

Durango Colorado
Transportation Assistance Group
Observations, Considerations and Recommendations

By

The Interagency Transportation Assistance Group (TAG)
Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks Technical Assistance Center

A report prepared for

The San Juan Public Lands Center

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NOTICE

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ART	Animas River Trail
ATS	Alternative Transportation Systems
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
BOR	Bureau of Reclamation
DMR	Durango Mountain Resort
DOT	Department of Transportation
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization
NPS	National Park Service
PUC	Public Utilities Commission
RTCA	Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program
SMART 160	Safe Multi-Modal Aesthetic Regional Transportation 160 Trail
TAG	Transportation Assistance Group
TAC	Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks Program Technical Assistance Center
USFS	United States Forest Service

1. INTRODUCTION

A Transportation Assistance Group (TAG) is a multi-agency team of professionals who assist agencies and/or communities to identify transportation issues and alternative transportation opportunities in and around public lands. Alternative transportation systems (ATS) provide alternative travel modes to the private automobile and may include bicycle and pedestrian networks, intelligent transportation systems, rail, trolleys, shuttle buses and/or trams. A TAG team visited Durango, Colorado, from November 8-10, 2010, to listen to local representatives' thoughts on ATS needs and to observe transportation conditions in Durango and surrounding public lands.

Results of the site visit are documented in this report which is organized as follows. Section 2 contains background information including area description, existing alternative transportation facilities, recent planning studies and a list of the November 8-10 meeting participants. Section 3 describes TAG team observations including what is working well and opportunities for ATS in the Durango area. Section 3 describes existing partnerships, stakeholders and Durango's community vision and public interest in alternative transportation. Section 4 presents considerations, findings and recommendations from the TAG team's analysis. Appendix A provides a list of relevant resources. Appendix B contains a list of meeting participants and their contact information by agency.

2. BACKGROUND

Durango stakeholders contacted the Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks Program Technical Assistance Center (TAC) to explore ATS opportunities in Durango and surrounding public lands. Representatives from Durango's San Juan Public Lands Center, the City of Durango and the Trails 2000 non-profit organization participated in a teleconference call with the TAC on September 10, 2010. The San Juan Public Lands Center jointly manages National Forest and BLM lands under Service First authority which allows local USFS and BLM offices to combine resources to improve public-land management. Key discussion points during this call included trailhead congestion and a lack of ATS connections between the Colorado Trail United States Forest Service (USFS) lands and Durango; gaps in the SMART 160 trail system and opportunities for ATS between Lake Nighthorse and Durango. During this call it was mentioned that regional Bureau of Land Management (BLM) representative Jack Placchi had recently visited Durango and recommended a TAG. Based on this call, the TAC consulted with BLM, USFS, Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Volpe Center who all concurred to arrange a Durango TAG visit.

2.1. Durango Area Description

The City of Durango lies in the Animas River Valley, at an elevation of over 6,000 feet. It is a vibrant community located in La Plata County in southwest Colorado. Durango's population was estimated at 15,632 people in 2008 and is anticipated to grow to 19,094 people by 2023 (City of Durango, 2010). Durango's population increased 11 percent from 2000 to 2008. La Plata County's population increased from 19,225 in 1960 to 43,941 in 2000 (129 percent increase) (Planning Works, 2007). Durango is home to Fort Lewis College which has about 3,685 students. Durango is surrounded by public lands which include city and state parks, BLM,

Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), Colorado Division of Wildlife and USFS lands as shown in Figure 1. The Southern Ute Indian Reservation is located south and east of Durango. Popular activities on nearby public lands include bicycling, mountain biking, climbing, hiking, camping, rafting, kayaking and fishing. Snow sports including downhill and cross country skiing, snowboarding, and snowshoeing all have high participation in the region (City of Durango, 2010).

The scenic beauty and many recreational opportunities and attractions on the public lands surrounding Durango draw many visitors to the area. The Durango Tourism Office estimated Durango's annual visitation at one million visitor days in 2007 (La Plata County Comprehensive Plan Community Draft #1a, 2010, pg 14 -Durango Tourism Office).

A few of the attractions drawing visitors to Durango and the surrounding region include:

- Historic narrow gauge railroad between Durango and Silverton
- 233 mile long San Juan Scenic Byway
- San Juan National Forest and BLM lands - destinations for mountain bikers/hikers
- Western terminus of the 500 mile long Colorado Trail
- Durango Mountain Resort/Purgatory ski area
- Chimney Rock archaeological area
- Mesa Verde National Park
- Anasazi Heritage Center / Canyons of the Ancients National Monument

Approximate distances of some attractions from Durango are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Distance between Durango and Regional Park and Public Land Locations/Attractions

Regional Attractions	Miles from Durango	Direction from Durango
Hermosa, CO (USFS trail network)	11	North
Durango Mt Resort (ski area)	27	North
Silverton, CO	48	North
Chimney Rock archaeological area	41	East
Mesa Verde National Park	47	West
Anasazi Heritage Center /Canyon of the Ancients National Monument	53	West

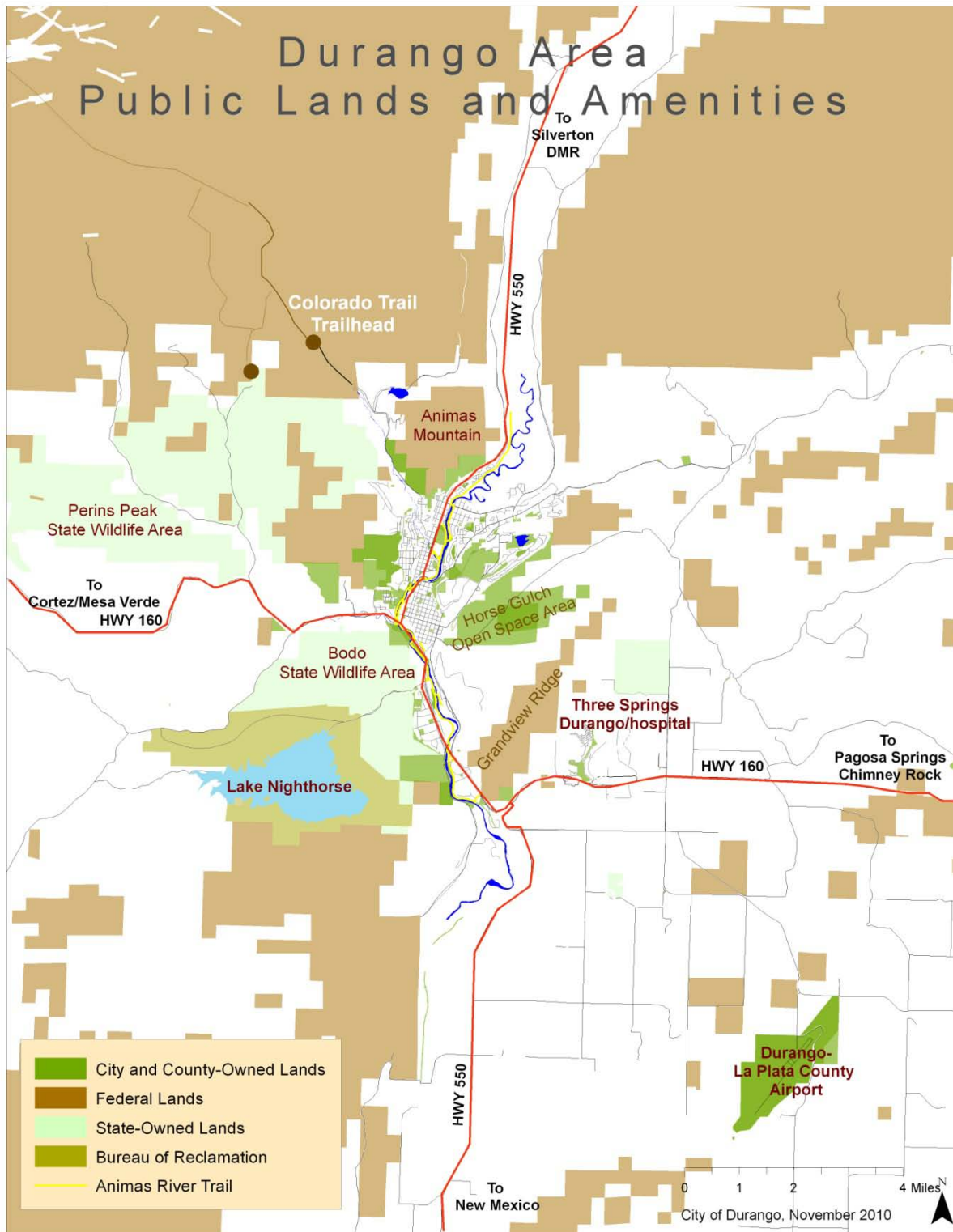


Figure 1: Durango Area Public Lands Map (Hall, 2010)

2.2. Transportation Network

U.S. Highway 160 connects Durango to Mancos and Cortez to the west and to Bayfield and Pagosa Springs to the east. U.S. Highway 550 connects to Silverton to the north and to Farmington, New Mexico, to the south. These two highways become one roadway US 550/ US 160 running north/south for approximately four miles through Durango. Residents of the Durango area report that delays at traffic signals in the US 550/US 160 corridor have become more prevalent in recent years. Increasing development along the corridor and in outlying parts of the County will exacerbate these problems, resulting in levels of service E and F, according to the Regional Transportation Study (Planning Works, 2007, pg 59). Other problems identified for the area's road network include:

- the seasonal influx of a significant visitor population,
- the convergence of federal and state highways and county roads within Durango,
- mountains, Animas River and existing development limit options to increase the capacity of the City's street systems,
- extra territorial growth dependent on the highway system through the City (Planning Works, 2007 pg 58).

