



March 17, 2015

Mountain Accord  
375 West 200 South, Suite 275  
Salt Lake City, UT 84101

Dear Executive Board,

Please consider this letter as the official comments from the Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment (UPHE) for the Mountain Accord planning process. UPHE board member, Dr. Howie Garber, has been an active participant of the Accord's environmental committee and as such has been intimately involved in the development process of the Accord.

UPHE applauds the comprehensive planning effort of Mountain Accord with regard to protection of the Wasatch Mountains, certainly the lifeblood of our community. We strongly endorse the goals of improving air quality to benefit public health, environmental protection, and scenic visibility. As a related issue, we find it imperative that Salt Lake County and the metropolitan area do its part to mitigate the consequences of the climate crisis. Hence, we certainly agree with the metrics of the associated transportation planning: Reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) to improve air quality. We recognize that it is a challenging task to come up with a transportation system that serves both locals and tourists alike.

UPHE has serious concerns about the proposed blueprint. Overall, for multiple reasons, we feel that the blueprint provides a disproportionate amount of consideration and leverage towards the resort ski industry, as exemplified by such proposals as a train going from Sandy up Little Cottonwood Canyon (LCC) and the proposed tunnel from Big Cottonwood Canyon to Park City. Simply put, it would appear that both of these proposals are designed to benefit first the ski industry first, with consideration for our air quality, watershed protection and the public being second.

According to their own study, the flat/declining trends of the resort skiing industry is one of many reasons to provide a more balanced approach to all stakeholders with regards to influence in the process. When the consequences of climate change with warming temperatures are acknowledged, the ski industry's viability in terms of revenue and employment rates will continue to decline over time. Given this reality alone, committing public funds to what appears to be for subsidizing the ski industry is short sighted, wasteful, and bad policy. No amount of

infrastructure or resort amenities will compensate for steadily shortened ski seasons, less and less snow, and warmer and warmer temperatures.

With the Wasatch Front facing shrinking mountain snow pack, earlier snow melt, and rising stress on diminishing water resources, preservation of those resources becomes increasingly important. Watershed protection for the sustainability of Utah's population should be the paramount priority. The vested interests of the ski industry and any other business entities including those related to tourism, while important to Utah's economy, should not be allowed to infringe upon that priority. Everyone needs water. In contrast only six to eight percent of Salt Lake County residents ski or snowboard. Additionally, statistics clearly show that locals make much greater use of the canyons during the summer months, a time when the proposed train and tunnel options would likely see far less demand, since they do not preclude continued automobile traffic.

Canyon trains and tunnels might be a benefit to tourism and a very small segment of our population, but obviously a critical question is whether there are any valid projections on ridership or number of cars that the train could take off the road. LCC sees a maximum of 9,000 cars on peak ski days, a small fraction of the vehicles using the 1-15 corridor. Given that this project could cost billions of dollars, this amount of money to improve air quality could be much better spent on mass transit improvements and expansion in the Salt Lake Valley and along the Wasatch front. Spending billions of dollars to transport skiers seems like an extraordinary expense to benefit a relatively small special interest.

The consequences of infrastructure required to connect the canyons, and the increase in usage that would be the result have not been properly evaluated. Connecting the canyons would likely jeopardize watershed health, wildlife habitat quality, diminish user experience and the long-term preservation of the aesthetic/wilderness value of the canyons. A tunnel linking LCC and BCC is a "want" of the ski industry but there is no demonstrated "need." The tunnel would basically be a taxpayer-funded connection that would exist to benefit four private ski resorts. There are no significant "problems" that an LCC/BCC tunnel would solve. The same argument applies to a fixed guideway system connecting BCC to Park City. It would not necessarily save time for PC-BCC travelers, is not supported by Park City officials, and would again be a taxpayer-subsidized benefit to a handful of businesses (ski resorts).

The transportation problem in Little Cottonwood Canyon and the Wasatch Canyons in general would be more economically solved by the use of buses. A more efficient, optimized bus system has a greater potential to get more vehicles off the road and to improve air quality. With proper implementation, buses could service both the ski resorts and dispersed recreation users on a year-round basis far more effectively than a train. Transit patterns and schedules of buses can be adjusted to fit demand on an as-needed basis, therefore providing more flexibility than trains and could more easily adapt to changes in ridership from different parts of the valley. Additionally, improved public transit in the canyons would greatly alleviate the traffic and safety issues while reducing the number of hours of blocked canyon roads due to traffic accidents.

Strategies to increase bus ridership and car-pooling are likely to be much more cost effective than trains and tunnels, and do not entail enormous upfront infrastructure costs. Such strategies could include the following:

- Discounted lift tickets for using mass transit or carpooling
- Dedicate an entire fleet of clean fuel buses only to canyon transportation
- Per-vehicle parking fee charged by the county or the ski resorts (either a daily fee or an annual pass) to help subsidize the optimized bus/parking system and provide an incentive to ride the transit system.
- An optimized bus system to include express buses to individual resorts in LCC and BCC.

Snowsheds or bridges over slide paths could be added for increased avalanche mitigation for the highway. Any infrastructure improvement in the canyons should also consider bicycle safety and bicycle lanes. Additionally, enforcement and doubling of speeding fines in BCC, LCC, and Millcreek would do much to improve both bicycle and general public safety.

UPHE *does* supports a train/light rail system linking the Salt Lake Valley with Park City. We believe such a system would be used far more extensively by commuters and lower-income resort workers on a more regular schedule than a LCC canyon train associated with seasonal ski recreation. Further consideration should be given to extending this train to Heber and Provo. We believe that this option would provide for a much wider ridership and hence, go much further to improve air quality than a train in Little Cottonwood.

To summarize, UPHE cannot accept the blue print as is because it does not follow the recommendations made by varied groups. The Mountain Accord's final recommendations should give broader consideration for the public at large and the other varied stakeholders besides just the ski industry. It can and should do much more in order to decrease vehicle miles and improve air quality than is currently recommended in the blue print. This should include the consideration of a rail system in Parley's Canyon. Finally, the protection of the Wasatch Front's watershed should be the number one priority of the Mountain Accord.

Respectfully submitted by the following

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Brian Moench, MD, President

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