

Colorado Historic Highway Inventory - Historical Summary and Evaluation of Significance

Highway Name: State Highway (SH) 159

CDOT Route Nos. and Milepost (MP) Limits:

<i>CDOT Route</i>	<i>Route Description</i>
159A	From the New Mexico State Line north via San Luis To SH 160-A in Fort Garland

Highway Location:

Counties: Costilla
Length (Miles): 33.624

OAHP Site Numbers (for previously recorded segments, if applicable)*:

<i>OAHP Site No.</i>	<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Assessment Date</i>	<i>Site Name</i>
None	No previously recorded segments are found on or adjacent to this highway		

Discussion of Site Forms (for previously recorded segments, if applicable):

No Colorado Cultural Resources Inventory forms for previously recorded segments of this highway were identified in Compass.

Historic Districts located within 250 feet of highway (OAHP Site Number and Name)*:

<i>OAHP Site No.</i>	<i>District Name</i>	<i>Assessment (If Applicable)</i>
None	No historic districts are found on or adjacent to this highway	

**Information based on data from Compass provided by OAHP*

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Historical Data:

SH 159 is approximately 34 miles long and extends north from the New Mexico state line through the community of San Luis before ending at U.S. Highway (US) 160 at Fort Garland in south-central Colorado. The road passes through the San Luis Valley along the western edge of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, just north of the New Mexico state line. In the early 1800s, nearby Taos, New Mexico became an important center for trade within the region, especially for fur trappers. An important and early trade route that came to be known as the Trapper's Trail, extended north from Taos over the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, north through the San Luis Valley to Fort Garland. Present-day SH 159 generally follows the route of the Trapper's Trail. The earliest major transportation corridors in south-central Colorado were wagon roads that often followed trails established by Native Americans. Settlers from New Mexico moved into the San Luis Valley in the 1850s and established early irrigation and water reclamation systems to facilitate agricultural production. The San Luis Valley developed into a center for agriculture and livestock-raising within the region beginning in the mid-nineteenth century and settlers used (Carter and Mehls 1984: 46-48; Autobee and Dobson-Brown 2003: E-12).

Railroad construction began in southern Colorado during the 1860s. The Denver and Rio Grande Railroad (D&RG) was organized in 1870 and construction on tracks south of Denver began that same year. The D&RG reached the San Luis Valley by 1877 and expanded throughout the valley over the next several decades linking communities together and to larger regional and state markets; tracks reached Alamosa in 1878 and a line was constructed from Alamosa to Espanola, New Mexico in 1880. Railroads served as an important means for distributing livestock and agricultural products produced in the San Luis Valley (Carter and Mehls 1984: 46-48, 79-81).

The popularity of the automobile increased dramatically between 1910 and 1920. The Good Roads Movement and establishment of the Colorado Highway Commission in the first decades of the twentieth century led to the establishment of a highway network throughout the region and state. Smaller communities increasingly saw the benefits of highway access, which led to further highway construction along less traveled routes in the 1920s and 1930s. US 160 became the major east-west route through the San Luis Valley in the 1930s by providing connections to SH 17, US 285, and many smaller and less prominent north-south routes that comprised the local transportation network (Carter and Mehls 1984: 138-141).

A map of Colorado territorial roads dating to 1866 shows a road along the general alignment of SH 159. An unimproved state highway was in place along this corridor and alignment by 1916 according to historic state highway maps. The road was designated SH 159 by 1926 and has retained a similar alignment and designation since that time. Within the context of the region, SH 159 was an early route and provided a direct connection between this agricultural region, New Mexico, and other important transportation corridors like US 160.

(Unless otherwise indicated, sources used in the preparation of this section included state highway maps, the Highways of Colorado by Matthew Salek, Highways to the Sky: A Context and History of Colorado's Highway System, Colorado State Roads and Highways, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Submission, plans in the Online Transportation Information System (OTIS), and site forms for previously surveyed resources in Compass when available.)

