



Downtown Estes Loop Project Frequently Asked Questions

November 3, 2014

The following lists a number of questions received at the October 8th project Open Houses, as well as through the project hotline, email address and website.

Project-Related Questions:

Question 1: How is this project funded?

Response: In September 2013, the Town of Estes Park was awarded 13 million dollars in Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) funding through a competitive process administered by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Central Federal Lands Highway Division (CFLHD). FLAP provides funding for work on public facilities that are located on, are adjacent to, or provide access to federal lands. The application project included reconfiguring existing two-way roadways to one-way to ease traffic congestion and improve safety for both vehicles and pedestrians between Estes Park and Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP).

In addition, the Town received funding (\$4.2 Million) under the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) Responsible Acceleration of Maintenance and Partnerships (RAMP) Program. The RAMP Program funding is designed to promote public-private partnerships including the transfer of ownership of certain CDOT roadways to a local agency with demonstrated support and willingness to take ownership and maintenance. Under this program, the Town will take ownership and maintenance from CDOT of West Elkhorn Avenue (from Moraine Avenue west to US 34), and the \$4.2 Million will constitute the local match for the larger FLAP project.

Question 2: I thought the one-way couplet roadway realignment option was selected. Why are other options being considered?

Response: In the Spring of 2013, the Town identified five different options for downtown transportation improvements, and held a public outreach process to gather feedback on these options. The one-way couplet option was the highest ranked transportation solution. As a result of this process, the Town Board then voted to proceed with preparation of an application to the FHWA FLAP for the one-way couplet option.

However, the Town's process differs from the federal process for project review and approval. Federally funded projects such as this require adherence to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and therefore a specific set of guidance related to alternatives. The identification, consideration, and analysis of alternatives are an important part of the NEPA process. Consideration of alternatives should lead to a solution that satisfies the transportation need and protects environmental and community resources.

The October 8th open houses presented multiple roadway options to gather feedback from the public and to gather input on environmental concerns/issues. In adherence with the NEPA process, the team will evaluate and screen previously identified alternatives and new alternatives brought forward through public input. FHWA's NEPA guidance provides additional details:

<http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/projdev>



Question 3: How will alternatives be screened and/or eliminated?

Response: The first step in evaluating alternatives is to develop screening criteria based upon the purpose and need of the project (for example, alleviates congestion, improves safety, etc.). For those alternatives which are recommended for elimination, the reasons for their having been eliminated will be clearly discussed. Public input will be incorporated into the development of screening criteria and the process for eliminating alternatives or carrying alternatives forward.

Question 4: How will a preferred alternative be selected?

Response: A preferred alternative will be selected through the NEPA process and described in the Final EA and decision document. With public input into the process, the CFLHD, together with CDOT and the Town, will make a final decision on the proposed action. The Town Board is not required to take official action unless an alternative different from that approved as part of their FLAP application is recommended.

Question 5: What resources will be evaluated in the Environmental Assessment (EA)?

Response: In adherence with NEPA requirements, the EA will evaluate a number of resources, including land use, social impacts, economic impacts, air quality, noise, water quality, floodplains, biological (wetlands, wildlife, etc.), hazardous materials and historic resources, among others. A traffic analysis will be completed, which compares No Action conditions to the design options under consideration.

Question 6: How will this project evaluate potential impacts to existing businesses?

Response: As part of development of the Environmental Assessment, the project team will evaluate foreseeable economic impacts under the alternatives. This includes potential impacts to the local economy such as the effects of the project on accessibility, existing and future development, tax revenues, and retail sales.

Question 7: What is the Town's long term vision to solve the downtown congestion problem?

Response: Transportation improvements such as those being evaluated as part of this project could make a significant step toward reducing congestion, but are only one piece of a complex puzzle. This project could reduce congestion by:

1. Providing a relatively free-flowing roadway and intersections for thru traffic headed to RMNP.
2. Beginning to separate the large volumes of cars and pedestrians that are trying to occupy the same space at the same time.

However, the congestion problem is too large and complex to be solved by any one project. The solution must also involve many other strategies, which the Town is considering, including:

1. Providing sufficient auto, RV, and bus parking in strategically selected locations, and using technology to communicate availability of parking to motorists in real time.
2. Running frequent shuttle bus alternatives that take visitors to their destinations more pleasantly than driving and parking – which the Town and Rocky Mountain National Park both offer each summer.
3. Employing variable message signage that communicates real-time congestion delays, parking limitations, and alternative route options.
4. Establishing a major event congestion management plan for the days where none of the above solutions are sufficient to reasonably manage the sheer volume of visitors coming to Estes Park.



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Many of the strategies above are outlined in the Town's *2014 Strategic Plan* (<http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/TownofEstesPark/CBON/1251615450348>)

Question 8: What are the next steps in this project and how will the public be involved?

Response: The NEPA process has been initiated. The first public open houses held on October 8th, 2014 were intended to gather public feedback on previously identified concepts, including the FLAP application design concept. The next step is to proceed with collecting environmental and traffic data, developing alternatives, identifying alternative screening criteria, and initiating the alternatives screening process. Public comments received will inform the alternatives development and screening process. Subsequent open houses will be held in January/February 2015 (specific date to be determined) to present an update on data collection efforts and alternatives screening. Small group meetings specific to topic areas will be ongoing. Public input is encouraged throughout the process, and the public may comment or ask questions via multiple methods:

- Project Website: www.downtownestesloop.com
- Project Hotline: 970-480-7045
- Project email: info@downtownestesloop.com

Questions Related to Parking, Signage, etc.

