

CHAPTER I

Introduction



The City of Rifle, in cooperation with Garfield County and the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), contracted with LSC Transportation Consultants to prepare a Transportation Master Plan for the greater Rifle area. The development of a Rifle Transportation Master Plan allows the City of Rifle to identify what transportation improvements will be needed between now and 2025. The Transportation Master Plan identifies the transportation system improvements to meet existing and future transportation demands, the priorities for improvements, and the financial plan to provide the improvements.

The study focused on transportation issues in the greater Rifle area. These included 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:

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

The Transportation Master Plan for Rifle has been prepared for adoption by the Planning and Zoning Commission and the City Council. Adoption by the Planning and Zoning Commission is pursuant to Colorado Revised Statutes 31-23-208 and 31-23-213. Once the Plan is adopted by the Planning and Zoning Commission and filed with the County Clerk of Garfield County, all plats of subdivisions within the planning area are subject to the adopted plan.

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 will not reduce future congestion to current levels in every case. The challenges presented by future growth must be dealt with in a variety of ways through a combination of strategies. This is consistent with similar approaches being taken by many cities faced with similar or more severe transportation problems.

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

- Selective improvements to the existing arterial roadway network to facilitate cross-town 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;
- Use of advanced traffic management and control techniques to make the best use of existing facilities, and;
- Provision of a competitive alternative to the automobile.

To facilitate development of the Transportation Master Plan, a Technical Advisory Committee and a Citizens' Advisory Committee were formed. The Technical Advisory Committee was made up of staff from the City of Rifle, Garfield County, and the Colorado Department of Transportation. The Citizens' Advisory Committee

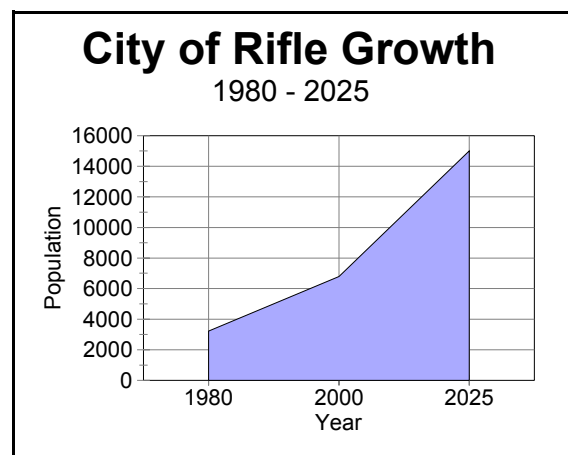
was made up of interested citizens from Rifle. Each committee met several times during the course of the project.

During the development of this Transportation Master Plan, five interim Working Papers were submitted for review. The Working Papers were submitted at the conclusion of each major phase of the plan development. The Working Papers were reviewed by the Technical Advisory Committee and the Citizens' Advisory Committee. Meetings were held with each committee to discuss the contents of the Working Papers and to receive input from the Committee members. Input from the Committees regarding the Working Papers was used in the following steps. The Working Papers served as draft versions of the chapters contained in this Transportation Master Plan. Appropriate revisions were incorporated throughout the plan based on input from the two Committees.

SUMMARY OF THE ISSUES

The City of Rifle has grown from 3,215 persons in 1980 to 6,784 persons in 2000, a growth of 111 percent, while Garfield County's population growth for this same time period has been about 95 percent. The City of Rifle's share of Garfield County's population has remained around 15 percent for the last 20 years.

The Colorado Department of Local Affairs is forecasting Garfield County to grow to 81,255 persons by 2025. If the City of Rifle maintains its share of the Garfield County population, the City of Rifle can expect to grow to almost 12,200 persons, an increase of about 180 percent. As housing prices increase in the Roaring Fork Valley, workers are having to look in Silt, New Castle, Rifle, Parachute, and Battlement Mesa for "affordable housing." It is highly likely that Rifle's share of the Garfield County population will actually increase since housing costs are substantially lower than in Glenwood Springs. Therefore, the popu-



lation of 12,200 by the year 2025 represents a low estimate. It is likely that by the year 2025, population levels in the City of Rifle could reach 15,000 persons.

