

Transportation Observations, Considerations, and Recommendations relative to the Colorado Front Range

**Provided by the Interagency Transportation Assistance Group (TAG) /
Alternative Transportation in Parks and Public Lands (ATPPL) Program**

**Lakewood, CO
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A review of the transportation in the Front Range region of Colorado by the inter-agency Transportation Assistance Group (TAG) was conducted July 24-26, 2007, on behalf of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USFS) in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the Intermountain Region (IMR) of the National Park Service (NPS). The review sought to explore opportunities for improving regional connections for urban residents to/from Federal recreation areas, and identify avenues for coordination between Federal land management agencies and transportation planning organizations over the next 15-20 years. The TAG considered extensive information that was provided via briefings from and interactive discussions with transportation planning organizations and other stakeholders in the Front Range, including the Colorado DOT, Colorado State Parks, Denver Regional Council of Governments, Pikes Peak Council of Governments, Pueblo Area Council of Governments, and Colorado Ski Country USA regarding transportation conditions and associated planning activities. The participation of these stakeholders emphasized to the TAG, an interest and willingness to work with Federal lands agencies on transportation issues and concerns within the Colorado Front Range. The TAG review agenda is included in an appendix.

The site visit and the preparation of this report were facilitated and funded by the Alternative Transportation in Parks and Public Lands (ATPPL) program, administered by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) in coordination with the Department of the Interior (DOI).

Background and Conditions

The Front Range generally encompasses the urban regions east of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. This report considers the Front Range in conjunction with federal lands that serve as primary outdoor recreation and touring destinations for Front Range residents. The resulting geographic area extends roughly from the eastern portions of Ft. Collins, CO, in the North to Pueblo, CO, in the South (including the Denver metropolitan region), and westward to form a rectangle that has Eagle, CO, included its western boundary. The Federal land units within this area include:

USDA Forest Service

- Arapahoe National Forest
- Pike and San Isabel National Forests
- Roosevelt National Forest;

- Routt National Forest;
- White River National Forest;

National Park Service

- Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument
- Rocky Mountain National Park,

Fish and Wildlife Service

- Arapahoe National Wildlife Refuge
- Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge
- Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge

The region thus defined attracts over 23 million visitors annually both from the Front Range, the Midwest, and elsewhere throughout the nation and indeed the world. It has the largest concentration of major ski areas, which increasingly are becoming year round destination resorts and communities. Summer traffic now exceeds winter traffic in most of the region, and many of the primary regional transportation corridors are insufficient to handle current and/or projected traffic. In particular, the I-70 corridor that serves as the primary access route for over 20,000 vehicles per weekend day to recreational areas east and west of the Continental Divide is legendary for traffic congestion and delay. Access to recreational opportunities adds significant trips to this corridor.

Projected population and recreational / tourism growth within the region, suggest that the access to and use of public lands will become increasingly challenging going forward. However, there are varied and changing parameters and demographics:

- Visitation to some federal lands, such as Rocky Mountain Park, has remained flat over the past 10 years.
- Visitation to destination ski areas within several national forests is at record levels over the last two years.
- Projections are that the travel time between Denver and Vail (100 miles) may grow from 2 to 6 hours by 2035.
- Visitation patterns are shifting increasingly toward large family group outings at day use areas.
- Closer proximity of federal lands to urban areas (due to urban growth) is making evening “backyard” visits an increasing phenomenon.

In consideration of these trends and the desire to facilitate the connection between people and outdoor recreational opportunities in national forests, the Forest Service requested the TAG visit so as to explore potential partnering opportunities and strategies for enhancing alternative transportation access to public lands in the Colorado Front Range. Figure 1 below depicts the wealth of Federal recreation areas within the area.

