

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (EA)

FOR THE

### DOWNTOWN ESTES LOOP PROJECT

(ROADWAY, BRIDGE AND CHANNEL/FLOODPLAIN IMPROVEMENTS)

CO FLAP 34(1) & 36(1) MORaine AVENUE AND RIVERSIDE DRIVE

TOWN OF ESTES PARK, CO



PREPARED BY:

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION  
CENTRAL FEDERAL LANDS HIGHWAY DIVISION  
LAKEWOOD, COLORADO



Volume 1 of 3



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CO FLAP 34(1) & 36(1) MORaine AVENUE AND RIVERSIDE DRIVE  
TOWN OF ESTES PARK, CO

**Prepared for:**

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## WHAT'S IN THIS DOCUMENT

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Central Federal Lands Highway Division (CFLHD) has prepared this Environmental Assessment, which examined the potential environmental impacts of the alternatives being considered for the proposed project located in the Town of Estes Park, Colorado. The EA document describes why the project is being proposed, alternatives for the project, the existing environment that could be affected by the project, the potential impacts from each of the alternatives, and the proposed avoidance, minimization and/or mitigation measures. FHWA-CFLHD is the lead agency for the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance.

For individuals with sensory disabilities, this document can be made available in an alternate format; if special accommodations are needed, please write to James Herlyck at [James.Herlyck@dot.gov](mailto:James.Herlyck@dot.gov) or 12300 West Dakota Avenue, Suite 380, Lakewood, CO 80228.

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## VIEWING LOCATIONS

Copies of the Environmental Assessment (EA) and the technical reports referenced in this EA are available for review at the locations listed below during the 30-day public comment period.

**Town Hall  
Town Clerk's Office**

170 MacGregor Avenue, Room 130  
Estes Park, Colorado 80517  
970.577.4777

**FHWA, Central Federal Lands Highway  
Office (Front Desk)**

12300 West Dakota Avenue  
Lakewood, Colorado 80228  
720.963.3000

**Estes Valley Library**

335 East Elkhorn Avenue  
Estes Park, Colorado 80517  
970.586.8116

**CDOT Region 4**

10601 West 10<sup>th</sup> Street  
Greeley, Colorado 80634  
970.350.2148

**Estes Park Visitor Center**

500 Big Thompson Avenue  
Estes Park, Colorado 80517  
970.577.9900

**CDOT Headquarters**

4201 East Arkansas Avenue  
Denver, Colorado 80222  
303.757.9011

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

## Ways to Comment on the EA

Written comments will be accepted until August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016 by the following ways:

- Through the project website at [www.downtownestesloop.com](http://www.downtownestesloop.com)
- By email to [info@downtownestesloop.com](mailto:info@downtownestesloop.com)
- By mail or drop off:

**Mail to:**

Felsburg Holt & Ullevig  
Attention: Estes Project Team  
6300 South Syracuse Way, Suite 600  
Centennial, CO 80111

**Or drop off at:**

The Town of Estes Park  
Public Works Department  
170 MacGregor Avenue  
Estes Park, CO 80517

**Oral comments will be accepted and recorded only at the public hearing that will be held on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016 at the Estes Park Events Center (1125 Rooftop Way) from 4:30-8:30 PM.**

**\*\*Please note that names and addresses provided become part of the public record\*\***

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**U.S. Department of Transportation  
Federal Highway Administration  
Central Federal Lands Highway Division**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (EA)**

**Submitted Pursuant to:**

**(Federal) 42 U.S.C. 4332(2)(c) and 49 U.S.C. 303**

**for the**

**DOWNTOWN ESTES LOOP PROJECT  
(ROADWAY, BRIDGE AND CHANNEL/FLOODPLAIN IMPROVEMENTS)  
CO FLAP 34(1) & 36(1)  
TOWN OF ESTES PARK, CO**

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\_\_\_\_\_  
FHWA-CFLHD  
Director of Project Delivery

