

CHAPTER 6.0 COMMENTS AND COORDINATION

This chapter describes the integrated program of agency coordination and public involvement conducted during the development of the SH 16 (Environmental Assessment (EA)). The program was planned and carried out as an open, inclusive and ongoing process sensitive to the needs of nearby residents and businesses.

The agency coordination and public involvement program included agency and public scoping, public open houses, small group and individual property owner meetings, briefings, newsletters, Web site postings, and media information. Outreach to low-income and minority residents and employers located within the SH 16 study area was an important element of the program.

AGENCY COORDINATION

Coordination with local, state, and federal agencies occurred throughout the project to ensure accurate resource identification and impact evaluation, as well as compliance with agency policies and procedures and transportation planning requirements. Agencies that had an interest in the project, specialized information, or regulatory authority were asked to participate in the development of this EA by:

- Providing information.
- Participating in project scoping.
- Reviewing alternatives.
- Identifying environmental issues and project impacts.
- Commenting on proposed mitigation measures.
- Attending meetings and briefings.

Those participating in all or some of these activities included the City of Fountain, El Paso County, the Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments, the Air Pollution Control Division of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, the Colorado Division of Wildlife, the State Historic Preservation Officer, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Fort Carson.

In addition, Fort Carson is a Cooperating Agency, meaning that it has certain responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) during the

development and review of this EA. As a Cooperating Agency, Fort Carson has provided information regarding resources within its jurisdiction, participated in the review and analysis of environmental issues and technical studies, attended meetings and briefings, and independently reviewed and commented upon this EA. Through this participation in the project, Fort Carson expects to be able to efficiently carry out its NEPA responsibilities, approvals, and other requirements as they relate to the Proposed Action described in this EA.

The Bureau of Reclamation is also a Cooperating Agency for this project with responsibilities under NEPA as related to ownership of a 33-inch water line, part of the Fountain Valley Conduit. The water line is operated by the Fountain Valley Authority and is currently located on Fort Carson, partially within Landfill #11. Because a portion of this water line will be within the proposed loop ramp of the SH 16/I-25 interchange, the water line will be relocated farther to the west outside of the proposed interchange footprint on Fort Carson land. Impacts of this action have been evaluated as part of this EA. The Bureau of Reclamation has reviewed information developed for this EA and expects to be able to carry out its NEPA responsibilities, approvals, and other requirements as they relate to the relocation of the water line as required by the Proposed Action.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A public involvement campaign was conducted throughout the project to ensure widespread public awareness of the project and to provide timely opportunities for public input into project decision-making. To reach those either interested in or affected by the Proposed Action, various tools were used, such as direct mailings, advertisements and announcements in local media, door-to-door and telephone conversations, and numerous meetings with both small and large groups. Since there are Spanish-speaking residents in the vicinity, public outreach also involved the use of media serving Spanish speakers. Outreach also included door-to-door visits and individual contact with potentially affected residents. The public involvement campaign was carried out over approximately four years and reached at least 3,500 interested individuals, nearby residents, business owners and tenants, and business operators and managers.

Project Mailing List: A mailing list was developed and maintained throughout the project for newsletters and invitations to public meetings. The list, ultimately containing approximately 3,500 names and addresses, was initially assembled using addresses within the study area and from requests by those wanting to be included on the mailing

list. As the project progressed, the list was expanded as additional requests were received, primarily at various public meetings.

Project Newsletters: Three project newsletters were published during the project to inform and update the public on the progress of the project and to invite them to upcoming open houses. The newsletters were mailed to those on the project mailing list in February 2003, August 2003, and January 2004 about two weeks prior to public meetings.

Project newsletters were posted on the Widefield School District 3 and Fountain-Fort Carson School District 8 Web sites to announce upcoming public meetings. Highlights of the newsletters also were included in take-home school newsletter inserts.

Public Meetings: Three public meetings using an open house format were conducted. Open houses were held on March 6, 2003, August 14, 2003, and January 28, 2004, at Mesa Ridge High School, located adjacent to the eastern terminus of SH 16. A total of approximately 142 attended these three meetings. The purposes of the open house public meetings were to provide information and to obtain input regarding three key project elements: Purpose and Need for the improvements and an identification of issues to be addressed in the EA; definition and evaluation of alternatives; and the selection of the Proposed Action.

Small-Group Meetings with Property Owners: Two series of small-group meetings were held with property owners in the study area to ensure their awareness of the project and to provide opportunities for them to comment on the various design options being considered. The meetings were conducted on weekdays, and, where possible, at locations within the study area to facilitate attendance. Invitations were sent about two weeks prior to the date of the meetings. For those that could not attend on that date, other opportunities were also offered, including one-on-one meetings and upcoming open houses. During the week of the meetings, project team members contacted the invitees door-to-door and by telephone.