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Not Significant - No historical significance identified

Significant - Historical significance identified (see details below)

Property Type and Areas of Significance:

A detailed explanation why this highway possesses historical significance is provided in the Significance Statement below.

Cultural:

Criterion A specific requirements

- Early and/or prominent project of the Colorado Highway Department (Transportation)
- Association with a significant event (If applicable, the Area of Significance is indicated in the statement of significance below)
- Association with federal work relief programs (Politics/Government)

Criterion C specific requirements

- Representative example (Transportation)

Engineering:

Subtypes

- Farm-to-Market Road
- Limited Access, Multiple-Lane, Divided Highway/Freeway
- Highway Bypass

Criterion A specific requirements

- Early and/or prominent project of the Colorado Highway Department (Transportation)
- Association with a significant event (If applicable, the Area of Significance is indicated in the statement of significance below)
- Association with federal work relief programs (Politics/Government)

Criterion C specific requirements

- Representative example (Transportation)
- Engineering achievement (Engineering)

Aesthetic:

Criterion A specific requirements

- Early and/or prominent project of the Colorado Highway Department (Transportation)
- Association with a significant event (If applicable, the Area of Significance is indicated in the statement of significance below)
- Association with federal work relief programs (Politics/Government)

Criterion C specific requirements

- Representative example (Transportation)
- Engineering achievement (Engineering)
- Landscape architecture (Landscape Architecture)

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Historic periods of highway construction:

- Pre-territorial (pre-1861)
- Territorial and pre-automobile state roads (1861-1890)
- Automobile age (1890-1930)
- Depression and World War II (1930-1945)
- Postwar Interstate Era (1945-1973)
- Completion and Augmentation of Interstate System (1973-2000)

Level of Significance:

- Local
- State
- National

Significance Statement:

SH 159 is classified a Cultural Route and an Engineered Route under the classification system in the MPS.

Criterion A

Research did not indicate that this highway is an example of an early or prominent project by the Colorado Highway Department (CHD) or was built or improved as part of a Depression-era federal relief project. However, the current alignment of SH 159 is located along the Trapper's Trail, an important early trade route that extended north from Taos, New Mexico to Fort Garland, Colorado and to areas further north. As such, the highway possesses significance in the area of Transportation for its association with the history related to this early trade route at the state level as a Cultural Route. In addition, the highway served as an important north-south transportation corridor that provided a direct connection between the San Luis Valley and along the western slope of the Sangre de Cristo mountain range, between New Mexico and US 160 as a farm-to-market-road conveying agricultural goods to market centers and prominent transportation corridors within the region. As such, it possesses significance under Criterion A in the area of Transportation at the local level as an Engineered Route.

Criterion B

Research did not reveal this highway to be directly associated with the events or work of a person important in history, nor does research indicate the highway represents the efforts of a specific individual to secure construction of this highway for the economic development of a community or area of the state. Therefore, this highway does not possess significance under Criterion B.

Criterion C

This highway is not considered to be an early or prominent project of the CHD. Research and literature review yielded no evidence to indicate the use of innovative or important engineering design or construction techniques that serve to distinguish this highway from other roads and does not appear to exhibit important engineering innovations or important later modifications. The highway's design and construction appear to fall within the established standard practices of state highway design and construction of the time and the highway does not possess significance under Criterion C.

