

**Colorado Historic Highway Inventory - Historical Summary and Evaluation of Significance**

**Highway Name:** State Highway (SH) 52

**CDOT Route Nos. and Milepost (MP) Limits:**

<i>CDOT Route</i>	<i>Route Description</i>
052A	From SH 119-B at IBM Plant east via Fort Lupton, Hudson, and Prospect Valley and North To SH 39-A and U.S. 6-I east of Wiggins
052B	From U.S. 34-B at (Main St) in Fort Morgan north To SH 14-C east Begin (CR 133) of Raymer

**Highway Location:**

Counties: Morgan, Weld, Boulder  
 Length (Miles): 97.228

**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>
5WL.7418	No assessment provided		STATE HIGHWAY 52

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

Although site numbers given in Compass indicate the road has been previously surveyed, no Colorado Cultural Resources Inventory forms for previously recorded segments of this highway were available. 5WL.7418/5WL.7418.1 are for SH 52 but no site form or eligibility assessment is provided in Compass (5WL.7418.01 is listed as not supporting). 5BL.10538 (Boulder Creek Bridge (D-16-U, not eligible) and 5MR.471 (Rainbow Arch Bridge, a National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Rainbow Arch Bridge in Fort Morgan (5MR.471) is available in Compass and contained information about the history of the Rainbow Arch Bridge) are for bridges and not previously recorded segments of the route.

**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 52 is a 97.67 mile long route that begins at SH 119B (52A), in Boulder County, and runs east through Boulder County, Weld County, and into Morgan County, where it turns north, ending at to SH 39A, east of Wiggins. The highway then resumes (52B) at Fort Morgan and runs north to SH 14C, ending at Raymer. It is generally a 2-lane highway, although it widens at some intersections.

SH 52 is contained in the Colorado Piedmont, a region defined geographically as the rolling hills and stream-laced valleys that lie to the east of the Front Range. This area contains both the most urbanized corridor in the state and also wide swaths of rural farm and ranchlands, with its history firmly rooted in the events that profoundly changed the region from the 1850s well into the twentieth century. Prehistorically the region was the hunting grounds of the Comanche, who were later pushed south by the Cheyenne and Arapahoe. By the 1850s sparse European-American settlement in the form of scattered farms and trading posts dotted the area around the South Platte River, with trails such as the Cherokee Trail crossing the plains and connecting with California-bound trails to the north. With the Pikes Peak Gold Rush, however, change was fast and intense. The urban core (Denver, Boulder, Golden) that became the metro Denver area sprang from commerce and transportation, i.e., the connection of the gold fields in the Rocky Mountains with the markets and cities to the east. The agricultural zone in the more rural northern area of the Piedmont grew from cultivation made possible by the fertile soils and readily available water in the area, which allowed settlers to readily feed the hungry markets of the urban core and the mountain mining camps (Wyckoff 1999:101-103).

An 1861 map does not show the road that would become SH 52, but it does show that southern Weld County had been surveyed for the Public Land Survey System, indicating the possibility that this road or segments of it existed around that time as a section road. A 1916 Colorado state highway map shows the highway's west end at U.S. Highway (US) 87 (later 285 and now 287) about five miles south of Longmont, then extending east as it does today through the small farm towns of Dacono, Fort Lupton, and Hudson. Hudson, a stop on the Burlington Railroad line, connected the surrounding farms to Denver and was platted in 1887 around a depot and section house that was constructed by the Union Pacific in 1863. The 1887 plat map for the town shows the road that would become SH 52 (Town of Hudson 2015). The 1916 highway map shows the highway continuing east past the Weld/Fort Morgan county line and turning 90 degrees north, where it turned 90 degrees east again through the town of Wiggins, another small town stop on the Burlington line, established in 1882 (Bright 2004:187). The route continued east to the more populous regional center of Fort Morgan. The 1916 map shows the route continuing east to Brush, then "stair-stepping" northeast along section lines, following the South Platte River and the Union Pacific Railroad line. Although this last segment would not become part of the designated SH 52, it still served to connect the farms and ranches of the eastern plains to Fort Morgan.

SH 52 became a state highway in the early 1920s. A 1924 maps shows that it was designated and surfaced from US 87 east to Fort Morgan, with a graded segment (SH 52B) extending north to New Raymer, yet another small farm town on the northern route of the Burlington Railroad line. By 1938, the route was paved from what is now I-25 east to Hudson, but it was not until 1964 that the route was paved in its entirety. In 1965 the highway was extended from 287 west to meet the diagonal (SH 119) at Niwot.

After its designation as a state highway, SH 52 was in need of a substantial bridge across the Platte River, which the highway crossed just north of Fort Morgan. Although a timber bridge had been in place on the road since the 1890s, with the road's designation as a state highway, the Colorado Highway Department contracted to build the 11-span Rainbow Arch Bridge, a reinforced concrete Marsh arch design, only one of which was built in Colorado. The Rainbow Arch Bridge served SH 52 from 1923 until 1963, when it was decommissioned so that a wider bridge that was better able to accommodate heavier traffic could be constructed immediately next to it. Today, SH 52 no longer utilizes the Rainbow Arch Bridge, although the bridge remains in its original location next to the current alignment of SH 52 and is in use as a pedestrian bridge over the South Platte, and was placed on the National Register in 1985.

