

Colorado Municipalities

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TRANSPORTATION





“Nothing behind me,
everything ahead of me,
as is ever so on the road.”

— Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*

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MISSION

Colorado Municipalities is published to inform, educate, and advise appointed and elected municipal officials about new programs, services, trends, and information to help them perform their jobs and better serve their citizens and communities.

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President's Corner

Local transit initiatives keep Colorado connected

BY SETH HOFFMAN, CML EXECUTIVE BOARD PRESIDENT

Hello Colorado! I'm Seth Hoffman, and I'm honored to serve as your Colorado Municipal League Executive Board president this year. I got my start in local government in Grand Junction in 2003 and spent a few formative years there before moving to Lone Tree, where I serve as city manager. Like all of you, I love working in local government, because we see the impact of our work and decisions daily.

One of the great privileges of this role is serving alongside municipal leaders from every corner of Colorado — large and small, urban and rural, mountain towns and plains communities. This variety of perspectives strengthens the board and helps ensure we're serving the full range of municipalities across the state. I'm especially pleased to welcome our newest board members, elected last month in Breckenridge. Each of us is here to serve, and we're always available if you have questions or ideas. The full board roster is available at tinyurl.com/CMLboard.

Transportation is the focus of this issue. Few services have a greater day-to-day impact on residents than how we move people and goods. Whether it's maintaining local roads, calming traffic in small-town corridors, partnering with CDOT on state highways, operating a municipal airport — or planning for the future with transit-oriented development and EV

charging networks — transportation is at the heart of local government.

This issue showcases practical, innovative solutions from communities like Arvada, Broomfield, Longmont, Fort Collins, Alamosa, and others. These examples reflect what local governments do best: solving complex problems with community-focused solutions.

Transportation also reminds us how interconnected our work is. Every transportation decision touches public safety, land use, housing, economic development, infrastructure, and long-term financial stewardship. These are the challenges we navigate every day as municipal leaders.

That's exactly why CML matters. Our organization exists to support your work — through advocacy, training, and connecting municipal officials who share the same opportunities and challenges. I'm grateful for the chance to serve this year, and I look forward to what we'll accomplish together.

One of CML's greatest strengths is the network it provides. I encourage you to stay connected — attend trainings, reach out to fellow municipal officials, and share your community's successes and challenges. There's rarely a problem you're facing that someone else hasn't tackled, and that shared knowledge is among our most valuable tools.

Thank you for everything you do to strengthen your communities. Enjoy this issue — and take time to enjoy the beautiful state we all share together.



SPOTLIGHT: LOCAL CONTROL

Cities & towns deserve better than state-imposed development

Local governments move forward on projects that work in their communities

By **BEVERLY STABLES**, CML legislative and policy advocate

Colorado municipalities don't need mandates to implement transit-oriented development — cities and towns have been hard at work on these projects long before House Bill 24-1313, Transit Oriented Communities, was passed by the legislature.

That legislation created a one-size-fits-all approach to transit-oriented development, or TOD, where local governments along the Front Range and near Grand Junction are subject to forced rezoning without input from residents or locally elected officials.

What this law ignores are the ongoing efforts of municipalities to create TOD in ways that makes sense for their communities. Examples abound across the state.

ARVADA

The City of Arvada completed and adopted its Olde Town Strategic Reinvestment Plan in 2023, which includes the Transit Station Plan, Parking and Transportation Demand Plan, and Bicycle Master Plan. These combine the

city's goals of increasing housing near transit while preserving the historic nature of Arvada's Olde Town neighborhood. The city emphasized community engagement throughout the development of its strategic plans, again balancing growth with preserving existing character. The city also found that an Arvada resident could take public transit from Olde Town to Denver's Union Station in 25 minutes or drive by car in 18 minutes — a common challenge for municipalities when promoting public transit that isn't always as fast and reliable as single-occupancy vehicles. Arvada also established goals for creating better connectivity by improving pedestrian and bicycle access as well as promoting use of public transit.

BROOMFIELD

The City of Broomfield is currently working on a TOD endeavor called Harvest Hill in partnership with the Ulysses Development Group. The affordable housing project is set to be

completed in spring 2027. Broomfield is funding \$2 million of the project, with additional funding coming from state and federal tax credits as well as a variety of state grants for affordable housing.

The project will add 152 new units located near a Regional Transportation District (RTD) station. Crosswinds at Arista is another TOD housing project created through a public-private partnership and leveraged funds from state grants. Opened in summer 2023, the 159-unit development is dedicated to affordable housing and also located close to RTD's Broomfield Station. Broomfield continues to advance its housing and TOD goals with projects like these, and they have found success in using state grant dollars rather than responding to state preemptions.

LONGMONT

The City of Longmont embarked on the 1st & Main Station Transit Revitalization Project in early 2023. The project includes transit improvements in



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partnership with RTD as well as significant commercial and housing developments. The city contributed \$8.5 million toward the project and leveraged a public-private partnership with the Longmont Urban Renewal Authority and a private developer to complete it. Longmont projects that between 250-300 new apartments will be built through the revitalization project.

FORT COLLINS

The City of Fort Collins approved its Transportation Master Plan in 2019, emphasizing a safe and reliable multimodal transportation system, with land use planning and investment done in coordination with the city's TOD goals. While Fort Collins

continues to see vehicle miles traveled rise, its Transit Master Plan establishes a wide array of strategies to promote other means of transit necessary for TOD. The city is working to expand bus rapid transit, provide high-frequency service, and improve access for bicyclists and pedestrians. Fort Collins is also evaluating the kinds of land use changes needed to achieve the goals laid out in its master plan while honoring its unique needs for high density corridors, mixed-use areas, and single-family neighborhoods.

These municipalities highlight just a few of the many TOD plans and projects that our members have been working on for years. Good-quality transit

across the state will allow more housing where it makes the most sense — and local governments are best equipped to make these decisions.

