

# CHAPTER I

## Introduction

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Garfield County is in the process of updating standards for the transportation system. To complete those efforts, LSC Transportation Consultants, 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 transportation Master Plan will also be used in the review of future development proposals. This Working Paper # 1 presents a summary of the existing conditions related to the Garfield County transportation system. This review includes a summary of area demographics, travel patterns, existing transportation facilities, and existing traffic volumes. A proposed functional classification system for the roadways is also presented for review by the county.

The study will focus on transportation issues in Garfield County. These include 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:

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

This report represents the first of three interim reports which will be submitted for review and comment prior to submittal of the final product. Reports subsequent to this will cover such topics as identifying existing and future deficiencies to the transportation system and evaluating improvement options.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

The study area encompasses all of Garfield County, shown in Figure I-1. The county extends from Eagle County to the Utah border. Much of the county lies

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along the Colorado River and I-70. The I-70 and SH 82 corridors are the locations of most 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 County Transportation Plan will focus on the county transportation system. However, much of the transportation network in Garfield County is made up of state highways including I-70, SH 82, and SH 13. Access to and from these major corridors is via the county road system, and this relationship must be recognized throughout the planning effort.

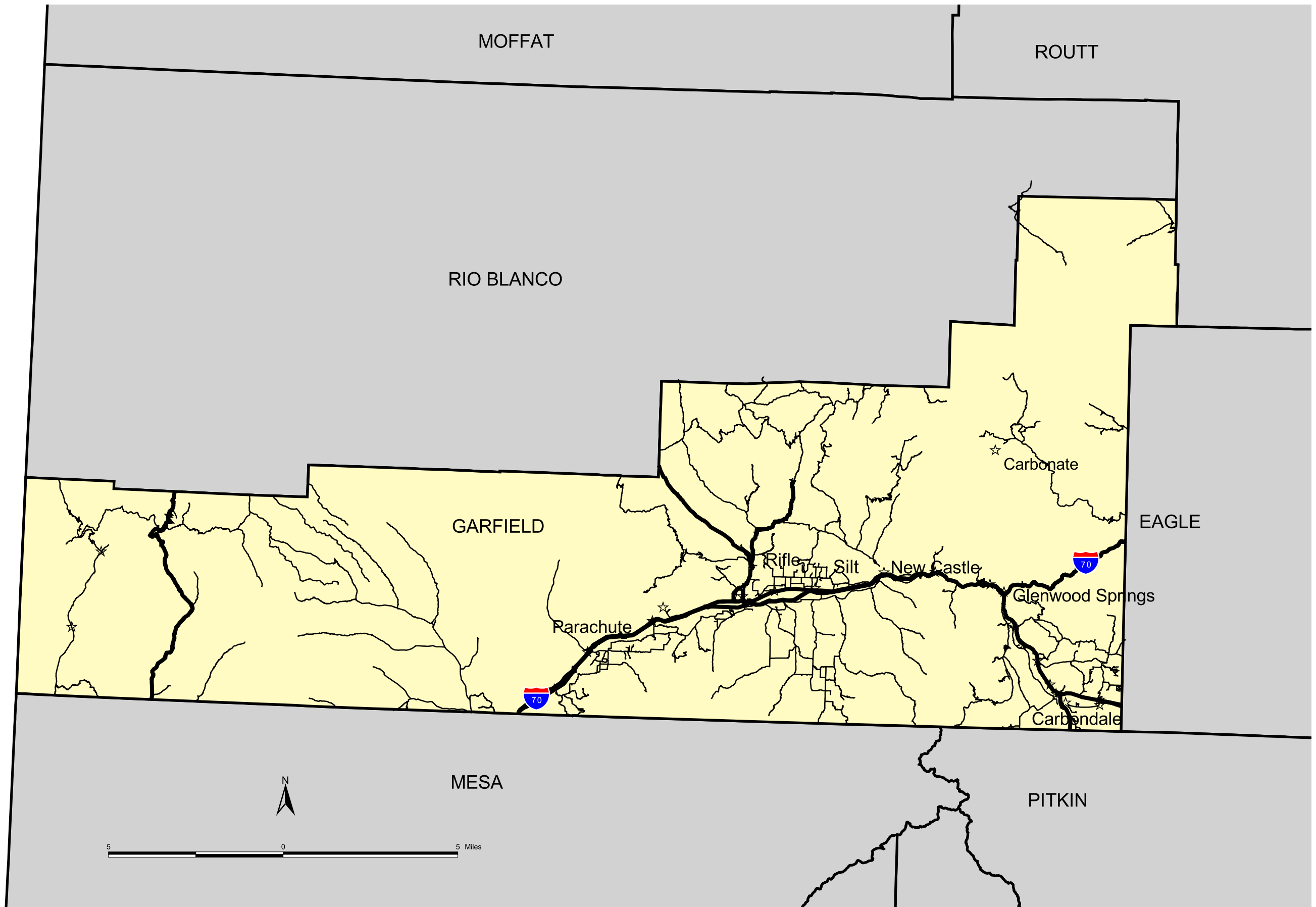
## **THE PLANNING PROCESS**

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

- 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, and;
- Monitor and adapt to changing conditions.

The Plan aims to moderate the severity of future congestion, but it may not reduce future congestion to current levels. A key factor in the process will be the establishment of level of service standards for the county road 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.

Figure I-1  
Study Area



The approach to managing traffic growth and congestion in the future will rely on 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 on automobiles for a greater range of trips; and
- 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 in 1990 to 43,971 in 2000, an increase of about 47 percent. The Colorado Department of Local Affairs is forecasting the population of Garfield County to grow to more than 80,000 over the next 20 years. This increase in population alone will tax the transportation infrastructure. When combined with the geography of the region and commuting patterns, the impact on the transportation system will be extensive.

With the population almost doubling, the Garfield County Transportation Master Plan will be faced with the challenge of significantly more traffic on the same basic collector and arterial roadway system. The Garfield County Transportation Master Plan will:

- Identify where additional traffic growth can be accommodated without a severe degradation of the level of service, and;
- Identify where additional growth should be discouraged.

The development of a Garfield County Transportation Master Plan allows Garfield County to identify what transportation improvements will be needed in the next 20 to 25 years. A vast majority of the travel into, out of, and within Garfield County is by private automobile. The Garfield County Transportation Master Plan needs to reflect the importance of maintaining this system of roadways. However, with limited public funds, it is highly unlikely that Garfield County will be able to maintain the same highway mobility.

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The Garfield County Transportation Master Plan needs to 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 residents have for getting from residences to employment centers, workers could be looking at commute times comparable to large metropolitan areas.