



Runyon replaces Aspen's Ireland in regional transportation role

AUGUST, 2 2010
[JANET UROUHART](#)
 THE ASPEN TIMES
 ASPEN, CO COLORADO

Eagle County Commissioner Peter Runyon has replaced Aspen Mayor Mick Ireland as chairman of the Intermountain Regional Transportation Planning Commission, a move that may signal a change in the group's focus as it recommends the allocation of state transportation monies.

On the other hand, there isn't any money to allocate, both Ireland and Runyon are quick to point out.

The region includes Pitkin, Eagle, Garfield, Summit and Lake counties, and Ireland had chaired the group, unopposed, for a decade or so. There are 27 voting jurisdictions, both counties and municipalities; Runyon won his bid for the chairman's seat with an 11-7 vote of the 18 jurisdictions represented at a July 15 meeting in Glenwood Springs.

"This was the only contested election and the only one supervised by CDOT staff members who printed ballots, set rules, limited debate and announced rules on who could and could not vote," said Ireland in response to an e-mail.

Brian Pettet, Pitkin County director of public works, had been the sole administrative staffer for the commission, as well as the county's voting delegate. County commissioners decided last week to pull Pettet out of the administrative role and let Eagle County assume those duties. Commissioner George Newman will be the county's representative on the commission.

The commission structure is somewhat informal in that any representative of a member jurisdiction can cast that jurisdiction's vote. For the city, Ireland and Transportation Director John Krueger usually attend the meetings; Krueger has been casting the city's votes, according to Ireland.

As chairman of the commission, Ireland was also the region's representative to the State Transportation Advisory Committee — a role that now falls to Runyon.

Runyon said his impetus for seeking the post is not to steer funds toward Eagle County or the Interstate 70 corridor, but rather to change the way the commission conducts business.

"It's not against Mick or the job he has done," Runyon said. "It was just time for a little different perspective. I think it was more an issue of comfort and complacency. We weren't meeting much as a group."

Runyon said he hopes to convene quarterly meetings so members have more face-to-face contact.

The commission had met once or twice a year and conducted much of its business via e-mail, according to Pettet.

Under Ireland's tenure as chairman, a number of funding allocations came to the Roaring Fork Valley, but Ireland stressed he did not personally obtain those resources. The intermountain partnership of counties gets the credit for work that resulted in allocations such as \$109 million for the four-laning of Highway 82 through Snowmass Canyon and the \$6.4 million Maroon Creek roundabout, for which the Colorado Department of Transportation provided 75 percent of the funding.

"I did lead the fight to protect funding allocation for PM-10 [pollution] mitigation in rural areas. That means about \$150,000 per year for Aspen or Pitkin County for dust-reducing projects," Ireland said.

Ireland's leadership benefited local projects to the extent his work benefited the region as a whole, according to Pettet.

"I think the region benefited. By the Roaring Fork Valley being part of the region, the Roaring Fork Valley benefited," he said.

Ireland, however, opposed making a \$70 million bridge to link I-70 directly to the Eagle County Regional Airport a top priority for the region. Eagle County wants to see that project happen and has sought federal economic recovery funds devoted to transportation for it, according to Runyon.

"We have been very conscious to not tap into funds that would have gone to other areas of the region," he said.

Runyon, also a member of the I-70 Coalition board, said he will have an eye toward what is good for the entire I-70 corridor. An I-70 project on Floyd Hill, in the foothills outside of Denver, for example, is beyond the intermountain region's borders but may have traffic benefits to the corridor within the region.

"Even though a project is outside of the [region], we might be interested in supporting it," Runyon said. "I want to have that discussion, not that I'm interested in driving it. I just want to have the discussion."

janet@aspentimes.com

<http://www.aspentimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100802/NEWS/100809984&parentprofile=&template=printart>