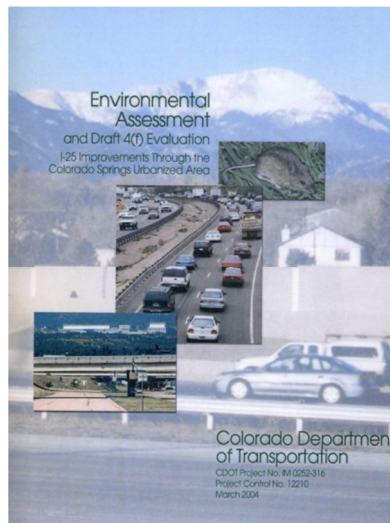




RE-EVALUATION, Mileposts 149 to 161

Interstate 25 Improvements through the Colorado Springs Area Environmental Assessment



LAND USE TECHNICAL MEMO

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CDOT Region 2

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Introduction

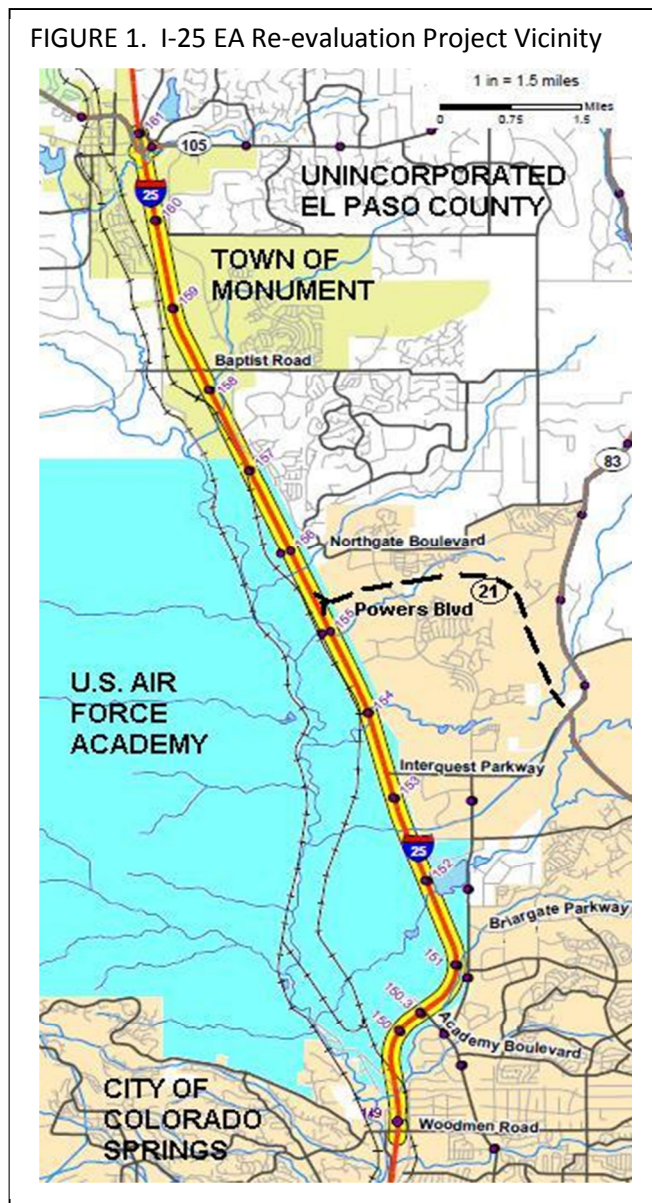
The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) has prepared this technical memorandum to update findings with regards to the land use conditions described in the original 2004 I-25 Environmental Assessment (EA) with regard to the portion of the Proposed Action between Woodmen Road (Exit 149) in Colorado Springs and State Highway 105 in Monument (Exit 161). The purpose of the EA's Proposed Action is to relieve existing traffic congestion and address project future congestion on I-25 within the Colorado Springs Urbanized Area.

