

VAIL HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION, INC.

The Simba Run Underpass Project



Proposed Simba Run Underpass viewed from above Simba Run Condo Complex looking southwest toward Cascade Village.

VHA Simba Run Underpass Proposal and Protective Sound Barriers Report - 01/02/15.

The Simba Run Underpass proposal – largely financed by CDOT -- raises what could be two critical issues for Vail. First, to what extent will forward looking projects be implemented to help manage Vail traffic and, second, whether Vail will realize any workable solutions to I-70 noise pollution.

These views show what the proposed the Simba Run underpass will look like when completed. The design could include a transparent sound wall along the length of the project.



Proposed Simba Run Underpass without sound walls shown as viewed from North Frontage Road looking east.

The purpose of the Simba Run underpass is to reduce the amount of local traffic using the Main and West Vail roundabouts. According to traffic engineers this will delay by many years the need to pay for an expanding of those two intersections.

Unfortunately, because construction costs are rising some local public officials are suggesting pulling the plug on the entire project. If the Town Council were to walk away from the project, it would mean leaving a nearly 70% contribution from state and federal governments on the table. It would also mean greatly increased costs for upgrading the Vail and West Vail roundabouts. It may also mean a missed opportunity to address noise pollution from I-70.

Clock is Ticking: The clock is ticking on making decisions about a list of tasks that need to be decided in compliance with agreed upon deadlines determining whether the project is to proceed to construction. There is an agreement that generally locks in financial participation percentages if the project proceeds toward construction within 18 months. That dead line is approaching.

Evaluating the cost of Interstate construction projects is not an exercise for the faint of heart. Interstate projects are very expensive and costs have escalated because highway contractors have now become much busier than 18 months ago when the Simba Run underpass became a federally funded project. This project is not unique. The cost of all Interstate projects have gone up by a similar amount. Before hasty decision are cast in stone, the short-term costs need to be compared alongside the long-term cost of expanding the Main and West Vail roundabouts earlier than expected. These numbers could exceed the cost of building the Simba Run underpass now. As a CDOT official says once a community takes a proposed project out of consideration, it will be a very cold day before the State and Federal officials offer to participate in the project ever again.

This is not a project that should be lightly swept aside. The Simba Run underpass will allow internal traffic circulation among neighborhoods located north and south of the Interstate, which reduces local traffic that now must use the Main and West Vail roundabouts. It will also allow for the reconfiguration of the Town's shuttle bus system improving its efficiency by transporting more passengers to their destinations faster. This will be an incentive for people to ride the Town's bus system rather than drive their own vehicles. It will have the effect of further reducing vehicular traffic using

