

# Chapter 1 Project Need and Purpose

## 1.1 Project History and Reassessment Purpose

A Public Hearing on the *Environmental Assessment for the Fourth Street Corridor (Montano Road to Alameda Boulevard), Village of Los Ranchos, Bernalillo County, New Mexico, NMSHTD Project # TPU-(M)-5089(2)05, Control No. 3475*, prepared by Wilson & Company, December 1999 (1999 EA) was held on January 11, 2000. During the hearing, extensive testimony was presented that favored an improvement alternative (a three-lane section) that had been eliminated from consideration in an earlier phase of the project. In response, and in consideration of public input and new Village leadership, many of the assessment criteria that eliminated the three-lane alternative from consideration were changed. After these changes and a series of public charrettes held in the Spring and Summer of 2000, the three-lane alternative became the build alternative preferred by the Village.

There is also public support for a four-lane alternative. The No Build Alternative, Preferred Build Alternative (four-lane roadway with curb and gutter and sidewalk) and four-lane roadway with shoulders and tapers build alternative discussed in the 1999 EA, and the Preferred 3-Lane Alternative discussed in this Environmental Reassessment are still under consideration. The selection will be based on the need for the project; viable alternatives; social, economic, and environmental impact; and public input of each of the alternatives. After evaluation of public and agency comments on the project, the Village of Los Ranchos de Albuquerque, in coordination with the New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department (NMSHTD), will select a recommended alternative. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) will independently evaluate and determine if the selected build alternative will have a significant impact on the human or natural environment based on the 1999 EA; this Environmental Reassessment; and public/agency comments following the Public Hearing. The best public-interested based decision will be documented in an Input Synopsis and submitted to the FHWA for a request for a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

The purpose of this document is to present: 1) the project purpose and need; 2) any changed conditions since the EA; 3) descriptions of the No Build, 1999 EA Preferred Alternative, and the Preferred 3-Lane Alternative; 4) comparisons of the social, economic, and environmental consequences of the No Build Alternative, the 1999 EA Preferred Alternative, and the Preferred 3-Lane Alternative; and, 5) a description of the public involvement activities that have occurred during and since the public hearing and activities that will yet occur.

This document will not reiterate the environmental analyses that were performed for the 1999 EA. Instead only differences between the 1999 EA Preferred Alternative and the Preferred 3-Lane Alternative will be emphasized. However, the document will still serve to evaluate the social, economic, and environmental impacts associated with the Preferred 3-Lane Alternative improvements to 4<sup>th</sup> Street between Solar Road and Ortega Road. The document will also serve to determine the need for an Environmental Impact Statement if significant environmental impacts are identified. The study described in this document was conducted to satisfy the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and has been prepared in accordance with the provisions and requirements of the FHWA and the Location Study Procedures and other guiding policies of the NMSHTD.

Readers wishing a more complete description of prior environmental analyses are referred to the 1999 EA that is available for review at the Village of Los Ranchos de Albuquerque and Wilson & Company. The document is also available for review on the Village of Los Ranchos websites, <http://www.villageoflosranchos.com> and [www.villr.com](http://www.villr.com). This environmental reassessment is also available on these websites.

## 1.2 Project Need

The project area is along 4<sup>th</sup> Street, from its approximate intersection with Solar Road north about 2.7 miles [4.3 kilometers (km)] to its intersection with Ortega Road (see Figure 1.2-1).

The 1999 EA recommended improvements to 4<sup>th</sup> Street to correct deficiencies of poor pavement conditions, existing and future traffic operations, roadway design, drainage, and to improve roadway safety. In addition, improvements to 4<sup>th</sup> Street were recommended to encourage economic development of the area. Although the project purpose and need has not changed, the Village's priorities and emphases have changed since the 1999 EA. Physical conditions along the corridor have not changed since the 1999 EA. No displacement of traffic from 4<sup>th</sup> Street, little to no right-of-way acquisitions in the northern portion of the roadway, and providing curb, gutter, and sidewalk were important considerations in designing the alternatives preferred in the 1999 EA. Following the public hearing, an interest was expressed to slow traffic flows, minimize, but not eliminate right-of-way acquisition in the northern project area, maintain a much more rural appearance, and provide opportunities for short bicycle trips within the Village.

A number of reasons for eliminating the three-lane roadway section were casually discussed in the 1999 EA. Each of these reasons are repeated and reexamined below and the methods in which this project has addressed each of these concerns is provided.

