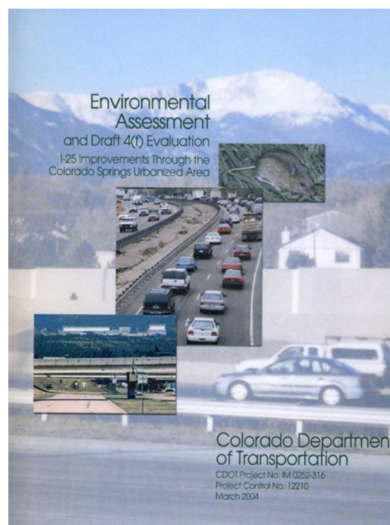




RE-EVALUATION, Mileposts 149 to 161

Interstate 25 Improvements through the Colorado Springs Area Environmental Assessment



SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS TECHNICAL MEMO February 2012

Prepared for:
CDOT Region 2

Prepared by:
Judy DeHaven, telephone (719) 520-5800

Introduction

The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) has prepared this technical memorandum to update findings with regards to the socioeconomic 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.

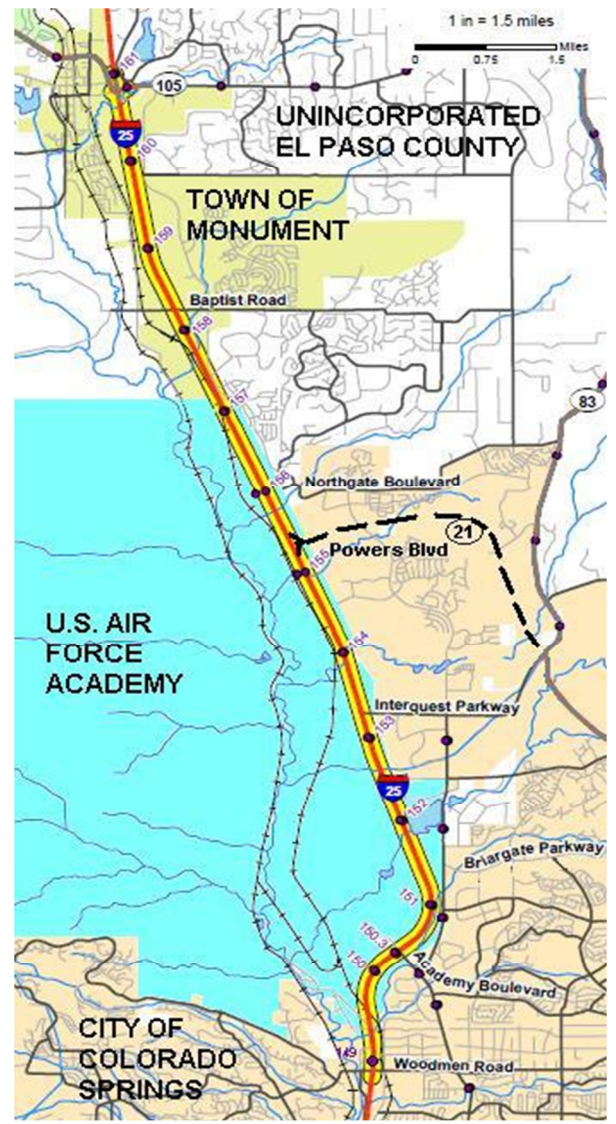
The I-25 EA originally evaluated impacts for the widening of I-25 between South Academy Boulevard (Exit 135) and SH 105, together with reconstruction of various I-25 interchanges within this corridor. Page 2-10 of the EA stated that, "Consistent with projected traffic demand in the I-25 corridor, the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

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. The EA calls for eventually widening I-25 all the way to SH105. The 2012 project will begin north of Woodmen Road (Exit 149) and may be able to widen I-25 to the North Gate Interchange (Exit 156) or slightly beyond, perhaps to Black Squirrel Creek. Nevertheless, to be prepared for possible additional funding availability 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. See Figure 1.

The I-25 EA included a new connection with Powers Boulevard (now State Highway 21), following SH21 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.

Figure 1. I-25 EA Re-evaluation Project Vicinity



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 Socio-Economic Resources, Impact, and Mitigation

The socioeconomic and Environmental Justice analyses in the 2004 EA were based on 2000 Census data, the Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments (PPACG) Destination 2025 Regional Long Range Transportation Plan, other PPACG statistical information regarding military employment and housing availability, and information obtained from meetings with local agencies and the public. The I-25 EA also addressed possible disruptions to local bus service of importance to low-income populations, but there is no local bus service in northern El Paso County.

Population: The 2004 EA found that the year 2000 population in El Paso County to be approximately 517,000 and projected the population would increase by more than 200,000 residents by the year 2025, to 718,800, an increase of about 40 percent. The projected population for the year 2010 was 604,000.

Employment: Employment in the region was estimated at 263,000 jobs in 2002 and was also predicted to grow 40 percent by 2025. The region's unemployment rate for the year 2000 was reported as 4.7 percent. The EA did not contain forecasts of future unemployment rates.