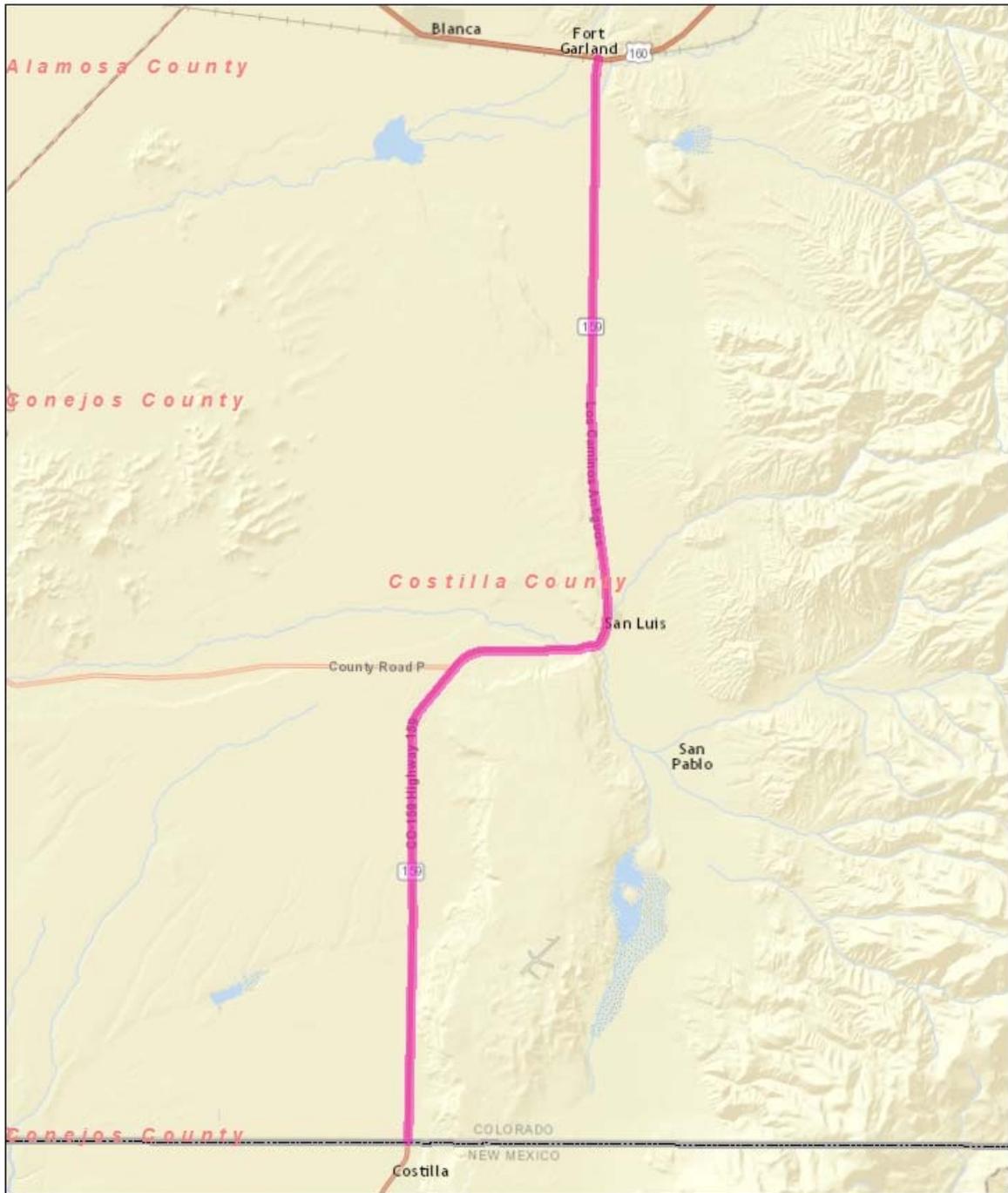
Criterion D

For a property to possess significance for information potential, the information yielded by the property must answer specific important research questions that cannot be otherwise answered. The technology of highway construction is well understood and documented. As such, this highway is unlikely to yield important information that cannot be discerned from archived plans and other records. Therefore, this highway does not possess significance under Criterion D.

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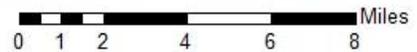
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- SH 159
- State Boundary
- County Boundary



SH 159



Map indicates the extent of the highway based on CDOT GIS data; portions co-signed with other highways may not be indicated.