



INFORMATION ITEM MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and Members of Council

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Date: July 20, 2021

Subject: Information Item: Andrus Road to Airport Road Multi-Use Path (Phase 2)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Andrus Road to Airport Road Multi-Use Path project is one of three City of Boulder transportation connections identified in the area of the confluence of Boulder Creek, South Boulder Creek and Fourmile Canyon Creek (Confluence Area), and the first of three discrete path projects to be built. The Andrus to Airport Multi-Use Path will provide a much-needed multimodal connection between Gunbarrel and the city. This missing link in the City and County off-street trail system has been identified since the 1980s in the City of Boulder's Transportation Master Plan (TMP) and was flagged as a priority in 2010, initiating stakeholder design conversations. The goal is to connect Gunbarrel with the network of Boulder Multi-Use Paths by linking the existing path along the west side of 63rd Street in Gunbarrel to the existing path at Airport Road.

The other two Confluence Area paths are the 61st Street Multi-Use Path and Valmont Road Multi-Use Path. The [61st Street Multi-Use Path](#) will span from the terminus of the Andrus Project to Valmont Road. The [Valmont Road Multi-Use Path](#) will provide a connection from 61st Street to the South Boulder Creek Trail along an RTD rail alignment north of Valmont Road. Staff have been engaged in the work of implementing the Airport to Andrus path connection as it had the strongest support from the community for providing a direct "off-street" connection from Gunbarrel to the central city.

The path will be a new 10-foot wide, 5,200-foot (0.98 mile) long, 6-inch-thick concrete trail. In addition, the project will include an at-grade roadway crossing, pedestrian bridge, culverts, and fencing. The path will be maintained by the City of Boulder Transportation & Mobility Department. The [proposed conceptual project design](#) was created through the collaboration of the city's Transportation & Mobility and Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) departments, Boulder County and community stakeholders.

In order to implement the proposed conceptual project design, the Transportation & Mobility Department requested a disposal of 2.75 acres of city open space from the Open Space Board of Trustees (OSBT) pursuant to the disposal procedures of Article XII, Section 177 of the Boulder City Charter in [September of 2017](#). This request was approved by the OSBT by a vote of four to one and subsequently by City Council in [October of 2017](#) by a vote of eight to zero. This approval included a simultaneous transfer of management responsibility for the 22-acre Pearl Parkway Right-of-Way from the Transportation & Mobility Department to OSMP. The 2.75 acres transferred to the Transportation & Mobility Department followed the alignment in the proposed conceptual project design and also included a section running south along 61st to connect to the Multi-Use Path system to be developed along Valmont Road west to the Boulder Creek Path.

As the project has progressed it has encountered some challenges with the proposed path alignment (see further info regarding the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Runway Protection Zone ((RPZ)) below) and thus, the City of Boulder's Transportation and Mobility Department decided to segment implementation of the Andrus to Airport Road Multi-Use Path into two phases ([see phasing map here](#)). Phase 1 construction, which commenced in January 2021 and was completed in late June, built approximately half of the total trail length, from Andrus Road to the west side of the 61st Street at-grade crossing. Phase 1 construction included an at-grade pedestrian crossing of 61st Street, pedestrian bridge over Fourmile Canyon Creek and four drainage culverts with a wire fence and wooden posts along both sides of the path.

Phase 2 construction is currently on hold and is intended to complete the connection of the path between Gunbarrel and Boulder's urban center. Approximately 1,400 feet of the path's currently proposed alignment (out of 5,190 feet total), all within Phase 2, is located within the RPZ of the Boulder Municipal Airport which was found to overlay the 2.75 acres of city open space disposed of for the purpose of the path. City staff from OSMP, the City Attorney's Office and the Transportation & Mobility Department, along with an outside counsel attorney, appealed to the FAA to allow construction of this segment of path within the RPZ. The FAA ultimately denied this appeal, citing that the path was considering a "new, incompatible use within the RPZ [...] and create a hazard to people and property." The only way for the project to move forward successfully at this juncture is along a new alignment outside of the RPZ, which would place it further south into the Open Space property. A new alignment would require consideration for disposal of city open space pursuant to Section 177 of the City Charter by both the Open Space Board of Trustees and City Council and, based on OSMP staff's review, would have significant impacts to both the ecological and agricultural resources of the property.

FISCAL IMPACT

Realignment of Phase 2 of the multi-use path would be funded by the Multi-Use Path Enhancement budget, which is an annual line item in the Capital Improvement Program from the

Transportation & Mobility Department. Redesign and permitting are estimated to be \$75,000 to \$100,000 and can begin once an alternative alignment is identified and agreed upon. Construction of Phase 2 would be planned to begin in January 2023 and would be funded by the Enhancement budget as well as any other funding opportunities pursued by the Transportation and Mobility Department.

COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENTS AND IMPACTS

ECONOMIC

Since the 1980s, city staff has identified the need to provide a much-needed path connection between Gunbarrel and the city. Providing this essential missing link accommodates multimodal access for residents to reach both economic centers, whether commuting to work, running errands, or for pleasure/exercise.

