

Supplement to the Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat Baseline Conditions Report (SAIC, 2006)

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1.0 Introduction

The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) is conducting an Environmental Assessment (EA) for changes to a 4-mile portion of US 24 between Interstate 25 and Manitou Springs. Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) conducted a preliminary site assessment for general wildlife species and their habitat within the US 24 West Project Area (Project) on May 30, 2006. This technical memorandum (TM) updates the existing conditions presented in the 2006 SAIC report and evaluates the potential for impacts as a result of the No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action described below.

2.0 No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative consists of existing transportation facilities and committed transportation projects that would occur regardless of whether the Proposed Action is constructed. The No Action Alternative would not make any improvements to the existing condition beyond those which are already planned and funded. The projects listed below are shown in existing adopted transportation plans and are locally funded projects.

- **8th Street Intersection Improvements.** Lengthens turn lanes and acceleration and deceleration lanes on US 24, and widens 8th Street north and south of US 24.
- **8th Street Bridge Replacement.** Replaces the existing four-lane bridge structure over Fountain Creek at 8th Street.
- **21st Street Roadway Improvements.** Includes the widening of 21st Street south of US 24 to four 12-foot travel lanes with dedicated turn lanes, extended acceleration lane, and curb and gutter. Geometric improvements to the US 24/21st Street intersection will also be constructed.
- **21st Street Bridge Replacement.** Replaces the existing four-lane bridge structure over Fountain Creek.
- **25th Street Bridge Replacement.** Replaces the existing two-lane bridge structure over Fountain Creek at 25th Street.

- **Midland Trail Extension.** Extends Midland Trail between 21st Street and Manitou Avenue to connect with Manitou Springs' Creekside Trail.

Under the No Action Alternative, improvements to intelligent transportation systems (for example, variable message signs) would be implemented as part of the congestion management program. Existing bus routes and service would continue as they are today, and bike and pedestrian facilities would only be extended or improved as local funds and grants allow.

3.0 Proposed Action

The Proposed Action would provide additional capacity on US 24 by building additional travel lanes, two new interchanges, and one new overpass. The Proposed Action includes rebuilding several cross-streets, replaces bridges over Fountain Creek, and includes modifications to Fountain Creek's channel at each bridge crossing. Sidewalks would be built at all intersections and interchanges. The Proposed Action would also accommodate a park and ride facility and two future local access points along the route, which would be built by others. The Proposed Action is illustrated in **Exhibit 1**.

A single point diamond interchange is proposed at the Cimarron Interchange. This interchange design differs from what was originally presented in the *I-25 Improvements through the Colorado Springs Urbanized Area EA* (CDOT, 2004). Since the I-25 EA was approved, new opportunities have been identified to improve existing and future traffic operations, making this improved design now feasible.

US 24 in the project area would be built to have eight through-lanes, four in each direction, east of 8th Street, and six through-lanes, three in each direction, from 8th Street to a point west of 31st Street. New interchanges are proposed at 8th and 21st Streets.

Intersection upgrades are proposed at 26th Street. The intersection of US 24 and 31st Street would be widened, as would the intersection with Colorado Avenue to the north. South of US 24, 31st Street would be rebuilt to align with the highway intersection.

At the west end of the corridor, an overpass would be built to carry US 24 over Ridge Road. Ridge Road would be widened between High Street and Colorado Avenue. The west end of the Proposed Action is approximately 1,800 feet west of the Ridge Road overpass where the overpass connects to the existing highway. Because there is not an existing or future congestion problem between Ridge Road and Manitou Avenue, no changes are proposed west of Ridge Road.

Accommodations would be made for the following features that will be built by others in the future:

- At 15th Street an overpass would be constructed to carry 15th Street over US 24 and Fountain Creek, and connect to the street network of Old Colorado City and Gold Hill Mesa. This overpass would include ramps on the east side to connect to the 8th Street intersection. Between the ramps and Colorado Avenue, 15th Street would be reconstructed to provide pedestrian features such as sidewalks.

