

# Project THOR a hidden hero in reopening of Glenwood Canyon

Regional broadband service restores internet connection to CDOT after cable was cut in mudslide

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The Glenwood Canyon mudslide damaged much of the infrastructure on Interstate 70, including the Colorado Department of Transportation's fiber-optic cable used to provide service in the canyon.

*Special to the Daily*

A regional broadband service called Project THOR, aptly named in this case, was the hidden hero of reopening the Glenwood Canyon last week, restoring internet service to the canyon to aid the Colorado Department of Transportation.

The Northwest Colorado Council of Governments [started Project THOR to bring cheaper, more reliable service](#) to Western Slope communities fed up with spotty connection and frequent outages whenever an accident or natural disaster damaged internet cables, executive director Jon Stavney said.

“We have fiber cuts on a regular basis on the network, I mean, things happen in the mountains,” Stavney said.

The project leases fiber-optic cables from local governmental agencies and private internet providers across the region to form a broadband network with multiple, “redundant” pathways to connect back to the main hub in Denver, allowing them to recover quickly if a line is cut, he said.

The Glenwood Canyon mudslides on July 29 damaged much of the infrastructure on Interstate 70, and this damage severed CDOT’s fiber-optic cable that was buried beneath the road, eliminating the internet service they use to power crucial technology, according to a statement from CDOT.

“[Project THOR] jumped in and provided CDOT with a backup bandwidth so that we could get our devices, cameras and weather station west of the 123.5 [mile marker] up and running so we could get better situational awareness,” the statement reads.

**The Colorado Department of Transportation’s fiber-optic cable (shown here) was cut in the wreckage from the Glenwood Canyon mudslides, eliminating the internet service the department needed to run crucial devices.**

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In this case, two of Project THOR’s many municipal partners — Eagle and Glenwood Springs — allowed CDOT to “plug in” to use some of their fiber-optic cable “strands,” effectively restoring connection to the canyon, Stavney said.

“Just like traffic being rerouted, this is internet traffic being rerouted so that they could operate their cameras and their variable reader boards on the other side of the cut,” he said. “They need to be able to operate the [variable reader boards] for telling motorists where to go, when it’s closed and to be able to run cameras and see what’s going on in the canyon.”

This kind of resiliency to outages is something that other local internet providers are not able to offer on their own, Stavney said.

[Eagle opted into the Project THOR network](#) in the spring of 2019, with the [town of Vail following suit a month later](#). Both municipalities — as well as others throughout the region — pay a monthly fee to use the strong broadband network pieced together through the project.

“There’s been a number of instances where having Project THOR in place has been able to help emergency response services and other communities when it comes to losing internet due to a major event like a fire or a mudslide or whatever else,” said Bill Shrum, Eagle’s assistant town manager.

Project THOR’s network was also used to restore service to Estes Park during the East Troublesome Fire last year, Shrum said.

They have also provided [more dependable connection to hospitals](#) like Middle Park Health in Granby, which rely on internet to send scans and other important medical documents to specialists in larger areas for consultations, Stavney said.

Stavney said they were especially glad to be able to help CDOT because the department leases much of its broadband fiber from Glenwood Springs to Denver to Project THOR.

“We’re just happy to be able to serve them back in this way,” he said. “They’ve been a great partner in giving us excellent public pricing for leasing their fiber so, as far as we’re concerned, this is a great full circle of public agencies being able to help one another.”

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