The I-25 EA originally evaluated impacts for the widening of I-25 between South Academy Boulevard (Exit 135) and SH 105, together with reconstruction of various I-25 interchanges within this corridor. Page 2-10 of the EA stated that, "Consistent with projected traffic demand in the I-25 corridor, the conceptual phasing for the Proposed Action calls for:

- (1) initially six-laning through central Colorado Springs, then
- (2) six-laning in northern El Paso County, and finally
- (3) adding HOV [High-Occupancy Vehicle] lanes through central Colorado Springs and widening to six lanes south to South Academy Boulevard."

The first of these conceptual phases was undertaken in central Colorado Springs, completed in 2007. The so-called COSMIX project resulted in 12 miles of six-lane freeway, between South Circle Drive (Exit 138) and North Academy Boulevard (Exit 150). It included major reconstruction at several interchanges, notably not including the Cimarron interchange (Exit 141) or the Fillmore Street interchange (Exit 145). Additional funding will be needed to complete Phase 1.

For the year 2012, CDOT has received funding to begin the second phase, meaning to widen I-25 to six lanes in northern El Paso County, within the area shown in Figure 1. The EA calls for eventually widening I-25 all the way to SH105. Total funding for this project is yet to be determined. Currently enough is available to widen I-25 from Woodmen Rd to Interquest (Exit 153). Nevertheless, to be prepared for possible additional funding being available to complete the widening to SH 105 with this project or available in the near future, CDOT's current EA re-evaluation effort is covering all Phase 2



improvements. Therefore, the study area for this re-evaluation extends northward all the way to Monument.

The I-25 EA included a new connection with Powers Boulevard (now State Highway 21), following SH 21 eastward to just past the Powers Boulevard/Voyager Boulevard interchange. The design and analysis of this connection in the I-25 EA superseded what was proposed earlier in the North Powers Boulevard EA that was approved in 1999. The current EA re-evaluation also includes this portion of Powers Boulevard from I-25 to just east of Voyager Parkway.

Summary of the 2004 EA Land Use Resources, Impacts, and Mitigation

The 2004 EA indicated that the Proposed Action would have minimal adverse impacts in terms of acquisition of homes and businesses. Since land uses around the freeway have largely developed since I-25 opened in 1960, adjacent land uses are compatible with the freeway due to sufficient setbacks. Widening I-25 would reinforce existing and planned land uses, rather than changing them.

On March 21, 2001 the City of Colorado Springs adopted the current Comprehensive Plan by ordinance and devoted an entire Article to the plan in the City Code. This plan was developed to guide the growth of the city over a twenty year period and has been designated as the official planning document of the City for all land development decisions. The Comprehensive Plan is an evolving document that incorporates Citywide Plans, Land Use Master Plans, Facility Master Plans, City Facility Plans and Studies and Utility Plan Studies. As new master plans are developed and approved they become part of the Comprehensive Plan. Land use types identified for the City of Colorado Springs in the Comprehensive Plan are: residential (low, medium and high density and private common residential); commercial, office, and industrial which are combined in a COI category; parks/open space and trails; Institution; Other, which consists of ROW/undetermined and Cemetery/Golf Course; and Vacant. The Comprehensive Plan is in essence the master plan for Colorado Springs. Annual reports track the changes in land use as well as progress or issues related to planning goals. The City of Colorado Springs Comprehensive Plan land use map for 2020 reflected the assumption that I-25 would continue to provide adequate mobility as the region's major north-south roadway.

The widening of I-25 has long been reflected in regional transportation plans approved by the Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments (PPACG), including the 2025 plan that was in effect at the time the EA was completed. The widening project was not only included in regional transportation plans, but was also identified as one of the region's top transportation priorities.

