



US 50 Little Blue Creek Canyon Information Sheet



COLORADO
Department of Transportation

Project Overview

- Due to a high number of accidents and fatalities over the last decade, a 4-mile section (mile post 123 to mile post 127) of US 50 between Gunnison and Montrose, known as the Little Blue Canyon, will undergo safety improvements.
- The new design will improve the driving experience with wider shoulders, improved guardrail, better sight distances, and a more reliable travel time.
- To maintain worker safety and the safety of the traveling public, closing US 50 for certain work activities is necessary.
- CDOT was awarded a \$20 million Federal Lands Access Program grant through Central Federal Lands (CFL) to complete this \$40 million project.
- Construction is anticipated to begin in February 2021 and continue through April 2023.

Travel Impacts

- First year of construction – February 2021 through April 2022
 - Rock blasting, securing rock excavation areas, and retaining wall construction is planned during the first year; roadway closures ensure safety of the traveling public and construction workers
 - February 2021 to April 2021
 - Single-lane, alternating traffic operations as necessary; delays are anticipated
 - April 2021 through April 2022
 - Single-lane, alternating traffic operations in the morning, midday, and evening during the following times:
 - 6:30 – 8:30 AM
 - 12:30 – 1:30 PM
 - 5:30 – 7:30 PM
 - Fully open on the weekends to two-way traffic (5:30 PM Friday to 8:30 AM Monday)
 - Weeknight full roadway closures from 7:30 PM to 6:30 AM, early April to mid-October, weather dependent
 - West end weekday closures to be completed by the end of July 2021, then single-lane, alternating traffic operations on weekdays to allow access to Arrowhead from Montrose; weeknight closures still anticipated
- Second year of construction
 - May 2022 to April 2023
 - Single-lane, alternating traffic operations during weekday daytime hours
 - Fully open on the weekends to two-way traffic (7:30 PM Friday to 6:30 AM Monday)
 - Weeknight full roadway closures from 7:30 PM to 6:30 AM, early April 2022 to mid-October, weather dependent
- Project is expected to take two years to complete; however, if a third year of work becomes required, travel restrictions will be similar to what is planned for the second year.
- When US 50 is closed, passenger vehicles and small trucks can use SH 92 as a local alternate route. All other trucks and recreation vehicles over 65 feet in length will need to use I-70 to the north, US 160 to the south, or wait for one of the planned openings. Please allow additional time due to the restricted open times and single-lane operations.
- Vehicles carrying hazardous materials will need to use I-70 to the north, US 160 to the south, or wait for one of the planned openings. Please allow additional time due to the restricted open times and single-lane operations.
- All of the above is subject to change once a contractor is selected.
- Additional information can be found on the CFL project website: <https://highways.dot.gov/federal-lands/projects/co/little-blue>

Questions can be directed to:
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US 50 Little Blue Creek Canyon Frequently Asked Questions

Why is this project even necessary?

Between 2000 and 2018, 230 crashes have occurred in this area with 67 injuries, 156 instances of property damage, and eight fatalities. This, coupled with the fact it can be hard to negotiate large, slow-moving recreation vehicles and trucks through the canyon, makes the canyon a challenging driving environment for everyone. This project is designed to make the canyon safer and improve the driving experience between Gunnison and Montrose.

Why is it necessary to close US 50?

This project requires blasting rock from several sections of the canyon walls along US 50 and removing loose rocks and material after each blast. Due to the tight right-of-way in the canyon corridor and the unpredictable nature of rock blasting and scaling operations, US 50 needs to be closed to allow the contractor to safely blast the rock without causing harm to the traveling public.

Why did Central Federal Lands (CFL) decide against doing work only during night closures? That sounds more convenient for nearby residents and businesses.

After evaluating all the options and considering the type of work needing to be done, CFL determined the project would be too dangerous to complete only at night. Rock blasting, in particular, is extremely difficult to do at night when darkness can obscure loose rocks and material from eyesight creating unsafe situations for workers and the traveling public. By working day and night, crews will be able to do rock blasting and scaling work safely during daylight hours and truck hauling operations during nighttime hours to remove the material from the canyon.

Will cycling be allowed during the closure?

The roadway will be reduced to dirt and gravel in places during construction; therefore, cycling on US 50 will not be allowed.

Will oversized trucks be allowed during the closure?

CFL and CDOT will allow oversized trucks through the closure whenever possible; however, lane width restrictions preventing oversized travel will be necessary during some phases of work. The highway will be fully opened to two-way traffic on the weekends allowing oversized vehicles through the project area.

Will access to recreation areas be maintained during the closure?

Yes, access to recreation areas along US 50 will be maintained throughout construction. Depending on construction activities that are occurring, motorists may face delays getting in and out of these recreation areas. More specific information will be determined after a contractor is selected.

How will emergency response vehicles get through the project when the highway is closed?

Access for emergency response vehicles will be maintained throughout construction and project managers will have direct communication with emergency responders needing to travel through the project.

How will the project communicate to residents, businesses, and the traveling public during construction?

The project team will use various communication methods to keep the public updated during construction. This will include sharing information through communication channels used in Montrose and Gunnison, using electronic message boards along the road, sending out email/text message updates, and setting up a project website and information hotline.

The main detour route is I-70; what if I-70 is closed due to a rockslide in Glenwood Canyon or some other major incident?

The US 50 project will immediately cease construction operations that impact traffic, suspend full closures, and open the highway to single-lane, alternating traffic conditions until the incident on I-70 is cleared and I-70 is reopened.

If I live along US 50 (e.g., in the Arrowhead development) will I have access to my home?

Yes, access for residents will be maintained throughout construction. Depending on construction activities that are occurring, residents may need to wait when leaving their property or returning home. More specific information about wait times will be determined once a contractor is selected. Access to Arrowhead will be provided on a limited basis until July 31, 2021. After July 31, 2021, access will be provided via single-lane, alternating traffic operations.

How will mail and deliveries for residents and businesses near the project be maintained?

Project leaders are working with USPS, FedEx, UPS, and other delivery companies to identify the best ways to maintain postal and package service on a regular basis for all affected residents and businesses, including Arrowhead. More details will be available closer to the start of construction.