

7 Community Outreach and Agency Involvement

The 150-mile-long U.S. 50 project area includes a large and diverse group of communities, agencies, and other stakeholders. The objective of the U.S. 50 Tier 1 EIS states: “To ensure that the full range of issues related to this proposed action are addressed and all significant issues identified, comments and suggestions are invited from all interested parties” (71 FR 4958). This chapter summarizes the community outreach and agency involvement associated with this document, including the:

- Tiering of the EIS, pre-scoping process, and results
- Scoping process and results
- Community outreach efforts
- Working group coordination
- Agency coordination
- Future public and agency involvement opportunities

7.1 TIERING OF THE EIS, PRE-SCOPING PROCESS, AND RESULTS

Prior to the initiation of the U.S. 50 Tier 1 EIS, meetings were held to confirm a tiered approach to planning improvements for the U.S. 50 corridor, to identify stakeholders, and to determine their interest in participating in the project. These meetings and their results are described below.

7.1.1 Tiering Meeting

In September 2004, staff members from CDOT and FHWA met to discuss the possibility of implementing a tiered approach to analyzing the U.S. 50 corridor. Tiering is a process for evaluating the environmental consequences of a project in two steps, known as tiers. The first tier examines a large area or a broad set of issues when a project is still in the formative stage. The second tier involves the preparation of a detailed NEPA analysis addressing the consequences of one or more specific projects and including project impacts, costs, and mitigation strategies.

They determined that a tiered EIS approach was reasonable to meet the long-term transportation project objective of providing a corridor location decision that CDOT and the impacted communities can use to plan and program future improvements, preserve right of way, and pursue funding opportunities.



Meeting discussions included:

- Issues associated with U.S. 50 in southeastern Colorado
- Lessons learned from other tiered EIS projects
- Project goals
- The tiering process (including how to comply with NEPA and FHWA requirements)
- Corridor preservation
- Interagency coordination
- Logical termini

CDOT and FHWA agreed that a tiered EIS would best integrate transportation planning decisions with environmental regulations while formally involving local communities in the process.

7.1.2 Community Pre-Scoping

Stakeholders from 14 communities (10 municipalities and four counties) were invited, via email, to participate in the U.S. 50 EIS process. Invitees included:

- City of Holly
- City of Granada
- City of Lamar
- City of Las Animas
- City of La Junta
- City of Swink
- City of Rocky Ford
- City of Manzanola
- City of Fowler
- City of Pueblo
- Prowers County
- Pueblo County
- Bent County
- Otero County

Each community was asked to have a publicly elected official represent their jurisdiction throughout the project. Community representatives would be asked to participate in a Community Working Group where they would learn about the project, identify their community's desired level of participation in the project, and provide information about any major issues or concerns they had about the project at that time.

Between April and June 2005, pre-scoping meetings were held that included these community representatives. More information about the project team's pre-scoping meeting dates, attendees, and discussion topics can be found in Appendix C, Public and Agency Involvement.

Another stakeholder included in pre-scoping of the EIS was Action 22. Action 22 is a coalition of cities, communities, counties, associations, businesses, and organizations in Southern Colorado. The project team met with a representative from the group on May 11, 2005, to establish ongoing communication that would last throughout the project.



Resolutions Adopted by U.S. 50 Communities

In June and July 2005, all 14 communities along U.S. 50 adopted resolutions in support of the U.S. 50 Tier 1 EIS project. A resolution also was adopted by Baca County, located in the southeastern corner of the state. These resolutions state that community leaders:

- Support the recommendations made in the previous U.S. 50 planning study (*A Corridor Selection Study, A Plan for U.S. 50*);
- Will work with CDOT to develop and implement corridor preservation strategies for the route selected (as the preferred alternative);
- Recognize and will comply with NEPA; and
- Have selected a project liaison to serve on the Community Working Group who is authorized to speak on behalf of the community.

7.1.3 Agency Pre-Scoping

Following the decision by CDOT and FHWA to pursue a tiered EIS for U.S. 50 through the Lower Arkansas Valley, federal, state, and local agencies with potential interests in the project were contacted. Representatives from these agencies were asked if they would meet to learn about the project, identify their agency's desired level of participation in it, and provide information about any major issues or concerns they had about the project at that time. Between May and August 2005, the project team met with the agencies listed in Table 7-1.