FRONT RANGE FEDERAL RECREATION AREAS

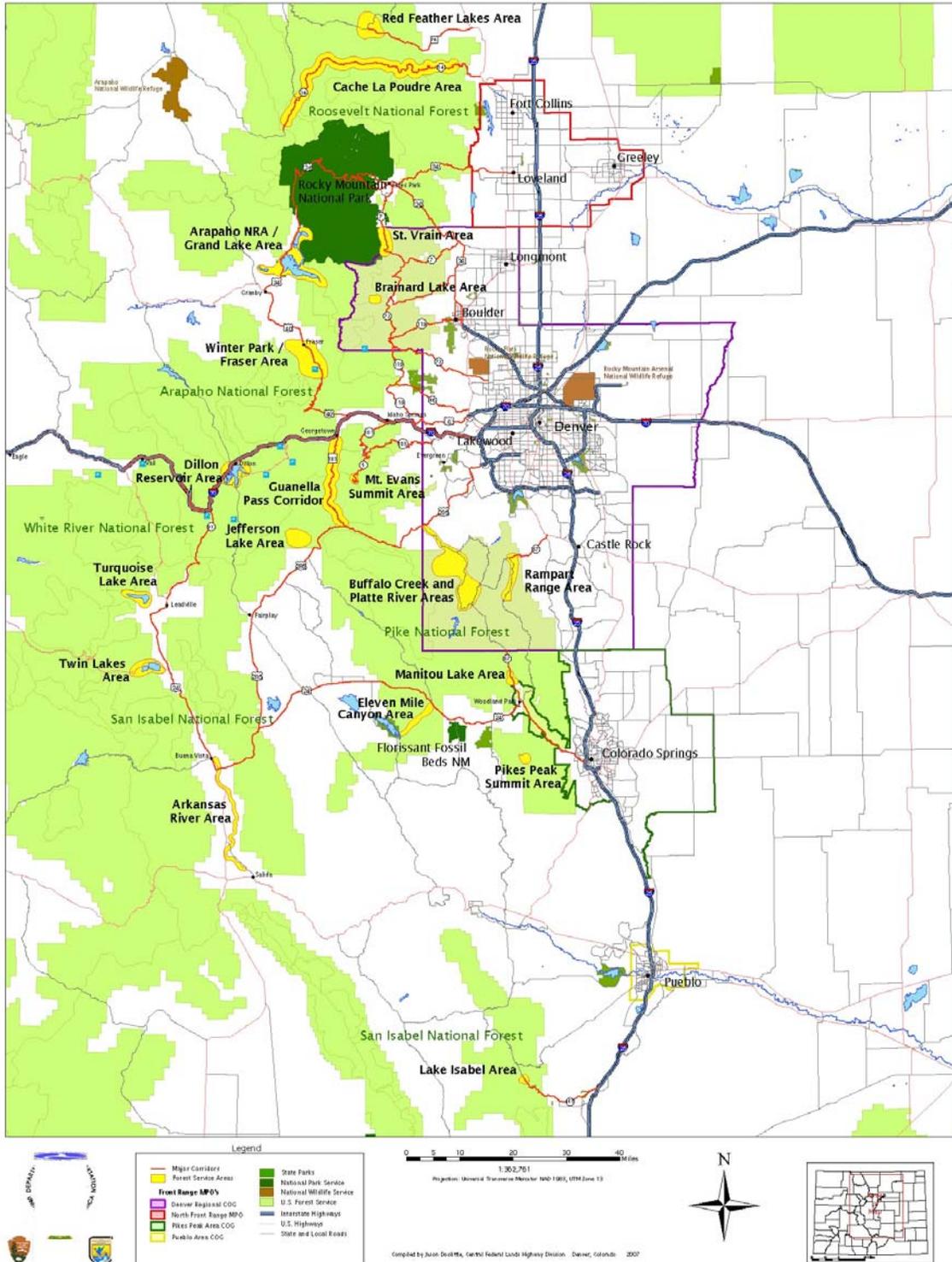


Figure 1: Map of Colorado Front Range Federal Land Recreation Areas

Prospective partnerships

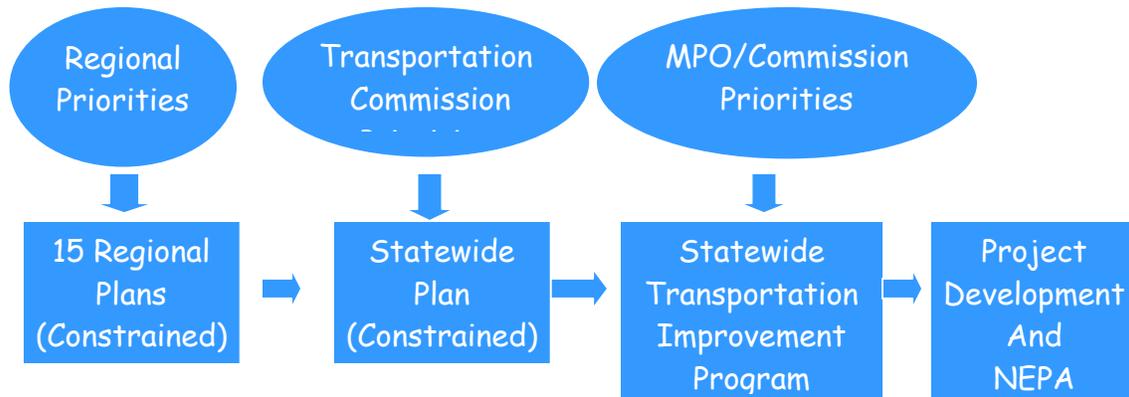
The Front Range presents a wide variety of prospective partnering opportunities, both in terms of land management and of transportation agencies. The region prides itself on the vast array of natural resource and recreational opportunities associated with public lands. Notably the Colorado state transportation planning initiative identifies recreational and travel to tourist sites as an important consideration in the 2030 Statewide Transportation Plan, *Moving Colorado: Vision for the Future*. Similarly, the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) in the Front Range echo the importance of recreational and tourism in their plans and programs, citing peak weekend traffic impacts and emphasizing the high value placed on preserving environmental quality and outdoor recreation opportunities for residents. The state and regional transportation planning organizations uniformly expressed a desire for greater federal land management agency participation in planning processes. That said, it was acknowledged that although some mechanisms existed for such involvement there is a need for building greater awareness on the part of transportation agencies and federal land management agencies within the Front Range of their particular needs.

Regional planning context

The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) is updating the 2030 Statewide and Regional Transportation Plans to the 2035 time horizon. Draft Statewide and Regional Plans are being readied for additional public involvement in the September – November 2007 timeframe. Regional plans are to be published in late 2007 – with the statewide plan in early 2008. Also, a draft Human Service Transportation Coordination Plan for rural transit has been prepared. Colorado Secretary of Transportation, Russ George, last May announced the intent to revisit a \$25 million planning study regarding alternatives for addressing transportation in the I-70 corridor, with the intent to reconsider transit options in particular. CDOT staff noted that the 2030 plan forecast was that travel time is expected to increase by almost 2 hours on winter Saturdays I-70, resulting in Denver to Vail travel times of four hours. Peak summer travel time is projected at six hours. Travel demand in the I-70 corridor is expected to grow 67.5% by 2030 making weekday trips comparable to peak hour holiday or ski weekend trips today.

The statewide transportation planning initiative encompasses fifteen regional plans, one of which is Intermountain Transportation Planning Region that covers a portion of central Colorado west of the Continental Divide that has many ski areas and associated resort communities. The regional planning vision is for “*a multimodal transportation network that promotes preservation of the unique character of each community through open space buffering, while providing economic, cultural, environmental, and outdoor recreational benefits.*” The Roaring Fork Transit Agency (RFTA) in the Intermountain Region works with the Forest Service to receive a \$1.68M FY2006 ATPPL grant for the purchase of four hybrid electric buses, and is seeking a similar grant under the FY2007 ATPPL solicitation. RFTA’s transit ridership has more than doubled since the late 1980s, in part due to workers at resort areas not being able to afford housing within these communities, long distances to areas of lower cost housing, and the high cost of gasoline.

Colorado's 2035 Statewide Planning Process



CDOT noted the Transportation Environmental Resource Council (TERC) as a model for transportation planning coordination. The TERC comprises management officials from state and federal resource and regulatory agencies, CDOT and MPOs, and provides a venue to increase executive level understanding of roles/responsibilities, address policy issues, and identify cooperative programs.

The Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) is facing extreme challenges in terms of accommodating anticipated growth given fiscal constraints that are insufficient to sustain existing regional transportation infrastructure and services, and going forward is facing non-attainment relative to Federal air quality standards. Traffic congestion in the Denver / Boulder metropolitan area ranked 17th nationally in 2003. As of 2006, it is estimated that 18.5% of travel in the region is delayed due to congestion. The importance of addressing congestion is linked to promoting a healthy economy as well as sustaining the region's reputation as a desirable place to live and recreate. However, the current planning forecast is that the total hours of delay will increase by 170% between 2006 and 2030. The regional plan calls for additional transit capacity, aggressive system and demand management strategies, and expanded pedestrian and bicycling facilities. The plan addresses traffic conditions generally, but does not explicitly consider recreational travel issues and concerns. Recreational travel demand is not identified specifically as part of the current transportation demand modeling process; however, DRCOG sees this as an opportunity for working more directly with Federal land management agencies going forward.

The Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments notes that tourism is the second largest contributor to the regional economy. U.S. Route 24, the primary road access to mountains west of the Colorado Springs metropolitan area, currently has weekend traffic congestion that extends for miles. The agency is in the process of incorporating summer recreational travel into its travel forecast model so as to be able to address conformity with air quality standards. It welcomes information from federal land management agencies regarding the prospects for recreational travel.

The Pueblo Council of Governments viewed recreational and tourism travel as important but noted that due to the greater distance from the mountains and relatively smaller size in terms of population, the region is less impacted by weekend travel – with a few notable exceptions associated with itinerant traffic. The agency, along with the CDOT and other MPOs in the Front Range, hopes to conduct a regional origin – destination travel survey that would provide information on recreational and other travel.

U.S. Forest Service units across the Front Range area have been involved in efforts to implement travel management plans. These plans are intended to identify acceptable use policies for forest roads and trails. Final decisions have been rendered in some ranger districts, while other plans are still in process. Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) use is a key issue addressed by these plans, which will influence future recreational travel patterns for OHV and related activities. These travel management plans do not appear to have been reviewed by state and regional transportation planning agencies; consequently impacts on regional traffic levels and patterns are unlikely to have been given much consideration to the extent these may exist. Additionally, in 2003 the addendum to the FTA and FHWA 3039 study identified a Peak to Peak Highway Shuttle System as a possible candidate for further study. A 2005 plan for Brainard Lake Recreation Area, just off the Peak to Peak Scenic Byway, included a shuttle system as an alternative method of access; however, it has not been pursued. Current improvements at Brainard Lake include consideration for the possible future implementation of a shuttle system in conjunction with relocation and realignment of parking facilities.

The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) provides a unified framework for recreation planning in the state. It is updated on a five year cycle to allow for strategic allocation of funding. It provides demographic and use data on recreational activities and locations statewide. The Forest Service has participated in SCORP efforts.

Rocky Mountain National Park maintains a General Management Plan that serves as a master plan for park development and operations. It includes provisions for alternative transportation services to alleviate traffic congestion and enhance the visitor experience at several locations, particularly those areas near the gateway Town of Estes Park, CO. The park conducts park centric alternative transportation planning studies, yet for the most part has not consider opportunities in the broader context of the Front Range and/or opportunities for facilitating visitor mobility and access to other Federal land units in the vicinity of the park. Of the three million visitors annually, 80% visit during May to September. On a summer peak day, over 9,000 vehicles enter the park; nearly three quarters come through the eastern entrances. About 95% of the park is wilderness, so visitation is concentrated along major transportation corridors. The park has operated a shuttle bus service in the Bear Lake area since the late 1970s. Currently there are two routes that operate during June 15 to September 30 from 7am to 7pm daily: Bear Lake (every 10-15 min), and Moraine Park (every 30 minutes). The \$1.2 million annual cost for the free shuttles is funded entirely from park entrance fees. In 2006, the park started a free, hourly hiker shuttle service on weekends from 6:30am to 7:30 pm during June 30 to September 3. The hiker shuttle runs from the Estes Park Visitor Center to the Bear Lake Park and Ride, and is funded from park entrance fees. Shuttle ridership in 2006 reached

nearly 270,000 overall. The park applied for an FY2007 ATPPL planning grant to model the effects of alternative transportation on resource protection and visitor experience, as well as to investigate opportunities for improving shuttle service and operations. The park is working to develop a hike / bike path in conjunction with the relocation of Bear Lake road.

Similarly, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has refuge management plans that address transportation needs if any are identified relative to a particular site. Most needs relate to refuge roads and trails to provide visitor access to wildlife viewing areas. The relatively new Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge has addressed access to its new visitor center, which is located adjacent to an area of high growth and development. The refuge operates an open air tram tour on a 10-mile loop road. It also received an FY 2006 ATPPL grant for a feasibility study to maximize alternative transportation opportunities and potentially connect the refuge to the Denver Regional Transportation District (RTD) System. The refuge also recognizes the critical need to plan transportation connections to and around refuge, in part due to the opening of a soccer complex on its doorstep in 2008 that will attract 1,000,000 people annually. During the TAG meeting the opportunity to consider linkages to the regional trail network surfaced.

Colorado Ski Country USA represents the ski industry in Colorado. Individual ski areas prepared development plans in conjunction with the Forest Service for areas that operate on forest lands. Colorado Ski Country serves as an advocate for industry concerns, and sees transportation as vitally important. Weekend traffic congestion in the I-70 corridor is a top concern, as the highway corridor is the primary transportation link between the major Front Range population centers, such as Denver, and the resort areas. The industry does not view compulsory alternative transportation use or travel demand management strategies such as congestion pricing (including for parking) positively. The industry is interested in having well maintained and un-congested transportation systems provided at no additional cost to recreational travelers over the general public. Colorado Ski Country expressed an interest with working closely with public agencies to address recreational transportation needs in the Front Range.

Existing alternative transportation

Alternative transportation in the Front Range area exists at a number of locations but does not provide inexpensive and/or convenient connections between major population centers and public land recreation venues. In addition to the services provided by public transit operators in the major metro areas (Denver / Boulder RTD, Colorado Springs Mountain Metropolitan Transit, Fort Collins Transport and Pueblo Transit), the notable services are highlighted below.

Eagle County Transit (ECO Transit) and **Roaring Fork Transit Authority** (RFTA) are public transit operators that provide local transit service in the mountain communities of Eagle County and the Aspen area respectively. RFTA partners with the USFS to provide the Maroon Bells shuttle service, and was awarded an Alternative Transportation in Parks and Public Lands (ATPPL) grant in Fiscal Year 2006.

Rocky Mountain National Park operates a free shuttle bus along two routes inside the park, and partners with the Town of Estes Park, CO, to provide a hiker shuttle that links the park to the town. In addition, the town sponsors a shopper shuttle on three routes in the community.

