

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Project Background

US 85 is an important regional transportation facility in northeast Colorado. It provides a connection from Greeley and other smaller communities in Weld County to the Denver metropolitan area. It is the most direct route from these communities to Denver International Airport (DIA) and downtown Denver. In the metropolitan area, it serves businesses and residents of Brighton and Commerce City. Although I-25 is the primary route for interstate traffic, US 85 provides an alternative route 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. This study assessed alternatives to upgrade US 85 to freeway/expressway design standards and analyzed interchanges and bypasses to serve the smaller communities along the corridor. Because of the disruption that these upgrades would create and the cost that would be involved, it was determined that these types of improvements would not likely be implemented in the foreseeable future. One of the recommendations of the 1992 study was to develop an access control plan for the corridor to maintain the safety and efficiency of travel along US 85 by better managing access to the highway in order to preserve its functionality until funds would be available to make long-term improvements.

The purpose of the current study effort was to work closely with residents, property owners, local governmental agencies, and highway users to develop a detailed, long-range Access Control Plan for the US 85 corridor. The limits of the corridor extend from the juncture of US 85 with I-76 on the south end to the intersection of Weld County Road (WCR) 80 north of Eaton on the north end, as illustrated by Figure 1. This report presents the findings of this planning study.

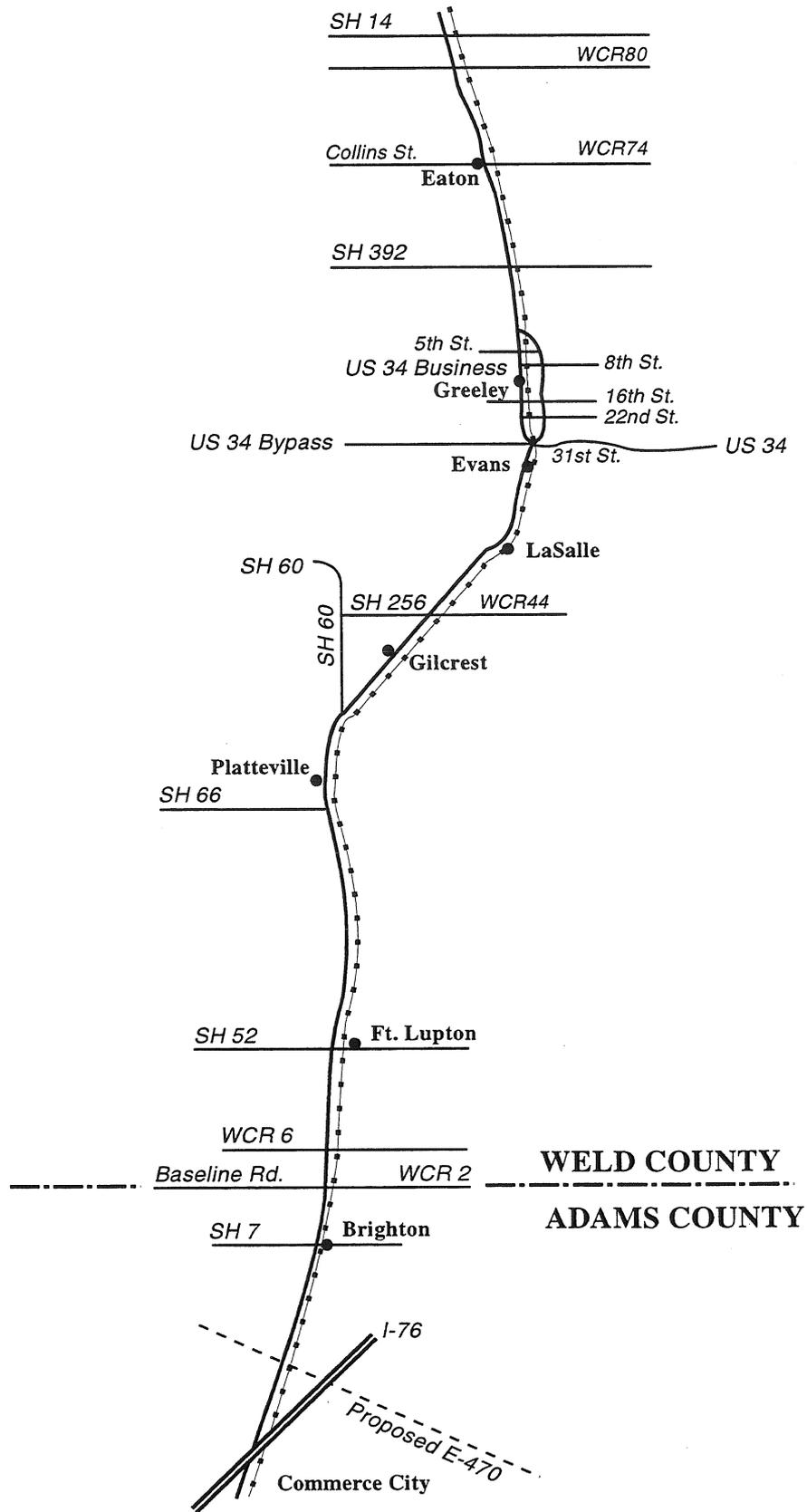


Figure 1



**US 85 ACCESS CONTROL PLAN**

COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
 FELSBURG HOLT & ULLEVIG

**Study Area**

## **1.2 Project Coordination**

US 85 passes through two counties (Adams and Weld), nine communities (Brighton, Commerce City, Eaton, Evans, Fort Lupton, Gilcrest, Greeley, LaSalle, and Platteville) and two CDOT regions (Four and Six) in the study corridor. In addition, there are three regional planning organizations (the Denver Regional Council of Governments [DRCOG], the North Front Range Transportation & Air Quality Planning Council [NFRT&AQPC], and the Upper Front Range Regional Planning Commission [UFRRPC]) within the corridor. The Town of Milliken, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) also participated in the study.

Throughout the study the project team maintained close coordination with local staff and officials. A Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) consisted of staff members from each of the local agencies and met almost monthly. The TAC initiated efforts to develop a statement of objectives and strategies for the access control plan and also to develop a series of guiding principles which would direct implementation of access control measures. In addition, members of the TAC provided the knowledge of each community's future planning efforts and local conditions, which was essential in assessing the sequence of changes which should occur over time at each access point.

