

## Alta Town Council Listening Session

### Written Comments

July 28, 2021 (revised 7/29/2021)

*9 comments with each one starting on a fresh page*

#### 1. From Del Draper

##### Comments on the Two Preferred Alternatives

##### Identity of Commenter

I am 70 years old and have had a family cabin at Alta since 1961. Over the decades I have driven up and down the canyon literally thousands of times. I am an avid skier and ski all Utah resorts.

Comments on the Enhanced Bus Alternative:

- 1) The existing road in Little Cottonwood Canyon is adequate about 99% of the time. The traffic problem is limited to a few winter days – probably about 20 or 30 days a year. Some of these are weather related and some are too many cars all trying to get up the canyon at the same time. The rest of the year traffic flows just fine.
- 2) Even on the very worst days when there is fresh powder at the resorts and it may take over an hour to get from the mouth of Big Cottonwood to the mouth of Little Cottonwood, once you are in the Canyon the traffic flows. It usually picks up speed about one mile up the canyon and approaches the 40-mph speed limit as it passes White Pine.
- 3) There is no need to add a dedicated bus lane in the canyon since the traffic flows in the canyon on the existing road on all days except when there is a weather event.
- 4) The same cannot be said of Wasatch Blvd. It is of critical importance to improve Wasatch Blvd and North Little Cottonwood Canyon Road so that busses can get by, around and ahead of any car traffic jams.
- 5) The proposed improvements on Wasatch Blvd do not do this. “Signal Priority” for busses is not adequate. If not a dedicated lane, then some system is needed with traffic controls that closes one lane to all cars and dedicates it to busses on these critical days.
- 6) Without adequate improvements on Wasatch Blvd the estimated travel times from the Gravel Pit Hub to the resorts in the EIS are meaningless. Busses will be caught in traffic.
- 7) Conversely, travel time in the Canyon for busses without a dedicated lane only adds a few minutes to travel time over the alternative of having a dedicated bus lane.
- 8) People will ride the bus if it is efficient and reliable and cost effective compared to the other choices. The bus is only efficient and reliable if it can pass the traffic jams on Wasatch.

- 9) Tolling in the canyon and charging for parking can make the bus cost effective compared to driving.
- 10) Personal anecdote: I ride the bus frequently to Solitude. Not only do I have to deal with Wasatch Blvd traffic jams, I love how it delivers me right to the lift, I don't have to pay to park, nor do I have to walk a mile from the road if the parking is full. These same advantages can be made to apply to Little Cottonwood Canyon.

Comparing the Enhanced Bus Service ("EBS") to the Gondola Alternative:

- 1) Enhanced Bus Service is far less expensive. Since a dedicated bus lane is not needed in the Canyon, the cost of Enhanced Bus Service is not just \$51 million less than the Gondola, it is \$206 million less. (Substitute the \$355 capital cost for EBS without a dedicated lane in the Canyon for the \$510 capital cost for EBS with the dedicated lane, and add the savings to the \$51 million saving of EBS compared to the Gondola).
- 2) Comparing EBS with a dedicated lane to the gondola is not only a false equivalency with respect to cost, but also a false equivalency with respect to environmental impact. The impact of the Gondola does not look so bad compared to the impact of EBS when the road needs to be widened. When it is acknowledged that EBS can work without a dedicated lane, the true additional adverse impacts of the Gondola are easier to recognize.
- 3) Buses are scalable and flexible. As the dynamics of the ski business change, or if it dries up, changes can be made in bus schedules, or they can be put to other uses. Not so the Gondola.
- 4) If it is necessary to take the bus to access the Gondola, why not save time and stay on the bus and ride it up the canyon.
- 5) While the Gondola adds a small amount of reliability on a few winter days, this additional reliability is simply not worth the cost.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Del Draper". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Del Draper

## **2. From Alicia & Peter Pond**

We strongly advocate for bus service. Buses are reliable transportation that most people understand and are comfortable with. They are inexpensive relative to a gondola and easily replaced. They are not gimmicky. They are a tried and true mode of transport.

We understand the underlying idea of the gondola -- no snowsheds, no interruption in service due to road conditions, avalanche, etc. However, the gondola comes across as extremely "gimmicky" and very "Gatlinburg Tennessee" -- we fear more tourists than skiers as passengers. Alta is not Europe. A miles-long gondola with its large and numerous poles does not belong here. ASL are the main beneficiary of a gondola -- more and more skiers, more and more money. We who live in Alta have already experienced quite a bit of change over the past 5 years with more traffic, charges for the summer road, more development, etc. Buses would be a change, but not nearly as dramatic as the introduction of a gondola overhead and the resultant construction.