The Southwest Transportation Planning Commission serves as the regional planning organization for the Durango planning area for major roadways that are eligible for state and federal funding. The City is an active participant in the transportation planning commission's decision making processes (Planning Works, 2007).

2.2.1. Air Travel

The Durango-La Plata County Airport is approximately a 20 minute drive away, located 14 miles southeast of the City. It serves the Colorado four corners area with daily service with Frontier Airlines, United Express, and US Airways. Animas Air Park, located south of the City along La Posta Road, primarily provides service for private aircraft.

2.2.2. Existing Hard and Soft Surface Trails¹

The City of Durango trail system includes 95 miles of interconnected hard and natural surface trails; of this total 12 miles are hard surface and 83 miles are natural surface trails (City of Durango, 2010). The hard-surface Animas River Trail (ART) follows the river for about 7 miles through Durango providing access to 12 City parks, hundreds of acres of open space, the Recreation Center, library, and other destinations (Figure 2). The ART was built over several decades, beginning in the 1970s and remains the north-south spine of the trail system, with both lateral connections and looped trails (City of Durango, 2010). Figure 3 shows existing trails in the Durango area. Durango has worked to integrate bike routes into the trail system as shown in Figure 4.

According to a survey conducted in 2010, the most important park and recreation facilities to Durango residents are the natural-surface trails for hiking and bicycling, and hard-surface trails for bicycle and pedestrian use (City of Durango, 2010).

Durango has over 83 miles of natural-surface trails including 12.1 miles at Overend Mountain Park to the west, 4.7 miles at Dalla Mountain Park to the northwest, 9.2 miles at Animas Mountain to the north and 57.2 miles in the Horse Gulch area to the east (City of Durango, 2010).

The Safe Multi Modal Aesthetic Regional Transportation (SMART) 160 Trail is a hard-surface trail which is partially completed and will serve as the system's east west spine as more sections are constructed. Integration of the trail system with on road bicycle and pedestrian facilities is critical to the functionality of the community's multi-modal transportation system. The completion of the ART, including the extension of the trail to the north City limits and reconstruction of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) substandard sections, is the top hard-surface trail development priority (City of Durango, 2010).

Durango achieved designation as a Silver Level Bicycle Friendly Community in 2008. The 1990 and 2000 census indicated that over 15 percent of Durango's population commuted to work by walking or bicycling, which is a much higher proportion than State or National levels (Planning Works, 2007). Figure 5 shows Durango's proximity to Federal, state and tribal lands within La Plata County.

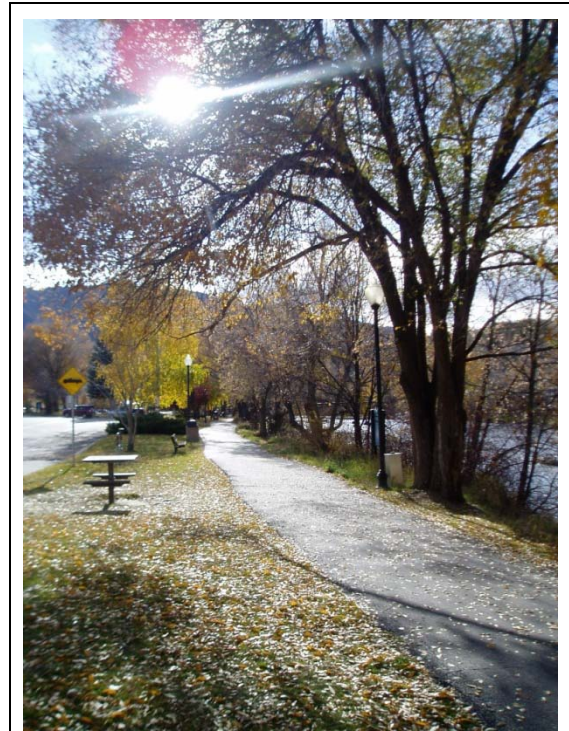


Figure 2: Animas River Trail in Durango
(Photo: R. Gleason)

¹ This section provides excerpts from the 2010 City of Durango Parks, Open Space, Trails, and Recreation Master Plan.

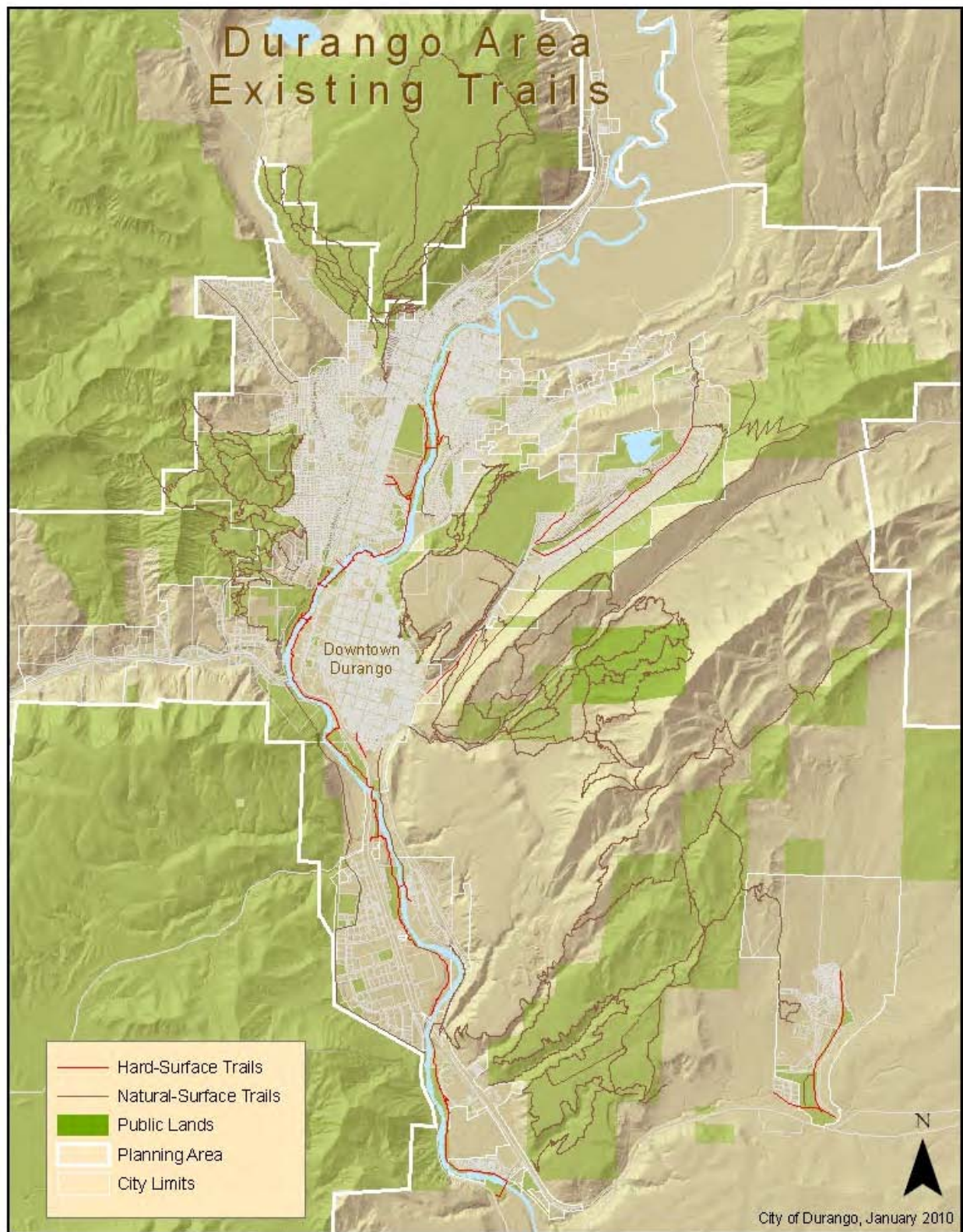


Figure 3: Durango Trails (City of Durango, 2010)

