

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Garfield County is in the process of updating the standards for the transportation system. To complete those efforts, LSC Transportation Consultants Inc. (in association with URS Corporation) was contracted to prepare a Transportation Master Plan for Garfield County. The development of the Garfield County Transportation Master Plan will guide the development and improvement of roadways and pedestrian corridors throughout the county. The document will also be used in the review of future development proposals. The report presents a summary of the existing conditions related to the Garfield County transportation system and presents recommendations for maintaining and improving the transportation system over the next 20 to 25 years.

The Transportation Master Plan includes the following elements:

- Summary of area demographics
- Travel patterns
- Existing transportation facilities
- Existing traffic volumes
- Functional classification system for the roadways (also presented for review by the county)
- Existing and future roadway deficiencies
- Criteria for ranking the transportation projects by priority
- Improvement alternatives
- Impact fees and methodology
- Fiscal constraint of recommended projects over 25 years

The study focused on transportation issues within Garfield County. Such issues consisted of evaluating a range of transportation solutions, including their anticipated costs and impacts to the community. The analysis and plan is designed to address the following three primary categories of need for the transportation system:

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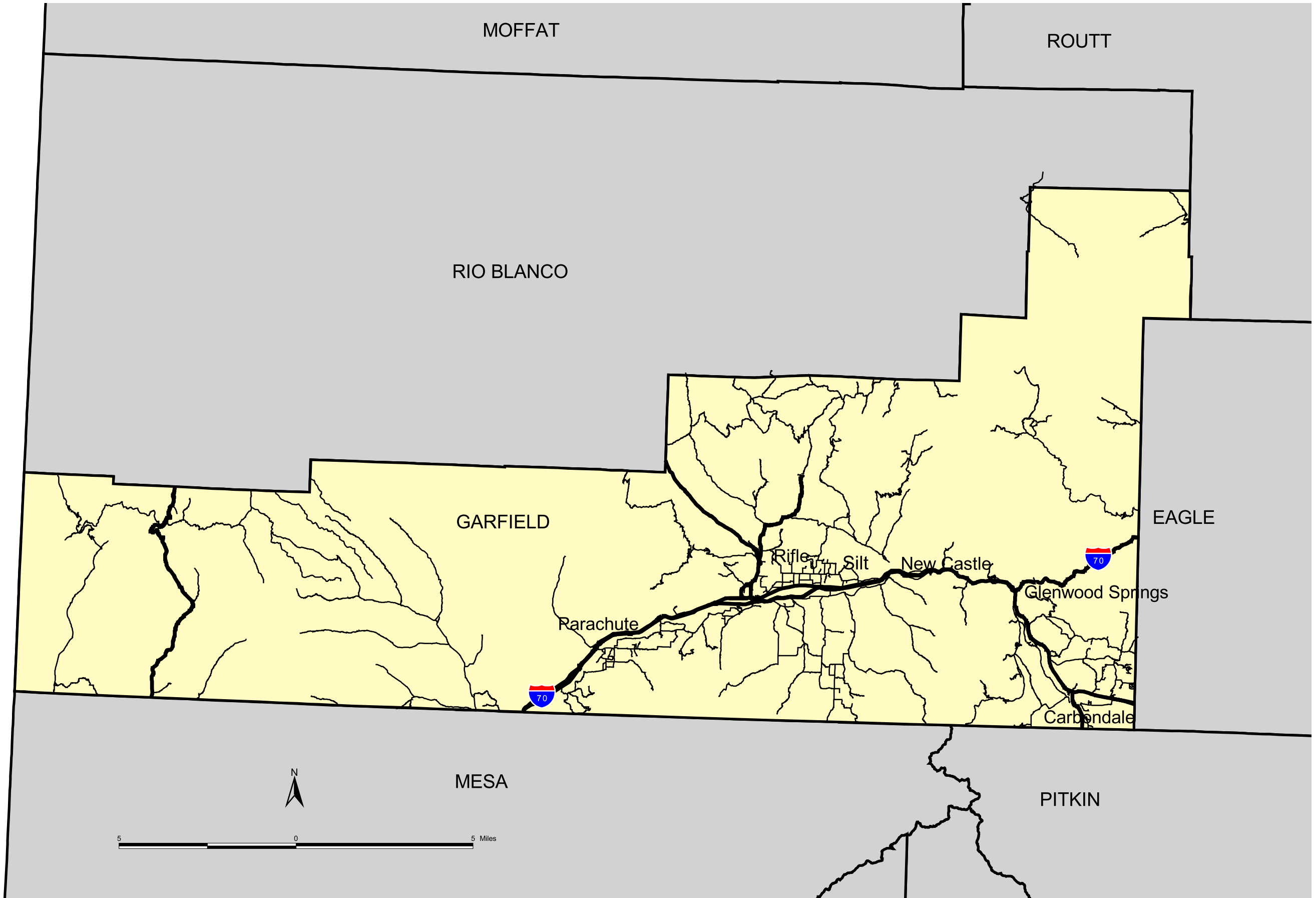
- Address issues related to past growth
- Address issues related to future growth
- Operate and maintain the transportation system