The **Colorado Front Range Trail** is a north-south bike / pedestrian trail network through the urban portions of the Front Range, connecting people to state and local parklands and other public land areas. Existing trails comprise 275 miles of the 880+ mile trail network whereas 609 miles has yet to be constructed, 474 of which is simply envisioned.

Other alternative transportation services:

- Colorado Mountain Express provides shuttle bus service between Denver International Airport and mountain ski resort communities in Summit and Eagle counties. One-way fares range from \$50 to the Frisco Transportation Center to \$112 per person to the Aspen / Snowmass areas.
- Casino sponsored shuttle bus service from nearby metro areas to gaming areas in Black Hawk, Central City, and Cripple Creek (<http://www.coloradocasino.com/transportation.php>).
- The Rio-Grande Ski Train offers year round service between Denver Union Station and Winter Park, CO. All tickets are same-day, round-trip, non-refundable, and non-exchangeable. The base adult fare is \$44. The train departs Denver at 9:00 am and returns at 5:30 pm, departing Winter Park at 3:00 pm for a same day return – thus allowing about three hours in Winter Park for day trippers. Multi-day stays require purchase of another ticket.
- Gray Line Bus Tours offers day tours to mountain areas and destinations, including: Berthoud Pass; Winter Park; Grand Lake; Rocky Mountain National Park from hotels in Denver; and Pikes Peak from Denver and Colorado Springs hotels (connecting to the Pikes Peak Cog Railway). The adult fare from Denver for the rocky mountain tour is \$90; whereas the fare from Colorado Springs to Pikes Peak is \$50.
- Pikes Peak Cog Railway (<http://www.cograilway.com/>) operates a year-round railway at a peak season fare of \$29 for adults and \$16 for children. Reduced off season fares are \$3 less for adults and \$1 less for children. A one-way hike and rail fare is offered on a space available basis that allows visitors to ride the train to the summit and hike down to the base of the mountain. Similarly, a one-way bike and rail fare is offered but given that bikes are not permitted on the train this is offered in conjunction with a bike outfitter that delivers bicycles to the summit for the ride down.
- Georgetown Loop Railroad, Inc., operates a scenic railroad between Georgetown and Silver Plume, as well as the Historic Royal Gorge Route Railroad. Both operate from May to early October, with occasional service provided along the Royal Gorge Route throughout the year. Adult coach fares range from \$18.75 to \$29.95.

The excursion services outlined above are popular with tourists and function as visitor attractions rather than visitor transportation services. However, as in the case of the Pikes

Peak Railway some do facilitate in a limited way, opportunities for recreational activities such as hiking and biking in addition to sightseeing.

Transportation Findings

The diversity of Front Range areas, stakeholders, public uses, and problems necessitated a precedent-setting broad scope for this TAG. The review and challenges going forward are complicated in that the geographic bounds of several urban areas are converging on each other and on fragile federal lands.

- **Quality of Life/Economic Development Impacts of Transportation:** The federal lands management agency perspective is that transportation service is more than transportation. The NPS, USFS, and FWS all describe their objectives as being more on providing access to a natural “experience” than simple transportation to/from/within a unit. The topic of interpretive resources as a transportation element came up repeatedly – to improve the entire visitor experience consistent with “eco-tourism.” Similarly, the I-70 highway corridor and associated federal lands are vital components of the economic engine for the area. So, investment in improving access to these areas has a huge economic benefit – necessity. In short, transportation to, from, and within federal lands was not viewed by stakeholders in a vacuum. Larger community quality of life and economic development interests clearly are at hand.
- **Congestion – a threat to recreational areas:** Federal Land management decisions, such as permitting ski area development as a winter sports opportunity, can have significant long-term impacts on travel patterns and traffic levels that extend well beyond the boundaries of a land unit due to eventual year round resort community development. I-70 traffic and associated congestion has grown to the point it is a serious concern that threatens the future of recreational access and economic vitality within the Front Range. Currently I-70 capacity limits the ability of visitors to safely, conveniently, and efficiently access Federal lands recreational opportunities both in summer and winter. There is no “silver bullet” but the consequences of how the issue is addressed exemplify the importance of transportation choices to Federal Land agencies. The Forest Service does not assign staff to major transportation projects that affect the National Forests except on an “as-needed” basis. The Arapahoe-Roosevelt National Forest has recently assigned a person to coordinate Forest Service involvement in the I-70 corridor study. The coordination effort is a collateral duty funded with Forest Service funds.
- **Forest Service Travel Management:** Federal Lands provide a diverse range of recreational opportunities; some are dispersed activities others more concentrated either temporally or spatially. Transportation is a key to providing public land access to all segments of the public, while also controlling the developed footprint. Federal land management agencies, particularly the Forest Service, are moving toward travel management policies that will concentrate visitor use by function and area. Traveler information has the potential to shift visitors to areas that are underutilized, provided that the land management agencies are prepared to accommodate the shift.

