

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and Purpose

US 85 is one of the most important regional highways in northeast Colorado, providing access to the Denver metropolitan area for a number of communities in Adams and Weld Counties. It also serves as an alternate route for interstate traffic to the north into Wyoming. As such, US 85 carries a wide range of traffic types: long distance interstate traffic, commuter traffic to the large employment bases in Greeley and the Denver metropolitan area, inter-community traffic within its corridor, and considerable agricultural traffic. Furthermore, it has been recognized that development pressures in the corridor lying between Denver and Greeley will continue to increase due to such influencing factors as general growth along the Front Range, the new Denver International Airport, and the proposed construction of the final segment of E-470. If growth in the corridor is to be encouraged and to be accommodated, good mobility along US 85 is essential.

In recognition of the fact that US 85 is the spine of the transportation system serving this area, the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) completed the US 85 Corridor Study in 1992 to assess the long-term needs of the corridor and to develop a plan of improvements to ensure that the highway will continue to be able to provide the level of transportation service needed by the area. One of the key recommendations of this study was to develop an access control plan for the corridor to preserve its functional integrity and to enhance its safety in a cost-effective manner.

The purpose of this current planning effort, then, is to work closely with residents, property owners, local governmental agencies, and highway users to develop a detailed, long-range Access Control Plan for US 85. The Plan addresses how each access in the corridor should be treated, the cost for the recommended access modifications, and the relative priority of the improvements. The ultimate goal is to develop an Access Control Plan which would be adopted by CDOT and the nine cities or towns and the two counties in the corridor through an Intergovernmental Agreement.

Study Area

The study area extends along US 85 from I-76 on the south end to Weld County Road (CR) 80, just south of Ault on the north end. Thus, the study area encompasses nearly 52 miles along US 85.

The corridor is one of varying character. It is urban in character as it passes through a number of communities; in fact, the highway serves as an integral part of the local transportation system in some communities. However, through long stretches of the corridor, it is very rural, primarily agricultural, in nature. Traffic volumes range from over 30,000 vehicles per day in the south end to about 6,000 vehicles per day at the north end.

There are currently 282 accesses, also quite varied, along this corridor. They are best classified as follows:

- 15 public road intersections with signals
- 68 unsignalized public road intersections
- 115 rural accesses
- 84 urban accesses

The accident history of this corridor reveals that 1,257 accidents occurred in this corridor during the period from January 1994 through May 1997. Of these, nearly one-half (47.8 percent) were access related.

Development of the Plan

Throughout the study, the project team maintained close coordination with local staff and officials of the governmental entities in the corridor. A Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) consisted of staff members from all of the local agencies and met almost monthly. They helped to establish technical guidelines for the plan, and they provided the knowledge of the community's local conditions and future planning efforts.

A Policy Committee (PC) was comprised of elected officials from the communities, counties, and regional planning organizations. This committee met four times during the study. The purpose of this group was to review the information developed by the TAC and, more specifically, to provide input to the study from a broader perspective. One specific task was to assist in the development and review of the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA), which formalizes the work of the study and the final Access Control Plan.

Another critical element of the coordination effort was public involvement. Public open houses were held at three key stages of the study process. At these open houses, exhibits addressing the access control planning efforts were available, and CDOT and consultant representatives were in attendance to answer questions and to receive comments, concerns, and input. During each series of meetings, the open houses were held at three locations in the corridor - in the south (Adams County), middle (Weld County south of the Platte River), and north (Weld County north of the Platte River) segments of the corridor.

In addition to the public open houses, considerable effort was also expended throughout the study in conducting meetings with special interest groups, individual property owners, and governing bodies in the communities within the corridor. During the development of the plan, at least one meeting was held with the governing body of each city, town, or county (City Councils, Town Boards, and Boards of County Commissioners) in the corridor. Many other meetings were held during the planning process with interested groups of business and property owners and with numerous individual property owners. Also, to expand public exposure of the planning process, presentations were made to groups such as the Northern Colorado Transportation Forum, Rotary Club, Lions Club, and Chambers of Commerce.