One noteworthy land use along the I-25 corridor in northern El Paso County is riparian area, which provides habitat for the threatened Preble's meadow jumping mouse. This animal was listed as a threatened species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1998. Because Preble's mouse habitat is protected by Federal law (Endangered Species Act), some undeveloped areas with Preble's mouse habitat near I-25 in northern El Paso County cannot be developed. Additionally, these protected areas affect the design of I-25 in the vicinity of creek crossings. For example, the unusual design of the I-25 interchange at State Highway 105 in Monument, reconstructed in 2004, is due to the presence of the threatened mouse in Dirty Woman Creek at that location.

CDOT not only avoids impacts to mouse habitat in the I-25 corridor, but also has undertaken efforts to maintain or restore such habitat. In the southeast quadrant of the Baptist Road interchange, CDOT purchased a 65-acre conservation area between the newly constructed

Struthers Road and I-25 in 2002. This land will be maintained in perpetuity as mitigation for the threatened Preble's meadow jumping mouse and includes wetland mitigation for impacts associated with the 2004 EA Proposed Action.

Another specialized land use along the I-25 corridor is an airfield on United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) property just north of Briargate Parkway and west of I-25. The need to maintain clear zones near USAFA's east-west runway results in constraints on the types of vertical fixed structures (signs, bridges, utility structures) that can be used on I-25 in this vicinity. For details about this clear zone, please see Appendix 1. USAFA also seeks to minimize any open water (e.g., water quality ponds) near the airfield to reduce the potential for bird-aircraft strike hazards. Land use within the USAFA consists of the Cadet Area, including academic, athletic, and housing facilities, parade grounds, an observatory, as well as religious and administrative facilities associated with the Academy. Other land uses within the property consist of administrative buildings, guest housing, Officers Club, residential developments, a public high school, hospital, commissary, base exchange, gas stations, a prep school, and Visitors Center.

The New Santa Fe Trail, a recreational multi-use trail built on the alignment of the historic railroad bed, passes through the Academy property and is an important north south regional trail. This trail and areas along the trail like Ice Lake are open to the public for recreational uses. Monument Creek also passes through the Academy property and its tributaries cross beneath I-25 to join Monument Creek. These creeks and floodplain areas are designated habitat for the threatened Preble's meadow jumping mouse.

Changes to the Project that Would Affect the Resource Differently

CDOT has not proposed to change the project in any way that would affect ROW differently from what was described in the EA. Since the EA was approved in 2004, the Baptist Road interchange was reconstructed (I-25 Exit 158), and the COSMIX project widened I-25 from South Circle Drive (Exit 138) to North Academy Boulevard (Exit 150).

Changes in Resources, Analysis Data, Analysis Methods or Applicable Regulations

There have been no new changes in regulations or legislation relating to land use evaluations that would require new methods of impact analysis at this time.

In 2004, the City of Colorado Springs encompassed 121,157 acres. In 2010 the City has grown to an area of about 124,800 acres, an increase of 3,643 acres. To illustrate the trends of development within the City, the annual reports prepared as a requirement of the Comprehensive Plan were reviewed. The 2004-2005 annual report and the latest report for 2007-2008 show that vacant land continues to be the single largest land use category in the City: 46,029 acres in 2004 or about 38% compared to 41,478 acres in 2008 or about 33% (it should be noted that Banning-Lewis Ranch at 23,000 acres accounts for roughly half of the vacant acreage within the City). Residential uses accounted for 24% in 2004 and 25% in 2008. Commercial, office and industrial accounted for 7% in 2004 and 8% in 2008. Parks/Trails/Open Space accounted for 8% in 2004 and 9% in 2008. Institution accounted for 8% in 2004 and 9% in 2008. Other land uses (ROW/undetermined and Cemetery/Golf Course) accounted for 15% in 2004 and 16% in 2008. Within the City portion of this re-evaluation area, development has occurred primarily east of I-25 north of Interquest Parkway (Exit 153).