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

- Identifies where additional traffic growth can be accommodated without a severe degradation of the level of service, and;
- Identifies needed improvements to accommodate anticipated traffic growth.

The development of the Rifle Transportation Master Plan allows the City of Rifle 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 the City of Rifle is by private automobile. The Rifle Transportation Master Plan reflects the importance of maintaining this system of roadways. However, with limited public funds, it is highly unlikely that the City of Rifle will be able to maintain the same highway mobility.

The Rifle 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 developed. If the automobile is the only choice residents have for getting from Rifle to jobs in the SH 82 corridor, workers could be looking at commute times comparable to large metropolitan areas.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public participation in the development of this plan was sought through a variety of approaches. The Citizens' Advisory Committee provided representation of the residents of Rifle throughout the plan development. In addition, other opportunities for public input were sought.

Kick-Off Meeting

Initial “Kick-off Meetings” of the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) and Citizens’ Advisory Committee (CAC) were held in Rifle on February 22, 2002. The TAC met to discuss project goals, priorities, public involvement, and a time line for completion of the final study.

During the February Kick-off Meetings, the LSC Team briefed the Advisory Committees on the study process to be undertaken. Key persons and agencies were identified to the LSC Team. Major issues and concerns for transportation were identified. There were many issues identified and the following represents only a portion of what was identified to the LSC Team:

- The need for additional north/south corridors within Rifle.
- The extension of Taughenbaugh with connections to County Roads 320 and 332 with access to the airport.
- Concern for current and future Airport Road traffic.
- The non-motorized trail system should provide alternate circulation within Rifle.
- Concern regarding the development of the West Rifle interchange and the impacts on US 6.
- Address impact of county development on Rifle and coordination with Garfield County and the entire region.
- The overall street pattern within Rifle may require a grid system combined with cul-de-sac development based on topography.
- A threshold capacity for roads relating projected volumes to existing volumes and the overall perception of current congestion.
- The Plan should consider new developments and the impacts on current and planned schools and emergency services.
- A need to establish typical street cross sections while providing some design flexibility.
- The need for a street classification system to identify arterials, collectors, and local streets.
- A need for public transportation connecting the older area of Rifle and the new development south of I-70 along Airport Road, as well as coordination with the Rural Transportation Authority in the Roaring Fork Valley.
- The need for public involvement throughout the planning process.

Public Meetings

Other opportunities were provided for residents of Rifle to participate in the planning process. A public open house was held in May 2002 at the City Market on Railroad Avenue. Representatives of LSC presented information about the Transportation Master Plan and sought comments from local citizens regarding transportation issues. The issues raised by members of the community were used to develop transportation system improvement options.

The transportation system alternatives were presented during a public meeting held in the City Council Chambers in July 2002. The various options were presented and input was sought from the City Council and citizens. The comments received at this meeting were incorporated into the Transportation Master Plan.

Working Papers

Five interim Working Papers were submitted during the planning process. These were posted on the Internet and were available for review by anyone with an interest in the transportation planning process. The website address was publicized with all interim materials and was included on the City of Rifle website. Comments were encouraged by toll-free telephone and e-mail.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals

The Rifle Comprehensive Plan identifies a number of transportation goals for Rifle.

Those goals include:

- Provide a safe, attractive, and efficient transportation network for automobile, bike, pedestrian, and transit users.
- Encourage an interconnected transportation pattern throughout the city.

The following transportation goals have been developed for the Rifle Transportation Master Plan.

- *Goal 1:* Develop consensus on a long-range plan or vision of coordinated state and local transportation improvements for the City of Rifle and its immediate vicinity.

- *Goal 2:* Evaluate roadway capacity issues at several key areas, including but not limited to, the central business district, access points to town, and the I-70 area.
- *Goal 3:* Evaluate safety and mobility issues within the study area.
- *Goal 4:* Identify arterial and collector streets.
- *Goal 5:* Identify future alternative arterial and collector locations through Rifle, including south of Airport Road.
- *Goal 6:* Identify capital improvements or strategies to accommodate future transportation needs.
- *Goal 7:* Evaluate access related operational issues and potential solutions, utilizing flexible and creative design criteria.
- *Goal 8:* Identify an off-site street impact fee to be adopted by the city that is legally defensible.
- *Goal 9:* Identify accumulated transportation and roadway shortfalls and costs to rectify regardless of future growth or development.

