

WHEN MAIN STREET IS A STATE HIGHWAY

PARTNERING WITH THE COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



AS COMMUNITIES ACROSS Colorado expand, change, and undergo various types of Renaissance, it makes sense that local planners would pursue upgrades to transportation systems. But what if that community's main street (or urban bypass) is also a state highway?

"Contact us early and often," Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) Region 4 Traffic & Safety Engineer Mike Crow says.

His Region 1 counterpart Steve Hersey agrees, adding that, when planning for changes on a state highway main street, "Start with us, the traffic engineers — you cannot go wrong."

CDOT's lead traffic & safety engineers (TSEs) discussed ways in which the department can partner successfully with cities and towns whose main streets (or urban bypasses) are state highways. While no two cities or towns will have the same transportation issues or the same goals for improving

travel through their areas, CDOT can help weave a common thread — balance.

"Our responsibility — and what the public expects of us — is that we build, maintain, and operate safe roadways while allowing for community needs to maintain a balance on our state highways," CDOT Staff TSE Charles Meyer says.

"As we work with municipalities on transportation solutions and special features for their main streets, we must first maintain the national and state standards and practices that provide travelers with safety, then use good engineering judgment, common sense, and partnering to accommodate the many users of the roadway — whether pedestrians, bicyclists, commuters, emergency responders, community businesses, etc. We really recognize that our highways would not exist if it were not for the demand for them, and that demand would not exist if safe and adequate capacity and access were not provided."

But how to reach this balance? A good place to start is for the state and local partners to come to the table, ready to blend request with requirements, the "nice to haves" with the "need to haves." And the partners have to trust that it can be done.

"It may be a common misconception that a town or city will not be able to make the changes they desire to their state highway main street," CDOT Lead Traffic Engineer Mike McVaugh says. "In actuality, we want to partner, and there are plenty of things we can do together."

The TSEs agree that as long as CDOT follows the Access Code and the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), there are many areas of "give" in working with local entities on that "ideal" main street.

"We are charged with maintaining uniformity in signing, striping, speed limits — all these things must follow our code to maintain safety and consistency for travelers," Meyer says.