Punitive measures are unnecessary, do not lead to more affordable housing, and discredit the hard work of so many municipalities that are already investing in transit-oriented development. Instead of punishing local governments, Gov. Jared Polis and the Colorado General Assembly should improve transit systems by increasing reliability, safety, and accessibility. Housing development will follow where high-quality transportation goes. Partnership with local governments rather than preemption will result in better housing solutions.

Circling the block

Are our streets better off without parking?

By **MAEVE McHUGH**, CML municipal research analyst

We've all been there.

Driving in circles around the block in search of a parking spot, waiting with the blinker on to claim one that is (hopefully) soon to be vacant, and even perhaps making our own parking spot in the direst of circumstances. Our streets, however, are subject to the laws of geometry — there is only so much space. And at 162 square feet, your average parking spot takes up a lot of it.

Towns across Colorado are considering their parking stock in new ways. Some, like Longmont, are implementing novel parking reforms. The city replaced its old parking minimums with parking maximums. Others are re-imagining uses for centrally located street parking to enhance downtown areas.

There are an estimated four parking spaces for every car in America. Considering that street rights-of-way are a valuable municipal resource, it is not surprising that how we use the space can greatly impact the town around it.

THE IMPACT OF PARKING

Parking affects road safety, traffic congestion, economic vitality, affordable housing, and so much more.

Parking configuration greatly influences the safety of a street. Pulling in and out of parking spaces (parallel and front- or back-in spaces alike) create situations where a driver is navigating through blind spots, oftentimes with oncoming or passing traffic. The blind spots created by parking can impact a street's safety, as it may obstruct a driver's view of oncoming traffic or pedestrians crossing a street.

Waiting for a parking spot, pulling into or out of a parking spot, and continuously driving and circling in search of a parking spot contributes to congestion on our streets. Studies show that increasing parking in an area can induce demand, making traffic and parking issues worse.

Parking availability can play a significant role in consumer decision-making. The struggle to find convenient

parking can deter shoppers and push them toward big box stores with large parking lots.

Constructing parking can cost up to \$50,000 per spot, according to a report by Shopworks Architecture. This forces developers to offset these costs by charging more for rent and foregoing more affordable units.

When developments are required to provide parking — some city codes require at least three parking spots per housing unit regardless of unit size — it takes up land that could otherwise become green space, more housing, commercial opportunities, multimodal spaces, or other projects that would benefit the community.

PARKING REFORM IN LONGMONT

The City of Longmont began eliminating commercial parking minimums after it found that the number of required parking spaces tended to take over entire lots, prohibiting additional commercial developments. Studies



Photo courtesy of Town of Frisco

A mural along Frisco's Promenade livens up a space that used to be a parking spot.

further found that parking minimums were at odds with city goals to expand housing options, improve transit operations, bolster pedestrian and bicycle connectivity, and promote economic development. Too much space and money was being set aside for parking.

The city still recognized the importance of making parking available, especially considering cars are still the preferred mode of travel for many residents. A 2022 study found that about 50% of downtown Longmont parking spaces were occupied during peak times. In response to the research and

reality of limited space, Longmont instituted parking maximums in lieu of parking minimums for new multifamily developments. This allows a maximum of two parking spaces for each unit, which saves developers money on constructing parking and makes room for other uses.

In many Colorado communities, however, it is not feasible to slash parking requirements. In transit deserts, or suburban and rural communities, cars are essential, offering greater access to jobs, education, childcare, healthy food, healthcare, and recre-

ation. Longmont allows developers to request variances to build more parking to meet the unique needs of their projects. Longmont's parking maximums create opportunities for the town to more efficiently utilize land by defaulting to fewer parking spaces instead of more.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE PARKING-BOX

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many towns and cities saw the opportunity to pilot placemaking programs that encouraged people to visit their downtowns while adhering to social

distancing guidelines. Some cities closed residential blocks to traffic, opening the entire street to pedestrians and bikes so they could safely walk and/or roll. Others closed select parking spaces in their downtowns or business corridors, allowing restaurants and businesses to expand their footprints.

Durango and Frisco are two case studies in how the pandemic offered cities a chance to shake up street parking and how they fare today. Both towns collected data on attitudes toward parking as they look to implement more permanent policies.

FRISCO

In the summers of 2020 and 2021, Frisco fully closed Main Street to create a Promenade. The program ended the following summer, and the Town Council requested more data from the community to understand their attitudes toward the program. Results showed that the Promenade was popular among residents — 63% of second

homeowners and 59% of primary residents preferred the Promenade. Opening Main Street and keeping parklets were a distant second for both groups. Residents who supported closing Main Street to cars appreciated the improvements in walkability and ambiance, indicating they would visit Main Street more often. Some residents expressed frustration with the initiative because when Main Street is at capacity, cars are forced to park on nearby residential streets, creating traffic and congestion that can be disruptive.

Among businesses, attitudes toward closure were mixed, where roughly one third of businesses within the Promenade boundary supported a full closure (36%), followed by parklets (33%), and full opening with no parklets (30%). Outside the boundaries, businesses were also mixed. More were in favor of a full closure and Promenade (46%), followed by fully opening the street with no parklets (33%), then parklets (21%).

Impacts on business revenue were mixed. Of businesses inside the Prome-

nade, 51% reported increased sales from closing Main Street, while 18% reported negative impacts, and 30% saw no impact. Businesses outside of the closure were evenly split, where 29% reported positive impact, the same percentage reported negative impact, and 42% reported neutral impact.

Frisco businesses appear to largely support parklets, as they allow for more space during the pleasant summer months, when customers are more likely to prefer being outside. The town credits the success of this program to the fact that the community has seen it in action over the past four summers. Residents look forward to the added vitality, and businesses can anticipate more room for customers and are planning to invest in their parklet spaces.

DURANGO

Durango's bump-out program (their version of parklets) also rolled out during the pandemic and received strong support from the community. The city notes that people have come

to expect the bump-outs in the summer, and the town has formalized the program and collected data on its impacts. Durango Downtown's Next Step project considers how it could replace the seasonal bump-outs with more permanent fixtures that enhance Main Avenue for visitors and businesses alike.

