

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

2019 Public Scoping

Public Involvement and Comments

Public involvement is a critical component to the planning process and the team is available to answer questions, take down public comments, and to meet in person.

- The EIS features a robust public process, including public comment periods and meetings, email updates and notifications and project information shared on social media channels and the project website.

The project team encourages public input throughout the phases of the EIS and will use the information to support the decision-making process.

- UDOT will review and consider formal comments (email, website, letter, written comment form) and provide an acknowledgement that your comment was received. The study team will contact you if additional information or clarification is needed. Responses to comments made during the comment periods will be included in the scoping summary report and Final EIS.
- Comments received outside of formal comment periods are equally valuable to the process and will be considered as part of the alternative development process. These will be documented in the project record but may not be included in the reports.
- Social media discussions are not part of the official EIS record, but they provide insightful information and help the team make the most informed transportation decisions we can for the Little Cottonwood Canyon study area.

What are the main steps in the EIS process and what do they involve?

- Scoping – Identify and gather public input about items to consider in the environmental study.
- Purpose and Need – Define a statement of goals and objectives that the study will address (purpose) and identify the existing and future conditions that need to be changed (need).
- Alternatives Development – Develop alternatives that meet the purpose and need.
- Alternatives Analysis – Screen alternatives based on their potential impacts and how they meet the purpose and need; gather public input.
- Environmental Resource Analysis – Quantify the effects to the social, economic and natural environment.

- Draft EIS – Report findings and gather public input.
- Final EIS/Record of Decision – Submit document for the final decision-making process and documentation of final decision.

What are the next opportunities to be involved in the process?

- UDOT anticipates releasing the EIS *Draft Purpose and Need Statement* and *Alternatives Screening Methodology Report* in the fall of 2019.
- The Purpose and Need Statement is one of the most consequential decisions that the lead agencies make during the NEPA process, because the purpose of and need for the project provide the foundation for determining which alternatives will be considered and for selecting the preferred alternative.
 - The purpose and need also can be a major factor in deciding whether a particular alternative can be approved under other laws such as Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.
- The Alternatives Development Screening Methodology Report identifies the criteria that will be used to screen alternatives and the methodology of the screening process.
 - Typically, a screening process involves identifying a broad range of potential alternatives and then applying a standard set of evaluation criteria to eliminate alternatives that do not meet the purpose of and need for the project or that are otherwise found to be unreasonable.
 - In addition, when the number of reasonable alternatives is very large, similar alternatives might be combined to allow a manageable number of alternatives to be studied in detail.

Wasatch Boulevard

Will noise walls be considered as part of the improvements to Wasatch Boulevard?

- UDOT considers noise impacts and noise abatement (reduction) for all residential properties adjacent to any project for which UDOT's Noise Abatement Policy applies.
 - By following its Noise Abatement Policy, UDOT ensures that all residents who might experience noise impacts from roads are considered equally under UDOT's processes.
 - UDOT will evaluate noise impacts and mitigation as part of the Little Cottonwood Canyon Project. UDOT will follow its Noise Abatement Policy when conducting this evaluation.

- Noise-abatement measures could include installing new noise walls and/or changing the locations or heights of existing noise walls. Noise impacts and evaluated mitigation measures will be included in the Draft and Final EIS documents.
- UDOT's Noise Abatement Policy requires UDOT to allow affected residents and property owners to vote on noise walls before any new or modified noise walls are installed.
 - The balloting of residents for noise walls usually occurs after the EIS process is completed and before construction. For more information, see: <https://www.udot.utah.gov/main/uconowner.gf?n=10496602977480171>.

Did you consider improvements to Highland Drive instead of Wasatch Boulevard?

- Yes, UDOT considered improvements to Highland Drive during the evaluation process. UDOT modeled the expected traffic volumes in the project area in 2050 using the Wasatch Front Regional Council's (WFRC) travel demand model.
 - The modeling assumes the 2050 projected household and population growth that was developed by the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute at the University of Utah (<http://gardner.utah.edu/demographics>) for the Wasatch Front and that was provided to the Governor's Office of Management and Budget.
- The travel demand modeling for the project included Highland Drive being built as a five-lane road and connecting through from 9800 South to the Draper city limits.
 - Even with Highland Drive being expanded to five lanes (four travel lanes and a center turn lane), the results of the travel demand model showed a need to expand the traffic capacity on Wasatch Boulevard to meet future regional growth.

Does UDOT consider safety in the process of making roadway improvements?

- Yes, during the design process, UDOT identified several safety needs along Wasatch Boulevard, including substandard shoulder width and bicycle lanes, insufficient sight distances at several intersections, substandard turn lanes, and hazards in the clear zone.
 - As part of the design process, UDOT will design any alternatives to meet current safety standards.
 - For Wasatch Boulevard, this will include appropriate shoulders and bicycle lanes, right- and left-turn lanes at intersections, and removing hazards within the clear zone.
- To improve pedestrian safety, UDOT, in cooperation with Cottonwood Heights, will be considering a 10-foot-wide path on the east side of Wasatch Boulevard as part of the improvement alternatives considered in the EIS.
 - Placing a path on both sides of Wasatch Boulevard would increase the potential for property impacts.