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, generally before or after the public open houses. 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. It is a legally binding agreement between CDOT and the local agencies which stipulates what improvements to access will be allowed in the future.

## **1.3 Public Involvement**

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. A mailing list was maintained for the study, including the owners of all properties adjacent to US 85 (based on county assessor's records), local officials, attendees of previous open houses, the media and other interested parties. Meeting announcements were also placed in the daily newspapers in the corridor.

The first series of open houses was held in early April 1998 in Brighton, Platteville, and Greeley. A total of approximately 100 people attended the three open houses. These meetings were held early in the study effort, before specific access concepts had been developed. The intent was to become more familiar with operational concerns in the corridor and to identify problem situations and locations.

The second set of open houses was held in late September 1998. These meetings were held in Henderson, Gilcrest and Evans, with more than 110 people in attendance. Preliminary access control improvements, which had been developed in coordination with the TAC and the PC, were exhibited. There was strong support for the concept of limiting access and the number of signals along the corridor, but many of the attendees had specific questions about access changes proposed in their community or changes that would affect access to their property. Numerous comment letters were received as a result of these meetings.

Based on the input received regarding the preliminary concepts and on additional discussions with the TAC and the PC, the access plan was revised. The revised access control plan was then presented at the final series of public open houses in February 1999 in Henderson, Gilcrest and Greeley. The three meetings were attended by over 115 citizens. Again, there was good support for preserving the functionality of US 85 through the corridor, but there was resistance to changes which would affect individual residents and property owners. This was particularly evident in the more rural portions of the corridor, where median closures for individual access points are recommended.

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. The primary purposes of these meetings were to apprise officials about the study, to report on progress made to date, to solicit input on their local needs, and to discuss implementation of the plan through the Intergovernmental Agreement.

Many other meetings were held during the planning process with other interested groups. As an example, two special meetings were conducted with business and property owners in the vicinity of the planned access modifications along the Greeley Bypass near 5th and 8th Streets in order to discuss their specific concerns. Similarly, a group of property owners in the Commerce City area met with representatives of the access planning team and city staff on several occasions. Presentations were also made to groups such as the Northern Colorado Transportation Forum, Rotary Club, Lions' Club, and Chambers of Commerce.

Lastly, the study team met with numerous individual property owners to gain a better understanding of their individual concerns and to discuss potential alternative solutions. These meetings were usually held on-site in the corridor.