

MEMORANDUM

TO: Open Space Board of Trustees

FROM: Dan Burke, Director, Open Space and Mountain Parks
Mark Davison, Community Connections and Partnerships Manager
Kacey French, Planning and Design Supervisor
Marni Ratzel, Principal Planner

DATE: December 8, 2021

SUBJECT: Written Information: US36 / North Foothills Highway Bikeway Feasibility Study

Background

Boulder County's Transportation Planning Division in the Community Planning & Permitting Department (CP&P) is initiating and leading a feasibility study to assess the practicality, considerations and impacts of a bikeway adjacent to US36 (North Foothills Highway) connecting Boulder to Lyons. **Attachment A** is a map of the approximate extents of the study. The potential bikeway is envisioned to be designed primarily for recreation cyclists of different speed and riding categories who want a separated facility due to the high traffic volume and large number of cyclist fatalities along the US 36 highway. It would be a hard-surface facility, open and maintained for travel year-round. Use of e-bikes may be allowed on the potential bikeway.

Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) owns or has conservation easements on lands adjacent to the US 36 right-of-way. An objective of the feasibility study is to avoid encroachment into OSMP lands as much as possible and minimize as well as mitigate any impacts to Open Space values and lands.

Regional trail connections are important collaborative efforts for the City of Boulder and OSMP and continue to be of community interest as they contribute to visitor experience, trail connectivity, wellness and improve the quality of life in our community. They also help to meet the city's Climate Commitment goal by reducing the number of vehicle miles traveled to reach local trails, in turn helping to preserve the ecosystems and habitats that make up OSMP. The OSMP Master Plan guides staff participation in these collaborative projects by envisioning a connected network of local and regional trails (outcome RRSE.E) and defining a strategy that encourages multimodal access to trailheads and leverages regional trail partnerships (strategy RRSE.4 and RRSE.7).

OSMP Interests

The OSMP lands to the west of US36 are designated as a Habitat Conservation Area (HCA) with sensitive habitat and resources including rare plants and plant communities and highly suitable habitat for species including those that are globally imperiled. The planned trail system on OSMP lands contained in the North Trail Study Area (TSA) is intended to minimize impacts to these highly valued natural resources and to provide a remote visitor experience that fosters appreciation and understanding of ecological systems, and with comparably lower levels of visitor use. The approved North TSA trail system is set back from US36 with a connection to Heil Valley Ranch, a Boulder County Open Space property/trail system outside of Lyons, which is contingent on future acquisitions. The North TSA trails west of US 36 are not part of and are excluded from the feasibility study conducted by Boulder County; their sole focus for the feasibility study to assess the practicality, considerations and impacts of a bikeway adjacent to US36.

OSMP's support of the Boulder County feasibility study was based on the following requirement being met:

- The feasibility study is limited to assessing the practicality, considerations, costs, impacts, critical flaws, etc. of an adjacent/parallel bikeway to US36 connecting Boulder to Lyons.
- Only alignment alternatives on the east side of US36 will be considered through the portion adjacent to OSMP lands. As detailed above, OSMP lands west of US36 are a designated HCA with sensitive habitat and resources including rare plants and plant communities and highly suitable habitat for globally imperiled species.
- The study considers an alignment that stays in the highway Right of Way (ROW) and avoids OSMP lands, or as much as *absolutely possible* avoids OSMP lands.
- The use of city Open Space for a hard surface trail that allows e-bikes would likely require a disposal of city open space. A disposal request would require complex negotiations and engagement as well as potentially require mitigation through the purchase of replacement ecologically valuable property elsewhere.

The potential bikeway would provide the following benefits to OSMP:

- Provide a safe alternative to vehicular access for those travelling to OSMP's northwest Boulder trailheads including the Joder Ranch, Left Hand, Foothills, and Boulder Valley Ranch trailheads.
- Increase equitable access by reducing access/transportation related issues for the 9% of residents who reported difficulty reaching OSMP by bus, bike, or foot (2019 OSMP Master Plan Survey).
- Provide an alternative experience and connection to compliment the planned trail system on OSMP lands to the west of US36 as identified in the OSMP North Trail Study Area Plan (2016).
- The Rocky Mountain Greenway (RMG) – a Colorado the Beautiful statewide priority trail project that has been designated by former President Barack Obama as an official project of America's Great Outdoors. The vision of the project is to ultimately connect the three Front Range National Wildlife Refuges (Rocky Mountain Arsenal, Two Ponds, and Rocky Flats) with Rocky Mountain National Park through an interconnected, multi-use, regional trail system. Connecting Boulder to Lyons is a critical segment, and one that has faced many challenges in the past. This feasibility study, and potential connection could help fulfill this larger vision.

The City of Boulder Department of Transportation and Mobility also supports the feasibility project. A potential bikeway would benefit the City of Boulder and the region's Vision Zero traffic safety initiative. A summary of benefits for the region's Vision Zero safety initiative and multi-modal transportation is included as **Attachment B**.

