



A message from the Board of County Commissioners on the proposed Lyons to Boulder Regional Trail

Since the early 1970s, the concept of constructing a multi-use recreational and commuter trail from Lyons to Boulder along the Boulder Feeder Canal has been a key component of the Boulder County Comprehensive Plan. The trail concept, which has received the strong support of bicyclists, equestrians, runners, hikers and businesses would provide a continuous link between Lyons to Boulder and offer a highly picturesque recreational amenity in north Boulder County.

Early this year, we asked county staff to begin exploring ways that the county might construct a trail in this vicinity using a route that would appropriately balance the aesthetics and safety concerns of constructing the trail while taking into account the potential trail impacts on property owners and residents in the region.

For over 10 months now, county transportation and open space planners have worked diligently to identify a trail alignment, or set of alignments, that would provide for the best recreational and scenic experience for trail users, taking into account the breadth of neighborhood, environmental, cost, management, and agricultural concerns and challenges of constructing a trail through this area. County staff has spent numerous hours meeting with residents, talking with property owners, poring over public easement records and evaluating a wide range of options for constructing a trail in the Lyons to Boulder (LyBo) corridor.

From these efforts, our planning staff identified three potential trail alignment scenarios that were presented to the community earlier this summer for feedback. Staff has since been collecting public input and preparing a recommendation for us, the Board of County Commissioners, to consider at a public hearing later this fall.

All of the proposed alignment options include the use of substantial portions of the rights of way along the Boulder Feeder Canal, a residential and irrigation water ditch owned and managed by the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District. Each of the route alternatives recognizes that building a trail that is responsible to the environment, trail users, and adjacent residents requires the combined use of existing roadways, the feeder canal corridor, and public open space.

Early on in the planning process, we acknowledged that in order to provide a high quality, safe multi-user regional recreational trail, we would need to partner and work closely with Northern Water which had established trail development guidelines in June 2000 for any agency or organization seeking to construct a trail along its canals. Applying Northern's guidelines, our staff was able to identify trail alignments along the feeder canal that would be managed effectively and ensure the safe, secure and efficient operations of the canal.

Up until the past month, discussions with Northern Water had been both encouraging and constructive. However, recent communications with individual board members and actions from their board of directors, including their decision in August to rescind their trail development guidelines, have made it clear that permission from them to use the feeder canal for any part of the LyBo trail is unlikely to be forthcoming.

While existing roads and adjacent county open space properties located within the proposed trail corridor provide a physical means of traveling between the Town of Lyons and the Boulder Reservoir, such a trail would be far less appealing, more costly, and more environmentally destructive than using portions of the feeder canal which offer existing cleared stretches of land, sweeping views of the plains and mountains, and a continuous path from north to south.

Under this new set of circumstances, we believe the construction of the Lyons to Boulder trail is not feasible at this time. As a result, we have decided to suspend our efforts on this project and direct our trail planning focus and funding to other portions of the county's regional trail system.

We would like to thank county staff for their hard work on this project, and commend members of the public for their spirited discussion on the upsides and downsides of the various trail possibilities along this corridor. We believe that we, and future boards of commissioners, should be open to resuming the public process where we left off should opportunities arise in the future for further consideration of a Lyons to Boulder trail.

Sincerely,

Boulder County
Board of County Commissioners

Ben Pearlman, Chair
Cindy Domenico, Vice-Chair
Will Toor, Commissioner

September 18, 2009