

A new change to the transportation system in Little Cottonwood Canyon may affect Westminster College student access to one of Utah's most popular areas to camp, climb, ski and hike — which receive 2.1 million visitors a year —, [according to the Deseret News](#).

The Utah Department of Transportation identified 'Gondola B' as the preferred alternative to solve Little Cottonwood Canyon's traffic congestion, which includes building an eight-mile gondola through the canyon and phasing in "enhanced busing systems and tolling, restricting single occupancy vehicles and a new mobility hubs" as they wait for funding, according to [UDOT officials](#).

Student Response to Gondola

Some students at Westminster said they oppose the gondola because of its lack of accessibility to the public.

"They're making skiing even more elitist," said Isabella Gerry, a sophomore business major. "Even if you're not a skier, they're taking access away. They're privatizing this public area just to get more wealthy people to come [to the canyon]."

Liam McGee, a sophomore environmental science major, said there were other "equally viable options," such as a better public transportation system, which would "cost less money, be easier to implement and detract less from the accessibility and aesthetic of the outdoors."

"The reason I moved to [Salt Lake City] — in all honesty — was because of the proximity to the mountains," McGee said. "Putting more infrastructure into what in reality is one of the more accessible outdoor spaces close to a city, just kind of ruins appeal."

John Borick, a sophomore outdoor education and leadership major, said the gondola poses aesthetic concerns when rock climbing.

"You should see some of the renderings they did, it's going to fuck up so much climbing," Borick said. "These towers are like, 250 feet tall so you'll be on some climbs on the wall, like your third or fourth pitch up, and you'll be eye-level with the [...] gondola."

Borick also said the money used for building the gondola could be used on more important projects, like saving the Great Salt Lake.

Chris Ledyard, a sophomore undeclared major, pointed to Ikon passes — a multi-resort unlimited ski and snowboard season access — as a cause of traffic congestion. Ledyard said the Ikon passes heavily populate outdoor centers.

The Ikon Base pass allows unlimited access at 13 destinations (including Solitude Mountain Resort in Utah) and up to five days each at 34 destinations (including Brighton Resort in Utah), according to the [Ikon website](#). The pass costs college students \$679, according to the [website](#).

The Ikon Base Pass Plus costs \$879 for college students, and allows access at more Utah resorts like Alta Ski Area, Deer Valley Resort, and Snowbasin, according to the [website](#).

“[The gondola] could be a cool idea,” Ledyard said. “I don’t know how much it’s going to help if they don’t limit who’s going up [the canyon].”

Gondola B Proposal

The Gondola B plan would “construct a base station with 2,500 parking spaces near the mouth of Little Cottonwood Canyon” with gondola cabins holding up to 35 people each and arriving every two minutes, according to [The Utah Department of Transportation](#).

[UDOT](#) said the gondola will avoid delays due to adverse weather, automobile crashes and slow moving traffic.

Terry Heinrich, a board member of [Friends of Little Cottonwood Canyon](#), said the gondola wouldn’t effectively clear traffic congestion. Travelers will prefer to drive up the canyon in their car instead of paying for parking and gondola tickets, according to Heinrich.

“I think [people are] going to get to the parking garage, and they’re just gonna say, ‘Hey, I don’t want to wait in line and go park, I can just [drive] right up the canyon,’” Heinrich said.

Friends of Little Cottonwood Canyon is a group of local residents “who have long enjoyed the natural beauty of Little Cottonwood Canyon,” and believe the canyon “should be protected from expansive development and overuse for future generations,” according to the [Friends of Little Cottonwood Canyon webpage](#).

In support of the gondola, Snowbird General Manager Dave Fields said, “The [gondola] could become an attraction in its own right,” in a [Salt Lake Tribune article](#).

Heinrich said she opposes Fields’ statement and said even tourists aren’t likely to use the gondola more than a rental car.

“If someone is coming from out of town, let’s say a couple who has two kids, [...] they might take the gondola once but they’re not going to do it everyday,” Heinrich said. “It’s too expensive and it takes 35 minutes.”

An alternative to the gondola is electric buses, which would depart “every 10 minutes to Snowbird or Alta,” and a carpool system, according to Heinrich.

“This year, the Vail resorts in Park City went to a reservation system,” Heinrich said. “[They charge] \$25 a day, but if you have four people in your car you don’t have to pay. So something like that could help.”

The gondola would cost taxpayers \$550 million in construction and up to \$30 million more in upkeep, according to [UDOT](#). UDOT said the gondola’s “30-year life cycle” makes it the cheapest traffic solution with “low impacts to the watershed, wildlife movement, and climbing boulders.”

The enhanced bus system and road widening proposal would cost \$510 million with \$11 million of winter upkeep, according to [the Deseret News](#).

UDOT will finalize their decision in the winter of [2022 or 2023](#), or “when federal, state and/or private funding is identified,” [according to UDOT officials](#).