

Colorado Historic Highway Inventory - Historical Summary and Evaluation of Significance

Highway Name: State Highway (SH) 84

CDOT Route Nos. and Milepost (MP) Limits:

<i>CDOT Route</i>	<i>Route Description</i>
084A	From the New Mexico State Line northwest via Chrome To Chrome to U.S. 160-A at Pagosa Springs

Highway Location:

Counties: Archuleta
Length (Miles): 27.838

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 (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 84 is approximately 28 miles long and extends north from the New Mexico border to Pagosa Springs. The highway passes through a forested and mountainous area in southwestern Colorado.

The earliest transportation corridors in the region 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 (Carter and Mehls 1984: 46-48).

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 connecting communities to larger markets; D&RG tracks reached Alamosa in 1878, a line was constructed from Alamosa to Espanola, New Mexico in 1880 and from Antonito over Cumbres Pass to Chama, New Mexico, in 1880, and tracks connecting Salida and the San Luis Valley were established in 1881 (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 (Carter and Mehls, 1984: 138-141). In 1913 the Colorado legislature initiated the creation of a highway (SH 15) across the continental divide in southern Colorado, which was located northwest of present-day SH 84. Earlier routes across the continental divide included wagon roads and unimproved roads between New Mexico and Archuleta County in Colorado. Historic state highway maps indicate that a road between Pagosa Springs and New Mexico was established by 1916 and designated as SH 67. By 1926 the route was designated SH 17, which also extended into New Mexico and back into Colorado. The westernmost segment of SH 17 generally followed the corridor of present-day SH 84 and was designated as SH 17 until 1942 when it was changed to SH 84. As such SH 84 is associated with the same historic themes as SH 17, which are summarized below (See the Colorado Historic Highway Inventory Form for SH 17 for more detail). This route of SH 17 went over Cumbres Pass and served as an important transportation corridor in southern Colorado that crossed the Continental Divide in the San Juan Mountains. Investigation of a route over Cumbres Pass began in 1920 when the State Highway Department and the Secretary of Agriculture drew up plans for the survey and construction of the highway. The road was opened to traffic and designated SH 17 in 1924 and extended southeast from Pagosa Springs, crossed into northern New Mexico, then re-entered Colorado and went over Cumbres Pass through Conejos, Alamosa, and then north through the San Luis Valley to Mineral Hot Springs. The segment of the early route of SH 17 through the San Luis Valley was stair-stepped and generally remained as such until the 1950s when and this portion was is no longer designated as SH 17. A 1924 article from Colorado Highways mentions SH 17 as important for opening up scenic parts of the state and for providing a shorter route than other existing highways between the San Luis and San Juan Valleys. Prior to its construction, western highway enthusiasts viewed its construction as pivotal to the industrial development of southwestern Colorado. A 1925 Colorado Highways article cited many important benefits of the new highway, including increased trade of natural and manufactured commercial products between the San Juan Valley and the San Luis Valley, access to previously isolated areas valuable for their scenic characteristics and recreational opportunities like fishing and motoring, and the access it provided to tourists visiting Mesa Verde National Park further to the west. Present-day SH 84 between Pagosa Springs and the New Mexico state line remained designated as part of SH 17 until 1942 when it was designated SH 84 ("New State Roads Open Beautiful Motorist Routes," Colorado Highways (December 1924): 10; "Cumbres Pass Open to Traffic," Colorado Highways (June and July 1925): 6-7, 24).

(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 84 is classified as Engineered Route under the classification system in the MPS.

Criterion A

The route of SH 84 was associated with same historical themes and the early history of SH 17 from approximately 1919 through the 1940s. As such, this highway possesses significance for the same reasons as SH 17 during this period. Prior to its designation as SH 84 this highway formed a portion of SH 17, which was established in 1924 in order to provide a transportation corridor between the San Juan Valley and San Luis Valley. Once constructed, the route of the highway, especially the southern portion that crosses Cumbres Pass, served as an important transportation corridor across the Continental Divide that facilitated increased commerce, trade, and tourism in a previously isolated part of the region. The highway facilitated development of recreational activities in the area like fishing and motoring and also provided tourists with easier access to Mesa Verde National Park. For these reasons, this highway possesses significance in the areas of Transportation and Entertainment/Recreation under Criterion A at the local level. In addition, the early history of SH 17 includes its extension through the San Luis Valley adjacent to the former D&RG railroad corridor and served as an important farm-to-market road within the valley and provided a direct connection for conveying agricultural goods to market centers and served as a prominent transportation corridor within the region at the local level. As such, the road also possesses significance for its association with the overall route of the early history of SH 17 as a farm-to-market road in the area of Transportation. Although not considered an early project by the Colorado Highway Department (CHD), this highway is considered a prominent project by the CHD due to the involvement of the Secretary of Agriculture in the planning and construction of the route and for the connections that it made throughout the region. As such, this highway possesses significance in the area of Transportation at the local level. No evidence was found to indicate that the highway was built or improved as part of a federal relief project.

