

6.1 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public involvement has been an integral part of the planning process throughout the schedule for the US 160 improvement project. CDOT's commitment to gaining input from and informing the public about this project began with the Feasibility Study and continued during conceptual design. Public involvement efforts are ongoing for this environmental analysis phase and will continue through design and construction.

Community input was sought through public meetings, project newsletters, small group gatherings with various stakeholders, and one-on-one meetings with property and business owners. Community interest has been high throughout the public involvement process. More than 200 people attended the Concept Design meeting in May 2000, approximately 100 people attended the Public Scoping meeting for the EIS in March 2003, and 63 people attended the DEIS public hearing in October 2005. The project team met with the public 11 times at several locations along the project corridor during the alternatives development process.

The format for most of the public meetings was an open house with a formal presentation. Attendees were asked to introduce themselves and briefly present their concerns or interests. Presentations covered environmental constraints as well as alternative design concepts. Technical staff, including designers, engineers, environmental scientists, and technicians, were available to answer questions and listen to comments and concerns. Notes were taken on oral comments received during the formal presentation. Dot charts were used to gauge public reaction to specific alternatives, and comments were written on comment forms and "butcher paper" at the meetings. Based on public input, project alternatives were revised and presented at subsequent public meetings.

An outreach program was initiated for minority and low-income stakeholders to ensure they have the opportunity to participate in the public process. Based on input given at the March 2003 public meeting and a subsequent meeting held on May 2, 2003 at the Narrow Gauge Mobile Home Park, sections along the alignment were redesigned to reduce impacts to the Narrow Gauge and Cropley mobile home parks.

The following comments are a summary of public input gathered during the public meetings. Because these meetings occurred before the change in alternative designations, the comments reference the original number/letter alternative titles.

Farmington Hill to Florida River

- People expressed concern over safety issues related to Farmington Hill. In its current configuration, with steep grades and tight curves, Farmington Hill poses a serious safety concern.
- Most people agreed that US 160 through Grandview is unsafe and needs improvement as soon as possible. The absence of turning lanes, climbing lanes, and signals were identified as serious safety issues.

- There was a discussion of the trade-offs of preserving the rural feeling versus growth and commercialization of the project corridor. Preserving the rural feeling with a median would require a greater ROW than building a jersey barrier-type median with a narrower ROW. Most people want to preserve a rural feeling wherever possible.
- Many of the property owners were concerned with alignments that might impact their property. However, most people seemed to recognize that it is difficult to improve safety without having some level of impact on adjacent properties.
- Most people want the highway to remain on its existing alignment. The Grandview section of US 160 is heavily commercial; therefore, people felt it makes sense to keep the existing alignment.
- Many people want bike and pedestrian trails as part of the overall design.
- Environmental concerns included preserving wildlife corridors and agricultural land critical to the “quality of life” and “rural character” of the area as growth inevitably occurs. Several people expressed concern over bisecting the agricultural area on Florida Mesa with a new highway alignment.
- Many people expressed concern about possible loss of convenient access to their property.
- Most people expressed a strong desire for a permanent highway fix, not a temporary fix.
- Some people expressed concern about noise impacts.
- Some people expressed concern about the impacts to existing businesses at the SH 172/CR 234 intersection with US 160. Others expressed concern about impacts to Florida Mesa Elementary School, and safety for the school children if the intersection is relocated to the east.
- Safety concerns were expressed about the CR 229 and CR 222/CR 223 (west) intersections with US 160.

Florida River to Bayfield

- General concerns along the project corridor included conflicts with wildlife, noise, and consolidation of access points.
- Safety concerns focused on three particular locations: the highway through Gem Village, the US 160/US 160B (west) intersection, and the Eight Corners and Commerce Drive intersections where there is a high number of turning movements.
- The relationship of the highway corridor to present commercial interests and future growth was a significant topic of discussion. The projected growth in Bayfield is largely north of US 160. Connections between the north and south sides of town are important.
- Some Bayfield residents were concerned about CDOT’s existing official designation of the US 160 corridor as a limited-access expressway.
- Except for alignment questions through Gem Village, most people want the highway in its existing location.