Table 7-1. Agencies Involved in the Pre-Scoping Process

Federal	
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	National Park Service
Federal Emergency Management Agency	
State	
Colorado Department of Local Affairs	Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
Colorado Parks & Wildlife (previously Colorado Division of Wildlife and Colorado State Parks)	Colorado Department of Natural Resources
Colorado State Historic Preservation Office	Colorado State Land Board of the U.S. Forest Service
Local	
Lower Arkansas Valley Water Conservancy District	



The lead agencies entered into two formal agreements with resource agencies during the U.S. 50 Tier 1 EIS. They include: (1) a PA among CDOT, FHWA, and the Colorado SHPO focusing on cultural resources (i.e., historic and archaeological resources), and (2) an agreement to integrate NEPA and Clean Water Act Section 404 criteria.

7.1.4 Railroad Coordination

The project team also met with the BNSF Railroad (formerly Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe) on August 11, 2005. BNSF owns and operates an active rail line through southeastern Colorado that closely parallels U.S. 50. More information about the project team's pre-scoping meetings with the agencies and BNSF can be found in Appendix C, Public and Agency Involvement.

7.1.5 Formation of Project Working Groups

After the project team identified active stakeholders, the next step was to develop means by which these stakeholders would work together, provide input, and make decisions. Three primary working groups were formed to accomplish this, including the Project Management Team, Community Working Group, and Agency Working Group. More information about how each of these groups was formed and their function is discussed below.

Project Management Team

The Project Management Team is comprised of representatives from the lead agencies (CDOT and FHWA) and the consultant team. The purpose of the Project Management Team is to coordinate the interests and information identified during the U.S. 50 Tier 1 EIS process to ensure that NEPA is followed and participating interests reach a general agreement on a preferred corridor within a reasonable timeframe and budget. The project team held several agency-specific meetings to adopt formal agreements dealing with historic resources and coordination with the Clean Water Act Section 404.

Community Working Group

The Community Working Group is comprised of publicly elected officials from each of the 14 communities located along U.S. 50 in the Lower Arkansas Valley. These communities have expressed an interest in being active participants in the U.S. 50 Tier 1 EIS project by adopting resolutions stating that fact. One or more elected official(s) from each community volunteered to serve as the community representative during the process. The community is responsible for selecting a replacement representative in the case that their member can no longer serve. The purpose of the Community Working Group is to help facilitate consensus on project-related issues involving the communities within the U.S. 50 project area.

To clarify how the Community Working Group would interact with the lead agencies and other project groups, Community Working Group members were brought together with representatives from the lead agencies at a charter workshop held on September 22, 2005. At this workshop, participants discussed how they would work together and make decisions on project-related issues. These discussions were translated into a charter agreement, which outlined participants' roles in project decision making, their responsibilities, and a dispute resolution process to be followed in situations when the group could not come to an agreement. (Ultimately, this dispute resolution process was never needed.) All 14 communities signed the charter agreement, formally called the Community Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), along with CDOT and FHWA. The Community MOU is presented in Appendix C, Public and Agency Involvement.

Agency Working Group

The Agency Working Group is comprised of representatives from 13 federal, state, and local agencies. These agencies expressed an interest in being active participants in the U.S. 50 Tier 1 EIS project during pre-scoping meetings. Each agency chose their own representative(s), and when their member(s) can no longer serve, the agency is responsible for selecting their replacement(s). The purpose of the Agency Working Group is to help coordinate decision making on resource issues and to provide technical input on resources within each agency's legal or regulatory jurisdiction.

To clarify how the Agency Working Group would interact with the lead agencies and other project groups, Agency Working Group members were brought together with representatives from the lead agencies at a charter workshop held on August 10, 2005. At this workshop, participants discussed how they would work together and make decisions on project-related issues. The discussions from this meeting were translated into an Agency Charter Agreement, which was signed by 13 agencies, including CDOT and FHWA.

The Agency Charter Agreement identifies CDOT and FHWA as lead agencies and discusses the roles of the Agency Working Group in the planning process. The Agency Working Group is supported by the Project Management Team. Roles of the Agency Working Group include facilitating corridor decisions regarding modal choice, identifying a preferred location and logical termini, providing the prioritization and design parameters for Tier 2 studies, and developing corridor-wide environmental mitigation strategies. The Agency Charter Agreement is included in Appendix C, Public and Agency Involvement.



7.2 SCOPING PROCESS AND RESULTS

After the NOI was published in the Federal Register in January 2006, the project scope, issues, and concerns were formally defined through a series of meetings. A single meeting was held for agency participants, and 10 meetings were held for the public, one in each of the municipalities along U.S. 50 in the Lower Arkansas Valley. Approximately 235 private citizens, 14 agencies, 14 communities, and six other organizations participated in these meetings, which are described in more detail below.

