

# SAVE OUR CANYONS

Mill Creek FLAP Grant  
Central Federal Lands Highway Division  
12300 W. Dakota Ave. Suite 380  
Lakewood, Colorado 80228

To Whom It May Concern,

Mill Creek Canyon is cherished by many members of our community, from leaf-peepers to picnickers to backcountry travelers. We appreciate the work that you have put forth on this project to rebuild Mill Creek Canyon road above the winter gate, and the consideration of improving access and safety to the canyon.

We understand that a major factor behind rebuilding Mill Creek Canyon road above the winter gate is to improve drainage and repair the crumbling road base, and we support these modifications of the aged and deteriorating roadbed to protect stream health.

Mill Creek Canyon (especially the upper portion) is unique with its narrow, tree-lined upper road, compared to the higher-speed, wider lanes of Big Cottonwood and Little Cottonwood Canyon. The natural features of Mill Creek Canyon lend themselves to a different character and make-up of recreational uses, with more non-motorized users (cyclists and pedestrians) and dog owners seeking solace in this unique canyon.

While we understand that widening the road may increase sight distances and therefore driver expectations, we remain concerned that road widening may also increase driving speeds. Introducing a wider road corridor could inadvertently lead to people driving faster, thus causing unsafe conditions for non-motorized users sharing the roadway.

In addition, while we appreciate the purpose of including varying road widths in this assessment (especially in environmentally sensitive areas), we are concerned that inconsistent road widths may lead to driver confusion and introduce difficulties when sharing the roadway. Indeed, inconsistent roadway width was a stated purpose and need for this project, and a consistent roadway width was recommended to safely accommodate users in the upper canyon. Therefore, we suggest keeping the minimum width of 18 feet consistent up and down the canyon. Having a consistent road width closer to 18 feet could improve driver expectations, reduce the need for retaining walls and slope cuts into the hillsides, and help save money on asphalt and excavation for this project.

Overwhelmingly, one of the biggest concerns that we have heard from the community throughout this process is the prioritization of car-centric infrastructure and transportation to and from the canyons.

It's noteworthy that the original project application and scope contained a request for a shuttle or transit planning, which was removed from the scope of this assessment and evaluation. After receiving public input on former designs, project partners shared an iteration where parking lots would include potential shuttle drop-off locations, to help facilitate a potential future transit system. During Summer 2023 public open houses, project partners expressed that they used the vehicle size of a small shuttle when redesigning trailheads, adding shuttle pull outs, and improving/adding restroom facilities at trailheads. After the open house, we were encouraged to hear the prioritization of shuttle service within this design. However, we note that in the environmental assessment, there is no mention of a shuttle and only certain locations that could allow for vehicle drop-offs. There has also been no update on the Forest Service and other partners' efforts to facilitate a future shuttle service in Mill Creek Canyon since Summer 2023.

It is disheartening this assessment does not prioritize a potential shuttle system. As visitation continues to grow with more people seeking solace and respite in our canyons, it is vital to prioritize equitable access and additional transit options to our public lands. A majority of comments asked for a shuttle, and a transit system in Mill Creek has been a major recommendation from many plans. The 2003 Revised USFS Plan calls for increased transit and bus service and generally shies away from the creation of new parking in order to protect the watershed. Numerous Salt Lake County plans and studies (2012 Mill Creek Canyon Transportation Study, Wasatch Canyons General Plans) call for a shuttle program, as does the 2015 Mountain Accord charter.

As Salt Lake Valley continues to grow in population, there will be an increase in people drawn to visit and experience the outdoors. We must create more opportunities for people to connect to their public lands that preserve the natural, interconnected ecosystems which make Mill Creek Canyon an outstanding place for visitors, wildlife and flora. Rather than maintaining existing natural spaces, the public is losing them at a rapid rate, as agencies continue to treat cars and pavement as the solution. In response to growing visitation, project partners should help connect people to the amazing experiences in Mill Creek Canyon through a shuttle program and active transportation (i.e. biking, walking), and using existing infrastructure (instead of adding more impervious surfaces in our canyons).

Public transit is the most equitable option for transportation up and down the canyon and is the most environmentally sensitive option to improve existing access options for users. We ask the Forest Service to continue its consideration of a shuttle for Mill Creek Canyon, exploring options and co-creating solutions with the community for offsetting shuttle costs to ensure that funds stay within the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest, and for mitigating any perceived potential environmental impact of a shuttle.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments and for incorporating some of the concepts from prior public engagement efforts into the plan. We hope that you will continue working to increase safety and access for all users of Mill Creek Canyon and continue the pursuit of a transit system.

Should you have questions or require further consultation regarding our organization's comments, please contact Crystal Chen, Policy Associate, Save Our Canyons.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Crystal Chen". The signature is written in a cursive style and is set against a light gray rectangular background.

Crystal Chen  
Policy Associate  
Save Our Canyons