- Some people expressed concerns about proposed new county road connections to US 160 and potential impacts to their property.
- Many people want bike and pedestrian trails as part of the highway design. Pedestrian safety and crossing locations in Bayfield were discussed.
- Several issues in Gem Village were discussed, including highway alignment, safety, impacts to business and residential properties, access and circulation problems, and impacts to agricultural properties. The vast majority of Gem Village property owners present expressed a strong preference for a southern bypass alignment.
- Some concern was expressed about speed limits on US 160, both now and in the future. A thorough discussion took place about the methods and factors involved in establishing speed limits.
- There was discussion about the three separate improvement projects proposed at the Eight Corners intersection in Bayfield: the temporary signal, the short-term project, and the long-term ultimate project. Some people were concerned that the temporary signal would delay the more significant improvement projects.
- Some people expressed concern about the long time lag between the engineering/ environmental planning and when ROW acquisition and construction would begin. This time lag often leaves people and development projects in limbo.

Farmington Hill Alternatives

An additional public meeting was held in March 2001 at Escalante Middle School in Durango to discuss two alternatives to replace the existing Farmington Hill connection of US 550 from CR 220 to US 160. Prior to the public meeting, the project team met with property owners along the two Farmington Hill alternative alignments. Property owners adjacent to Alternative 1G were most concerned about impacts to future development and the adequacy of access to areas north of US 160. Impacts to the agricultural and rural character of the area, access, and noise and visual impacts to an area that had previously been isolated from the highway were the issues raised by property owners along Alternative 1F. The following specific concerns were expressed at that meeting:

- Several attendees questioned the traffic count and did not think either alternative was necessary.
- Some thought that Alternative 1F would remove green space and destroy the “rural flavor” of the area.
- Some attendees asserted that Alternative 1F would take travelers too far east when the majority of travelers want to go west to Durango.
- A number of people wanted easy, safe, and efficient access to the highway.
- Some people were concerned that the proposed highway improvements would not be sufficient to accommodate future traffic volumes resulting from the anticipated levels of commercial and residential growth.
- Most meeting attendees found Alternative 1G less objectionable than Alternative 1F.

Additionally, the project team met twice with the San Juan Citizen's Alliance to discuss their environmental and procedural concerns. There were also meetings with Trails 2000, as well as La Plata County and City of Durango planners regarding development of a bike and hiking trail through the project corridor.

CDOT hosted a Public Scoping meeting in March 2003 to present two new alternatives for Grandview and the US 160/CR 501 intersection in Bayfield. The new Grandview alternatives allow some direct access to the highway instead of building frontage roads, and present different intersection configurations at the CR 233 (west), and the SH 172/CR 234 intersections with US 160. At the request of the town of Bayfield, CDOT also evaluated a long-term solution that uses the signalized intersection recently constructed at the US 160/CR 501 intersection instead of building a diamond interchange. The input gathered at this meeting focused on impacts to specific property owners, and, subsequently, design changes were made where possible to address these concerns.

Decision to prepare an EIS

During preparation of the Preliminary EA, FHWA and CDOT determined that preparation of an EIS would be appropriate. This decision was based on project and land use changes and potential environmental and social impacts. A Notice of Intent was published in the *Federal Register* on December 24, 2002 (FHWA 2002). A copy of this notice can be found in Appendix D, General Correspondence.

6.1.1 Bayfield Solutions Committee

Due to the complexity of issues facing the town of Bayfield, a separate public process was initiated to propose and discuss solutions for transportation improvements in this community in 1999. The Bayfield Solutions Committee, composed of representatives from CDOT, local officials from Bayfield, and Bayfield property owners, met 12 times over a 5-month period to generate ideas that would meet both the needs of the community and the traveling public, and address safety and design issues and constraints. The Bayfield Solutions Committee meetings resulted in recommendations for short-term and long-term improvements for this portion of US 160, which were documented in the *Solutions Committee Final Report* in February 2000. This report and responses to the report from CDOT, La Plata County, and the town of Bayfield are included in *Appendix B* of the *Alternative Alignment Screening Report* (URS 2000).

6.1.2 Webb Family Comments

The Webb family owns a large parcel of ranch land on Florida Mesa. The Webb Ranch property, approximately 600 acres, occupies portions on both sides of the existing US 160 and US 550 highways. The majority of the ranch is located southeast of the existing US 160/US 550 (south) intersection at Farmington Hill.

~~Since the first public meeting in 1999,~~ The Webb family initially opposed any additional encroachment on their ranch from new alignments. Their concerns centered on a desire to keep their ranch intact and not to have a highway further divide their property. CDOT met with representatives of the Webb family to discuss alternative alignments. The resulting Alternative G Modified (Preferred Alternative) alignment was developed by the CDOT project team to

address the concerns expressed by the Webb family. The alignment extends across the top of the mesa, near the west edge, avoiding the residence, barn, and other structures on the Webb Ranch.