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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**A Federal agency may publish a notice in the Federal Register, pursuant to 23 USC §139(l), indicating that one or more Federal agencies have taken final action on permits, licenses, or approvals for a transportation project. If such notice is published, claims seeking judicial review of those Federal agency actions will be barred unless such claims are filed within 150 days after the date of publication of the notice, or within such shorter time period as is specified in the Federal laws pursuant to which judicial review of the Federal agency action is allowed. If no notice is published, then the periods of time that otherwise are provided by the Federal laws governing such claims will apply.**

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADT	Average Daily Traffic
APE	Area of Potential Effect
AST	Aboveground Storage Tank
ATPPL	Alternative Transportation in the Parks and Public Lands Program
ATR	Automatic Traffic Recorder
BMPs	Best Management Practices
CAQCC	Colorado Air Quality Control Commission
CDOT	Colorado Department of Transportation
CDPHE	Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
CDPS	Colorado Discharge Permit System
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CFLHD	Central Federal Lands Highway Division
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CLOMR	Conditional Letter of Map Revision
CPW	Colorado Parks and Wildlife
COSTIS	Colorado Storage Tank Information System
CWA	Clean Water Act
CWCB	Colorado Water Conservation Board
DHV	Design Hourly Volume
DOI	Department of Interior
DOT	Department of Transportation
EA	Environmental Assessment
EDC	Economic Development Corporation
EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
EPSD	Estes Park Sanitation District
EPVC	Estes Park Visitor Center
ESA	Endangered Species Act
EVRPD	Estes Valley Recreation and Park District
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FIRM	Flood Insurance Rate Map
FLAP	Federal Lands Access Program
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
HCM	Highway Capacity Manual
IPAC	Information, Planning, and Conservation System
ITS	Intelligent Transportation Systems
Leq(h)	one-hour equivalent sound level
LOMR	Letter of Map Revision
LOS	Level of Service

LUST	Leaking Underground Storage Tank
LWCF	Land and Water Conservation Fund
MAP-21	Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century
MBTA	Migratory Bird Treaty Act
MLRA	Major Land Resource Area
mph	Miles Per Hour
MSAT	Mobile Source Air Toxics
MUTCD	Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices
NAAQS	National Ambient Air Quality Standard
NAC	Noise Abatement Criteria
NCHRP	National Cooperative Highway Research Program
NEPA	National Environmental Protection Act
NFRMPO	North Front Range Metropolitan Planning Organization
NH <sub>3</sub>	Ammonia
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
NPS	National Park Service
OHWM	Ordinary High Water Mark
OPS	Colorado Division of Oil & Public Safety
OWUS	Other Waters of the United States
PDC	Program Decision Committee
PID	Photoionization detector
PM <sub>2.5</sub>	Particulate Matter 2.5 microns in diameter
ppm	Parts per million
RAMP	Responsible Acceleration of Maintenance and Partnerships
RCRA	Resource Conservation and Recovery Act
REC	Recognized Environmental Conditions
RMNP	Rocky Mountain National Park
ROG	Reactive organic gases
ROW	Right-of-Way
RTP	Regional Transportation Plan
SH	State Highway
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
SIP	State Implementation Plan
SO <sub>2</sub>	Sulphur dioxide
SPF	Safety Performance Functions
SWMP	Stormwater Management Plan
TAC	Technical Advisory Committee
TDM	Travel Demand Management
TMDL	Total Maximum Daily Load

TVC	(Estes Park) Transportation Visioning Committee
UFR	Upper Front Range (Transportation Planning Region)
ULI	Urban Land Institute
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey
US 36	United States Highway 36
UST	Underground Storage Tank
UTSD	Upper Thompson Sanitation District
VOC	Volatile Organic Compounds
vpd	Vehicles Per Day
vph	Vehicles Per Hour
Xbk	Knotted mica schist
YgLP	Longs Peak granite

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## ES EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