7.2.1 Agency Scoping Meeting

The agency scoping meeting was held on February 23, 2006. The purpose of the meeting was to establish a foundation for informed and meaningful agency scoping comments specific to the U.S. 50 Tier 1 EIS process. The goals of the meeting were to:

- Develop an understanding of the corridor, including previous planning efforts
- Provide clarity regarding project milestones, decision making, and resource methodology approaches
- Provide an opportunity for agency representatives to review the draft purpose and need statement and draft project area

The group was asked to provide feedback on project assumptions. They informally agreed with eliminating the previously considered north and south regional corridors, and with using a community-developed vision to identify a general location for U.S. 50 north, through, or south of the communities within the boundaries of the existing regional corridor.

Agencies discussed project topics of specific importance to their respective agencies. These topics included avoiding habitat fragmentation, minimizing impacts to wetlands and riparian habitats, protecting Section 4(f) resources, and considering impacts to low-income and minority populations. The group also discussed opportunities that the project would create for coordination between agencies on environmental strategies. A summary of agency participation in this meeting and comments obtained is presented in Appendix C, Public and Agency Involvement.

7.2.2 Public Scoping Meeting

Public scoping meetings took place between February 27, 2006, and March 7, 2006. One meeting was held in each of the towns and cities along U.S. 50 in the Lower Arkansas Valley, including Pueblo, Fowler, Manzanola, Rocky Ford, Swink, La Junta, Las Animas, Lamar, Granada, and Holly. A total of 235 people attended these meetings, which were designed to facilitate open communication and dialogue.

As with all the public meetings associated with the U.S. 50 Tier 1 EIS, members of the public were encouraged to comment in writing, via telephone, or online if they could not attend a meeting.

The purpose of the meetings was to:

- Review the results of the previous U.S. 50 study, *A Corridor Selection Study: A Plan for U.S. 50* (CDOT 2003a)
- Clarify the goals for the U.S. 50 tiered EIS process
- Collect issues and concerns that needed to be considered while developing a preferred corridor location for U.S. 50 through the Lower Arkansas Valley

Key issues identified by the communities during this process included concerns for increasing traffic in through-town routes and impacts to the local economy. The project team used the comments provided by the communities to develop alternative evaluation criteria. A discussion of the evaluation criteria used to screen alternatives is included in Chapter 3, Alternatives Considered. Appendix C, Public and Agency Involvement, includes a summary of the public scoping process.

7.3 COMMUNITY OUTREACH EFFORTS

Outreach to the public began early in the project and continued throughout the U.S. 50 Tier 1 EIS process. This outreach included resolutions adopted by communities along U.S. 50 within the project area (discussed in Section 7.1.2), public meetings at key project milestones, and communication with the public.

7.3.1 Communication with the Public

A *Communication Handbook* was developed to guide the project's community outreach efforts. This plan is included in Appendix C, Public and Agency Involvement. The goal of this plan was to ensure that the project's outreach efforts created an atmosphere of openness and trust with the public and other project stakeholders. The communication plan included several techniques utilized to communicate with the public and solicit input about project-related issues. These techniques included:

- Developing and maintaining a contacts database
- Holding public meetings
- Sending more than 1,200 mailings (newsletters and postcards) to households and businesses along the corridor
- Hosting a project website with e-mail link located at www.coloradodot.info/projects/us50e
- Creating an information telephone line



- Hosting call-in spots on radio shows
- Providing a children's table to accommodate members of the public attending with children
- Ensuring Spanish translators were on call for every meeting
- Implementing a Speaker's Bureau
- Responding to individual inquiries
- Placing ads in all the local newspapers
- Disseminating information to the media, including public service announcements
- Posting fliers in 81 locations within the communities to provide contact information and meeting locations (in Spanish and English)
- Creating press releases that announced the NOI, answered frequently asked questions, and gave project status updates

These tools were used as appropriate to maximize the public's ability to actively participate in the project and provide input about project-related issues. Feedback received from the public at large was collected during meetings, from a project website, using a project-specific telephone number, by facsimile, and by direct mail.

Outreach to Minority and Low-Income Populations

The U.S. 50 Tier 1 EIS project team worked hard to reach out to people who, if not encouraged, might not prefer to attend meetings or provide input for various reasons. While not exclusively focused on reaching minority and low-income populations, the strategy for scheduling the public meetings and communicating the information incorporated outreach to these populations. Low-income and minority populations were identified using 2000 U.S. Census data for each of the counties in the corridor. Following release of the 2010 Census, low-income and minority populations were re-identified. The following issues were taken into consideration during the public engagement planning process:

- Meeting venue selection incorporated accessibility because most low-income and minority populations in the study area live within urbanized areas of the project corridor.
- Meeting announcements and communications included alternate methods of outreach, such as posting flyers in targeted locations and providing information in English and in Spanish.
- Spanish-speaking radio stations were incorporated as communication vehicles, and a special public service announcement in Spanish was created.
- All communications included a paragraph in Spanish explaining that all reasonable accommodations would be made for people with disabilities and those who require Spanish translation.