- 1) The 1999 EA stated "*Safety concerns with the continuous center left turn lane*" – In reexamining the 3-lane alternative, design modifications have been made to slow traffic (see below), which will lower the danger to pedestrians and other vehicles.
- 2) The 1999 EA stated "*In areas with frequent driveways, conflicts occur when drivers attempt to turn in opposite directions*" – In response to this concern, the number of access points along the roadway have been reduced; therefore, fewer points of conflict will exist.
- 3) The 1999 EA stated "*Two way left-turn lanes are used as a refuge area for left-turning drivers producing conflicts with drivers attempting to make turns*" – Although this is still true with the 3-lane alternative, the four-lane alternative offered no such refuge and turning vehicles are forced to cross a greater number of lanes with vehicles driving different speeds. With a center turn lane, turning vehicles are removed from the through lanes and the potential for rear-end accidents are reduced.
- 4) The 1999 EA stated "*Narrower lanes in the four-lane section would slow traffic more than wider lanes in the three-lane section*" – With the 3-lane alternative, driving lane widths have been reduced to 11 feet. Additionally, a solid white outside edge stripe will be added to assist in visually confining drivers.
- 5) The 1999 EA stated "*Curb and gutter will reduce speeds in the four-lane section*" - Parallel parking, which will help reduce speeds, has been added in certain areas of the new 3-lane alternative.
- 6) The 1999 EA stated "*Difficulty finding gaps to complete left turns because of the high traffic volumes*" – Traffic volumes are only slightly reduced in the 2020 horizon year; therefore, additional traffic signals have been installed at three intersections to produce traffic platoons and gaps for entry in the new 3-lane alternative.
- 7) The 1999 EA stated "*The three-lane section may pose problems to emergency vehicle (especially fire) navigation and stalled vehicles may block the roadway*" – In the new 3-lane alternative, in an emergency situation, roadway drainage swales, the parallel parking areas, and the center turn lane could be temporarily used to move vehicles out of the way allowing for emergency vehicles to pass safely. Stalled vehicles may be removed to the drainage swales or parallel parking areas.
- 8) The 1999 EA stated "*Unacceptable level of service in the southernmost zone*" – The

former level of service analysis did not consider a 3-lane roadway with additional turning lanes provided at the intersections. When reanalyzing the 3-lane section with the additional turn lanes and with new case study data, it operates at acceptable levels of service.

- 9) The 1999 EA stated “*Loss of bicycle lanes in the southern section*” – With the new 3-lane alternative, the Village proposes to provide a widened 12-foot multi-use path on the west side of 4<sup>th</sup> Street between Solar Road and Mullen Road. This shared pedestrian/bicyclist facility will provide connectivity to the secondary bike trails currently in place and will connect the two discontinuous pieces of Guadalupe Trail. In addition, the Village will provide the bike route connection along Osuna and Chavez Roads by widening the road to 14 feet. These facilities will be signed and marked for bicyclists. These improvements were developed in coordination with the City of Albuquerque Public Works Department (see Appendix A).

The Village is interested in providing opportunities for intra-village bicycle trips. In the 3-lane alternative, the roadway shoulders have been widened to 4.5 feet in order to meet FHWA requirements for bicyclist use. The economic importance of the roadway to the Village imposed constraints upon the type of bicycle facilities provided. Provision of dedicated bicycle lanes would have required the acquisition of additional properties. As a result, loss of Village gross receipt revenues and the impact to businesses through acquisitions and relocations of businesses could be quite substantial. This portion of 4<sup>th</sup> Street is not designated as an existing or planned bicycle route, lane, or trail on the Long Range Bikeway System map for the Albuquerque Urban Area (map dated April 3, 2001).

- 10) The 1999 EA stated “*Negative traffic impacts to adjacent roadway corridors*” – Transportation demand models with the expanded intersection configurations revealed that the actual displacement of vehicles to other roadways was not substantial (see Section 3.1). Based on the 1999 Traffic Flow Map for the Albuquerque Metropolitan Planning Area, this corresponds to approximate daily vehicle increases of 2 to 5 percent on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, 2 to 18 percent on Edith Boulevard, and 4 to 11 percent on Rio Grande Boulevard; therefore, the traffic displaced from 4<sup>th</sup> Street was not considered substantial.
- 11) The 1999 EA stated “*The three-lane section does not conform to the State Implementation Plan (air quality)*” – Although the 3-lane section differs from the roadway appearing in the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), additional analysis has determined that substantial air quality differences from the 1999 Preferred Alternative have not resulted from the roadway design change (see Section 3.8).

Local consultative efforts to demonstrate that the new 3-lane alternative is not a significant change in design and scope from the conforming program have begun. That consultative process continues with the submittal of this reassessment and supporting documentation to FHWA who will submit it to the EPA for review and approval. As an option, FHWA and the EPA may choose to wait until the MTP 2025 has been approved. Appendix B contains the report, with all supporting analyses and documentation submitted to the Transportation Conformity Technical Committee in February 2001 and the committee’s response.

The Village of Los Ranchos de Albuquerque, based upon the analyses, has determined that no meaningful increases in carbon monoxide levels result at either the project level or the regional emissions scale from the 4<sup>th</sup> Street project change in scope. The Transportation Conformity Technical Committee concurred with the above findings, and

determined that selecting the 3-lane alternative does not constitute a significant change in the project scope, design or timing, nor would there be a meaningful increase in carbon monoxide (see Appendix B).

At the request of the Village of Los Ranchos, the Middle Rio Grande Council of Governments (MRGCOG) performed a regional mobile emissions analysis for the year 2020 based on a reduction in capacity on 4<sup>th</sup> Street. According to the analysis, the 3-lane alternative would add approximately 0.02 tons per day of carbon monoxide to Bernalillo County emissions in the year 2020. After consideration of all planned and programmed projects, Bernalillo County is expected to have 1.89 tons of CO per day remaining (headroom) under the recently approved CO emissions budget for the year 2020. Because the modifications to the 4<sup>th</sup> Street project utilize only 0.02 tons of CO per day headroom (approximately one percent of the total headroom), this project does not threaten the exceedance of Bernalillo County's approved CO emissions budget. Therefore, the changes to the 4<sup>th</sup> Street project scope produce no substantial changes to regional air quality.

The following chapter describes the roadway and intersection improvements designed to meet the project purpose and need.