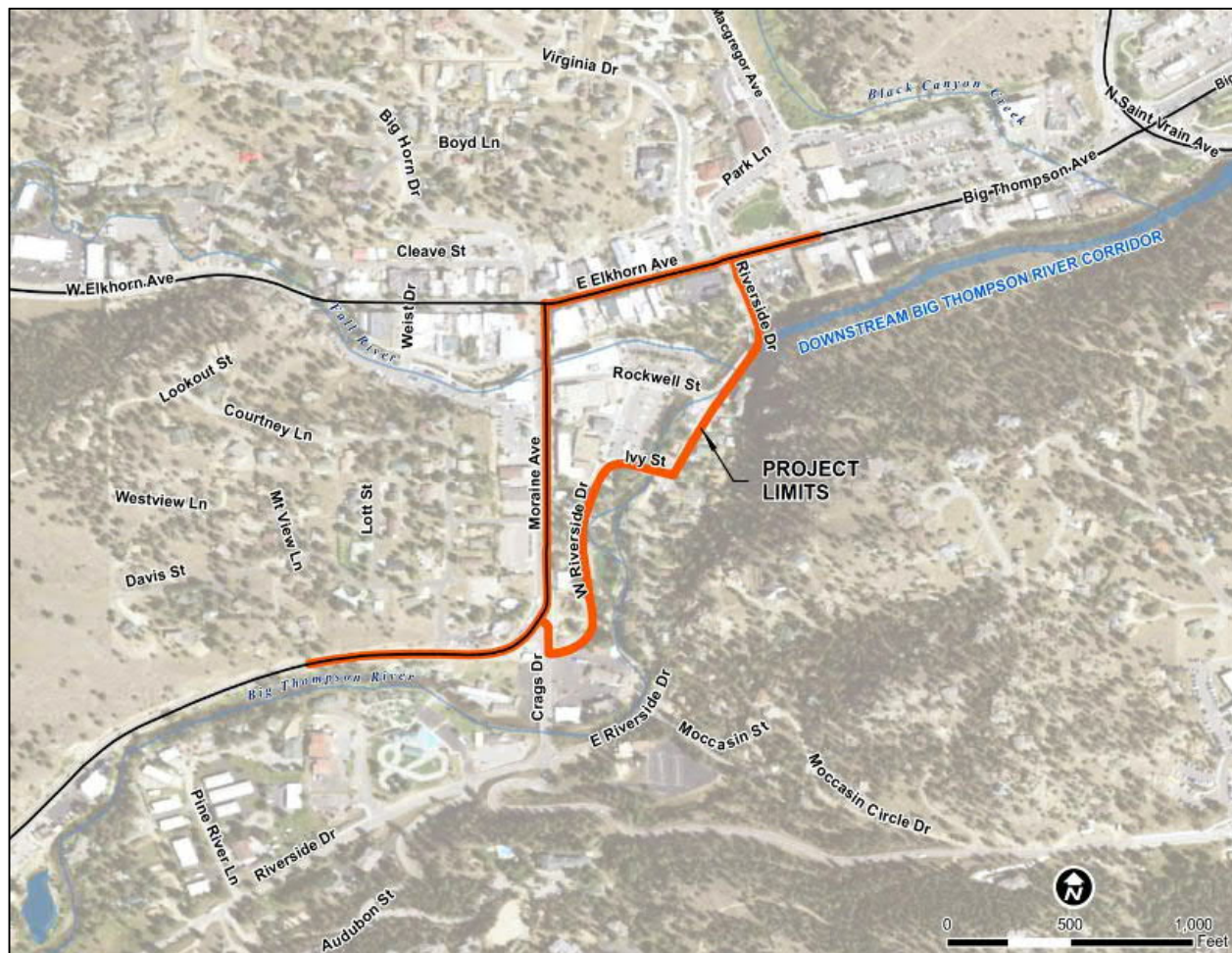
### **ES.1** *What is this Project?*

The Downtown Estes Loop project is being proposed to alleviate congestion and improve mobility in downtown Estes Park, Colorado. The project proposes conversion of Elkhorn Avenue, Moraine Avenue and Riverside Drive from the existing two-way configuration to a one-way couplet. The study area is shown in Figure ES-1.

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) requires that federal agencies use a systematic, interdisciplinary approach to decision-making when actions may affect the quality of the human environment. This Environmental Assessment (EA) documents the NEPA process for this project. Central Federal Lands Highway Division (CFLHD) is the Federal Lead Agency for this EA. One of CFLHD's functions is to administer the Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) established under the transportation bill called Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21, §11119; 23 USC 201, 204). FLAP provides project funds for roads that provide access to Federally owned properties that are owned and/or maintained by non-Federal Government agencies with an emphasis for projects facilities accessing high use recreation areas and economic generators. Matching funds are required in order for projects to be eligible for FLAP program funds.

