



If there is ample parking in adjacent buildings, do we need on-street parking?



Noon, Friday, 1/6/17. Parking in West Vail North Frontage Road shopping center parking structure. These and other private facilities are generally underutilized.

VAIL HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION, INC.

Vail Parking/Transportation Needs: Gridlock at Every Turn

February 17, 2017

Does An Opportunity Await? The Vail Homeowners Association has been successful in getting the Vail Town Council to begin to address the community's transportation and parking issues. A task force has been established to study and propose solutions, the specifics as to areas of research, budget, time table and reporting have not yet been made public. If managed correctly, this could be a real opportunity to develop a comprehensive plan and policies to address Vail's present and future transportation and parking needs. Whether that happens remains to be seen, as the tilt of the representation on the task force will be commercial, even though the full spectrum of transportation and parking issues go well beyond those of business interests. Real and lasting solutions should not only serve business needs but, also, improve public safety and benefit the entire community.

Vail's Parking Needs. It has long been assumed that Vail needs more parking facilities. As a starting point, the new Task Force should undertake an assessment of Vail's present and future parking needs. That would necessarily involve a realistic examination of the carrying capacity of the Town. During the first half century of the Town's existence, Vail was growing, so there was little need to be concerned about ultimate capacities or plans for when the Town reached full build-out. That is no longer the case. There is virtually no vacant land left, and while some growth will take place, future development will involve replacement or restoration of existing structures. Likewise, there is reason to believe that the mountain has reached full capacity, at least as far as peak capacities are concerned. So, from a planning standpoint, the Town should be addressing foreseeable needs in that context; i.e., how much more parking does Vail need at full capacity?

Predictable parking needs should drive Vail's parking policies. There is wide consensus that, at present, Vail needs somewhere between 500 to 600 parking spaces. Whether that is correct should be determined in connection with a realistic assessment of the Town's total capacity and needs. That should include not only winter and summer visitor needs but also work force parking. Worker housing is now largely outside of Town, requiring a transportation system and parking to enable those workers to reach their daily employment. Vail has embarked on a ten-year affordable housing plan that could expand parking needs, but it is already on shaky ground; it requires \$30M+ in additional taxes, and recent public meetings have revealed a strong negative attitude toward more taxes for affordable housing. Whatever the outcome of that assessment, it will set the basic planning parameters for parking needs. Only then can realistic solutions be explored.

Another important determination that should be made is exactly how many parking spaces presently exist; i.e., are available through the Town's structures and private facilities. It is generally believed that in the Vail Town Center, there are about 4,600 public and private parking spaces. Of those, 2,400 are controlled by the Town of Vail and 2,200 by the private sector. There are roughly 600 - 1000 additional spaces on the Frontage Roads. Much of the existing private parking is underutilized, but factual data remains to be gathered. The more private spaces available for public parking, the less the demand for additional structures and unsafe Frontage Road parking. In recent years, there has been tension between Vail's need for parking revenue and the utilization of private parking that has operated to prevent full utilization of the private facilities. Future policies should eliminate any such constraints.

On-Street Parking. A comprehensive parking plan must, also, deal with on-street parking and its related public safety, congestion and aesthetics issues. There seems to be consensus that it is only a matter of time before there will be a serious or worse accident. Slowing speeds and putting in pedestrian crosswalks are band aids; they increase congestion by backing traffic up during commuter rush hours. Congestion is already a serious issue due to the crowding which occurs with increasing frequency in both the winter and summer. The most immediate and inexpensive way to reduce congestion and public safety conflicts is by eliminating on-street parking all together. While Vail has permission to utilize Frontage Road on-street parking for 30 days in the winter (and none in the summer) that does not mean that it should. A comprehensive plan is a perfect opportunity to re-examine on-street parking and to end its continued use.



Frontage Road dash, unsafe even in the best of conditions.