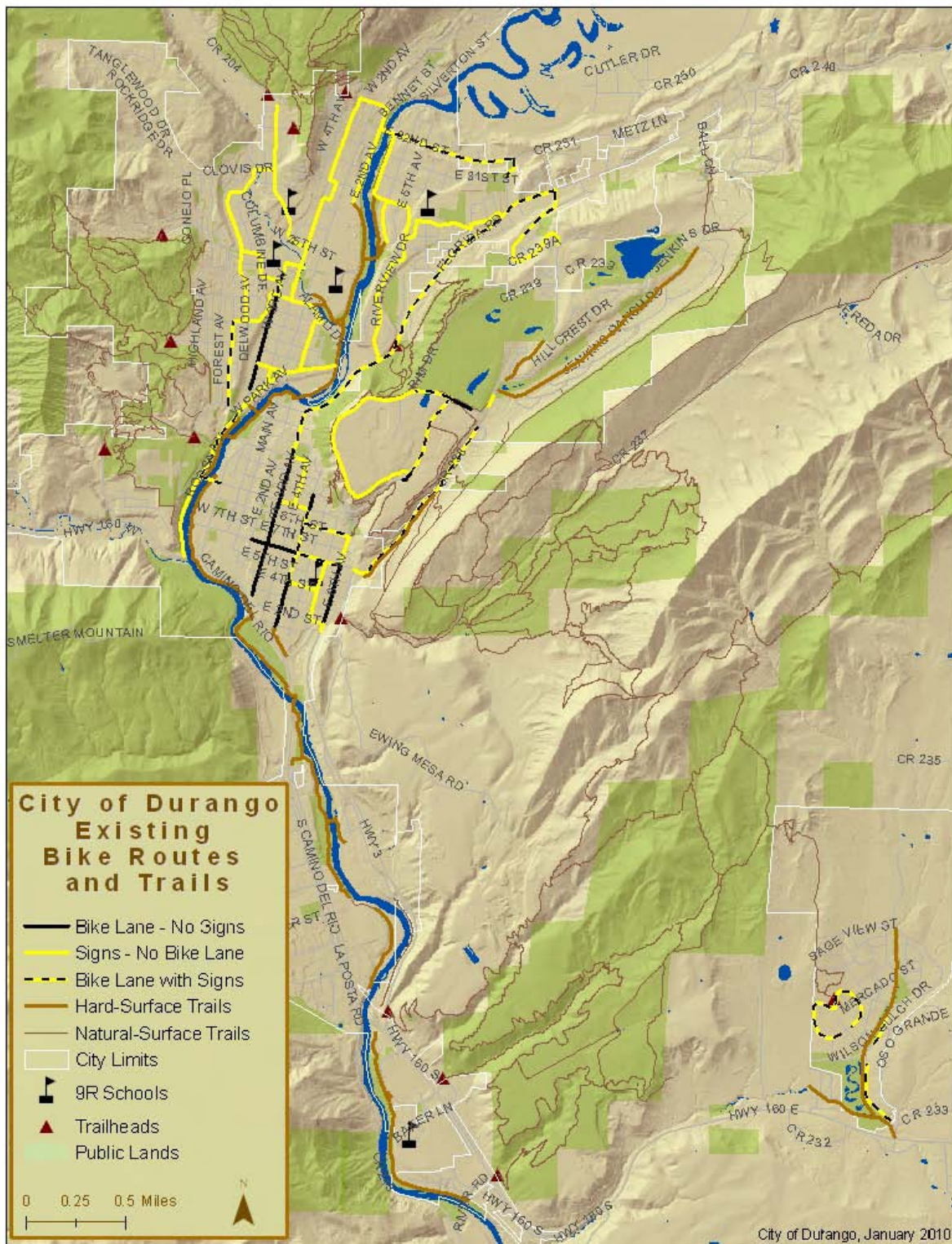


Figure 4: City of Durango Bike Routes and Trails (City of Durango, 2010)

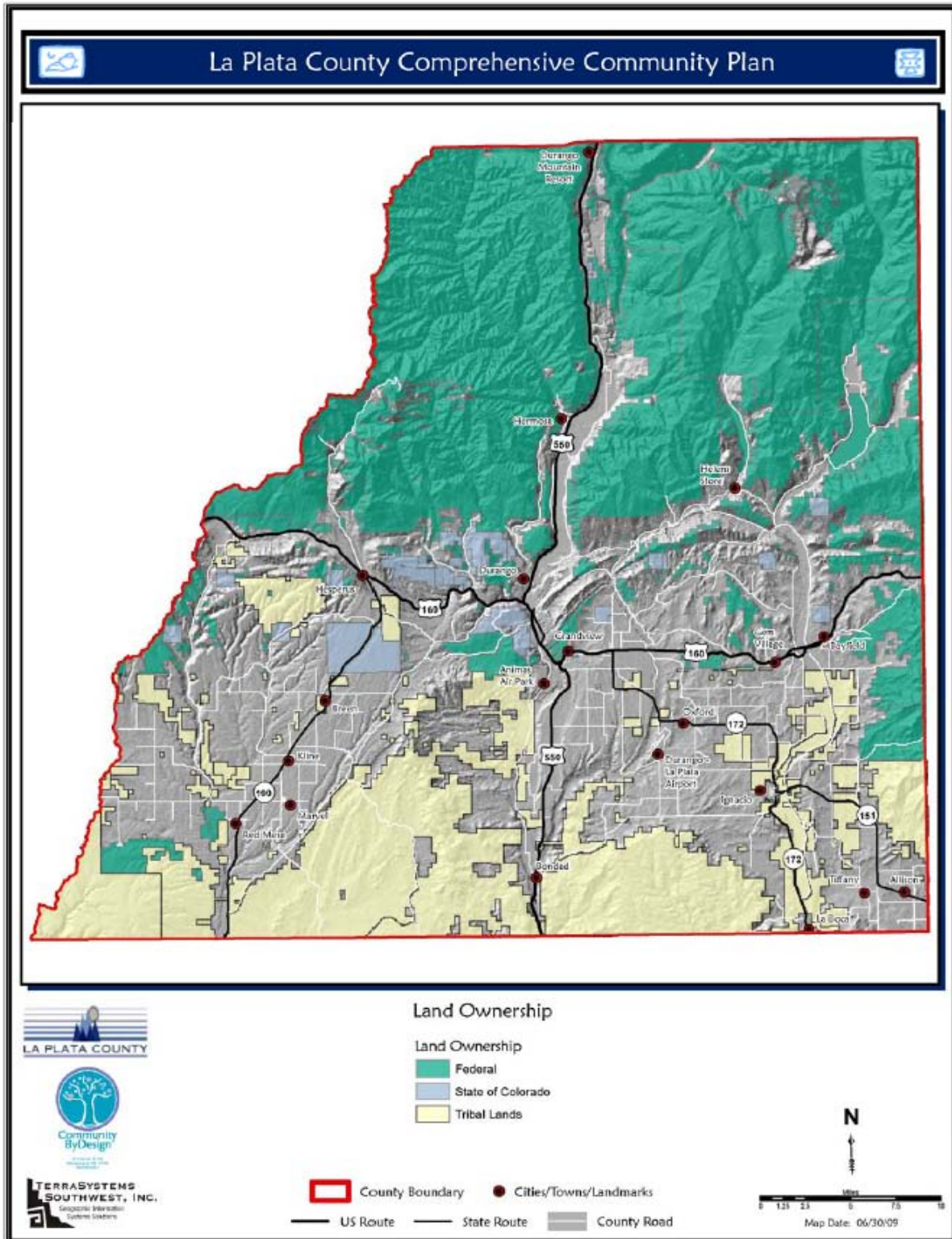


Figure 5: La Plata County Federal, State and Tribal Lands (La Plata County 2010)

2.2.3. Durango Transit

The City of Durango provides public transportation by bus, para-transit bus and bus trolley. The City of Durango runs the Durango Transit “T” bus system and historic style trolleys (Figure 5). The Main Avenue historic trolley is free to passengers and runs from 7 am to 10 pm seven days a week in the summer (the first week in May through the first weekend in October) every 20 minutes. It operates Monday through Friday from 7 am to 7 pm and 10 am to 7 pm in the winter. Trolley service travels along Main Avenue between College Drive north to the Days Inn Hotel (northern Boundary of the City limit) servicing the central business district.

The Durango T fixed route bus service has six routes on 30 minute headways throughout Durango. Ridership on the Durango T has grown approximately 20 percent over the last three years and remains popular with many Durango residents. Durango's Dial a-Ride service, also known as the Opportunity Bus, provides "door-to-door" transportation to disabled, elderly or other persons unable to use Durango's fixed route system (Planning Works, 2007).



Figure 6: Durango T Transit Trolley with Bicycle Rack
(Photo: R. Gleason)

2.2.4. Regional Public Transportation

The City recently opened an 8,000 square foot, \$4 million Intermodal Transit Center which serves as a regional hub for public transportation, including Durango Transit, Road Runner Transit, Greyhound, and Durango Mountain Resort. The facility includes restrooms, information counters, a passenger concourse, city transit offices and covered bicycle parking for approximately 100 bicycles.

Road Runner Transit connects the east side of La Plata County with medical services, jobs, education and shopping in Durango. Primary transit routes operate between Ignacio and Durango and between Bayfield and Durango with four daily round trips. The service was started in 1999 with major support from the Southern Ute Indian Tribe and a federal grant managed by the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT). Its initial purpose was to increase mobility among seniors and persons without cars or licenses. As gas prices have increased in recent years, many commuters have found that they can save money by riding the Road Runner (Southern Ute Community Action Programs, 2010).

Durango's "Get Around Durango" bike-ride-walk website provides information about alternative transportation options and opportunities in Durango (City of Durango, 2010).

2.2.5. Recent Planning Studies

La Plata County, the City of Durango and surrounding public land management agencies have spent significant time and effort in planning for the future. These stakeholders, as well as non-profit organizations and the public, are engaged in various planning processes as demonstrated by several recent planning documents described below. Multi-modal transportation systems are a significant portion of all of these plans. Connections to recreation and surrounding public lands are a key theme in these plans.

