



## Downtown Estes Loop Project October 8<sup>th</sup> Open House Summary

### November 3, 2014

The Central Federal Lands Highway Division (CFLHD), Town of Estes Park and Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) – are initiating a project development process including public outreach, environmental analysis and preliminary engineering for evaluation of transportation options. The project includes three primary roadways: Elkhorn Avenue, Moraine Avenue and Riverside Drive through downtown Estes Park.

Two open houses were held on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014 to introduce the project development process and gather public feedback. The first open house was open to all, and also included targeted outreach (mailed letter) to residents and businesses located along the study area roadways. The first open house was held from 12pm – 2pm. A second open house for the general public was held from 4pm-6pm that same day. Both meetings were held at the Estes Park Museum Meeting Room, 200 Fourth Street. The open houses were announced through press releases, newspaper advertisements, the project website ([www.downtownestesloop.com](http://www.downtownestesloop.com)), the town email listserve, and social media. Per the sign-in form, 123 persons attended the first open house and 104 persons attended the second open house.

The meeting boards from the meetings are posted on the project website:  
<http://downtownestesloop.com/public-outreach/open-house-announcements/>

Boards were organized into:

- Project History (design options evaluated prior to this project)
- State and federal funding sources allocated to the project
- Design options presented as part of previous studies
- Environmental and community considerations
- Tentative project schedule

The following sections summarize meeting board content and feedback received at the open houses. In many cases multiple and similar comments were received. Similar comments have been combined in this summary document.

#### A. Project History:

The “Downtown Estes Loop” roadway realignment project builds on previous transportation planning studies and public outreach activities for improving transportation downtown. The Estes Valley Transportation Alternatives Study completed in 2003 identified potential improvements to the downtown street network including a one-way couplet system utilizing Elkhorn, Moraine and Riverside roadways. The study also recommended transit and parking improvements, which have been advanced and implemented over the last decade, including: implementation of transit service; completion of a 2013 Transit and Parking Study; and the planned Visitor Center Parking Structure.

The Estes Park Transportation Visioning Committee was a citizen led committee that developed a vision for Estes Park’s transportation system 20 years into the future. This committee recommended nine (9) scenarios to enhance transportation in Estes Park. Of these scenarios several included enhancements that built the foundation for the Downtown Estes Loop including: rerouting US 36 to West Riverside, creating a one-way couplet on existing roadways, and rerouting Rocky Mountain National Park traffic to West Riverside. The visions and recommendations from this committee are compiled in a *Roadmap to the Future 2012* document.





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In the Spring of 2013, the Town initiated a public outreach process to gather input on the community's priorities for improving transportation downtown. Attendees weighed in on several transportation-related project options, one of which was the conversion of traffic through the core downtown area from two-way to one-way traffic (one-way couplet). The Town Board voted to proceed with a competitive funding application for the one-way couplet and submitted an application for funding through the Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP), administered through the Central Federal Lands Highway Division (CFLHD). The application was successful, and the Town was awarded \$13 million in FLAP funds for construction of the one-way couplet concept. To secure federal funds, the FLAP program requires a local match. In order to secure matching funds, the Town partnered with the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) to submit an application for CDOT's Responsible Acceleration of Maintenance and Partnerships (RAMP) program. The Town was awarded \$4.2 million through CDOT's RAMP program for West Elkhorn Avenue. This funding will be used as both the local match for the FLAP funding, and to rehabilitate West Elkhorn Avenue (new pavement resurfacing, new striping and upgrades to signing). The terms of the RAMP application require that Estes Park take over ownership and maintenance from CDOT of West Elkhorn Avenue from Moraine Avenue to West Wonderview Avenue (US 34).

### **B. Public Comments Received on Design Options:**

Maps of three design concepts, as well as the No Action option, were presented at the October 8 open houses. The comment form distributed at the meeting provided space for attendees to indicate their preference, ideas, and concerns for each of these options.

**The following comments were provided on comment forms for the options shown.**

- No Action (Maintain existing conditions):
  - By doing nothing, issues with traffic will continue. Visitation could suffer.
  - Need to carefully consider out of direction travel, impacts to businesses and residences, etc. with any of the build options.
  - Leave as is, this is a parking problem, add parking lots, add parking structures
  - Leave roads alone/No action is ok if parking is added, and pedestrian under crossings are added on River Walk, improved shuttles from outside of town
  - Consider parking/parking structure first or concurrently with this study
  - Existing has worked for many years
  - Town needs change, delays are affecting Town and RMNP routes are significant
  - No change to downtown roads, improve signage and force RMNP traffic to use Wonderview(US 34)/Fall River Entrance
  - Visit Estes Park does an excellent job of bringing visitors to town. Visitors know what to expect and still come
  - Problem is pedestrian and vehicles at signals, old barn dance operation worked better, change signal operations
- Concept 1 (Elkhorn/Moraine/Riverside All 1-Way Direction):
  - Concern with out of direction travel along the three roadways (visitors/residents circling to find parking).
  - Confusing for drivers and dangerous for pedestrians (*similar concern for Concept 1, 1A and 2*)
  - Dislike for one-way streets, concern about safety on one-way streets (*similar concern for Concept 1A*)