Within the re-evaluation area, land north of the North Gate /I-25 interchange continuing north to SH 105 lies within the Town of Monument and El Paso County's planning purview. Similar to the City of Colorado Springs Comprehensive Plan, El Paso County has a Master Plan for development within the county that is comprised of many smaller plans and Parks and Leisure Services Master Plan, and Mineral Extraction Master Plan. Within the re-evaluation area the land use is covered in the Tri-Lakes Comprehensive Plan (adopted on October 19, 1999) for unincorporated areas of the county and the Town of Monument's Comprehensive Plan (adopted in 1984). Both El Paso County and the Town of Monuments planning documents continue to evolve as new plans are proposed and approved.

Within the re-evaluation area, ongoing development continues to increase nearby population and employment. The City of Colorado Springs Comprehensive Plan includes a 2020 Land Use Plan that continues to guide development within the City. The City has updated its 2020 Land Use map as recently as 2011. Based on this planned land use, PPACG has developed the 2035 Moving Forward Update Regional Transportation Plan. This plan, which supersedes the 2025 plan, also calls for the widening of I-25, in accordance with the Proposed Action in the EA.

Additionally, the Town of Monument in early 2012 amended its land use plan for the I-25 Gateway Corridor, which comprises the northern portion of the study area for this re-evaluation. The land use identified for areas along the I-25 corridor are a mix of Business Park, Gateway Commercial and Community Commercial. No parks or recreation areas are planned. Open space areas are shown along several small drainages. This new land use plan focuses on quality development that would protect the scenic qualities of the area and would be more consistent with the topography.

With the emphasis on quality development along the I-25 corridor, two land use designations were modified. Regional Commercial was redefined at Gateway Commercial Center to clarify the major commercial developments serving as gateways to Monument and the Tri-Lakes Area to have high quality architecture, enhanced landscaping with wide buffers along the freeway and parking areas screened with landscape islands. Small Office/Warehousing was renamed Gateway Small Office/Business. The emphasis for this category is to encourage small businesses that are of high quality consistent with the site conditions and to avoid warehousing and other uses that may have outdoor storage.

Previously designed mixed use areas east of I-25 at Jackson Creek Parkway are now recommended for Gateway Commercial. Areas around the Baptist Road interchange are also recommended for Gateway Commercial where previous designations had been planned as Industrial and Business Park. All other areas adjacent to I-25 between these two interchanges are now recommended Business Park from mixed use and open space. The plan amendment, geared toward providing I-25 motorists with a favorable aesthetic impression of the town, will be beneficial for the aesthetic character of the highway corridor.

Recent Development in Northern El Paso County

Since 2004, there has been no major commercial or residential construction on USAFA property along I-25, but a 30-acre array of solar panels was constructed by USAFA in 2011 near North Academy Boulevard (I-25 Exit 150). Figure 2 depicts developments discussed in this tech memo.

However, residential and commercial development has continued to expand on areas east of USAFA from Woodmen Road to Monument. Some former residential properties east of I-25 and north of Woodmen Road have been converted to commercial uses.

FIGURE 2. Recent and Planned Land Use Changes along the I-25 Corridor in Northern El Paso County



Since 2004, undeveloped parcels have been converted to commercial and office uses around Interquest and Voyager Parkway, with two large proposed developments, Interquest Marketplace (135 acres) and Colorado Crossing (153 acres). These developments are regional retail and commercial centers with residential also included as part of Colorado Crossing. To date, the proposed development is ongoing within Interquest Marketplace with the hotel and convention center construction continuing. Two restaurants and a 14-screen movie theater

have been completed with the construction of the bowling alley/laser tag facility to be completed in the spring of 2012. However, construction within Colorado Crossing has not been on hold for several years due to financial difficulties.