2010 City of Durango Parks, Open Space, Trails and Recreation Master Plan (City of Durango, 2010)

This plan establishes a ten year “road map” -2010 to 2019 -for development of parks, open space, trails, recreation programming and facilities. Chapter five describes plans for the area’s trail network. The executive summary in section 1.3.5 summarizes Durango’s interconnected network of hard and natural surface trails. This 2010 plan builds upon the 2001 City of Durango Parks, Open Space and Trails Master Plan.

Draft 2010 La Plata County Comprehensive Plan. Guiding Principles, Vision, Goals and Strategies. (La Plata County 2010)

This is a policy document that describes what county residents want the community to be in the future. Chapter seven addresses transportation and places a strong emphasis on multi-modal transportation options for visitors and residents.

2007 City of Durango Comprehensive Plan (Planning Works, LLC, 2007)

This plan represents over 24 months of planning and extensive public participation beginning with two workshops in March, 2005, when the Sonoran Institute met with over 110 citizens to define community values and vision. One key goal of this plan is to identify diverse and comprehensive transportation solutions. Chapter 8 defines key transportation issues and provides two key goals (goal 13 and 14 in the document) followed by supporting objectives. Numerous policies are provided for each objective. The goals and objectives, which demonstrate a strong commitment to ATS, are listed below.

Goal 13: To maintain a transportation system that safely and efficiently meets the needs of residents, businesses and visitors.

Objective 13.1: Develop and maintain a comprehensive transportation system that efficiently carries a variety of modes of traffic within and through the community.

Objective 13.2: Improve street system capacity to meet increasing demands for all modes of transportation

Objective 13.3: To coordinate site development with the region’s multimodal transportation system.

Objective 13.4: Provide adequate off-street parking in areas where street pavement is needed for traffic flow.

Goal 14: To provide employees, residents and visitors with realistic opportunities to use various modes of transportation.

Objective 14.1: Develop and maintain a transportation network and demand management strategies that minimize anticipated increases in single occupancy automobile traffic.

2030 La Plata County and City of Durango Transportation Integrated Plan (LSA Associates, 2006)

This is the regional transportation plan to guide transportation investment and policy decisions. The Plan considers motorized vehicles, public transportation, bicycling, and walking. This Plan identifies long-term transportation demand for the 2030 horizon.

The plans described above demonstrate Durango and the surrounding region have dedicated significant time and effort into community visioning and transportation planning. All of these planning efforts emphasize the importance that ATS plays and will play in Durango and surrounding public lands in the future. Other planning studies for Durango including public lands resources are listed in Appendix A.

2.2.6. November 2010 TAG Meeting Participants

The following individuals participated in the November 8-10 Durango TAG meetings. The three-day meeting agenda and participants for each meeting are included in Appendix B.

Transportation Assistance Group (TAG)

- Adam Schildge, FTA Transit in Parks Program Manager
- Ben Rasmussen, Community Planner, U.S. DOT John A. Volpe National Transportation Systems Center
- Floyd Thompson, USFS National Program Leader Sustainable Tourism, Recreation Planning & Scenic Byways
- Hugh Osborne, National Park Service (NPS) Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA)
- Laurie Miskimins, Transportation Planner/FHWA Central Federal Lands
- Larry Squires, Community Planner FTA/Region 8
- Phil Shapiro, Deputy Director, TAC
- Rebecca Gleason, Research Engineer, TAC

Local participants and their contact information can be found in Appendix B.

3. OBSERVATIONS

The City of Durango and other stakeholders have spent significant time and effort on transportation planning as demonstrated by the many recent planning studies. A common theme in all of the plans is non-motorized transportation and transit connectivity. Stakeholders expressed a strong desire to put the long hours of planning work into action. Durango is progressive with regards to alternative transportation planning and has been successful in many ways. For example Durango has funded a full time multi-modal transportation coordinator by creatively using grant and city funds. The coordinator and others are currently creating a multi-modal transportation plan for the city. Durango's ART is a scenic, well used trail which serves as a north/south hard surface trail spine or trail "highway". East/west hard surface trails connecting to public lands and other places are lacking. Multiple networks of soft surface trails through public lands have been developed that provide local residents and visitors with options to hike and bicycle near town. Durango has a well developed transit system throughout the city and regional area to serve local populations.

The TAG team listened to various stakeholders and received a tour of several sites. TAG members heard about the importance in considering wildlife needs for any transportation project in this area of increasing development and shrinking wildlife habitat. The TAG team observed many people walking and bicycling throughout the city and on the ART during the November 2010 visit. The following sections describe the TAG team's observations on what is working well and some opportunities for alternative transportation to address transportation needs.

3.1. Lake Nighthorse

Lake Nighthorse is a new reservoir and 5,500 acre recreation area southwest of Durango constructed by the Bureau of Reclamation, which is not yet open to the public. It is anticipated construction will be completed in 2012 (Lake Nighthorse, 2010). The reservoir site is only two miles from downtown Durango. The Animas-La Plata Water Conservancy District, in cooperation with the Bureau of Reclamation, the NPS RTCA program and the Durango office of DHM Design is working with the public to develop a Recreation Plan for Lake Nighthorse. County Road 210 and Wildcat Canyon Road connect Lake Nighthorse to Durango. Alternative transportation opportunities along County Road 210 corridor and other opportunities should be considered and integrated into the recreation plan for this site. Transit options and bicycle/pedestrian connections from the ART should be explored. Some issues with regard to transportation between Durango and Lake Nighthorse include projected increased traffic on County Road 210 and associated problems such as speeding and animal/vehicle collisions. Topography along existing roadways limits opportunities for creating safe bicycling routes. There are concerns about disturbing wildlife when considering alternative routes outside existing roadway corridors. Trails can become wildlife migration barriers. Wildlife managers want to concentrate impacts and minimize the construction footprint.

3.2. Colorado Trail Access to Town

The west terminus of the Colorado Trail is located about 2 miles northwest of Durango. The first few miles of trail are heavily used by Durango locals and visitors for day hikes, walking dogs, and bicycling. Junction Creek Road (County Road 204) leading from town to the trailhead is a

two lane paved county road with minimal shoulders, which limits walking and bicycling between Durango and the trailhead. Driving is a common way to access the trailhead and the parking lot is commonly crowded. The Durango T bus Route #5 (Crestview route) loops up Junction Street to Clovis Drive with two stops a couple of miles south of the trailhead. The opportunity to extend this loop to the trailhead and beyond to the Junction Creek Campground were discussed. The city's multi-modal coordinator mentioned the city bus service must stay within a certain distance of the city limits (0.25 miles) due to Colorado Public Utilities Commission (PUC) regulations. However, there may be an opportunity to extend this transit route by working with the PUC. Durango stakeholders expressed interest in alternative funding sources for a pilot program such as extending transit to the Colorado Trail. If this is deemed a priority, potential funding could come from trail user groups, such as mountain biking and/or hiking clubs. A pilot program that requires leasing a vehicle could be eligible for a capital grant from the Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks program, but operating costs would not be eligible for funding.

Through hikers or mountain bikers who arrive at the trailhead have to navigate a narrow roadway and local traffic to get into Durango, which presents a safety issue. The trailhead lacks wayfinding signs and is unwelcoming to arriving long distance travelers. There have been numerous unsuccessful efforts to create a non-motorized connection from this trailhead to Durango over the past 20 years. A trail connection through or near State Division of Wildlife lands west of the county road is controversial due to wildlife concerns. Topography and land ownership in the vicinity of Junction Creek Road may make road expansion and options for a pathway separate from the roadway difficult. Other trail options mentioned include a connection east of Junction Creek Road or to the west connecting the Colorado Trail to Dry Fork Road or Lightner Creek Road and the SMART 160 trail. The county plans to improve County Road 204 in the near future, which presents an opportunity to create space on the roadway for bicyclists and pedestrians.

3.3. SMART 160 Trail

The **SMART 160** Trail has been a vision of Durango area residents since the mid 1990's. It began as a concept to develop a multi-use hard-surface trail adjacent to east- and west-bound U.S. Highway 160 through Durango and on to Bayfield. Its primary purpose is to provide a safe, functional and convenient way for bicyclists and pedestrians to travel within the highway corridor as they go about their daily activities, including accessing Federal, State, and local public lands surrounding Durango. The City of Durango and La Plata County have each identified the SMART 160 Trail as a top priority in their adopted Comprehensive Plans. The City is committed to developing the SMART 160 Trail within the City and connecting it to the Animas River Trail (ART) --the north-south spine to the Trail. The 9 mile long ART is nearing completion and approximately 2 miles of the Smart 160 Trail has been built or is under development, including the sections just south of the BLM Grandview Ridge near Three Springs. In December 2010, CDOT was awarded \$1.7M. to construct additional sections of the Trail in the Grandview area. As shown in Figure 7, the Trail will provide a link for bicyclists and pedestrians accessing the BLM Grandview Ridge. It has potential to provide bicyclist and pedestrian access to; BOR Lake Nighthorse area; and state and federal lands west of Durango.