The Town of Estes Park applied for this project and committed the required matching funds in 2013. The Colorado FLAP Program Decision Committee (PDC) approved funding to include this project in the Colorado FLAP program. The Proposed Action is administered by CFLHD in cooperation with the Town of Estes Park and the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT).

Figure ES-1: Project Study Area



While the original EA process began with a study area that included only improvement to Elkhorn Avenue, Moraine Avenue, and Riverside Drive, the study was expanded to include future phases that could occur in the general area by others. More information is provided in Section ES.6 below and in *Chapter 2: Alternatives Considered*. The Proposed Action analyzed in this EA consists of the following:

- Funded Phase 1 – CFL project CO FLAP 34(1), 36(1) Moraine Avenue and Riverside Drive – reconstruction and realignment of Riverside Drive, reconstruction of the Ivy Street Bridge and associated transportation improvements along Elkhorn and Moraine could be built as part of the currently funded FLAP project (Phase 1). These improvements are funded.
- Future reconstruction of the Rockwell and Riverside Bridges – This will likely occur at some point in the future; however, these activities are not currently planned and programmed “projects”. There is no identified funding source; CDOT involvement is likely as they will own and maintain the newly constructed Riverside Drive.
- Future channel/floodplain improvements – There is not a currently planned or programmed project that includes these activities; they are not yet funded but are likely to be built in subsequent phases.



## ES.2 How is this Project Funded?

In September 2013, the Downtown Estes Loop Project was selected for inclusion in the FLAP for Preliminary Engineering, right-of-way, and construction costs up to \$13 million. FLAP provides funding for work on public facilities that are located on, are adjacent to, or provide access to federal lands. In addition, the Town received funding (\$4.2 Million) under the 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 accepted 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. Neither the RAMP nor FLAP funding are in the form of loans that would require repayment to the state or federal government.

## ES.3 What is the Purpose of this Project?

The purpose of the FLAP project is to improve access to Federally-owned properties that function as major economic generators and provide vast public recreational opportunities. The program intent is to provide improved access while maintaining environmental and economic viability of the adjacent communities. This project is intended to improve access to and from Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) by reducing travel time, congestion, and pedestrian/vehicle conflicts through downtown Estes Park as well as the associated negative impacts to visitor experience.

## ES.4 Why is this Project Needed?

The project is needed to improve system management and reduce severe congestion of the existing roadway network for both motorized and non-motorized users accessing RMNP. During the peak summer visitor season, traffic demand at the two main project intersections (Elkhorn/Moraine and Elkhorn/Riverside) used to access the RMNP Beaver Meadows entrance exceeds capacity, which contributes to extensive delay, safety concerns and community impacts.



*Pedestrian/Vehicle Conflicts at Elkhorn/Moraine Intersection*

The primary project needs depend highly on a broad range of issues and are discussed as follows:

- For many years, travel into and out of downtown Estes Park combined with traffic to and from RMNP has created severe weekend congestion in downtown Estes Park for

several months of the year. This congestion limits access to and from the park's highest use entrance (Beaver Meadows).

- Visitor experience along this corridor is diminished by the extreme congestion which causes increased vehicle/pedestrian conflicts and poor air quality in the business district and heavy delays to visitors of RMNP.
- In the future (2016 – 2040), anticipated traffic increases are expected to increase the severity of delays and cause delays to occur on more days per year and for longer periods of time.
- In 2014, capacity was exceeded approximately 40 days per year for periods of 2 hours or more creating 262 hours of congestion on those 40 days.
- Traffic forecasts for 2040 indicate that capacity will be exceeded for two hours or more on approximately 147 days per year creating 1,189 hours of congestion on those 147 days.
- On high traffic days, the number of hours of severe congestion in a given day will increase as the peak demand is spread out during the day.
- In 2040, some of the days when congestion is predicted are not associated with peak visitor season. Congestion on these days is caused by growth forecasts in employment and housing. As a result, congestion in 2040 will also occur on weekdays and during off season weekends.
- Existing and future congestion at the Elkhorn/Riverside, Elkhorn/Moraine and Moraine/Crags intersections causes motor vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian safety issues, restricts access, limits bus transit service efficiency, extends emergency response times for police, fire and ambulance services, and limits future economic growth in Estes Park and the surrounding area by discouraging travel when congestion is occurring or anticipated.

