

SAN JUAN COUNTY ROAD 7950 ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR ROAD IMPROVEMENTS

SEPTEMBER
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NEWSLETTER



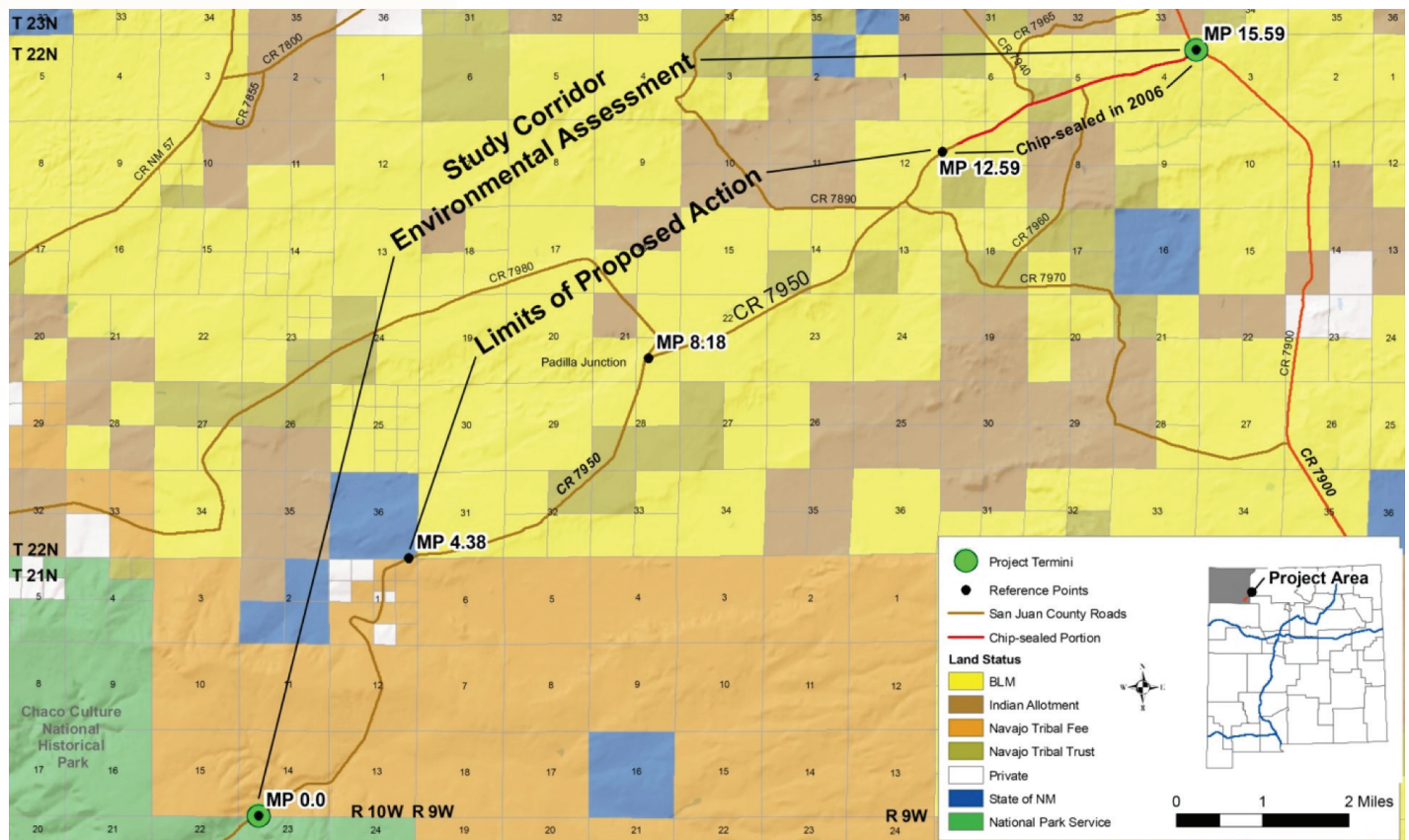
The use of Federal funds for the road improvements requires compliance with Council on Environmental Quality regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The preparation of an Environmental Assessment (EA) began in 2009; the draft EA was put on hold and is now being reactivated with important changes. Previous public involvement has provided valuable direction to guide the project team towards a new Preferred Alternative to address diverse concerns about safety and access along CR 7950.

Project Background

CR 7950 leads to a very special place, the Chaco Culture National Historical Park (CCNHP) and World Heritage Site, which has cultural and historic significance to Native Americans. The park is known to be an important destination for those interested in learning more about the ancestral Pueblo peoples or who are drawn to the park for recreational or spiritual activities. The park is remote and has limited access. CR 7950 is the primary access to the park.