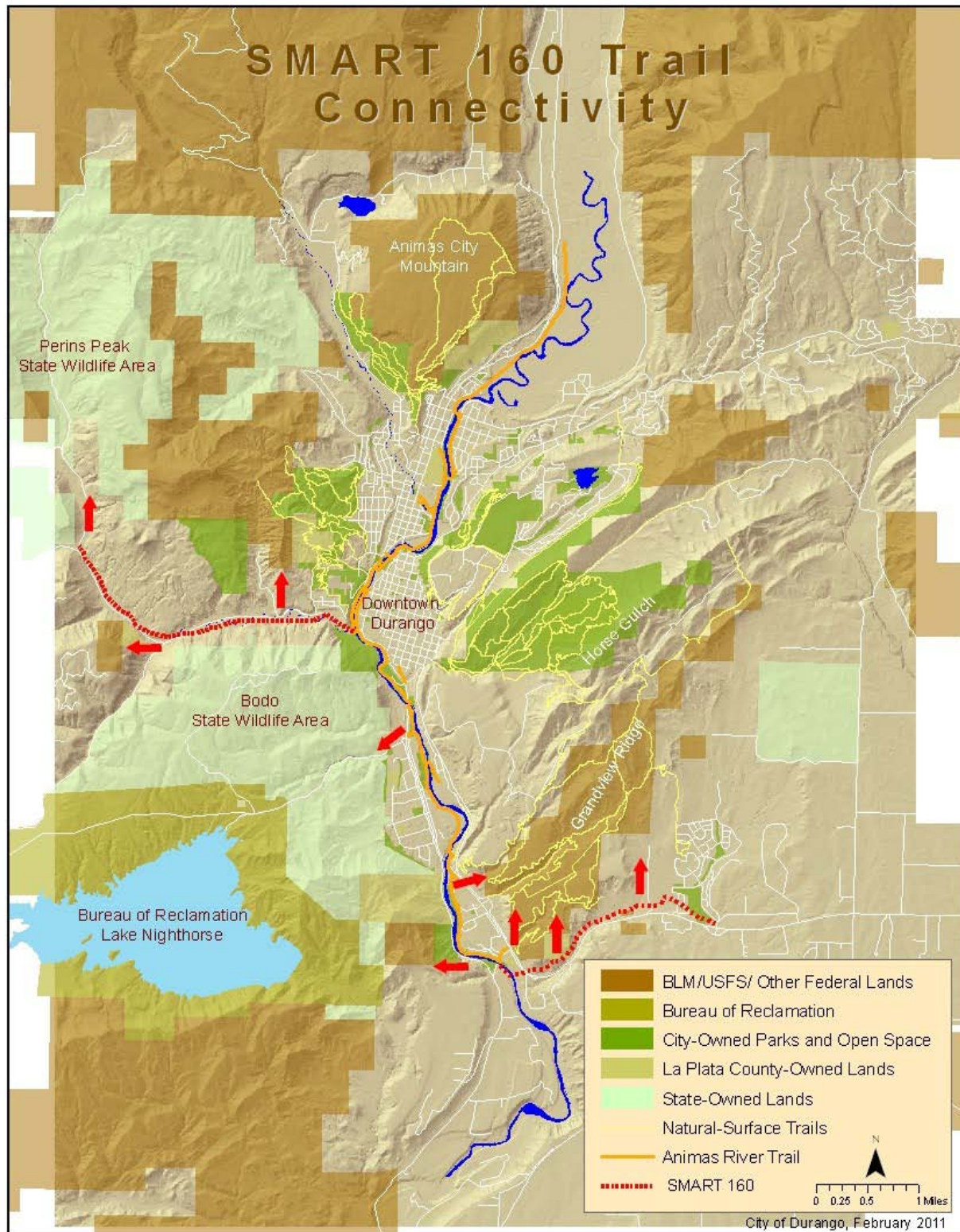


Figure 7: SMART 160 Trail Public Lands Connectivity

Three Springs, a developing 621-acre mixed-use traditional neighborhood has incorporated an extensive internal trail system into its design. Located within the Three Springs development is the Mercy Regional Medical Complex; plans for up to 2,000 homes; extensive neighborhood and community parks; sites for an elementary school and a middle school; and a large regional commercial center. Three Springs has constructed approximately 1,500 feet of the SMART 160 Trail just west of Three Springs Boulevard.

La Plata County has plans for a multi-use event center at the south end of Grandview Ridge near Three Springs for recreational and cultural activities and events, including equestrian access to the BLM Grandview Ridge property. Hwy 550/160 is currently the only roadway between Durango and Three Springs providing direct access to Grandview Ridge. Local stakeholders report the highway is often heavily congested and experiences high rates of speed. In addition to local traffic to Grandview Ridge, visitors to other public lands surrounding Durango must travel on this highway along with through-traffic and trucking commerce. The completion of the SMART 160 Trail through this corridor is anticipated to be heavily used by the community and visitors, providing safe non-motorized access to the area's Federal lands. .

The highway is a barrier to non-motorized travel from the ART to the Three Springs area and to the BLM Grandview Ridge east of the highway. The hard surface ART currently ends just past Home Depot at River Road, which is due west of the Grandview Ridge Salebarn Trailhead. Filling in the SMART 160 east gaps, including a safe non-motorized overpass of US 550/US 160 would provide AASHTO compliant non-motorized access between Durango, Three Springs and surrounding Federal lands. The planned route for the eastern extension of the SMART 160 Trail begins at the south end of the ART at River Road (by Home Depot) and follows the south side of US 160 until crossing the highway with an overpass west of the Hwy 550/160 (Farmington Hill) intersection. It then continues on the north side of US 160 to the existing SMART 160 trail being constructed by CDOT just south of Grandview Ridge near Three Springs (See Figure 7).

The TAG team expressed some concern about whether the design was far enough along to implement and about how the SMART 160 Trail would address public lands transportation needs. Another factor in this discussion was a roadway recommended in the 2030 La Plata County and City of Durango Transportation Integrated Plan that would cut through the BLM's Grandview Ridge to connect Durango to Three Springs. There was some discussion about whether completion of the SMART 160 Trail could reduce the footprint required for the proposed roadway across Grandview Ridge BLM lands.

3.4. Airport Access/Public Transportation

Most TAG team members flew into the Durango-La Plata County Airport. A few members carpoled and rented cars to drive the 20 minutes from the airport into Durango. Others used Durango Transportation, which is a private company charging about \$30 for a trip for access and egress from the airport to Durango. Customers sometimes have to wait up to an hour after requesting service depending on the location of the private company's vehicle. This service was inconvenient as well as expensive.

The quality of alternative transportation to and from the airport appears to make it very inconvenient for visitors not to rent a car, thus discouraging use of alternative transportation options for their entire trip. There were questions about the ability of the Durango T service to

leave the city limits in regards to PUC regulations. Appendix C contains an example of how Montana communities addressed Public Service Commission regulations with regard to rural public transit. Subsequent to the TAG meeting, Durango's multi-modal coordinator learned that the PUC does not prohibit Durango Transit from providing airport service. Durango T is pursuing funding for 2012 to expand service to the Durango-La Plata County airport.

Based on the TAG team's experience public transportation options in Durango appear to focus on local use rather than visitor use. Information on public transportation options did not appear to be readily available to visitors at the airport or at local hotels. Once in Durango, visitors are likely to use the Main Street Trolley, but are not likely to use the Durango T fixed route buses. The Durango T maps do not show connections to city parks, trailheads or nearby public lands.

3.5. Regional Transit Connectivity

The Durango T, Main Street Trolley and Roadrunner Transit provide valuable public transportation services to many local residents and some visitors. Private providers such as Durango Mountain Resort (DMR), Greyhound and Durango Transportation provide valuable transportation services as well. However, there are opportunities to improve these systems. Two key themes emerged during TAG discussions related to regional transit connectivity which are summarized below. Many opportunities exist for partnerships and coordination between the lodging/tourism industry, private shuttles and the public transportation system to provide more options for both residents and visitors to travel in and around Durango.

1. How to better accommodate visitors with transit

A representative from the Durango Area Tourism Office stated that transit is not well integrated into the tourism industry due to limited transit options available and limited hours of operation. One idea to address this issue is for the city and county to work together to provide broader access from hotels to area destinations by altering transit stops so that hotels are served directly and/or educating front desk staff so that they know where the nearest transit stop can be found and how frequent service runs. Another idea is to improve information provided to visitors to increase awareness of transit options. Continuing dialogue between the lodging/tourism industry and transit providers can result in solutions for transit to better meet the needs of visitors and reduce congestion and parking needs. With regard to connecting to public lands, the capacity to haul outdoor gear – multiple bicycles, bicycle trailer, kayaks, backpacks, etc. – was mentioned as an important item. Other ideas included how to access regional destinations such as Durango Mountain Resort, San Juan Skyway, Mesa Verde National Park, Chimney Rock archaeological site, Anasazi Heritage Center /Canyon of the Ancients National Monument and Chaco Canyon. Exploring how to integrate public service with private operators was discussed as part of the solution to these issues.

