

**5.1 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Public involvement has been an integral part of the planning process throughout the schedule for the US Highway (US) 550 project. The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) has been committed to gaining input from and informing the public about the US 550 project from its inception. During the development of the 1999 US 550/US 160 Feasibility Study, numerous meetings, workshops, presentations and publications occurred with the public, local agencies and special interest groups. The project has been coordinated according to the requirements and guidance set forth by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA).

Public outreach has continued with the public as part of the Environmental Assessment (EA) project development process for US 550. Two public meetings were held during the development of the EA. Both of the meetings consisted of a presentation of the US 550 project with a question and answer session followed by an open house. The first occurred on September 16, 2003 at Sunnyside Elementary School and the second was held on September 17, 2003 at Ignacio High School. Sixty-one people attended the first meeting and six comment forms were received. Ten people attended the second meeting and three comment forms were received. Notes were taken on oral comments throughout the presentation, and comment forms were made available to fill out at the meeting or to send in by mail.

Agency coordination also occurred with the Southern Ute Indian Tribe (SUIT), since there are portions of the US 550 corridor that bisect tribal lands with varying degrees based on the specific alternative. Section 106 consultation was initiated with SUIT early in the corridor identification and documentation process, in concert with general communication. This coordination is previously outlined and discussed in Section 3.17.5. One meeting was held with SUIT tribal representation on January 29, 2003 at the SUIT complex in Ignacio. A presentation of data specific to the location of, and potential impacts, known historic properties relative to alignment alternatives were presented at the meeting. Another meeting was held with SUIT tribal representation on June 23, 2004 at the CDOT Region 5 facility. The meeting was held primarily to: 1) determine the location of previously recorded and evaluated archaeological sites within the EA study corridor; and 2) establish which sites would be directly impacted by one or more proposed conceptual alignment alternatives. On July 1, 2004 a meeting was conducted between CDOT and SUIT representatives to discuss site location data.

Meetings and coordination with the agencies and the public served as critical components of the EA process. Newsletters were mailed to all property owners and residences, including rental properties, adjacent to the highway corridor. The newsletter provided a description of the proposed action; CDOT contact information; and date, time, and location of the two September 2003 meetings. In addition, a bilingual public meeting announcement was posted at the Sunnyside Mobile Home Park. Public meeting announcements were published in The Durango Herald and the Southern Ute Drum during the week prior to the public meetings; and public service announcements were made on the tribal sponsored public radio station, KSUT.



Common concerns expressed during the meetings and in comment forms include:

- Safety of children at Sunnyside Elementary School and associated school bus stops during construction and with specific alignments;
- Farm and business access from one side of US 550 to the other because of the median addition;
- Size of median widths throughout corridor;
- Speed limits on US 550, both now and in the future;
- Wildlife and livestock crossings over US 550;
- Right of way (ROW) acquisition concerns; and
- Alignment impacts on property or business owners.

The completed EA will be made available for public review at the Durango Public Library and at the CDOT Region 5 office. During the 30-day comment period, a public notice will be published announcing the availability of the EA for public review and the opportunity to request a public hearing. In addition, a newsletter will be mailed to all property owners and tenants announcing the comment period and the availability of the EA. If no request is made for a public hearing, an informal public meeting will be held at the close of the comment period.

Once the public comment period has ended, a decision document will be issued by FHWA and CDOT, which will include all comments received on the EA and responses to those comments.

## 5.2 AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

The following agencies, organizations and municipalities were either directly or indirectly involved in this project:

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- La Plata Board of County Commissioners
- La Plata County Engineering Department
- State Historic Preservation Office
- Southern Ute Indian Tribe
- La Plata County
- School District 9R
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Colorado Department of Natural Resources Division of Wildlife



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