- Concern that traffic will bypass downtown thereby, hurting business (*similar concern for Concept 1, 1A and 2*)
- Requires everyone (tourists and residents) to drive through Elkhorn Avenue
- Relocation concerns (*similar concern for Concept 1, 1A and 2*)
- Concern with impact to Riverwalk (*similar concern for Concept 1, 1A and 2*)
- Concern with creating bottlenecks where lanes merge near Moraine/Riverside (*similar concern for Concept 1, 1A and 2*)
- Elkhorn should only have 2-lanes and no bike lanes, extra room is needed for loading and parking
- Have 3 lanes through downtown Elkhorn and 3 lanes on Moraine to Rockwell
  - Refer to Frank Theis original plan
- The one-way roads will impact various areas in town, in particular, the west end of town.
  - Eliminates one of two accesses going onto Davis Hill
- Gold Route would not be an Elkhorn only service and would drop down Moraine and back up to Riverside, adding more time to the route.
- Forces roadway users leaving the post office into town instead of exiting to the south (*similar concern for Concept 1, and 1A*)
- Concern for pedestrian crossings on Riverside for properties that use Town lots for parking (*similar concern for Concept 1, 1A and 2*)
- Add bike lanes (*similar concern for Concept 1, 1A and 2*)
- Concern on the speed of the traffic on Riverside (*similar concern for Concept 1, 1A, and 2*)
- Concept 1A (Elkhorn: Maintain 2-Way, Moraine & Riverside: 1-Way):
  - Consider raising bridge at confluence of Fall and Thompson Rivers; put pedestrian and bike trail under the bridge—safer and keeps traffic moving
  - Allows all buses (including Gold Route) to maintain route.
  - Parallel parking on left side of Riverside is a bad idea
  - Most logical option with least impact
- Concept 2 (Maintain 2-Way Streets, Riverside Widened to 4-Lanes):
  - Concerns on impact to property owners on Riverside Drive
  - Good solution, but let it come at a later date
  - Preserves access to businesses without having to circle through town
  - Concerns about this option bypassing downtown
  - Could better facilitate a future pedestrian mall
  - Concern with aesthetics, natural and historic resources along Riverside (See environmental section below for further detail).
  - Seems more expensive than other options
  - Provides opportunity for investment, redevelopment
  - Bypass of downtown would allow for a pedestrian mall on Elkhorn or closing for events
  - Consider the middle lane (of the 3 lanes) changing direction during peak times or change the west direction to elevated 2 lanes that turn into a parking structure at the post office
  - Crossing four lanes at intersections may prohibit pedestrians, especially aging and young families
  - Allow the 4-lanes to reverse directs at times 3&1, 2&2, 1&3 to move traffic
  - Four lanes on Riverside would affect the small town character of the town
  - Will shift backup westbound to Riverside. No increase in traffic flow capacity westbound
  - Allows vehicles with no interest in visiting downtown to get through town

- Not a good idea to put the main four lanes in the middle of the floodplain

*Other Concepts/Ideas to Address Transportation Problems:*

The comment form included space to document additional ideas to help alleviate the existing transportation issues. The following comments were provided by meeting attendees on comment forms:

- Need an overall solution/vision to address transportation issues.
- Parking:
  - Need more parking downtown.
  - Consider parking concurrently with this project
  - Consider a parking structure in the post office lot.
  - Encourage free parking outside of downtown (Fairgrounds Parking Lot, etc.)
  - Consider paid parking (downtown)
    - Consider seasonal only along Elkhorn and Moraine
  - Town employees and shop employees could park out of town, leaving more for visitors.
- Crosswalks/Signals:
  - Consider pedestrian overpasses and underpasses (tunnels)
  - Consider traffic control (police) at major intersections during congested times
  - Bring back police to control pedestrian crossing and traffic flow
  - Move crosswalk at Barlow Plaza
  - Install a signal light at intersection by the Donut Haus
  - Concern with the modification of the signal timing in downtown (Elkhorn/Moraine and Elkhorn/Riverside) to remove the pedestrian “all-walk” phase—have diagonal pedestrian crossing
  - Crosswalk and lights at Wonderview and McGregor
  - Coordinate signals from 34/36 out to Beaver Point
- Signage:
  - Need better signage directing visitors to parking, alternate routes to RMNP and exposure to downtown businesses.
  - Provide attractive (not traffic green sign with white lettering) directing to RMNP or have message signs saying how many minutes to RMNP (i.e. “5 minutes to North RMNP entrance”, 20 minutes to South RMNP entrance”)
  - Direct traffic at US 36/34 going to RMNP to use Wonderview(US 34)/Fall River Entrance
  - Provide “Lot Full” signs
- Access & Entrances
  - Beef up Fall River Entrance on US 34 Bypass
  - Maintain access to post office
- Multi-Modal (bike, transit, etc.):
  - Need bicycle facilities on downtown streets
  - Evaluate impacts to transit (RMNP hiker shuttle, Town Gold Route/Trolley) with each of the options.
  - Make transit a priority with a dedicated shuttle/trolley lane
  - Increase shuttle service from Visitor parking/Fairgrounds to downtown.
- Need an economic impacts analysis of businesses with the build options
- Consider roundabouts
- Potential impact of construction to properties downtown



