

Pillars for Transportation Solutions in the Central Wasatch Mountains
Central Wasatch Commission
June 7, 2021

In connection with UDOT's Little Cottonwood Canyon Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), we, the undersigned commissioners (Commissioners) of the Central Wasatch Commission (CWC), hereby state the following.

For over two years, CWC has actively engaged in assessing the foundational elements of the upcoming Draft EIS and successful solutions for transportation in the Central Wasatch Mountains. Throughout that process, each Commissioner has invested heavily in studying and reviewing objectives and options regarding the complex decisions surrounding solutions to the transportation and preservation challenges facing Little Cottonwood Canyon (LCC) and the Central Wasatch Mountains. Although our work in this critical area is not yet complete, we have decided to issue this statement in the interest of sharing some observations we have at this time.

The Commissioners are unified in the opinion that "doing nothing" regarding the challenges facing the Central Wasatch Canyons is not a viable solution. In addition, although we are not yet fully united on a preference for a particular transportation mode, we continue to work toward arriving at consensus. In the meantime, we have come to agreement on a set of "pillars" that we believe should be considered and implemented in connection with the eventual transportation solution. These broad principles are consistent with the original intent of the Mountain Accord, and we believe should be applied to whatever transportation mode is ultimately recommended in UDOT's Record of Decision.

PILLARS

Visitor Use Capacity

The transportation alternatives being evaluated in the EIS have the potential to significantly increase the quantity of visitors accessing LCC, and what they do when they visit. All of these alternatives pose a risk of "over-use" of LCC, which could result in negative environmental, public safety and water resource consequences. Additionally, over-use could negatively impact the visitor experience for both tourists and locals who seek to enjoy recreation and nature from unmanaged crowds.

These concerns have been raised repeatedly by the public, various groups, and elected officials during the EIS process, but the limited scope of the EIS's stated "purpose and need" has not allowed UDOT the opportunity to fully consider these issues. To appropriately address the risks, we believe a corresponding visitor use strategy needs to be identified and implemented to complement any existing management plans.

Watershed Protection

Protection of the fragile environmental conditions of the Central Wasatch Mountains is the highest priority for the communities that rely on these Mountains for watershed and water supply. Any transportation solution for LCC should minimize and mitigate negative environmental impacts, including irreversible damage to the watersheds that provide precious drinking water to more than 450,000 people in the Valley and in the LCC itself.

Traffic Demand Management, Parking and Bus (or other Transit) Strategies

The Commissioners favor the implementation of a set of traffic management strategies that address both traffic impacts on the roads accessing Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons, as well as the roads within these Canyons. In addition, consideration of expanded bus (or other transit) service and parking management outside of the Canyons is critical, regardless of the transportation mode ultimately selected for LCC.

Management strategies outside of the Canyons include providing parking in dispersed locations and improved bus (or other transit) service. The Commissioners also favor appropriate roadway improvements along Wasatch Boulevard and 9400 South. Canyon traffic management options include variable tolling, limited access for single occupancy vehicles, carpool programs, and the reduction of on-road parking. These Canyon strategies should be utilized immediately as a “first phase” of the final EIS alternative implementation, i.e., even before a long-term LCC transportation mode is designed and constructed. None of the proposed transportation alternatives in the EIS will be fully effective without corresponding traffic demand management, expanded regional parking, and bus (or other transit) strategies.

Integration into the Broader Regional Transportation Network

Understanding that the EIS is limited from a geographic perspective to a narrow focus on LCC and its immediate surrounding area, a broader, more holistic approach should be used when implementing solutions for traffic issues related to LCC. To that end, consideration should be given to the integration of any LCC-oriented system with transportation issues attendant to Big Cottonwood Canyon and the broader valley-wide transportation network. To justify the cost from a public benefit perspective, a large-scale infrastructure investment that serves a singular purpose (i.e., alleviating traffic congestion issues affecting LCC) should be accompanied by broader service and infrastructure investment in other areas of the valley. As a result, we support the exploration of the idea of transit micro-hubs in areas throughout the valley as gathering places for visitors and residents to catch transit.

Year-Round Transit Service

The Commissioners consider year-round transit service to destinations in the Canyons a priority, including dispersed recreational opportunities, and other dispersed recreational opportunities in the surrounding areas (such as areas along the foothills). The existing LCC EIS only considers winter, peak transit service.

Long-Term Protection of Critical Areas Through Federal Legislation

Transportation improvements for LCC should be coupled with improved land and natural resource protection. The ultimate transportation solution should be conditioned upon the passage of federal legislation (the Central Wasatch National Conservation and Recreation Area Act). This coupling of federal legislation to transportation is necessary given the delicate balance that was central to the Mountain Accord agreement, based on four principal tenets: transportation, economy, recreation, and environment.

[SIGNATURE BLOCKS OF COMMISSIONERS]



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Summit County Councilmember



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