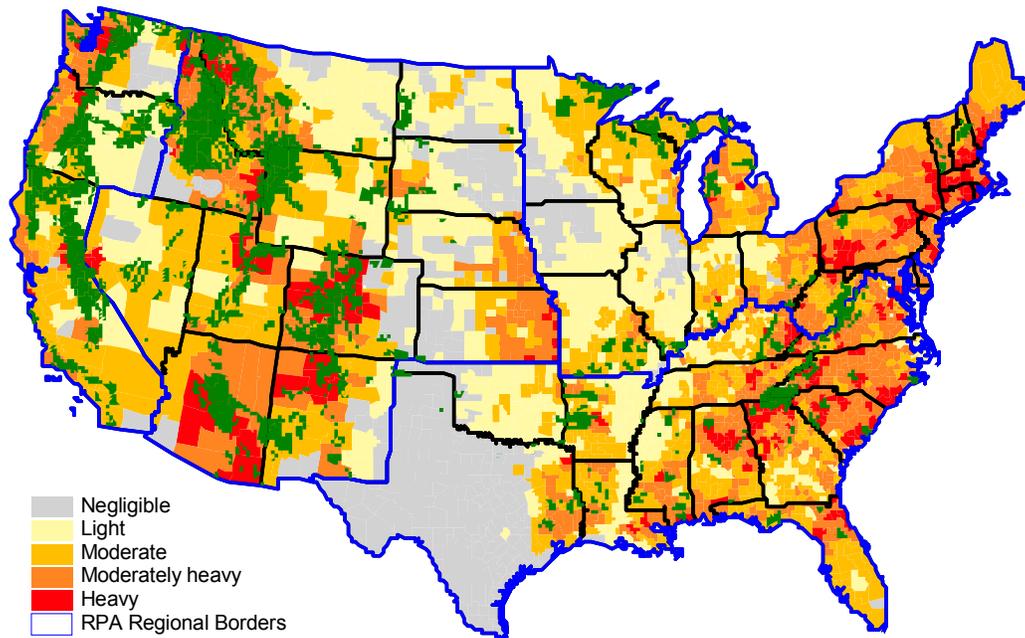


Figure 2: Population Pressure in Counties with National Forests 2020

- **High Visitation in Front Range Forests:** Federal Lands are a significant presence in Colorado; serving as the primary outdoor recreation and tourism venues for Front Range residents and others nationwide and around the globe. The Front Range contains three of the top ten most visited national forests, including the top two: White River and Arapahoe / Roosevelt. Visitation in the three forests is over 19.7 million according to the 2000-2005 National Visitor Use Survey. Forest Service personnel feel that the National Forests in the area can accommodate more visitors in the high use areas however the infrastructure can not safely or conveniently handle more vehicles. The Forest Service is faced with making large capital investments in transportation to safely accommodate the traffic if alternatives are not developed.
- **Weak Regional Planning Linkages:** Linkages between federal land management plans / activities and state / regional transportation planning processes are extremely weak given the significance of federal lands and recreational travel in the Front Range. Resource limitations and a lack of familiarity contribute to federal lands, such as the national wildlife refuges, being regarded as “dots in the middle of urban development” by transportation planning agencies.
- **Coordination and cooperation opportunities:** Opportunities to improve cooperative planning between federal land agencies and state / regional transportation agencies. The benefits of such cooperation can assist in coping with current shortfalls in

funding relative to needs across all agencies, as well as building a regional strategy for securing more adequate financial support of critical investments to support recreation and tourism in the Front Range, consistent with Federal Land agency missions and objectives such as reconnecting people with nature, conserving natural and cultural resources, fostering healthier lifestyles, and providing quality visitor experiences. Realizing the opportunity will require an expanded dedication and resource commitment by oversubscribed leaders and staff within federal lands agencies in conjunction with state / regional transportation agencies. Sharing of data and information is key. For example, state and regional transportation planning agencies in the Front Range were not aware of the national visitor use survey data the Forest Service has available. Similarly, federal land management agencies were not aware of a comprehensive origin-destination study that the transportation planning agencies in the study area are planning to conduct in the near future.

- **Transportation Considerations:** The Forest Service in particular faces a special challenge to ensure that public access issues are fully integrated rather than being overshadowed by advocacy efforts on the part of ski areas and/or other permitted users within transportation planning processes. The broad impact of ski area development plans both on and off forest lands extend beyond engineering considerations and need to be addressed comprehensively within the agency, and in consultation with state and regional transportation planning and operating agencies to ensure that impacts to all visitors and residents are considered in addition to those of skiers as represented by the ski industry.
- **Initial Successes:** Federal lands agencies have several initial successes in providing environmentally sustainable transportation solutions (i.e., RAFTA transit to Maroon Bells, Rocky Mountain Wildlife Refuge trams, Rocky Mountain National Park transit). Additional near term opportunities are evident (Guanella Pass, Brainard Lake, etc.) and would benefit from ongoing technical expertise to improve opportunities for funding under competitive grant programs such as the FTA Alternative Transportation in Parks and Public Lands Program.
- **Improving coordination with Statewide and MPO planning process:** In addition to identifying immediate actionable items for further study, the TAG findings also include important recommendations that are procedural in nature, and hold implications generally for alternative transportation in parks and public lands outside of the Front Range. Notably, the need for improved understanding and methods for considering the transportation needs of federal lands in statewide and regional transportation planning processes and a need for ongoing technical assistance as highlighted below.

Despite passage of SAFETEA-LU two years prior and promulgation of regulations in February 2007 to promote greater attention to the needs of federal lands in statewide and regional transportation planning processes, it is clear that federal lands, resource agencies, States, and MPOs alike will need assistance to fulfill the consultation and participation requirements of the law. The Front Range identity is closely associated with federal lands and outdoor recreation and has exemplary transportation planning organizations, yet attention to federal lands transportation issues has been limited and indirect for the most part. Promoting the economic development aspects of

recreational resources contained within federal lands provides an opportunity for the Front Range to strengthen its relationship and broaden its appeal among state agencies and MPOs.

The Forest Service is responsible for developing land and resource management plans for the National Forests. Transportation is a part of this planning however it is only a part of the planning effort that is focused on the transportation needs of the National Forests. The Forest Service is willing, but admittedly ill prepared, to address regional transportation planning issues. While the Forest Service looks to model their activities after NPS, the general state-of-practice in consultation and coordination between federal land agencies (including the NPS) and statewide / regional transportation agencies is lacking, or uneven, across the nation. In part this may be attributable to the project oriented nature of transportation planning within federal land agencies. The Fish and Wildlife Service characterized their transportation planning to date as “ad hoc,” with no concept of a master plan, even though resource management plans are prepared as required by law for all refuges.

The importance of early involvement – before investment / improvement decision are made is understood and embraced by all, but there is a general lack of understanding of the specific mechanisms for achieving the necessary participation and involvement by federal lands agencies in transportation planning processes. In that each state and regional planning organization is allowed to establish planning procedures suited to their jurisdiction, these are not standardized, so national “guidance” can only speak to generalities and offer examples. It is apparent that in some cases, “hands-on” facilitation, like this TAG, by FTA, FHWA, and the Volpe Center as their technical resource, may be needed to achieve the desired interaction.

