

Lower Animas Valley Recreation Trail Presentation on Alternatives Evaluation

County Commission Meeting – August 27, 2024



Purpose and Need

Create a safe and enjoyable non-motorized (pedestrian/bicycle) connection between existing trail systems in the City of Farmington and Aztec to support alternative transportation, recreation, and quality of life initiatives in San Juan County



Portion of 16-Mile Multi-Use Paseo del Bosque Trail in Albuquerque, NM

Outdoor Recreation and Alternative Transportation

- Outdoor Recreation and Alternative Transportation has collectively prioritized by San Juan County, Farmington and Aztec as identified in local and regional planning documents
 - San Juan County
 - 2021 Strategic Plan (adopted September 2021)
 - 2023 Initiative – Countywide Recreation
 - 2026 Initiative – “Rail to Trail” Expansion
 - 2018 San Juan County Growth Management Plan
 - Section 6 – Transportation, Part E – Non-Motorized Transportation System
 - City of Farmington
 - 2040 Comprehensive Plan (adopted September 2021)
 - Goal 5 – Mobility (Multi-Modal Transportation)
 - Goal 6 – Parks & Recreation
 - Goal 10 – Resiliency (Healthy & Sustainable Community)
 - Outdoor Recreation Industry Initiative
 - City of Aztec
 - 2040 Comprehensive Plan (adopted June 2021)
 - Section 4.5 – Cultural Tourism & Outdoor Recreation
 - Section 7.5 – Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure
 - Section 8.3 – Trails
 - Implementation Strategy – 8.2.4 – Farmington to Aztec to Durango Regional Trail Development
 - Farmington MPO
 - 2024 Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan

Building Blocks for A Stronger Community

Year	Initiative	Description
2022	SUPPORT FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT	Continue to find new ways to show support for law enforcement.
	"MAKE US SHINE" Campaign to encourage citizens to work to keep the county clean	Expand County cleanup program to keep public lands clean, explore expanded recycling.
	SHOP LOCAL	Lead a Countywide "Shop Local" Campaign.
2023	TREE PLANTING	Promote and take part in tree planting throughout the County.
	COUNTYWIDE RECREATION	Expand recreational opportunities for County citizens and visitors.
	FILM INDUSTRY HUB	Develop a local Film Industry Hub.
2024	STAFF DEVELOPMENT	Provide for staff development with needs-based training programs for County employees.
	SUPPORT DRILLING	Support the expansion of drilling in the County.
	INTERNSHIP PROGRAM	Expand on County's Internships program.
2025	ENERGY HUB	Support the movement to establish San Juan County as an all-encompassing Energy Hub.
	RETIREMENT DESTINATION	Support research and planning for the County to be branded as a retirement destination.
	LOCAL AGRICULTURE	Support interest in and expansion of local farming opportunities.
2026	NAVAJO NATION RELATIONS	Improve communication and cooperation with the Navajo Nation.
	HOUSING PROGRAMS	Work to strengthen affordable housing opportunities.
	COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTER	Work with partners to establish a "Healthy Living" Community Resource Center.
2026	MANUFACTURER RECRUITMENT	Recruit manufacturers into the County.
	FREIGHT RAIL LINE	Promote and develop plan for a rail system from I-40 corridor to San Juan County.
	BEHAVIORAL HEALTH	Create a partnership for an improved/ expanded behavioral health workforce.
2026	"RAIL TO TRAIL" EXPANSION	Work with partners to design and construct the Aztec-Farmington Rail to Trail.
	RECREATIONAL EQUIPMENT MANUFACTURING	Promote recreational equipment manufacturing in San Juan County.

What is a strategic plan?

A strategic plan is a tool used by the County to create a roadmap for the future. Initiatives addressed by the strategic plan are identified as ways to *Build a Stronger Community* by adding new or improving, existing programs. Initiatives will work in concert with established programs.

How did we get here?

This plan was developed through a six-month process of brainstorming, fine-tuning ideas, and working through feedback. The collaborative

effort included citizens of San Juan County, the County's leadership team, County elected officials, and the County Commission. Each person brought a different perspective, viewing our County through many social, professional, and cultural lenses. A total of 115 initiatives were considered, 20 are targeted for implementation through 2026.

How are we going to accomplish these initiatives?

The Strategic Plan identifies a target year to implement each initiative. County staff will work toward that goal implementation as resources allow. Staff will call on professionals in their respective disciplines, community members, and other experts to accomplish our objectives. Each initiative will build on the others and may be altered to better fit the community's current needs. Each building block expands on our mission to *Build A Stronger Community*.