Funding

The bikeway feasibility study is supported by a \$400,000 grant-funded project with \$331,150 coming from federal funds. The local match contribution is funded by Boulder County's CP&P (\$46,350) and Parks and Open Space (\$15,000) departments, with OSMP contributing the remaining \$7,500.

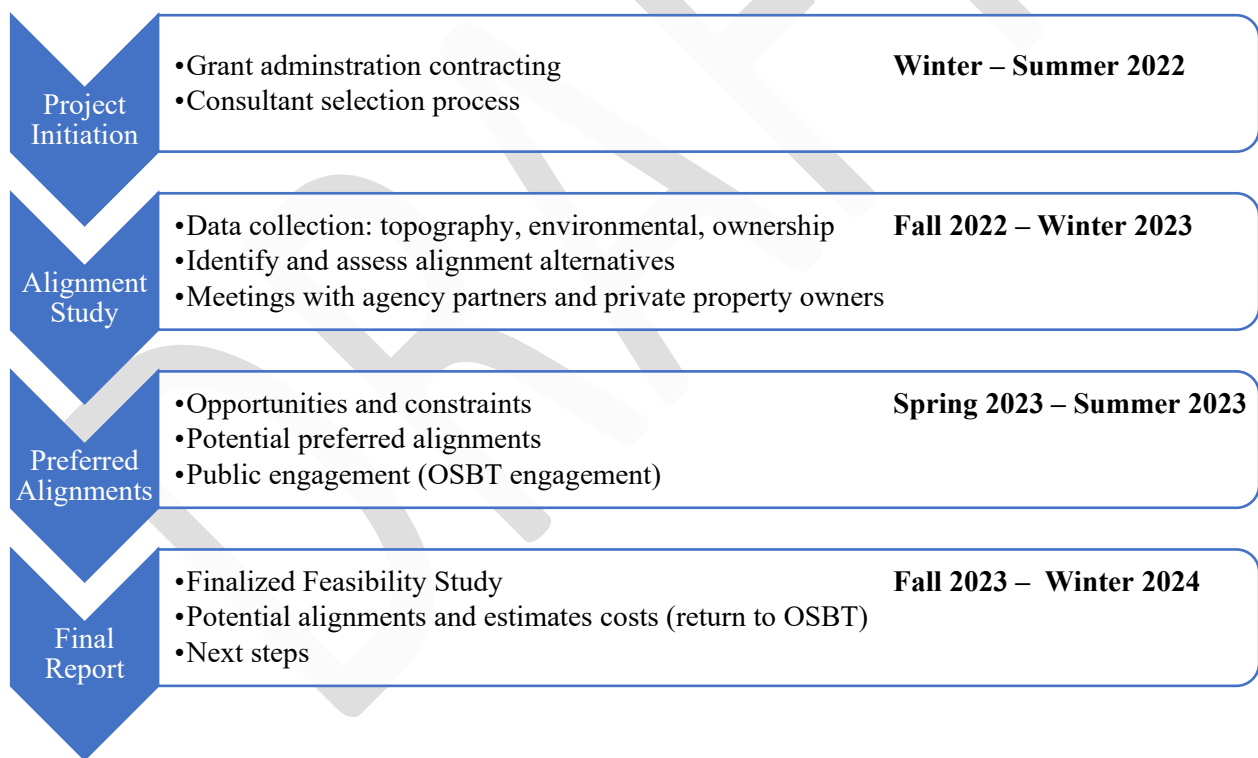
OSMP's Role

Boulder County will include OSMP staff as part of the project team finalizing the feasibility study's scope and deliverables. Staff will provide information about open space values adjacent to the right of

way, ensure an alignment avoids OSMP lands as much as possible, and describe the negotiation, mitigation and potential disposal process that would be required should an alignment be located outside of the ROW and utilize OSMP lands. OSMP coordination on the feasibility study will ensure alignment alternatives identify a corresponding safe and complimentary regional trail or path to minimize potential for increased use and pressure on OSMP soft surface trails. Staff also will review deliverables to ensure the final products will be supportive and at the right level of detail for city policy makers to make an informed decision regarding the proposed next steps for the bikeway in a subsequent phase. The decision of whether to proceed with further design and construction would be a future process and project phase after completion of the feasibility study.

Status

Boulder County anticipates initiating the feasibility study in early 2022. A summary of the planning process is detailed in the diagram below. The timeline is preliminary and subject to change. The study will evaluate alignment alternatives, identify opportunities and constraints of alignments and develop a conceptual level cost estimates of potential alignment alternatives in a Final Report. Key milestones are to gather public input on potential alignments and a staff recommended preferred alignment in Spring – Summer 2023. Outcomes anticipated for inclusion in the final report are a right-of-way map, environmental documentation, summary of public engagement, and potential bikeway alignments and next steps.



