congestion avoidance strategies as well as other Travel Demand Management (TDM) strategies.
- Partner with local corridor businesses and promote those that provide incentives for off peak travel.
- Coordinate with the CDOT on TDM efforts. In 2014, the two organizations partnered on a media campaign that educated I-70 travelers about peak traffic times, and encouraged off peak travel.
- Support and promote efforts of transit companies that provide bus and van service between the Front Range and mountain resorts and towns.
- Support and promote carpool resources and options for those traveling between the Front Range and mountain resorts and towns.
- Advocate for legislation to benefit the I-70 Corridor.
- Contracted with the research firm RRC & Associates in both 2012 and 2014 to perform intercept studies at the Morrison Dinosaur Lots, as well as poll their Front Range Snow Sports Panel. This effort gathered information on carpooling motivations and habits, congestion avoidance strategies used by I-70 travelers, interest in ski bus/van services, awareness of incentives for off peak travel, perceptions of EB Twin Tunnel project, willingness to pay tolls on future managed lanes, and gathered ideas for improving I-70. This data serves as a baseline to measure the Coalition's TDM impacts.
- Participated in state initiatives such as the Senate Bill 1 Transit Task Force, and the Governor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Transportation Funding.
- Managed the Land Use Transit Planning Study.
- Developed Performance Criteria for an Advanced Guideway System (AGS)
- Hosted the I-70 Travel Management Summit, bringing together stakeholders from resorts, towns and chambers to explore how stakeholders can work towards positively impacting I70 congestion in the near term.

In June of 2014, the I-70 Coalition will host a retreat to reflect on the successes and the strengths of the organization, renew and refine agreement for the mission and priorities of the Coalition as it enters its second decade, and begin discussions of how to maintain or expand the Coalition's influence on transportation planning in the Mountain Corridor.