History



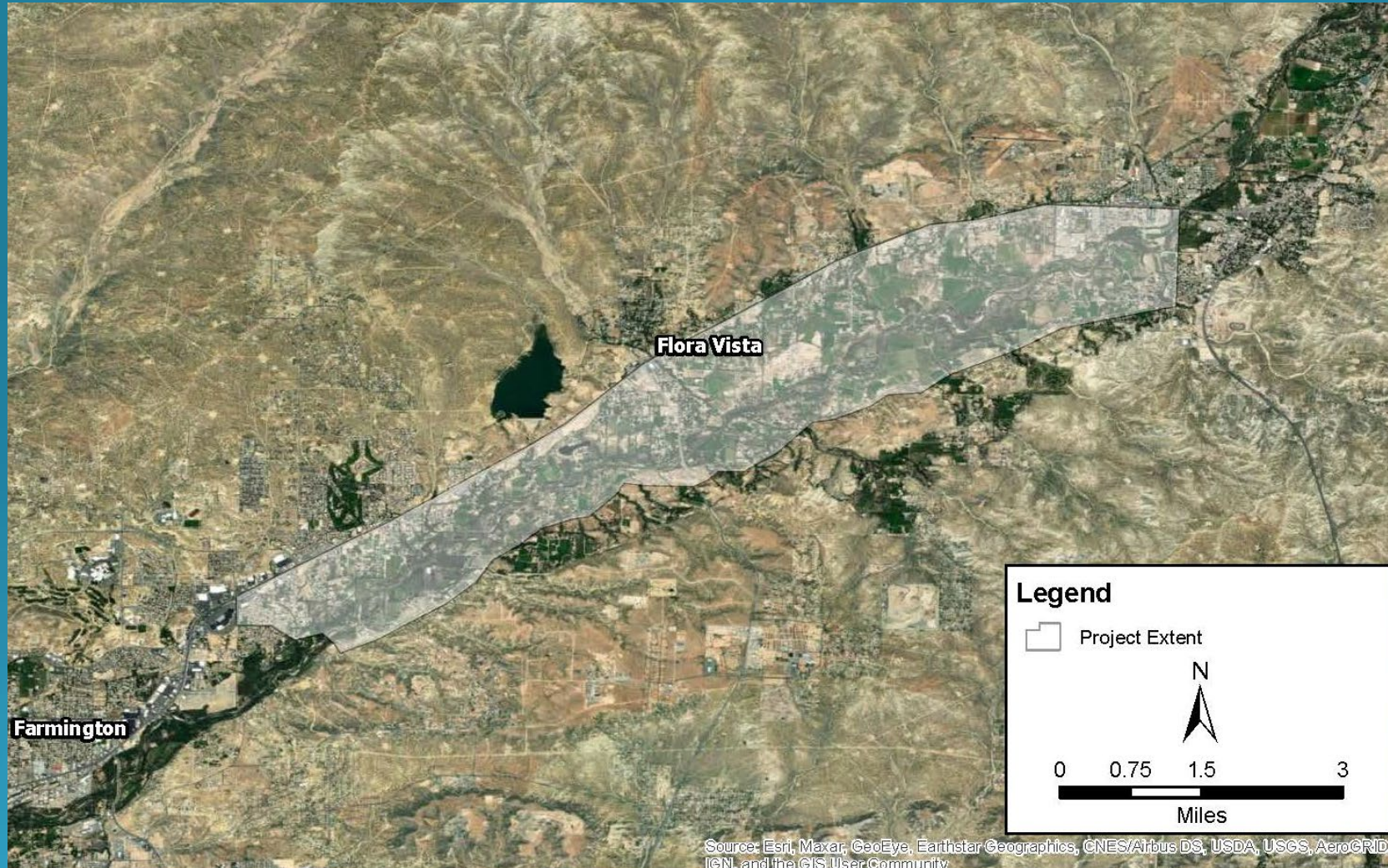
- San Juan County and the cities of Farmington (COF) and Aztec (COA) began collectively discussing a dedicated pedestrian/bicycle connection between the cities in 2019
- The former Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad alignment between Farmington and Aztec was identified as a priority alignment
 - Right of Way of former railroad was dedicated to SJC, COF, and COA in 1971
- Project presented to the San Juan County Commission was in March 2021 prior to inclusion of the project on the Farmington Metropolitan Transportation Organization Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP)
- Collaborative application for project engineering by San Juan County, Farmington, and Aztec for Trails+ funding from the New Mexico Economic Development Department Outdoor Recreation Division (ORD) in 2022
 - Supported by SJC Resolution 21-22-58, COF Resolution 2022-1845, COA Resolution 2022-1280
 - Project received \$250K in Trails+ funding with \$250K in matching funds split between San Juan County, City of Farmington, and City of Aztec
 - The San Juan County Commission awarded the design contract to Souder Miller & Associates on October 4, 2022