Durango's research indicates that some businesses oppose the bump-outs because of the loss of parking spaces intended for their customers. Businesses outside Main Avenue tend to oppose them because they offer additional square footage, unfairly advantaging Main Avenue businesses at the expense of a public service in the form of public parking.

In response, the town quantified the value of both parking and bump-outs and found that while the town forewent about \$44,000 in parking meter revenue, the annual increase in sales tax generated from the increased business thanks to their bump-outs totaled \$64,000. Regarding fears

about lack of parking, Durango reported these arguments did not hold true, as ample available parking can be found within a two-block radius of Main Avenue.

In tandem with reducing parking spaces, Durango increased their parking prices to avoid exceeding peak demand (demand should not exceed 75% for more than 6 hours a day) and encourage longer-term parkers to park in underutilized locations. This includes area employees occupying central parking spaces during peak periods for extended lengths of time. The city created a permit program allowing employees to park in underutilized locations for free with their pass.

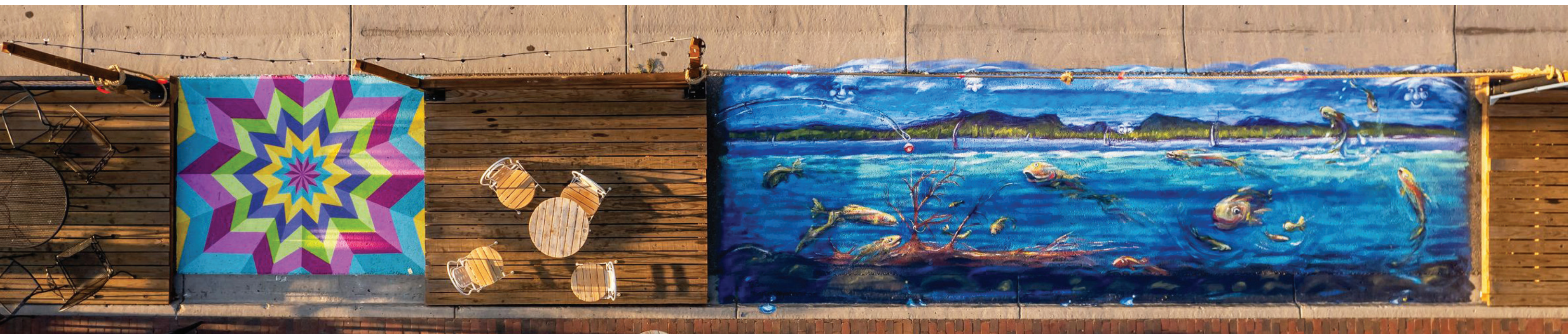
With a few summers under their belt, Durango recognized the need to implement fees for the program to recoup parking meter costs and support staff time. They also created design standards and framed it as a pilot program rolling out over five years. This helps assure residents and businesses that the program is intended to evolve to

the needs of the town, and they can invest accordingly.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

In Frisco and Durango, the parklet and bump-out programs had an easy on-ramp due to the pandemic. In Longmont, new regulations allow for variance and aim to reduce parking in step with other investments in public transit and urban infill projects. As evidenced by these case studies, programs that reduce parking become easier to implement if residents can better imagine the project. To achieve this, towns can start with small-scale pilot projects, or by making changes incrementally.

Figuratively speaking, cars aren't going anywhere, and simply taking away parking spaces will not solve any problems. Without meaningful investments in our built environment to foster more walking, rolling, and transit use, parking will remain a fixture on our streets, forcing us to continue circling the block.





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The historic Green Mountain Falls Gazebo stands on a small island in Gazebo Lake Park.

SPOTLIGHT: FEDERAL FUNDING CUTS

Rivers & roads

Funding for small community infrastructure faces uncertainty

By **MAEVE McHUGH**, CML municipal research analyst

Without a clear picture of federal funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), much-needed infrastructure projects around the country are in limbo.

In January of this year, executive orders froze billions of dollars in federal funding, leaving governments unsure how to fund critical transportation infrastructure projects. One of the many programs funded by the BIL, also known as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, is the Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation Program (PROTECT). PROTECT funding was distributed by the Federal Highway Administration and contributed to infrastructure improvements aimed towards making communities more resilient to climate change. Funding categories were divided into planning grants, resilience improvement grants, at-risk coastal infrastructure grants, and community resilience and evacuation route grants.

The town of Green Mountain Falls put together a request for PROTECT funding to replace the main bridge connecting the town to Highway 24, one of two evacuation routes for the town — roughly \$8 million in total. With some technical assistance, town staff prepared application materials that included a cost-benefits analysis, partner engagement, and securing matching dollars — only to find that the program had been put on pause. Without clear guidance on whether the program will continue, and if so, what changes have been made, Green Mountain Falls is stuck. Their application narrative was tailored to this funding opportunity, and their matching funds are contingent upon the receipt of federal funds under the BIL.

While funders appear to prefer “shovel-ready” projects, this forces municipalities to funnel time and resources toward a project that may or may not receive funding. In the case of Green Mountain Falls, and other towns that prepared applications to now-frozen or canceled funding, these are

taxpayer resources that cannot be recovered. Additionally, communities with smaller tax bases face additional funding barriers, as infrastructure projects can be incredibly costly, regardless of community size. Preparing shovel-ready projects can also be difficult for smaller towns because the process can strain the already limited capacity of town staff. Rewriting an entire grant would demand additional resources — all for funding that is not promised.

While Green Mountain Falls remains unsure about the future of its bridge, dozens of other programs seeking funding from the BIL and IRA share the same uncertain fate. In communities across Colorado, where cuts to wildfire mitigation work by the National Forest Service combine with continued drought and dry conditions, emergency preparedness and evacuation plans weigh heavy on cities and towns. For Green Mountain Falls, the PROTECT funding would ensure safe evacuation from the town and safeguard their future.

