

**MINUTES OF THE CENTRAL WASATCH COMMISSION (“CWC”) TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE MEETING HELD, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2022, AT 2:00 P.M. AT 41 NORTH RIO GRANDE STREET, SUITE 102, SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH**

**Present:**  Mayor Dan Knopp, Chair

 Mayor Mike Weichers, Co-Chair

**Staff:** Blake Perez, CWC Executive Director of Policy

 Madeline Pettit, Community Engagement Intern

**Others:** Carl Fisher

Barbara Cameron

 Steve Van Maren

 John Knoblock

 Carlton Christensen

 Adam Diamond

**OPEN TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE MEETING**

1. **Chair Dan Knopp will Call the Meeting to Order and Welcome Those Present.**

Chair Dan Knopp called the Central Wasatch Commission (“CWC”) Transportation Committee Meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. He welcomed those present and explained that the intention was to receive feedback about Little Cottonwood Canyon. He was interested in hearing from members of the public.

**LITTLE COTTONWOOD CANYON EIS DISCUSSION**

1. **The Transportation Commission will Discuss the UDOT FEIS for the Little Cottonwood Canyon EIS.**

At the CWC Board Meeting held on October 3, 2022, Josh Van Jura from the Utah Department of Transportation (“UDOT”) was to share information related to the UDOT Little Cottonwood Canyon Final Environmental Impact Statement (“FEIS”). This would include information about what UDOT used to reach their preferred alternative. Chair Knopp wanted to hear initial reactions from the Committee and members of the public to continue the transportation discussions.

Mayor Mike Weichers reported that the Cottonwood Heights City Council held a Work Session the night before. The UDOT FEIS was discussed at that time. He explained that there was a sense of disappointment among Council Members. The Cottonwood Heights City Council communicates with Mr. Van Jura monthly and informed him that their main concerns pertained to the mass parking at the gondola base station. That would direct traffic through Cottonwood Heights. For UDOT to state that the intention was to have a 2,500-space parking garage was extremely disappointing. The Council believed that UDOT needed to prioritize collaboration with cities rather than ignore their concerns. Mayor Weichers stated that the experience caused City Council Members to feel disrespected. Not only did UDOT suggest a parking garage, despite the concerns expressed, but the number of parking stalls doubled.

The Cottonwood Heights City Council decided to strengthen its message in the next comment to UDOT. Mayor Weichers noted that a lot of media had reached out to the City and it was possible that they would engage with the media more and make their position clear. Cottonwood Heights wanted to be a partner with UDOT and create positive solutions. However, the City did not feel involved or considered based on the information that had been released.

Chair Knopp asked if the parking structure would be in Cottonwood Heights. This was confirmed. Chair Knopp wanted to know if the Cottonwood Heights City Council had discussed the other parking structure at the bottom of Big Cottonwood Canyon. Mayor Weichers reported that there was support for that parking structure because it could serve a lot of purposes for both Big Cottonwood Canyon and Little Cottonwood Canyon. There had been no pushback from Council Members or residents on that specific parking structure. It would likely be supported.

Chair Knopp stated that he spoke to Doug Shelby recently. UDOT was pushing hard with eminent domain to get that done. Mr. Shelby wanted to offer the land on the other side of the highway and place the parking structure below grade off Wasatch Boulevard. It would be accessible from the freeway and there would be multiple ingress/egress points. He was more than willing to offer that land but would fight against the gravel pit site. Mayor Weichers explained that there had been multiple meetings with Mr. Shelby and UDOT and that site was unlikely to be used. UDOT stated that it had been studied and would not be an option.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Chair Knopp asked that members of the public speak on the UDOT document and proposal.

*Carl Fisher* read through some of the documents and echoed the disappointment mentioned by Mayor Weichers. There was a bit of a silver lining because a phased approach was being contemplated. UDOT had a goal to reduce 30% of the vehicles on the road. With a phased approach that included busing, enhanced carpooling, and micro-transit services, there could be a significant reduction in the number of vehicles on the road. It was unfortunate that UDOT was still considering the gondola. He felt the gondola would fail the canyon in many ways. It may be beneficial for the resorts but it would not be beneficial for users or the watershed.

