

Complete the beltway

Formation of a highway authority a positive sign

And so it comes to this. A stretch of roadway of about 22 miles from Golden to Broomfield is all that is keeping the Colorado 470 beltway from cinching up and encircling the metro area.

Two things, primarily, have so far prevented the linkup: money and the city of Golden. While Golden continues its resistance, the ability to obtain the necessary funds is about to be tested.

After many years of efforts by a variety of governmental entities to obtain public money for the project, three northwest metro governments — Jefferson County and the cities of Broomfield and Arvada — are planning to form a public highway authority next month that will seek somewhere between \$500 million and \$1.5 billion from the private sector.

As Arvada Mayor Bob Frie said last week in a meeting with *Rocky* editors, "We're not going to have any new taxes; it'll all be user fees. We'll look for an operator willing to put up money to build the road in order to collect the tolls. The cities just don't have that kind of dough."

We're glad to see this step taken — the open market will now determine the viability of the project.

If the northwest governments fail to persuade private interests to invest the large sums required — and there are a number of huge companies that do this sort of thing — then the ongoing dispute with Golden about the wisdom of the enterprise could well be moot. But if a private operator or operators can indeed be induced to come up with

the investment, then the tussle with Golden will no doubt intensify.

We've long supported the beltway's completion in order to improve the flow of traffic and as a logical link in the larger regional transportation grid. Beltways enhance much-needed suburb to suburb connections. They take traffic off local streets. They provide motorists with more direct routes to their destinations, thus saving them time and the money spent on increasingly expensive gasoline.

Moreover, as a Jefferson Economic Council report last November found, completion of the project will likely be an economic boon for the region.

Golden officials dispute the need for the link and have championed recommendations of a study they commissioned that would move most of the traffic burden to the east of the city, chiefly to Arvada. Widening and otherwise improving several of the area's main arterials — like Colorado High-

ways 93, 72 and 128, and Indiana, Alkire and Simms streets, among others — would do the trick, they say. And for less money.

Yet however workable their plan, it remains less attractive than completing the beltway — which will now have a market test of its viability. If beltway proponents are too optimistic regarding their estimates of probable traffic, then they won't be able to locate private backing for the project.

Most metro areas of Denver's size completed their beltways many years ago. It's high time this region caught up.

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