The Advisory Committees were asked to consider these goals and to provide input on possible revisions. No changes were made. The goals were used to evaluate the various transportation system improvement options.

PREVIOUS PLANS AND STUDIES

Recent planning efforts in Rifle identified several problem areas within the city as well as the direction of future growth. These plans have helped Rifle develop into what it is today. The following plans were reviewed by the LSC Team:

Rifle Comprehensive Plan Update, 1998 – A character-based plan relying on the understanding of Rifle’s desires for the future, and a vision on how to achieve those desires. This plan calls for the following transportation actions to have been taken since its adoption in 1998:

- *Provide controlled access points for major collectors and arterials to minimize congestion and ensure safety. Alternative routes to the collector and arterial system should be provided;*
- *Work with the other valley towns and cities, major worker destination communities, and transit funding to establish regional transit for Rifle commuters;*

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- *Work with others to create a park-and-ride facility which provides easy access to I-70, safe vehicle parking, and enhances use of local businesses, and;*
- *Ensure that an interconnected road pattern is developed.*

Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Comprehensive Plan, 1996 – This plan is designed around a concept that the parks needs of the community will be satisfied by neighborhood parks in each of the residential areas, as well as two major community facilities. This plan identifies the needs of each existing park as well as the facility needs.

City of Rifle Land Use Regulations, 2000 – These regulations cover all land use issues including, but not limited too, annexation, zoning, subdivision review, off-street parking regulations, historic preservation, etc.

Pitkin/Garfield Counties Transit Development Plan, 1991-1995 – This bi-county transit development plan provided several recommendations to both Garfield and Pitkin Counties to improve public transit service.

Study of Local and Regional Travel Patterns, 1998 – Volume 1 presented current travel patterns from the Town of Parachute to the City of Aspen. Data were obtained from two surveys administered in 1998 to employees and employers throughout the study area. Results are depicted in numerous tables and figures.

REPORT CONTENTS

Chapter II identifies various socioeconomic, population, and travel growth characteristics, as well as the future population of Rifle. Chapter III is an in-depth overview of the existing transportation system and facilities. This includes the roadways, public transportation, and bicycle/pedestrian facilities. Chapter III also presents the existing traffic level within Rifle, as well as a summary of the levels of service on select roadways, and a discussion of safety on Rifle's roadways.

Chapter IV provides a discussion of existing deficiencies in the Rifle study area. The existing deficiencies should be corrected to accommodate existing traffic levels.

The identification of existing deficiencies is also important in the calculation of off-site transportation impact fees as they must be excluded from the calculation.

Chapter V introduces the overall travel demand modeling framework. This framework is introduced with a general discussion of modeling practices and followed by a discussion of the Rifle Travel Demand Model Development. Three computer models were developed for the City of Rifle. These models include:

- Base Year Travel Demand Model for Rifle
- 2025 Projected Development and Travel Demand Model
- 2025 High-Growth Option Travel Demand Model

Chapter VI offers a discussion of both current and projected land use/development as a basis for estimating future automobile travel patterns within Rifle. This chapter also describes the “build-out plan” for the city expressed in zoning and mapping, as well as the basis for future projections. These data were then used to forecast future travel in the City of Rifle.

Chapter VII presents a summary of the forecasted traffic within Rifle. These results address future challenges for traffic congestion within Rifle. The lack of east/west connections and the fact that only one major north/south corridor exists currently, makes traffic congestion on select corridors, based on the forecasted development in Rifle, a likelihood in the future.

Chapter VIII presents a number of options for improvement to the transportation system in Rifle. The various options and the effects on traffic volumes are presented. The alternatives are evaluated in Chapter IX and prioritized for the preferred Transportation Master Plan.

Chapter X presents the projected revenues. Revenue projections are included for projects on the state highway system as well as revenues for the City of Rifle.

Chapter XI presents the financially-constrained transportation plan based on the preferred transportation plan presented in Chapter IX and the financial constraints

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presented in Chapter X. Finally the development-related improvements are described in Chapter XII. This chapter also includes the recommendations for the off-site transportation impact fee program.