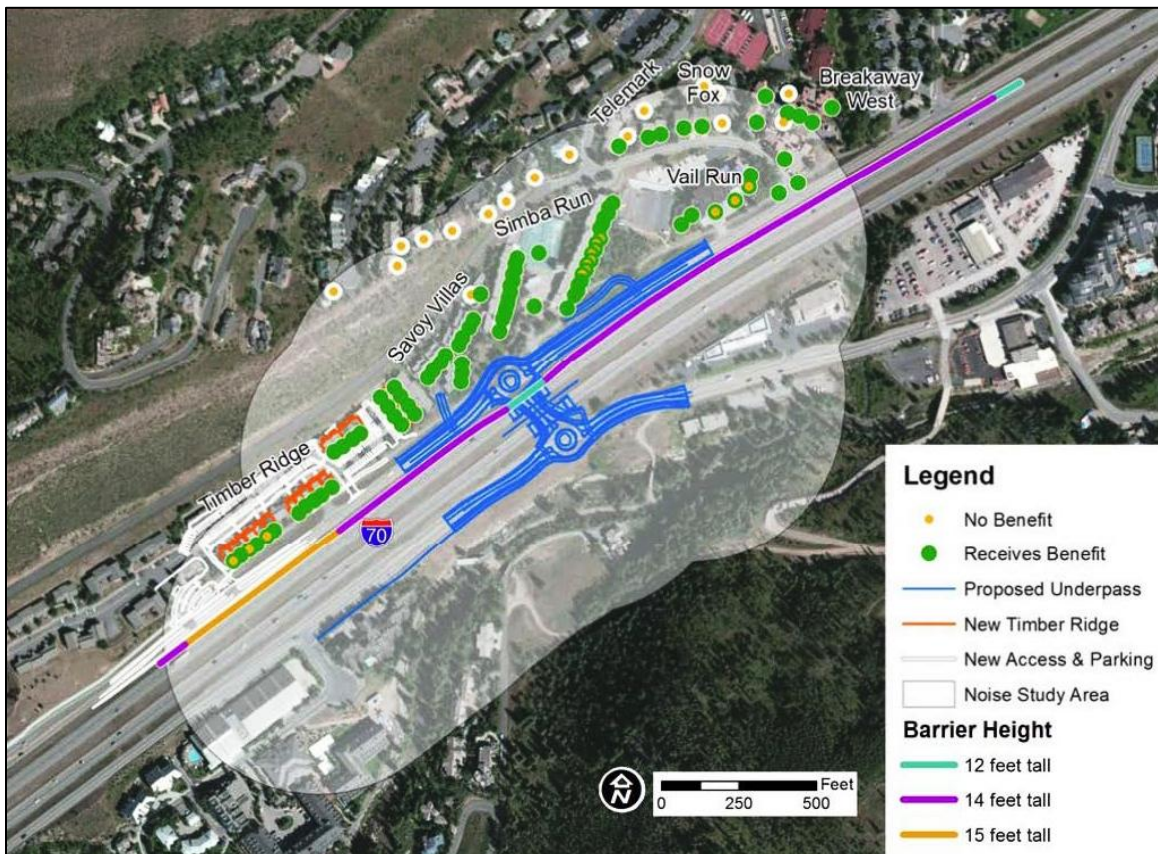


Diagram shows length of sound barrier walls, the benefited neighborhoods and the benefited residential units qualified to vote in the survey authorizing the sound wall portion of the Simba Run underpass project.

the Main and West Vail roundabouts. And secondly, lessen the demand for more public parking in the Town and West Vail commercial centers. The proposed underpass also extends the effective capacity of these two essential roundabouts (Main and West Vail) for another 20 years, thus during that time reducing CDOT's need to invest in its Vail roadway system. However, keeping pace with Vail's traffic and transportation system, will not lessen the demand for CDOT to make further investment in the community's transportation facilities.

Protective Sound Barriers in the Project: Included in the project is a sound barrier wall. For years the community has sought ways to mitigate the excess noise pollution generated by I-70. Solutions such as tunnels and burying I-70 are cost prohibitive, leaving only sound walls as a viable solution. Many areas of Vail are already in violation of Federal highway noise standards. CDOT has tried solutions such as noise reducing asphalt to no avail. As traffic inevitably increases in the coming years, the situation is only going to become worse. The Town of Vail has indentified the impacted neighborhoods in [a detailed highway noise study of the entire community in 2005](#). The report showed where sound wall would be the most effective. But beyond those locations, protective sound walls could be installed to reduce the highway noise levels in other neighborhoods that are not yet at pollution levels.

Sound Reduction can be significant - Listen to the before and after differences: Review the linked [audio recording](#) of reductions in highway noise levels from behind sound walls of varying height. The audio clip was taken with calibrated audio measuring instrument from a fixed location alongside of Interstate 70 near the location of the proposed Simba Run Underpass. A measurement was taken of the normal I70 traffic noise, two additional measurements lowering the noise level by 5 and 7 decibels (db) each.

[The audio clip of these measurements is accessible on line.](#) It begins with the normal level, then drops by 5 db, then replay the normal level followed by a drop of 7db. The difference between normal condition and 7db, would bring down the noise level for a nearby residents so much so that they could for the first time enjoy their outside decks and have windows open on a sunny summer or winter afternoon. This drop in the effects of highway traffic noise would increase the resale value of these benefiting residential units and properties.



