

## Executive Summary

In 2005, as a result of a mill and overlay maintenance project, St. Francis Drive was re-stripped from four driving lanes to six driving lanes south of San Mateo Road in order to address traffic congestion for traffic exiting Interstate 25. This congestion had led to traffic queuing onto the off-ramps, potentially endangering Interstate traffic and prompting the re-striping project. The resultant re-striping project eliminated this queuing congestion and safety concern. However the change reduced the shoulder width on St. Francis Drive south of St. Michael's Drive that was utilized as a de-facto bicycle lane. The change in lane configuration also created safety concerns at the merge points from St. Michael's Drive due to the loss of the previously existing auxiliary lane on St. Francis Drive for the merging traffic from St. Michael's Drive. After a testing period with the new striping configuration, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) agreed that the striping configuration could become permanent. At that time, a commitment to the FHWA from the NMDOT was made to complete a comprehensive corridor study subsequent to the re-striping project.

This study is the result of the initial phase of that process, the *Initial Evaluation of Alternatives*, also called Phase A, or Phase I-A. The initial content describes the existing conditions: a developed, but not overly dense, Western U.S. city that is struggling to maintain its identity and historical character while grappling with the growing pains of being a State Capitol, while also fostering a vibrant local cultural and economic engine of its own, current downturn notwithstanding.

A primary objective of a Phase A study is identifying the purpose and need for any proposed improvements. While many may agree that a change in St. Francis Drive is needed, developing a consensus on what that change should be may be a bit more challenging. The Purpose and Need Statement defines the dominant criteria, among many, with which proposed projects will ultimately be measured against.

The Purpose and Need Statement is as follows:

*The purpose of the St. Francis Drive Corridor Study is to identify corridor deficiencies, identify alternatives to improve the corridor that address the increase in traffic congestion and enhance mobility for all modes of travel, and to prioritize potential future projects. The need for the St. Francis Drive Corridor Study is supported by the existing and projected level of service along the corridor, potential safety issues, as well as the limited connectivity of pedestrian and bicycle facilities.*

The criteria with which the alternatives for the St. Francis Drive Corridor were evaluated included:

*Does the Alternative Satisfy the Project Purpose and Need?  
Does the Alternative Provide the Capacity to Accommodate Future Vehicular Travel Demand?  
What is the Alternative's Engineering Feasibility?  
Does the Alternative Support the General Plan Goal of Shifting to Other Transportation Modes?  
Does the Alternative Support the General Plan Goal of Improving Community Cohesion?  
What is the Alternative's Relative Environmental Impacts?  
Does or Can the Alternative Incorporate Urban Design Components?*

*What is the Alternative's Cost Relative to Expected Funding?*

This evaluation, by its design, considers a multiple of alternatives, in order to develop projects that are complementary to the objectives of all involved. Considerations of cost, right-of-way, community impacts (both positive and negative), forecast travel demand, local land use policy goals and effects, and more, are evaluated on factors that impact the environment and regional mobility.

A list of the initial set of alternatives includes:

- The No Build\*
- Lane Conversion to Reduce Number of Lanes\*
- General Purpose Lane Addition\*
- Lane Conversion to Dedicated Bus Lane\*
- Transit Lane Addition
- Lane Conversion to Dedicated Commuter/HOV Lane
- Expressway with Frontage Roads
- Lane Conversion to Single Reversible Lane
- Split-Level Expressway
- Reduced Lane Width\*
- Intersection Improvements\*
- Access Control\*
- Complete Streets\*
- Trail Connectivity\*
- Enhanced Transit Service\*
- Transportation Systems Management\*

These alternatives were evaluated for appropriateness for three segments along the corridor: 1) Old Agua Fria/Rabbit Road to West San Mateo Road, 2) West San Mateo Road to Alamo Drive, and 3) Alamo Drive to NM 599. Those alternatives marked with an asterisk passed the initial screening and were selected for further consideration for at least one of the segments.

