



Utahns United Against a Gondola in Little Cottonwood Canyon

Quarterly Update from Friends of Little Cottonwood Canyon

Dear Friends,

Even though the LCC gondola appears to be far off, there are several current happenings surrounding UDOT's gondola decision and the urgency to implement commonsense traffic solutions for the next ski season. This newsletter is packed with **updates on the UDOT lawsuit, local government actions, the Sandy Mayoral race, a retort to pro-gondola Ski Utah, and a stunning independent critique of UDOT's gondola decision by Engineering faculty and students at Brigham Young University.**

Please connect with us on social media [@friendsoflcc](#) (Instagram/ X.com), or [Facebook](#) to stay up to date on our efforts and gondola news. Contact us at contact@lccfriends.org.

Gondola Lawsuits Update

As a reminder, in December 2023, three plaintiff groups filed lawsuits over UDOT's decision to pursue the gondola in LCC. These suits generally claimed that UDOT improperly evaluated the impacts of the proposed gondola and that UDOT did not comply with the Administrative Procedures Act (APA). To save judicial resources and avoid contradictory rulings, the three suits were consolidated into one.

In the Fall of 2024, UDOT provided the court and plaintiff groups the "Administrative Record" (AR), which is the body of documents UDOT claims they relied on to come to the gondola decision. Of significance is the fact that when it comes time for the court to hear the plaintiffs' and UDOT's arguments over the claims in the lawsuits, **the parties can only rely on documents within the AR to make their arguments.** Because of this AR constraint, the plaintiffs' lawyers have been requesting UDOT to add certain documents to the AR that UDOT initially excluded and has yet to provide despite repeated requests by the plaintiffs.



On June 12th, the judge heard oral arguments from the plaintiffs' lawyers and UDOT's lawyers over the completeness of the AR. **The judge took the matter under advisement and will make a ruling on the AR at an unspecified date in the future.** She will either agree with UDOT's claim that the AR is complete, or agree fully or partially with the plaintiffs in that UDOT needs to add certain documents to the AR. Once the AR is "complete" to the judge's liking, a date will be set, likely for many months in the future, to hear the attorneys' oral arguments over the merits of the claims presented in the lawsuits.

It's worth recalling that **UDOT has claimed it cannot/will not implement Phase 1 of its ROD, which is to build mobility hubs and add ski busses, until the lawsuit is settled.**

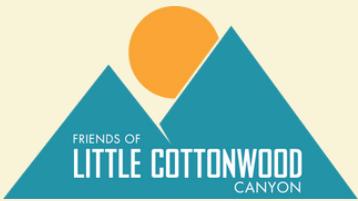
Therefore, the longer the lawsuit is delayed, the longer it will take to move forward with the building of mobility hubs for the ski season.

Cottonwood Heights Pushes for Congestion Resolution by Next Ski Season

In recent months, Cottonwood Heights City Council has focused on pushing immediate and meaningful resolutions to ski resort-related traffic congestion. In March the council met to discuss withdrawing its membership in the Central Wasatch Commission (CWC). CWC is charged with implementing the Mountain Accord of 2015, which focuses, among other things, on fixing transportation issues in the canyons.

The council expressed that **it did not feel that CWC was doing enough to address congestion issues along the Wasatch or adhere to Mountain Accord** in light of the cost of membership for Cottonwood Heights to participate in the CWC. The council invited CWC Executive Director Lindsey Nielsen to discuss. Cottonwood Heights informed CWC it will remain in the organization for one more year on the condition that CWC act on the council's request to push on the legislature and UDOT to fix transportation issues with immediacy. If no meaningful solutions are implemented in that time frame, it is likely Cottonwood Heights will withdraw from CWC. Cottonwood Heights Councilwoman Ellen Birrell has since joined the CWC board and vowed to **"quote the Mountain Accord at every meeting...and hold their (CWC) feet to the fire to aspire to what appears in the Mountain Accord."**

In a subsequent city council meeting Councilwoman Birrell led a discussion with the Chief of Police and Public Works to discuss what should be done NOW to address severe snow morning congestion for the 2025-2026 ski season. UDOT reps were invited to this discussion and did not attend. During this meeting it came to light that UDOT is difficult to work with and that as such, the mayor of Cottonwood Heights will be meeting with UDOT Director Carlos Braceras in the coming weeks. More to come on the results of that meeting when we have that.



Our POV on the Sandy City Mayor's Race

We closely follow all local, regional and state politicians to ascertain their views and leanings regarding the LCC gondola proposal. We've followed current Sandy City Mayor Monica Zoltanski's words and actions and we know that she is against building a gondola in LCC, stating, "I've really fought for Little Cottonwood Canyon and the Sandy community who is resoundingly opposed to building a gondola."