San Juan County, New Mexico is responsible for maintenance of the road from milepost (MP) 15.59 (at the junction with CR

7900) to MP 4.38, where the road crosses into Navajo Tribal land. No public right of way exists along the 4.38-mile segment of road that is located on the Navajo Tribal land, between MP 4.38 and the Park boundary. The County has previously been maintaining the entire roadway from MP 15.59 to MP 0.0 although the southerly 4.38 miles of the road are within lands of the Navajo Nation. Improvements are planned for the road from MP 4.38 to MP 12.59 (see map below). No work is planned for the segment of road from MP 0.0 to MP 4.38. Ongoing maintenance of that segment of the road will be the responsibility of the Navajo Division of Transportation.



The U.S. Department of Transportation / Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has allocated funds to be used specifically for a project that will improve CR 7950. The purpose of the proposed road improvements are to:

- Reduce the County’s current and future maintenance commitment and dedication of resources for maintenance.
- Improve the safety and operability of the roadway.
- Enhance mobility and access to all properties served by the roadway.

New Preferred Alternative – Proposed Action

Through the analysis of cultural, biological and community resources, and with consideration of public input received to date, a new Preferred Alternative is

being proposed. The Preferred Alternative is to improve the road surface by applying stabilized aggregate, rather than the chip seal paving that was proposed as an earlier preferred alternative. The construction of stabilized aggregate (see example in photo) will provide a stronger, safer, and weather-reliable road surface, minimize the amount of maintenance that is required, and still maintain an unpaved route to the park. Other improvements will include an upgrade of the signage and drainage facilities.

Environmental Study and Analysis Results

The EA process included project Scoping to identify possible improvement alternatives, and to identify issues and concerns from the pub-

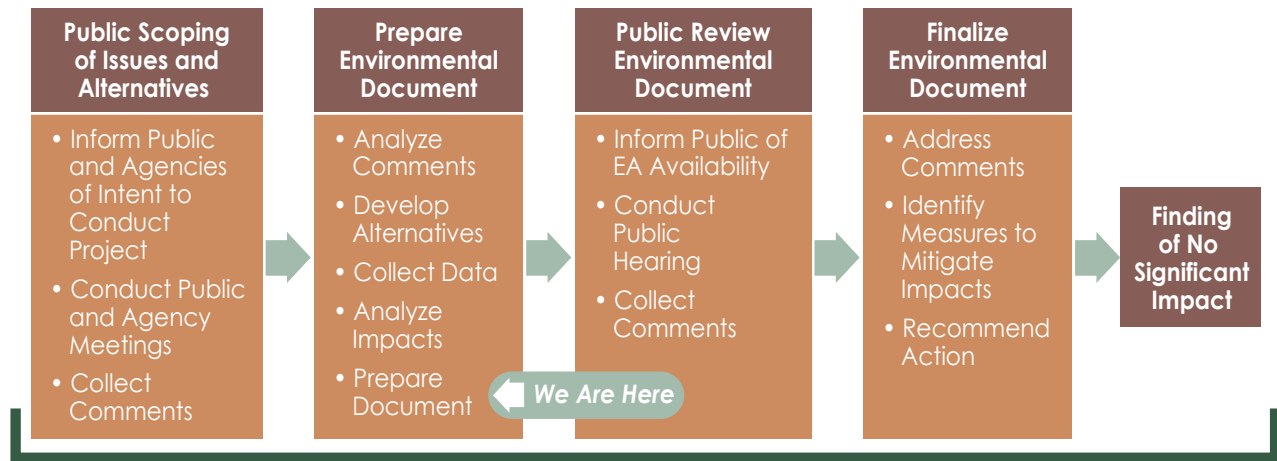
lic, agencies and tribes with regard to those alternatives. The comments received during Scoping provided direction for developing a reasonable range of project alternatives, helping to focus the analysis for completing the EA studies, and providing valuable community input for project team consideration. The flow chart below shows the EA process and general schedule, and indicates the present status of this project in that schedule.

What We’ve Heard from the Public to Date

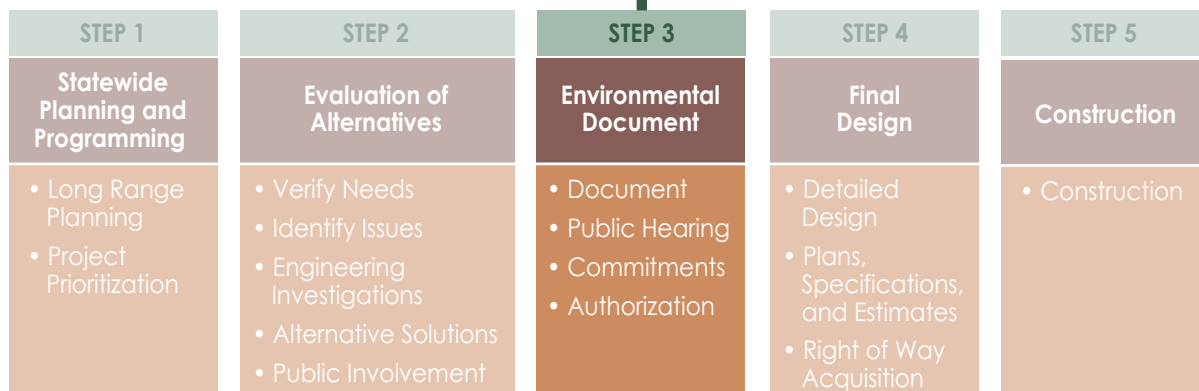
The following are the most common concerns heard regarding this project and its relationship to the CCNHP:

- Preserve the historically significant, culturally sensitive national park and World Heritage Site.

The Environmental Process



Phase Status of Project



- Do not encourage increase in visitor traffic.
- Do not create the need for revisions to state road maps indicating paved road access and associated changes in traffic types and volumes.
- Consider the need for road improvements to serve local residents and park employees.
- The Navajo Nation has authority over the southerly portion of the road.

concerns have been addressed to develop a compromise between safety and access needs and preserving the remote feel of the park entrance for visitors.

Benefits of the New Preferred Alternative for Improvements

By implementing the new Preferred Alternative, the following benefits will be realized:

- Vehicle safety associated with roadway surface condition and signage will be improved.

- Periodic roadway maintenance requirements and the dedication of tax dollars for maintenance by San Juan County will be reduced.
- The project footprint and construction duration will be minimized, because right of way definition and acquisition efforts will be minimal.
- The roadway surface of a segment of CR 7950 will be improved with a treatment that will have a life expectancy of 3 to 5 years.
- Impacts to the CCNHP associated with paving of CR 7950 will be avoided.

With the change in the Preferred Alternative and by defining the limits of the Proposed Action, these

Overview of Alternatives

Alternative A – Proposed Action <i>Stabilized Aggregate</i>	Alternative B – Considered but Eliminated <i>Chip Seal</i>	Alternative C – No Action <i>No Improvements</i>
<p>This alternative will consist of the placement of four inches of imported aggregate base course material, stabilized with a combination of binding agents (magnesium chloride and lignosulfonate). The binding agents act to stabilize and contain the gravel, reducing dust, and giving the resulting surface a longer life than would be achieved with untreated base course. The width of placement of the stabilized aggregate would be 24 feet, generally about 0- 2 feet wider than the existing roadway.</p>	<p>This alternative was previously introduced as the preferred alternative by San Juan County. It consisted of the placement of an aggregate with an asphalt binder. This alternative is the same as that previously constructed for the northerly three miles of CR 7950, from MP 12.59 to 15.59. This alternative has been eliminated from further consideration based on public input.</p>	<p>This alternative consists of no new construction / no improvements to CR 7950. Roadway maintenance activities would continue to be performed as currently being done, upon request, by San Juan County, from MP 4.38 to MP 15.59. Maintenance of the roadway from MP 0.0 to MP 4.38 is the responsibility of others, i.e. the Navajo Nation.</p>

Example of Stabilized Aggregate Surface



Existing Surface



Project Summary

Studies and reports addressing the need for improvements to San Juan County Road (CR) 7950, between CR 7900 and Chaco Culture National Historic Park, were prepared for San Juan County between 2007 and 2009. These documents were put on hold in early 2010 and the discussion of possible improvements was suspended. This project is now being reactivated.

San Juan County has identified a new Preferred Alternative for CR 7950 improvements based on public input and consideration of stakeholder perspectives. The limits of the Proposed Action (actual construction limits) have also been revised based on available right of way, construction budget, and clarification of jurisdictional responsibilities. With these changes, the Environmental Assessment (EA) is being completed, a public hearing will be conducted and public comments received. Construction of roadway improvements is planned for 2013, pending environmental clearance.

The availability of the EA document and an official notice regarding the public hearing will be publicized in regional newspapers. **The public hearing is tentatively planned for the evening of Thursday, November 15, 2012, to be held at the San Juan County Commission chambers at 100 South Oliver Drive, Aztec, New Mexico.** This hearing will begin with an Open House that will start at approximately 6:00 or 6:30 pm, to be following by a formal presentation at 7:00 pm. A *Technical Memorandum – Transportation Analysis Update*, dated September 2012, has been prepared for this project by URS Corporation and is available for public information and review on San Juan County's web site, www.sjcounty.net. This memo can be opened by going into the home page and clicking on *Breaking News* in the lower left area of the page. Persons wishing to subscribe to the project mailing list to receive future notices and project updates can contact Public Involvement Coordinator Darla Hareza by telephone at 602-648-2314 or via e-mail at Darla.Hareza@urs.com.