Question 9: Why is a downtown parking structure/transit hub not included in the Downtown Estes Loop project after it was shown to residents as one of the improvement options at the open house in March 2013?

Response: The Town began considering applying for FLAP funding in January of 2013. Early in the process there were five possible options developed for the consideration of the public:

1. Parking Structure/Transit Center downtown
2. Completion of a bike/pedestrian trail along the Big Thompson to the National Park
3. Two way road along West Riverside
4. One way couplet road configuration (westbound-Elkhorn/Moraine, eastbound-Riverside)
5. Do nothing

Town staff held two public meetings with over 580 letters sent to affected property owners and businesses and a second meeting for the general public. A study session with the Town Board was held to describe the potential FLAP grant projects (including a parking garage, one-way couplet, two way reroute of Highway 34/36 through downtown onto Riverside, and a trail system); to review the FLAP criteria; the need for matching funds of 17.21%; and potential CDOT funding for the match if the one-way or two-way road projects were awarded. During the meetings the public was asked to rank the projects, which outlined the desire to move forward with pursuing FLAP funds. The ranking from the public was as follows (the lower the number, the better):

- The Parking Structure came in with a total of 115, making it the #1 choice.
- The One-way Couplet came in second with a total of 170.
- Third was the Big Thompson Trail with a total of 222.
- Fourth was the Two-way Roadway with a total of 237.
- The Do Nothing option was the lowest ranked with a total of 297.





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The purpose of these federal funds is to reduce congestion and improve access to federal public lands. In reviewing the criteria for the project, it was clear that the construction of a parking structure or building a trail along the Big Thompson were much weaker options to meet the objectives of the FLAP funding than the road improvement options. As this was a competitive process, the Board determined that the one-way couplet was the best option that both was favored by the community and met the requirements of the FLAP grant.

However, the Town Board recognized that parking in the downtown core was the number one choice of the public and has been identified as a major issue by both guests and residents. After extensive public input and board discussion at their meeting on March 26th, 2013, the Board took formal action to authorize staff to proceed with the application for a FLAP grant for the one-way couplet and identified a downtown transit parking structure as a future project.

Question 10: Why is parking not included in this project?

Response: Evaluation of new parking facilities (structured or surface parking) is not within the scope of this transportation project because it would not meet the need identified for this project. As part of this study, any potential displacement of public parking along the three study area roadways (Elkhorn, Moraine and Riverside) would be evaluated for replacement.

Question 11: What is the Town doing to address parking needs?

Response: Like congestion, the scarcity of downtown parking is not simply solved by the completion of one project. The Town of Estes Park has been studying the downtown parking issue since 2003. In December 2013, the Estes Park Transit & Parking Study was completed. It recommended implementation of six different transit, parking, and Travel Demand Management strategies to address this issue. The recommendations included new intercept parking spaces outside of downtown and construction of a new parking structure near the downtown core.

The Town secured \$3.9 Million in grant funding to implement these strategies through the construction of a new transit hub and parking structure at the existing Visitor Center located at 500 Big Thompson Avenue. Bids for this parking garage are scheduled to be opened in late November. If the bids are within budget, the work could start in January 2015 and be completed mid-year. The proposed parking structure will provide 215 parking stalls where 114 parking spaces currently exist. The net gain is 101 new spaces. Thirty nine (39) existing spaces will remain in service north and west of the Visitor Center building. The total parking available at the Visitor Center will be 254 spaces. An additional 92 spaces exist on the south side of the river and are accessed from U.S. 36.

Question 12: What about additional signage to direct drivers through town and to parking?

Response: Additional signage to inform RMNP-bound drivers of alternate routes via Wonderview Avenue (U.S. 34) and Mary's Lake Road is an essential tool in managing the increasing congestion in downtown. The Town's Transportation Advisory Board and Public Works staff will develop a Guide Sign Program for the primary roadways in the Estes Valley. This effort is not currently an identified component in the Downtown Estes Loop scope of work.





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Question 13: Congestion seems to have increased after the traffic signals were changed from the all-walk pedestrian phase. Why were the signals changed?

Response: The signals were changed to alleviate congestion and move vehicles through downtown more efficiently. The current congestion is not caused by the signal change, but rather by the continued increase in pedestrians, cars, campers, shuttles, tour buses, and carriages jockeying to simultaneously use two segments of downtown roadway. In 2008, the traffic signals in town were programmed to allow an “all-walk” phase which stopped traffic in all four directions approximately every 100 seconds. This “all-walk” phase was found to contribute to congestion as pedestrians crossed at different speeds and entered the intersection at the tail end of the phase. Traffic count records indicate that 510,172 vehicles entered and exited Estes Park in July of 2008 via U.S. 34 and U.S. 36. Fast forward to 2011 after CDOT interconnected the signal cycle communication, eliminated the “all-walk” phase, and gave the green pedestrian signal time back to the cars. The intersections accommodated a 16% increase in traffic (592,596 vehicles) in July 2011.

Traffic still continues to grow. CDOT recorded 614,240 vehicles entering and leaving Estes in July 2013 via U.S. 34 and 36. This represents a 20% increase over 2008 volumes. 2014 totals for July are not available because the July traffic counts on U.S. 36 were disrupted by the flood repair work. CDOT, together with the Town, are continuing to discuss and analyze the best peak season signal timing for the Riverside/Elkhorn and Elkhorn/Moraine intersections.



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