

CHAPTER 5. HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION

Policies in this Chapter affect immediate and long-term Canyon transportation and traffic issues.

HIGHWAYS

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENTS SHOULD BE WITHIN EXISTING RIGHTS-OF-WAY, BLEND WITH THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT, MAXIMIZE PUBLIC SAFETY, COMPLY WITH BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR WATER QUALITY PROTECTION, AND BE CONSISTENT WITH THIS PLAN.

SMALL PARKING AREAS SHOULD BE DEVELOPED FOR DISPERSED RECREATION USE.

SANITATION AND TRASH FACILITIES SHOULD BE PROVIDED AT HEAVY USE AREAS ALONG HIGHWAYS INCLUDING SANITATION FACILITIES AT SKI AREA PARKING LOTS.

JOGGING AND BIKING LANES SHOULD BE ADDED WHERE FEASIBLE AND SAFE AS A MATTER OF PUBLIC SAFETY IN CONJUNCTION WITH ROAD MAINTENANCE, IMPROVEMENT AND RECONSTRUCTION. ADDITIONAL CANYON OPPORTUNITIES FOR THESE RECREATIONAL PURSUITS SHOULD BE EXPLORED, BUT INCREASED USE SHOULD NOT BE ENCOURAGED IN AREAS WHERE IT IS NOT FEASIBLE TO ADDRESS TRAFFIC/USER SAFETY CONCERNS.

PULL-OFFS SHOULD BE PROVIDED FOR BUS STOPS.

Canyon highway improvements should be for general maintenance and public safety considerations, not for increasing traffic volume capacities. Improvements should be within existing rights-of-way. Any widening of thoroughfares should be limited to site-specific circumstances or for providing widened shoulder areas for maintenance, snowplowing, or emergency use.

Dispersed recreation users often use highway shoulders for parking, both in summer and winter seasons. To improve user and public safety as well as to accommodate snowplowing in winter, it would be preferable to provide small, unobtrusive parking areas for dispersed recreation users. Construction of such lots should be based on dispersed recreation use by area, terrain suitability, and Canyon-by-Canyon vehicle capacities.

Areas should be constructed in the Cottonwood Canyons to provide safe waiting/loading/unloading areas for non-resort bus stops for winter dispersed recreation use. They should be designed to afford snowplowing and with the potential for possible future summer bus service.

Construction of parking areas, bus stops, and sanitation and trash facilities should be done in a manner which minimizes their visual intrusion and blends with the natural environment.

Heavy-use areas along highways, i.e., trailheads and parking areas, should have sanitation and trash facilities provided. Sanitation services and trash facilities should be provided by cooperation among appropriate jurisdictions. Provision of these services should be an agenda item for the Wasatch Canyons Coordinating Committee.

As feasible and where they can be safely accommodated, jogging and biking lanes should be added to canyon highways. Joggers and bikers often must contend with heavy weekend and rush-hour traffic which jeopardizes their safety, and the safety of others on the road. Failure to implement this measure is an invitation to increased public safety problems on the canyon roads. Where no additional lane is available for joggers/bicyclists, increases in this use should not be encouraged.

While not foreclosing the paving of Guardsman's Pass for summer recreational use, there are significant considerations which warrant further study. Much of the existing road is on private land, is on a steep grade, and is narrow. Over the top of the Pass (in Summit and Wasatch Counties), substantial reworking of the road would be required before paving.

Use of the Guardsman's Pass road on an all-weather basis would present additional problems. Its winter use may contribute to existing winter traffic and parking problems in Big Cottonwood Canyon, avalanche hazards would be significant, snowplowing would be difficult, and travel could be dangerous. Winter use could also conflict with area backcountry ski and snowmobile use.

By itself, Guardsman's Pass Road would not be a viable Mountain Transportation System. However, the Wasatch Canyons Coordinating Committee should further study options for Guardsman's Pass paving and summer use and for possible use by snowcats during the ski season to connect Big Cottonwood Canyon with Park City and Wasatch County. Consideration of these options should be in conjunction with a Canyon transportation plan and a comprehensive Mountain Transportation System.

HIGHWAY TRANSPORTATION

THE HIGHWAY TRANSPORTATION GOAL OF THE PLAN IS TO REDUCE PRIVATE VEHICULAR TRAFFIC IN THE COTTONWOOD CANYONS DURING PEAK PERIODS.

TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, MEASURES SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED TO DISCOURAGE PRIVATE AUTOMOBILE USE AND TO ENCOURAGE USE OF MASS TRANSIT IN THE SHORT TERM. FOR THE LONGER TERM, A MOUNTAIN TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM SHOULD BE DESIGNED AND PURSUED.

SUCCESS OF THESE MEASURES DEPENDS UPON PUBLIC/PRIVATE SECTOR COOPERATION, INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION, AND PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE.

ESTABLISHMENT OF PARK-AND-RIDE FACILITIES TO SERVE BIG AND LITTLE COTTONWOOD CANYONS SHOULD OCCUR IMMEDIATELY.

As documented in the report Salt Lake County Canyons Master Plan Analysis of Transportation Facilities for the Cottonwood Canyons, both Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons are currently at, or have already exceeded, their highway and parking design capacities during peak winter weekends and holidays. Highway carrying capacity exceedance inconveniences users and increases their exposure to public safety risks from winter road conditions and potential avalanches. The transportation problem persists in these canyons despite the provision of mass transit and cooperation by the ski resorts to reduce auto use.

Additional measures are necessary to reduce private automobile traffic in the Cottonwood Canyons during the peak 10-to-12 winter weekends when congestion is most severe. The majority of peak winter car traffic is associated with the ski resorts. Some of the most effective vehicle reduction opportunities would rely upon resort cooperation and action.

Resorts and affected governments should cooperate in implementation of strategies to elicit a voluntary public response in reducing winter private car use, particularly during peak traffic periods. Options are suggested for affected governments and the resorts to discourage private car use and to encourage mass transit use.

Among options governmental jurisdictions should consider to reduce car use are more aggressive enforcement of parking regulations along highways and seasonal parking fees or parking permits for public parking areas within the canyons.

Affected jurisdictions should also pursue measures to enhance mass transit use. Park-and-ride/kiss-and-ride facilities to serve canyon mass transit are clearly needed immediately. This may mean a number of small lots or a centralized, efficient location. The location and sizes of the lot(s) should be based on transit efficiencies and community acceptance. Salt Lake County should aggressively pursue a solution to this need. Establishment of multiple bus stops within the canyons and a shuttle service geared to dispersed recreation would help alleviate congestion from that use.

In addition to governmental actions, each ski resort should develop, annually update and monitor a plan for the reduction of private automobiles specifically at that resort. Some resort options for mass transit incentives could have coincidental canyonwide benefits.

Approval of any additional skiers at one time (SAOT) at a resort would require a resort evaluation and mitigation plan for projected traffic affects on the existing or future transportation system resulting from the ski use expansion.

Among options available to the resorts for automobile use disincentives are preferred parking, lift ticket discounts and free or discounted parking for car-poolers and high-occupancy vehicles; parking permits or fees for private automobiles; parking restrictions during peak traffic/use periods; and less convenient parking for low-occupancy vehicles.

Options to provide incentives for mass transit use in conjunction with the resorts include improved mass transit loading and unloading facilities and convenience at resorts (a terminal could include heated waiting area, rest rooms, lockers, and food service); provision of park-and-ride areas in the valley; resort owned mass transit or additional resort subsidies to public mass transit; ticket and other discounts to mass transit users; season mass transit ticket packages; employee mass transit packages; and use of resort mini-buses for destination guest transport. It may be desirable to offer a combined ticket for ski lifts and bus transport at centralized valley locations.

For the longer term and future valley and mountain transportation systems, consolidation of parking facilities, terminals, and multiple, linkable systems should be considered. If a valley light rail system is realized, commuter parking lots associated with it could be utilized on weekends and holidays for canyon mass transit.

Mass transit systems within the canyons may need to be further publicly subsidized to reduce prices as a further user incentive. In addition, the implementation of these measures will require additional special mass transit busses which are equipped to safely service the canyons.

A more vigorous public information program by both the resorts and all affected agencies including Salt Lake County, Utah Department of Transportation, and the Utah Transit Authority could increase mass transit use.