During the DEIS comment period, a letter was received from representatives of the Webb Ranch (see Appendix G, DEIS Public Hearing, Comment 50). This letter states that the Webb family has decided to develop the ranch property and intends to collaborate with CDOT on the location of US 160, US 550, and the US 160/US 550 (south) interchange.

6.1.3 Value Engineering Study

FHWA defines Value Engineering as “*the systematic application of recognized techniques by a multi-disciplined team which identifies the function of a product or service; establishes a worth for that function; generates alternatives through the use of creative thinking; and provides the needed functions, and reliability, at the lowest overall cost.*” A Value Engineering Study by a team of independent technical reviewers was conducted on the project and the Preliminary EA. The team included representatives from FHWA, CDOT, and several consulting engineering companies. The following disciplines were represented: traffic, environmental, structural, and roadway. This EIS includes changes that were made based upon their comments and suggestions.

6.1.4 DEIS Public Hearing

A public hearing for the US 160 DEIS was held on October 13, 2005. Prior to the hearing, a Notice of Availability for the US 160 DEIS was published in the Federal Register on September 23, 2005. The hearing was held at the CDOT Region 5 maintenance facility located at 20581 Highway US 160 West, Durango, CO 81301. Sixty-three people attended the public hearing. A court reporter was present to record the presentation and public comments. In addition to verbal comments at the hearing, comments could also be submitted in writing or on-line. Comments must have been received and/or postmarked by November 7, 2005, the end of the comment period.

The hearing had three parts: an open house, technical presentation, and comment period. The open house was held from 4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. At 5:30 p.m., the technical presentation began. Keith Powers, Region 5 Program Engineer, gave an overview of the project, the environmental process, and the alternatives considered in the DEIS. Kerrie Neet, Region 5 Environmental Program Manager, spoke about the impacts of the project on the natural and social environment. Shane Harris, Region 5 Right-of-Way Manager, spoke about the acquisition and relocation process.

After the technical presentation, public comments were taken. Nine people made verbal comments at the hearing. Fifty-two written comments were received during the comment period. Many of the verbal and written comments were in regards to the Commerce Drive intersection with US 160 in Bayfield. In all cases, commentors want to maintain full movement access to and from Commerce Drive. Other issues are the roundabout at US 160B and CR 521 (Eight Corners), wetland mitigation, access, wildlife, location of the US 160/US 550 (south) interchange, air quality, and cumulative impacts.

6.1.5 Future Public Involvement

A Public Hearing will be held to accept comments on the FEIS. A Notice of Availability (NOA) of the FEIS, and the meeting date and location will be announced in the *Federal Register* and locally in the *Durango Herald*. Announcements will also be distributed through the CDOT Outreach Program and to people who commented on the DEIS.

The public will have the opportunity to provide official comments on the project. Written comments, to be included as an official part of the record, will be accepted for 30 days following the NOA.

After receipt and full consideration of public and agency comments, the Preferred Alternative will be selected. This alternative, the basis for its selection, and the response to agency and public comments will be documented in a ROD.

6.2 AGENCY COORDINATION

There was an Agency Scoping meeting for the US 160 EA on February 25, 1999, at the CDOT Region 5 Maintenance Facility in Durango. Topics covered included project overview, results of the Feasibility Study and preliminary environmental field investigations, preliminary alternatives, and the project schedule. The following governmental agencies and community groups attended:

- FHWA
- BLM
- SUIT
- CDOT
- CDOW
- La Plata County
- Town of Bayfield
- Trails 2000

Additional entities that have been involved with preparation of this document include:

- USFWS
- USACE
- EPA
- SHPO
- City of Durango
- CDPHE
- NRCS
- CNHP
- San Juan Citizen's Alliance

On May 31, 2000, representatives of FHWA, CDOT, and the project consultants met with representatives of the SUIT at tribal headquarters in Ignacio, Colorado. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the results of the cultural resources survey and to listen to tribal concerns. As a result of this meeting, tribal concerns were expressed in a letter to CDOT dated June 28, 2000. This letter is included in Appendix E, Historic Preservation Correspondence.

After the determination that an EIS would be prepared, another Agency Scoping meeting was held on March 4, 2003, at the CDOT Region 5 Maintenance Facility in Durango. In addition to the lead agencies, CDOT and FWHA, three other entities attended the meeting: USACE, BLM, and the City of Durango. The new alternatives were presented and comments were received. The focus of this meeting was on development and improvements in the Grandview section. Throughout the preparation of this FEIS, coordination with the agencies has continued.