Thank you,  
Alicia & Peter Pond

### 3. From Karen Travis

#### QUESTIONS REGARDING EXTRA BUS LANES vs. OVERHEAD TRAMWAY UP LCC:

It is impossible for me to back one of either of these solutions to the traffic problem with such limited explanations about exactly what each entails. So much emphasis is on the skiing and recreating public but not much is being said about the residents and businesses in the canyon and what they can or cannot expect.

#### OVERHEAD TRAMWAY:

1. Where and how much parking will be at the mouth of the canyon for those using the tram?
2. If tram users get stuck up canyon (Interlodged or malfunctioning tram), will they be able to leave their cars in the parking lot at the mouth of the canyon overnight?
3. What happens if the tram cable ices up, heavy winds keep the tram from running, or a mechanical problem keeps the tram from running? How do people then get up or down the canyon? Who is responsible for evacuating the tram cars in any of these situations and trained and available are said rescuers?
4. Do I presume correctly that even with the tram, the road will be kept open for vehicles (service vehicles, residents, employees, and other who are not able to ride the tram within the allotted hours)? Or will the tram run 24 hours a day?
5. Will each tram car be equipped with phone/radio service to the base in case of an emergency?
6. Will each car stop at Snowbird or will there be express cars to and from Alta?
7. If a resident, business owner, or service personnel needs to get to the valley ASAP for a needed supply, mechanical part, or other emergency business (i.e. a suddenly broken snowblower, furnace, hot water tank, etc.), how difficult will it be to get down and back up the canyon with the repaired snowblower, mechanical part, new appliance, etc. in record time? Or get the needed mechanic up and down the canyon to do the job?
8. Others who may not have been considered are those residents who may have jobs in the Salt Lake Valley and have odd schedules. How do they conveniently get up and down the highway in all weather conditions?
9. Will the tram run in the summer? On what sort of a schedule?
10. I presume there will be a fee to ride the tram?

#### EXPANDED BUS LANES:

1. It seems that this option could easily be tested out right now on a limited basis in that UTA could expand their canyon bus schedule to be more frequent. I know people that used to ride the bus, want to ride the bus, but will no longer ride the bus because of 1) filled parking lots 2) overcrowded busses with standing room only 3) inconvenient scheduling 4) no express busses to Alta so the Snowbird stops add too much time to the trip. These problems could be ironed out right now and the entire idea of more busses more frequently could be tested in real time.

2. Will the expanded bus lanes (2, I presume, one uphill and one downhill) be added to the outside lanes or the middle lanes of the road?
3. Will snow sheds need to be built over the road in the most avalanche prone areas?
4. What will a summer bus schedule look like since White Pine Trailhead, Snowbird, and Alta become congested summer parking lots?
5. Will there be a fee difference between summer and winter? I presume summer scheduling will be less frequent than winter?
6. Where are cyclists expected to ride once 2 bus lanes are added?
7. Will the bus lanes be fully restricted to busses or will there be a time that they will be available for other vehicle traffic? There is always someone in a car that needs a passing lane. Will concrete trucks, for example, use the bus lanes or automobile lanes? There are a lot of slow-moving vehicles that use the canyon so what is the plan for them once the bus lanes are created?

#### 4. From Chad Horne

Imagine the photo that was sent at the bottom of this meeting notice with a power line.....no, a really big power line, complete with erector set towers ranging from 130 to 230 feet (the height of a 20 story building) running straight up the bottom of the canyon, across the Blackjack Cliffs into Alta. Imagine these towers are so tall that they will need synchronized anti-collision red lights on their tops anytime any aircraft is anywhere near the area. This is what is proposed and is buried within the detail of the UDOT documents under the title of "Gondola."

Most of us think of Gondola as something that sits at the minimum necessary altitude to clear trees and hazards, maybe 35-50 feet above ground level like those in Snowbasin or at Deer Crest at Deer Valley. What is proposed is more like an Aerial Tramway and would resemble something more akin to the Tram at Snowbird, but with taller towers and running the entire length of the canyon, with synchronized lights on top, permanently transforming one of the many iconic views of Little Cottonwood Canyon. The use of the word Gondola is a complete misnomer to most reasonable people. Aerial Tramway is a more appropriate word.