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

The study area encompassed all of Garfield County (as shown in Figure I-1). The county extends from Eagle County to the Utah border. Much of the county lies along the Colorado River and I-70. The I-70 and SH 82 corridors are the major locations of development within the county. The topography is widely varied from the rugged canyon walls of Glenwood Canyon to the flat lands along portions of the Colorado River valley.

The Transportation Master Plan focuses on Garfield County's transportation system. However, much of the transportation network within Garfield County is made up of state highways including I-70, SH 82, and SH 13. Since access to and from these major corridors is via the county roadway system, the relationship must be recognized throughout the planning effort.

Figure I-1
Study Area



PLANNING PROCESS

The Transportation Master Plan responds to the future challenges with an approach which strives to achieve the following:

- Manage rather than eliminate traffic congestion
- Provide a wider range of travel options
- Mitigate community impacts of the transportation system
- Keep the transportation system in good repair
- Support efforts and behaviors which limit environmental impacts
- Monitor and adapt to changing conditions

The document aims to moderate the severity of future congestion, but it may not reduce future congestion to current levels. A key factor in the process is the establishment of the level of service standards for the Garfield County roadway system. The challenges presented by future growth will be dealt with in a variety of ways through a combination of strategies. This is consistent with similar approaches being taken by many counties faced with similar or more severe transportation problems.

The approach to managing traffic growth and congestion in the future will rely upon the following:

- Selective improvements to the existing roadway network to facilitate movement of people and goods.
- Selective additions to the roadway system to support new and expanding growth.
- Provision of a reasonable range of travel choices to reduce the reliance upon automobiles for a greater range of trips.
- Use of advanced traffic management and control techniques to make the best use of existing facilities.

SUMMARY OF THE ISSUES

Garfield County has recently been experiencing significant growth. The county population grew from 29,974 people in the year 1990 to 43,971 people in the year 2000, which is an increase of about 47 percent. The Colorado Department of Local Affairs is forecasting the population of Garfield County to grow to more than

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80,000 people over the next 20 years. The population increase will place a burden upon the transportation infrastructure. When combined with the geography of the region and the commuting patterns, the impact upon the transportation system will be extensive.

With the population almost doubling, the Transportation Master Plan is faced with the challenge of significantly more traffic on the same basic collector and arterial roadway system. The report has identified where additional traffic growth can be accommodated without a severe degradation of the level of service, and where additional growth should be discouraged. The development of the report allows Garfield County to identify the transportation improvements that will be needed within the next 20 to 25 years. A vast majority of the travel into, out of, and within the county is by private automobile. The document needs to reflect the importance of maintaining the roadway system. However, with limited public funds, it is highly unlikely that Garfield County will be able to maintain the same highway mobility.

The Garfield County Transportation Master Plan has developed projects that integrate alternative modes into the mix of solutions. With workers being pushed west along the I-70 corridor by high housing costs, alternative transportation modes need to be considered. If the automobile is the only choice workers have for getting from residences to employment centers, workers could be looking at commute times comparable to large metropolitan areas.