

PROJECT UPDATE

The Downtown Estes Loop study continues to move forward with a focus on completion of the Environmental Assessment (EA) for public review and comment in the coming months. Together, the three agency partners— Federal Highway Administration, Central Federal Lands Highway Division (CFLHD), Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) and the Town of Estes Park – are committed to helping alleviate congestion and improve overall connectivity between the Town and Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP). Michael Davies, Director of the Office of Project Delivery at the FHWA – CFLHD, states: “The intent of FLAP is to bring together the national park and surrounding communities to enhance access and connectivity for all. We understand the significance of this project to the residents and visitors of Estes Park, and will work closely with our project partners and the community to fulfill the project vision.”

This project originated through the Town’s past transportation studies and its 2013 application for Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) funds to explore a one-way couplet along Elkhorn Avenue, Moraine Avenue and Riverside Drive. Approximately \$17.2 million in funds were subsequently awarded through a combination of FLAP funds and CDOT RAMP (Responsible Acceleration of Maintenance and Partnerships). An EA was initiated in the fall of 2014, beginning with the development of a purpose and need statement: Improve access to RMNP by reducing travel time and congestion, and improve safety through Downtown Estes Park. A multi-tiered screening process led to the decision to evaluate the environmental impacts of the No Action and Alternative 1 (One-Way Couplet) in the EA. A public meeting was held in March 2015 to present the alternatives analysis findings, followed by Town Board action in April 2015 to continue the EA process with these two alternatives.

Over the last several months, the project team has undertaken a more in depth analysis of several key issues impacting the project. The team has been developing and analyzing detailed models based on recently released data showing higher flood flows and larger floodplain boundaries as a result of the September 2013 flood. This data has presented the project team with new challenges for the project design and budget. Josh Laippy, CDOT Chief Engineer, states “The devastation caused by the 2013 floods required an in-depth analysis of our roads and bridges in an effort to protect vulnerable infrastructure assets as well as nearby homes and businesses. Through the funding leveraged as part of the Downtown Estes Loop project, we can better secure the transportation infrastructure through downtown Estes Park.”

The project team has also been studying a recent request from the Town to CFLHD to study a downtown transit facility parking structure alternative in the EA. A downtown transit facility parking structure was discussed in the original 2013 application as a future Town project. In response to the community’s concerns and the Town’s request, the team developed traffic models to study the impacts and effectiveness of a parking/transit structure in the vicinity of the post office in context of the same criteria developed for screening previously identified project alternatives. The team’s analysis shows that more parking is needed in the downtown area, but the structure alone does not address the project’s purpose and need to the extent modeled for Alternative 1. However, a future transit facility parking structure would not be precluded under the No Action Alternative or Alternative 1 (Downtown Estes Loop). Frank Lancaster, Town Administrator, states: “The Town appreciates that our request was given due consideration and analysis. Although the transit facility parking structure is not feasible within the current project, the Town is committed to making long-term improvements to parking in the downtown area. At the same time, the Town fully supports the continued study of the Downtown Estes Loop and its potential to improve access to the park, reduce congestion in town, and complement future downtown parking improvements.”

The project partners (CFLHD, CDOT and the Town) are working closely together to complete the analysis and documentation necessary to distribute the EA to the community for review and comment. The flood plain analysis and transit facility parking structure alternative screening will be fully documented in the EA. At this time, public release of the EA is expected in the spring of 2016.

Additional information on this study may be found on the project website: www.downtownestesloop.com or by contacting the project team at info@downtownestesloop.com or 970-480-7045.