EXHIBIT 1
Proposed Action

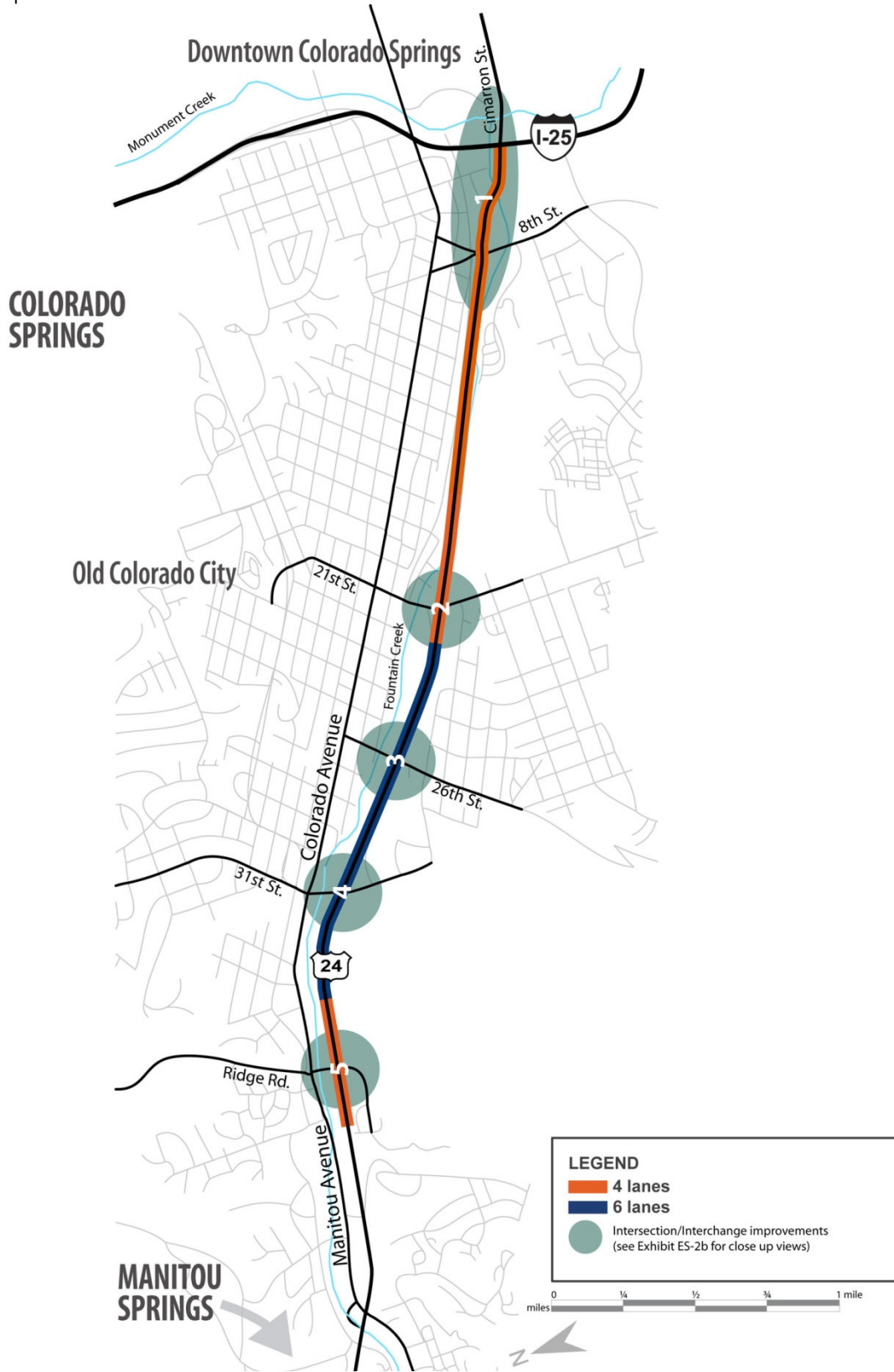
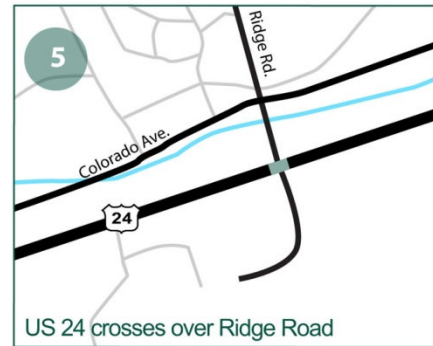
