

Taos Congestion Relief Project Stakeholder Working Group Meeting #8



MEETING DATE: May 31, 2006

ATTENDEES:

Rudy Baca, University of New Mexico at Taos
Larry Brooks, LRPNA
Rick Chavez, Gannett Fleming West
Cornelia de Bruin, Taos News
Francisco "French" Espinoza, Town of Taos
Matt Foster, Town of Taos
Phil Gallegos, NMDOT District 5
Robert Gates
Jim Hansen, Property Owner
George Herrera, Gannett Fleming West
John Hillyard, Tierra Blanca Neighborhood Association
Eric Johnson, Marron and Associates
Sandra Maes, North Central Regional Planning Organization (RPO)
Sheila McCarthy Grainger, Property Owner
Charlie Ortiz, NMDOT Project Development
Bob Perry, Town of Red River
Leslie Regos, CH2M Hill
Reva Suazo, Pueblo of Taos
Ted Terry, TCAR
Bill Thomas, Vista Linda Neighborhood Association
Colleen Vaughn, NMDOT Environmental Section
Larissa Weinman, Pueblo of Taos
Suzanne Wollter, Lower Ranchitos
Mark Yaravitz, Crossroads Realty & Management LLC

Introductions/Review Agenda

Leslie Regos welcomed the participants and started the meeting. The last two meetings were held in February. Leslie explained the purpose of this meeting was to review with the SWG the alternative analysis results.

Review/Approval of Minutes

Leslie mentioned that the meetings held in February had been summarized and distributed. There were no comments on the meeting minutes.

New Issues – “5-minute” Opportunity

The following issues were mentioned by stakeholders (with Project Management Team responses in italics):

- Is the environment one of the main criteria? *Yes, it has the highest weight and the most subcriteria.*
- I understand that we will make choices from the alternatives then proceed with the environmental process. *There is a screening process. We will select a few alternatives for the environmental review process.*
- What is the level of tribal participation? *Taos Pueblo has been active in the project development process. They participated in the SWG and on the Project Steering Team (PST). Reva of Taos Pueblo mentioned that once the alternatives have been reduced to a certain number, the project will then be presented to the Tribal Council for a decision*
- What is the extent of involving the larger public? *This group represents the larger public. A public meeting is set for June 29.*

Review of Alternatives Analysis Results

John Schrandt briefly discussed the alternatives and pointed out each alternative alignment on poster size maps:

- Alternative 1 is a direct alignment from NM 68 at Stakeout Drive to US 64 east of the airport. A Paseo del Cañon (PdC) west link is included in this alternative.
- Alternative 2 is a jogged alignment following the Tract A boundary within Taos Pueblo lands. A PdC west link is included in this alternative.
- Alternative 3 is the PdC extension that avoids Taos Pueblo lands.
- Alternative 4 follows PdC west and Blueberry Hill Road. The route was developed at the request of Taos Pueblo. This alternative was considered in prior studies.
- Alternative 5 is the one-way pair with one-way routes on NM 68/US 64 and on Camino de la Placita.
- Alternative 6 is an enhanced 3-lane facility on NM 68 just south of the one-way pair.
- Alternative 7 is a loop road to the northeast of the center of Taos that connects US 64 (Kit Carson Road) and connects with US 64 at Hail Creek Road on Taos Pueblo lands.

Leslie discussed the main criteria (six categories): access, operations, socio-economics, safety / design, environmental, and implementation. Leslie continued with a discussion of the Alternative Analysis Summary. Each category in the analysis has an average weight based on input from the Stakeholder Working Group. Environment had the highest weighting and implementation the lowest. Each criteria was scored with “5” as best and “1” as lowest. The Stakeholder Working Group had the following comments (Project Management Team response are shown in italics):

- Alternative 7 didn’t go as far north on to Pueblo lands on the earlier versions of this alignment. *We will look at a variation of Alternative 7 that matches the Molzen-Corbin alternative and doesn’t go as far north.*
- Alternative 3 goes through agricultural lands. Why does it score so high? There are many issues on Alternative 3. *The intent of the exercise is to use this as a high-level screening to get us to three or four alternatives.*
- *We are intending to have the Project Steering Team meeting on June 14, and we are looking at getting on the Tribal Council agenda on June 15.*

