



Memorandum

TO: Pitkin County and City of Aspen Open Space and Trails Board
FROM: Gary Tennenbaum-Director of Pitkin County Open Space and Trails, Austin Weiss-City of Aspen Parks and Open Space Director, and Gerald Fielding-Pitkin County Engineer
SUBJECT: Castle Creek Trail Planning
DATE: February 1, 2018

The County and City have been working on planning safety improvements along the Castle Creek Road corridor from the Music/Aspen Country Day Schools to the Marolt Trail. This is the second Joint Meeting between the Pitkin County and City of Aspen Open Space and Trails Boards to discuss the proposed Castle Creek Trail. In this meeting, staff is providing all the public comment received during the second round of public process, which included alternatives for options on trail and shoulder improvements.

Staff is seeking feedback from both boards as well as direction on choosing a preferred alternative to go to final design and cost estimate. Staff will then take the recommendation to City Council on February 6 and the Pitkin BOCC on February 27 for their direction on the design and cost estimate of the recommended alternative. If approved, staff will then bring back the final design and cost estimate to both the City and County Open Space Boards for approval and budget recommendation. Then it will go to the City Council and BOCC for final project and budget approval.

Background

At a joint meeting between the County and City Open Space Boards in September 2016, the Castle Creek Trail was prioritized for planning in 2017 in response to many community members' requests. The Castle Creek Trail planning began on July 24, 2017 with an open house to start soliciting public feedback on the opportunities and challenges associated with improving pedestrian and bicycle safety along Castle Creek Road. Staff also has met with interested parties, including neighbors and the Music and Aspen Country Day School, to get feedback on what data to get to help the Open Space Boards and elected officials make decisions with regard to improvements.

The public comment period was extended till September 29th to ensure all stakeholders had time to submit comments. All public comments were included in the open space boards' packet and are still available online. There was a community survey, Aspen Music Festival and School survey, comment cards received at the public open house, letters and emails received, website comment submissions, and the insights from the kickoff meeting. This generated a large amount of public feedback.

The consultants hired a firm to provide user counts along the road via video camera for two weeks. The first week counted use from August 2-9 and the second week was from September 17-24. Neither the Music nor Aspen Country Day School were notified that the cameras were in use during those weeks. The data is available on the projects website.

The consulting engineers have considered all of the public feedback and have analyzed the corridor for what is feasible. A survey of the right-of-way that included all trees over 4 inches in diameter was completed, so all impacts along the alignments could be evaluated. Alignment concepts and estimated costs were created and presented at a joint meeting of the City and County Open Space Boards on November 2, 2017.

At the joint meeting on November 2, the boards recommended releasing the alternatives to the public for feedback. An open house and presentation on the alternatives was held on November 15, 2017. The public comment period was open through January 1, 2018, providing the opportunity to participate in a survey about options and to provide open comment.

Discussion Items

All public comment and a summary of the survey is included in the packet. After reviewing the public comment and survey responses, it became evident that a strong majority supports pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements in this corridor.

In the survey responses, the east-side alternative came out slightly ahead in preference for alternatives. The “no improvements” option was the least preferred. Shoulder improvements came in with relatively little support in the survey, but there was strong support in the survey responses for widening the shoulders in the corridor and uphill bike lanes. Improved safety measures - increased signage, slower speeds and speed tables - had strong support. A physically separated trail also had strong support. There was also some support in the comments, as well as in the survey, for limiting impacts from any trail alternative.

Aside from the survey, public comment received in emails, comment cards and letters was split in preference between the east-side trail and shoulder improvements. Overall, the east-side trail alternative received the most support, but there is concern for the cost and impacts.

Staff worked to combine all the comments and survey responses into a recommended preferred alignment. The recommended alignment is a modified east-side separated trail. This modified design would include the uphill bike lane and as much separated trail from the roadway as possible by narrowing the trail to less than 6-8 feet wide, uphill bike lane to less than 4 feet wide, and buffer to less than 3 feet wide where necessary to limit the disturbance to vegetation, height or need for retaining walls, and to reduce cost. This design will include increased safety signage and speed tables along the corridor. Staff will also propose lowering the speed limits in this corridor.

A modified east-side alignment will significantly reduce the current east-side cost estimate of \$3.8 million, limit the impacts to aesthetics and vegetation, and provide a much safer corridor for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Open Space and Trails will work with Pitkin County Public Works on rockfall mitigation strategies and recommend an alternative to the BOCC to determine if and how to fund rockfall mitigation.

Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends that both the City and County Open Space Boards forward a recommendation to City Council and the Pitkin BOCC directing staff to procure, design and obtain any necessary land-use approvals to implement a modified east-side trail alignment and bring that design and cost estimate back to both open space boards as well as City and County elected officials once completed, for final approval.