SPOTLIGHT: AIR TRAVEL

Operating a municipal airport? Be prepared for takeoff!

Running an airport isn't easy,
but the benefits to your community go sky high

By **TODD FESSENDEN**, Town of Erie utilities director

Operating a municipal airport brings unique challenges. Unlike other city or town operations, airports are high-maintenance facilities with strict safety and regulatory requirements. Infrastructure at the airport must meet the rigorous standards of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Colorado Division of Aeronautics (CDOA). Fortunately, most capital improvement projects are funded 90% by the FAA, 5% by CDOA, and just 5% by the municipality. These funds, however, come with grant assurances — chief among them, a commitment to keep the airport operational for 20 years.

Municipal airports rarely generate profit. In fact, more than 90% of small airports are subsidized by their municipalities. Residents may question the value of the airport, especially those living near flight paths. The small aircraft used by private pilots and flight schools are noisy, and repetitive practice flights such as “touch-and-gos” often amplify noise complaints. While aviation accidents are far less common than car accidents, they draw greater public attention and concern. Effective public communication and expectation management are essential.

Recruiting capable airport management can also be difficult. Given that municipal airports aren't revenue drivers, it's often hard to justify staffing costs. Yet, success

depends on two key roles: an airport manager and a fixed-base operator (FBO). The manager handles internal operations, capital needs, and regulatory compliance. The FBO provides essential pilot services, fuel, supplies, transportation, and guidance — essentially acting as a concierge for incoming aviators. These roles can be staffed in-house or outsourced.

Municipal airports can play a vital role in emergency response for nearby communities. From wildfire and flood operations to medical flights and dog rescue missions, these facilities are critical infrastructure. Having knowledgeable staff or a well-trained manager is essential for compliance and preparedness.

Finally, municipal airports are the foundation of the aviation industry. After the Vietnam era, the supply of trained pilots and maintenance technicians steadily declined. Most commercial pilots today began their training at municipal airports. If your community values the ability to travel affordably across the country, or internationally, supporting your municipal airport is a smart long-term investment.

Like other essential but sometimes unpopular facilities (wastewater plants, landfills, major roadways) airports are a vital public asset. They are worth defending, maintaining, and communicating about with clarity and purpose.

SPOTLIGHT: PUBLIC SAFETY

Speed corridors & camera enforcement

By **J GILMORE**, Fort Collins Police Services director of communications

IT is the mission of every public safety entity to provide the community it serves with a sense of safety and security. Nationally, speeding remains a leading cause of traffic fatalities and injuries. In 2024, Fort Collins experienced 13 fatalities resulting from crashes, following 15 traffic-related fatalities the year before. Driving is a shared experience between drivers, passengers, bicyclists, and pedestrians — and every road user is at risk when drivers speed.

Colorado legislation (Senate Bill 23-200) allows for a roadway to be identified as a “speed corridor” based on incidents of crashes, speeding, reckless driving, or community complaints. In July 2024, the Fort Collins City Council resolved to update the Automated Vehicle Identification Systems (AVIS) Municipal Code to designate speed corridors along roads within the city that historically show excessive traffic violations. The corridors were selected based on data collected over a three-year period: the most com-

mon locations for injury/fatal crashes, community concerns about dangerous driving behavior, and citations involving speeding, careless driving, reckless driving, and racing.

The designation of speed corridors allowed Fort Collins Police Services to expand their Traffic Safety Initiative to include the use of photo/radar enforcement at key locations and roadways throughout the city. This expansion included activating speed detection for the already established stop-light violation detection cameras; and in conjunction with mobile speed-detection vehicles and education and enforcement by the Fort Collins Police Services Traffic Enforcement Unit. Accompanying the ordinance update, the expansion began with a 30-day public notification period, during which signage was installed and awareness campaigns launched. This was followed by a 30-day period where violators received warnings instead of citations. After 60 days, the system began issuing tickets to drivers

Fort Collins enhances approach to reduce traffic fatalities and promote safer streets

exceeding the speed limit by 11 mph or more. The system photographs speeding vehicles and drivers, with citations mailed to the registered owners. For speeds 25 mph or more over the limit, violations are delivered in person by an officer following an investigation.

Driver behavior is influenced by factors such as weather, population growth, and the presence of radar vehicles. After the warning period ended in fall 2024, the system issued around 9,500 citations in December, which dropped to about 5,600 by March.

Speed-detection cameras are not a new phenomenon in the world of traffic safety. Photo enforcement plays an important role in making our streets safer for all. It is only used on public streets, and photographs are only taken if drivers are violating traffic laws. These systems help supplement police efforts by allowing for consistent enforcement without high resource demands, freeing up officers to

focus on other safety priorities. The hope is collisions and fatalities will decrease within the corridors, and have a ripple effect on non-designated roadways as well. While primarily targeting designated corridors, the entire Traffic Safety Initiative aims to create a broader culture of safe driving citywide.

In line with the city’s Vision Zero goals, the primary goal of speed corridors and automated enforcement is to promote traffic safety through speed enforcement, eliminate roadway fatalities, and reduce injury crashes. We use every tool available to us to help educate and encourage responsible driving behavior — social media, local news reports, bus shelter posters, vertical banners around the city, bookmarks, and a cheeky bumper magnet that reads “Slow the FoCo Down,” a nod to the pet name locals have for Fort Collins. Speed-detection cameras are another tool to create the safe community we all desire to live and work in.



SPOTLIGHT: EV INFRASTRUCTURE

Charging ahead

State grants help cities & towns achieve electric vehicle goals

By **MATT MINES**, Colorado Energy Office associate director of transportation

Colorado is committed to achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Transportation is among the leading sources of greenhouse pollution in the state, so reducing emissions through widespread electric vehicle (EV) adoption is an important part of our strategy. In particular, we're striving to have 940,000 EVs on Colorado roads by the end of the decade. With more than 180,000 EVs registered across all 64 Colorado counties to date, we're making great progress.

