

ROARING FORK SUNDAY

Aspen, Snowmass Village, Woody Creek, Basalt, El Jebel, Carbondale, Glenwood, Rifle

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Nights At The Roundtable

■ Over Pizza, Soda, Officials From Aspen To Parachute Gather Momentum To Solve Our Regional Transportation Problems

BY DONNA J. DOWLING
Roaring Fork Sunday Writer

A little-publicized cadre of officials from Aspen to Parachute has been gathering in recent months over pizza, cookies and sodas, and after only eight dinner meetings the group seems to be

emerging as a new force — pushing for regional transportation planning for the Roaring Fork and Grand valleys.

Among its accomplishments the group helped get state legislation drafted, sponsored and passed this winter that will allow regions like ours to form rural transportation districts. Before the legislation, forming such districts wasn't a legal option outside metro Denver.

Gov. Roy Romer is expected to sign the bill into law soon.

Another accomplishment: all 12 governments

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Roundtable Breaks Down Regional Barriers

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from Aspen to Parachute also signed a joint resolution committing to create an efficient, sustainable and regional multimodal transportation system. The vote was something like 61-2.

The group's official name is the Regional Transportation Partnerships Program. Most people involved simply call it the "roundtable," named for its roundtable-style gatherings, which travel between Carbondale and Rifle.

Given its infancy, no one knows exactly how the group will evolve. Some see it becoming an "official" board if this region's voters decide to pursue a rural transportation district.

It will certainly be the group that explores what the boundaries, structure and finances of such a district could look like; that process is getting

underway, now that the legislation looks like a reality.

Others see the group as the pathfinder that could smooth the way toward valleywide land-use planning — an historically thorny subject that will be chipped away at when the Denver & Rio Grande right-of-way is finally purchased. Once that rail corridor is held by local governments, a two-year comprehensive planning effort will get started.

Whatever its future, the roundtable's present-day incarnation is making a difference in stimulating a year-long dialogue on regional issues. In the process, Basalt trustees are getting to know Rifle council members, and Aspen council mem-

bers are on a first-name basis with Carbondale trustees.

"This group here has torn down a big huge wall," said Terry White, a long-time resident who is now an administrator with the Roaring Fork Transit Agency. Speaking as a citizen, not as a RFTA official, White said he is wildly

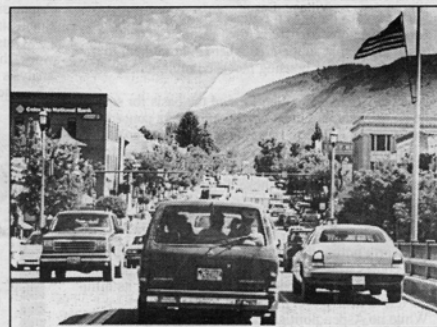
impressed that the valley's politicians have all come together. For decades, Aspen was perceived as the "hippie kooks" by the valley's more conservative ranching

residents, he noted. "I get chills, tingly because it's so nice. For 20 some odd years, that's all I've seen ... the big wall. It's being taken down brick by brick," he said.

"The dialogue is just won-

Terry White

"This group here has torn down a big huge wall"



Roaring Fork Sunday File Photo

The Grand Avenue Bridge in Glenwood Springs experiences even more traffic than the busiest spots in Aspen.

derful," echoed Glenwood Springs Mayor Marc Adler at a recent roundtable.