Farther north, near Middle Creek Parkway, development of a regional data center for Progressive Insurance has converted approximately 70 acres to commercial use. Two private schools, The Classical Academy and Community Bible Study, have developed about 25 acres. Along Voyager Parkway between Middle Creek Parkway and North Gate, FedEx has expanded its use by about 13 acres with the addition of warehouses and distribution facilities in 2009. Residential growth has continued to expand with numerous residential subdivisions such as Northgate Highlands, Greyhawk at Northgate, Trail Ridge, Talon Hill, and Northgate Village.

Since 2004, the majority of the development north of North Gate to SH 105 has occurred on the east side of I-25 with the construction of Jackson Creek Crossing, a two-acre shopping center at Jackson Creek Parkway and Baptist Road; Jackson Creek Commerce Center including Walgreens, a bank, McDonalds and a hotel located south of Jackson Creek Crossing, also totaling about 2 acres; and the 88-acre Monument Marketplace located farther north on Jackson Creek Parkway near Leather Chaps Drive. Monument Marketplace is anchored by a Walmart Super Center, Home Depot, and Kohl's. Farther north along Jackson Creek Parkway is the 12-acre Tri-Lakes Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) facility. Residential growth has continued to expand with the development of subdivisions like Ridge Pointe, Paradise Villas, and Summer Glen Estates and the continued development around Gleneagle.

The Tri-Lakes YMCA includes a new outdoor soccer field approximately 200 feet east of I-25 and 0.9 mile south of SH105 (Exit 161), established in 2007-2008. This field is well within the typical 500-foot noise impact contour for the existing, busy I-25 freeway that is planned for future widening. The marginal compatibility of this land use may diminish in the future with implementation of the I-25 Proposed Action because traffic volumes and traffic noise would increase. Because this facility was developed after the 2004 EA and FONSI for I-25 were approved in 2004, CDOT is not responsible for providing noise mitigation for this soccer field.

Future Development

Continued development is expected to occur on vacant land along the north I-25 corridor in accordance with adopted regional and local plans. In addition, the following specific projects have been identified.

USAFA staff have indicated that plans are under development to construct a new Visitors' Center somewhere in the vicinity of Northgate Boulevard, I-25's Exit 156. If this facility is built north and west of the interchange, than an existing New Santa Fe Trail trailhead and parking area would have to be relocated to the south side of North Gate Boulevard to accommodate this new facility. These uses are both on USAFA property, outside of CDOT's easement.

USAFA staff also report that a new National Guard Readiness Center (armory) will be constructed on USAFA property east of I-25, north of Briargate Parkway, with access off of Voyager Parkway.

PPACG's Regional Transportation Plans calls for a park-and-ride lot near I-25 and North Gate Boulevard. This civilian facility east of I-25 would not be on CDOT's easement, nor on USAFA property. The project is not included for funding in the region's current Transportation Improvement Plan, so is not anticipated to be built in the near future.

A major mixed-use development called Copper Ridge is planned in the area surrounding the planned Powers Blvd/Voyager Parkway interchange. The developer of this property has entered into agreements with CDOT and the City of Colorado Springs to help fund and expedite the completion of the North Powers Blvd connection from I-25 to the current Powers Blvd (SH 21) northern terminus at State Highway 83. Intense land use at Copper Ridge does not represent a change from previous land use expectations at this location, but is a major development that will contribute to future traffic demand on I-25. In 2011, the City of Colorado Springs used its Urban Blight Ordinance to give preferential tax treatment to this development (skeptics asked: why is vacant, undeveloped land considered urban blight?), as a means of expediting construction of this Powers Boulevard connection. The developer announced in early 2012 that a large Bass Pro Shop (outdoor outfitter) store will be an anchor in the commercial center.

Regional Growth Pattern

In 2011, 18,000 acres within the 24,000-acre Banning-Lewis Ranch in easternmost Colorado Springs was purchased for oil exploration. This area was annexed in 1984 by the City of Colorado Springs, and has long been planned as the city's primary residential growth area for the future. There are many legal issues (e.g., environmental rules regarding "fracking") that must be negotiated before natural gas exploration could take place. No timeline has been established for when the work could occur. This major change in regional land use may have the consequence that future residential growth must occur elsewhere (not in eastern Colorado Springs), which may result in faster development of remaining undeveloped land near I-25. An increased pace of development along I-25 could cause expected future I-25 congestion to develop earlier, thus increasing public pressure to complete the I-25 Proposed Action.