SH 52 is known to have served agricultural communities in the northern agricultural zone of the Colorado Piedmont since 1887 and probably longer. It clearly conveys characteristics of the farm-to-market subtype outlined in the MPS, Colorado State Roads and Highways, including the 90 degree turns that convey its relationship with early section roads, its route through small market centers and long-established farmlands, and its connections with the larger regional processing center of Fort Morgan. In addition, its repeated intersection with the historic Burlington Railroad line indicates it served prominently in this role. It was an early and prominent project of the Colorado Highway Department, with maps showing it was in place and mostly surfaced by 1924.

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(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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## Colorado Historic Highway Inventory - Historical Summary and Evaluation of Significance

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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 52 is classified as an Engineered Route under the classification system in the MPS.

#### *Criterion A*

State Highway 52 served as a farm-to-market route since the early days of homestead and railroad settlement in Boulder, Weld, and Fort Morgan counties, and clearly connected small farm towns with larger processing centers along the Burlington Railroad line in the agricultural region of northeastern Colorado. It is a good example of the farm-to-market subtype, and is significant as a farm-to-market road and an early example of Colorado Highway Department (CHD) project. As such, it is significant under Criterion A in the area of Transportation at the local level for its role in agricultural development and an early project of the CHD.

#### *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*

Although this highway was an early and 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 it is not known to have been the site of 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.

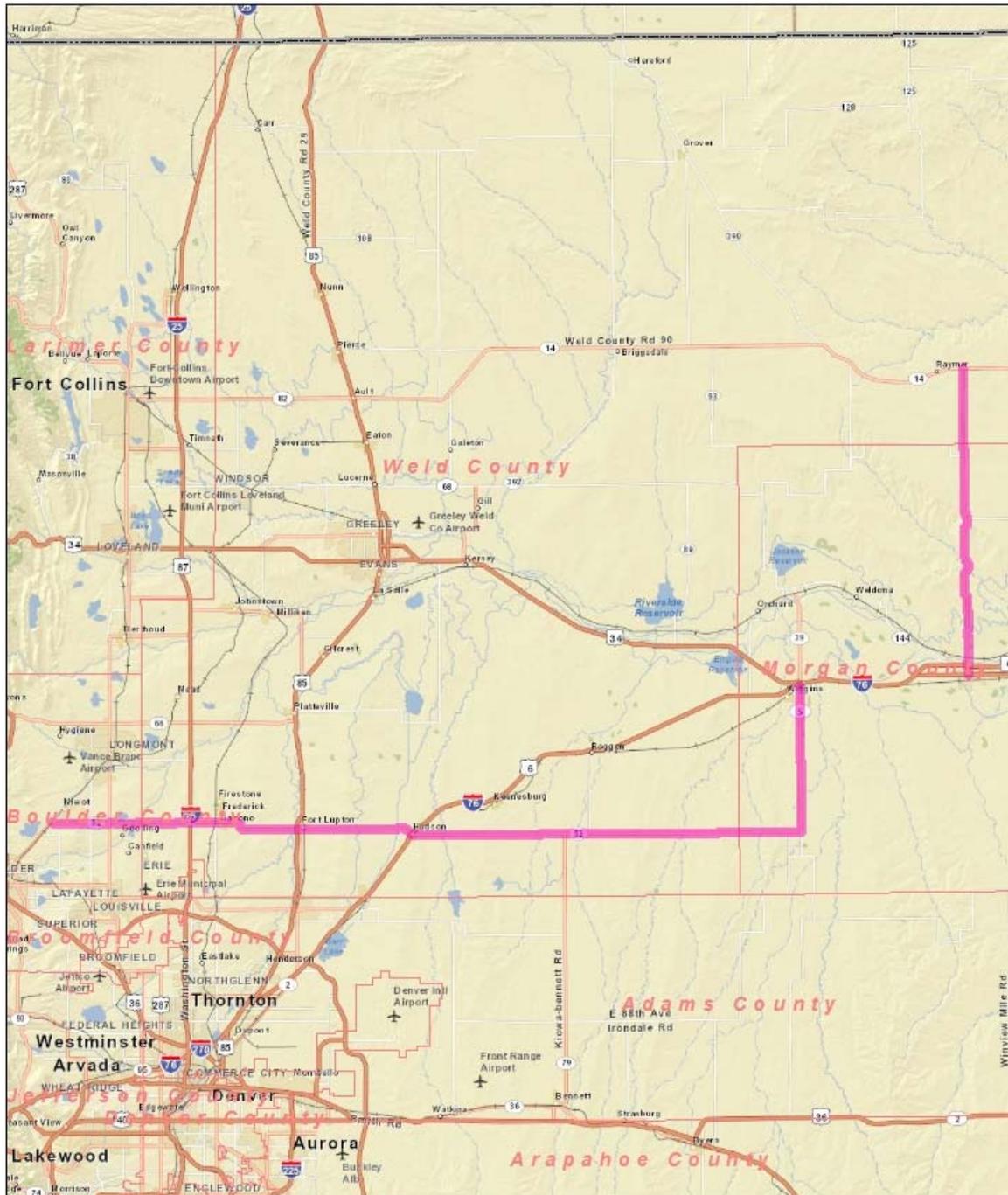
#### *Criterion D*

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.

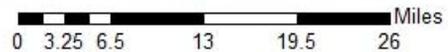
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# Colorado Historic Highway Inventory - Historical Summary and Evaluation of Significance

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- SH 52
- State Boundary
- County Boundary

**SH 52**



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

\*Information based on data from Compass provided by OAHF