

Report pans Jefferson Parkway

Sierra Club names link one of the 50 worst projects in U.S.

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The Sierra Club took a dim view of the proposed Jefferson Parkway as part of the group's 2012 report: Smart Choices, Less Traffic: 50 Best and Worst Transportation Projects in the United States.

Featured on the "worst" side was the Jefferson Parkway — a proposed 10-mile, four-lane tollway to run from Superior to State Highway 93. Bill Roettker, the Sierra Club Rocky Mountain Chapter transportation specialist, said the parkway was nominated because it did not meet most of the design standards that the environmental group supports. The plans include no pedestrian or bicycle options, for example.

Roettker said another mark against the parkway is that its location seems to encourage suburban sprawl development.

"On top of that, of course, what makes the Jefferson Parkway particularly troublesome is that it cuts a 300-foot wide section along the eastern edge of the old Rocky Flats land, where it will be churning up a lot of dirt," Roettker said.

The Rocky Flats site was used for Cold War-era nuclear weapon production. The site was contaminated with radioactive material. After it closed, the site was cleaned up and contaminated buildings were removed, a process that concluded in 2005.

"I'm kind of curious what project the Sierra Club is really criticizing," said Bill Ray, the interim executive director of the Jefferson Parkway Public Highway Authority (JPPHA), the coalition board that has overseen the parkway plan.

Ray said the parkway plan is estimated to cost \$204 million, not the \$814 million listed in the Sierra Club report. He also said that claims of inducing sprawl were unfair: The project is bordered by protected open space for roughly two-thirds of its length.

"And the No. 1 inducer to more traffic is population growth," Ray said, citing an estimated 2 million additional Colorado residents in the next 20 years. "If people think (Highway) 93 is bad now, wait until then."

While not yet included in the plans, Ray said the JPPHA intends to include pedestrian and bike transit options for the parkway.

As for the issue of disturbed soils threatening the public, Ray said nearly every study done on the parkway transit corridor have revealed no human radioactive contamination.

"The authority is on the record that we will conduct whatever monitoring or testing that might be required," Ray said.

Nonetheless Roettker said even if the parkway is built, the vision of a Denver metro area 470 beltway would not be complete. Miles on either end of the Jefferson Parkway would remain to be planned and built, resulting in traffic impacts for the communities of Broomfield and Golden.

"I don't see any saving grace to it really," Roettker said.