

January 8, 2016

Cottonwood Pass Road Construction Project

Gunnison County, Colo. – The Federal Highways Administration (FHWA), Central Federal Lands Highway Division (CFLHD), in cooperation with Gunnison County and U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Gunnison National Forest, is proposing improvements to Cottonwood Pass Road, also designated as County Road 209 and Colorado Forest Highway 59. The project area extends from Taylor River Road (CR 742) to the summit of Cottonwood Pass for a length of 13.5 miles in Gunnison County, Colorado.

The existing Cottonwood Pass Road within the project corridor is a two-lane, gravel roadway with widths varying from 18-24 feet, as well as multiple unpaved pull-offs and intersecting roadways. The roadway does not meet the current design speed standards for a rural road of 30 to 35 miles per hour (mph). The existing rough gravel surface is insufficient in width for two lanes of traffic to safely pass in numerous areas along the roadway including hairpin switchbacks. Larger vehicles use the entire roadway to negotiate a turn around these switchbacks, often blocking the path of oncoming traffic. The existing horizontal alignment around switchbacks also limits stopping sight distance.

The purpose of the project is to provide a safe and sustainable roadway that will improve access to the highly visited area of the Gunnison National Forest and reduce maintenance costs. The project will reconstruct the existing gravel road to a paved surface. In addition, the project will provide for consistent lane widths, shoulders, clear zones, and improve horizontal alignment and roadside drainage. The horizontal alignment changes particularly in the area above treeline will allow for more uniform traffic flow, enhance the visitor experience, and reduce the possibility of accidents or vehicle damage.

Proposed improvements created by the project include:

- Reconstruction of 13.5 miles of road including 11-foot travel lanes, 1-foot shoulders, and a clear zone to improve safety for motorists;
- Improving roadway geometrics to provide 35 MPH design speed from the Taylor River Road intersection to approximate mile point 6.5 and 30 MPH from mile point 6.5 to the summit of Cottonwood Pass;
- Upgrading the driving surface to asphalt pavement and increasing roadside drainage conveyance to better protect the road surface from deterioration; and
- Curve widening and advanced warning signs at hairpin switchbacks.

Construction of the new road is scheduled to begin in the spring of 2017 or 2018 and last through fall of 2018 or 2019. Final schedule is dependent on the availability of funds.

Project Funding and Administration:

The project is being funded through a partnership agreement between Gunnison County, the United States Forest Service (USFS), Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). FHWA provides 82.8% funding through the Colorado Federal Lands Access Program, a new federal program that provides funding for construction of state or locally owned roads that access federally owned properties. CDOT will provide 12.2% funding through statewide toll credits and Gunnison County will provide 5% funding through the County's Road and Bridge Funds. The project's total cost is approximately \$29,000,000.

Temporary Traffic Impacts:

The project includes considerable earthwork, grading, and paving and will require large construction equipment and hauling vehicles. The short construction season at high elevation will require fast paced work during the summer, which is also the high visitor use period. The narrow existing widths and need for large construction equipment would present significant challenges in coordinating the work while allowing for safe public travel within the work zone. Therefore, considerable delays to public traffic are required in order to maximize construction efficiency, minimize public safety hazards, as well as reduce the overall project costs.

1. Contract award is anticipated in the winter of 2016 or 2017 depending on funding availability.
2. Construction would begin the following spring, as weather allows, and would be completed through the following two years.
3. During the construction years the following measures will be in place:
 - a. Cottonwood Pass will be completely closed to all public traffic, 24 hours a day, on the Gunnison County side from the top of the pass to Taylor River Road (CR742).
 - b. Emergency vehicle access will be allowed at all times.
 - c. The parking area at the top of the pass will be accessible from the Buena Vista side at all times.
 - d. During winter months, defined from Thanksgiving to April 1, no work will be allowed.
4. Bicycle and pedestrian use will be prohibited as the surface will be roughly graded and unexpected obstructions and hazards may exist.
5. Camping along Cottonwood Pass Road will be prohibited.
6. The Timberline Trail crosses Cottonwood Pass Road within the project limits and will remain open for use. Advanced warning signs and precautionary measures will be in place to allow safe passage of Timberline Trail users within the construction zone.
7. The Taylor Park Cattle Pool will be allowed access within the project limits and will maintain normal grazing management operations during construction.

If you have any questions about this project please call the Gunnison County Public Works Department at 970-641-0044 or email publicworks@gunnisoncounty.org