2. How to coordinate a regional transit system

A unified umbrella approach to regional transit is difficult due to diverse opinions throughout the region. Stakeholders report previous attempts at regional transit systems have failed, in part due to barriers to bringing diverse stakeholder together and in part due to low ridership. Identifying the needs of visitors in addition to commuters and designing a system to meet those needs may increase transit ridership. Considering connections to some public lands attractions may increase

the viability of regional transit. As suggested above, improved coordination between the city and Roadrunner systems to include a broader area could be a good first step. Durango stakeholders are interested in methods to overcome barriers and would like to learn from other regional transit models. A few regional transit services that could provide models for the Durango area include:

- Eastern Sierra Transit Authority: <http://www.estransit.org>
- Yosemite Area Regional Transit System: <http://www.yarts.com/>
- Roaring Fork Transportation Authority/Maroon Bells Bus: <http://www.rfta.com/>
- Sun Valley/Ketchum: <http://www.allsunvalley.com/transportation/>
- Southern Teton Area Rapid Transit: <http://www.startbus.com/>

Another useful resource for coordinating multiple providers is the Montana Coordinated Transportation Handbook and Update to the Handbook. These may be found at: http://www.mtcdd.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=126&Itemid=100008

3.6. Partnerships/Stakeholders

The Durango community has developed strong partnerships between many stakeholders who are engaged in alternative transportation planning. Stakeholders include the San Juan Public Lands Center (BLM/USFS), NPS RTCA, City of Durango, La Plata County, Bureau of Reclamation, FTA, Colorado DOT, Colorado Division of Wildlife, Animas-La Plata Operation and Maintenance Association, Trails 2000 (non-profit), Durango Area Tourism Office, Chamber of Commerce, Fort Lewis College, Colorado Trail Foundation, DHM (Consultant for Nighthorse Lake), DMR, Mercy Regional Medical Center and the public. This is not a comprehensive list. Appendix B lists the numerous individuals within these organizations who provided valuable input into ATS planning during the November 2010 TAG meetings. Regular communications between these and other interested stakeholders can lead to a common understanding of issues and help formulate realistic solutions for ATS in Durango and surrounding public lands.

3.7. Community Vision/Public Interest

Durango residents have a strong community vision which has developed over the years through various public participation processes. The planning studies mentioned previously contain descriptions of the significant community input over the years. The public is very interested in further developing ATS in the Durango area. Natural surface trails for hiking and bicycling, hard surface trails for bicycle and pedestrian and neighborhood parks were the top three priority amenities based on a survey of 568 Durango residents (Leisure Vision/ETC Institute, 2009).

4. FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

The TAG recommends pursuing planning and implementation activities in parallel. There is a sufficient planning base to move forward with some site specific planning and implementation initiatives while a unified, long-term cooperative regional transportation planning framework is developed. Advancing implementation activities is viewed as essential to sustaining the momentum and cooperative spirit among the stakeholders, who are as interested (if not more so) in pursuing near term results than further longer range planning. Exceptional opportunities exist

to provide alternative transportation access and bicycling experiences in Durango and elsewhere in the region.

After considering issues and facts discussed during the TAG, team members agreed that four key recommendations should be considered by public lands and other stakeholders in the Durango region:

1. Continue dialogue among local stakeholders to coordinate and improve alternative transportation in the Durango area.
2. Develop an integrated regional public lands alternative transportation plan
3. Perform a more detailed study of the various options for accessing the Colorado Trail from town, in addition to the proposed road improvements
4. Determine the relevance of SMART 160 to public lands visitor access.

In addition to these recommendations resulting from the TAG, a post TAG visit by several members of the TAG identified an opportunity for alternative transportation at the Chimney Rock archaeological site.

4.1. Create Option for Steering Committee to Continue Dialogue, Coordinate and Improve Alternative Transportation

Local participants in the TAG engaged in worthwhile dialogue among themselves regarding opportunities and issues related to alternative transportation in the Durango area. The TAG team recommends that this dialogue continue through an existing mechanism or a new group to encourage regular communications among transportation providers, public agencies, the business community and others to develop partnerships, and coordinate activities. This group could serve as a steering committee for developing plans for new or improved facilities and services and for coordinating existing and future services.

4.2. Develop an Integrated Regional Public Lands Alternative Transportation Plan

Regional Transportation Planning is a continuing and evolving process. Although the region has a remarkable transportation planning legacy, the area will benefit from developing unified regional transportation plans, policies, and procedures in support of alternative transportation initiatives. Opportunities exist to unify disparate rural, human services, and recreational transit services. A regional transportation planning study is needed to develop detailed facility, operational and financial plans. This planning should build on the vision for the trail system, existing and future transit system operations and planning studies for the Durango Transit and Road Runner systems, and should integrate with other planning efforts. The overarching theme should be the need for regional, seamless, and sustainable transit services and trails that are integrative and supportive of land agency management plans. It should focus on sites typically accessed by visitors (e.g., land management agency sites, hotel, tourist attractions, etc.).

The need for broad public participation was demonstrated by the level of participation by stakeholders during the TAG. Federal agencies should work cooperatively with other stakeholders in the area to review and coordinate plans in order to unify mobility and management strategies in the region. The Federal agencies should work cooperatively with

Durango, La Plata County, Dolores, Cortez, Mancos, Rico, Silverton, Bayfield, Pagosa Springs, Colorado DOT Region 9, etc. to apply for Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks program funding to develop a long-range, alternative transportation strategy for the Durango region to extend and complement existing regional transportation plans.

The plan should start by inventorying all existing plans and alternative transportation services in the region, and prepare a unified inventory and map of existing and planned public and private transit services, trails and bicycle facilities. This inventory should include public transit services such as those provided by Durango Transit and the Road Runner Transit service, and private service such as that provided by Durango Transportation to the airport and DMR to the ski area. Existing data that describes the character of the service, user population and utilization should also be identified and obtained.

The plan should consider ways and means for cooperatively addressing priority needs that have already been identified, particularly related to existing trails and access to public lands attractions. Such a plan will develop and analyze options for bicycle facilities, transit routes, unified trip planning, wayfinding / information systems, fare payment systems, marketing, and supporting infrastructure. The plan could help reduce fragmentation, leverage resources, and improve efficiency among alternative transportation systems and services. Some examples of the types of analysis that could be performed include:

1. The needs and desires of different user groups. International visitors, USA recreational users, and regional and local residents have different perspectives and needs. The plan should develop alternative transportation public lands visitor use strategies by visitor market segment.
2. Ways to improve visitor transportation information including improved wayfinding to public lands and alternative transportation guides, both of which could promote alternative transportation options to different market segments.
3. Incentives for transit ridership for each market segment (e.g., reduced fares, park and ride lots, web-based trip planners, etc.).
4. How to improve service to and from Durango – La Plata County Airport, which presents an opportunity to consider how improved alternative transportation service might be used to facilitate visitor mobility without a proliferation of rental cars in the area.
5. Shared use of equipment and staff among different providers, which may reduce total cost and provide better service to all user groups.
6. Opportunities for facilitating tour services in the Durango region could be evaluated with respect to multiple destination travel to cultural attractions (e.g., Mesa Verde, Chimney Rock, Anasazi Heritage Center/Canyon of the Ancients National Monument, San Juan Skyway).
7. Ways to integrate, enhance, and promote existing alternative transportation services, which appear to have untapped potential. Opportunities exist with respect to improving signage, providing more widespread information about schedule, stops, fares, and payment options for transit services.

8. Opportunities to provide better information and signage on trails, and at trailheads. An example of such an opportunity is improved signage and information at the western terminus of the Colorado Trail.

The plan should consider multiple planning horizons and financial contingencies by creating mobility policies and programs with respect to: immediate needs (now-2 years), intermediate needs (2-5 years) and longer term (10- 20 years). The long range study needs to take a serious look at financial feasibility and sustainability and explore various ways and means to finance transit service at price points commensurate with various market segments.

Federal land management agencies in the Durango area are encouraged by the TAG team to apply for a Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks program planning grant to develop this plan. While such a grant is not guaranteed, development of a comprehensive alternative transportation plan is eligible for a grant.

4.3. Perform Detailed Study of Options for Accessing the Colorado Trail from Durango

The 500 mile Colorado Trail starts in Denver and terminates at Junction Creek Road just outside the City of Durango. The trail and the terminus are used by several different user groups. First, there are through hikers and bikers who may need to get from the terminus to Durango after a long ride or hike. Another group includes mountain bicyclists who are visiting the Durango area or live nearby who want to ride on the Colorado Trail. These two user groups are joined by users such as families and dog walkers who may access the trail for short distances.

While each group has unique needs they all need to get conveniently and safely to and from the trail terminus. Today, the only way users know of to get to or from the terminus is to ride or walk along Junction Creek Road or drive and park in the parking lot at the terminus. Through hikers and bikers need information on what to do and where to go when they reach the terminus as well as a safe means of getting from there to Durango. Local mountain bikers need a safe and convenient means of getting to the terminus from other trails in the area as well as to and from local starting points. Families and dog walkers need a safe and convenient way to get to the terminus and use the trail for a few hours.

Local perception is that Junction Creek Road (CR 204 and FS 171) is unsafe for pedestrians and bicyclists to use as access to the Colorado Trail terminus. La Plata County has planned and designed an improvement to the road with widened shoulders, but immediate funding is not available to implement the redesign.

The TAG recommends that non-motorized and/or transit access options for access to and from the Colorado Trail be considered in addition to the road improvement. One option would be to extend Durango Transit service to the trail terminus and maybe beyond to the Junction Creek Campground and picnic area. Service to the campground may provide users access to a second less congested entry to the trail as well as an opportunity for campers to get to and from town without an automobile. If service is not extended from the current terminus, clear directions to the nearest bus stop and where scheduled service is be available to long distance hikers and bikers who arrive at the terminus.