Why doesn't UDOT reduce the speed limit along Wasatch Boulevard?

- The evaluation of speed limits is done outside the EIS process.
- To determine speeds on state roads, UDOT conducts a speed study. The posted speed limit is based on the 85th-percentile speed while giving consideration to the road surface, shoulders, sight distance, development, pedestrian activity, and crash data. Using these criteria, the posted speed limit for Wasatch Boulevard is 50 miles per hour.
- To ensure mobility on state roads and equity between cities, UDOT must apply the speed study policy equally on state roads within each city. Wasatch Boulevard south of 9400 South is posted at 35 miles per hour. That portion of Wasatch Boulevard is a city road, and therefore the local government can post the speed limit.

Why is Wasatch Boulevard needed as a regional road facility?

- Wasatch Boulevard is classified by UDOT and WFRC as a principal arterial. Principal arterials are defined as corridors that provide long trip demands, interconnect urban areas, and provide connections between business districts and outlying residential areas.
- Principal arterials are a necessary part of any transportation system to ensure overall mobility for the traveling public and to reduce congestions on smaller local streets. Wasatch Boulevard provides the principal arterial connection for residents in eastern Cottonwood Heights, Sandy, and Draper to I-215.
- Highland Drive is also classified as a principal arterial serving the western parts of these cities. Without principal arterials to serve regional traffic, congestion would substantially increase on local roads, which would substantially increase travel times.

Will UDOT consider aesthetic treatments for Wasatch Boulevard?

- UDOT will work with the City of Cottonwood Heights and local residents to develop an aesthetics plan for Wasatch Boulevard.

How will improvements to Wasatch Boulevard support other modes such as mass transit or active transportation?

- As part of the alternative development process UDOT will be looking at roadway alternatives that consider separate bikeways/trails, transit priority and shoulder use.

Is UDOT improving Wasatch Boulevard for the ski traffic?

- Although the design will help alleviate congestion caused by ski traffic, the primary purpose of the improvements is to reduce congestion during the morning and evening commute periods that occur throughout the year.
- UDOT's evaluation of current traffic conditions and projected traffic conditions in 2050 shows heavy congestion during weekday commute periods. The alternatives that are being considered are intended to reduce congestion to acceptable levels.

Visitor Capacity

Will the EIS analyze the potential for induced recreation use and associated environmental impacts caused by transportation improvements, and will the analysis include a visitor capacity analysis?

- Although the project purpose being developed as part of the EIS process is not intended to increase visitation in the canyon but to improve overall transportation mobility, it is possible that visitation in the canyon may increase as a result of projected population growth and increasing recreation demands along the Wasatch Front.
 - Recreation use and associated impacts to the environment will be analyzed as they relate to the transportation alternatives considered in the EIS.
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (a cooperating agency in preparation of the EIS) will advise UDOT regarding the expected impacts from transportation improvements and associated recreation use to National Forest System land and forest resources in accordance with the Revised Forest Plan Wasatch-Cache National Forest (USDA Forest Service, 2003).
 - At this time, the Forest Service is not considering a visitor capacity analysis.
 - Through its implementation and monitoring of the management protocols and objectives in the Forest Plan, the Forest Service has determined that many areas in the canyon may handle increased use without significant resource impacts, with the construction and sustained operations and maintenance of infrastructure designed to accommodate current and future visitor demands.
- The Forest Service will evaluate the alternatives during the EIS process to determine if they appear to have a potential to significantly increase visitation to National Forest System lands, outside of permitted ski areas, along the S.R. 210 transportation corridor.
 - It is anticipated that alternatives in the EIS will be developed to improve safety and enhance watershed protection near Forest Service trailheads in the canyon, including reduced roadside parking, improved and formalized parking lots (maintaining current area parking capacities), planned implementation of stormwater/runoff best management practices, and increased toilet capacity.

Is the purpose of the project to get more vehicles and people up the canyon?

- No. UDOT is looking to solve numerous needs on S.R. 210, including road closures and safety risk caused by avalanches, safety issues to cyclists and pedestrians, environmental concerns caused by roadside parking at trailheads, and roadway mobility.
 - Currently, during busy ski days, vehicles can back up for miles on their way up the canyon, causing access issues for local residents at the base on the canyon,

delayed emergency response because of the heavy traffic, and long travel times for buses and other vehicles entering the canyon.

- These are the mobility issues UDOT is trying to solve with the Little Cottonwood Canyon EIS project.
- During the EIS process, UDOT will evaluate whether an alternative would reduce these issues and would potentially induce travel as a result of the improvement in traffic conditions.