Parking Solutions. Looking forward, a comprehensive plan should only address unmet needs. There is no need to build more parking than is needed; that will only serve to overload the Town's capacity and create more congestion. Over the years, various options to increase parking inventory have been considered, but none have been realized. There once was a belief that development at Ever Vail, which was slated to include as much as 400 publically available parking spaces, would satisfy foreseeable needs. Thus far, market conditions have not attracted developers to take on the 12 acre, high-density project, and there are little prospects that will change in the near future. Other potential solutions that have been discussed include: adding a 5th deck to the Lionshead structure, a new building at the Municipal Office complex, which would include parking, and an expanded parking structure at the Vail Valley Medical Center. As far as the Lionshead structure is concerned, there seems

to be some recognition that it will need a complete rebuilding in the not distant future; the Vail Village structure, which is now over 40 years old, may not be far behind. But all of this should await a realistic assessment of Vail's needs.

There is also the potential for inventive approaches to parking. Seasonal variable pricing of parking rates could be used to modulate consumer demand; the Town now has the capability to vary parking rates in their parking structures to whatever formula is desired, but to date, public officials have not been inclined to allow greater flexibility in parking formulas based upon actual usage. Alternatively, the Town could create an on-line reservation system for both public and private parking to better utilize the existing inventory. These are matters that should be considered by the Task Force.

While solutions remain to be developed, one thing is clear... it is past time to hope for a solution and, instead, time to make plans to create one.



Gore Creek Drive and Bridge Street give way to morning delivery trucks as nearby truck terminals go underused.



Delivery Truck Parking. At the same time, there is, also, a need to revisit delivery truck parking in the Town core with further investment in facilitating off-street parking for truck deliveries. More than ample off-street truck docking facilities have been provided in recent years in private redevelopments at the cost of several millions of dollars. More restrictive enforcement options are available but have not been put into practice.

Vail's Transportation Needs. Concurrent with the assessment of Vail's parking needs, there should also be an assessment of Vail's public transportation needs. As Vail reaches full capacity, is there need for more intra-Town public transportation? As the work force moves down valley, is there adequate transportation available to eliminate the need for private vehicle transportation? And, if additional parking facilities are located down valley, as some have advocated, what are the transportation needs to move those individuals to the Town core? These and other questions should be addressed as part of a comprehensive plan.

Is There a Need for Unified Management? There are those who believe that transportation resources need to be placed under a unified management authority, one that could develop innovations such as a central reservation system for parking spaces.

Finances. A comprehensive plan must also address finances. Officials have been tossing funding obligations back and forth for decades, with little or no progress. The Town of Vail has yet to enter into a successful public/private partnership with Vail Resorts to develop additional off-street public parking; even though, there is currently a \$4.3M commitment from VRI for parking facilities. The Town of Vail's bonded debt used to build both the Vail Village and Lionshead Parking Structures was retired in 2012, so those assets are now debt free.