- *The westerly routes do the best job of improving access. Only the one-way pair results in level of service improvements in the center of town.*
- *The one-way pair would create more congestion in the area than relieving congestion.*
- *Most of the traffic wants to go to the center of Taos.*
- *Alternative 5 negatively affects parking in the downtown.*
- *Could you get the larger maps to the library? Yes, after the June 29 public meeting.*
- *Alternative 2 has the lowest scoring followed by Alternatives 1 and 4. Can we get rid of some of the poor performing alternatives?*
- *On a scale of 0 to 5, there is no statistical difference between Alternatives 1 and 2. You may want to merge them into one alternative with two variations.*
- *Alternative 3 could work in the future with a route to the south. Alternative 3 gets traffic around to the west with less environmental impact.*
- *The criteria, such as moving emergency vehicles, are based on the purpose and need of the project.*
- *The westerly route would be a 2-lane route at first in a 200-foot right-of-way. It would be good to have a 200-foot right-of-way for future route.*
- *NMDOT would probably want a 200-foot wide right-of-way on Paseo del Cañon west. expansion although a narrower right-of-way could be considered if a more compact typical section were used.*
- *Were you aware that the town's extraterritorial zone went away, and the land went back to the county? The zoning all reverts to R-4 in the extraterritorial zone. The county control starts at the town limits. There is a resolution published.*
- *On existing Paseo del Cañon west in town, the right-of-way is just 100-feet wide.*
- *We can say that one project is first and another second, such as an in-town project first and a relief route second. We need to determine whether we are going to look at environmental approval of a program or of a specific project.*
- *If you were going to fix downtown, it would be best to do a north-south relief route first. We don't need to drive through orange barrels. Phasing is an important consideration.*
- *Could you combine Alternatives 5 and 2 and the rescore? We could look at a transportation plan. We could also look at what is best in the west and what is best in town.*
- *You need to find out if Alternative 7 is something that can be considered by the Pueblo. We cannot discuss Alternative 7 in a meaningful way until we talk with the Pueblo. Alternative 7 also has a significant impact on private lands.*
- *Let us take Alternative 7 out. NMDOT has been considering Alternative 6. We have on improvement project for Alternative 6 for the year 2010. Alternative 5 either needs to be taken forward or removed because it is also programmed for 2010. It can only be one or the other.*
- *EPA (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency) has done a study on the corridor. We can use the EPA report to refine Alternative 6. I think some of the alternatives are feasible but will not be needed for 10-20 years. We need to think about right-of-way acquisition now even though it may be too early to build. Corridor preservation is an important issue, and it is the best chance of having as little impact as possible in the future.*
- *On fire and safety, getting to some of the outlying areas is difficult. Need to start with Paseo del Cañon. An extension of Paseo del Cañon West scored well. You need and east-west access. To get from the State Police (on Paseo del Cañon East) to the blinking light (US 64/NM 522/NM 150), emergency vehicles take NM 240 to Blueberry Hill Road.*
- *It is called a relief route for a reason – to relieve congestion. NMDOT has to weigh in. Alternative 3 does not relieve congestion in Ranchos de Taos, and it can get traffic on NM 240.*
- *Alternative 7 doesn't do anything for east-west traffic.*
- *Alternative 6 has good support. You need to get opinion of one-way pair is in or out. I think we need both alternatives. You need to have an alternative below*

- Ranchos de Taos. We haven't really looked at impacts on Blueberry Hill. *Alternative 4 didn't score as well on safety because of the new intersections.*
- Blueberry Hill Road will not be a relief route. *There may be interest in Alternative 3 with a connection to NM 68 (to the south) and Alternative 1 as a straight route.*
 - You need to talk about Alternative 1 vs. 2 with the Pueblo to see which one to leave on the table.
 - Now that we are narrowing it down, it may be time to present the alternatives to the pueblo. You need to give reasons why the alternatives were developed.
 - Leave Alternative 3 on the table and discuss Alternative 1 or 2 with the Pueblo.
 - Alternative 4 also has pueblo land.
 - On Alternative 3, we have a public to consult.
 - There will be a full EIS (environmental impact statement). Paseo del Cañon is included in Alternatives 1, 2, and 3.
 - *Is there anyone who disagrees that we need both improvements in-town and to the west? (No one disagreed.) We can clear the entire project all at once with a programmatic EIS.*
 - On the one-way pair, that issue is beyond the scope of this committee. It is a specialized issue.
 - On the one-way pair, I don't like the south on NM 64 and north on Camino de la Placita. *Alternative 5 did not score well on safety and operations.*
 - It is time to eliminate alternatives off the board. Get Blueberry Hill off. Get the one-way pair off.
 - I think Alternatives 4 and 7 can be tossed.
 - I would be happy to junk Alternatives 4 and 7. *Would anyone object to dropping 4?*
 - You need to explain to the pueblo why you want to drop Alternative 4.
 - At the tribal council meeting, it will be the first presentation. They will not necessarily make a decision.
 - If there is a not a definitive answer from the pueblo, look at Alternative 3.
 - Alternatives 1 and 2 were selected because there are no structures. Some of the pueblo people don't want to give up land, but others in the pueblo may eventually be interested in developing that land.
 - When are you going to know where exactly the routes are going? It is hanging over our heads and makes our lands useless. *These are concepts. In the environmental, we will get to 10%, 20%, 30% alignment.*
 - How long will this hang over our heads? *An environmental study can take 3 years.*
 - Will anyone buy our land with this hanging over our heads? *We may know in a year. If we start the environmental study, we would know in a year.*
 - Could we suggest different routes? *Now is the time – talk to Phil or John.*

Discuss Next Steps

The Project Management Team will give presentations to the Taos Town Council and Taos County Commission. The team will request an opportunity to make a presentation to the Pueblo of Taos Tribal Commission. A Project Steering Team meeting is scheduled for June 14 and a public involvement meeting for June 29th. After these meetings, the Project Management Team will review comments received, select alternatives for evaluation in the environmental phase, and prepare a Phase B report.

Final Comments

The following action items were identified:

1. Send out chart and table to Stakeholder Working Group with the meeting minutes.
2. Prepare and distribute a PDF route map.

3. Get chart, table, and map on NMDOT web site,
4. Large maps will be posted at the library after the June 29th public meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 p.m.