

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) published a Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on January 27, 2004 in the Federal Register in accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and FHWA regulations. This Interstate 25 (I-25) New Pueblo Freeway Record of Decision (ROD) has been prepared in compliance with 23 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 771 and 23 CFR 774 and with 40 CFR 1500-1508 and the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), as amended.

In November 2011, FHWA and Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) published the *Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Section 4(f) Evaluation for I-25 Improvements Through Pueblo* (CDOT and FHWA, 2011) (DEIS), which preliminarily identified a Preferred Alternative (the Modified I-25 Alternative) based on consideration of the goals and objectives identified in the Purpose and Need as well as the potential impacts resulting from the alternatives. After consideration of the public and agency comments on the DEIS, in addition to the factors noted above, FHWA and CDOT identified the Modified I-25 Alternative as the Preferred Alternative in the *Final Environmental Impact Statement and Section 4(f) Evaluation for I-25 Improvements Through Pueblo* (CDOT and FHWA, 2013) (FEIS). In August 2013, FHWA and CDOT published the FEIS, which presented the evaluation of alternatives and the benefits and impacts to natural resources and community resources associated with each alternative. The FEIS is incorporated into this ROD by reference. Information about the availability of the FEIS is included on page i at the front of this document. The FEIS described the decision-making process and summarized the analysis for identifying the alternatives considered for the FEIS, their associated impacts, proposed mitigation, and ability to meet the Purpose and Need. *Appendix G – Public and Agency Comments* of the FEIS also included a full accounting of all comments received on the DEIS provided by the public and agencies and CDOT's responses to those comments.

As outlined in the FEIS, it is the intent of CDOT and FHWA to implement the Preferred Alternative in its entirety. Due to current funding limitations and federal requirements that oblige the project to be included in the Pueblo Area Council of Governments (PACOG) fiscally constrained plan, only Phase 1 of the Preferred Alternative will be selected with the approval of this ROD.

This ROD is the final step in the NEPA process for Phase 1 of the Preferred Alternative.

1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the New Pueblo Freeway project is to: 1) improve safety by addressing deteriorating roadways and bridges and non-standard road characteristics on I-25; and 2) improve local and regional mobility within and through Pueblo to meet existing and future travel demands.

Construction of I-25 through Pueblo began in 1949 and was completed in 1959. The roadway was constructed before the Interstate Highway System and its associated design guidelines had been created. As a result of its age and the design practices at the time it was built, this segment of I-25 contains structural and operational deficiencies. Today, these deficiencies (needs) are becoming apparent through transportation problems that can be grouped as follows:

Safety Problems. This segment of I-25 has high accident rates that exceed state averages, areas where shoulders are too narrow to safely accommodate a broken-down vehicle, on and off ramps with inadequate lengths to maneuver vehicles, and inadequate spacing of interchanges to safely merge and weave into highway traffic.

Mobility Problems. In this segment of I-25, there are interchanges that do not connect to appropriate City of Pueblo (City) streets, a lack of alternate routes for north-south and east-west connectivity, areas of reduced speed, insufficient capacity for projected traffic forecasts and poor levels of service, aging bridges with inadequate bridge sufficiency ratings, and conflicts with local and regional travel.

For additional information related to the factors supporting the project safety and mobility needs, please refer to *Chapter 1 – Purpose and Need* of the FEIS.