- A member of the project team attending all public meetings was prepared for basic translation services, as needed.

7.3.2 Public Meetings at Key Project Milestones

In addition to the scoping meetings, a series of public meetings were held in August 2007, which included one meeting in each of the cities and towns along U.S. 50 in the Lower Arkansas Valley (10 meetings total). The goal of the meetings was to obtain public input on the proposed purpose and need, range of alternatives, and screening criteria. A total of 302 people attended these meetings. The Range of Alternatives and Screening Criteria Public Meetings Report is included in Appendix C, Public and Agency Involvement.

As with all the public meetings associated with the U.S. 50 Tier 1 EIS, these meetings were held in a format that facilitated open communication and dialogue. Members of the public were encouraged to comment in writing, via telephone, or online if they could not attend a meeting. Also, meetings were held in each community so that residents who lived in one community and worked in another could attend a meeting in whichever location was more convenient.

A total of 69 comments were received from the public. A majority of the comments received were in favor of the process and decisions made in drafting project alternatives and screening criteria. Other comments identified concerns for impacts to the local economy and welfare of the communities impacted by the project. Some comments identified concerns for the purchase of private land for right-of-way uses.

7.4 WORKING GROUP COORDINATION

As described previously in Section 7.1.5, working groups were established by the lead agencies early in the project to provide active stakeholders the opportunity to work together, provide input, and make decisions. The Agency Working Group provides the technical background for environmental impact evaluation and decision processes. The Community Working Group provides local knowledge of transportation, land use, and social issues and serves as liaisons between the project team and local decision makers.



The Community Working Group and Agency Working Group have met at key project milestones to provide input on project-related issues, as described in the Community Working Group MOU and Agency Working Group Charter Agreement. These milestones represented identification of:

- Scoping results
- The project area, and the purpose and need
- A full range of alternatives and proposed screening criteria
- Preliminary alternatives to be evaluated
- A preferred alternative and mitigation

The scoping results milestone meeting was cancelled at the request of the working groups. Most of the group's members attended the public scoping meeting in their community, and some of them attended the agency scoping meeting. The groups ultimately determined that they did not need to meet to review the results of the scoping process since they had all participated in it.

Each working group convened to review the project area and purpose and need in June 2006. The groups then met to review the full range of alternatives and proposed screening criteria on July 24 and 25, 2007. This meeting was attended by members of CDOT, FHWA, the Agency Working Group, the Community Working Group, and project consultants. The meeting schedule included a half-day office-based meeting followed by a bus tour of the U.S. 50 project area. The purpose of the bus tour was to enable members of both working groups to discuss conflicts among human (i.e., built) and natural resources that existed in the project area. The office-based meeting had 23 attendees; the corridor tour had 24 participants. The topics discussed during this meeting included floodplain issues, community/economic impacts, agricultural resources, historic resources, wetland and riparian impacts, and disaster recovery (within the town of Holly).

The Agency Working Group met on August 20, 2008, to discuss mitigation strategies for wetland, riparian, and biological resources. This meeting helped develop the Mitigation Strategies Plan, included in Appendix E. A detailed discussion of recommendations for mitigating impacts of potential Tier 2 projects is included in Chapter 8, Mitigation Strategies.

7.5 NEXT STEPS

The DEIS Notice of Availability was prepared in collaboration with CDOT and published in the Federal Register on June 10, 2016, and announced in publications distributed in Pueblo, Otero, Bent, and Prowers counties.



Public hearings have been scheduled for the following dates and locations:

Lamar

Monday, July 11, 2016

Lamar Community Center

Las Animas

Monday, July 11, 2016

Las Animas Municipal Golf Course

Rocky Ford

Tuesday, July 12, 2016

Rocky Ford Chamber of Commerce

Pueblo

Wednesday, July 13, 2016

Southeastern Colorado Heritage Center

During these public hearings, verbal and written comments will be recorded and obtained through mailings/forms available on the website. All comments will be gathered, sorted, and formatted in a summary report. FHWA will prepare a combined FEIS/ROD with responses to public input and will outline the decisions made and reasoning for their conclusions, per Section 1319 of the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), unless conditions are present (such as practicability issues) that preclude the use of a combined FEIS/ROD. As Tier 2 studies are conducted in the future by CDOT, continued public outreach will include website updates, mailings, and additional opportunities for agency and public involvement.



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