One key factor to increasing EV adoption is ensuring all Coloradans have convenient and reliable access to charging. The state has been investing in our EV charging network for more than a decade, offering a number of grant opportunities to install charging in local communities and along major transportation corridors. As of early May 2025, there are nearly 6,000 public EV chargers, 20% of which are fast chargers. Thousands more chargers are expected to come online over the next several years.

Local governments play an important role in helping build a robust charging network, while ensuring community members can feel confident making the choice to drive an EV. Local governments are eligible for three grant programs through the Colorado Energy Office to install chargers in their communities. To date, these programs have supported 169 local government projects to install more than 740 charging ports across the state.

The Direct Current Fast Charging (DCFC) Plazas grant program helps fund larger-scale, high-powered fast-charging projects (at least four ports per site) along major transportation routes and in communities where more chargers are needed to meet local demand. The Charge Ahead Colorado grant program provides funding to support community-

based Level 2 and DCFC charging stations. Charge Ahead offers three funding rounds per year plus a rolling application that is available year-round for smaller projects.

In addition to supporting community adoption of electric vehicles, some local governments are exploring opportunities to replace gas-powered fleet vehicles, such as sanitation trucks, police cars, and school buses, with electric alternatives. Our Fleet Zero-Emission Resource Opportunity (Fleet-ZERO) grant program can support this transition to electric fleet vehicles, providing funding for charging infrastructure for EV fleets. Fleet-ZERO offers two funding rounds per year plus a rolling application for certain qualifying entities proposing smaller scale projects.

Lastly, the Colorado Energy Office offers both planning and implementation grants to support community led electric mobility projects, such as electric carshares, e-bike shares, and electric shuttle services, through its Community Accelerated Mobility Project (CAMP) grant program. CAMP is a great opportunity for local governments that are looking to expand transportation options to serve people's needs in their communities. While this grant does not cover EV charging alone, it can help cover the costs to install chargers as part of a larger community-based project.

The state offers many opportunities to support electric vehicle adoption in local communities. If you're not sure where to start, our local ReCharge Colorado coaches can help you navigate and identify the opportunities that are right for your community.

For more information on grants to fund electric vehicle infrastructure, visit the Colorado Energy Office website, energyoffice.colorado.gov.

RURAL VOICES

Alamosa & the railroads

Railroads brought the City of Alamosa to life. And even as the city has grown and its economy has diversified over the years, railroads remain at the heart of the community. In 2009, a building that had once served as city's railroad depot was converted into a Colorado Welcome Center. It is a reminder of Alamosa's railroad history, which began when a 19th Century entrepreneur laid tracks through the San Luis Valley.

By **DON THOMPSON**, City of Alamosa Historical Preservation Advisory Committee member

General William Jackson Palmer, a civil engineer and veteran of the American Civil War, was building south with the railroad he had named the Denver and Rio Grande. His plan was to make it to the Rio Grande in El Paso, Texas, where he would connect to the Mexican railroad traffic. The explosion of railroad building in the late 1800s was to build on the cross-continent routes, and most railroads had the term *Pacific* as part of their name, indicating a desire to make it to the west coast. Palmer instead saw the Mexican railroad traffic as a better prize.

As Palmer built south towards his goal of El Paso, gold was found in the Colorado San Juan mountains, and Palmer did a hard right turn in Walsenburg heading for the gold fields. This required him crossing the Sangre de Cristo mountains, the San Luis Valley, and then the south San Juan mountains in New Mexico.

In 1878, Garland City was the end of construction about eight miles east of Alamosa. As track building and a bridge to cross the Rio Grande were finished, allowing access to Alamosa. The workers had breakfast in Garland City, put a building on a flat car, towed it to what was to be the site of Alamosa, and were able to have dinner in the building that night. Talk about a popup city.

Originally, Alamosa was in Conejos County. It wasn't until the 1930s that having the bulk of the population in Alamosa and the county seat in Conejos became enough of a problem to have Alamosa County formed from what have been part of Conejos County.

While Palmer had been building the Denver and Rio Grande as a standard gauge (48½ inches wide) railroad, his transfer into building a railroad in the mountains had him switch to the building of a narrow gauge (36 inch) line. Advantages of the narrow gauge were the ability to have sharper curves (a less costly procedure in the mountains) and the ability to climb somewhat steeper grades. The transfer from standard gauge to narrow gauge and the opposite did add costs, and the portion of the line into the San Luis Valley was upgraded to standard gauge early in the 20th Century.

Up until the mid 1950s there was passenger service to Pueblo, Salida, Creede, Santa Fe, and Chama to Durango and Farmington. Agricultural products from the Valley and mineral products from New Mexico keep the freight operations busy. While Alamosa is now much more than just a railroad town, it was the original reason for being and still has a major impact on employment in the area.

LEGAL CORNER

Footing the bill for state highway maintenance

By **ROBERT SHEESLEY**, CML general counsel

Road maintenance is expensive, from the road surface itself to appurtenant street lighting (both the light and electricity), curbs, gutters, sidewalks, fencing, sound barriers, medians, and drainage. Costs have risen steadily and form a substantial part of any municipality's budget, and the State of Colorado recently budgeted \$747 million to maintain highways. But who pays for the upkeep of a particular roadway is not always clear.

Several municipalities have encountered the view of the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) that the state is responsible only for the traveled portion of a highway — including an interstate highway — when it passes through a municipality. For example, CDOT has claimed that municipalities must pay for the electricity to light interstate highways and expressways that pass through their jurisdictions, even when the municipality doesn't own the lights or the highway is only bounded on three sides by a city.

Other cities have been asked to mow medians and clear drainage areas along interstates. This spring, an Aurora homeowner was stymied by CDOT's refusal to replace a damaged fence

adjacent to a state highway. CDOT ultimately agreed to the repair but not after unsuccessfully demanding the city pay for the fence.