Changes in Proposed Mitigation

The 2004 EA did not identify any mitigation measures as the Proposed Action was found to be consistent with the existing land use plans and the *PPACG Destination 2025 Regional Long Range Transportation Plan*.

Conclusion

The Proposed Action continues to be completely compatible with adopted local and regional land use and transportation plans. Implementation of the Proposed Action may become more important and more urgent now that the 18,000-acre planned residential growth area in eastern Colorado Springs has been purchased for energy exploration and extraction.

The key findings of this technical memorandum are summarized in a table which follows.

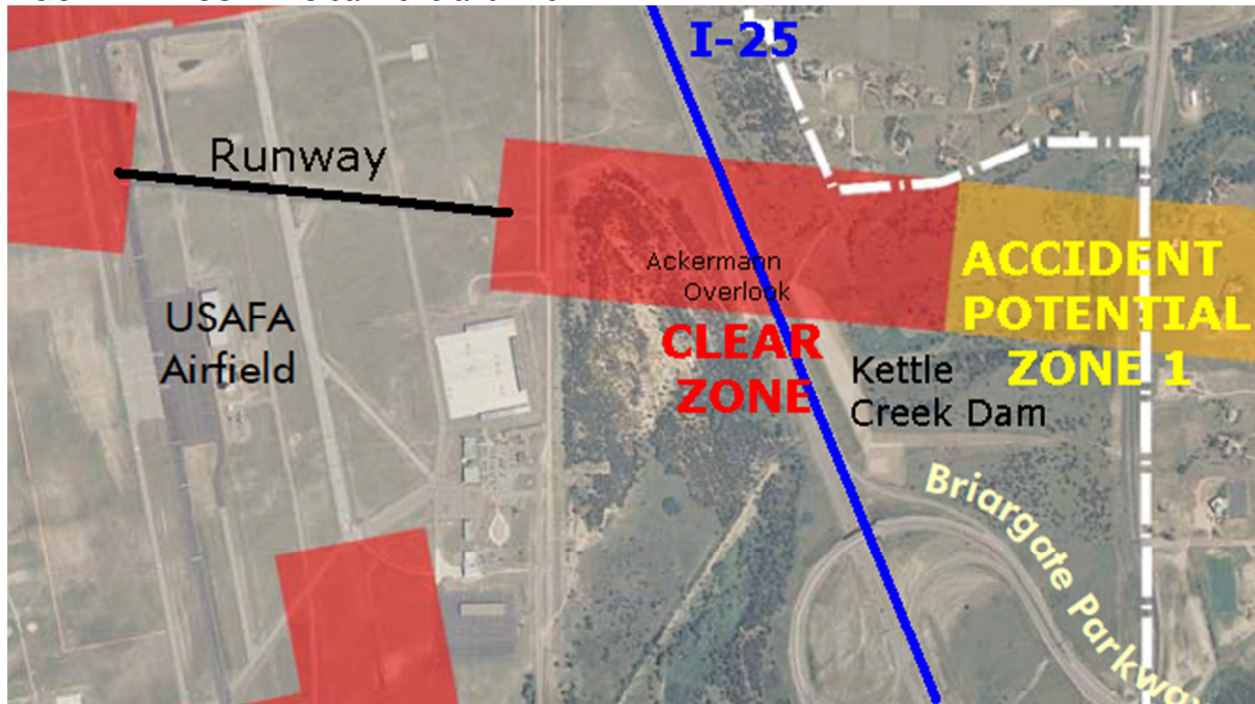
TABLE 1. Summary of Previously and Currently Identified Land Use Impacts and Mitigation