To date, costs for the design, including easement acquisitions and utility relocations, plus preparation for the Phase 2 path tie-in at Airport Road have already been expended. Resources have been prioritized for this path alignment due to community preference. If there is a viable realigned Phase 2 segment of the path to connect at the original proposed tie-in at Airport Road, the benefit of these prior expenditures will be fully realized. If there is not a viable path alignment for Phase 2 that would satisfy both FAA and OSMP criteria, one option would be to focus on implementing the 61st Street path connection. This path would be located directly adjacent to 61st Street and would be considered “off-street.” It is not the direct connection favored by the community but would provide a continuous off-street path between Gunbarrel and the overall path network. See Fiscal Impact section above for further information.

ENVIRONMENTAL

This enhanced access between the city center and Gunbarrel aims to create a new, safe travel alternative to the automobile, allowing neighborhood residents opportunity to shift their mode choice, which is essential to meeting our City of Boulder mobility and climate commitment goals.

The entire length of the project was planned and designed to have as little impact as possible on the environment, to integrate with the surrounding landscape, and per the original path alignment, to not bifurcate the Straty/Cline property/parcel owned/managed by City of Boulder OSMP and used for ecological and agricultural purposes. This was accomplished by aligning the trail along the northern border of the property near the existing fence line where sensitive habitats and other natural features were not impacted, minimizing the amount of earthwork grading for the trail to minimize impact to surrounding area and to reduce the impact to scenic views, and selecting a surface material that is durable, and cost effective to maintain.

In considering a new path alignment for Phase 2, staff will continue to hold environmental considerations in high regard, while also acknowledging that the shift from the northern fence line to an alternative alignment means that meeting all of the above stated design preferences is no longer feasible. The only way to realize these preferences in their entirety was through the original, approved path alignment.

SOCIAL

Between 2016 and 2018, city staff hosted a number of info sessions and project meetings with adjacent stakeholders, in order to ensure broad participation. Community comments and path alignment preferences were noted and influential in the chosen design. The original alignments received strong community support in order to connect Gunbarrel with Boulder, including from Boulder County, the cycling community and other engaged residents. Should staff not be able to complete the Andrus to Airport Multi-Use Path, the successful fulfilment of this goal will remain unrealized.

For residents without reliable access to a vehicle, the Multi-Use Path system, should this link be completed, and transit system (RTD #205 being the only route with access to Gunbarrel) offer the most cost-effective alternatives to the automobile. Should the Transportation and Mobility Department be unable to complete a multi-use path linkage, a barrier to a low-stress connectivity and access between these two activity generators will continue to exist.

BACKGROUND

As mentioned above, the Andrus to Airport Road Multi-Use Path is one of three City of Boulder transportation multimodal connections identified in the Confluence Area. This project was designed through extensive collaboration between the city's Transportation and Mobility Department, OSMP, Boulder County and adjacent property owners. The project team [evaluated four alignments](#) for the Andrus to Airport Path project, including two alignments recommended by adjacent property owners. As a result of this analysis, which made an assessment of the impact to agriculture, recreation/visitor experience, real estate requirements, preservation of the environment, constructability and cost, the project team identified Alternative 1 as the top performing alignment.

Agreements between OSMP and Transportation and Mobility were made to coordinate and successfully build the intended bicycle and pedestrian connections. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed with OSMP in August 2015, which stated that the existing Pearl Parkway right-of-way, an area of significant environmental value, was transferred to OSMP for a fair and equitable exchange, allowing for their contribution of land for the multi-use path. Transportation and Mobility has successfully transferred the right-of-way to OSMP and OSMP has made the identified alignment available for the path. The FAA, however, has subsequently communicated that alignment is not acceptable for airport safety reasons and they are unable to support the proposed route for the path. As a result, we would like to continue to explore an alternative alignment so that Phase 2 path construction can proceed. In spring 2016, the project team met with adjacent property owners to discuss project improvements. The project land use application was then reviewed and conditionally approved by the Boulder County Commissioners in winter 2016.

Project staff was first made aware of the issue regarding the path's alignment through the RPZ when the Boulder Municipal Airport reached out in September 2019. Since then, city staff, including the Airport Manager, Transportation and Mobility and OSMP have communicated with the FAA, and proposed measures to ensure that this project accords with best practices for protection of RPZs, including conditions such as fencing the path, ensuring use of the path is subject to the City's rules and regulations for both use of multi-use paths and use of the Airport and executing a MOU setting forth the permissible uses in conjunction with construction and use of the path to ensure appropriate protection of the RPZ as set forth in applicable FAA guidance

and Advisory Circulars. The FAA's final response to these proposed conditions was delivered to staff in February 2021 (see Attachment C) and professed disagreement with the city's proposal, firmly denying construction of the path along its original alignment.

NEXT STEPS

This Informational Item will be shared with the Open Space Board of Trustees (OBST). Transportation and Mobility staff will continue working with OSMP staff to determine the feasibility of Confluence Area path alignment and implementation.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Andrus to Airport Multi-Use Path Map

Attachment B: Path Ownership Map

Attachment C: 2/19/21 FAA Final Response

Attachment D: Briefing Paper - Proposed Multi-Use Path Through RPZ