A Canyons Transportation Committee including Salt Lake County, the Utah Transit Authority, the U.S. Forest Service, the Town of Alta, Salt Lake City, and Utah Department of Transportation should meet annually and cooperate in reviewing and coordinating the monitoring of traffic and parking, planning and implementation of short-term transportation measures, and consideration of a long-term mountain transportation system under this Plan. An annual review should be conducted with the resorts as to the effectiveness of measures implemented by them, possible additional options, and any additional measures which would be required for approval of area modifications increasing ski area capacities. Activities of the Canyons Transportation Committee will be noticed and open to the public.

Should the above options not be effectively implemented or fail to decrease winter traffic volumes, additional measures should be considered by Salt Lake County, in cooperation with other jurisdictions, including such options as canyon-wide auto permitting, tolls at the mouths of the canyons, mandatory resort guidelines for parking and/or mass transit use, and possible eventual winter conversion of the Cottonwood highways to sole mass transit use with canyon property owner permitted use.

Salt Lake County and the affected jurisdictions should establish a transportation safety evaluation and improvement program. Among areas for investigation and/or implementation are: establish and enforce minimum safety, braking, and performance regulations for Canyon busses; restrict service and truck traffic during peak periods; establish and enforce maximum automobile traffic levels; and avalanche control and safety measures.

Avalanche control and mitigation measures are critical for protecting the public in the Cottonwood Canyons. A comprehensive analysis of avalanche control, potential avalanche mitigation measures, funding sources, and opportunities for cooperation in protecting public safety from avalanche danger should be undertaken and policies should be implemented based on the findings.

In addition to these Cottonwood Canyon measures, future transportation options to reduce traffic congestion in Mill Creek Canyon should be considered for summer peak use periods. One long-term option is to close the canyon to car traffic during peak-use weekends, establish a park-and-ride facility at the mouth of the Canyon, and provide low-cost bus service.

MOUNTAIN TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM/SKI INTERCONNECT

FURTHER CONSIDERATION AND EVALUATION OF SKI INTERCONNECT EXPANSION BY SALT LAKE COUNTY WILL BE AS A MOUNTAIN TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM SERVING SALT LAKE COUNTY INCLUDING DOWNTOWN SALT LAKE CITY AND THE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, WASATCH, AND SUMMIT COUNTIES AND THE COTTONWOOD CANYONS AND PARK CITY SKI RESORTS. CONSIDERATION OF A SYSTEM SHOULD BE VIGOROUSLY PURSUED AND INCLUDE PARTICIPATION BY AFFECTED GOVERNMENTAL AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ENTITIES, ADDRESSING TRANSPORTATION PROBLEMS IN THE COTTONWOOD CANYONS, AVOIDING SKI TERRAIN EXPANSION WITHIN THE PLAN AREA, ADDRESSING OTHER EXISTING TERRAIN USES, AND ASSESSING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND THEIR MITIGATION. NO SPECIFIC TRANSPORTATION MODE IS RECOMMENDED AT THIS STAGE. (SEE THE GLOSSARY IN APPENDIX 6 FOR AN EXPLANATION OF TERMS.)

SKI INTERCONNECT IN ITS PRESENT FORM SHOULD BE MAINTAINED, IMPROVED AND FULLY MARKETED AS GUIDED SKI TOURS AMONG THE CANYON SKI RESORTS AND PARK CITY.

PROPOSALS TO EXPAND INTERCONNECT BEYOND GUIDED GROUND TOURS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE BROADER TRANSPORTATION AND SKI RESORT EXPANSION POLICIES OF THE PLAN.

THE PROPOSED INTERCONNECT CHAIRLIFT/SKI TERRAIN SYSTEM CONNECTING THE CANYON RESORTS AND PARK CITY BY ITSELF DOES NOT MEET THE GOALS OF THE PLAN.

IMPLEMENTATION OF A MOUNTAIN TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM WILL REQUIRE AMENDMENT TO THIS PLAN.

