VAIL HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION, INC.

To: Alan Kosloff, Board of Directors, and Membership
From: Jim Lamont
Date: March 24, 2008
RE: Town of Vail Evacuation Plan and I-70 Closures.
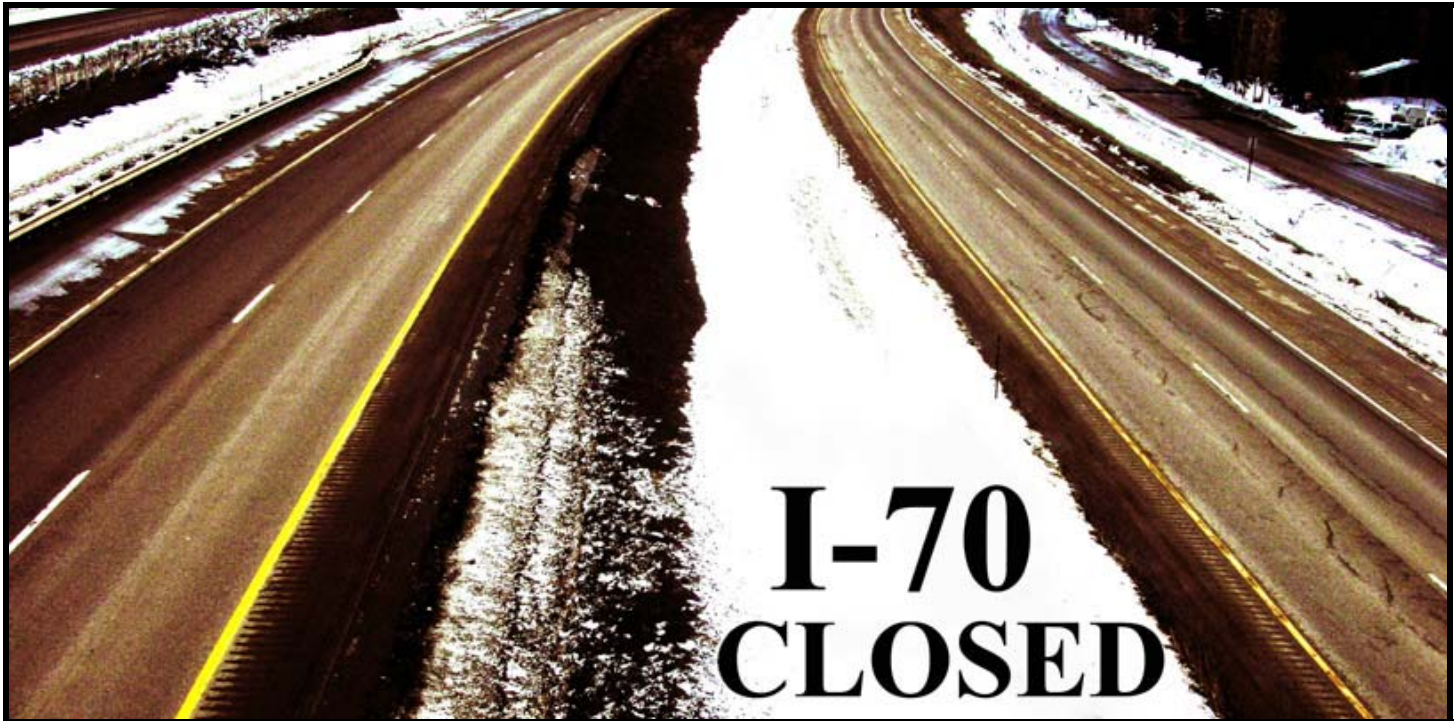
Summary: This winter's two major traffic gridlock events have demonstrated the deficiencies of emergency evacuation preparedness in Vail. Public officials are being urged to improve their efforts by the time wild fire season begins. The public is aware that the community's emergency services, including other responsible local and state agencies, are not as prepared for managing a traffic crisis as once thought.

