

Joint plan to finish beltway

Jeffco, Broomfield, Arvada form financing authority while Golden objects

By Jeffrey Leib *The Denver Post*

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TOLLWAY: Golden officials slam idea

Jefferson County, Broomfield and Arvada are forming a public highway authority to close the beltway loop around the Denver metro area with a 20-mile partly tolled link between the Northwest Parkway and C-470.

Officials of the three jurisdictions said Monday that it is time to "buckle the beltway" because road congestion and the cost of the project — estimated now at about \$813 million — will only increase over time.

"We want to be prepared for the future," said Jefferson County Commissioner Kevin McCasky, noting that metro Denver is expected to add 1.5 million residents in coming decades.

Golden Mayor Jacob Smith criticized the proposed beltway extension, saying it is aimed at promoting housing construction and business growth in the corridor instead of relieving congestion.

"This always has been about development," Smith said.

In forming a public highway authority, Jefferson County, Arvada and Broomfield are taking a model that cities and counties used to build the E-470 and Northwest Parkway toll roads.

The Northwest Parkway never achieved the traffic counts and toll revenue originally predicted, and late last year, its owners — Broomfield, Lafayette and Weld County — leased the toll highway to a foreign consortium for 99 years.

The Portuguese-Brazilian team paid \$600 million for the lease, including a \$60 million "incentive" it would pay to help take the Northwest Parkway across U.S. 36 to Colorado 128 near Jefferson County's airport.

The deal calls for that incentive to be paid only if the road is extended from Colorado 128 to Colorado 93 near Golden.

The tentative plan to complete the beltway calls for that extension as a 10-mile tolled section.

"I'm pleased to know the political wheel is moving in that direction," said Pedro Costa, chief executive officer of the company that operates the Northwest Parkway.

Where the tolled section ends, Colorado 93 would convert into a four-lane, non-tolled parkway through Golden, tying in with U.S. 6 until the parkway reaches C-470.

The highway authority would likely have two options for extending the beltway link — sell bonds to pay for it or find a private "concessionaire" such as the Northwest Parkway operator to possibly finance and build the project.

For years, Golden officials have said there will never be enough paying traffic to support extension of the toll road through Jefferson County.

If the new authority were able somehow to get the beltway extension financed, the more likely impact would be to clog other roads in the area, said Golden Public Works Director Dan Hartman.

"Building it will do nothing to decongest streets in the region," he said. "We think it's a stupid idea."

Beltway buckle

Jefferson County, Arvada and Broomfield will form a public highway authority to explore ways of financing and building a 20-mile roadway link that would close the beltway around metro Denver. Their tentative plan calls for a 10-mile tolled portion sandwiched by parkway extensions at the north and south ends.

— Proposed beltway
— Proposed tollway