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- Concern with emergency vehicle services and connections
- Need good landscaping plan with any Concept
- Concern that in the future, with the town purchasing West Elkhorn that roads will be shut down for festivals and other events, or even more drastically, a walking mall.
- Raise bridges at river crossings/floodplains

Roadway design ideas (from comment forms):

- Consider a 3-Lane option on Riverside rather than 4-Lane.
- Convert to one way streets at certain times of day “reversible flow” either daily (i.e. morning southbound to RMNP, afternoon from RMNP to town) or seasonally (one-way in summer)
- Why a permanent loop? Why penalize the locals and other off-season visitors with the inconvenience for 7-8 months out of the year? It definitely is not needed during winter.
  - In peak season, put barriers (i.e. huge flower pots) to close off West Elkhorn to become a walking mall and close off Big Horn so there are no right turns, in nonpeak season, remove barriers
- Consider Elkhorn 2-way  Moraine 2-way  Riverside 4-way 
- Consider Elkhorn 2-way
- Moraine one way, Riverside four lanes (or two lanes eastbound and westbound)
- Consider reversing one-way couplet directions (Riverside westbound, Elkhorn/Moraine eastbound)
- Merge concepts 1A and 2
- Use other roadways (such as Mary’s Lake Road) to bypass downtown streets
  - Bypass from Moraine near the dump to the west end of Elkhorn
- Add a turn lane on West Moraine from Twisted Pines to Beaver Point and incorporate a sidewalk
- Close off downtown area on Elkhorn between Riverside and Moraine and create a pedestrian mall or extend the Elkhorn mall to Spruce Street west of downtown
- I would like to see the drawing for the pedestrian mall
- Why not try a demonstration trial period by making the current Elkhorn/Moraine one way westbound and divert eastbound traffic onto Riverside and see what happens?
- Instead of a split at the Donut Haus, how about the traffic split at Rockwell and divert westbound traffic at that point instead?

### C. Environmental and Community Considerations:

An Environmental Assessment (EA) process is underway to evaluate a number of resources in accordance with requirements of the National Environmental Policy (NEPA) including: economic impacts, land use, social 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.

Primary environmental concerns heard at the meeting include:

- Noise (impacts to Riverside if traffic increased)
- Beneficial impact to air quality from improved traffic flow; concern with increased emissions if Riverside modified.
  - Reduce air pollution from the shuttles.
- Potential impacts to existing historic resources



- The cottage portion of 351 Moraine Avenue is the original visitor center of RMNP and the stone/rock wall that fronts the property along Moraine Avenue and the Mountain Climbing School address one lot closer to town should be preserved.
- Potential displacement of businesses and residences
- Direct and indirect effect on retail shops with a change in the roadway system
- Disruption to existing natural resources (parks, riverwalk, vegetation)
  - Keep the little park by the post office; it is a rare and wonderful little patch of green in the town right by the river.
- Include environmental sustainability with whatever is chosen.

## D. Other comments

The following comments were provided by meeting attendees on comment forms:

- Concerns about the impact of construction with any option
- Too much money to spend for a 3 month problem
- This is an unneeded project.
- How do any of the options integrate into a larger plan, is there a long term plan?
- Put meaningful information/data on the project website
- Open house materials were ineffective. Have a presentation describing each option and their differences/similarities. Provide opportunities for meaningful discussion.
- The Town should not take ownership from CDOT of Elkhorn and Moraine, the maintenance is too costly
- Have RMNP coordinate its free days from October 15 to May 15, when the Town needs more visitors. If free days are needed in the summer, use a week day instead of a weekend
- We don't trust our town anymore.
- Concentrate on keeping tourism and sales tax flowing to all businesses
- People love Estes for what it is and how it operates currently
- Traffic is not the biggest concern, parking, bikes, sidewalks, bus lanes are more important
- How do any of the alternatives fit with the long-term vision? Don't be reactive with a short-term solution
- Consider official voting on the solution

## Next Steps in the Project:

A number of comments stated above related to the project process, parking, signals, etc. have been addressed in a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document, also on the project website.

The next step in the EA process is to collect environmental and traffic data. Subsequent open houses will be held to present an update on data collection and the process for screening alternatives (anticipated January/February 2015). Small group meetings on specific topic areas will also be scheduled.

We need public input into this process throughout the project. *Opportunities to Gather Feedback:*

Project Website: [www.downtownestesloop.com](http://www.downtownestesloop.com)

Project Hotline: 970-480-7045

Project email: [info@downtownestesloop.com](mailto:info@downtownestesloop.com)