

Lease signed for NW Parkway

By Jeffrey Leib *The Denver Post*

11/20

Ask Portuguese business executive João Azevedo Coutinho why his company is spending \$603 million to lease the Northwest Parkway for 99 years, and he says the investment comes with the expectation that there will be a "ring road" around metro Denver.

On Monday, Portugal's Brisa Auto-Estradas closed on its deal with the Northwest Parkway Public Highway Authority that will retire about

\$503 million in bond debt on the toll road, which has failed to meet original traffic and revenue predictions.

The deal includes another \$40 million to cover parkway debts owed to local government entities and \$60 million that could be spent to extend the parkway 2.3 miles to the west, to Colorado 128 in Broomfield.

Spending the \$60 million is contingent on construction of a far longer extension of the parkway, to Colorado

93 in Jefferson County, said Northwest Parkway Executive Director Steve Hogan.

Taking the parkway to Colorado 93 is expected to be part of a more ambitious plan — estimated to cost up to \$1 billion — to extend the highway to the junction of C-470 and Interstate 70. That would complete the beltway around the Denver metro area.

"We see that as an important event," Coutinho, chief executive officer of Brisa Internacional, said of completing the highway loop. He said his company will work in "partnership" with others to pursue that aim.

Officials from Broomfield, Arvada and Jefferson County have been among those lobbying for completion of the beltway. The city of Golden has been a strong foe of the plan.

Early details of the Brisa-Northwest Parkway transaction included the possibility that the deal would be followed

with a toll increase to \$3 for vehicles that travel the full length of the parkway.

Hogan said Monday he is "not aware of any plan for a toll increase." Hogan leaves his position at the end of the month, but will continue as a consultant for the Northwest Parkway authority for six months.

The authority retains ownership of the road, which runs from Interstate 25 near 160th Avenue on a roughly 9-mile arc to a location just east of U.S. 36.

Former Colorado Gov. Bill Owens attended Monday's closing of the toll-road lease arrangement and said the nation will be seeing more deals like it. "There's not enough public resources to meet our infrastructure needs," said Owens, now a vice chairman with RBS Greenwich Capital. The company is an affiliate of The Royal Bank of Scotland, which Owens said will aid in financing Brisa's transaction.

Owens added: "This is a model of public-private partnership that brings additional resources for public needs."