Mayor Zoltanski's opponent, Cindi Sharkey has been less forthcoming with her views on the gondola. Based on her public actions we conclude that she is not against the gondola. Mrs. Sharkey was one of five Sandy City Councilmembers who signed and sent a letter to Salt Lake County Council imploring the council not to pass a resolution to eliminate the gondola. The letter urged, "**Do not pass a resolution recommending that UDOT take the gondola off the table for consideration. We're not taking that action in Sandy.** In our city, we want UDOT to fulfill their duty to recommend the best overall solution. Whether that solution gets funded and implemented, how, and in what phases are later steps."

You can read the entire letter signed by Cyndi Sharkey using the link above. Mrs. Sharkey is running on a platform of protecting taxpayer interests in Sandy City through smart spending. We find her support of a gondola which would cost every taxpayer in Utah including Sandy Residents an estimated \$1200 per household counterintuitive to that promise. Sandy residents are already partially funding the eventual gondola through sales and use tax increases. In addition, being open to the gondola ignores the will of over 60% of Sandy residents who expressed they do not want a gondola and parking structure in LCC—even in spite of the fact that they are dealing with traffic congestion from skier activity.

Little Cottonwood Canyon Gondola: Who Really Pays? Profits? Benefits?

In April, the Salt Lake Tribune published an Op-Ed from Ski Utah CEO Nathan Rafferty in support of the gondola. In his opinion piece, Mr. Rafferty says he aims to clear up misconceptions and misinformation surrounding the LCC gondola. The article was full of recycled half-truths that fit the narrative of the rich who stand to gain from the gondola build. We felt a need to publish a retort to Mr. Rafferty's claims. While our responding Op-Ed was not published by the Tribune--whose Board Member, Tom Love, has close financial and business ties to pro-gondola parties including Ski Utah and Gondola Works--we have published the retort on our website and intend to do so in future publications.



New BYU Study Casts Strong Doubts on Validity of UDOT's Cost Calculations that Favored Gondola Over Busses

In May we attended a presentation at [The Intermountain Engineering, Technology and Computing \(i-ETC\) Conference](#) by faculty and students from BYU's School of Civil and Structural Engineering on "Life Cycle Costs of the Little Cottonwood Canyon Transportation Scenarios". The study walked through best practices and sound methods for conducting a Life Cycle Cost Analysis (LCCA) **using the real life example of how Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) applied Life Cycle Cost Analysis to evaluate LCC transportation alternatives**—a cog rail, enhanced bussing, and different starting points for a gondola—to inform its Record of Decision (ROD) in favor of the Gondola B alternative. UDOT justified its ROD with its own LCCA calculations, showing that a gondola would be the lowest cost solution in the long run.

However, the conclusions of the BYU analysis of UDOT's LCCA for Little Cottonwood Transportation solutions were astonishing if not slightly disturbing. Among other faulty methods UDOT applied to its gondola LCCA, **it used an incorrect and unprecedented negative discount rate, over 200% below what the Utah Office of Management and Budget recommends for such transportation cost estimates**. Doing so greatly increased the apparent cost of busses while lowering UDOT's estimate of the gondola's cost. UDOT also used a shorter than-is- typical project timeline to calculate the long term costs of the various alternatives, including the gondola. Critically, UDOT did not conduct sensitivity analysis to the key assumptions of its cost analysis and ignored cost overrun risk calculations of the various alternatives considered. There were other errors that we cannot cover here. The result of this inconsistent and arguably incorrect approach to UDOT's cost calculations made the gondola look far less expensive vs. enhanced bus service than what would be realistic if LCCA best practices had been used by UDOT.

BOTTOM LINE: BYU's sensitivity analysis (which UDOT did NOT perform for its LCCA) found that enhanced bus services were less expensive than the gondola in all but one future scenario. And when all errors in UDOT's LCCA approach were corrected, enhanced bus services ALONE proved to be less expensive and far less risky in the long run from a cost-perspective. UDOT's evaluation of the gondola cost is likely very wrong—again.

Read highlights of BYU's findings on our website [here](#) and access the full BYU presentation [here](#).



Check out the New Friends of LCC Website

We have redesigned our [website](#) to be more newsworthy and **reflective of our focus on holding the Utah Legislature, local politicians, UDOT, and other organizations accountable** to taxpayers and local residents regarding funding and implementing transportation solutions in LCC. Among other helpful information, you will find updates on lawsuits, contact information for legislative committees that make decisions, and politicians who are for and against the gondola. And if you are not on social media **you can now keep up to date on our social media postings via our [homepage](#)**. Any thoughts on how we can make our website more useful and informative? Let us know at contact@lccfriends.org.

With deepest thanks for your support,

Mike Marker, President

Please contact me directly if you have any questions or comments at:
mike@lccfriends.org