Mr. Fisher felt that the 2,500-stall parking garage at the mouth of Little Cottonwood Canyon was a disaster, regardless of what mode of transportation takes people up and down the canyon. Save Our Canyons stressed from the beginning the importance of getting people to the mouths of the canyons without the use of personal vehicles. He wished UDOT would look beyond their confined scope. Mr. Fisher believed there would be a lot of lawsuits that would tie up this work for a long time. That was a tragedy for users of the canyon and for the canyon itself.

Chair Knopp asked about the first few phases. Mr. Fisher explained that the first phase would improve the existing bus system. More buses would be purchased and operated within Little Cottonwood Canyon to start. There could also be some addressing of snowsheds and some corridor improvements. He noted that catching a bus at the mouth of the canyon would not solve all of the issues. It was important to find better ways to get people to the mouth of the canyon.

Mayor Weichers noted that UDOT graded roads for traffic flow. Wasatch Boulevard was graded an A or a B for 340 days a year. For 25 days of the year, there is a level F or E. It did not make sense to install a gondola to address the 25 days per year where the traffic levels were poor. Chair Knopp wondered if the Transportation Committee should formulate some questions for Mr. Van Jura. Those could be posed to him during the CWC Board Meeting. Chair Knopp wanted to understand what the plan was moving forward and what would be done first.

*Barbara Cameron* stated that a train from the airport would be outstanding. Alternatively, a train from other points in the valley would work well. She noted that the issue of tolling had not been discussed yet. Mayor Weichers reported that tolling had been discussed during the Cottonwood Heights City Council Work Session. That would probably be the first strategy to be implemented. Cottonwood Heights expressed the hope that tolling would be installed for the next season. However, that was not possible. Nothing could happen until the Record of Decision (“ROD”) was issued. If the ROD came in January, tolling could be implemented the following season. The issue with enhanced busing was the fact that it would take 18 to 24 months to order a bus. As a result, the only thing that UDOT could do in the very short term was tolling and ordering buses.

Ms. Cameron asked the Stakeholders Council for their input. She noted that John Knoblock left a comment in the Zoom chat box suggesting a dedicated bus lane. Ms. Cameron asked that more information about the phased approach be shared with the CWC Board. She also asked that the Stakeholders Council Members be able to share some ideas and input in writing.

Mr. Fisher discussed the tolling component. He believed tolling was significantly complicated by the U.S. Forest Service. UDOT would need to take a close look at how some of those issues could be navigated. For instance, trailhead fees as well as tolling. This could be a complicating factor and price certain groups out of the canyon. CWC Executive Director of Policy, Blake Perez, explained that none of the recreation trailhead fees were above the tolls. The tolls would only be implemented during peak demand times. According to UDOT, there would not be a conflict between the recreation trailhead fees and the proposed tolling. Mr. Fisher felt it was a disaster to toll in one canyon and not the other. It could shift pressure onto Big Cottonwood Canyon. Chair Knopp noted that UDOT had a plan to toll both canyons at the same time.

Ms. Cameron wondered how the phased approach could occur if there were lawsuits taking place. She believed there would be some lawsuits if UDOT proceeded. Mr. Fisher was not certain. The approach would likely depend on how erosive the challenges were to the process.

*John Knoblock* pointed out that the existing buses are not ideal for steep and snowy mountain transit. The buses seat 23 people and 46 are often crammed onto them. Many people do not want to take the bus because it is not comfortable. Another alternative would be to have 16-person passenger vans where everyone has a seat. He wanted to know if that was being considered by Utah Transit Authority (“UTA”) or if there were restrictions.

*Carlton Christensen* explained that the most constraining piece is the fact that there are not enough drivers. The notion of adding smaller vehicles is simply not doable for UTA. The buses are now equipped with chains to move up and down the canyon. He explained that one of the challenges is the traffic on heavy days and waiting in the same line of personal vehicles. If the buses could turn around faster, there could be more runs with the same number of drivers. It was not in the UTA plan to change the size of the buses currently. Mr. Knoblock noted that weekends and powder days are the biggest areas of concern. There did not need to be a high-capacity transit option for most of the season. It was possible to look outside of the box.

Mr. Fisher noted that he posted a link to an article about the Mountaineer micro-transit service that was operating in the Alpine Meadows areas. He wondered if it would be possible for the CWC to ask for a presentation on what was being done there. Chair Knopp explained that having outside drivers or contract drivers running shuttles could create difficulties. Mr. Fisher did not believe it was a perfect solution but there needs to be a regional approach to a regional problem.

