

Southwest Tour

The committee traveled to southwest Colorado and visited the following projects and sites:

- the US 24 Buena Vista Enhancement Project in Buena Vista;
- the US 50 Blue Creek Canyon/Windy Point Project outside Gunnison;
- the CO 82 Grand Avenue Bridge Project in Glenwood Springs; and
- the Eisenhower-Johnson Memorial Tunnels.

US 24 Buena Vista Enhancement Project. The committee toured the US 24 Buena Vista Enhancement Project with Chafee County Commissioner Keith Baker and Buena Vista Mayor Joel Benson. Commissioner Baker explained that combining a Responsible Acceleration of Maintenance and Partnerships (RAMP) project and a Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) surface treatment project allowed for cost savings. Committee members toured the new intersection at US 24 and W Main Street in Buena Vista, and walked along new concrete improvements at curbs, gutters, and sidewalks in town. Commissioner Baker and Mayor Benson also highlighted the new pedestrian crosswalks and signals across US 24. Mayor Benson indicated that the project will also address drainage issues around the intersections of US 24, Cedar Street, and Cottonwood Avenue.

US 50 Blue Creek Project. The committee stopped at US 50 mile marker 123.6 to meet with Jason Smith, CDOT Region 3 engineer. Mr. Smith discussed the phased projects for US 50 in the Blue Creek area between Gunnison and Montrose. The first phase of the project, completed in 2014, focused on mitigating rock landslides and widening US 50 by adding shoulder space and a passing lane, and using lightweight Styrofoam fill to mitigate landslides. Mr. Smith noted that the two main concerns with the Styrofoam include water and rodent damage.

The current phase of the project includes installing coupled shear piles and caps to mitigate an active landslide. The project will add an uphill passing lane, and complete drainage and embankment elements. Mr. Smith discussed the resurfacing elements of the project, which include both cold-in-place and hot mix asphalt overlay resurfacing.

Once completed, CDOT has plans to reconstruct US 50 through Blue Creek Canyon by working with Central Federal Lands in the Federal Highway Administration. Design is slated to begin in Fall 2017, with project completion anticipated for in Fall 2021. The project will soften curves, add shoulders, and provide additional rockfall mitigation.

CO 82 Grand Avenue Bridge Project. The committee met with CDOT representatives in Glenwood Springs to discuss the Grand Avenue Bridge Project. This 30-month construction project will replace the road and pedestrian bridges that connect I-70 with downtown Glenwood Springs. To complete this project, CDOT will close the Grand Avenue Bridge on August 14, 2017, for 95 calendar days. After this period, the bridge will open with one lane going in each direction.

CDOT representatives discussed the measures the community is taking to mitigate traffic delays during the construction period. These measures include carpooling and vanpooling; increased utilization of walking, biking, and public transit; and encouraging people to shift their schedules or telecommute. The Roaring Fork Transportation Authority will provide free transit services for the duration of the 95-day bridge closure.

Eisenhower-Johnson Memorial Tunnels. Committee members received a tour of the workings of the highest vehicular tunnel in the world. 52 CDOT staff operate the tunnel 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, with 4 staff onsite at all times to address fire suppression, vehicle breakdowns, and control traffic for the 56,000 vehicles a day that pass through the tunnels on peak days. Tunnel staff provide vehicle assistance to an average of 20 to 30 vehicles per day. Staff have an average fire suppression time of five minutes. The committee toured rooms housing backup generators and batteries, the ventilation system, and the control room. The main challenges facing the tunnels involve groundwater issues around the fault zone, combining older technology with new technology that can be reliable for the next 40 years, and extreme weather events.