

Entrance to Aspen decision-making flow chart

By Gary Lauder

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Are you concerned that evacuating Aspen during a wildfire is presently estimated to take up to 14 hours due to only two lanes across Castle Creek bridge plus Power Plant Road?

If yes, are you concerned that during construction of the hypothetical three lane shifted proposal, this number would worsen? And that once complete, the evacuation time would still exceed 10 hours?

If yes, then would you acknowledge that the only way to improve evacuation time would be to build a new bridge, and the only location for that would be aligned with Main Street?

If yes, then you accept that the 3-lane-shifted approach is not the solution, and nor is doing nothing, and you are making progress in pruning the decision tree. Then the question becomes: which of the alternatives proposed (or not yet proposed) would be best, and what criteria should be set to evaluate them? The recent survey included 4 alternatives, and the remaining 3 are the “Preferred Alternative” (PA), split shot (SS), and the modified split shot (MSS) (although the modifications listed on that survey were very vague and somewhat contradictory). There was no good reason for the inclusion of the SS since it is worse or no better in all respects than the MSS—due in part to the SS’s requirement that eastbound traffic coming from Cemetery Lane be routed through the roundabout. Roundabouts have finite capacity, so doing so slows inbound traffic. This is why the SS was poorly rated for traffic impact by Jacobs and the MSS was never evaluated by them. This narrows the choices down to two: the PA or MSS (which has elsewhere been referred to as the “Improved Split Shot” (ISS).

This author prefers the MSS/ISS (with my own set of preferred modifications), but before describing that, it is worth noting that the differences between the road layouts of the PA and the MSS are fairly subtle. Consequently, the fastest way to get either of these two alternatives built would be to commence the process for moving towards building the PA, and then if the MSS is decided for, to file a supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) to change it.

It’s important to know that there are some homeowners that are located near where the new bridge would be built who are dead set against that scenario to preserve their private space by advocating for open space. They are behind the campaigns to require a 60% vote, and you should expect the level of misinformation to reach a crescendo just prior to the upcoming election. They are also engaged in an effort to persuade the

residents of Cemetery Lane that voting for referendum 2 means that only the preferred alternative would be built (false) and they make no mention of the MSS. Referendum 2 allows for the process to move forward that would evaluate the alternatives and build the best one. Then if the city does decide to move forward with building a bridge, they will sue and use whatever means at their disposal to delay, so the sooner it is commenced, the sooner Aspen will have another means of escaping a wildfire and solving its traffic problems.

The modifications of the modified split shot are:

1. inserting a turnaround between cemetery lane and the roundabout to enable eastbound cemetery lane traffic to join eastbound 82 without going through the roundabout.
2. Aligning eastbound 82 to be near existing 82 so that most of Marolt would be untouched.
3. Eliminating the proposed new traffic light at 7th & Main and making one-way the segment of 7th Street between Main Street and Hallam.
4. A potential alternative/additional modification (although more expensive than #1) would be to put an underpass under westbound 82 at Cemetery Lane to enable Cemetery Lane drivers who want to head into town (eastbound (EB)) to just go under WB 82 to join EB 82.

These modifications would make traffic flow much more smoothly than the unmodified version that Jacobs evaluated, and it would also make it substantially safer than the present due to the elimination of the existing traffic light at Cemetery Lane.

This scenario would also be dramatically better than the PA due to not having to route ALL Cemetery Lane traffic through the S-curves and up 7th Street where westbound traffic would turn right on Main Street to get out of town. The PA requires a traffic light at 7th and Main, which will be a major bottleneck and is substantially less safe than the MSS's scenario which eliminates it due to its only having right turns.

The status quo should no longer be tolerated given the necessity of fixing the bridge sometime soon, and the difficulty of fixing it while also using it. The most relevant analogy is to trying to change a tire while also driving a car. The fastest and least expensive scenario would be to build a new bridge to Main St., then route all the traffic across that, then rebuild the existing Castle Creek bridge, then route the outbound traffic over that.

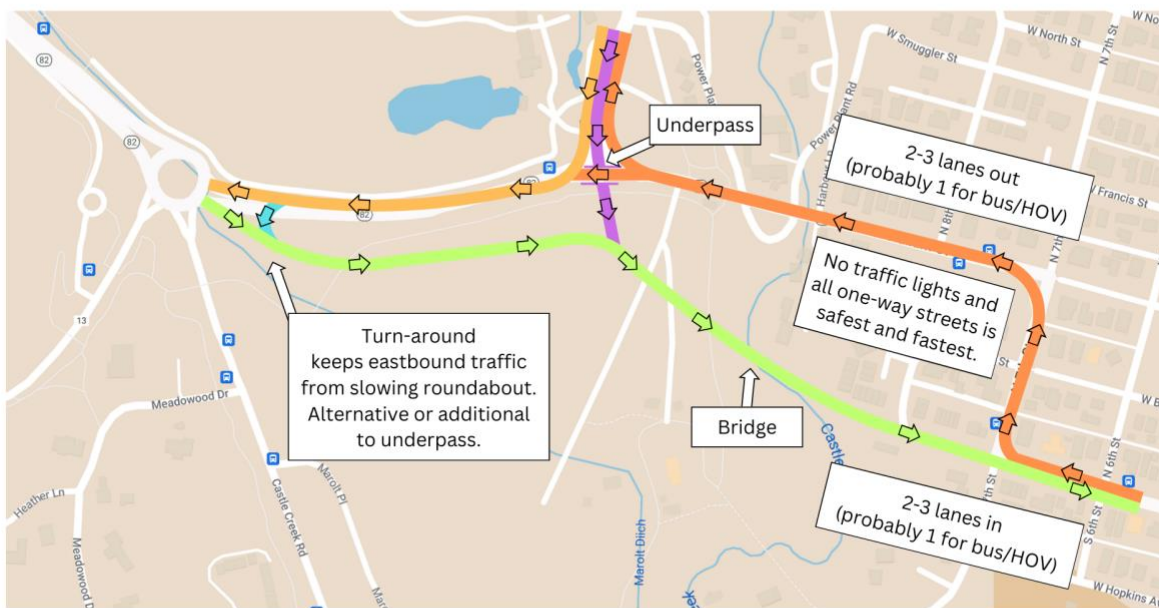
Under the preferred alternative, Aspen would have to assume ownership of the Castle Creek bridge, and therefore all of its expenses. Under the split shot scenario, it would be a divided highway, and therefore CDOT would own both.

Referendum #2 would remove only one of the many hurdles to implementing the above (or other) improvement to the ETA. There would be a new EIS process, and CDOT and the FHWA would consider the alternatives. When the Record of Decision (RoD) was done in the 1990's, they considered 43 alternatives, but not these. As long as the community's priorities are accurately conveyed to them, they would likely pick these and NOT the PA.

Referendum #1 would make it harder to get anything approved ever. It's perfect for the residents down in Castle Creek, but not for everyone else.

There is always more to say, but those are the highlights.

Modified/Improved Split-Shot (ISS)



This design was never evaluated in the RoD nor by Jacobs. Its traffic performance would be dramatically better than the split-shot that was evaluated, as well as better than the Preferred Alternative's traffic.

For more on this subject, see <https://www.LauderPartners.com/Aspen>