Corridor Considerations

- Approximate 8-mile project corridor bounded by Pinon Hills Extension (under construction) in Farmington and Hartman/Riverside Park in Aztec
 - Resulting trail system would represent 18 miles of coordinated trail between Among the Waters trailhead, near San Juan Regional Medical Center and Aztec Ruins National Monument
- As conceived, the preferred alignment would be the former D&RGW railroad right of way
 - San Juan County offered the former D&RGW right of way for public sale in 1976
 - Roughly 2 miles of the route were sold as part of said sale and that property is no longer in public ownership
- To avoid conflicts with private property, alternate public routes within the corridor have been evaluated for suitability with the stated trail objectives
 - Study area bounded by Pinon Hills Extension (east), NM 516 (north), Main St, Aztec (west), Southside River Road/CR 3000 (south)

Study Corridor



Corridor Evaluation

Four primary routes within the study corridor were evaluated for project suitability

- NM 516
- Former D&RGW Right of Way
- County Road 3050/3500/3520 collectively known as Old Aztec Highway
- County Road 3000/Southside River Road

Route suitability was evaluated against six criteria

- Character/Aesthetics
- Connectivity
- Ease of Implementation
- Environmental Issues
- Safety
- User Accommodation

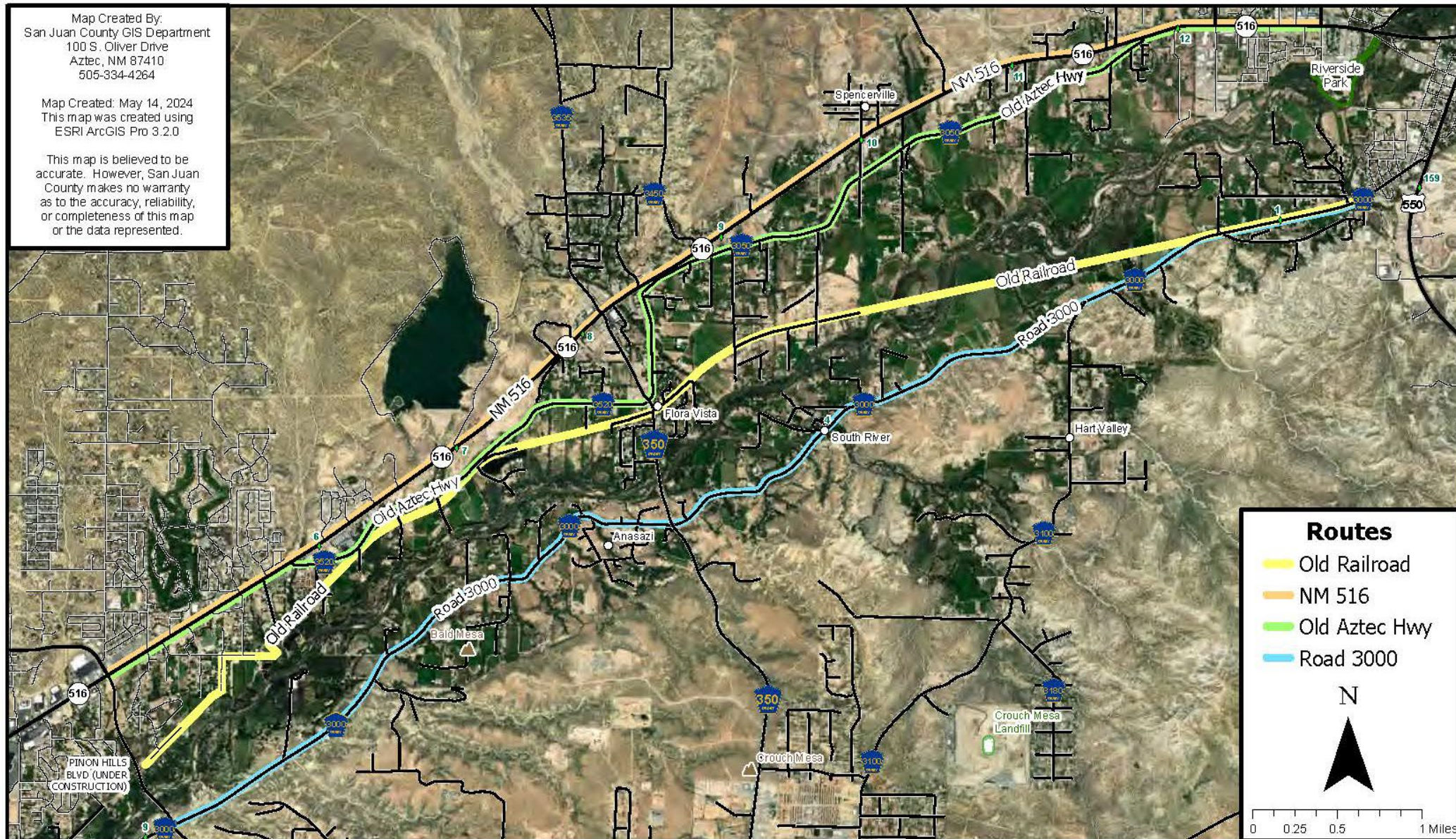


Lower Animas Valley Recreation Trail Project Corridors

Map Created By:
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Map Created: May 14, 2024
This map was created using
ESRI ArcGIS Pro 3.2.0

This map is believed to be accurate. However, San Juan County makes no warranty as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of this map or the data represented.



Routes

- Old Railroad
- NM 516
- Old Aztec Hwy
- Road 3000

N

0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles

NM 516 Corridor Evaluation

Scores well for Connectivity and Ease of Implementation

- Existing retail corridor and access to Lake Farmington
- Existing state right of way
- Would require NMDOT involvement in development

Scores neutral for Environmental Concerns

- Existing/developed corridor already cleared for cultural and environmental resources

Scores neutral/poor for Character/Aesthetics and Safety

- Busy highway not conducive to recreational use
- Not particularly scenic
- Only 1 established bicycle/pedestrian crossing at CR 350 in Flora Vista