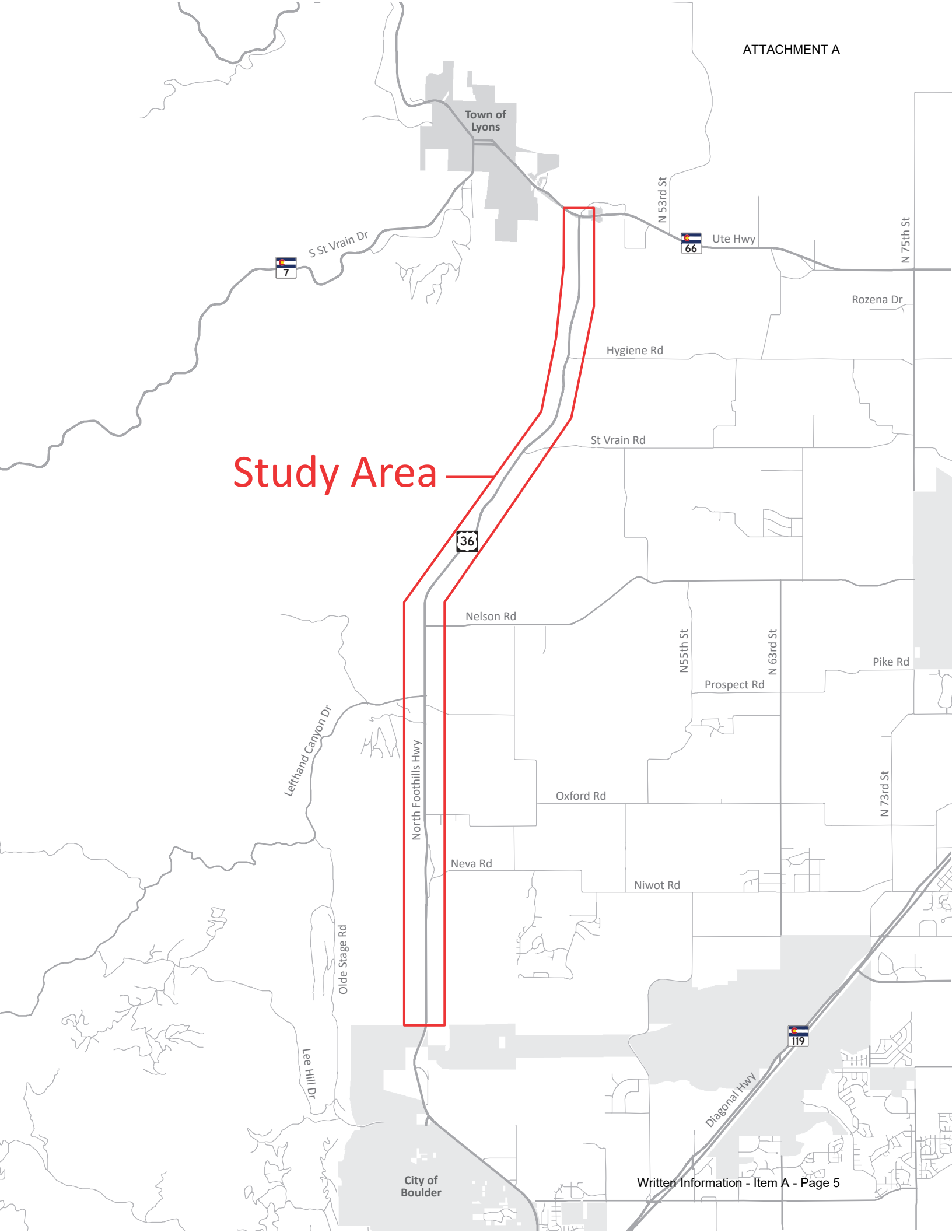
Next Steps

Boulder County will utilize consultant services to complete the feasibility study. After completing the consultant selection process, the alignment study will include gathering data, and identify and evaluate alignment alternatives for the potential bikeway. Staff will return to the OSBT with an update on the alignment alternatives in Spring – Summer 2023. Selection of potential preferred alternatives to consider for additional study would be outlined in a Final Report currently scheduled to be drafted sometime in Fall – Winter 2023.

Attachments:

- **Attachment A:** Feasibility Study Map
- **Attachment B:** Multimodal transportation benefits

DRAFT



Study Area

North Foothills / US36 Feasibility Study

Benefits for the region's Vision Zero safety initiative and multi-modal transportation

- A crucial first step to create a safe bicycle route connecting Boulder with Lyons and would provide access to many destinations in between.
- The North Foothills Highway (US 36) is one of the most biked roads in the county for both recreation and for transportation purposes, but unfortunately, is also one of the deadliest for cyclists.
- Funding this study would support our region's Vision Zero traffic safety initiative and would also support the City of Boulder's Transportation Master Plan objective to create multimodal connections to neighboring communities.
- A recent Boulder County crash data report revealed that 30% of all life alerting or fatal bicycle and pedestrian crashes (20 out of 67) from 2009 to 2018 occurred on North US 36 between Jay Road and Lyons. Based on this data, a Lyons to Boulder separated multi-use path could save 20 cyclists lives every ten years.
- The posted speed limit on US 36/North Foothills Highway is 60 MPH. The high speed and large volume of traffic present a daunting obstacle for anyone other than the most experienced cyclist.
- Funding the feasibility study would start the process of determining whether a separated pathway could be constructed to allow more cyclists with varying skill levels to recreate and commute by bike.