Many questions are unanswered in the proposals that are critical to Alta residents and property owners. The costs of the infrastructure of both presented options is staggering. The lack of any outline of funding methods, operating entities (UTA, other?) and management plans, operational hours, and costs to the public users of the options is unusual in a proposal that is so heavy on detail. My guess is somewhere along the way we will be asked to help fund something most of us that live here don't want, don't think materially helps with the issues at hand, and adversely impacts our enjoyment of the canyon.

Lastly, that UDOT did not consider some more scalable and less expensive options in their final proposal that utilize existing infrastructure, with somewhat simple modifications, is quite curious. Why, for example, is there no proposal for increased express bus service, constructing only the snow-shed portions of the roadway improvements to alleviate concerns during avalanche conditions with mandatory 4 wheel drive with snow tires at all times from November 15 to May 15 (in all conditions) with heavy fines for violators? Why is tolling only shown as a part of a longer range program instead of implemented immediately, along with a 4WD mandate to relieve the very current conditions we will encounter in a few months? Is the lack of a near term solution intended to create a large scale infrastructure program that may not be needed or desirable for the residents of Alta for the long term? In the past couple of years, we have seen what has happened to our National Parks as crowds increase to the point of over-run. Maybe we can help prevent that here and preserve the experience for all.....

We are residents and property owners in Alta. Our voices deserve to be heard at the high level meetings that our elected officials will be attending as this process moves forward. I hope our elected officials will keep this in mind as they represent us in this process, both formally in public meetings and informally in their interactions with the decision makers at all levels.

Table 2.6-6. Gondola Alternative B – Tower Height and Construction Method

Tower Number <sup>a</sup>	Tower Height (feet)	Construction Access
1B	262	Road access; adjacent to S.R. 210
2B	236	Road access; adjacent to S.R. 210
Angle station	Not applicable	At Little Cottonwood Canyon park-and-ride lot
1	131	Helicopter
2	164	Helicopter and crane from Granite Mountain Storage Facility
2	197	Helicopter
4	164	Road access through existing dirt road
5	164	Helicopter and crane from S.R. 210
6	197	Helicopter and crane from S.R. 210
7	197	Helicopter and crane from S.R. 210
8	186	Road access; adjacent to S.R. 210
Angle station	Not applicable	Road access; adjacent to S.R. 210
9	131	Crane from S.R. 210
10	197	Helicopter
11	197	Helicopter and crane from S.R. 210
12	230	Crane from S.R. 210
13	230	Crane from S.R. 210
14	197	Road access; near Snowbird access road
15	164	Road access; near Snowbird access road
Snowbird station	Not applicable	Road access
16	131	Road access; near Alta Bypass Road
17	131	Helicopter
18	180	Helicopter
19	230	Road access from Alta ski resort
20	131	Road access from Alta ski resort
Alta station	Not applicable	Road access from S.R. 210

<sup>a</sup> Gondola towers 1B and 2B would be constructed for Gondola Alternative B only. Towers 1–20 apply to both Gondola Alternatives A and B.

Respectfully Submitted,

Chad Horne

## 5. From Sara Gibbs

Thank you for providing opportunities for community input on the LCC EIS and thank you for all your time involved with this project. The following comments are from me and not on the behalf of my non-profit employer.

I feel that conversations, comments, and videos that I have seen and heard are all about gondola or bus options and a lot about the hub terminal at the LCC base. I am not saying that I am for or against anything, I just have some thoughts on the hub terminal station in Alta.

Alta should not be seen as a transportation hub stop but as a small town with a school, a mayor, a government, a post office, with residents of all ages. Like adding lanes to Wasatch Boulevard will forever change Cottonwood Heights, adding this hub terminal to the Town Of Alta will forever change our town.

When and if this building is built, I hope that this terminal will have public input from the Alta community, and the design will fit in with the surroundings of Alta. This grand building offers an excellent opportunity to showcase all of Little Cottonwood Canyon, a perfect location for local art, historical, and environmental displays.

The Alta terminal building obviously will need to offer lockers, food amenities, and bathrooms for the folks riding the gondola, that should not even have to be mentioned. The only day lodge in Alta (Albion Day Lodge) can not support all of the gondola rider's needs and Albion Day Lodge is a good walk or ski away from the proposed site for the terminal. Speaking of the site, I am curious about the location of the terminal building, I do see a location at minute 2:23 of the Gondola Works video but I can not decipher if it will end up being closer to the highway or closer to the rope tow. If it is up at highway level, will a lift or magic carpet need to be installed to transport gondola riders back up to the terminal? New food and businesses in this building are exciting for Alta, and could be a great bonus for our town, especially in the summer when the town is busy and options are not available for food or drink. Finally, I hope UDOT will consider providing employee housing at the terminal for those who will run the building as affordable housing is non-existent in Alta. It sure would be a pickle if the manager of the terminal is stuck down the canyon due to whatever comes their way.