### ***ES.5 How Were Alternatives Developed and Evaluated?***

The project alternatives were developed based upon the project Purpose and Need, as well as through issues identified during the public scoping process and evaluation of existing conditions. The alternatives were screened through a two-tiered screening process, beginning with preliminary screening (Level 1). Four initial alternatives (including the one identified in the original FLAP application from the Town to CFL) were included in Level 1, as well as a number of alternatives brought forward by the public. Evaluation criteria were developed consistent with the primary components of the purpose and need. These criteria were qualitative, with the intent of comparing each alternative based on a general understanding of the function of each (without the availability of detailed design).

The No Action alternative and five build alternatives were carried from Level 1 into Level 2 for more detailed screening against a broader set of criteria. The Level 2 screening process involved more detailed analysis of design and traffic conditions, project costs, potential impacts to natural resources and a number of other factors. Data was compiled and utilized in the screening based on the best available data at the time.

## **ES.6 What is the Proposed Action?**

### **Transportation Improvements**

The alternatives development and evaluation process resulted in identification of a Build Alternative (referred to as the Proposed Action) that meets the project Purpose and Need. The Proposed Action involves conversion of existing roadways from two-way to one-way for a total length of 0.92 miles. The project begins at the Elkhorn Avenue/Riverside Drive intersection, continues west on Elkhorn Avenue (US 36) to the intersection of Moraine Avenue/Big Horn Drive for 0.15 miles, then turns south on Moraine Avenue (US 36) for 0.3 miles to the intersection of Moraine Avenue and Riverside Drive/Crags Drive. These two-way roadway segments would be converted into one-way roads, west and south, respectively. The two-lane one-way couplet is completed in the returning northerly direction via a reconstructed Riverside Drive. This segment begins at the Moraine Avenue/West Riverside Drive/Crags Drive intersection then follows near West Riverside Drive, Ivy Street and East Riverside Drive for 0.40 miles back to the beginning of the project at the East Riverside Drive/Elkhorn Avenue intersection, completing the loop.

New signals would be added at the two main intersections (Elkhorn/Riverside, Elkhorn/Moraine). A new signal or roundabout will be added at the Moraine/Crags/West Riverside intersection. New sidewalk, on street bike lanes and trail connection improvements would be installed. Directional signage along the corridors will be installed, as well as landscaping.