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 associated with the early history and same historical themes as SH 17 because it was designated and developed as SH 17 through the 1940s. SH 17 encompassed Cumbres Pass and the portion of the road that traverses the Continental Divide, which may exhibit early and important engineering design or construction techniques; however, these features are not related to the portion of the route that is currently designated SH 84. Current portions of SH 17 represent those portions of the route that may exhibit features that distinguish it from other roads. Because of this, the highway's design and construction appear to fall within established standard practices of state highway design and construction of the time and this highway does not appear to possess significance under Criterion C.

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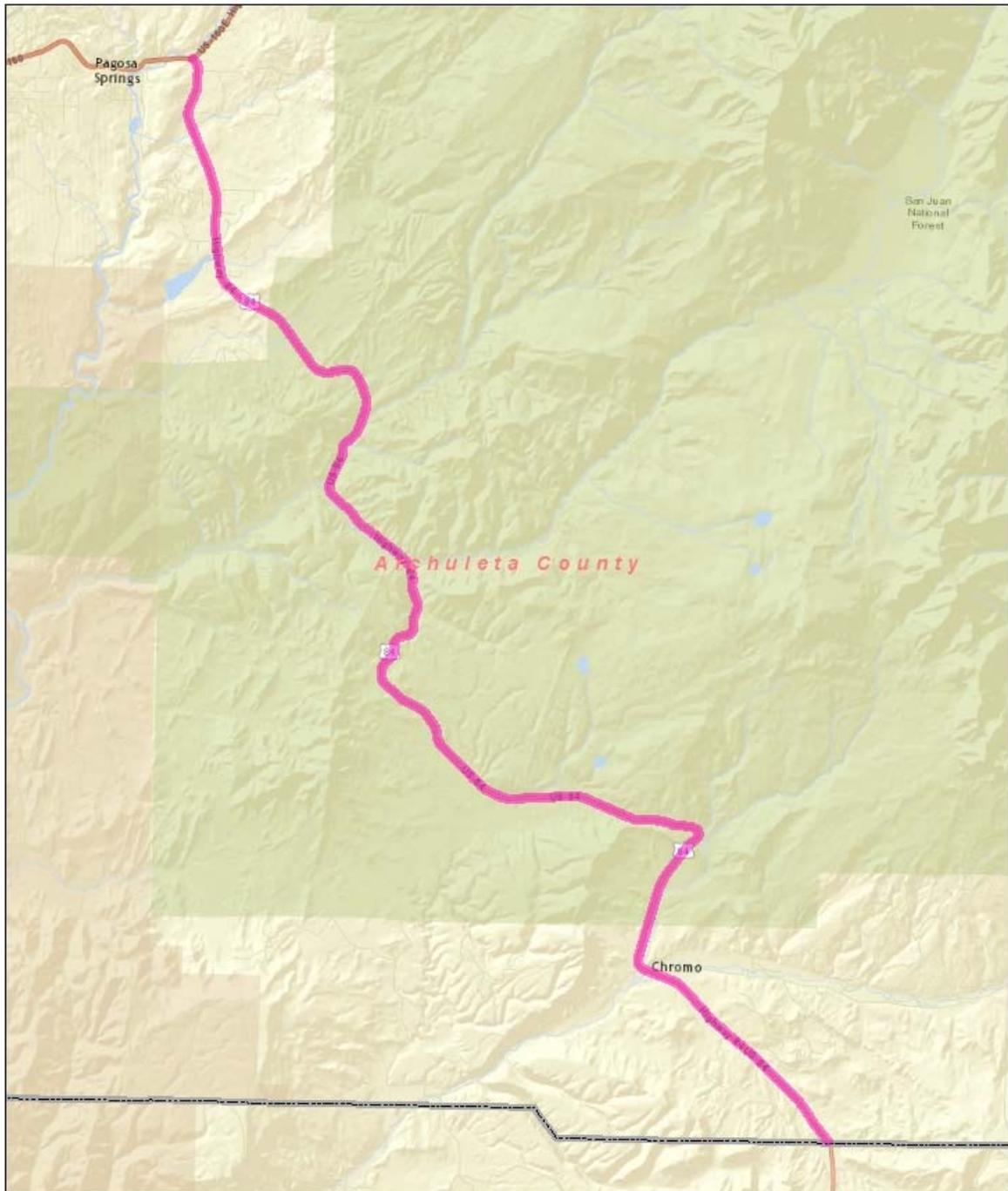
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Criterion D

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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Service Layer Credits: Sources: Esri, DeLorme, NAVTEQ, USGS, Intermap, P.C., NRCAN, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), Esri (Thailand), TomTom, 2013



-  SH 84
-  State Boundary
-  County Boundary

0 0.75 1.5 3 4.5 6 Miles

SH 84



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