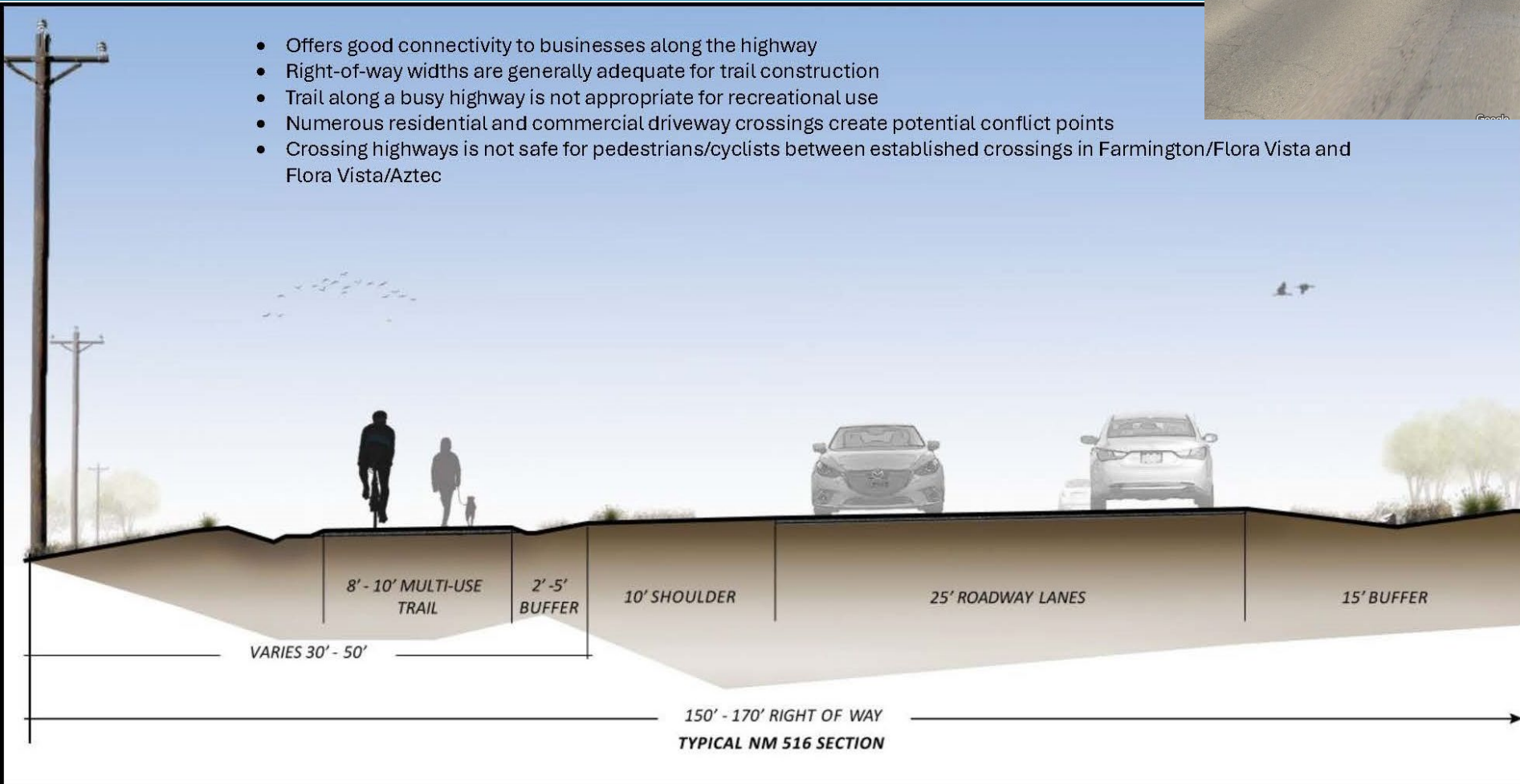
Scores poor for User Accommodation

- High traffic volumes, high speeds, and many street/driveway crossings are likely to result in vehicle conflicts

NM 516 Rendering



- Offers good connectivity to businesses along the highway
- Right-of-way widths are generally adequate for trail construction
- Trail along a busy highway is not appropriate for recreational use
- Numerous residential and commercial driveway crossings create potential conflict points
- Crossing highways is not safe for pedestrians/cyclists between established crossings in Farmington/Flora Vista and Flora Vista/Aztec



CR 3000/Old Aztec Highway Corridor Evaluation

Scores well for Character/Aesthetics and Connectivity

- Rural roads pass through farmland and residential areas
- Established tree canopy provides shade during hot weather
- Roads are representative of rural San Juan County

Scores neutral for Environmental Concerns, Safety, and User Accommodation

- Existing/developed corridor
- Environmental research does indicate the presence of cultural resources in areas
- 35 mph speed limit is favorable for bicycle/pedestrian use