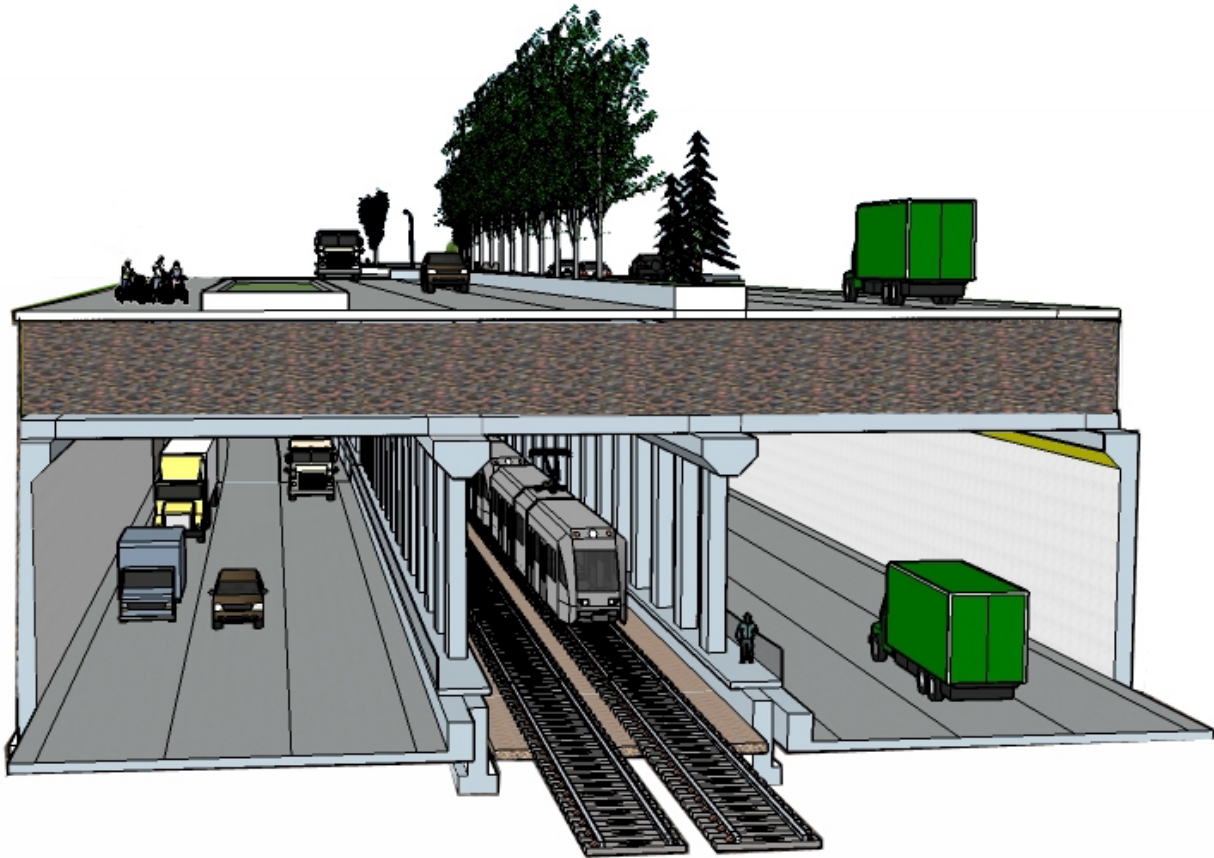
It would be unfortunate if a competition developed for tax dollars between parking and transportation needs on the one hand and affordable housing on the other. Vail's needs are not a zero sum game.



I-70 cover concept recently approved for Denver project.

The I-70 Conundrum. Interstate 70 has been one of Vail's most persistent environmental and noise problems. Any solution to Vail's overall transportation issues should, also, consider the future of the Interstate. Recently, Federal transportation authorities approved a CDOT project that will [expand and cover I-70 through a Denver residential neighborhood](#). The approval could open the door for a similar approach to resolve I-70's issues in Vail.

To that end, the Association, at its recent annual membership meeting, received a [report that adds greater definition and clarity to a potential redevelopment of Vail's portion of I-70](#).

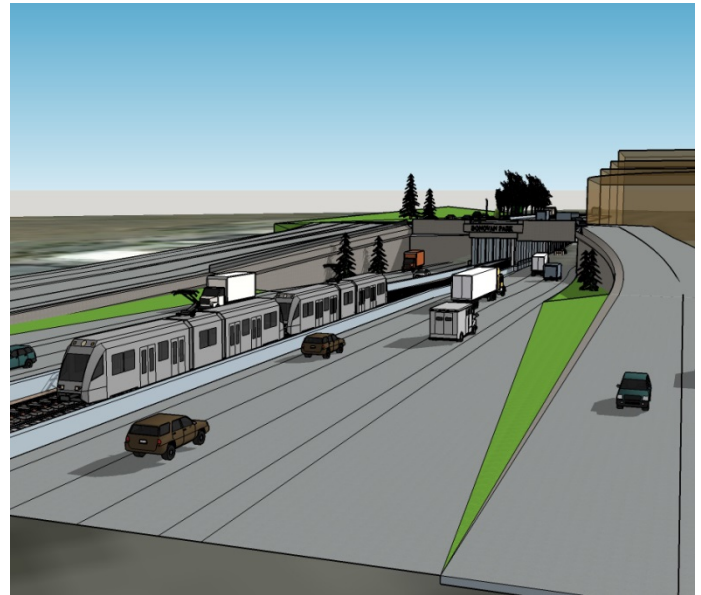


Plan condenses by half the footprint and excavation to bury I-70, cuts hauling cost and limits transport to within building site.