Chair Knopp asked Mr. Christensen where UTA stands with UDOT currently. Mr. Christensen explained that UDOT informed them of their decision a few hours before it was released publicly. UTA counseled with UDOT on the bus components. As far as the decision-making, UTA did not have a role in that. Additionally, UTA had not taken a formal position as a Board. Chair Knopp wondered if there would be a formal position. Mr. Christensen did not believe that was planned. UTA expressed concern about staffing levels and the facilities to service an expanded fleet. In the UDOT proposal, there was some shuttle service involved to the base of the gondola station. UTA would be prepared to support that if it was something they wanted to do.

There was discussion regarding canyon capacity and the number of visitors. Mayor Weichers referenced some of the information in the UDOT Little Cottonwood Canyon FEIS. It stated that it took 26 minutes from Big Cottonwood on Wasatch to Alta. On an F-rated day, that doubled to approximately 50 minutes. If someone drives to the gondola station and gets onto the gondola car, there would be a 45 to 50-minute timeframe anyway. Convenience-wise, a visitor would get to Alta in the same amount of time, whether they are driving a personal vehicle or taking the gondola. Mr. Fisher noted that the time estimate did not include the queuing times and waiting in line for a gondola. Chair Knopp believed some of that wait was built into the times.

Mr. Knoblock noted that if the organization wanted to prevent something like a gondola, a transit system that would work was needed. There are ways to improve the parking and reservation systems at the ski resorts. He suggested that the ski resorts work as a team to optimize a system rather than each resort having a separate system, which creates confusion for users. Ultimately, the bus system can only move 1,000 people per hour up the canyon when there was a desire to move 1,200. It seemed that a shuttle bus system was the only way to make a dent in those numbers. If UTA was not the organization to make that happen, it may be necessary to look into who would be able to handle that. Mr. Christensen clarified that he did not say UTA was not the organization to make that happen. However, it was not within their current plans, because there is no funding to focus on shuttles.

Mr. Perez encouraged those present to learn more about micro-transit. It may be worthwhile to understand why public transit agencies implemented micro-transit programs. It was meant to reduce low ridership from fixed routes and offer a flexible service. He believed that type of program would be incredibly expensive to run. Mr. Christensen reported that UTA has four areas where micro-transit is run. It is expensive but more effective in areas that are not served well by a fixed route bus. The area in the south end of Salt Lake Valley was doing well and ridership had increased on micro-transit but it is more expensive to operate. Mr. Perez was curious to learn more about how much it would cost and how the Forest Service would respond.

Ms. Cameron noted that Solitude and Brighton both run 18-passenger vans for their employees, but the vans sit at the Park and Ride or the top of the canyon waiting for the beginning and end of the day. She wondered if that was considered a micro-transit solution. Mr. Christensen clarified that it is a vanpool. In that case, one of the employees was likely the driver. There would not be a driver needed to operate the van, but one would be needed for micro-transit. Mr. Knoblock believed this was a model or concept that could be utilized within the canyon. If there were volunteer or rideshare drivers that could be available on-demand for peak days, that could make a significant difference. Some out-of-the-box thinking was necessary. Mr. Christensen raised concerns about liability and insurance with volunteer or rideshare drivers.

Mayor Weichers wondered who would be involved in the October 3, 2022, CWC Board Meeting with UDOT. Chair Knopp reported that Mr. Van Jura would present. Mr. Perez confirmed that Mr. Van Jura would be there as well as some members of the consultant team. Chair Knopp wanted to develop some questions so the discussion with UDOT would be robust. One of the questions he had related to the schedule of work and overall timeline.

Mr. Knoblock wanted to hear details about the tolling system. He also wanted to understand when that piece would be implemented. He suggested that for tolling, single occupant vehicles could be charged $50, vehicles with two riders could be charged $20, and three or more passengers would be free. This would encourage carpooling. Mayor Weichers explained that Cottonwood Heights had asked UDOT about that type of tolling. According to Mr. Van Jura, the current technology was not able to recognize the number of people in a vehicle. That might be possible in a few years but did not exist currently. Mr. Knoblock reported that 25% of the vehicles in the canyon were single-occupant vehicles. There could be a toll only for those vehicles. For example, there could be a pull-off lane where that toll was paid. Those who did not comply could be ticketed.