If we are going to spend all of this money, let's make sure this building is gorgeous, filled with amenities, the community likes it, and make sure it fits in with our town.

Thank You,

Sara Gibbs



## **6. From Friends of Alta**

### OPINION EDITORIAL

#### LITTLE COTTONWOOD ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

According to the 2020 U.S. Census, Utah has had the highest percentage population increase in the nation, growing 18.4% since 2010. Much of that growth has occurred in the Salt Lake valley.

Utahns love the outdoors, and many choose to live in the Salt Lake valley to enjoy the world-class recreation that our canyons have to offer. But many may not realize that these canyons are also our watershed, and the source of much of the water we use in our homes and businesses.

Utahns are faced with the harsh reality of a rapidly growing population rising in tandem with the growing popularity of outdoor recreation. The resultant increase in visitation to our canyons is beginning to impact the health of our canyons and our watershed. We are literally “loving them to death.”

The Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) is currently determining the safest and most environmentally friendly way to get people in and out of Little Cottonwood Canyon. The National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) requires an Environmental Impact Study (EIS), presently in draft form, to analyze alternatives.

The first consideration of the Draft EIS is the visitor capacity of Little Cottonwood Canyon and the impact of increasing human visitation upon it. We also believe the long-term transportation solution for LCC must focus on mass transit for all LCC users. Additionally, the right solution must be flexible to meet the needs of canyon visitors throughout the year while simultaneously protecting our fragile watershed.

Amplifying the need for a canyon-wide transportation solution that extends beyond the resorts, the Winter Wildlands Alliance has noted that human-powered snowsports are “the fastest growing segment within the otherwise stagnant winter outdoor recreation industry.”

Currently, UDOT has narrowed its draft EIS to two alternatives: a Gondola and Enhanced Bus with a separate bus lane. We believe the Enhanced Bus with a separate bus lane is the preferred option.

### **GONDOLA**

Running from La Caille to Snowbird and Alta, the gondola alternative is attractive to some as an exciting “tourist attraction” or “theme park ride.” But besides being anathema to NEPA goals, this “sexy” gondola fails to solve the LCC problem for multiple reasons.

- First, with only 1500 parking stalls at its base, the gondola would require many passengers to change modes of transportation three (3) times [personal car to bus to gondola]. This inconvenience would limit adoption for many potential visitors.
- Second, the proposed gondola serves only the ski resorts. It would serve only those who paid to access a private ski area, but leave behind the growing population of hikers, mountain bikers, backcountry skiers, photographers, and other canyon visitors. And depending on cost-feasibility and adoption, it may not run in the summer at all.

## **ENHANCED BUS TRAVEL WITH ROAD WIDENING**

The Enhanced Bus with Road Widening option meets the goal set out by UDOT to minimize potential harm to the watershed while maintaining the infrastructure to service the whole canyon. This option is flexible and can be changed to meet changing needs for transportation in LCC.

While we support extending the Draft EIS Public Comment Period to address questions in the Enhanced Bus proposal surrounding snow sheds, water runoff, trailhead parking, parking restrictions, mobility hubs, and more, we are convinced that Enhanced Bus is the better alternative.

In conclusion, the Draft EIS is at the proverbial “fork in the road”. One route leads to successful planning, engineering, visitor management and watershed protection in Little Cottonwood Canyon. The other route leads to an expensive marketing ploy.

The Little Cottonwood EIS Study is open for public comment until September 3, 2021. We encourage you to share your feedback at <https://littlecottonwoodeis.udot.utah.gov/#comment-form>

Thank you,

Kody Fox

Executive Director

7. Roger Bourke (3 slides only, comment being share at listening session)



Alta Terminus – Slide 1



Wildcat Base – Slide 2



PowderRidge to Buckhorn – Slide 3

## **8. Ellen Birrell**

Jen, I realize I may be too late. But if there is time for me to make a public statement it goes as follows: The organization save not pave representing 966 residents predominantly located in the Cottonwood Heights and Sandy area are very concerned that the gondola with La Caille parking garage is going to only slightly reduce traffic in the canyon but significantly increase traffic within our neighborhoods getting to the gondola garage on the north east side of La Caille. We also believe the gondola will not have the proclaimed high ridership because all two thirds of riders going up to Alta will have to transfer three times lugging their ski equipment in order to reach Alta from either the 9400 S. Highland or the gravel pit parking garage at the mouth of big Cottonwood Canyon.