Recommendations and Possible Next Steps

1. **Geographic Scope.** The large geographic size and varied conditions of the Front Range region are daunting. The need to tighten the focus of the Front Range scope geographically is evident, but how to do so is less obvious. In the end, the TAG recommends excluding the Pueblo region as part of the “Front Range” because the Pueblo area does not generate as many trips as the regions farther north in terms of both origins and destinations. The TAG also views the Aspen area as outside the geographic scope, recognizing that although it has public lands transportation issues, they fall outside of the Front Range area scope. The remaining region faces a number of similar issues associated with having a major metro area adjacent to federal land units, particularly with respect to portions of the Arapahoe / Roosevelt and White River national forests (particularly those close to major population centers that can serve as alternatives to recreational sites served by I-70, national wildlife refuges in the Denver region, and Rocky Mountain National Park.
2. **Improve interagency / organizational communication.** Ongoing and substantive interaction between Federal land management agencies and state/local/regional transportation planning agencies is essential to promoting informed planning and decision making. Where it exists, the interactions between Federal land management

agencies and transportation planning organizations are fragmented and inconsistent, occurring primarily at the project level with respect to consultation on environmental impacts. The payoff from improved early planning communication and coordination comes not just in the form of improved chances of competing favorably for ATPPL funding but also in the ability to leverage the use of existing highway and transit funding programs at the Federal, State, and local level to be more responsive to Federal lands access and mobility needs, resulting in far more substantial benefits to the communities. For example, cooperation by the Forest Service with RFTA in the purchase of buses, allows RFTA not only to serve summer visitors to Maroon Bells, but also to cost effectively provide year round services. Notwithstanding efforts by Forest Service regional staff to participate in Colorado statewide planning outreach events, historically, communication and information sharing within and among Federal land management agencies has been based mostly on personal initiative than organizational protocol, with the result that participants are not prepared nor necessarily authorized to discuss the full spectrum of Federal agency concerns. Resource limitation has also proven to be a barrier to collaboration. For its part, CDOT acknowledged its role and responsibilities under §23 USC 135(e)(2) to “consider the concerns of Indian tribal governments and Federal land management agencies that have jurisdiction over land within the boundaries of the State.” During the TAG, an invitation to participate in the statewide planning activities was extended by CDOT to all of the Federal lands agencies. Improvement opportunities identified by the TAG are outlined below:

- A. Federal land management agency headquarters staff, in conjunction with their Departmental colleagues (particularly those within the Department of the Interior) as appropriate, should consider requesting FTA and FHWA to sponsor a series of information dissemination Awareness-Building Workshop Series directed to both the transportation planning community (MPOs and States) and federal lands agencies. In concept these workshops would be facilitated by FTA and/or FHWA, utilizing key meeting venues and electronic media. The focus should be both strategic (e.g. the importance of recreational interests to communities and economies; federal lands as “traffic generators”), as well as tactical (e.g. outline of points of access to planning processes, such a public involvement, committees / task forces, Unified Planning Work Programs (UPWPs), transportation plans, and regional Transportation Improvement Program / Statewide Transportation Improvement Programs (TIP/STIPs). The TAG serves as a model for initiating inter-agency coordination that might be replicated elsewhere. The occasion of this TAG resulted in creating contacts in real time for several such agencies in the Front Range, but the need exists broadly throughout the country. Federal land managers and State / regional transportation planners “speak different languages” – an institutional hurdle that needs to be overcome in order to promote transportation dialogue and help illuminate process and common goals or differences. Additionally, federal lands agencies can learn about transportation planning through multiple training opportunities offered by the National Highway Institute (<http://www.nhi.fhwa.dot.gov/home.aspx>) and the National Transit

Institute (<http://www.nationline.com/>), as well as the FHWA / FTA transportation professional capacity building website (<http://www.planning.dot.gov/>).

- B. More effective communication is needed among land management interests, along with improved connections to metropolitan and statewide transportation planning programs. To facilitate information-sharing among Federal land management agencies, a “regional” approach could be taken whereby key contact people would be designated to be the conduits of communication with transportation agencies. The Forest Service typically relies on its engineering group to serve this role, but historically the focus has been on environmental consultation more so than state and/or regional transportation planning. Stronger linkages within and among the Federal land management agencies would be required to address a wide range of engineering, recreation, and resource interests across the agencies. Any of the Federal land management agencies can take the lead; however in the Front Range, the Forest Service clearly manages the greatest portion of the Federal lands and accounts for the majority of visitation.
- The TAG recommends that Federal land management agency staff attend transportation meetings where and when possible. The Colorado statewide 2035 transportation planning process provides an immediate opportunity for Federal land management agencies to engage. An invitation to serve as an Ex-Officio member of the Statewide Transportation Advisory Committee was extended by CDOT. Likewise, there are opportunities for Federal agencies to get involved at the regional level, where “grass roots” planning takes place. And, Federal land management agencies have corresponding opportunities to participate in transportation planning activities of the MPOs throughout the Front Range, including by providing recommendations for existing and future transportation planning studies. This can include identifying projects for implementation through the Federal land agency’s plans and programs, as well as federal lands topics warranting study by transportation planning staff.
 - The TAG recommends that the Forest Service and other Federal land agencies work with FHWA and FTA to determine the best way for the agencies to interface with transportation planning agencies in areas where transportation issues may have a significant affect on federal lands. Once transportation planning opportunities are better understood by Federal land agencies, a systemic approach to participation should be determined. A possible model if active involvement is warranted is provided by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency – which has elevated recreational travel issues and has as designated Forest Service representative on their policy board. Another is a model based on the TERC that has been used successfully with respect to environmental topics. This would entail creating a working group comprised of Federal land agencies, primarily, but also involving recreational organizations, CDOT, and MPOs, peripherally. It would be staffed by agency staff representatives, who would communicate mostly by email, meet occasionally, somewhat similar to the CDOT Transportation Planning Regions. Agency representatives would be responsible for ensuring information is sought from and shared within all parts of their agency.

- C. The FTA and FHWA should be requested to encourage Colorado DOT and MPOs to be attentive to non-commuter recreational access and mobility needs. Efforts to strengthen consideration of recreational travel needs in travel demand modeling is noted specifically. The lack of attention to recreational travel needs is a major contributor to the lack of communication between States / MPOs and Federal land management agencies. Conversely, the Federal land management agencies should develop their land management plans in coordination with the applicable MPO/State transportation planning interests to help inform and stimulate interest in Federal lands issues on the part of Colorado DOT, the regional transportation planning districts, and the MPOs.
- D. Technical assistance is needed to help the Federal land management agencies to effectively prepare to engage and constructively interact in state and regional transportation planning processes. The agencies need to be prepared to articulate their transportation visions, goals, and funding / project programming priorities but with some notable exceptions, are not well equipped to do so. The TAG recommends that the Federal land management agencies work with the FTA and the FHWA to determine a means of providing the necessary “ongoing, on-call” technical assistance that goes beyond what can be provided on an occasional basis through an interagency TAG. The need is most evident in areas such as the Front Range where natural areas are nearby major, growing population centers where continuing public sector consultation, cooperation and coordination across all levels of government. Several possibilities exist but require further exploration, as briefly illustrated below.
- An ATPPL Federal Land Management Agency Cooperative Transportation Technical Assistance Group (CT²AG) – a concept suggested to the FTA by Kevin Percival, the NPS Transportation Planning Team Leader as a means of addressing the SAFETEA-LU Section 5320 provision that: “The Secretary of Transportation shall develop cooperative arrangements with the Secretary of Interior that provide for:
 - technical assistance in alternative transportation;
 - interagency and multi-disciplinary teams to develop alternative transportation policy, procedures, and coordination; and
 - the development of procedures and criteria relating to the planning, selection, and funding of qualified projects and the implementation and oversight of the program of projects in accordance with this section.”
 - A unified USDOT technical assistance corps comprised of transportation and planning experts drawn from FTA, FHWA, and the John A. Volpe National Transportation Systems Center.
 - A center similar to the America’s Byways Resource Center that serves as a clearinghouse for information on the Byways program and assists agencies in developing byways and funding proposals. (Note: in this regard, the FTA has

