AGENDA ITEM or FINAL CONTRACT REVIEW SUBMITTAL FORM

Agenda Item: Ratification of Correspondence; Gary Merrifield; C

Action Requested:

Parties to the Agreement:

Term Begins: **Term Ends:** **Grant Contract #:**

Summary:

The attached letter was signed and distributed on 1/12/2016.

Fiscal Impact: None

Submitted by: Katherine Haase **Submitter's Email Address:** khaase@gunnisoncounty.org

Finance Review: ○ Required ◉ Not Required

Comments:

Reviewed by: Discharge Date:

County Attorney Review: ○ Required ◉ Not Required

Comments:

Reveiwed by: Discharge Date: Certificate of Insurance Required

Yes ○ No ○

County Manager Review:

Comments:

Reveiwed by: GUNCOUNTY1\mbirnie Discharge Date: 1/13/2016

◉ Consent Agenda ○ Regular Agenda ○ Worksession Time Allotted:

Agenda Date: 1/19/2016

Revised April 2015

Gunnison County
COLORADO

Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners
Phone: (970) 641–0248 · Fax: (970) 641–3061
Email: bocc@gunnisoncounty.org · www.GunnisonCounty.org

January 7, 2016

Gary Merrifield
19256 A CR 343
Buena Vista, CO 81211

Dear Mr. Merrifield:

Thank you for your letter dated January 4, 2016 expressing your concerns about Gunnison County's decision to close Cottonwood Pass during the reconstruction project with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). I am hopeful that I can answer some of the questions you have asked and clarify why we made the decision that we made.

You are correct in that our community was opposed to improvements on Cottonwood for many years. If we as a community had moved forward with this project when Chaffee County did, we would not have the financial burden for the project that we now have. Back then, the FHWA was able to fund the entire project, now communities have to participate and the participation is substantial. The Federal, state and County transportation funds are all stressed to their limits due to decreased funding allocations which require us to find ways to save money at every turn. It would be easy to support keeping the Pass open if the construction costs did not affect our Road and Bridge fund, as was the case for Chaffee County , when the east side of the Pass was paved.

Gunnison County staff has been meeting with representatives of the FHWA and the Forest Service for many months to determine how to best stage and complete this project. As you are well aware, our side of Cottonwood is not an easy project. The road will be rebuilt and many of the switchbacks will be removed and realigned. Please know that the FHWA Project Manager did reach out to Chaffee County and Town of Buena Vista staff to participate in these meetings, but they did not attend.

Late last fall staff came to the Commissioners with the possible options and pros and cons of various alternatives to manage traffic during construction. Some of the scenarios that we considered were:

Traffic Control

1. Flagging stations would have caused delays of up to an hour each in multiple locations.
2. Use of traffic control would have ensured that the project would take two full years.
3. Flagging would require that detours be built while reconstructing difficult sections of the road, extending the project even longer and costing more.
4. Detours would increase the environmental impact and cause additional acreage to be rehabilitated at the end of the project.
5. Traffic control on similar projects increased the cost of the project from 1.0 million to 1.5 million dollars.

Full Closure

1. With the delays that flagging would require, the distance one must go by using Monarch might be longer, but the amount of time required would be the same.
2. With weather cooperation the project could largely be completed in one year and the final portion of the work done the second year.
3. Handling of excess material, particularly in the top section of the Pass, would be facilitated by not having to handling it numerous times while trying to re-open the road for traffic. That will significantly reduce the duration and the cost of the project.
4. The Board discussed a number of construction scenarios with our staff and determined it would be impossible to keep an ever-change group of Forest users advised of extended traffic delays, closures, etc. We are planning on as much communication as possible this upcoming season to assist businesses that will be affected reaching customers, and visitors coming to the area regarding the upcoming closure.
5. Safety for the travelling public and for the construction workers was a major factor in our decision. Night work would be almost impossible, and continually moving excavated material to allow safe access for vehicles, motor homes, etc., around rock, stockpiles of materials and moving equipment did not seem feasible.

Again, thank you for voicing your concerns. I am truly sorry that this project will adversely affect your business in the short term. The goal is that the completed project will assist in growing businesses and provide a safer, more enjoyable visit to the area.

Sincerely,

Paula Swenson