The Junction Creek terminus parking facility appears to be heavily utilized. The TAG also recommends that the USFS redesign the Junction Creek terminus parking facility to enhance

parking management and to improve signing to better serve all the user groups. The signing could include interpretive information as well as information about nearby camping, bicycle trail connections and transit service.

4.4. Determine the Relevance of SMART 160 to Public Lands Visitor Access

Durango is well on the way to having an excellent bikeway and pedestrian system for recreational and transportation use. The ART provides an excellent north south spine for bicycle and pedestrian travel. The Durango community recognizes that there currently are not sufficient paved east west trails providing access to the ART or adjacent public lands. The planned SMART 160 Trail currently under construction will provide a comparable east-west trail that will interconnect with the ART and has potential to connect to various public lands around Durango, including the BLM's Grandview Ridge, BOR's Lake Nighthorse, and public lands west of Durango.

One of the major challenges for the SMART 160 Trail is safe options for crossing US 550/US 160, which is a major high volume thoroughfare. A solution to this crossing issue may be eligible for a Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks program grant if it will provide alternative transportation access for public lands in the Durango area. However, a Transit in Parks application should make clear how this crossing relates to public lands access. The TAG recommends that the relevance of this crossing to public lands be analyzed and documented and that expected usage for public lands visitation and commuting are documented as well. In addition to use, the analysis should address the transportation utility of the crossing and how it provides connectivity among public lands resources.

5. APPENDIX A – ONLINE RESOURCES

Bureau of Land Management San Juan/San Miguel Final Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement

http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/BLM_Programs/land_use_planning/rmp/archived/sj-sm.htm

US Forest Service. The San Juan National Forest works with the Bureau of Land Management as the San Juan Public Lands Center to jointly manage National Forest and BLM lands under Service First authority. <http://gis.fs.fed.us/r2/sanjuan/projects/fmp.shtml>

2010 City of Durango Land Use Code Update White Papers

<http://www.durangocodeupdate.com/library.htm>

City of Durango Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping

<http://www.durangogov.org/gis.cfm>

Durango Transit Information. <http://www.durangogov.org/transit/>

6. APPENDIX B - NOVEMBER 2010 TAG AGENDA AND MEETING PARTICIPANTS

Durango Area Alternative Transportation TAG Meeting November 8-10, 2010

Monday, November 8 – San Juan Public Lands Center (PLC)

15 Burnett Court, Tech Center, Durango, CO 81301

- 0830 Welcome **(Pauline; Phil)**
- 0845 Overview of Durango area public lands and trail system **(Core Team)**
- 0915 Discussion of transportation issues **(Core; Amber; La Plata County; CDOT; BOR)**
- 1000 Break
- 1015 Goals and objectives work session **(Phil to lead)**
- 1145 Field Review of Public Lands Transportation and Trails: **(Core Team leads)**
(Bag Lunch on Trolley: pick up at PLC for tour)
- 1230 Arrive at Colorado Trail at Junction Creek
- 1330 Dalla Mountain Park trailhead
- 1400 Three Springs to look at trail
- 1430 Arrive at Sale Barn Trailhead
- 1515 Head to Santa Rita Park
- 1530 Meet at Centennial Shopping Center. Take CR 210 to Lake Nighthorse
- 1630 Alternate locations, if any
- 1730 Return to PLC

Dinner on own

Tuesday, November 9 – Durango Discovery Museum Education Building

133 Camino del Rio, SW of the intersection of Main Ave and Camino del Rio. Look for the smokestack.

- 0830 Stakeholder Prep Session **(Phil and TAG)**
- 0930 Agency Stakeholder Meeting **(Phil and TAG)**
- 1130 Lunch
- 1300 TAG Team Work Session, Part 1 (TAG recommendations and next steps)
- 1600 Dinner at Carver's
- 1900 Public Stakeholders at PLC **(TAG and Core)**
- 2100 End of Day

Wednesday, November 10 – Durango Discovery Museum Education Building

- 0900 TAG Team Work Session, Part II (More recommendations; Annotated outline of Report)
- 1200 Lunch
- 1300 Out Brief to management and staff **(TAG)**

1430 THANKS FOR COMING!!!

Durango TAG Team:

- Phil Shapiro - Transit in parks Technical Assistance Center (TAC)
- Rebecca Gleason - TAC
- Ben Rasmussen – VOLPE Center
- Floyd Thompson - National USFS Rep (8th and 9th only)
- Adam Schildge - National FTA Rep
- Larry Squires - FTA Region 8
- Laurie Miskimins - Federal Lands Highways Central Federal Lands
- Hugh Osborne - National Park Service- RTCA

Durango Core Team:

- Pauline Ellis (Travel Management/Partnerships Coordinator, FS/BLM) Point of contact
- Kevin Hall (Director of Natural Lands, Trails and Sustainability for City of Durango)
- Mary Monroe (Director, Trails 2000)

Local Leaders:

San Juan Public Lands

- Mark Stiles, Forest Supervisor/Center Manager
- Bill Dunkelberger, Deputy Forest Supervisor/Associate Center Manager
- Ben Martinez, Engineering Staff Officer
- Jeff Hyatt, Acting Recreation Program Leader
- Jed Botsford (Columbine Recreation Staff)
- Matt Janowiak (Columbine District Ranger/Field Manager)

Other Federal, State and Local Agency Partners

- Mark Chiarito, Bureau of Reclamation
- David Valentinelli, CDOT Off-systems Engineer
- Laurie Blantz, CDOT Planner
- Shawn Nau, La Plata County Manager (invited)
- Jim Davis, La Plata County Engineer
- Jason Miner, La Plata County Planner(invited)
- Cathy Metz, City of Durango Parks and Recreation Director
- Amber Blake, City of Durango Multi-modal Coordinator
- Patt Dorsey, Colorado Division of Wildlife Area Manager

Other Important Community Partners

- Katie Nelson, DHM-Consultant for Nighthorse Lake
- Russ Howard , Animas-La Plata Operation and Maintenance Association
- Sarah McClain, Durango Area Tourism Office
- Jack Llewelyn, Chamber of Commerce (invited)
- Ken Francis, Fort Lewis College Office of Community Affairs

Contact Information for TAG and Core Teams:

Pauline Ellis
Travel Management/Partnerships Coordinator
San Juan Public Lands
15 Burnett Court
Durango, CO 81301
970-385-1225 peellis@fs.fed.us

Kevin Hall
Development Manager, City of Durango
Parks, Open Space and Trails
949 E. 2nd Avenue
Durango, Colorado 81301
970-375-7315 HallKS@ci.durango.co.us

Mary Monroe
Director, Trails 2000
PO Box 3868 | Durango, CO 81302 P: 970-259-4682 | mary@trails2000.org www.trails2000.org

Rebecca Gleason, P.E. Research Engineer
Mobility and Public Transportation
Western Transportation Institute (WTI)
Montana State University
P.O. Box 174250
Bozeman, MT 59717-4250
(406)-994-6541 Rebecca.Gleason@coe.montana.edu

Phil Shapiro
Principal, Shapiro Transportation Consulting
(301) 593-0563 Work (301) 351-1809 Mobile Pshapiro.stc@gmail.com
102 Claybrook Dr.
Silver Spring, MD 20902

Laurie Miskimins, Transportation Planner
FHWA-Central Federal Lands Highway Division
12300 West Dakota Avenue
Lakewood, CO 80228
Tel: (720) 963-3455 laurie.miskimins@dot.gov

Hugh E. Osborne
Community Planner
Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance
National Park Service
303-969-2781

Floyd A. Thompson, III: ASLA/NARRP National Program Leader Sustainable Tourism, Recreation Planning & Scenic Byways USDA Forest Service, RHVR 201 14th Street, SW, Room 4C Washington, D C 20250 email: fthompson02@fs.fed.us website: www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/tourism (202) 205-1423, FAX 1145

Contact Information for TAG and Core Teams, continued:

Larry Squires
Community Planner
FTA Region 8
720-963-3300
Larry.squires@dot.gov

Benjamin Rasmussen
Community Planner
benjamin.rasmussen@dot.gov
617-494-2768 (w)
617-571-3695 (c)
U.S. DOT Volpe Center
55 Broadway
Cambridge, MA 02142
<http://www.volpe.dot.gov/>

Adam R. Schildge
FTA Parks program administrator
Presidential Management Fellow / Transportation Program Analyst
Office of Transit Programs
Federal Transit Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
202-366-0778
Adam.schildge@dot.gov

Anticipated Meeting Participants List

Monday am Overview, Goals and Objectives, PLC: TAG Team; Core team; Matt Janowiak; Jed Botsford and Jeff Hyatt (SJPL); David Valentinelli (CDOT); Amber Blake (City); Mark Chiarito (BOR); Jim Davis invited (La Plata County); Patt Dorsey invited (Colorado Division of Wildlife), Benerito Martinez and Bill Dunkelberger invited (SJPL).

