

Staff Report Memo



To: Mayor and Council	From: Mike Johnson, CED Director
Date: December 3, 2024	
Re: UDOT Big Cottonwood Canyon Environmental Study Public Comment – DRAFT LETTER	
Meeting Requested:	Business Meeting ☐ Work Session ☒ Other ☐ _____
Public Hearing Needed?	Yes ☐ No ☒ Undetermined ☐
CM Approval or Denial	Denied ☐ Approved ☐ Continued ☐ CM Signature: _____

REQUEST

Council input on a draft public comment letter for Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) Big Cottonwood Canyon Environmental Study. This round of public comment is intended to be focused on the preliminary purpose and need of the project, observations or concerns with associated and existing traffic patterns, and community and natural environmental resources that should be assessed in the study. A link to the UDOT project webpage is as follows: <https://udotinput.utah.gov/bccstudy>

In drafting a letter for Council review, staff utilized previous public comments shared about the Little Cottonwood Canyon EIS process that it finds to remain relevant and reemphasized the importance of local collaboration between Cottonwood Heights and UDOT.

Attachments:

- Draft BCC Environmental Study Public Comment

December 13, 2024

Delivered Via Email – bccstudy@utah.gov

Subject: City of Cottonwood Heights Public Comments – Big Cottonwood Canyon Environmental Study

Dear Project Team Members and Leadership:

On behalf of the Mayor and City Council, please accept this letter as official public comment from the City of Cottonwood Heights (“the city”) regarding the Big Cottonwood Canyon Environmental Study.

The city appreciates UDOT’s continued willingness to regularly engage, coordinate, and collaborate with the city, and requests this continued partnership on this and other regional projects in the area, as they create a direct local impact on the city and its residents. The city’s primary focus in this initial phase of the study, is focused on re-emphasizing points made in the city’s Wasatch Boulevard Master Plan and previous public comments made during the Little Cottonwood Canyon EIS process, and collaborating with the city to find mutually agreeable solutions to canyon traffic challenges while retaining (and enhancing) local character, roadway safety for all users, and local use and access. Within this context, the city’s key points, particularly as it relates to the envisioned intersection enhancements at Fort Union Boulevard / SR-190, are as follows:

- In contemplating intersection improvements and capacity changes to the intersection, such improvements should prioritize transit solutions to canyon traffic. Such improvements should be designed to incentivize and greatly improve the efficiency of utilizing public transit over single-occupant vehicle use. Designs should be directly compatible with the anticipated mobility hub within the gravel pit property. Intersection improvements that benefit single-occupant vehicles should not be prioritized over transit-supportive solutions. While the city continues to find that enhanced busing is the preferred and most efficient solution for future traffic in both canyons, enhanced transit is in fact the only viable solution to future traffic within Big Cottonwood Canyon. To that effect, effort should be made to clearly demonstrate transit (via busing) becomes the principle by which this project and future canyon-related projects are designed.
- The city strongly recommends that UDOT continue to adequately factor in safety and ease of use for all modes of transportation throughout the intersection. This includes planning and design to accommodate safe bicycle and pedestrian crossing through the intersection, as well as connectivity for envisioned shared-use path and on-street bike lane infrastructure given equal consideration. Such facilities will set a precedent for envisioned improvements through the Wasatch Boulevard Corridor, and connectivity to those future connections are critical. This includes ongoing collaborative planning with the city.
- Intersection and roadway design contemplated as part of this project should consider the same recommendations the city made throughout the LCC EIS process. That is, roadway

design and formal speed limit remain critical factors in ensuring that safety and a high quality of life are improved and maintained for all roadway users and residents/businesses in the area. In 2022, the City Council passed a local resolution affirming this as a local priority. Intersection and roadway design should be done with this in mind and should be closely calibrated with the city as this project moves forward.

- The city recommends more immediate action to improve safety and mobility for on-street cyclists through the intersection. The recent north-bound right-turn lane barrier functionally eliminated the existing bicycle lane through the intersection, creating a situation that results in fast-moving traffic, vehicles making multiple turn movements, and cyclists all having to share the same lanes.
- While active transportation and trail improvements are warranted in this intersection area as soon as possible, the city recommends that construction and implementation of any added vehicular capacity associated with this project coincide with the construction and implementation of the mobility hub, or at a very minimum, coincide with other identified enhanced transit measures established in the interim.
- The city recommends that the final project design account for year-round traffic and transit support within the project area. This should include preliminary programming recommendations to demonstrate the benefit of using transit year-round to reduce canyon congestion. This could include identification of additional bus stops throughout Big Cottonwood Canyon, analysis of bus mobility throughout all canyon roads, etc. Equal consideration to transit use should be considered throughout the project area and should not be disproportionately focused in one segment of the project over any other.
- While it is acknowledged that disturbance of natural areas is likely necessary to accommodate the project, the city recommends that all effort be taken to limit such disturbance and propose retaining and landscaping solutions to further limit the visual impact of such disturbance.

The following comments (with some slight modifications made to focus feedback on the proposed project area) have been previously provided to UDOT in the city's LCC EIS public comment letter dated October 17, 2022, and remain relevant to this project:

The city acknowledges and respects the need to explore options for enhanced canyon access and transit usage. Its priority has always been focused on the local impact of any regional decision. The following have been consistent points of emphasis:

Enhanced and safe corridor mobility for all users

- Grade-separated crossings, and enhanced at-grade crossings, coupled with 35mph roadway speeds (with such speed reduction supported by roadway design)
- Development of a shared-use path, accessible from adjacent neighborhoods and parking areas, from canyon to canyon

Strong focus on speed reduction and protection of local character and aesthetic through roadway design and speeds

- Lower roadway speeds to 35 miles per hour as occurs throughout Utah on State roads in towns with adjacent commercial and residential components through roadway design and posted speed limit
- Redesign and lower speed mitigate concerns with roadway noise and offset the demand for unsightly sound walls
- Collaborative redesign of Wasatch Boulevard as a special gateway corridor including traffic calming enhancements and other road design components that alert drivers that they are entering a neighborhood area and need to reduce speed.

Appropriate management of traffic congestion and neighborhood access

- Improvement of visibility and safety in and out of neighborhoods adjacent to the project area through traffic calming, intersection design, improved visibility, and slower roadway speeds

Transit-oriented solutions that alleviate current and future peak-hour congestion from Wasatch Boulevard. Solutions should only be implemented when traffic conditions and data warrant it.

- Focus on enhanced busing with a major transit hub within a future mixed-use development at the Big Cottonwood Canyon area location alleviates congestion within the corridor
- Tolling and bus-only infrastructure throughout the project area incentivizes transit usage in a way that is flexible and scalable

Again, the city appreciates the opportunity to provide these public comments, and looks forward to ongoing collaboration and partnership with the project team to find solutions that benefit UDOT's regional goals in a way that meets the local needs and goals of Cottonwood Heights and its residents.