***Central Wasatch Commission Statement on Pillars for Transportation Solutions in the Central Wasatch Mountains***

***Prior to the Draft Release (Summer 2021) of***

***Utah Department of Transportation Little Cottonwood Canyon***

***Environmental Impact Statement***

***To: Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) and Interested Parties***

***From: The Commissioners of the Central Wasatch Commission [OR ANY COMMISSIONERS THAT ARE WILLING TO SIGN ON TO THIS MEMORANDUM]***

***Date: May \_\_, 2021***

For over two years, the Central Wasatch Commission (CWC) has actively engaged in assessing the foundational elements of the upcoming UDOT Little Cottonwood Canyon Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). As the commissioners of the CWC (Commissioners), each of whom have closely followed the EIS process, we would like to express our gratitude to UDOT’s leadership and staff for their efforts in connection with this study as we anticipate the release of the next EIS draft in the coming months. Each Commissioner represents a unique constituency, and each of them has invested an exorbitant amount of time studying and reviewing options regarding the complex and critical decisions surrounding solutions to the transportation and preservation challenges facing Little Cottonwood Canyon (LCC).

Although, the Commissioners are not fully united at this stage with respect to a preference for a particular transportation mode, we are unified in the opinion that “no action” is not a viable solution. In addition, we have come to an agreement on a set of “pillars” or “principles” that ***we believe should be*** ***considered*** ***and implemented*** in connection with the eventual transportation solution -- regardless of the alternative that UDOT ultimately recommends in its Record of Decision. Rather than focusing on a specific mode at this time, we have elected to focus on these unified principles, which are intended to cover broad concepts that can (and should) be applied to whatever transportation mode is eventually selected.

**PILLARS**

***Visitor Use Capacity***

The transportation alternatives being evaluated in the EIS have the potential to significantly increase the quantity of visitors accessing LCC, and what they do when they visit. As a result, all of these alternatives pose a risk of “over-use” of LCC, which could result in negative environmental, public safety and water resource consequences. Additionally, over-use will almost assuredly negatively impact the visitor experience for both tourists and locals who seek to enjoy recreation and nature, not unmanaged crowds.

These concerns have been raised repeatedly by various groups during the EIS process, but the limited scope of the EIS’s stated “purpose and need” has not provided UDOT the opportunity to fully consider these issues. In order to appropriately address the risks, we believe a corresponding visitor use management strategy needs to be identified and implemented to complement any management plans that may already exist.

***Watershed Protection***

Protection of the fragile environmental conditions of the Central Wasatch Mountains is the highest priority for the communities that rely on these Mountains for watershed and water supply. Any transportation solution for LCC should minimize and mitigate against negative environmental impacts, including irreversible damage to the watersheds that provide precious drinking water to more than 450,000 people in the valley and in the LCC itself.

***Traffic Demand Management, Parking and Bus (or other Transit) Strategies***

We favor the implementation of a set of traffic management strategies that address both traffic impacts on the roads surrounding Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons, as well as the roads within these Canyons. In addition, consideration of expanded bus (or other transit) service and parking management outside of the Canyons is critical, regardless of the transportation mode ultimately selected for LCC.

Management strategies outside of the Canyons include expansion of parking in dispersed locations and improved bus (or transit) service. We also favor appropriate roadway improvements along Wasatch Boulevard (as contemplated by the EIS). Canyon traffic management options include variable tolling, limited access for single occupancy vehicles, carpool programs, and the reduction of on-road parking. These canyon strategies should be utilized immediately as a “first phase” of the final EIS alternative implementation, i.e., even before a long-term LCC transportation mode is designed and constructed. None of the proposed transportation alternatives in the EIS will be fully effective without corresponding traffic demand management, expanded non-Canyons parking, and bus (or other transit) strategies.

***Integration into the Broader Regional Transportation Network***

Understanding that the EIS is limited from a geographic perspective to a narrow focus on LCC and its immediate surrounding area, a broader, more “holistic” approach should be used when implementing solutions for traffic issues related to LCC. To that end, consideration should be given to the integration of any LCC-oriented system with transportation issues attendant to Big Cottonwood Canyon, as well as the broader valley-wide transportation network. To justify the cost from a public benefit perspective, a large-scale infrastructure investment that serves a singular purpose (i.e., alleviating traffic congestion issues affecting LCC) should be accompanied by broader infrastructure and investment in other areas of the valley. As a result, we support the development (to the extent feasible) of transportation/economic development micro-hubs in areas throughout the valley as gathering places for visitors and residents to park, pick up a few needed items (ski rental, breakfast, après ski) and comfortably wait for their transportation mode.

***Year-Round Transit Service***

Consideration should be given to year-round transit service to destinations in the Canyons, including dispersed recreational opportunities, and other dispersed recreational opportunities in the surrounding areas (such as areas along the foothills).

***Long-Term Protection of Critical Areas Through Federal Legislation***

Transportation improvements for LCC should be coupled with improved land and natural resource protection. As a result, the ultimate transportation solution should be conditioned upon the passage of federal legislation that is based on the current draft of the Central Wasatch National Conservation and Recreation Area Act. This coupling of federal legislation to transportation is necessary given the delicate balance that was central to the Mountain Accord agreement, which was based on four principal tenets: transportation, economy, recreation, and environment.