Monday Field Visit: Add Dave, our BOR Nighthorse Lake Tour Guide; Katie Nelson, (DHM-Consultant for Nighthorse Lake); Russ Howard (Animas-La Plata Operation and Maintenance Association) during Nighthorse Lake visit. Patt Dorsey (CDOW)

Tuesday am Expanded Stakeholders' Group @ Durango Discovery Museum : Additional Agency Partners: Sarah McClain (Durango Area Tourism Office), Jack Llewelyn invited (Chamber of Commerce), Cathy Metz (City of Durango), Ken Francis (Fort Lewis College Office of Community Affairs), Jason Mininger invited (La Plata County Planner), Patt Dorsey invited (CDOW)

Tuesday pm @ Durango Discovery Museum: TAG ONLY workgroup

Tuesday 4-6pm: Dinner at Carver's

Tuesday 7-9pm: Public Meeting, PLC: TAG Team; Core team

Wednesday am @ Durango Discovery Museum: TAG ONLY workgroup

Wednesday pm Management Out Brief @ Durango Discovery Museum:

Matt Janowiak, Jed Botsford, Mark Stiles (tentative), Bill Dunkelberger (invited), Ben Martinez (invited), BOR, CDOW, County, City and CDOT Representatives

Durango Colorado 11/8/10 Monday 8:30 am meeting Participants

	Name	Title/affiliation
1	Katie Nelson	DHM Design - Lake Nighthorse
2	Mark Chiarito	USBR- Durango
3	Larry Squires	FTA/Community Planner Region 8
4	Rebecca Gleason	Research Engineer/ Western Transportation Institute
5	Ben Rasmussen	Community Planner/ US DOT Volpe Center
6	Ben Martinez	USFS San Juan Public Lands
7	Laurie Miskimins	Transportation Planner/ FHWA Central Federal Lands
8	Phil Shapiro	Principal, Shapiro Transportation Consulting
9	Adam Schildge	FTA Parks Program Administrator
10	Hugh Osborne	Community Planner NPS RTCA
11	David R. Valentinelli	CDOT Region 5 off system engineer
12	Floyd A. Thompson	USFS National Program Leader Sustainable Tourism, Recreation Planning & Scenic Byways
13	Jeff Hyatt	USFS San Juan Public Lands Center
14	Laurie Blanz	CDOT Region 5 planner
15	Mary Monroe	Director Trails 2000
16	Kevin Hall	Director of Natural Lands, Trails and Sustainability, City of Durango
17	Amber Blake	City of Durango Multimodal Coordinator
18	Pauline Ellis	USFS San Juan Public Lands Center/ Travel Management/Partnerships Coordinator

Durango Colorado 11/10/10 Tuesday Agency Stakeholder 9:30- 11:30 am Meeting Participants

Name	Title/affiliation
Rebecca Gleason	Research Engineer/ Western Transportation Institute
Sarah McLean	Sales Manager - DATO
Patt Dorsey	Area Wildlife Manager/ Colorado Division of Wildlife
Larry Squires	community planner/FTA region 8

Mark Chiarito	USBR- Durango
Katie Nelson	DHM Design - Lake Nighthorse
Floyd A. Thompson	USFS National Program Leader Sustainable Tourism, Recreation Planning & Scenic Byways
Laurie Miskimins	Transportation Planner/ FHWA Central Federal Lands
Cathy Metz	Parks and Recreation Director, City of Durango
David R. Valentinelli	CDOT Region 5 off system engineer
Jeff Hyatt	USFS/BLM San Juan Public Lands Center
Jim Davis	La Plata County
Ben Rasmussen	USDOT Volpe Center
Adam Schildge	FTA Parks Program Administrator
Daryl Crites	Trails 2000
Kevin Hall	Director of Natural Lands, Trails and Sustainability, City of Durango
Mary Monroe	Director Trails 2000
Hugh Osborne	Community Planner NPS RTCA
Jed Botsford	BLM San Juan PLC
Pauline Ellis	USFS San Juan Public Lands Center/ Travel Management /Partnerships Coordinator
Phil Shapiro	Principal, Shapiro Transportation Consulting

Durango Colorado Public meeting 11/9/10 7pm-9pm meeting Participants

Name	Title/affiliation
Sandy Young	SCIF, STPLC RAC committee
Mary Rothchild	Public stakeholder
Laurie Miskimins	Transportation Planner/ FHWA Central Federal Lands
Floyd A. Thompson	USFS National Program Leader Sustainable Tourism, Recreation Planning & Scenic Byways
Larry Squires	community planner/FTA region 8
Hugh Osborne	Community Planner NPS RTCA
Ben Rasmussen	US DOT Volpe Center
David Bruzzese	Mercy Regional Medical Center
Ernie Norris	Colorado Trail Foundation
Larry Eads	Colorado Trail Foundation
Randy Sipes	Durango Mountain Resort Transportation Director
Rebecca Gleason	Research Engineer/ Western Transportation Institute
Phil Shapiro	Principal, Shapiro Transportation Consulting
Adam Schildge	FTA Parks Program Administrator

Durango Colorado TAG Outbrief Wednesday 11/11/10 Participants

Name	Title/affiliation
Phil Shapiro	Principal, Shapiro Transportation Consulting
Rebecca Gleason	Research Engineer/ Western Transportation Institute
Laurie Miskimins	Transportation Planner/ FHWA Central Federal Lands
Adam Schildge	FTA Parks Program Administrator
David R. Valentinelli	CDOT Region 5 off system engineer
Jeff Hyatt	USFS/BLM San Juan Public Lands Center
Ben Martinez	USFS San Juan Public Lands
David Bruzzese	Mercy Regional Medical Center
Jed Botsford	BLM San Juan PLC
Jim Davis	La Plata County
Matt Janowiak	USFS/BLM
Ben Rasmussen	USDOT Volpe Center
Mary Monroe	Director Trails 2000
Hugh Osborne	Community Planner NPS RTCA
Mark Stiles	USFS/BLM
Kevin Hall	Director of Natural Lands, Trails and Sustainability, City of Durango
Amber Blake	Multimodal coordinator
Pauline Ellis	USFS San Juan Public Lands Center/ Travel Management/Partnerships Coordinator

7. APPENDIX C – MONTANA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION/ TRANSIT REGULATION REFORM

The following excerpt is from *An Evaluation of the Transportation Component of the Real Choices Systems Change Grant in Montana*. By David Kack, Research Associate and Amy Galt, Research Assistant, Western Transportation Institute. Prepared for the Montana Transportation Partnership And Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services January 2006. Pages 29 and 30.

5.1. House Bill 273 (Legislative Reform)

As noted in Chapter 4, a primary effort surrounding the Ravalli County project was to change the laws/regulations concerning Public Service Commission (PSC) oversight of certain transportation providers in Montana. Before House Bill 273, only certain types of transportation services were exempt from oversight from the PSC. As noted in Montana Code Annotated 69-12-102 (MCA 69-12-102) [4], some of those exemptions included:

“(h) the operation of:

(i) a transportation system by a municipality or transportation district as provided in Title 7, chapter 14, part 2; or

(ii) municipal bus service pursuant to Title 7, chapter 14, part 44;...

(k) the transportation of disabled or elderly persons provided by private, nonprofit organizations...”

BitterRoot Bus is operated by Ravalli County Council on Aging, and provided service to the general public as well as persons with disabilities and elderly persons. Therefore, BitterRoot Bus had oversight from the Public Service Commission. This was in addition to the oversight provided by the Montana Department of Transportation. With the oversight from the PSC came related rules and procedures. The one procedure that was most troublesome for BitterRoot Bus was the procedure that dealt with making changes to fares and service. When BitterRoot Bus wanted to make a change, it first had to provide written notification to the Public Service Commission. The PSC would then send on the proposed changes to all transportation providers who were under the PSC’s oversight (including taxi companies and other “for profit” agencies). Other providers could protest the proposed changes, and if that occurred, a hearing would have to be scheduled to discuss the issues with the proposed changes. Unfortunately, there was a taxi company operating in Ravalli County that protested almost every change proposed by the BitterRoot Bus. Even if the changes were eventually allowed, the time and money spent dealing with the process meant that the BitterRoot Bus could not provide the service to its clients in a timely and cost effective manner.

In addition to BitterRoot Bus, there were other public and specialized transportation systems that had to deal with the effects of this law (MCA 69-12-102). Given that one goal of the Systems Change Grant Project was to make it easier for transportation systems to coordinate with each other, it became apparent that a change would need to be made, so that PSC oversight was eliminated from certain transportation providers. With support from the Montana Independent Living Centers and their main lobbyist, June Hermanson, House Bill 273 was passed by the Montana Legislature, and signed by the Governor in March 2005.

In short, House Bill 273 [5] exempted more transportation providers from PSC oversight. A summary of the additional exemptions includes:

“(iii) any public transportation system recognized by the Montana Department of Transportation as a federal transit administration provider pursuant to 49 U.S.C. 5311;

(k) the transportation of persons provided by private, nonprofit organizations, including those recognized by the Montana Department of Transportation as federal transit administration providers pursuant to 49 U.S.C. 5310.”

With House Bill 273 becoming law, all rural general public transportation providers (FTA Section 5311) and FTA Section 5310 providers (senior citizens and persons with disabilities) became exempt from Public Service Commission oversight. Due to the fact that this bill did not become law until March 2005, the full impacts of its passage have yet to be realized. However, several changes that have occurred with various transit systems in Montana, show that this bill has already had a major impact on public and specialized transportation systems in Montana.

Rubel, Thom, *Improving Public Transportation Service through Effective Statewide Coordination*. Prepared by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices.

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