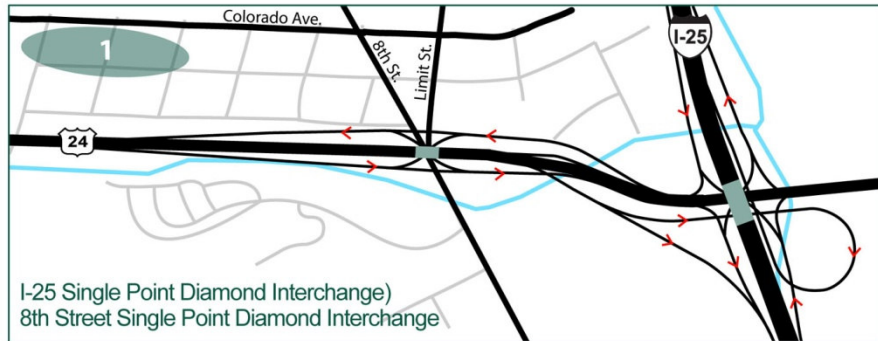
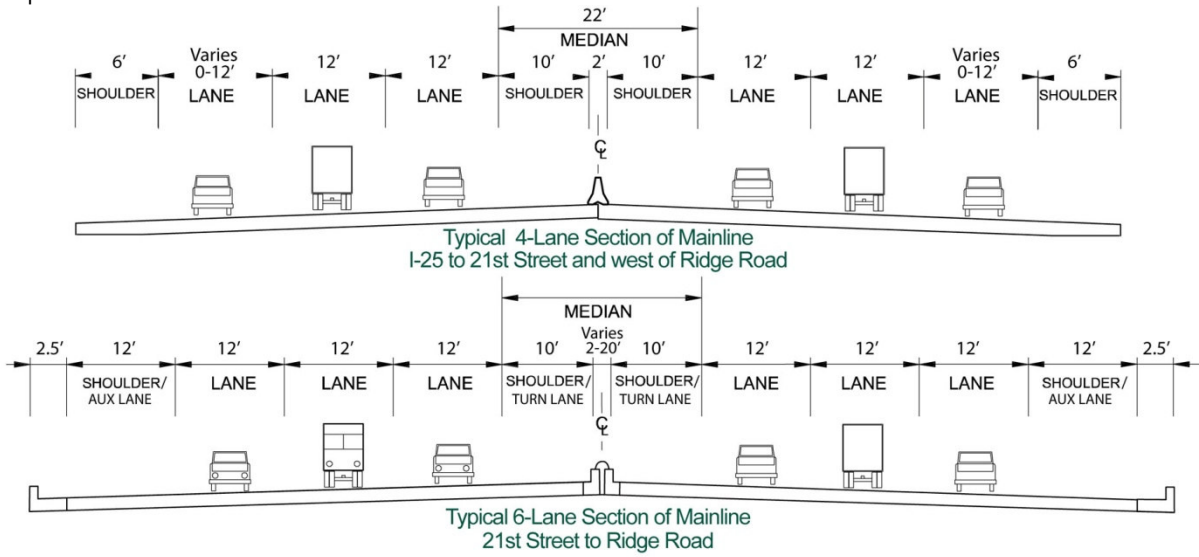


