

Archeological Impacts Technical Memorandum

I-25 Improvements Through the Colorado Springs Urbanized Area Project

CDOT Project No. IM 0252-316

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Colorado Department of Transportation

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1.0 Project Description (Proposed Action)

The Proposed Action would widen Interstate 25 (I-25) from South Academy Boulevard (Exit 135) to State Highway 105 (Exit 161, Monument), a distance of approximately 26 miles. Within these limits, a six-lane cross-section (three through-lanes in each direction) would be built south of the U.S. Highway 24 Bypass to South Academy and north of Briargate to SH 105. Additionally, for the 12-mile central portion from the US 24 Bypass (Exit 139) to Briargate Parkway (Exit 151), the Proposed Action consists of an eight-lane cross section (four through-lanes in each direction).

In the eight-lane cross-section, the inside (left-most) lane in each direction would be open to general traffic during off-peak hours; during morning and evening peak hours, this lane would be reserved for use by carpools and buses only. To accommodate this flexible use, the high-occupancy-vehicle (HOV) lane would not be barrier-separated from the general-purpose lanes, but would be demarcated by appropriate signage and striping.

The non-barrier HOV treatment also allows for decommissioning of the lanes back to general-purpose operation in the event that the lanes do not result in adequate peak-period usage to justify HOV operations. This will depend in part upon public willingness to fund expanded transit operations that would use the HOV lanes. The HOV lanes are projected to be marginally successful without transit system expansion, but could become solidly successful if used by buses on hypothetical future routes (currently unfunded). Express bus service between Colorado Springs and Monument began in 2002 as a 3-year “demonstration project.”

In conjunction with the additional laneage, the Proposed Action includes interchange reconstruction at several locations. These include major reconstruction of existing interchanges at:

- Exit 141 – Cimarron (U.S. Highway 24)
- Exit 142 – Bijou Street
- Exit 145 – Fillmore
- Exit 147/148 – North Nevada Avenue and Rockrimmon Boulevard (consolidated)
- Exit 156 – North Gate Road, plus freeway-to-freeway ramps for Powers Boulevard
- Exit 158 – Baptist Road

For each of the interchange reconstruction projects, numerous design alternatives were considered and evaluated. These alternatives were presented for review and input at advertised public meetings.

Additionally, minor geometric changes will be made at Exit 146, Garden of the Gods Road. The existing southbound-only ramps at Exit 147 A (Corporate Centre Drive) will be closed, with access via a local street connection to the reconfigured Nevada/Rockrimmon interchange. In conjunction with freeway widening on U.S. Air Force Academy property, the Ackerman Overlook will be relocated to a safer location.

2.0 Existing Conditions

An archeological inventory was performed to identify and assess the significance of historic and prehistoric sites within the project right-of-way (ROW) according to guidelines as established in Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) (as amended), the State Register Act, Article 80.1, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation regulations, and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). A prehistoric site is defined as containing at least five pieces of prehistoric cultural material (stone tools, flakes, bone, shell, etc.) or a feature. Features can consist of hearths, stone circles, or rock alignments. A historic site comprises any structure or debris (at least five pieces) that is at least 45 years old. Isolated finds are four or fewer pieces of prehistoric/historic debris and lack features or structures.

The survey corridor is characterized by a mix of residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, public, and military land uses. The northern and southern portions of the survey corridor consist largely of open fields and prairies with major and minor drainages. The central portion of the survey corridor is encompassed by the City of Colorado Springs, the U.S. Air Force Academy, and Fort Carson Military Reservation.

Twenty-nine previously recorded prehistoric and historic sites were revisited during the 2002 survey. Three new sites and two isolated finds were discovered during the survey, bringing the total number of sites and isolated finds identified in this report to 34. Twenty-one (61.8 percent) of these sites consist of trash dumps, cement foundations, wells, cisterns, and tree alignments. These sites are believed to have once functioned as homes, farms, or commercial areas associated with I-25 or State Highway 85/87 (SH 85/87). One of the 21 sites is a portion of abandoned SH 85/87. Eleven sites, including the two isolated finds, are prehistoric lithic scatters (stone tools and by-products of stone tool manufacture). The two remaining sites have both prehistoric and historic components. The historic components of these sites also include trash dumps and foundations. The prehistoric components consist of small lithic scatters.