Mr. Fisher explained that Save Our Canyons questions related to the phasing plans. He agreed with comments shared by Mr. Knoblock related to an occupancy-oriented toll. It would be great to have that type of toll if the technology was there, but in the absence of that, there could be congestion pricing. Mr. Fisher wondered if there was a possibility for the gondola proposal to be eliminated if the 30% reductions were met through other means, such as incentivizing carpooling. Since many people did not like the idea of the gondola, there should be an opportunity to prevent that from happening so long as the reduction goals were met. It was also important to consider visitor capacity, which was one of the flaws in the UDOT process.

Chair Knopp noted that the transportation solutions needed to make the users happy. Currently, the public is not happy during peak days. The intention was to mitigate the issues and make sure the public is satisfied. The current transportation plans are not sustainable and not working. Something needed to be done. Mr. Fisher agreed that certain users are unhappy, but based on polling, he believed users were generally fairly pleased with their overall experiences.

Mayor Weichers liked the idea of focusing on different solutions first to reach the proposed reduction numbers. If those targets were not reached, there could be conversations about mass transit options in the future. Mr. Perez reviewed some of the possible questions that could be posed to UDOT during the next CWC Board Meeting, which were as follows:

* What is the timeline for the phased approach? How will each of the steps be evaluated?
* What are the other alternatives if the steps do not meet expectations or mobility needs?

Mr. Perez noted that there could be specific goals, such as increasing bus service by 50% in a certain number of years. There need to be clear targets and outcomes. These goals and outcomes could be evaluated before a new set of buses needed to be ordered. From there, the decision could be made to either order new buses or look into a different solution. Chair Knopp referenced the staffing issues Mr. Christensen mentioned earlier in the meeting. Having additional buses on the road may be unrealistic. He was not sure how to make that happen. Mr. Christensen explained that UTA was taking steps within its budget to staff some additional service in 2024. It would take that much time to get the staffing in place to run those buses.

Mayor Weichers pointed out that transportation issues are often seasonal. The bus driver positions could be made more lucrative to draw in the necessary additional drivers for that period of time. He suggested possible funding from the State. There may be creative ways to handle the current staffing issues. Mr. Perez noted that there was surge pricing with rideshare apps. There could be something similar in place with bus drivers. It was an option for UTA to explore. Chair Knopp noted that there could be issues if those temporary drivers were offered higher rates than the current drivers. Mr. Christensen confirmed this. Mr. Fisher pointed out that there was demand for year-round transit service, so the discussions should not necessarily be focused on seasonal work. There may need to be seasonal positions to accommodate peak demand, but there was high demand for year-round bus service.

*Steve Van Maren* believed that if there was going to be a phased approach to address the transit issues in the canyon, there need to be funding strategies in place.

Ms. Cameron wanted to know what the UDOT plans were for the Legislature. It was important to understand how the recommendations would be financed. Additionally, she wanted to hear more about the plans for the parking structure in Big Cottonwood. Ms. Cameron noted that she also wanted to hear from Mr. Van Jura about whether lawsuits would impact the phased approach. Chair Knopp offered to ask those questions during the CWC Board Meeting with UDOT. Mayor Weichers reported that Cottonwood Heights had asked Mr. Van Jura about funding. He stated that the Legislature was an option as well as Federal grants and private/public partnerships.

Mr. Perez stated that there had been a lot of good dialogue during the meeting. He had written down some notes and there were a lot of consistent themes. The questions would be submitted to the CWC Board for consideration. He thanked those present for their participation.

**ADJOURN TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE MEETING**

1. **Following a Motion and Affirmative Vote, Chair Dan Knopp will Close the Public Meeting.**

**MOTION:** Mayor Weichers moved to ADJOURN. Chair Knopp seconded the motion. The motion passed with the unanimous consent of the Committee.

The CWC Transportation Committee Meeting adjourned at approximately 3:00 p.m.

***I hereby certify that the foregoing represents a true, accurate, and complete record of the Central Wasatch Commission Transportation Committee Meeting held Wednesday, September 21, 2022.***

Teri Forbes

Teri Forbes

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Minutes Secretary

Minutes Approved: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_