



New Mexico Transportation Information Exchange

NM TRANSPORTATION INFORMATION EXCHANGE

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Surface Transportation Policy Project - New Mexico

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ON THE CALENDAR

April 19: This Land is Our Land: Preserving the Public Estate, lecture by John G. Mitchell, Senior Editor National Geographic Magazine. Location: UNM's Dane Smith Hall, Room 123, 7 PM.

April 25-27: The New Mexico Heritage Preservation Alliance (NMHPA) will hold its annual conference, "Enchantment at the Speed of Life: Preservation on New Mexico Time," in Silver City. Workshops include: a look at communities located along the way to National Parks and National Forests; design guidelines, and an overview of preservation basics. Call toll-free 1-866-700-nmhp; on the web at <http://www.nmheritage.org/>

May 17: Bike-to-Work Day. Contact Greater Albuquerque Spokes People (GASP) (505) 955-9578.

NEWS FROM THE NM TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVE TEAMS

Here are a few items from partners working on flexible standards on state highways and projects with the state highway department, NMSHTD.

TURQUOISE TRAIL RECONSTRUCTION

Ross Lockridge, Turquoise Trail Citizens Advisory Committee

On March 14, NMSHTD announced a delay in funding for the reconstruction of the Madrid to Cerrillos section of the National Scenic Byway, the Turquoise Trail (NM 14). The funding was delayed, according to Larry Velasquez, NMSHTD Engineering Design Division Director, because the Department took a 70 million dollar hit and other projects were given priority. It will probably be delayed at least until fall of 2004.

The project was on schedule for the letting of bids this April and the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) was meeting its input commitments well within that time frame. The Department has spent around a million dollars in construction planning over the past 7 years. The planning has taken a long time in part because, from the citizens' point of view, the earlier designs lacked context sensitivity and were for arterials rather than for this scenic rural collector.

Designing with context sensitivity in mind has only recently become a nation-wide wave and still has not been fully embraced by the NMSHTD. Developers may not agree, but if delays in construction result in doing things right - in proper context for New Mexico's rural roads and communities - it is worth it, for reasons of safety as well as for quality of life. What is urgently needed is a thorough research and design project that leads to traffic calming standards for US rural highways. The Turquoise Trail would be ideal for that.

When the funding was delayed, the CAC and the Department were focusing on issues of the "treatment" or installation of guardrails, and also the extent of clear zones. The citizens are requesting that vegetation rather than asphalt be emphasized around guardrails for erosion control. The CAC, and hopefully the Department engineers, will continue to work toward context sensitivity in the design and toward a design worthy of a National Scenic Byway.

For more on saving the Turquoise Trail & rural roads, visit on the web at:

www.raintreecounty.com/SavTTLet.html

DESIGN AND LIVABILITY: THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF ENGINEERING AND FUNCTIONAL DOWNTOWN DESIGN

Erick J. Aune, AICP, Aztec Main Street Association

Has the term "Context Sensitive Design" come up during discussions involving road development lately? According to the Federal Highway Administration, context sensitive

design (CSD) “is a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders to develop a transportation facility that fits its physical setting and preserves scenic, aesthetic, historic, and environmental resources, while maintaining safety and mobility. CSD is an approach that considers the total context within which a transportation improvement project will exist.” Though the concept may seem fortified with just the right vitamins and minerals, it may be easier said than done.

The Aztec Main Street Association in conjunction with the City of Aztec has spent the past three years gearing up for a significant enhancement and road resurfacing project for Main Avenue - Federal Highway 550. Utilizing TEA-21 and other appropriate funds to leverage an “Enhanced Transportation Facility,” the community has derived a core value that may truly embrace the total context of downtown Aztec: a slower, safer roadway that enhances and preserves the historic and cultural integrity of downtown.

The next step is to formulate a design that upholds this core value and falls within the appropriateness category of the state highway department’s engineering standards. In order to find common ground, a design team will be established, per procurement, that will involve NMSHTD’s District 5 engineers in the final design from the get-go. The interdependence of planning, design, and engineering is critical for communities across New Mexico, and community involvement is equally essential.

SILVER CITY TRAFFIC RELIEF ROUTE

Joe Hutto, Gila Resources Information Project (GRIP) e-mail: getagrip@zianet.com

Greetings from the Southwest part of New Mexico! Although we may be far removed from other parts of the state, NMSHTD has found us. They promise to bring us prosperity, auto congestion relief, safety and asphalt for the future masses of our community, if we would just get out off their way.

The study for the Silver City Traffic Relief Route (TRR) is now approaching two years of age but the citizens against the TRR have aged four years. The cost of the study to date is a little over \$400,000. Now, with the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) urging the study team along, the engineers have discovered that upgrading the existing traffic signals will dramatically improve the flow of traffic on our existing highway at a maximum price of \$210,000.