**A. Summary of Findings**

A year 2030 analysis was performed using the Santa Fe VISUM regional travel demand model, recently updated by the NMDOT to reflect adjusted socioeconomic forecasts, adding in available transit routes, ridership levels and estimates, and additional background data used for calibration.

The result of this 2030 evaluation shows that growth will continue along the St. Francis Corridor, and that substantial growth is anticipated farther to the west (see Figure 26 and Figure 27 on pages 74 and 76). North of Cerrillos Road on St. Francis Drive, the travel demand forecasts show increased vehicular traffic with congested operations, particularly on the minor streets. Significant increases in traffic congestion are anticipated at the southern end of the corridor at Zia and Sawmill Roads.

The lack of a robust, interconnected arterial roadway network throughout Santa Fe has led to a limited number of corridors bearing the majority of regional and cross-town traffic volume in the City.

St. Francis Drive, along with Cerrillos, Airport, Zia and Rodeo Roads are examples of these congested arterials. Due to the topography and historical development pattern of Santa Fe, roadways of lesser functional class are also pressed into service and essentially function as minor arterials, even though the roadway cross-section and community character are not conducive to the volume of traffic that utilizes them. Alameda, Agua Fria, Rufina, and Camino de Las Crucitas are examples of these roadways.

Travel demand on the St. Francis Drive corridor is expected to increase by 15%-50% between now and 2030. Due to the regional nature of the corridor, and because it is one of two continuous north-south roadways in the City of Santa Fe, St. Francis Drive is expected to remain a vital travel corridor for Santa Fe and the region well into the future. The current and future employment density along the corridor, combined with the wide dispersion of dwelling units throughout the City and County, will also contribute to keep travel demand on St. Francis Drive at a high level.

### **Summary of Conclusions**

This Phase A Initial Evaluation of Alternatives examined the existing conditions and constraints along the St. Francis Drive corridor. Using this information and public input, a series of alternatives were developed in order to address the future needs of the corridor, while closely considering the future travel demand, desires of the community, adopted regional plans and policies, environmental impacts and available financial resources.

Due to the limited right-of-way width through the central segment of the corridor, alternatives to accommodate future vehicular travel demand are severely constrained. In addition, adopted local policies seek to limit reliance on the automobile, and the local governments could generally be considered to be opposed to improvements that would further separate the neighborhoods that are adjacent to the corridor, such as would result from adding travel lanes. Solutions that favor alternative modes within the existing roadway may be able to garner local support.

Santa Fe will continue to grow, creating additional new trips all over the City, many of which will end up on St. Francis Drive due to its continuity and access to significant parts of the City and State. In addition, St. Francis Drive is also a major regional, State and U.S. Highway, and serves as a significant regional, intrastate and interstate roadway that will almost inevitably result in high traffic volumes on the corridor. This will necessitate continued reliance on accommodating the automobile in order to maintain the function of a regional, State and U.S. highway.

Balancing these two opposing objectives (opposition to geometric improvements and the need to accommodate a regional roadway) will require regional cooperation beyond just addressing the traffic congestion and improving the roadway character on St. Francis Drive. It will require prioritization and development of a common plan for the future to make the best of a difficult situation. Available

resources are also limited, further complicating an already demanding problem. A compromise approach, one that will likely result in higher congestion levels no matter the solution, is needed.

As the City of Santa Fe has adopted future land use plans along St. Francis Drive that will allow denser re-development to occur, the opportunities for lifestyle shifts away from the automobile will increase. Small urban centers, served by a robust local transit system, might attract traffic that would otherwise have used an automobile. However the forecast travel demand indicates that overall travel will increase substantially over today's levels. This is without adding the additional density that the Rail Corridor Study contemplated in order to address the dilemma presented above (the issues of forecast travel demand, a regionally significant roadway, limited resources, and local preference for less automobiles and more transportation mode choices). This has led the City to study a more compact, denser level of development (compared to the present) near the proposed transit stations. This additional (denser) development is considered critical as a hub of activity to allow the transit stations, combined with the transit service, the opportunity to produce viable changes in travel behavior.