Perhaps without knowledge of the issue, some municipalities have agreed, formally or informally, to maintain highway right-of-way beyond the scope

There does not appear to be a clear path to resolution of this issue, and state budget woes will only exacerbate the situation.

of their legal responsibility. Through maintenance agreements, the municipalities assume broad cost burdens, even where CDOT traditionally performed maintenance.

The dispute boils down to the debate over the meaning of what is often referred to as the "division of authority" statute, C.R.S. § 43-2-135, within the State Highway Act, C.R.S. §§ 43-2-101 et seq. Colorado's transportation statutes evolved from the early 20th century

until reaching something resembling their current form in 1953. Unfortunately, these laws were based on a road system that preceded the modern highway system, having been written shortly after the completion of the Valley Highway in Denver but before any interstate highway existed in Colorado.

The State Highway Act generally describes three categories of road systems: 1) state highways, 2) county roads, and 3) city streets. The state is responsible for construction and maintenance of any part of the state highway system that extends into an incorporated area. C.R.S. § 43-2-103. Municipalities are responsible for costs of the city street system that are not part of the state highway system. C.R.S. § 43-2-124(4).

As the state highway system expanded and integrated into cities, the division of authority statute attempted to clarify the "jurisdiction, control, and duty" of the state and municipalities for "streets which are part of the state highway system." Municipalities "exercise full responsibility for and control" over such "streets" outside of the traveled road and including curbs, contiguous shoulders, and appurtenances. They also provide street illumination and



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street cleaning, storm sewer inlets, and catch basins. CDOT retains authority regarding driveways and signage and is responsible for traffic control devices and signage (other than street signs). Generally, title to these streets vests in the municipality. C.R.S. § 43-2-135(1).

Ultimately, a municipality's duty or authority over a roadway under this statute should depend on whether a "street" is part of the "state highway system." Unfortunately, CDOT has not maintained any records of which streets were formally designated as part of that system. Now, CDOT has taken the view that this would include any state highway passing through a municipality. Under this view, CDOT should maintain only the traveled part of such roads and a municipality pays for the rest, simply because a highway passes through a municipality or aligns, however briefly, with the former alignment of a city street.

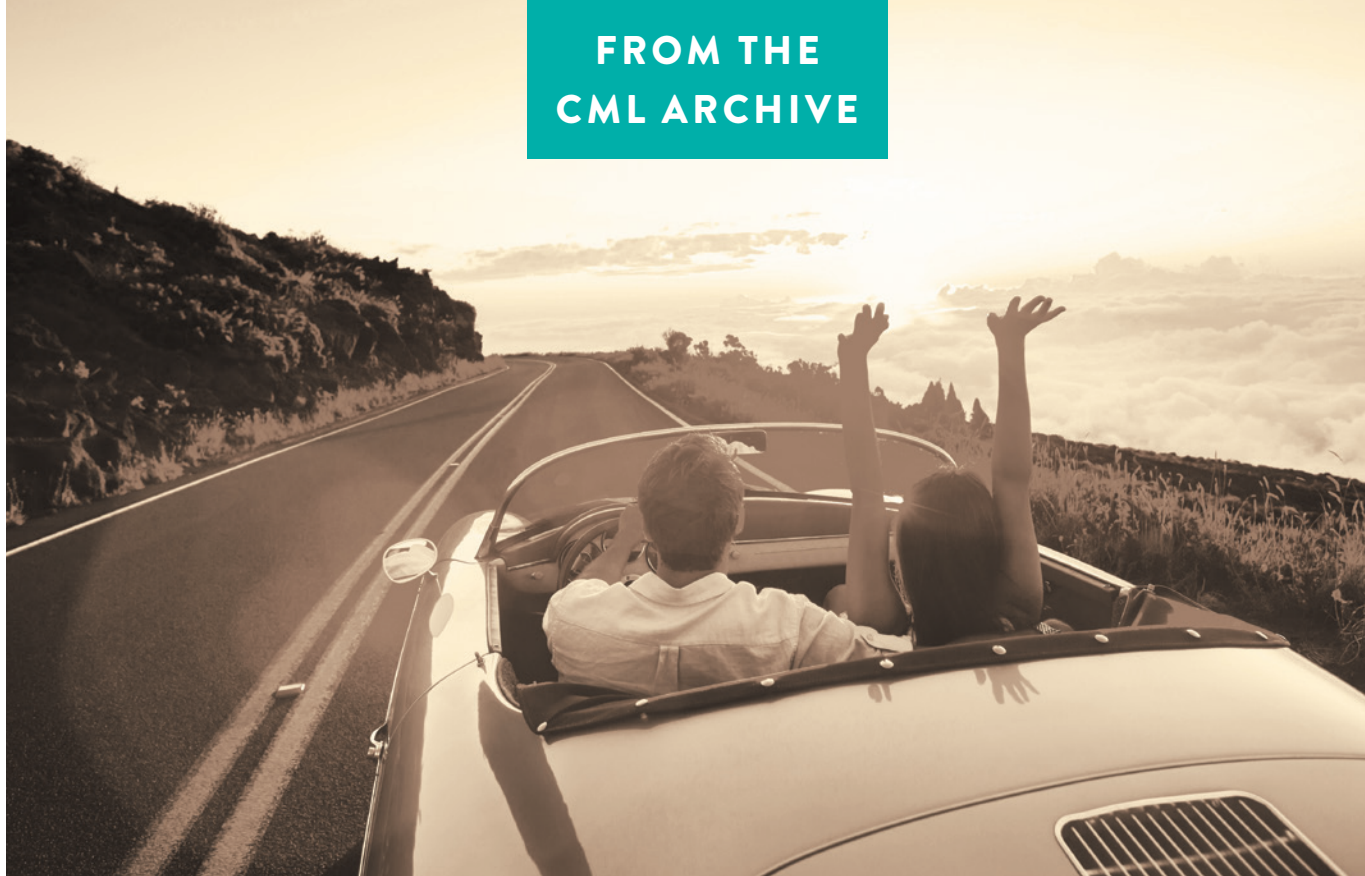
CDOT's view, if extended consistently to the rest of the division of authority statute, would allow municipalities to perform construction work in and under the highway, allow others to cut into the highway, and to regulate traffic and parking on the highway. But municipalities expect they would be denied the authority to turn off the lights, issue permits to close those portions of the roadways, or take other actions that are supposedly within their jurisdiction.