Scores neutral/poor for Ease of Implementation

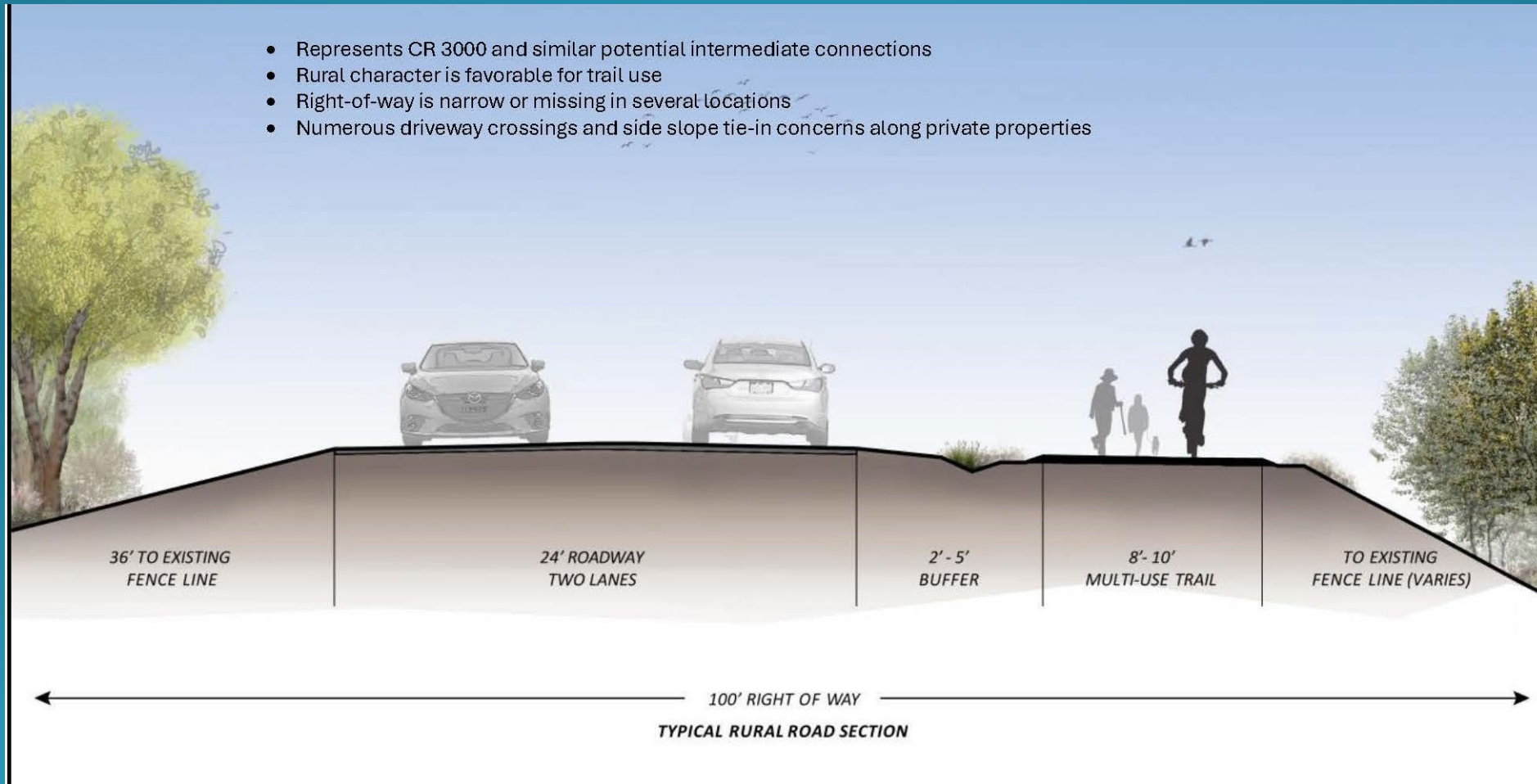
- Formal definition of existing road right of ways will require prolonged survey efforts in some areas
- Managing steep roadway side slopes and utility relocations are costly

Both route options similar in evaluation criteria

San Juan County recently completed similar multi-use path project serving CCSD Schools in Kirtland Area

CR 3000/Old Aztec Highway Rendering

- Represents CR 3000 and similar potential intermediate connections
- Rural character is favorable for trail use
- Right-of-way is narrow or missing in several locations
- Numerous driveway crossings and side slope tie-in concerns along private properties



Kirtland Multi Use Path



Railroad Right of Way Corridor Evaluation

Scores well for Character/Aesthetics, Connectivity, and User Accommodation

- Located on dedicated cross-country route and along low volume residential streets
- Would provide superior access for residential properties along route
- Marketable alternative as both historic and scenic
- Could potentially accommodate equestrian users