The latest remodeling scheme is to expand five blocks of the existing highway (in the center of town) from four to five lanes. But during the presentation of this idea, the engineering contractor stated that the expansion would never be built due to the disruption to many local businesses. They simply can not seem to find the obvious answers to moving people with all modes of transportation efficiently through our community.

Meanwhile, the latest version of the TRR is a route that is closer to the existing highway than all other routes previously discussed. The relief route has been transformed into a

two-lane country road with a few major intersections, with passing lanes on steep grades leading uphill. There is some thought about alternate modes of transportation. The question of "limited access" has still not been thoroughly analyzed and what this road may look, drive, bike and walk like in 2020 is still a question.

This process has been very difficult due to a lack of process and information, a constantly moving target, and traffic engineers not thinking differently since WWII. We must find ways to re-educate NMSHTD and their consultants so that when they come to a community they involve citizens representing all parts of a community, look at internal traffic patterns, and respect local plans.

STATE NEWS: THE 2002 LEGISLATURE

STPP-NM AND NM TRANSPORTATION REFORM ADVOCATES SECURE LEGISLATIVE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION POLICIES

DeAnza Valencia, STPP-NM

During the 2002 legislative session, STPP and other organizations successfully advocated for the passage of House Joint Memorial 79, calling for the New Mexico State Legislature to establish an interim committee to examine the state's transportation priorities. Advocates for the memorial included organizations ranging from the Conservation Voters Alliance and the New Mexico Conference of Churches to the Las Vegas/San Miguel County Chamber of Commerce.

At a press conference held at the Capitol, Hank Dittmar, president of the Great American Station Foundation and national board member of STPP, announced, "We now call for the development and implementation of state and local transportation policies that provide for real changes in transportation planning and investment."

During the ten years that federal funding was provided under federal legislation known as ISTEA and TEA-21, much progress was made by other states improving and diversifying their transportation networks. New Mexico, however, is at the top of another "worst list" because unlike most of its neighbors in the western states, it has built roads and has failed to allocate any substantial money for the development of alternative modes, such as transit, rail, bike paths and pedestrian trails.

"There is a growing constituency for change in this state. People and groups are joining together to re-examine transportation and the major way it impacts our lives. New Mexico spends zero dollars on transit operations. We know we can do better than that," said Janice Varela, co-chair of the New Mexico Coalition for a Livable Future at the Capitol press conference.

Organizations or individuals interested in supporting STPP-NM's efforts during the legislative interim committee process should contact DeAnza Valencia at (505) 243-8666.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL WILL EXAMINE REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITIES *Carol Raymond, Santa Fe Southern Railroad*

House Joint Memorial 45 directs the Legislative Council to study the potential for Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) in New Mexico.

Across the state, cities, towns and counties are engaged in providing public transportation services to a growing body of citizens who need or want an option to the automobile. These efforts are hampered by a functional problem: New Mexicans live in areas that are defined not by county or city limits, but by where they live, work and get services. Regions.

So why does transit (in New Mexico) exist in this artificial world of cities and counties? Why would the Albuquerque bus system *not* be able to serve surrounding communities? Why is a Santa Fe / Espanola / Los Alamos Park and Ride system considered too risky for these cities to take on individually? These are the challenges that the memorial seeks to address.

The Legislative Council is charged with studying the potential for RTAs and creating enabling legislation for RTAs, to be ready for the 2003 Legislative Session. New Mexico could become one of the last states to create RTAs. New Mexicans need the option of planning, operating and financing transit on the basis of regions. If you are interested in helping to track and amplify this effort, contact Carol Raymond, (505) 989-8600, ext. 22. E-mail: carol@sfsr.com.

NATIONAL NEWS

TEA 3: TRANSPORTATION EQUITY ACT UPDATE ON THE WEB

The Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP) has launched a new website, <http://www.tea3.org>. The site will keep you posted on the federal hearing schedule, policy issues, and other developments in the TEA-21 reauthorization process.

A LETTER FROM NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Friends,

A critical issue for preservation in the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization debates is protection afforded historic sites by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act. In Congress, among associations representing road builders, and at the Federal Highway Administration, discussions are taking place and legislative proposals are taking shape to limit existing protections that historic sites are provided during road building projects.

The common theme among the various proposals is that protecting historic resources is getting out of hand, that it now goes too far and is responsible for UNNECESSARY major delays in the building of much needed highway projects. Proposals vary widely and some are less harmful to historic sites than others.

Here are some of the ideas to "streamline" historic sites reviews.