developed an ATPPL program manual, which is posted on its website along with other ATPPL information, and offers program assistance through its field offices). (<http://www.bywaysresourcecenter.org/>)

3. **Data needs and forecasting.** Data and information describing the linkages and key relationships / connections between recreation and other travel/ traffic considerations in transportation planning is lacking, especially as it relates to transportation planning models. This is not unique to the Front Range; however, it is perhaps more important given the significance of recreational travel in the overall transportation picture in the Front Range. The TAG noted that the sequence of technical activities associated with a multi-agency 2050 planning effort that is scheduled to be initiated over the coming year, which is progressing in advance of a comprehensive study of Front Range travel origins / destinations (O-D) that is not scheduled until 2010. The O-D survey (or a critical piece of it) should be accelerated so that it takes place *before* conducting the 2050 study – without introducing undue delays in the schedule. The TAG views the lack of recreational travel data and information for informed decision making an immediate opportunity for improvement. Better data information / collection related to recreation travel is needed to be communicated to MPOs for modeling purposes. And, socio-economic studies to further define recreation hot spots, economic impacts / tourism spending, as well as the economic value of recreational land to the public is essential to commanding policy attention within the transportation planning process.
 - The TAG recommends that the Federal lands management agencies consider how to accelerate data collection that could inform the corridor study results, participate in development of the O-D survey, and also consider submitting a planning grant proposal under the FY-2008 ATPPL solicitation to augment the O-D survey effort.
 - The TAG recommends that the Forest Service explore ways to make its national visitor use monitoring data readily available to transportation planning agencies in areas where the National Forests contribute significantly to the traffic on public roads.
4. **Transportation Planning and Investment.** Federal land management agencies do not have predictable control over funding made available to them under ATPPL and other discretionary funding programs. The ability to accurately identify total need to enable and guide future funding is fundamental to sound planning. When that isn't possible, investment priorities necessarily need to be drawn from a broad universe of needs and be flexible as funding opportunities arise.

The TAG believes that there are ample opportunities for Federal land management agencies to improve transportation planning practices. A few illustrative examples are offered below.

- Bridge disconnects between resort development and transportation planning by engaging with ski areas in transportation planning, with an emphasis on alternative transportation options. For example, study options to overcome

the prohibition against ski area buses to/from DIA from stopping elsewhere in the Denver area.

- Explore transit connections between Federal land areas / ski resorts and other points along existing routes that could provide other recreation opportunity access for more people and/or outreach to a broader demographic.
- Consider a recreational traveler information system as a mechanism to manage site capacity, improve the visitor experience, and protect fragile ecosystems. Opportunities for coordinating with CDOT on the use of roadside electronic message signs could be explored.
- Improve how transportation is explored, evaluated, and incorporated in Forest Management and corresponding management plans of the other Federal land agencies. Consider how alternative transportation can address opportunities, in addition to solving problems (i.e. Maroon Bells 'reactive' approach).
- Look at transportation more broadly and articulate a vision that can be shared with the public, the state, and MPOs. Forest Service Travel Management Plans are not getting input from the state and MPOs –better communication is needed, along with a mechanism for early interaction from local/regional/state leaders. Future Travel Management Plans might be broadened to consider the relationship to / impact on regional transportation.
- Work with Colorado DOT to establish predictable funding for alternative transportation and/or transportation enhancements. For example, in Oregon and Washington, 10% is taken off of top of the Forest Highway Program for Transportation enhancements.

5. **Promising Alternative Transportation Opportunities.** Demand for recreational access is overwhelming in many portions of the Front Range. Opportunities for cooperative ATPPL planning initiatives appear to exist at several recreational 'hot spots.' Examples include: Brainard Lake, Rocky Mountain Arsenal, Rocky Mountain Flats, as well as the earlier Peak-to-Peak highway concept.

The Boulder Ranger District is working with Rocky Mountain National Park to construct a Forest Service campground along the Peak-to-Peak Highway that will create additional parking for hikers in the Longs Peak Trailhead area. Given that parking supply sets a "de facto" visitor capacity limit, the question of "should shuttle bus operations be considered as a means to accommodate growth instead" appears to warrant consideration. Possibilities for a coordinated / cooperative hiker shuttle in conjunction with Rocky Mountain National Park and surrounding communities could be explored.

The Forest Service is making changes at Brainard Lake to better accommodate the recreational demand and protect the resources. One of the changes is to construct a large parking lot on the National Forest to accommodate winter recreation users. Construction of parking lots is both land and capital intensive. In this area and others that have the same characteristics, ATPPL planning grants could be pursued to develop and evaluate feasible alternatives to increasing parking capacity.

There appear to be opportunities to better manage parking at Guanella Pass, and the use of Forest Highway, Transportation Enhancement, and/or Coordinated Federal Lands Highway Technology Implementation Program (CTIP) funds may be used in this regard even though ATPPL isn't likely given the lack of a transit alternative in the area.

As part of its master planning and site development process, the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge has to address issues regarding parking, visitor access and circulation, trails, and interpretive shuttle services, as well as alternative transportation linkages to regional systems – only some of which may be achieved under the FY-2006 ATPPL grant.

