

Short-term pain for long-term congestion relief

CONE ZONE ALERT: I-225 UPGRADES TO BEGIN SOON

The initial phase, priced at an estimated \$1.1 million, will improve the on and off ramps at southbound I-225 and Colfax.

The bright orange traffic cones that cause highway lanes to narrow and driver patience to fray could show up around the I-225/Colfax Avenue interchange as soon as late October as part of the first phase of a long-planned highway upgrade designed to improve traffic flow, particularly in and around the heavily trafficked Anschutz Medical Campus.

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the winning bidder will have about five and a half months to complete the first phase.

A real “fast track.” Additional project work could progress quickly. Bidding on the much larger Phase 2 – which would include constructing a new on-off ramp off at 17th Avenue Place, beginning a bridge structure over the highway, and additional Colfax Avenue ramp work, at an estimated price tag of \$18 million – is planned for October.

Shovels should hit the dirt on that phase early in 2010, says Jeff Thompson, University of Colorado Hospital director of Governor and Corporate Relations.

Funding for Phases 1 and 2 is already in place and comes from a mix of federal dollars from the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (the so-called stimulus package), the City of Aurora, and contributions from local “stakeholders,” including UCH, University of Colorado Denver, The Children’s Hospital, and the Fitzsimons Redevelopment Authority, Thompson says.

Additional federal funding totaling \$850,000, the result of efforts by Colo-



Clear traffic lanes on I-225 could become a rare sight in the coming months.

The City of Aurora has announced it will open sealed bids for the project on September 30. Work should begin soon thereafter. The city’s project manual says

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rado 7th Congressional District Representative Ed Perlmutter, is anticipated as part of a pending House transportation bill.

Wanted: \$20 million more. With roughly \$20 million of funding in hand, the city is still seeking another \$20 to \$23 million to complete the project, including finishing the bridge and building and extending connector roads from the highway into the campus.

“A significant portion of these ‘Phase 3’ funds could come from the City of Aurora’s application for a TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) grant. These grants are part of the stimulus package,” Thompson explains. About \$1.3 billion in TIGER grants are available nationally, he adds, although the competition for funds will be intense.

“Congressman Perlmutter and the city are working hard to get more stimulus and/or other federal funds dedicated to the I-225/Colfax project,” Thompson says. “They aren’t needed right away, but we want momentum to finish the job by the time Phase 2 is at least nearing completion.”

Orange crush. A separately funded but related construction project to widen I-225 between approximately Sixth and Mississippi Avenues will cause even more cones to sprout early next year, he adds.

The highway improvements mean campus workers should be ready to dodge cones “for at least a couple of years,” Thompson says, or find alternate routes.

But the commuting pain, he adds, is necessary for roads that were not originally designed to support the heavy traffic volumes the campus now attracts. In addition, with construction of a new Veterans Affairs medical facility set to begin nearby next summer, and construction of a FastTracks light rail spur to the campus still at least several years away, the vehicle crush is likely to worsen without the necessary upgrades to I-225.

“These [road] projects are critical,” Thompson notes, “to ensure access to the Fitzsimons Life Sciences District, including the Anschutz Medical Campus and the hospital, for emergency vehicles, patients, students, faculty, and the growing number of employees.”