The first series of small-group and one-on-one meetings was conducted between mid-July and mid-August 2003. Twenty-three individual property owners were invited and about half attend (ten business owners and/or their representatives and one residential owner). Issues identified during these small-group meetings included:

- Existence of numerous operating wells, water mains and sewer lines in the area.

- Potential for impacts to groundwater wells and water quality in the area.
- Opposition to the use of an improved Southmoor Lane as the frontage road replacement for Southmoor Drive.
- Need for safety improvements at turns into the frontage roads (particularly Southmoor Drive).
- Impacts of improvements to existing businesses fronting US 85 such as restrictions in access and loss of property.
- Potential impacts to the 'future' of businesses in the area.

The information received from this first series of one-on-one and small-group property owner meetings was utilized in alternative screening.

The second series of small-group meetings was held on December 9, 2003, at the CDOT offices in Colorado Springs. Twenty-eight individual property owners were invited; twelve owners or owner representatives attended. Follow-up contacts (telephone conversations, individual meetings) were made with three owners unable to attend the meetings. Attendees were in unanimous agreement that a connection of Southmoor Drive and Rice Lane frontage roads under SH 16 was neither desirable nor beneficial to property owners in the area. Property owners requested that the project team consider centering the new Southmoor Drive frontage road alignment on the adjoining property lines to share the burden of right-of-way acquisition between the owners. This idea was considered during the development of the Proposed Action, but ultimately the decision was made to shift the alignment of Southmoor Drive approximately 50 feet to the south. Issues related to the proposed Rice Lane frontage road connection to US 85 included the accommodation of existing and planned utilities in the area and changes to the alignment of Rice Lane that would improve access to properties.

Three property owners along the I-25 frontage road (Bandlely Drive) were invited to a separate meeting to discuss design options at the I-25/SH 16 interchange. Two owners attended and the third was subsequently contacted by telephone. All preferred a partial cloverleaf interchange design at I-25 and the accompanying frontage road alignments, primarily because it would separate Fort Carson and local traffic movements within the interchange and minimize property impacts.

The information from this second series of small-group property owner meetings was utilized during the screening and selection of the Proposed Action.

PUBLIC INFORMATION PROGRAM

The SH 16 Public Information Program was planned and conducted to ensure there was widespread awareness of the project, the process for identifying and evaluating alternatives and design options, and opportunities for the public to be involved. Information was regularly provided to five local newspapers, four television stations, and eight radio stations that serve the area. In addition, the Widefield and Fountain-Fort Carson School Districts allowed project information to be posted on their Web sites and to be sent home in school newsletters.

News releases, articles, display ads, and advisories were submitted to the media to announce the project start-up, at important project milestones, and during the week prior to public open houses. Quarter-page display ads were sent to the newspapers for publication one week before and the day of the open houses. The advisories were sent to all of the media for use during the day of the open houses. News releases and articles summarizing the highlights of the open houses were prepared and distributed to all of the media for broadcast and publication within ten days of the open houses. These provided specifics of the issues and comments from the open houses and outlined upcoming project activities. A number of attendees indicated that they had learned of the open houses through these media outreach efforts.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE OUTREACH

Data from the *Census 2000* suggested that low-income and minority residents likely live within the study area. Early investigations, including door-to-door visits, concluded that low-income and minority residents still live within the study area and occupy 4 single-family homes, a small apartment complex, and a predominantly vacant mobile home park with 26 units, only 6 of which are habitable and currently occupied. As the design options were developed and refined and a Proposed Action selected, the project team determined that none of these residents would be directly or indirectly affected.

Maintaining an open and inclusive outreach to all residents in the study area was important throughout project development. While it was expected that some minority and low-income residents and their employers in the area would receive project information through newspapers, television, and radio, as well as project newsletters, the team recognized that these tools may not adequately inform many of those who live nearby. Therefore, the outreach plan included paid advertisements in the *Hispania News* and door-to-door visits.

Prior to the open house and small-group meetings, project team members attempted to personally contact each low-income and minority resident at their home or by telephone to explain the project, answer questions, and encourage their attendance at the meetings. These contacts started weeks in advance of the meetings and continued until the day before they were held.

Details regarding this outreach are included in the *Environmental Justice Technical Report* contained on the CD attached to the back of this EA.

REMAINING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Further public involvement activities, including an advertised public hearing, are anticipated to follow the completion of this EA. FHWA will evaluate comments received at the hearing and during a 30-day period for the public review of the EA, and will document in a separate report their response to comments and a decision to either issue a Finding of No Significant Impact or to prepare and Environmental Impact Statement.