***Pillars for Transportation Solutions in the Central Wasatch Mountains***

***Central Wasatch Commission***

***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) and successful solutions for transportation in the Central Wasatch Mountains. As the commissioners of the CWC (Commissioners), each of whom has closely followed the EIS process, we are grateful for UDOT’s leadership and the work of its staff as we anticipate the release of the Draft EIS in the coming months. Each Commissioner represents a unique constituency and has invested heavily in studying and reviewing options regarding the complex and critical decisions surrounding solutions to the transportation and preservation challenges facing Little Cottonwood Canyon (LCC) and the Central Wasatch Mountains.

Although, the Commissioners are not fully united on a preference for a particular transportation mode at this this time, we are unified in the opinion that “no action” regarding these challenges 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 decides in its Record of Decision. The Commission at this stage focuses on the following principles and pillars to cover broad concepts that can (and should) be applied to whatever transportation mode is eventually selected.

The Commission will continue to analyze the transportation modes and their consequences, with the continued aspiration to come to consensus on a specific mode proposal.

**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. 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 could negatively impact the visitor experience for both tourists and locals who seek to enjoy recreation and nature from unmanaged crowds.

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

***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 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***

The Commissioners favor the implementation of a set of traffic management strategies that address both traffic impacts on the roads accessing 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 providing parking in dispersed locations and improved bus (or transit) service. The Commissioners also favor appropriate roadway improvements along Wasatch Boulevard. 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 regional 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 service and infrastructure investment in other areas of the valley. As a result, we support the consideration 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***

The Commissioners consider year-round transit service to destinations in the Canyons a priority, 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. The ultimate transportation solution should be conditioned upon the passage of federal legislation (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, based on four principal tenets: transportation, economy, recreation, and environment.