

## ***US 287 from SH 1 to the LaPorte Bypass - Environmental Assessment Executive Summary - September 2004***

### ***What is the project?***

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in conjunction with the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) has been conducting studies to investigate alternatives that would improve mobility (travel conditions) and safety on the stretch of approximately 2 miles of United States Highway 287 (US 287) between State Highway 1 (SH 1) and the LaPorte Bypass intersection east of the town of LaPorte, mileposts (MP) 348.50 and 350.35. The complete Environmental Assessment (EA) is now available for review at various locations as noted in the attached announcement.

This stretch of US 287 is currently a two-lane, undivided road with one 12-foot lane in each direction and varying shoulder widths (0 to 4 feet). There are three signalized intersections within the project area, intersections of US 287 with SH 1, North Shields Street, and the LaPorte Bypass. The posted speed limit is 45 mph, the design speed is 50 mph, and there is an at-grade crossing with Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) at North Shields Street.

### ***Why are FHWA and CDOT pursuing this project?***

**Purpose:** The purpose of this project is to improve the mobility and safety of existing and future travel on US 287 between SH 1 and the LaPorte Bypass intersection.

**Need:** The US 287 improvement is intended to achieve an acceptable level of service (traffic flow condition) and alleviate existing traffic congestion. Current travel conditions, primarily between intersections, are poor. The difficulty experienced by drivers making left turns and the related decrease in safety conditions further emphasize the need for improvements in this corridor. With future increased traffic volumes predicted (based on growth trends in neighboring cities), the travel and safety conditions will deteriorate further without implementation of improvements.

### ***Alternatives Studied***

FHWA and CDOT considered 12 alternatives along with the No Action Alternative, and assessed each alternative's ability to meet the purpose and need of the project. This study included consideration of whether to construct a new alignment or widen the existing roadway.

The following key issues were used to screen alternatives: crossing habitat suitable for threatened and endangered wildlife and plant species, impacts on public parks and natural areas, impacts on areas containing hazardous materials/waste, maintenance responsibilities for the route, the need for a new railroad crossing or overpass, residential relocations, commercial/industrial relocations, preliminary right-of-way procurement costs, impacts on approved future residential development, disruption of large farmland parcels, socioeconomic and environmental justice issues, and preliminary roadway, bridge, and utility costs.

After the initial screening process, 3 of the 12 alternatives along with the No Action Alternative were retained for further analysis: Alternatives A4 and A5 on the existing alignment and Alternative B on a new alignment. (See attached map.) Alternative A4 would minimize potential impacts on the human and natural environment, while following the existing road. Alternative A5 would necessitate relocation of Terry Lake Dam while reducing impacts on the south side of the existing road. Alternative B would include construction of a new roadway corridor to the south of existing US 287.

## ***Environmental Analysis***

The direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts and potential mitigation measures associated with these alternatives were analyzed for 25 different resources. Impacts requiring mitigation were identified for eight resources: right-of-way acquisition and relocation, noise, ecology, wetlands, floodplains, water quality, hazardous materials/waste, and construction.

## ***Preferred Alternative***

As the lead agency, FHWA is responsible for the decision on the Preferred Alternative. After completion of the environmental analysis, FHWA and CDOT met with the city of Fort Collins, Larimer County, and other local, state, and federal agencies to announce the recommendation of Alternative A4 as the Preferred Alternative. The Preferred Alternative meets the project's purpose and need by improving the mobility and the safety of existing and future travel while using the existing US 287 alignment. In addition, the alignment of Preferred Alternative A4 has been engineered to minimize potential impacts on the human and natural environments in the corridor while maximizing safety benefits. The attached map shows the Preferred Alternative alignment and potential relocations. Relocations will include a range of 4 to 5 single-family residences, 6 apartment units, 8 businesses, and 14 to 23 mobile homes. Other impacts include loss of 0.3 acre of riparian (edge of stream) habitat, loss of 0.25 acre of wetlands, 325 linear feet of encroachment on the Dry Creek floodplain, noise impacts on 48 residences, and hazardous materials/waste impacts at 4 sites. Complete information on all impacts and proposed mitigation is found in the EA document.

## ***Public Involvement Program***

A public involvement program (PIP) to encourage participation by both agencies and local residents/businesses was initiated at the project start-up, and will continue to be conducted until the study is completed. CDOT solicited comments and suggestions from federal, state, and local agencies, special interest groups, and the public. Materials were distributed in both English and Spanish.

Federal, state, and local agency representatives were actively encouraged to participate in the process. Comments and suggestions were received through one Agency Scoping Meeting and three Agency Status Meetings between November 1999 and April 2001. CDOT also participated in numerous meetings with local agencies to discuss specific aspects of the project.

Five project factsheets were distributed to local area residents, local businesses, special interest groups, and federal, state, and local agencies between October 1999 and March 2004. A project website is maintained at [www.us287-north-of-fort-collins.com](http://www.us287-north-of-fort-collins.com). Three public scoping meetings were conducted with special interest groups in November 1999, January 2000, and February 2000. Public workshops were held on May 4, 2000 and September 21, 2000. CDOT proactively sought to involve the residents, property owners, and businesses that border the action alternatives under study by conducting door-to-door community interviews between April and June 2003.

## ***What's next?***

After the public hearing (see attached announcement), FHWA and CDOT will respond to comments and publish a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) decision document. After the NEPA decision document is published, the project will enter into the design phase, followed by utility and right-of-way acquisition (including relocation of affected residences and businesses), and ultimately project construction.

## ***Contacts***

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