EXHIBIT 2
Proposed Action



- At Ridge Road ramps providing direct access to US 24 would be constructed to convert the overpass to a tight diamond interchange.
- At 31st Street a park and ride facility would be constructed in the northeast quadrant of the intersection, with access from Colorado Avenue.

As described in Chapter 4 of the EA, the Proposed Action also includes various mitigation measures such as the construction of a greenway and the extension of some trails. The Proposed Action is illustrated in **Exhibit 1**.

4.0 Methodology

CH2M HILL biologists conducted a site visit in January 2009 and performed web-based research to determine any new developments or changes regarding species status, populations, or habitat within the Project since release of the previous existing conditions report.

On February 9, 2009, CH2M HILL biologist Bill Knapp coordinated with Casey Cooley of the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) to identify specific items of concern in relation to wildlife species and populations within the Project area. Based on this conversation, CDOW is primarily concerned with current wildlife crossings and migration routes over US 24, primarily in the bottleneck area located between Garden of the Gods and Red Rock Canyon Open Space.

5.0 Results

The primary species of concern as identified by CDOW in this area is mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*); other species that are known to be present to a lesser degree include black bear (*Ursus americanus*), and mountain lion (*Felis concolor*). Approximately 50 percent of mule deer deaths are due to vehicular strikes (CH2M HILL ____). This statistic is based on results from a study done south of the Project along Bear Creek near the Broadmoor in Colorado Springs. The primary concern stated by CDOW in relation to the Project is potential for increased vehicular strikes and disruption of wildlife crossing corridors.

Wildlife movement within the Project area is primarily concentrated around the Red Rock Canyon Open Space, with crossings over US 24 typically occurring from south to north as wildlife follows natural water drainage into Garden of the Gods park. CDOW would like to see an increase in permeability of wildlife crossings at the proposed bridge reconstruction/replacement locations in the effort to reduce vehicular collision and potentially assist existing wildlife populations. CDOW requested that areas of planned mitigation/reclamation contain a reduced level of deer attractants (planted shrubs, trees, and forbs) in an effort to minimize wildlife crossing over US 24.

Within the areas of proposed bridge work, CDOW recommends no barriers to existing fish populations be installed during Project construction activities, and where possible, aquatic habitat enhancements be constructed (e.g., riffle pools). Brown trout (*Salmo trutta*) and rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) are known to inhabit Fountain Creek within the Project area, and could benefit from the enhancements to the creek that are associated with the Project. No other fish are known to occur in this stretch of Fountain Creek at this time, but minnows or other species are likely. No state-listed species of concern, such as the flathead

chub (*Hybopsis gracilis*) or the Arkansas darter (*Etheostoma cragini*), have been observed in this reach of the creek, but are known to occur downstream. Flathead chub have been observed within Fountain Creek several miles downstream near the Fountain wastewater treatment facility (NDIS, 2010).

Various songbird species occur within the riparian area adjacent to Fountain Creek throughout its entire reach. Multiple nest locations were observed during winter surveys indicating this area as optimal nesting habitat during the breeding season (approximately May 1st through August 31st) for migratory birds. No raptor nests were observed at the along the riparian corridor or within the Project right of way at time of survey.

The majority bird species are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), with only a few non-indigenous species, such as the European startling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), being excluded from protection. The MBTA states that it is illegal to collect, possess, and by any means transfer possession of any migratory bird nest; however, it does not contain any prohibition that applies to the destruction of a bird nest alone (without birds or eggs), provided that no possession occurs during the destruction. Statutes other than the MBTA legally protect some unoccupied nests, including nests of threatened and endangered migratory bird species and raptor nest under some circumstances.

Spring time/breeding season nesting surveys are recommended within the corridor for identification of active nest locations. Based on these surveys, vegetation grubbing or clearing activities are to be avoided in areas containing identified nest locations until after the breeding season. Once a nesting location becomes inactive, provided it does not qualify as a protected nest (i.e., threatened/endangered species or raptor), clearing activities may resume. A 50-foot “no work” radius is recommended around each identified active nest location during the breeding season.

Conclusion

Based on the 2006 SAIC report and observations from the January 2009 site survey the Project area was found to contain habitat for general wildlife within the riparian area and portions of the floodplain along Fountain Creek. Multiple songbird nest locations were observed within the Project ROW during winter surveys, and therefore a spring survey, prior to the start of Project activities, may be needed to determine the location of active nest locations for avian species protected under the MBTA. Impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat and mitigation commitments will be detailed in the EA document.

6.0 References

CDOT, 2004. Colorado Department of Transportation. *I-25 Improvements through the Colorado Springs Urbanized Area EA*.

NDIS, 2009. Website data at www.ndis.nrel.colostate.edu, various dates.

SAIC, 2006. Science Applications International Corporation. *Final Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat – Baseline Conditions Report, U.S. 24 West Corridor, El Paso County, Colorado*. May 30.