Income: Median household income within the El Paso County was \$46,800 in 1999 as compared to the \$47,200 median household income for the state. El Paso County was found to have 8 percent of the population living below the poverty level (\$17,603 for a family of four), which is lower than the statewide poverty level of 9.3 percent. Low income populations within the project corridor were concentrated to the east of I-25 from South Circle Drive (Exit 138) northward to Uintah Street (exit 143), including downtown Colorado Springs, south of I-25 in a triangular area also bounded by South Nevada Avenue and Lake Avenue (i.e. South of downtown), and west of I-25 from US24 to Uintah (i.e. immediately west of downtown).

The 2004 EA and its appendices did not include data on sales tax revenues.

Minority Populations: According to the 2000 Census, minority populations (i.e. non-white and Hispanic populations) within El Paso County represented 18.8 percent of the total population. This was slightly higher than the statewide percentage of 17.2 percent. Within the 2004 EA project area, the areas with the highest minority concentration (census blocks with more than 20 percent minority) were found near Fillmore Street (I-25 Exit 145) and south of South Nevada Avenue (I-25 Exit 140).

Changes to the Project that Would Affect the Resource Differently

CDOT has not proposed to change the project in any way that would affect the socio economic conditions 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

PPACG has developed the 2035 Moving Forward Update Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and the 2010 Census has been conducted since the completion of the 2004 EA. The RTP was adopted by PPACG's Board of Directors on January 11, 2012.

In preparing the RTP Update, PPACG worked with the Colorado State demographer to develop population and employment control totals for El Paso County. PPACG also used information from the 2010 census when available. The region's current Small Area Forecast for 2010 to 2035 was approved for use in RTP development by the PPACG Board in September 2011.

Because information has not been released on a census block level for income and minority populations, the American Community Survey 2005-2009 (ACS) was utilized to characterize minority and low-income populations within the County. ACS regularly gathers information that was previously found in the long form of the decennial census. Other than the decennial census, the ACS is the largest survey that the Census Bureau administers.

There is always a time lag involved in developing socioeconomic data available for projecting future growth. For example, detailed data from the Decennial Census taken in April 2010 are generally not available until two to three years after the Census date. Most data currently available do not reflect the full brunt of the national recession on the national economy. Also, the number of troops assigned to Fort Carson, the region's single largest employer, has fluctuated in response to ongoing military base realignment plans and the ebbs and flows of overseas deployment. These are just a few of the areas of uncertainty that complicate socioeconomic forecasting. While regional transportation plans and project-specific analyses are required to be based on the latest regional planning assumptions, it should be noted that those numbers are assumptions.

The study area for this I-25 EA re-evaluation focuses on a portion of northern El Paso County that includes four governmental jurisdictions. As shown in Figure 2, these are the City of Colorado Springs, the U.S. Air Force Academy (Federal installation), unincorporated El Paso County, and the Town of Monument.

Population: In 2010, the population in El Paso County was 622,263 with the population in 2025 projected to be 795,081. Thus, population growth through 2010 has been about 18,000 greater than was predicted in the 2004 EA. The new projected for 2025 is about 73,000 more residents than previously projected.

PPACG now makes long-range forecasts out to the year 2035. The projected population of El Paso County in 2035 is 919,458. Compared with the 2010 Census population of 622,263, growth between 2010 and 2035 will be nearly 300,000 new residents.

Employment: The employment in the region is predicted to be approximately 450,000 by 2025 and 575,000 by 2035. The PPACG 2025 plan previously projected 2025 employment to be 326,200 jobs, so again the new forecasts are well above the numbers assumed in the 2004 EA.

Income: Median household income within the El Paso County between 2006 and 2010 was \$56,268, as compared to the \$56,456 median household income for the state over the same time period. The corresponding number for the City of Colorado Springs was \$53,074. El Paso County was found to have 10.6 percent of the population living below the poverty level (\$17,603 for a family of four), which is slightly lower than the statewide poverty level of 12.2 percent. For the City of Colorado Springs, the figure was 11.8%. Low income populations within the project

Figure 2. Governmental Jurisdictions within the I-25 EA Re-evaluation Study Area



corridor were found predominantly in the central portion of the city and further south. One low income population was identified close to the current project area, east of I-25 and south of Woodmen Road.

Northern El Paso County is a newly developing area that is generally considered to be comparatively affluent. A map presented to the PPACG Board of Directors in September 2011 (“Socio-economic Data 2035 Long-range Transportation Plan, Household Income 2035”) visually demonstrated this comparative affluence as the transportation analysis zones in northern El Paso County show a high density of high-income (\$100,000 or more per annum) households and fewer low-income (zero to \$20,000) households than the rest of the Pikes Peak Region. There is no fixed-route local transit service available in northern El Paso County.

Minority Populations: According to the ACS, non-white persons in the County total 20.2 percent of the population, which is slightly higher than the statewide average of 18.7 percent. In Colorado Springs, the figure is 21.2%. Persons identifying themselves as Hispanic account for 15.1 percent of El Paso County residents, which is lower than the statewide percentage of 20.7 percent. In Colorado Springs, the figure is 16.1%. Regionally, the areas with the highest minority concentration were found south of US 24 between I-25 and Marksheffel Road. These

areas are eight to 16 miles south by southeast from the southern project limit for the 2012 proposed I-25 widening.