The Association recommends that authorities:

- Improve cell phone, Internet and other types of public media including upgraded television monitoring and reporting of traffic conditions in Vail and along I-70 in Eagle County.

- Provide infrastructure to redirect traffic and to communicate to the general public in real time Interstate/roadway closures, evacuation routes and instructions, including the potential to one-way Frontage Road traffic and reverse flow I-70 east or west bound lanes to provide for four lanes of out bound evacuation traffic.

- Enforce traffic law prohibiting motorists from blocking intersections.

- Divert non-local eastbound I-70 traffic further to the west where transcontinental traffic can use alternative routes to avoid lengthy closures of Vail and other high mountain passes.

- Consult with interested public and private parties throughout Vail, Eagle County and region in formulating their emergency response procedures, facilities and communications with the public.

- Remove sources and defend against wild fire and traffic blockage threats in all areas of the Town of Vail.

The Association continues working with its constituencies to formulate and convey constructive proposals to public officials. Please forward comments and concerns to the Vail Town Council with a copy to the Association. Vail Town Council Addresses are: email address - towncouncil@vailgov.com U.S. mail address - 75 S. Frontage Rd., Vail, CO 81657.

Introduction: Responsible public agencies have not demonstrated that their emergency evacuation plans are fully workable and operational. Over the course of nearly a month, with the first event occurring New Year's Eve, Vail was twice completely gridlocked due to hazardous weather closures of I-70. Massive traffic jams lasted for several hours, the largest for more than 24 hours. The second event resulted in the heart attack death of a motorist because emergency response vehicles were blocked by the traffic jam from getting to the victim.

In each event, traffic management authorities were unable to adequately communicate with the public or rapidly deploy enough personnel to keep intersections and roadways from being clogged. Manpower alone cannot be depended upon to restore order. It is important to know that most emergency responders commute to Vail, some from as far away as Denver. Massive traffic jams in Vail prevent backup personnel from even getting to their posts during an emergency.

In the first event on New Year's Eve, CDOT publicly announced via the mass media, before informing Vail officials, the reopening of I-70. Stranded motorists rushed to get on the Interstate, only to find the Interstate and on-ramps still barricaded by Vail police. Within minutes the Main Vail roundabout filled with cars, coming to a complete standstill. The Interstate and Frontage Roads quickly backed up becoming a massive traffic jam that soon gridlocked the West Vail roundabout as well.

On-scene witnesses at the Main Vail roundabout reported the police response was delayed and inadequate, but valiant. It has been some public safety officials' opinion that controlling traffic through roundabouts is impractical, if not impossible and gridlock is inevitable. During the second gridlock incident, the inevitability argument was dispelled when Vail fire department personnel took the initiative by personally directing traffic and clearing the roundabout. Firefighters saw the importance of getting traffic moving because Vail's main fire station was cut off from the rest of the community.

Frequent I-70 closures continue through the winter and follow a summer of chronic highway blockages due to construction that have also resulted in loss of motorists' lives. Closures and blockages cause significant economic damage as well. An economist reports that I-70 closures account for an average loss of $700,000 to $850,000 per hour to the state economy.

Critics worry that if public officials are unable to manage I-70 road closures, why should the community have confidence that they are prepared to manage a mass evacuation. While there is plenty of blame

being passed around, it is consistently noted by local officials that the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) has been slow to lead and engage with local emergency responders, law enforcement and the public to improve the reliability of the state and federal highway system in Eagle County.

 Fire Department Recommendations: Vail's newly appointed Fire Chief has recommended an upgrade of Vail's fire fighting and emergency response capabilities. These actions will be matched with a stepped up effort to reduce the wild fire threat by removing the multitude of diseased and dead trees from public and private property throughout the surrounding community. However, these propositions do little, as yet, to improve emergency public communications and traffic management.

Recommendations are that the Main Vail Fire Station remains in its present location and work begins with haste on a comprehensive renovation. A similar proposal is being made for the East Vail Station. The decision to speed the building and manning of a new station in West Vail is also affirmed. The location of each of the fire stations improves overall responsiveness, but emergency vehicles are not free from being trapped by gridlock.