### **Channel/ Floodplain Improvements**

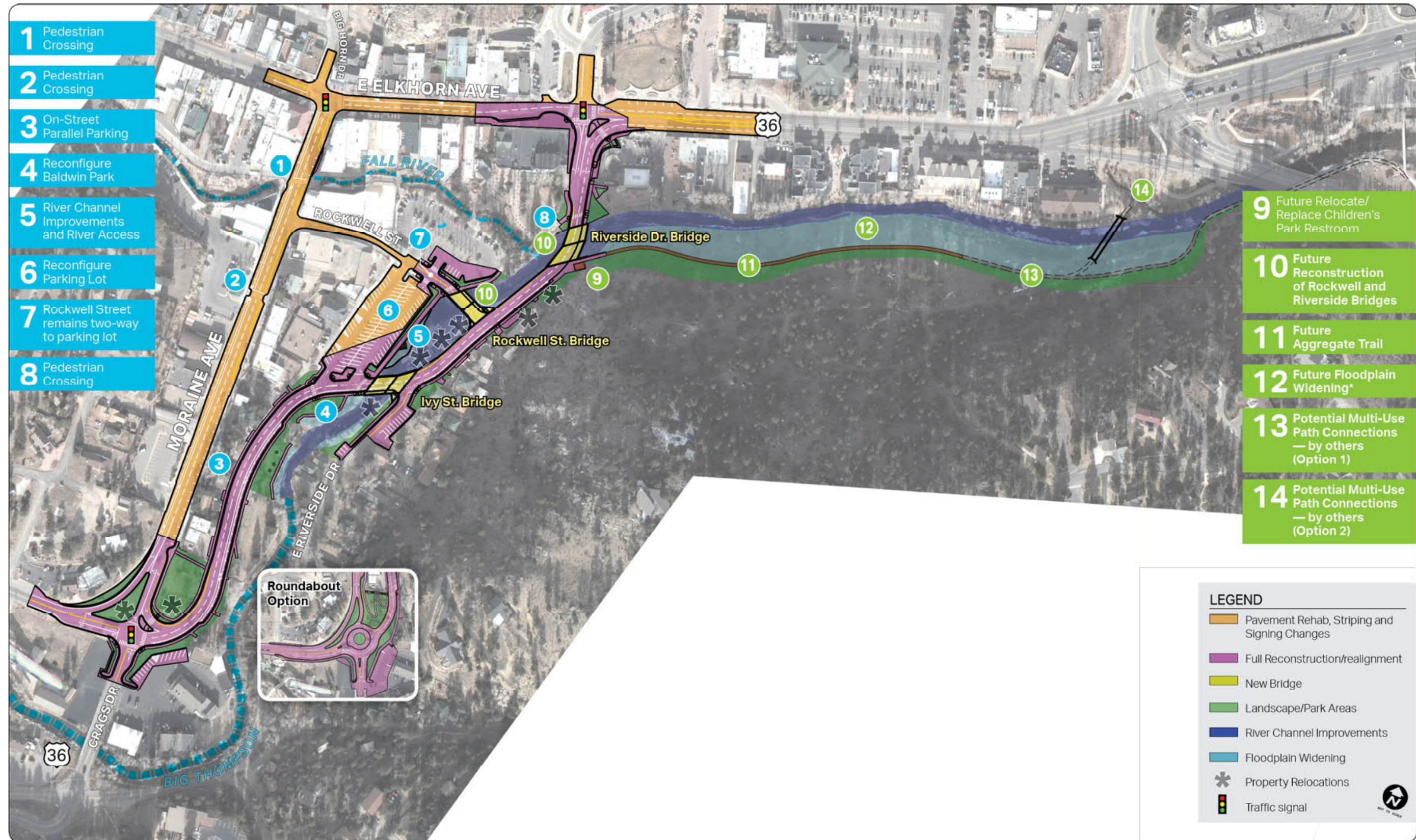
The initial review and estimates for transportation improvements within downtown Estes Park were developed in the Spring of 2013 and included in the Colorado FLAP program. Afterwards a significant flooding event occurred in September 2013 that impacted the project study area. This event began a series of studies by regulatory agencies and local floodplain administrators. The initial studies that have occurred indicate changes to the predicted 100-year flood levels in downtown Estes Park and surrounding areas. Results of these studies, released in 2014 and determined to be the best available data, indicate major increases to floodplain boundaries in downtown Estes Park. CFLHD determined that the results of the best available data are to be incorporated into this NEPA study as the best available regulatory flow volumes, which directly affect the criteria for bridge and drainage design within the project boundaries.

Hydrology and hydraulics analysis indicates that the Ivy Street, Rockwell and Riverside Bridges need to be completely rebuilt and elevated to provide additional hydraulic capacity for the Big Thompson River. The analysis also indicated that rebuilding, enlarging, and elevating bridges alone will not fully mitigate the flooding risks; flooding issues currently extend downstream of the Big Thompson River and Fall River confluence along the Riverwalk park. This increased the study boundaries, the scope of the proposed build alternative, and a plan for phasing the construction of the build alternative. Thus, this EA includes the study of additional elements related to the hydraulic design features that are not required to provide the transportation improvements and improved access to RMNP. This includes the replacement of a bridge on Rockwell Street, the replacement of the bridge on Riverside Drive, and channel/floodplain

improvements along the Big Thompson River between the Riverside Bridge and US 36. The Proposed Action is shown in Figure ES-2.