The Bjornson Plan – A Framework for the Future: If Vail were ever to offer an X prize to those who capture and harness Vail's future potential, Sig Bjornson would be a likely candidate. An Eagle county architect with ties to Vail, Bjornson, has created a community-wide futuristic plan for Vail, the first in many decades. His plan applies "transportation" solutions to bridle Vail's biggest dragons: parking, traffic congestion, resident housing, highway noise and environmental degradation. It creates a framework to guide infrastructure investment into the distant future. Bjornson has delivered a vision that is worthy of further evaluation and deliberation. It resolves many of the engineering, construction, public safety and security stumbling blocks of earlier proposals.

The plan compresses the existing width of the I-70 right-of-way by one-third to half, freeing nearly 130 acres for other uses. The design increases the number of vehicular travel lanes, including bikeways, and provides for light rail, mag-lev train lines and their stations. These feats are accomplished by covering I-70 with a series of six bridges, several hundreds of feet in length, between East Vail and Dowd Junction, onto which portions of the Frontage Roads are relocated.

The earlier "cut and cover" concept was rejected because it buried the Interstate in an underground manmade tunnel that required expensive excavation and disruptive earth hauling out of the valley. Bjornson's concept balances areas needing to be excavated with areas needing to be filled, known as a "cut and fill" method. This technique minimizes the extent of costly and disruptive earth hauling by redistributing excavated material within the construction site for each of the six bridges.



I-70 Donovan Park Bridge (above), one of six, which frees CDOT land for other uses, illustrated by colored blocks (below).



Conceptually, a bridge structure that encloses and covers the interstate is built above ground; earth is then filled in along each side. The Frontage Roads are combined into one multilane boulevard located on the surface of the bridge structure. The width of each bridge is minimized by compressing the Interstate and Frontage Road travel lanes onto the smallest footprint possible. Strategically placed gaps are left between the bridges to minimize the cost of replacing existing interchanges and crossings. Bjornson calls his conception the “compress and bridge” approach.

A close analogy would be the Vail Village parking structure. The parking structure was built first, and then, earth was backfilled and bermed around the sides.

The project can be built in phases over many years, or ideally, in conjunction with CDOT expansion plans through Vail. It will likely take several years of detailed study to verify the feasibility of the concept. There is no immediate deadline that would pressure officials to take up consideration of Bjornson’s plan. There is ample time for thoughtful analysis, reflection and discussion. There is no pressing need for officials to stifle these conceptual innovations or any other creative solutions before they can even be thoroughly studied. It is a futile attempt to address the question of “cost/benefit” for an undertaking so distant into the future. The questions for now, and the foreseeable future, should be “how can it be done, and what are the benefits?”

The question of who pays the cost, and how, should take place once there is a willingness to move the project from concept to reality. As opportunities present themselves, it will be possible to weigh the merits of the variety of concepts articulated by Bjornson, particularly in light of technological change, investment and political prospects opened by evolving conditions. In the interim, what will be necessary is for the community to nurture the efforts of those who freely

offer up ideas and concepts to better the lives of their community. The Vail Homeowners Association will explore the detail of the Bjornson Plan and its merits in future reports.



Vail needs a long range view that provides vision and incentives to improve public safety and environmental conditions well into the future. Decades of ambivalence, while a boon for those who benefit from indecision, is symptomatic of the community's inability to articulate a coherent vision of its future consistent with its founding principles. The Association believes that as Vail reaches full capacity, it is time for Vail to once again dream about its future.

What You Can Do. If these issues concern you, get informed and become involved. Government responds to the public; silence only enables those who would seek to profit in the absence of accountability. Join the Vail Homeowners Association in shining a spotlight on issues that concern everyone.

VHA [Membership:](#)

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