All recorded sites are within 250 feet of the existing fenced Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) ROW in rural areas and within 500 feet of the ROW in urban areas. Due to development and construction adjacent to I-25, most of these recorded sites have been damaged, partially destroyed, or significantly altered and, therefore, are not eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

In consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), three of the prehistoric sites have been determined as *potentially* eligible to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), and one prehistoric site was determined eligible for listing on the NRHP. One historic site was previously determined NRHP eligible, an evaluation with which CDOT and the SHPO concur. The remaining 29 sites and isolates are not eligible for inclusion on the NRHP and no further work is required at any of these localities.

3.0 Methodology

Prior to archaeological fieldwork, a file search of state inventory documents was performed at the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society. In the past, a total of 33 cultural resource survey projects have been completed within 3,500 feet of the current project ROW. Sixty-nine sites and 52 isolated finds have been previously recorded within this area. Twenty-nine of these sites lie within the present survey corridor.

The cultural resource survey started at milepost 160.4 near Monument, Colorado and continued south through Colorado Springs to milepost 131.9, a distance of 28.5 miles. Most of the proposed construction will be limited to the existing fenced I-25 ROW, although some areas will be impacted outside of the ROW at interchanges. The surveyed ROW consisted of a 250-foot corridor on either side of the existing I-25 fenced ROW in rural areas. The surveyed ROW expanded to a 500-foot corridor on either side of the I-25 fenced ROW in urban areas. Any site within or straddling the ROW boundaries was recorded or revisited.

The survey method in rural areas consisted of three people walking linear transects approximately 80 feet (24 m) apart beginning at the outside edge of the fenced ROW on either side of I-25. Because most of the urban areas within the survey corridor comprise residential and commercial properties, a typical pedestrian survey as conducted in rural areas was not possible. Urban areas were surveyed by a single person using random transects in undisturbed portions of the ROW. If unrecorded cultural material was identified during the survey, a more intensive examination of the general area was undertaken to determine the exact nature and extent of artifacts. Site and isolated find forms were completed in the field, the boundaries of the cultural resource were plotted on the appropriate USGS 7.5' topographic map, and photographs of the sites and any diagnostic artifacts were obtained.

4.0 Impacts of the No-Action Alternative

Since no construction would occur for this alternative, no impacts to archaeological sites would result. Sites located within CDOT rights-of-way are protected from damage due to maintenance activities.

5.0 Impacts of the Proposed Action

According to concept design plans, only one prehistoric site will be disturbed during construction associated with the Proposed Action, whereas the remaining four eligible and potentially eligible sites will be avoided and therefore not affected. Consequently, no additional research is necessary for these four locales. One prehistoric site cannot be avoided, therefore, in December 2002 the site was subject to a test excavation program to determine eligibility. Testing revealed the presence of intact buried cultural remains, and as a result the site is evaluated as NRHP eligible based upon its ability to yield data.

6.0 Mitigation

The prehistoric site that was tested is important chiefly because of what can be learned through data recovery excavations and has minimal value for preservation in place. Therefore, large-scale, controlled excavations are considered the most beneficial mitigation of adverse effects. Therefore, controlled data recovery will be initiated prior to construction and will serve as mitigation of adverse effects as required under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's regulations (36 CFR 800). Consultation with Native American Tribes will be on-going for the project, and the input of interested tribes regarding this site will be solicited as the undertaking progresses. The SHPO concurred in the determination of eligibility and effects on April 30, 2003.

In the event that buried cultural remains are discovered during construction anywhere in the project corridor, the CDOT Staff Archaeologist will be notified immediately.

7.0 Confidentiality and Non-Disclosure of Data

Information on the locations of archaeological sites are not available to the general public in order to assure protection of these resources. Individual interested in information about these sites must contact the CDOT Staff Archaeologist at 303-757-9525, however, the location and certain information about the sites may not be disclosed.