Scores neutral for Environmental Concerns and Safety

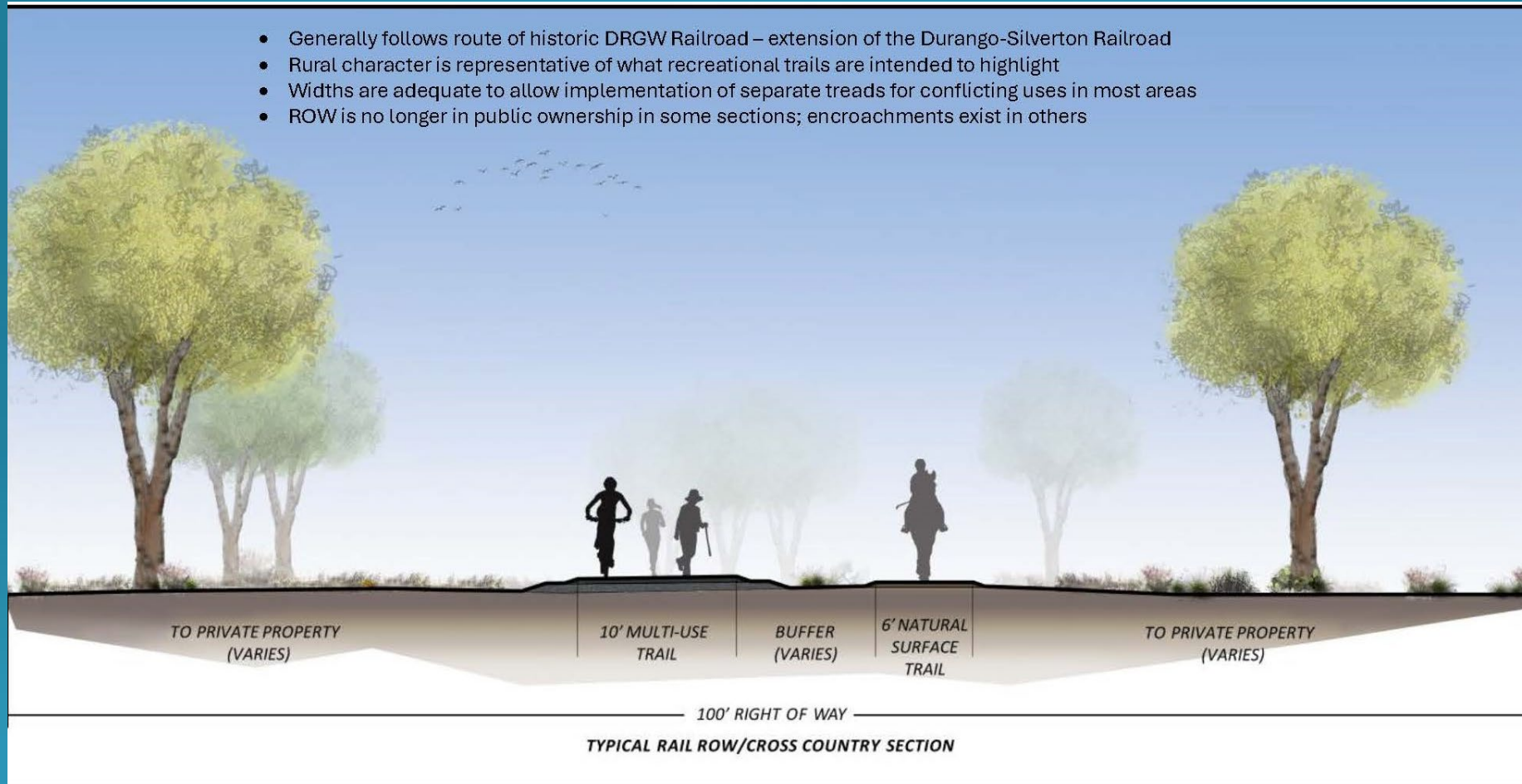
- Historic nature of railroad would require SHPO coordination and investigation
- Potential conflicts in residential areas

Scores neutral/poor for Ease of Implementation

- As previously noted, approximately 2-miles of route is no longer in public ownership

Railroad Route Rendering

- Generally follows route of historic DRGW Railroad – extension of the Durango-Silverton Railroad
- Rural character is representative of what recreational trails are intended to highlight
- Widths are adequate to allow implementation of separate treads for conflicting uses in most areas
- ROW is no longer in public ownership in some sections; encroachments exist in others





Public Involvement

- A public information meeting at the San Juan County fire station in Flora Vista on May 9, 2024, had 49 attendees sign the roster
- Public comments on the project were received through June 1, 2024, and a total of 39 comments were received
- Comments received ranged from strong support to strong opposition of the project
 - Those opposed to the project cited concerns regarding safety, property infringement, vagrancy, cleanliness, and maintenance
 - Those supportive of the project cited the benefits of outdoor recreation, history, culture, physical and mental wellness, and tourism/economic development for the region
- All public comments as they were received are included as Appendix F in the final Alternatives Evaluation



Funding

Federal and State Funding Programs Specific to Recreation and Alternative Transportation Project Development

- Federal
 - Recreational Trails Program (RTP)
 - Transportation Alternative Program (TAP)
 - Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ)
 - Safe Streets for All (SS4A)
- State
 - NMEDD ORD Trails+



Conclusions

- No single best alternative
- A combined or hybrid approach to complete a connection through the study area would utilize portions of each alternative driven by the practicality of implementation considering physical, social, and logistical constraints
- If implemented, project would likely proceed in phases between logical termini within the corridor
- No construction funding for implementation of the project currently exists
 - The San Juan County Commission would have discretion over future funding applications for the programs previously noted as would the cities of Aztec and Farmington