The answer may lie buried in state and municipal records, if anybody can find them. From 1953-1979, state law required CDOT annually send a list of streets it considered part of the state highway system to each municipality. C.R.S. § 120-13-134 (1953). In 1980, CDOT was to send a one-time certification of this information, but further additions could be made after a municipality received a 60-day notice and an opportunity to be heard by

the state Transportation Commission. C.R.S. § 43-2-134.

There does not appear to be a clear path to resolution of this issue, and state budget woes will only exacerbate the situation. A legislative solution seems unlikely, as the state's voluntary retreat from its position would involve recognizing substantial costs. In the meantime, municipalities may be approached more and more with unreasonable demands to pay for state responsibilities. Any such request should be reviewed carefully to determine the proper designation of the roadway in question and the proposed maintenance obligation.

With special thanks to several municipal attorneys who have worked on this issue and provided materials used in this article, including Jerry Dahl, Bob Jagger, Corey Hoffmann, Geoff Wilson, and Brandon Dittman.

FROM THE
CML ARCHIVE

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In 1953, the rubber hit the road

By **ALEX MILLER**, CML publication & design specialist

In the post-WWII era, automobiles changed the way Americans lived and worked. The rapid increase in motorized vehicles created opportunities for Coloradans — and headaches for municipal leaders. By 1950, Colorado cities and towns identified highway problems as their biggest challenge. After several years of sustained effort, the Colorado Municipal League won a major victory at the state legislature in 1953 — the creation of the Highway Users Tax Fund. This new source of revenue provided a lifeline for municipalities struggling to finance transportation, and in the decades following its introduction, the League has continued its efforts to apportion more of those desperately needed funds to Colorado's communities. The following article from a 1953 issue of *Colorado Municipalities* marks this historic occasion.

New highway laws represent a victory for municipalities

BY NEIL D. HUMPHREY, CML ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Originally published in *Colorado Municipalities*, Volume 29, No. 5 (May 1953)

More than three years of concentrated effort by the Colorado Municipal League and its member cities and towns began to pay dividends with the enactment of two important proposals of the Colorado Highway Planning Committee by the General Assembly during their recently adjourned session.

After innumerable conferences, changes, and compromises, the Senate finally came up with two bills containing the essential provisions of the CHPC recommendations. Although these measures fall short of the original goals advocated by the League, they should be recognized as definitely beneficial when compared with the present law.

The gains of the municipalities will be two-fold when the act becomes effective December 31, 1953. First of all, the state will assume the responsibility for construction and maintenance of all municipal links of state highways. This will remove an estimated 328 miles of highway, and the resulting expense, from the cities' responsibility.

Secondly, municipalities will receive 5 per cent of all highway user revenue instead of merely 4 per cent of the

motor fuel tax alone. This is an estimated \$1,580,000 for the 1954 fiscal year at present rates, as compared with \$912,000 for the 1952 fiscal year. When Denver's share as a county is added, however, the total share

for cities in 1952 becomes \$1,458,000. As can be observed, the total amount received by cities will not be substantially increased. This is due to the fact that Denver now receives highway money as both a city and county; under the new law Denver will receive money only from the city distribution.

Since the legislation is in two acts, each act will be discussed separately. In a treatment of this kind, it will be impossible to give as much detail as many will desire.

Therefore, more complete coverage will be supplied in a series of special bulletins.

CREATION OF HIGHWAY USERS TAX FUND

Senate Bill 178, which becomes effective December 31, 1953, establishes the Highway Users Tax Fund, which will be composed of all moneys received from (1) any excise



“Although these measures fall short of the original goals advocated by the League, they should be recognized as definitely beneficial when compared with the present law.”

tax on motor fuel, (2) annual registration fees on drivers and vehicles, and (3) ton mile taxes.

This fund will be divided three ways, with the state receiving 65 percent, the counties, 30 per cent, and the municipalities, 5 per cent. This 5 per cent share, as will be readily recognized by municipal officials, is substantially less than the 9 per cent originally recommended by the Colorado Highway Planning Committee and advocated by the League. It does, of course, represent an increase over present distribution.

The method by which the 5 per cent share is apportioned among the municipalities is also established. The State Treasurer will allocate four-fifths of the amount on the basis of “adjusted” urban motor vehicle registration and one-fifth in proportion to the mileage of open and used streets. Adjusted urban motor vehicle registration is computed by multiplying the actual number of registrations by a factor of between 1.0 and 2.0 in order to reflect the increased standards and costs of construction. This factor varies from 1.0 for cities having no more than 500 registrations to 2.0 for cities with more than 185,000 registrations. Money received from this fund may be used for the construction or maintenance of any city street.

SYSTEMS OF STREETS, ROADS, HIGHWAYS

Senate Bill 170 establishes a system of classification for all city streets, county roads, and state highways. Of principal interest to city officials is the act’s assignment of responsibility for construction and maintenance of all urban links of state highways directly to the State Department of Highways. It also provides that the department may enter into contracts with municipalities for the maintenance or

construction of urban connections. As noted, this removes 300-odd miles of highways from city responsibility. The major effect of this provision will be observed in the cities of more than 2,500 population which have not heretofore been eligible for state maintenance and construction of these costly links.

CITY STREET SYSTEM

The law specifies that in each municipality a city street system is to be established which will designate arterial and local service streets. Municipalities will have complete jurisdiction over these streets. The procedure for designation of arterial streets is also outlined in the law. A deadline of December 31, 1953, is set for the certification of the system to the Department of Highways.

All municipalities of over 5,000 population, with the exception of home rule and statutory councilmanager cities, are required to appoint a street supervisor on or before January 1, 1954. Municipalities of less than 5,000 population are not required to appoint a street supervisor but may contract for such engineering, maintenance, and supervision as may be necessary.