Mobility

Will the EIS evaluate only a third lane in Little Cottonwood Canyon, or will other options be considered?

- UDOT included a third lane as a potential alternative in the EIS because WFRC's 2019–2050 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP; May 2019) identifies project R-S-53, which would widen Little Cottonwood Canyon Road from two to three lanes.
 - Although the RTP identified a specific action (widen from two to three lanes), that does not mean UDOT must implement widening of Little Cottonwood Canyon Road.
 - The RTP must be fiscally constrained, so the plan identifies specific projects to develop a cost estimate to stay within an overall budget.
- Once UDOT decides to implement a project from the RTP, the project goes through an environmental process in which alternatives to solve the need are evaluated. In the case of Little Cottonwood Canyon Road, the need is based on long traffic delays.
 - Therefore, in addition to evaluating roadway capacity, UDOT will look at other alternatives brought forward to solve the traffic need.
- During the scoping process, the public brought forward numerous alternatives to solve the need, including more buses, buses only, gondolas, trains, reversible lanes, allowing vehicles to use the roadway shoulder during peak hours, and tolling.
 - All of these alternatives will be evaluated in the EIS.

Will a connection to the Wasatch Back be evaluated in the EIS?

- UDOT received comments during the scoping period that if an aerial connection was implemented between Park City and Little Cottonwood Canyon ski resorts there would be no need to add capacity on S.R. 210 in Little Cottonwood Canyon.
- UDOT will analyze whether a reduction in traffic from Park City would improve mobility on S.R. 210.

Will summer transit be addressed in the EIS?

- UDOT received comments during the scoping period that the EIS should consider summer transit service as an alternative to expanding trailhead parking.
- As part of the alternative development and screening process, UDOT will evaluate summer transit options against the project purpose and related screening criteria to determine if transit can meet the identified need associated with trailhead parking.

Avalanche Mitigation

Can UDOT conduct avalanche mitigation earlier in the day to open the road before 8 a.m.?

- UDOT starts avalanche-control procedures at 5 a.m. by closing S.R. 210, and the avalanche-control work occurs between 6 a.m. and 8 a.m. UDOT's goal is to have S.R. 210 open by 8 a.m. or earlier.
 - Little Cottonwood Canyon is one of the most avalanche-prone stretches of highway in North America. UDOT's primary goal is public safety, and therefore UDOT must evaluate on each winter day what avalanche control and associated roadway closure will be needed to meet this goal.
- UDOT's avalanche-control program in the canyon consists of using artillery and remote trigger devices to cause a controlled avalanche and then removing any snow that is blocking S.R. 210.
 - With regard to the timing of roadway closures, UDOT considers many factors including snowpack, backcountry clearance, business/resident travel needs, traffic flow, and the safety of the avalanche-control workers.
 - In addition, UDOT can't predict the amount of snow that will need to be cleared off the road if an avalanche blocks S.R. 210.

Trailhead Parking

Is UDOT planning to increase the amount of available parking at trailheads in Little Cottonwood Canyon?

- No. The ability to expand parking on land managed by the Forest Service is limited per the Revised Forest Plan Wasatch-Cache National Forest (USDA Forest Service 2003).
 - The plan states that, in the Tri-Canyon Area (Big Cottonwood, Little Cottonwood, and Millcreek Canyons), it is a desired future condition to manage capacities of canyon parking areas (ski area lots, summer-use homes, and developed and dispersed

recreation sites) to year 2000 levels, unless modification is needed for watershed protection.

- The Forest Service has been using the Salt Lake County Parking Study – Existing Conditions memorandum (Avenue Consultants 2012) as an approximate baseline for the 2000 levels, since it is the most comprehensive parking study to date.
 - UDOT plans that none of the alternatives developed will increase parking levels estimated in the Cottonwood Canyons Parking Study – Existing Conditions memorandum.
 - The study included both formal and informal parking (shoulder parking) in the capacity analysis.

Operations and Maintenance

Can the EIS address enforcement of 4WD and chains during winter storm events?

- The enforcement of chains and 4WD vehicles is a state or local funded operational safety issue that can be handled administratively and does not require evaluation under the National Environmental Policy Act.
- The State and local law enforcement continually look at ways to improve enforcement.
 - UDOT and canyon partners are considering pilot programs for the 2019-2020 season to improve enforcement, including certification of employee vehicles and a sticker program for other canyon users.

Construction Timeline

The Regional Transportation Plan shows funding for avalanche mitigation (snow sheds) in Phase 3, which is 2035 to 2040. Will it take 20 years before anything is done to advance construction of snow sheds in Little Cottonwood Canyon?

- No. Before any improvements are made to S.R. 210, UDOT must complete the EIS process (scheduled to be completed in early 2021).