Access Control Plan

Figure ES-1 provides an overview of the major access improvements included in the US 85 Access Control Plan. Although the detailed plan includes every access in the corridor, this illustration focuses on public road intersections.

Because implementation of the improvements identified in the Access Control Plan will take many years, and because funding for these improvements must come through the planning efforts of three different transportation planning regions (Denver Regional Council of Governments, North Front Range Transportation and Air Quality Planning Council, and Upper Front Range Regional Planning Commission), a priority was assigned to each improvement in the plan. As it is difficult to define funding levels within specific time frames, the priorities were established on the basis of the greatest need as opposed to a likely time frame for implementation. Improvements were, therefore, separated into three categories: high priority, medium priority, and long-term priority. These priorities are also depicted on Figure ES-1.

The plan recommends that the Adams County portion of the corridor from I-76 north to the Adams-Weld County line be upgraded over time to approach freeway conditions. Existing signalized intersections at Bromley Lane and 104th Avenue would be replaced with interchanges (high priority). New interchanges at 120th Avenue and E-470 are essential elements of larger projects which are addressing regional mobility concerns. The plan recommends that this program of building interchanges (medium and long-term priorities) be extended north into southern Weld County through Fort Lupton. Ultimately, the plan recommends that there be no at-grade public road intersections between I-76 and CR 16 and only a few properties with direct access to US 85.

The central portion of the corridor is bounded by CR 16 on the south and LaSalle on the north. Between the communities, improvements will be made at each of the public road intersections; auxiliary lanes for left and right turns will be upgraded to meet the design standards for the posted speed limits. These public road intersection improvements will also allow large trucks to make U-turns. Once this has been accomplished, the median openings serving property access points will be closed. This will create out-of-direction travel, but it will improve safety because all turns will be made where there are adequate auxiliary turn lanes. In addition, the intersections between Platteville and LaSalle intersect US 85 at an oblique angle. These intersections will be reconstructed so that the cross road is nearly perpendicular to US 85; this will address sight distance and safety concerns. The Plan includes signalization of several intersections in the Towns of Platteville and Gilcrest. Because there are frontage roads which border US 85 through both of these communities, the Plan also includes closing several intersections to reduce the number of conflict points. US 85 through LaSalle was reconstructed in 1994, and no changes are included in the Plan.

North of the Platte River, the Cities of Evans and Greeley represent the most urbanized portion of the corridor. In both communities, frontage roads adjacent to US 85 have created very complicated signalization at intersections. The Plan includes relocation of these frontage roads in the long-term so that there is only a single signal. This will increase the capacity of these intersections because there will be more green time available for the major movements. Also in the long-term, an interchange is proposed at 5th/8th Streets and a grade separation is planned at 18th Street.

The corridor north of Greeley returns to a rural setting, with the exception of the community of Eaton. As with the central portion, the public road intersections will have auxiliary lane improvements which will enable median openings for private access points to be closed. Several traffic signals are included in Eaton, as are access restrictions at three minor intersections.

Cost Estimates

It has been estimated that all of the improvements recommended in the Access Control Plan could be implemented for approximately \$230 million (in 1999 dollars). This estimate is for construction costs only and does not include right-of-way acquisition or displacement/relocation costs.

Implementation

The improvements recommended in the Access Control Plan represent a long range plan and, as such, will be implemented over time as traffic and safety needs arise and as funding allows. In order to ensure that these improvements can be implemented in the future, it is important that the Access Control Plan be adopted by all entities in the corridor and that it be used in all transportation and land use planning which could affect US 85. Therefore, it is recommended that the US 85 Access Control Plan be adopted through an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) between CDOT, the towns, the cities, and the counties in the corridor. Because this Plan is a long range plan and conditions may change over time, a key element of the IGA is a specified process for modifying the plan in the future. This process calls for the creation of an Advisory Committee comprised of one representative from each of the signatories of the IGA. Amendment requests would be reviewed by the Committee, and changes could be made only with the affirmative vote of 2/3 of the signatories. This process should ensure continuing coordination between the communities in the corridor.