The law specifies reports which must be made annually and designates the procedure for handling money received from the Highway User Tax Fund.

Municipalities failing to comply with the provisions of the act are allowed a 60-day grace period. However, if the required reports are not received at the end of this period, the State Treasurer withholds 10 per cent of the money until the requirement is satisfied.

All local governing bodies are required to submit to the department by December 31, 1954, a plan of priorities for construction of city streets under their jurisdiction. The



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department will, upon request, furnish instructions for this survey.

The law also provides that, although counties and municipalities may contract with each other or with the State Highway Commission for construction or maintenance of streets or highways within a municipality, the work must be separately budgeted.

URBAN LINKS

The Department of Highways is required to certify to each municipality the streets, bridges, and underpasses which are presently part of the state highway system. The department will have the power to prohibit suspension of signs, banners, or decorations above streets on the state highway system. Municipalities, however, will be required to clean and illuminate the connections and to maintain all underground facilities.

Cities also will be responsible for traffic and parking regulation enforcement. However, the Department of Highways has the right of approval over such regulations adopted after December 31, 1953.

Full responsibility will be assumed by the Department of Highways for installation, maintenance, operation, and control of traffic control devices on state highway connecting links in municipalities having less than 5,000 population. With the exception of route markers and directional signs, cities over 5,000 population will be responsible for traffic control devices. The department still maintains power of approval over stop signs or traffic control signals on any state highway.

This is a brief summary of the new laws. As stated above, bulletins will be prepared to explain in more detail how the law applies to municipalities.

SPECIAL SECTION



BIG IDEAS. BOLD LEADERS.

One unforgettable week

By **DENISE WHITE**, CML engagement & communications manager

CML's 103rd Annual Conference brought together nearly 1,300 municipal leaders and staff for four dynamic days of learning, connection, and celebration. Attendees took part in more than 45 sessions, three mobile tours, and three preconference workshops. Highlights included a forward-looking keynote from futurist Crystal Washington (sponsored by CIRSA), an inspiring Welcome Lunch with Alamosa Mayor Ty Coleman (sponsored by Xcel Energy), a high-energy session with Kenyon Salo (sponsored by Streamline), a visit from Colorado Gov. Jared Polis, and an engaging Meeting of the Minds conversation

with Kyle Clark (sponsored by Swire Coca-Cola). We honored municipal excellence with the 2025 Sam Mamet Good Governance Awards, presented to Wheat Ridge Mayor Bud Starker and Buena Vista Town Clerk Paula Barnett, and celebrated officials earning MUNiversity distinctions. From the Mayors Mingle to Small Town Connect to Exhibitor Showcases and evening receptions, the energy and engagement remained high throughout. Special thanks to our 80 sponsors and 150 incredible speakers for making the conference a success. Mark your calendars for next year in Westminster, June 23–26, 2026!



CML photos by Alex Miller

Kenyon Salo, the “James Bond of speaking,” fires up the audience at the 2025 CML Annual Conference.



CML Executive Board member Dave Frank, left, listens during a conference session.



Conference attendees mingle at an outdoor reception near a ski lift in Breckenridge.



CML photo by Alex Miller

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis chats with Durango Mayor Gilda Yazzie, left, and Durango Council member Shirley Gonzales.



CML photo by Alex Miller

Keynote speaker Crystal Washington presents “The Future Is Now” at the opening session.



CML photo by Alex Miller

CML Executive Director Kevin Bommer, left, interviews 9News anchor Kyle Clark during the Meeting of the Minds Luncheon.



CML photo by Robert Sheesley

The CML Executive Board gathered for a meeting following the board election June 26. Pictured in the back row, from left, are Rachel Medina, Dan Kramer, Jason Gray, Seth Hoffman, Joshua Rivero, James Marsh-Holschen, Scott Trainor, Dave Frank, Angela Lawson, and Sarah Johnson. In the front row, from left, are Anna Stout, Liz Hensley, Laura Weinberg, Wynetta Massey, Duane Gurulé, Hollie Rogin, Carol Saade, Sharon Davis, Michelle Eddy, Candy Meehan, and Dale Hall.



Photo by Town of Breckenridge

Runners and walkers line up for the 5k Fun Run.



CML photo by Alex Miller

Keynote speaker and City of Alamosa Mayor Ty Coleman inspires the audience with lessons on becoming the positive change you want to see in your community.



CML photo by Alex Miller

Steamboat Springs Councilmember Dakotah McGinlay, left, Broomfield Councilmember Kenny Van Nguyen, and Westminster Councilmember Claire Carmelia present “Don’t Reply All: Bridging Generational Gaps in Municipal Leadership.”

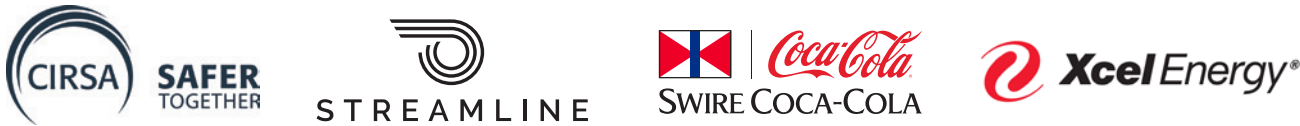


CML photo by Elizabeth Haskell

CML Legislative Advocacy Manager Heather Stauffer, center, and Legislative and Policy Advocate Beverly Stables play with baby goats in the exhibit hall.

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COLORADO MUNICIPALITIES

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Autumn 2025

Each fall, CML staff and Executive Board members travel across the state to see our members face-to-face. These are opportunities for you to get to know CML, learn about the municipal implications of the legislative session, and network with colleagues from neighboring communities. Learn more at cml.org.

Effective Governance

Autumn 2025

This interactive, daylong workshop teaches practical skills from staff/council relationships, ethics, liability, media relations, civility, and more. It's a great opportunity to meet other municipal leaders and discover new ways to empower your community.

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