AMONG CRITERIA FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF MOUNTAIN TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM OPTIONS ARE THE FOLLOWING:

- 1. FOUR-SEASON USE**
- 2. VISUAL AND NOISE IMPACTS**
- 3. MINIMUM (OR NO) IMPACTS TO OTHER EXISTING USES**
- 4. ABILITY TO PERFORM UNDER ADVERSE WEATHER CONDITIONS**

5. **PROVEN PERFORMANCE RECORD OF TECHNOLOGY AND PUBLIC SAFETY OR COMPLIANCE WITH ESTABLISHED PUBLIC SAFETY CODES OR REGULATIONS**
6. **WATERSHED IMPACTS - construction and operational phases**
7. **WILDLIFE IMPACTS**
8. **EFFECTS ON TOURISM**
9. **MULTI-JURISDICTIONAL INVOLVEMENT IN PLANNING AND DECISIONMAKING PROCESSES**
10. **LIFE-CYCLE COSTS (full costs of construction, operation and maintenance for the life of the transportation mode)**
11. **PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FINANCING OPPORTUNITIES**
12. **MITIGATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPACTED TERRAIN OR OTHER USES**
13. **LONG-TERM RAMIFICATIONS FROM POTENTIAL ASSOCIATED DEVELOPMENT -- ski terrain, resort development, commercial enterprises**
14. **CONSISTENCY WITH THE SALT LAKE COUNTY WASATCH CANYONS MASTER PLAN AND THE U.S. FOREST SERVICE WASATCH-CACHE LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN**
15. **COMPATIBILITY WITH CANYON AND AFFECTED AREA-WIDE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS**

Authority to make decisions on a potential mountain transportation system is shared by multiple governmental entities and current analysis is fragmented among them. Cooperation is necessary among the U.S. Forest Service, the affected counties and local governments, other governmental entities and the ski resorts to coordinate analysis and share information relative to independent but cohesive decisions leading to planning, design, construction, and operation of a Mountain Transportation System.

No particular transportation mode (tram, roads, cog rail, "super tunnel", cable systems, etc.) should be the focus of consideration until the full range of alternatives are comprehensively analyzed for environmental impacts, watershed implications, engineering feasibility, costs and benefits, socio-economic impacts, and public and private financing options. Modes of transportation for a Mountain Transportation System should be

fully addressed before any option is approved by Salt Lake County or other governmental entities with approval authority.

A Mountain Transportation System would not, by itself, offer the most attractive ski terrain additions for ski resorts, and has as its highest potential an opportunity to efficiently move people between Cottonwood Canyon ski resorts, the Salt Lake Valley, and other ski areas (with potential for Heber Valley).

A Mountain Transportation System must be compatible with this Plan, particularly by recognizing use areas and levels, and by proposing transportation modes that support and perpetuate them. A System could be constructed and operated in phases, but would be subject to amendment of this Plan to recognize the provisions of a Mountain Transportation System.

The present guided tour interconnect affords skiers the opportunity to ski cross country between resorts and ski at more than one resort area in a single day. The program adds another dimension to the Wasatch ski experience.

Proposals have been considered to expand ski interconnect by building conventional chairlifts and opening new ski terrain among the canyon resorts and Park City. This concept, addressed in the Governor's Task Force on Interconnect, identified specific corridors, and by itself would be inconsistent with the policies of the Plan. If new ski terrain were incorporated with the proposed chairlift interconnect, as would be likely, it would conflict with the Plan's policies regarding downhill ski area expansion and protection of existing backcountry ski areas. Alta's Town Council has established a policy opposing any ski lifts in Grizzly Gulch due to public safety concerns. The proposal may have adverse implications for the Salt Lake Valley in terms of infrastructure capacities and economic benefits. A chairlift system could contribute to transportation problems in Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons. The attractiveness of riding in an open chair from Jupiter Bowl to Snowbird is questionable and not satisfactory for four-season use. Finally, a chairlift "interconnect" would not satisfy criteria outlined in this Plan for a Mountain Transportation System.

The chairlift interconnect system concept by itself should only be further considered as a component of an overall transportation system that links the Salt Lake Valley with the ski resorts of Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons, Park City, and possibly the Heber Valley. For the long-term benefit of the Wasatch Mountain region, a mountain transportation system should be comprehensively evaluated before portions of a system are put in place that could be inconsistent with a wise use of our finite Canyon resources.

It would be premature to endorse any one inter-canyon/resort transportation system. Likewise, it would be inappropriate to advocate construction of any system without the analysis, coordination and criteria reviews called for in this Plan. The Inter-Resort Transportation System study underway through the Mountainlands Association of Governments offers an opportunity to perform such analysis.