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Participants

Transportation Assistance Group (TAG)

- Charles Goodman, Director of Systems Planning, Federal Transit Administration
- Susan Law, Community Planner, Central Federal Lands Highway Division, Federal Highway Administration
- Gary Ritter, General Engineer , Volpe National Transportation Systems Center
- Jennifer Stewart, Community Planner, Region 8, Federal Transit Administration
- Floyd Thompson, Floyd Thompson, U.S. Forest Service, Office of Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness Resources
- Bill Fodge, Forest Highway Program Manager, Region 5 (Washington Office Engineering representative)

U.S. Forest Service

- Rich Doak, White River National Forest
- Carol Kruse, Arapahoe – Roosevelt National Forest
- Paul Kruse, Arapahoe – Roosevelt National Forest
- Chris Spurl, Center for Design and Interpretation, Rocky Mountain Regional Office

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

- Tom Locke, Refuge Roads Coordinator, FWS Region 6 Office
- Stephen Smith, Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge

National Park Service

- Gay Page, Transportation Planner, Park Facilities Management Division
- Kevin Percival, Transportation Planning Team Leader, Park Facilities Management Division
- Jayne Schaeffer, Park Roads and Parkway / Alternative Transportation Program Coordinator, Intermountain Region, National Park Service
- Larry Gamble, Chief, Branch of Planning and Compliance, Rocky Mountain National Park, National Park Service
- Linda MacIntyre, National Park Service, Denver Service Center
- Dennis Nagao, National Park Service, Denver Service Center
- Bob Welch, National Park Service, Denver Service Center

Other Participants

- Terry Rosapep, Acting Regional Administrator, Region 8, Federal Transit Administration
- Larry D. Anderson, Central Federal Lands Highway Division, Federal Highway Administration

- Elijah Henley, Central Federal Lands Highway Division, Federal Highway Administration
- Ryan Tyler, Central Federal Lands Highway Division, Federal Highway Administration
- Craig Larson, Colorado Division, Federal Highway Administration
- Kathy Engelson, Colorado Department of Transportation
- David Heller, Denver Regional Council of Governments
- Steve Rudy, Denver Regional Council of Governments
- Craig Casper, Pikes Peak Council of Governments
- Todd Ahlenius, Pueblo Area Council of Governments
- Scott Babcock, Strategic Planning Program Manager, Colorado State Parks
- Melanie Mills, Executive Vice President for Public Affairs, Colorado Ski Country USA

Supporting Documents

Colorado DOT

- Statewide and Regional Plans - 2035 updates
<http://www.dot.state.co.us/StateWidePlanning/PlansStudies/2035Plan.asp>
- 2030 Statewide Plan
<http://www.dot.state.co.us/StateWidePlanning/PlansStudies/2030Plan.asp>
- Colorado Travel Map
<http://dtdexternal.dot.state.co.us/travelmap/>
- 2006 Colorado Visitor Profile Travel Study - Longwoods International
<http://colorado.com/data/docs/2006LongwoodsVisitorProfile.pdf>
- Heritage Tourism - potential funding and partnerships with State of Colorado
<http://colorado.com/docs/EXECSUMSTANDALONE030106.pdf>

Intermountain Transportation Planning Region

- 2035 Regional Transportation Plan:
http://www.dot.state.co.us/StateWidePlanning/PlansStudies/Docs/Techreports/Intermountain_Tech_Report_1.pdf

Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments (PPACG)

- Executive Summary of PPACG's 2030 Regional Transportation Plan
<http://www.ppacg.org/Trans/2030/Volume%20I/Executive%20Summary.pdf>
- Newsletter update
http://www.ppacg.org/cms/images/stories/pdf_files/transplan.pdf

Pueblo Area Council of Governments (PACOG)

- 2030 Long Range Plan
http://www.pacog.net/long_term_plan.htm, completed in 2004.

Colorado State Parks

- Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)
<http://parks.state.co.us/Trails/LWCF/SCORPPlan/>

U.S. Forest Service:

- Pike & San Isabel National Forest – Rampart Range Motorized Trail and Road Analysis
http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/psicc/spl/rampartdecision_noimpact.shtml
- Urban Front-country Initiative (summary)

Recent news media on I-70 corridor

- Colorado backs off I-70 plans; options beside widening are on table (5/18/07)
http://www.denverpost.com/search/ci_5928646
- Trains proposed for I-25 and I-70 (11/14/06)
http://www.denverpost.com/search/ci_4656106
- I-70 Ideas Going Nowhere Fast (describes recreation traveler frustrations)
http://www.denverpost.com/search/ci_5311051

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NOTICE

The Transportation Assistance Group (TAG) is convened at the request of the recipient agency. The TAG is an agency-independent effort that is intended to provide technical assistance in support of the ATPPL program and does not imply, preference, or guarantee programmatic funding or project support. This document is disseminated in the interest of information exchange. The recommendations found herein reflect the collective expertise and consensus of the individual TAG members, do not represent regulatory or programmatic requirements, and do not in any way reflect the official opinion of any Federal agency. The United States Government assumes no liability for the contents of this document or use thereof.

APPENDIX

**Transportation Technical Advisory Group
Colorado Front Range Recreational Travel & Federal Lands Management**

*** A G E N D A ***

Tuesday, July 24

- 8:00-9:00 Federal agencies: meeting purpose/objectives
- 9:00-9:30 Stakeholder orientation
- 9:30-11:00 US Forest Service presentation
- 11:00-12:00 US Fish and Wildlife Service presentation

- 12:00- 1:00 *Lunch break*

- 1:00-2:00 Rocky Mountain National Park presentation
- 2:00-3:00 Colorado Department of Transportation presentation
- 3:00-4:00 Denver Regional Council of Governments presentation
- 4:00-5:00 Colorado Ski Country USA presentation

Wednesday, July 25

- 8:30-9:00 TAG reconvenes, recap
- 9:00-10:00 Intermountain Transportation Planning Region presentation
- 10:00-11:00 Colorado State Parks presentation
- 11:00-12:00 Pueblo Area Council of Governments presentation

- 12:00-12:30 *Working lunch*

- 12:30-1:30 Pikes Peak Council of Governments presentation
- 1:30-TBD Field trip, Peak-to-Peak Highway / Brainard Lake Recreation Area

Thursday, July 26

- 8:00-12:00 Technical Advisory Group working session

- 12:00-1:00 *Lunch*

- 1:00- 3:30 Technical Advisory Group working session continues
- 3:30-4:30 Technical Advisory Group report to stakeholders
- 4:30 *Meeting adjourns*