



PO Box 1210  
Wilson, WY 83014  
[info@tetonbackcountryalliance.org](mailto:info@tetonbackcountryalliance.org)

Date: February 17, 2020

To: Mr Luke Reiner, Director, WY Department of Transportation

From: Gary Kofinas, Chairperson, Teton Backcountry Alliance

Cc: Leroy Wells, Bruce Daigle, Shelby Carlson, John Fitzgerald, Brenden Cronin of WYDOT; Jim Roscoe, WY State Legislator; Luther Propst and Mark Newcomb, Teton County Commissioners; and Darin Martens, Linda Merigliano, and Mary Moore of BTNF.

Dear Mr. Reiner,

I am writing on behalf of [Teton Backcountry Alliance](#) (TBCA), a Teton County, Wyoming based grassroots non-profit organization that works to promote safety, responsible recreational use, and stewardship in the Tetons, and in particular the Teton Pass area.

As I am sure you are aware, Teton Pass has long been a popular backcountry ski destination in the American West, but recently has begun to attract larger numbers of both national and international visitors. A 2018-19 counter at the north and south trailheads of Teton Pass found that the total traffic entering and exiting the Teton Pass backcountry from November 21, 2018 to January 13, 2019 was 11,709 people, with the highest single day of use tallying 611 people on December 12. We estimate that skiers and boarders currently take about 150,000 runs on Teton Pass each winter season. Given the growing interest in backcountry skiing, we anticipate that winter recreational use of Teton Pass will continue to increase in the future ([report on NPR](#)). And as I am sure you are also aware, this increase in use has created a number of challenges. These include skier-triggered avalanches that cross the highway and close the Pass, dog and pedestrian management, and serious parking congestion. Hwy 22 is also a valuable thoroughfare that allows about 6,000 commuters to travel from their homes in Teton County Idaho to places of their work in Teton Country, WY.

TBCA has engaged the public in discussions and last spring administered a [survey](#) about the current issues on Teton Pass and what people see as solutions. Based on those discussions, the survey, and our observations, Teton Backcountry Alliance requests your attention to a set of recommendations for your agency to consider implementing in the future. These include:

- Constructing a chain-up / hitchhiking pick-up area on the north side of Hwy 22 in the relatively flat area east of its junction with Trail Creek Road (aka Old Pass Road). Such a pullout would avoid the unsafe congestion and nuisance issues that currently exist when hitchhikers use the Heidelberg driveway for pickups. TBCA can imagine that such a pullout might also include shelter, such as those used at bus stops, and partial sponsorship could come from Teton County. It should be noted that an effort to construct such a pull out was made ten years ago, including getting permission from land owners. However, it was never constructed.
- A lower speed zone at the area on top of Teton Pass. The current legal speed limit in this area is 55 mph. Recreationists who park at Teton Pass stage themselves quite close to traffic at this location, and many of these people cross the road here to access the boot trail up Mount Glory

This is currently a dangerous situation, especially in icy conditions. Signage for drivers indicating pedestrian traffic would also help.

- Continue snow removal of the “pullout” (i.e. parking area) at the top of Teton Pass for winter recreationists’ parking. WYDOT has done an excellent job accommodating skiers on Teton Pass in the past. TBCA and the public are grateful for their work! Here TBCA simply asks that this effort be continued so that snow removal for parking is maintained with enough depth so vehicles and pedestrians in this area do not interfere with the safe flow of traffic on the highway. Rethinking the parking arrangement on Teton Pass is needed as part of a long term planning process, but for now, snow removal is critical.
- Construction of snow sheds for the Mt Glory and Twin Slide avalanche runout zones. As stated, about 6,000 vehicles cross Teton Pass on Highway 22 each workday so people can access jobs in Jackson Hole. Avalanches that close the Teton Pass highway reap havoc on workers and businesses. The TBCA survey found that the public agrees that snow sheds can resolve many of the negative effects of avalanches on Teton Pass. Snow sheds also may be of great interest to the State of Idaho, since its residents’ livelihood depends on the roadway, and Idaho’s contribution to total costs may be of interest. TBCA recommends that WYDOT conduct a detailed feasibility analysis for snow sheds on Teton Pass that includes not just the cost of construction but the full cost of closures to the economy of people using the highway.

We appreciate that the challenges for agencies (WYDOT, BTNF, Highway Patrol, Teton County Sheriff’s Dept, and others) are complex and the solutions will not come overnight. While several of the solutions listed above could be quick low-cost fixes, others will require long-term planning. From conversations with Darin Martens of BTNF, we also understand that in the near future key stakeholders will be launching a planning process to address some of these challenges. The Teton Backcountry Alliance applauds that effort!

Finally, we want to recognize the hard work of WYDOT personnel who work on Teton Pass on a daily basis. Their professionalism, expertise, and willingness to communicate and cooperate with the Teton Backcountry Alliance is greatly appreciated. We hope that as WYDOT makes its own decisions, it will consider and implement the four recommendations noted above. We also hope the Teton Backcountry Alliance can continue to find ways to cooperate with and be supportive of WYDOT in the future.

Should you have questions about our recommendations or other matters, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



Gary Kofinas  
TBCA Steering Committee Chairperson  
[www.tetonbackcountryalliance.org](http://www.tetonbackcountryalliance.org)  
cell: 307.690.5103  
email: [gary.kofinas@alaska.edu](mailto:gary.kofinas@alaska.edu)