EA 2004 – No-Action Alternative	EA 2004 – Impacts of Proposed Action	EA 2004 – Mitigation	2012 – What Has Changed	Re- evaluation 2012 – No Action Alternative	Re- evaluation 2012 – Impacts of Proposed Action	Re- evaluation 2012 – Mitigation
<p>PPACG’s <i>Destination 2025 Regional Long Range Transportation Plan</i> and the City of Colorado Springs <i>Comprehensive Plan</i> assume capacity improvements on I-25 through Colorado Springs.</p> <p>Not making these improvements would be inconsistent with regional and local plans, which were developed with extensive public involvement.</p>	<p>The Proposed Action would be compatible with existing and planned land uses.</p> <p>The Proposed Action would be consistent with the PPACG <i>Destination 2025 Regional Long Range Transportation Plan</i> and local land use plans.</p>	<p>No mitigation is necessary.</p>	<p>PPACG has the <i>2035 Moving Forward Update Regional Transportation Plan</i> that has superseded the <i>Destination 2025</i> plan. The new plan also calls for I-25 widening.</p> <p>Development continues to convert vacant land to residential or commercial uses. Based on review of larger commercial developments, it is estimated that over 100 acres of vacant land has been converted to commercial uses since 2004. It is estimated that over 100 acres of vacant land has been converted to residential lands use since 2004.</p> <p>The Town of Monument has a new Land Use plan calling for aesthetically appropriate Gateway development along I-25.</p> <p>On its land, USAFA has constructed a solar panel array near Exit 150. USAFA anticipates a National Guard Armory at Exit 153 and a new Visitors’ Center at Exit 156.</p> <p>Additionally, a Northgate Park-and-Ride Lot is proposed near Exit 156, east of I-25, on private property.</p>	<p>Not making the remaining, planned I-25 Improvements would be inconsistent with adopted regional and local plans. This would not support commercial land use zoning planned near Exit 156 and within the Town of Monument.</p>	<p>The Proposed Action remains consistent and compatible with existing and planned land uses.</p> <p>The Proposed Action is included in and compatible with the PPACG <i>2035 Moving Forward Update Regional Transportation Plan</i> and local transportation use plans.</p> <p>Conversion of vacant grassland to highway use will also include water quality mitigation features and possibly wetland mitigation within CDOT right-of-way.</p>	<p>No mitigation is necessary.</p>

APPENDIX 1 USAFA Airfield Clear Zone Information

Figure A-1 shows the clear zone associated with USAFA's east-west runway, and its location with respect to Interstate 25.

FIGURE A-1. USAFA Clear Zone and I-25



The USAFA has a Class A runway with a Clear Zone 500 feet to each side of the centerline and a 1,000-foot-wide corridor extending from the runway threshold along the extended runway centerline for a distance of 3,000 feet. Three zones were established based on crash patterns: the Clear Zone, Accident Potential Zone I, and Accident Potential Zone II.

The Clear Zone starts at the end of the runway and extends outward 3,000 feet. The Clear Zone has the highest accident potential of the three zones. The USAF has adopted a policy of acquiring property rights to areas designated as Clear Zones because of the high accident potential. In general, the USAF (or others under an USAF permit) must not plan, locate, or construct a new use or facility within the boundaries of the Clear Zone.

Rights-of-way for communications and utilities are an allowed use, provided that all facilities are at grade level or underground. For Class A runways, such as the existing USAFA runways, Accident Potential Zone I extends from the Clear Zone an additional 2,500 feet. Accident Potential Zone I includes an area of reduced accident potential. Accident Potential Zone II extends from Accident Potential Zone I an additional 2,500 feet in an area of further reduced accident potential. The required width for all zones is 1,000 feet for a Class A runway.

Source: Colorado National Guard, 2011. *Environmental Assessment, Proposed Readiness Center for the 1/157th Infantry Battalion, Colorado Springs, Colorado*