

# The 2009 Asphalt Outlook

As 2008 comes to a close, there are a number of new developments and market conditions that allow the asphalt industry of Colorado to be optimistic towards the coming year. Also, in response to information being distributed by cement and concrete promoters, we feel it is important to clarify a number of issues and explain the advantage of using asphalt for pavements in Colorado.

**COST OF ASPHALT:** Asphalt prices have dropped with declining crude oil prices. The statement that concrete now costs about the same or less than asphalt is not accurate. Using price information from earlier in the year is not valid. Furthermore, our member companies who are also in the concrete business state that the cost of cement has increased and this has resulted in higher prices for concrete. Cost comparisons of material types need to take into consideration the intended use of the product. Concrete pavement is not an option for many asphalt resurfacing and maintenance applications.

**ASPHALT & POLYMER SUPPLY:** Asphalt is much more readily available today than earlier in 2008. Suncor Energy, Sinclair Oil, Frontier Oil & Refining, have all indicated that they will be supplying asphalt into the Colorado market in 2009 at levels equal to, or greater than in 2008. Although there has been some reduction in supply capacity due to the installation of re-refining or coker units at some facilities, this is not the case with all. For example, the largest supplier of asphalt in Colorado, Suncor Energy, does not have a coker nor plan to install a coker at its Commerce City facility. They supply approximately 450,000 tons of asphalt/year and are expecting higher volumes of asphalt in 2009. Furthermore, there are two new suppliers of asphalt and polymer in Colorado, namely, Mountain States Materials – Cheyenne and NuStar Energy - New Mexico, which will increase supply and competition in the Colorado asphalt market. The sale of Sem Materials is expected to occur this winter and the new company is expected to provide polymer modified asphalt in 2009 at traditional levels. The Association of Modified Asphalt Producers (AMAP) [www.modifiedasphalt.org](http://www.modifiedasphalt.org) has reported that polymer for asphalt modification is expected to be more readily available in 2009.

**PERFORMANCE LIFE:** The blanket statement that concrete pavement lasts longer than asphalt is not accurate. There are numerous asphalt roadways throughout Colorado that were originally placed in the 1950's, 60's and 70's and are still in place and in service today. It is not an apples-to-apples comparison to compare how long a road resurfacing project lasts (typically 10 to 15 years) to how long a new or reconstructed roadway lasts. These are two different issues. There are many rehabilitation and maintenance applications of asphalt pavement where the design life is 10 years. The performance of these applications cannot be compared directly to the performance of 8" - 10" of concrete designed to last 30 years. The history of road-building in Colorado can be uncovered by coring nearly every asphalt pavement. The core will show that in nearly all cases the original asphalt material placed many years ago is still in place. Older concrete pavements, such as I-25 between Denver/Ft. Collins or Lincoln Ave. in Parker, become rough, noisy and full depth cracks need to be removed and replaced at a significant cost. The remedial treatment for older asphalt pavements is typically only a surface milling and overlay. This treatment is part of the "perpetual pavement" concept and allows an older

asphalt roadway to retain a high level of serviceability at the low cost of surface rehabilitation and maintenance.

**ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY:** Asphalt is 100% recyclable and thousands of tons of asphalt pavement are recycled each year in Colorado. The amount of recycled asphalt pavement in Colorado continues to increase each year and 2008 was a record year for asphalt pavement recycling. Also, porous asphalt pavement is part of Build Green because paving parking lots with porous asphalt reduces storm water runoff and storm water retention. Porous asphalt pavement and using recycled materials can contribute to LEED credit through materials recycling and the use of porous asphalt. Currently, paving green with concrete is not an option in the Colorado Front Range. The Urban Drainage and Flood Control District has issued a moratorium on the use of pervious concrete due to “*early failure and rapid deterioration*” of experimental test locations. The use of warm mix asphalt has been introduced into Colorado as a way to reduce plant energy requirements, reduce plant emissions, and allow paving in colder climates. The use of ground tire rubber and roofing shingles continue to be evaluated as environmental innovations in asphalt technology.

**ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:** Most agencies, including the Colorado Department of Transportation, have budgets that are nowhere near what is necessary to maintain their current network of roadways. Currently, road work projects using asphalt materials provide the best value for agencies struggling to maintain, preserve, and resurface existing roadways. Also, water and utility work is a constant issue with urban roadways, and the project costs for these agencies skyrocket with working on concrete roads.

**QUALITY OF LIFE FACTORS:** Some of the additional benefits of asphalt pavement are the ability to **reduce roadway noise** using quiet, open-graded surface mixes such as stone matrix asphalt; **ease of maintenance** when future development or adjacent land use requires inevitable utility cuts across the roadway surface; **reduced time of construction/reduced business impact** – asphalt pavements can typically be constructed and repaired faster than concrete while maintaining traffic. Often times asphalt can be placed at night to further reduce disruption to traffic and area businesses.

**SUMMARY:** Asphalt is America’s most recycled road material, and there are a number of factors why a majority of all pavements are asphalt. Asphalt is smooth, quiet, easy to construct, and easier and less expensive to maintain. In the discussion of pavement type selection or strategy of repair selection, it is important to take a broader look at all issues including the rising cost of all construction materials, including cement and concrete.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:** Contact the Colorado Asphalt Pavement Association at (303) 741-6150 or at [office@co-asphalt.com](mailto:office@co-asphalt.com) [www.co-asphalt.com](http://www.co-asphalt.com)