One minority population was identified close the project area east of I-25, near the south entrance to the USAFA. This consists of apartment buildings in the vicinity of Woodmen Road and North Academy Boulevard. This area is about one mile away from the southern project limits for proposed 2012 widening. It is the same location as the low-income area mentioned above.

Changes in Proposed Mitigation

No business or residential relocations would be required for the Proposed Action between Woodmen Road and State Highway 105 in Monument. Improved mobility on I-25 will benefit all motorists, regardless of their race, ethnicity or income. No change to the mitigation proposed in the 2004 EA is anticipated.

Conclusion

The latest PPACG socio-economic forecasts indicate that regional growth is occurring and will continue to occur at rates higher than were anticipated in the 2004 I-25 EA, based on higher population and higher forecasted employment levels. This may result in faster-growing traffic demand, accelerating the anticipated need for relief of traffic congestion on I-25 in northern El Paso County.

While detailed block group data are not yet available from the 2010 Census, recent ACS data and PPACG forecasts suggest that the No-Action Alternative and the Proposed Action would not have a disproportionate adverse effect to low-income or minority populations. Based on available data, there are very few areas of low-income or minority populations in northern El Paso County, so any “cut-through” traffic using Voyager Parkway, Jackson Creek Parkway or Struthers Road to avoid congestion on I-25 would not be imposing traffic-related impacts on low-income or minority populations.

Summary of Previously and Currently Identified Socio-economic 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	Re-evaluation 2012 – Impacts of Proposed Action	Re-evaluation 2012 – Mitigation
<p><u>Socioeconomics</u> Congestion and delays currently experienced would increase further and for longer periods. Tourism visits to the region could decline causing a reduction in tourist revenues.</p>	<p>Project construction would have positive, short term impacts on the local economy but not long-term impacts on regional income levels.</p> <p>Reducing congestion on I-25 could improve the movement of goods and services through the community. Supports growth in north El Paso County and is consistent with planned zoning and land use.</p>	<p>No mitigation necessary.</p>	<p>The COSMIX project widened I-25 in the area where congestion was worst.</p> <p>With continued growth and development in northern El Paso County, the I-25 section north of the COSMIX project now has become the traffic bottleneck. (I-25 mobility is critical to the economy of the Pikes Peak Region.)</p>	<p>The No-Action Alternative would not relieve the congestion north of the completed COSMIX improvements, so delays would be experienced for longer periods of time. These delays would impact movement of people, goods, impacting opportunities for economic growth.</p>	<p>The addition of the two additional travel lanes proposed under the design-build project would ease current and future I-25 congestion, benefitting all highway users. The Proposed Action supports growth in northern El Paso County and is consistent with planned zoning and land use.</p>	<p>No mitigation is necessary.</p>

[Table continues on next page for Environmental Justice.]

Summary of Previously and Currently Identified Socio-economic 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	Re-evaluation 2012 – Impacts of Proposed Action	Re-evaluation 2012 – Mitigation
<p><u>Environmental Justice</u> Congestion on I-25 could result in increased cut-through traffic through minority and/or low income neighborhood. This could cause an increase in safety, noise and air quality issues.</p>	<p>The 26 mile project would require the relocation of 5 households (one minority owned) and 16 businesses (including three businesses owned or operated by minorities). None of these impacts are in northern El Paso County. No disproportionate and adverse effects to minority or low income populations.</p>	<p>Since there would be no disproportionate impacts to minority or low-income populations, special mitigation actions focused toward these populations is not needed.</p>	<p>The proposed 2012 widening is in northern El Paso County, where there are few alternative routes. This is a relatively newly-developed area with minimal low income or minority populations. No residential or business acquisitions are required.</p>	<p>The No Action Alternative would not relieve the congestion north of the COSMIX improvements. Congestion could result in increased cut-through traffic on parallel routes.</p> <p>No disproportionate and adverse effects to minority or low income populations.</p>	<p>The addition of two additional travel lanes proposed under the design-build project would ease current congestion on I-25 between Woodmen Road and Interquest Parkway. This improvement could result in less cut through traffic on parallel routes (e.g., Voyager Parkway).</p> <p>No disproportionate and adverse effects to minority or low income populations.</p>	<p>No mitigation is necessary.</p>
	<p>Proposed Action may require temporary detours and relocation of bus routes and stops during construction. This could affect low-income transit riders.</p>	<p>Transit service will be maintained and bus stops will be modified as needed. Any temporary alterations will be signed in advance.</p>	<p>The COSMIX project mostly completed central I-25 widening near low income or minority areas. There is local no bus service in northern El Paso County.</p>	<p>The No Action Alternative would not affect transit operations.</p>	<p>The proposed widening on I-25 would not affect local transit operations. It could improve timeliness of intercity FREX (Front Range Express) commuter bus service.</p>	<p>No mitigation is necessary.</p>