If the site was the subject in a 106 review and agreement was reached, 4(f) will not apply. Only historic sites actually on the National Register of Historic Places will be protected by 4(f). Historic sites are to be deleted from resources protected by 4(f) because they are already adequately protected by Section 106. Only publicly owned historic sites would be eligible for 4(f) protections. Only highway agencies can determine purpose and need for highway projects, and only highway agencies can say what alternatives to the agency's preferred alternative can be examined.

Limitations on law suits to require adherence to 4(f) are being proposed. There are variations of these, but you get the picture.

We are looking for stories about states that have figured out how to build roads without destroying or damaging historic sites. We would like to hear about what's been saved and what's been lost and how citizens needed to intervene to successfully force alterations to projects in order to save historic sites. We need to know more specifics about how state transportation agencies are meeting the challenge of building roads and protecting historic resources at the same time.

There are dozens of reasons why highway projects are delayed (like no money or no community support), but there seems to be a focus on environmental and historic preservation reviews as the principal causes of road project delays. We are proposing to do two things. One is to remind Congress of the many reasons projects take time to build, and the other is show them environmental and historic resources reviews work well in some places and could work well everywhere, when there's a commitment to make them work.

We really need your help and hope you can provide some good information as we work on a strategy to deflect unfair and inaccurate criticism of historic reviews by pointing out why the reviews are necessary and where they are working quite well.

Dan Costello

Public Policy, NTHP

(Please contact Julianne Fletcher of NM Heritage Preservation Trust, toll free at 866-700-nmhp if you are interested in responding.)

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL: CONGRESSIONAL HEARING HELD

*From Transfer, STPP's Electronic Newsletter
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On February 5, health and transportation officials and advocates from across the country took part in a Congressional Forum to discuss their efforts to create Safe Routes to School. Rep. Jim Oberstar of Minnesota, ranking Democrat on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, convened and moderated the forum in the Library of Congress. In his opening statement, Rep. Oberstar lamented the health of an "entire generation of children who are mobility challenged." Dr. Jeff Runge, Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), emphasized the need to allow people of all ages to move about safely and freely, to enable commerce and to promote social interaction and health. He cautioned, however, against encouraging children to walk or bicycle without providing a safe street environment. Two top officials of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Bill Dietz and Christine Branche, said safe routes to school is important in fighting physical inactivity and the obesity epidemic in children.

A major issue for Safe Routes to Schools programs is the funding of engineering changes - sidewalks, crosswalks, traffic signals - typically the most costly of the "four E's" of pedestrian and bicyclist safety. STPP's Barbara McCann and James Corless discussed state-level efforts to use federal safety money for Safe Routes to School engineering projects. While programs in California and Washington have experienced demand far in excess of funding, proposals for similar programs in other states have been opposed by state Departments of Transportation and typically killed in committee.

STPP took the opportunity at the forum to release an updated Summary of Safe Routes to School Programs. The document is now available on STPP's website at www.transact.org (Transfer and subscription information can also be found on STPP's website.)

RESOURCES / ANNOUNCEMENTS

NM Highway Commission meetings are posted on the website www.nmshtd.state.nm.us under Commission. You'll have to call Santa Fe to get onto the mailing list in order to get the agenda; call (505) 827-5100 and try to get to the right person!

The Los Alamos County Cyclists' Coalition's website is up and running: www.labikes.org <http://www.labikes.org>. Diane Albert, President of the LACCC and Los Alamos County

Councilor, has been selected to serve on the New Mexico Municipal League's District #2 Public Infrastructure and Communications Policy Committee. This committee looks at transportation issues.

STPP is launching a new series of research and education briefs, called “Decoding Transportation Policy and Practice.” These short papers will educate readers on complex transportation issues, and will often be the first place to learn of STPP’s latest research findings. The first issue decodes the complexities of Revenue Aligned Budget Authority, or RABA, and why this means that federal transportation funding is projected to decline \$9.1 billion next year. www.transact.org

QUOTE OF THE SEASON

“One of the biggest problems that we've had is that transportation has had a singular focus for so long that it has become divorced from its integral relationship to quality of life, housing, open space, neighborhoods, parks, etc. We haven't made transportation work in favor of those things. In fact, the agencies responsible for linking those ideas rarely even talk to each other.”

James Corless, STPP - California

The NM Transportation Information Exchange is a publication of the Surface Transportation Policy Project's New Mexico office. Editor: Joanne McEntire. To subscribe, send your name, address, e-mail and organization’s name to jomcen@spinn.net.

The Surface Transportation Policy Project is a national coalition working for transportation policies and investments that protect neighborhoods, increase access to goods and services, promote social equity, preserve the environment, strengthen the economy, and improve quality of life. STPP has offices in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Sacramento, San Francisco, and Washington DC.