It is our desire to see enhanced busing based on a modern system of electric buses, with high frequency during peak times. Foremost, before UDOT makes any decision, there should be a one-year trial period of enforcing no private vehicles during morning and afternoon peak of the 30 days of peak traffic along with the high frequency of buses departing from not only 9400 South Highland Dr. but also other specified locations within Salt Lake County offering direct, nonstop service to each of the four resorts.

Ellen Birrell, save not pave

Sent from my iPhone

## 9. Mark Levin

Hi Jen:

A few comments for consideration:

- Any system of toll charges for use of SH-210 needs to have special provisions for property owners, non-owner canyon residents, employees, utility companies, guests, deliver vendors and parcel services, etc. This ideally should be an exemption from toll charges, or perhaps a deeply discounted annual or other pass system.
- The current buses are ill-prepared for winter canyon travel. Probably should be configured and equipped with all wheel drive, locking differential in rear, etc. Buses should have external ski/snowboard racks to allow more passengers to safely seat on the bus.
- Ski areas need to do their part to facilitate bus transportation by offering significantly expanded long term ski and clothing lockers from what they have now. Likely many more people would ride the bus if their skis and boots and stuff were already up at the area in a locker, instead of having to schlep that stuff up there and back on a bus. Same consideration applies to gondola transportation.
- Base Facilities – construction of more bed-base lodging should be encouraged to facilitate overnight stays by tourist skiers, taking load off canyon traffic. Existing height restrictions and area ratios related to building should be relaxed to facilitate redevelopment at a scale that makes economic sense and encourages older structures to be replaced. Town of Alta should consider whether encouraging the development of more retail shops and restaurant type facilities and creating some form of a walkable town area to attract more overnight stays would reduce canyon traffic. Also, having more apres-ski environment would likely cause some day skiers to wait before joining the downhill traffic flow, thus flattening the peak a bit.
- Parking – Alta ski area should be encouraged or required to begin plans to put in a multi level parking structure to accommodate the parking for its land use on its own premises. Vail ski area is one example of this. Yes, it's expensive, but the ski areas are also asking for the public, including non-skiing public, to spend \$600 million dollars on transportation.
- BOTH the gondola AND an enhanced bus system probably should be built. At the very least, there need to be avalanche sheds constructed at all major slide paths, even if the gondola is built.
- The Gondola has many environmental benefits that need to be considered that far offset its minor visual impact. Every vehicle is not on SH-210 is less re-suspension of dust on the roads going into the air and watershed, less exhaust fumes in a narrow canyon, less diesel or gasoline burned releasing carbon, less rubber tire residue and oil drips going into the watershed.

- We need to be realistic in addressing the large increases in the SLC valley population, and the projected further large increases. The ski areas will need to be expanded to accommodate that growth if any quality of the ski experience is to be maintained. Its unpopular with a loud minority, but too bad.
- Transportation planning should encourage linking of the ski areas with a system of gondolas.
- Gondola should run to late at night, as it is for Mountain Village at Telluride. Night operations will facilitate a certain percentage of skiers staying (and spending money) later after skiing instead of all of them rushing to line up all at once at the end of the day.
- Gondola should probably either be free or low cost.
- Any parking or ski reservation system should end at noon and become an open access after that, as there is typically a contingent of morning skiers who depart to go back to work mid day that opens additional capacity. An example of this was Winter Park this past season, who started out with a ski reservation system then later changed that to allow afternoon skiing with no reservation. Similar was at Copper Mountain.
- Interlinking of the ski areas is a good idea, as it can help reduce the number of tourist skiers on SH-210. Park City has much more of a bed base and evening attractions than either Snowbird or Alta, make it easy for those tourists to stay in PC and ride a gondola to come visit, instead of trying to take their rental car up 210 in a blizzard.
- Much stricter enforcement of vehicle suitability for canyon travel in winter conditions should be considered. A reasonable standard MINIMUM is probably all wheel drive and actual snow-rated traction tires on all wheels, not “all season” tires.

Mark Levin, P.E.