Sound Walls in the Denver Metro Area above and below in Summit County.

CDOT will only fund an amount equal to what it would cost to build a 14 foot high solid concrete wall. Such a design would likely be unacceptable to the Vail community but alternatives exist.

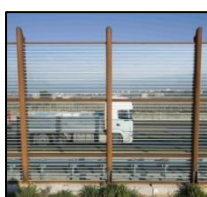
If the community wants a better architectural and environmental design the Town of Vail would be responsible to fund the difference in cost from its own revenues but that could well be a sound investment.



Here are a few examples of architectural designed sound barriers both transparent and solid wall found throughout the world.



Above: Transparent acrylic glass sound wall attached to concrete crash barrier on the Autobahn between Innsbruck, Austria and Munich, Germany



Types of Sound Wall barriers for throughout the world.

The Simba Run Neighborhood Sound Barrier Vote: Some of the adjacent property owners have seized on the sound walls as a reason to scuttle the entire project. [Federal regulations require that residents](#) who would directly benefit from a sound wall project, vote on whether they desire it be built or not. The voters are owners and residents of residential units adjacent to the Simba Run underpass. These units have been evaluated by authorities as being those residents who stand to materially benefit from the wall. Because it owns the adjacent Timber Ridge affordable housing complex now under redevelopment the Town of Vail will casts nearly 33% of the vote.

Community Decision. While the decision to include sound walls at the Simba Run underpass is going to be submitted to a vote of the affected area, the implications are community-wide. CDOT is treating the Simba Run sound wall issue as a “one and done” decision whereby a rejection there would be treated as a community-wide decision to reject any sound walls.

Reconsideration could be a long time coming and CDOT will not look favorably on restoring a proposal that had been previously rejected. In fairness, it should be the entire community that is given the opportunity to say whether it wants sound barrier wall based upon knowing when, where and how much a community-wide design and project will benefit the quality of their Vail experience.

Additional Study Needed: More study is required to provide the community with a comprehensive overview of the importance of this decision. There now is sufficient data that the cost and sequencing of a system of community-wide sound barrier walls can be easily calculated. As well , the cost of delaying the Simba Run underpass can be estimated in a side by side comparison of the sooner or later costs of expanding the Main and West Vail roundabout. These factors should be in hand before decision makers render a final judgment on whether to proceed or not with the construction of either or both the underpass and associated sound barrier.

The noise study is a requirement of federally funded transportation projects, which is funding nearly 70% of the Simba Run project. If the project exceeds its budget, the project need not necessarily be scrapped; additional funds could be requested or the project could be shelved until more funding became available.

The requirement for sound walls was not anticipated nor included in the project’s original \$20 million cost estimate. The Colorado Department of Transportation and the Town of Vail have known for several years, because of an [earlier noise studies conducted](#) by the Town that I-70 was in violation of Federal noise standards.

It is important to note that the Interstate’s violation of noise pollution standards extends for the most part through the entire length of the Vail community. If CDOT desires to expand traffic capacity through Vail, it will continue to confront the sound wall requirement. The Town, because it has not prepared an adequate community-wide sound wall plan, should resist being drawn into CDOT projects that are funded in a manner that uses the Town’s lack of an acceptable sound wall plan, as a reason for CDOT to not fulfill its responsibility to solve the Interstate noise pollution problem throughout the entire community.

As the CDOT noise study shows there is a direct quality of life and financial effect upon property valuations for affected owners from interstate noise pollution. Noise pollution levels are expected to increase along with traffic projections. There could be added environmental benefits such as installing a state of the art roadway drainage system, which would be a major first step in cleaning up the effects of roadway pollution on Gore Creek.



**Main Vail Roundabout:
Ready for 2015 World Alpine Championships, but can it handle future traffic demand without the Simba Run Underpass?**