Traffic Management: Traffic growth on I-70 is escalating the swiftness that Vail's blockages occur. During episodes of required tire chaining or road closures in Vail, large trucks are allowed to congregate alongside Interstate 70 and on the Frontage Roads. Roadways can rapidly become obstructed when hundreds of passenger vehicles are added to the mix. Once blocked, the traffic jam spreads down valley toward Eagle-Vail and Avon. This circumstance leads to a conclusion that traffic enforcement officials must begin aggressively enforcing traffic regulations that prohibit motorists from entering and blocking an intersection.

Vail for its part needs to reassess its roadways and traffic management systems. It would benefit from installing infrastructure and procedures that would keep traffic flowing at all times. Traffic control officials must enforce regulations that discipline motorists who block roundabouts and intersections. Some suggest that emergency traffic signals and real time variable message signs need to be installed in the roundabouts and at critical locations along the Frontage Roads. Others advise the high priority need to construct the Simba Run I-70 underpass and expansions of the Frontage Roads, which will allow direct high volume vehicular access between Vail and West Vail without use of either the West or Main Vail roundabouts. Concern also exists for finding ways to quickly reverse eastbound lanes on I-70 back through Dowd Junction to handle a mass evacuation of Vail.

Critics claim that CDOT needs to be more proactive in accepting responsibility for improving traffic management at a regional level. Officials have yet to come to agreement on stopping or redirecting Denver bound traffic on I-70 in stages further to the west of Vail. In the second New Year Vail Pass closure, traffic was stopped at Avon, allowing Vail traffic to be cleared. Once committed eastbound on I-70 there are few options, north or south, for traffic to avoid Vail or other Colorado high-mountain passes.

High volume traffic turnarounds have been suggested at critical locations on I-70, redirecting transcontinental traffic to be dispersed to waiting areas or onto alternative routes. Some proposed that eastbound transcontinental vehicle traffic should be redirected as far west as mid-Utah. There, I-70 joins with I-15, where traffic could be diverted and continue on the Great Basin prairie route north to I-80, which traverses southern Wyoming, giving access to Denver by I-25.

Communications: Stopping or redirecting traffic requires conveying detailed and timely communication from CDOT and local authorities. Vail and Eagle County are the only areas not served

by the I-70 real time fiber optic television traffic monitoring system. The system is locally available to the public via cable television and universally on the Internet. Vail itself should install real time variable messaging signs or Internet based television monitoring for its key intersections and roadways. Until they are installed, emergency services and the public cannot adequately respond when traffic congestion happens. There are multiple sources of media information available that are useful though at times frustrating because of spotty service or deficient coverage. These should be improved and updated as well. Each has its limitations ranging from inadequate content and investment to lack of public awareness of availability.

Emergency Shelters: Integrated with the communication system is the need to coordinate the directing of stranded and evacuated motorists to shelter. Communities need to be advised by responsible agencies that they are having traffic directed to their vicinity and to prepare emergency shelters accordingly. The demand for shelter will exponentially grow the more that transcontinental traffic is allowed to proceed into the impacted area. Currently, emergency lodging and food are provided by small service organizations; preparedness for large-scale evacuation remains problematic.

Conclusion: Success or failure in a community-wide emergency evacuation or traffic crisis hinges on people knowing what is expected of them. Public officials point out that training for Vail and Eagle County's emergency first responders has occurred. However, has adequate on-going training been passed along to those responsible for guiding hotel guests, some without personal transportation, away from danger? How effective can the public bus system be in moving hundreds of people in a crisis? What and where are the public shelters of last resort? Is there a multi-source media program in place to continually remind the public how to respond? Has the public been made aware of shortcomings in the response system, so that they can advocate for needed improvements?

These are questions being raised of government authorities by those who want to avoid learning painful lessons after the fact.