

UNDER THE DOME

WITH THE NCLA

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US HWY 36 DEBATE PROMPTS QUESTIONS ABOUT I-25 NORTH EXPANSION

This week, the funding for significant highway improvements to US Hwy 36, the Boulder Turnpike linking Denver and Boulder, came under fire by the legislature. The debate prompted questions over the funding options being considered for the state's other large highway expansions, including the expansion of I-25 between Longmont and US Highway 14 in Fort Collins.

In 2009, the Colorado legislature passed FASTER, the then-controversial Funding Advancement for Surface Transportation and Economic Recovery Act. FASTER provided a new funding source, increased registration fees, for various identified transportation projects throughout Colorado. In addition to the fee increase, the Act provided for the little discussed formation of the "High-Performance Transportation Enterprise" (HPTE) within CDOT. The Enterprise was charged with overseeing innovative funding deals, including public private partnerships, otherwise referred to as P3's.

Since FASTER's passage, the HPTE has been exploring various P3 options to crack the \$770M funding shortfall for the large scale projects in the state, US 36 being the first among them. The plan to expand US 36 includes a single toll lane in each direction to supplement the paid lanes. A conglomerate of private sector companies was chosen to partner with the state to finance, build, operate, maintain the expansion and the ongoing maintenance of the entire Boulder Turnpike roadway.

The 50-year deal with Plenary Roads Denver came under fire after contract terms were not being disclosed by CDOT. After a legislative hearing this week, the terms were ultimately released and new processes for public hearings, transparency and disclosure were committed to by CDOT.

An alternative to raising taxes to build roadways, tolling new lanes in major corridors prompted discussions on the difficulty of raising taxes or alternative revenue sources despite long-held expectations that such expansions would occur.

NCLA has been advocating for the expansion of I-25 north of Hwy 66 to three lanes since its inception in 1992. The project has been on the books for years but the dollars have never materialized. The project is now among those the HPTE sees as viable for P3 and a tolled 3rd lane.

DELGROSSO TACKLES TRANSPORTATION FUNDING WITH CASH

Under the shadow of the debate on the Boulder Turnpike's P3 and tolling approach, House Minority Leader Brian DelGrosso has opted to attack the significant transportation funding shortfall with a direct \$100 M cash appropriation for transportation projects throughout the state.

House Bill 14-1259 proposes to allocate \$100M from the state's general fund to the state highway fund, with certain caveats. Specifically, the moneys are to be allocated to each of the state's engineering regions in proportion to the number of state highway system lane miles in each engineering region. Additionally, the moneys aren't to be used for expansion of the state's highways but only for maintenance, repair, reconstruction and replacement of existing state highways and bridges.

NCLA will take a formal position on HB 14-1259 this week after Representative DelGrosso presents his bill to the NCLA Board of Directors. The bill will also be heard by the House Transportation Committee later this week.