



The Connection: Linking US 550/US 160

FAQs

Updated: Feb 2018

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why is the US 550/US 160 Connection Project necessary?

A: The intended connection of US 550 to US 160 is part of long-range planning for enhanced mobility for the entire southwest Colorado region.

“The need for this project is based on the projected increased travel demands on highway capacity and efficiency, and the existing substandard design that contributes to accidents associated with roadway deficiencies.” (From both the Record of Decision and Supplemental Final Environmental Impact Statement for the US Department of Transportation)

This connection project is part of long-range planning to enhance transportation for Southwest Colorado. The connection is a key component for future growth providing mobility, safety, economic vitality and connectivity for the entire Four Corners area and all communities within this region which are currently seeing significant amounts of growth.

Q: What are the anticipated benefits of the US 550/US 160 Connection Project?

A: The planned project south of Durango will provide several benefits to the traveling public, once completed.

SAFETY: The connection will allow abandonment of the current Farmington Hill route and realign US 550 along a ridge directly into the existing US 160 Grandview Interchange. The realignment will improve mobility by providing a safer and more efficient connection of Highways 550 and 160.

MOBILITY: The connection will improve mobility by providing a more efficient connection of US 550 to US 160 at the existing Grandview Interchange, providing access to the area’s regional hospital; the police substation; the Grandview and Three Springs residential development; and the City of Durango business development. The project improvements will reduce travel times, improve access and greatly enhance safety.

ECONOMIC VITALITY: US 550 and US 160 have been identified as critical corridors for local commerce. The two highway corridors are busy truck routes, which provide significant freight mobility for oil and gas, agriculture, and other industries. The project enhancements will ensure safe and reliable transport of critical goods and services to and from New Mexico and the Four Corners region.

CONNECTIVITY: The project will provide connectivity to a new urban core, including the regional hospital; police department; retail and business district; and residential neighborhoods.

Q: When will construction of the US 550/US 160 Connection Project begin? When will it end?

A: The connection project is expected be a multi-season construction project, to take place over a two-year period. Please see the [Design-Build Process](#).



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Q: How will construction of the US 550/US 160 Connection Project be phased?

A: Construction phasing will be determined and announced by the design build contractor selected to construct the project. The proposed construction timeline and schedule information will be made public once a contractor is chosen.

Q: Why is CDOT using the design-build process on the US 550/US 160 Connection Project?

A: The design-build process, allows CDOT to establish a project scope, goals and design criteria and select a team base for “best value.” This often enables CDOT the flexibility to maximize the scope of work and stretch limited project funding.

Q: What is the budget for the of the US 550/US 160 Connection Project?

A: The project budget is estimated at just under \$100 million.

Q: Where is funding for the US 550/US 160 Connection Project coming from?

A: The connection project has garnered tremendous support from local and federal entities. Through several partnerships, the project is being paid for with money from the federal government, the Colorado Department of Transportation, La Plata County, the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, the Southern Ute Tribe Growth Fund, and City of Durango. (View [Budget/Funding Quick Link](#) on Project Webpage for detailed info.)

Q: What significant events have transpired in association with the planned US 550/US 160 Connection Project?

TIMELINE

- **May 2006** – The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for US Highway 160 from Durango to Bayfield was published by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), US Army Corps of Engineers, and the Bureau of Land Management.
- **November 2006** – The Record of Decision (ROD) for US Highway 160 from Durango to Bayfield was signed. The Selected Alternative included an interchange 0.6 miles east of the current US 160/US 550 intersection.
- **September 2007** – CDOT began detailed design work on the phase of the interchange that included the US 550 connection.
 - During this work, it was discovered that there was a gas well within the alignment selected in the ROD. The US 550 connection was redesigned to avoid this gas well.
 - This alignment shift required revisiting the environmental process. As part of this process, a local ranch was evaluated under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPR). In consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), CDOT determined that a portion of the ranch was eligible for listing on the NRHP and that the preferred alternative would result in an adverse effect to the ranch.
- **July 2008** – The first construction phase of the US 160 Grandview Interchange began.
 - This phased construction process was a critical component of long range planning, aimed at addressing the safety and mobility needs of traffic traveling on US 160, and the future connection to US 550.
 - The construction was fast-tracked to capitalize on time-bound ARRA funding (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009) that would have gone to other state DOT's if CDOT hadn't taken the initiative and utilized the funds when they were available.



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- **July 2008** – The FHWA received a letter from the owners of an area ranch identifying potential archeological sites not identified in the US 160 FEIS. This necessitated an additional evaluation process of the FEIS to determine if these archeological sites are eligible to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).
- **November 2011** – The US 160 Grandview Interchange was completed. This \$46.5 million project included a second westbound lane, 4 major bridge structures and ramps.
- **June 2012** – The Supplemental Final Environmental Impact Statement (SFEIS) for US 550 south connection to US 160 was published by the USDOT, FHWA, and CDOT.
- **March 2015** – The Independent Alternatives Analysis for the proposed alignment was finalized and published.
- **April 2015** – Record of Decision for the Supplemental Final Environmental Impact Statement (SFIS) for the US 550 south connection of US 160 was signed.
- **Fall 2016** – La Plata County, partnered with CDOT, submits a FASTLANE grant application to the USDOT requesting funding for the US 550/US160 connection.
- **October 2016** – Dubbed the “Road to the Future,” La Plata County and the City of Durango complete the construction of Wilson Gulch Road. The new road provides use of the US 160 Grandview Interchange bridge and roundabout road feature which offers a more direct, convenient and safe route to the Three Springs development.
- **December 2016** – La Plata County, partnered with CDOT, submitted the FASTLANE application (amount requested: \$15 million). The federal Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act provides FASTLANE funding support for critical transportation projects to ease congestion and facilitate the movement of freight on interstate systems and major roads.
- **December 2016** – CDOT Region 5 (Southwest Colorado) submitted a request to the Transportation Commission and received approval for \$27 million in additional funding if a FASTLANE grant is awarded to La Plata County for the connection.
- **July 2017** – The USDOT contacted La Plata County to offer \$12.3 million instead of the \$15 million requested. La Plata County notified CDOT of the USDOT request for a reduced grant award, and CDOT agrees to accept the lower award.
- **AUGUST 2017** – Colorado US Senators Cory Gardner and Michael Bennet publically announce the \$12.3 million FASTLANE award, contingent of a 60-day congressional review. La Plata County’s \$12.3 million award is the largest FASTLANE grant award for small projects nationwide in 2017.
- **November 2017** – La Plata County obtained official notice from the USDOT of the FASTLANE grant award of \$12.3 million.
- **November 2017** – The Colorado Transportation Commission approved \$54.4 million for the US 550/US 160 connection project. The funding approval is a provisional commitment made by the Transportation Commission using Senate Bill (SB) 267 state funds. The Colorado Legislature passed SB 267 in May 2017.
- **November 2017** – CDOT garners support from several local entities – the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, Southern Ute Tribe Growth Fund, La Plata County and the City of Durango all offer partnership contributions totaling \$2.98 million toward the connection project.