This EA documents the environmental impacts and opportunities associated with downtown Estes Park roadway, bridge and channel/floodplain improvements. It has been determined that the cost of these improvements exceeds the available funding and the project will be completed in several construction phases. The first phase of construction also known as the Downtown Estes Loop and CO FLAP 34(1), 36(1) Moraine Avenue and Riverside Drive, meets the original project Purpose and Need to improve access to RMNP and could be built as part of the currently funded FLAP project. Phase 1 includes reconstruction and realignment of Riverside Drive, reconstruction of the Ivy Street Bridge and associated transportation improvements along Elkhorn and Moraine. The future bridge replacements along Rockwell Street and Riverside Drive and the future channel/floodplain improvements do not have a funding source or anticipated dates for implementation.

Figure ES-2: Proposed Action



Source: AECOM

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### ***ES.7 What is the No Action Alternative?***

The No Action Alternative would leave existing 2015 roadway and other study area conditions as they are through 2040. No roadway capacity, safety, mobility or accessibility improvements would be built within the downtown involving Elkhorn Avenue, Moraine Avenue or Riverside Drive.

### ***ES.8 How Were the Impacts Analyzed?***

Potential beneficial and adverse effects of the Build Alternative and the No Action Alternative were analyzed in this EA for direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to resources.

- Direct impacts are caused by the action and occur at the same time and place.
- Indirect impacts are caused by an action and are later in time or further removed in distance but are still reasonably foreseeable.
- Cumulative impacts result from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions.

Specific impacts are described in Chapter 3, as well as mitigation measures identified to address impacts.

### ***ES.9 How will the Project be Phased?***

#### **Phase 1**

- Funded Phase 1 – CFLHD project CO FLAP 34(1), 36(1) Moraine Avenue and Riverside Drive – reconstruction and realignment of Riverside Drive, reconstruction of the Ivy Street Bridge and associated transportation improvements along Elkhorn and Moraine could be built as part of the currently funded FLAP project (Phase 1). These improvements are funded.

#### **Future Phases**

- Future reconstruction of the Rockwell and Riverside Bridges – This will likely occur at some point in the future, however these activities are not currently planned and programmed “projects”. There is no identified funding source; CDOT involvement is likely as they will own and maintain the newly constructed Riverside Drive.
- Future channel/floodplain improvements – There is not a currently planned or programmed project that includes these activities; they are not yet funded but are likely to be built in subsequent phases.

### ***ES.10 How has the Public Been Involved To-Date?***

The project team implemented a multi-pronged outreach process beginning with a public involvement plan. This plan identified a broad set of engagement tools to gather input, from a project-specific website to in-person meetings. Through the EA process, the project team held public and small group meetings, established a Technical Advisory Team (TAC), and met one-on-one with resource agencies, stakeholder representatives and individual property owners. The public information program provided information about the project and public meetings

through mailings, a project website, advertisements in local newspapers, social media, and a telephone hotline. The Town Public Information Office also helped distribute information about the project through Town communication channels.

### ***ES.11 What Are the Next Steps in this Process?***

In accordance with federal regulations, a 30-day review period is required for an EA. The comment period for this project will extend from July 5<sup>th</sup> through August 5<sup>th</sup>). During the review period, a public hearing will be held with the opportunity to provide written and verbal comments. Details are as follows:

Downtown Estes Loop EA Public Hearing

July 20, 2016

Estes Events Center, 1125 Rooftop Way, Estes Park, CO 80517

4:30-8:30 P.M., Presentation at 5:00 P.M.

The public is encouraged to review and comment on the EA and/or attend the public hearing. Comments on the EA will be accepted during the 30-day public review period via email, mail, at the public hearing, and through the project website: [www.downtownestesloop.com](http://www.downtownestesloop.com).

After consideration of public comments, CFLHD, together with the Town of Estes Park and CDOT, will make a final decision about the project. If CFLHD determines that the project would not result in significant impacts to the environment a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) would be issued. It is anticipated that CFLHD would issue a NEPA Decision only on Phase 1, unless funding becomes available for future phases. Final design, right-of-way acquisition, permitting and construction can begin following the issuance of the NEPA decision.