the Sensible Solution

Complete the Connection and Relieve Congestion the Better Way
The answer is yes, IF the connection actually improves the flow of traffic and relieves congestion in the northwest metro area. There is a way to do that, a strategy developed with the cooperation of Arvada, Golden, Lakewood, Westminster and Wheat Ridge. It is called the Countywide Transportation Plan and it virtually eliminates congestion on local streets, cuts travel times and requires no tolls to go between C-470 on the south and U.S. 36 on the north.

The key elements of the Countywide Transportation Plan are major improvements to two north-south arterials – State Highway 93 and Indiana/McIntyre Street. Each is widened to four lanes. Neither becomes a superhighway or toll road, as some have proposed. However, with speed limits of 55 mph much of the way, driving these improved roads will be quick and easy.

Here’s the most sensible part: Improving existing roads is much less expensive than building a toll road through Arvada and a six- to eight-lane highway through Golden. Additionally, it does a lot more to improve traffic conditions. Using traffic models developed by the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG), transportation experts CRA International calculated the cost of each project based on how much congestion it relieves – essentially looking at which is the better value. It found that a toll road alone costs six times as much to build per daily minute of congested travel time saved.

CRA International also used DRCOG models to forecast the amount of traffic congestion in the north Jeffco area in 2030. If no improvements are made, portions of several local roads in Arvada and Golden will be congested six or more hours every day. If a toll road is built, congestion levels improve only slightly – portions of some roads are still jammed up three to five hours daily and portions of others six or more hours. But if SH 93 and Indiana/McIntyre Street are widened and the other improvements proposed by the Countywide Transportation Plan are made, the streets of Arvada and Golden will be nearly free of congestion more than 20 years from now. And that’s accounting for continued population growth in the region. The analysis by CRA International confirmed the findings of the 2001 Northwest Quadrant Feasibility Study, conducted by consultant CH2M Hill and funded by DRCOG, Jeffco, Arvada, Golden, Lakewood, Westminster and Wheat Ridge. That study also recommended improvements to existing major roads as the best solution to traffic congestion in the area.

“Buckle the Beltway.”
“Close the gap.”
“Build the missing link.”

Completing the “470” loop around metro Denver just makes sense, doesn’t it?
How much time in serious traffic congestion will motorists be spared?

Compared to building nothing, a toll road saves area motorists from driving a total of 78,225 miles a day in heavy traffic. But improvements in the Countywide Transportation Plan save motorists from spending nearly 500,000 miles a day in congestion. If a toll road is built, one road that definitely will NOT be congested in 2030 is the toll road itself – not even during morning rush hour.

The volume on some portions of the proposed toll road is projected to be as low as 10,000 vehicles a day, according to CRA International’s analysis. The reason? For most motorists traveling within the area, the toll road does not get them where they want to go. And for motorists looking to get across the region from north to south, or vice versa, the toll road is not the most cost-effective or even the quickest route.

The study by CRA International came to a startling conclusion: Less than 1 percent of motorists seeking to travel between the Northwest Parkway at I-25 and I-70 at C-470 would choose to use the Northwest Parkway and a new toll road. And no heavy trucks traveling between these two points would use the two toll roads. Why? There’s a quicker way to go and motorists tend to avoid paying tolls if they can. It’s the same for trips between Boulder and I-70 – the travel time is shorter using the widened roads in the Countywide Transportation Plan.

Here’s another reason why a toll road is a poor solution to the area’s transportation problems: The financial success of a toll road depends on local roads being so congested that motorists feel they have no choice but to pay. Investors bankrolling the project will want commitments from Arvada and Jefferson County to let local, free roads degrade so that residents are forced to drive the toll road. That sort of gridlock guarantee – sometimes called a “non-compete clause” – is part of an agreement between Broomfield and Brisa, the Portuguese company leasing the Northwest Parkway for 99 years. Similarly, in the 1990s, Commerce City agreed to put in stoplights along Tower Road to intentionally slow traffic and encourage more motorists to drive the E-470 toll road.

The executive director of the E-470 Public Highway Authority wrote in the Rocky Mountain News on April 11, 2008, that he assumes that for this new stretch of toll road “a key stipulation in any agreement between local governments and the builder and operator of such a toll road would be that those governments would not build any competing nontolled roadway.” Toll roads are often promoted as a free or lower-cost way to get new pavement. But what if a new toll road does not take drivers where they want to go and it prevents the construction of new roads or road improvements that actually are needed to relieve traffic?

Then that toll road stops looking like such a good deal.
Golden hired Muller Engineering in 2002 to study and design elements of the Countywide Transportation Plan that go through Golden. With input from residents and regional citizen groups, the firm proposed improvements to U.S. 6 and SH 93 that preserve Golden’s natural beauty and historic charm while meeting current and future traffic needs. The Golden City Council adopted the proposal by a unanimous vote on Oct. 23, 2003.

Countywide Transportation Plan

Quick Facts

- Developed with the Cooperation of Jefferson County, Arvada, Golden, Lakewood, Westminster and Wheat Ridge
- Costs Less than Alternatives
- Cuts Travel Time
- No Tolls
- Preserves the Mountain Backdrop
- Eliminates Congestion
- Completes the Loop
- Can Be Built Over Time as Funds Become Available

For more information and ideas on how you can get involved, visit www.cityofgolden.net/thesensiblesolution.