The high use of the Santa Fe Depot Station as a commuter station, combined with its success as a tourist draw to Santa Fe (and back to Albuquerque too) has provided proponents of this local transit approach a data point as evidence of the potential success of these types of developments. Through the Rail Corridor Study and the St. Michael's Drive study, the City of Santa Fe is evaluating additional bold changes in this direction. However these changes require expansion of the local transit system in order to achieve the goal of reducing automobile use. Without a convenient choice for transit being available, the land use changes by themselves will not result in the desired travel behavior. This will require substantial local and regional commitments to transit operations.

The NMDOT encourages the City and County of Santa Fe and the MPO to consider and develop its locally and regionally approved policy planning documents. The NMDOT is a partner with all the participating jurisdictions through the MPO in developing a transportation strategy that serves both the needs of the region and the goals of the local area. However implementation of this regional strategy is not the sole responsibility of the NMDOT.

The City and County of Santa Fe, with the Santa Fe Metropolitan Planning Organization members, have begun to forge an understanding of the direction of land use and transportation objectives and how best, from a local perspective, to accommodate future travel demand estimates while struggling with the resource requirements to address the issue: cost (operations and maintenance), land acquisition, community acceptance, granting of variances, etc.

Addressing the future of the St. Francis Drive corridor requires consideration of the entire local and regional roadway and transportation system, with improvements on State and Federal facilities, expanded transit opportunities (both locally and regionally), land use changes (on the ground, not just in

planning documents), as well as developing ITS for the region to maximize the efficiency of the existing system. These options form the basis of the recommendations of this study.

### **Local and Regional Transit**

A review of the Santa Fe Trails transit system indicates there is good route coverage throughout the City, except perhaps north of the river. Headway could be improved to present the choice of transit as a viable alternative for local and regional automobile trips. In order to achieve the reductions in the number of trips on St. Francis Drive that would result in traffic operations comparable to today would require a high percentage of transit use, much higher than today. This would require a large expansion of the local transit system in order to serve the passenger level that would result from a large shift from the automobile to transit. Pedestrian and bicycle modes would likely supplement these reductions during warmer weather. The feasibility of expanding the other transit systems, NM Rail Runner Express, NM Park & Ride, and NCRTD, will also need to be evaluated. A portion of this study is currently underway by the Regional Planning Authority and may help clarify the viability of this approach. As of this writing, this project has initiated a working group to consider the process to develop a regional integrated transit plan.

### **Targeted Intersection Improvements**

Since a shift to transit alone will not likely result in acceptable roadway operations, limited roadway improvement should also be considered. These will likely be targeted to improve traffic operation through the corridor and seek to balance the regional needs with the local policy goals. Improvements to the State highway system will be the responsibility of the NMDOT, working in conjunction with the local governments.

Improvements could also be combined with enhancement projects to improve the pedestrian and bicycle environment, both at the intersections and by expanding the trails network throughout the State right-of-way in order to create more connectivity with City and County trails.

### **Next Steps**

The above discussion illustrate that strategies for addressing the purpose and need for the St. Francis Drive Corridor Study are intermingled with a discussion of regional transportation objectives. This *Initial Evaluation of Alternatives* Study evaluated multiple alternatives throughout the corridor, and has reduced those to a handful of potentially feasible options for each segment. The Phase B Study will evaluate these options further. This will provide the local transportation planning authority, the Santa Fe MPO, with a range of options for the St. Francis Drive corridor that can address the overall goals of the region.

Other alternatives were considered that ultimately were not limited to the St. Francis Drive Corridor in order to be fully effective. These regional level alternatives provide a starting point for

refinement in the development of the next Santa Fe Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and provide an inkling of the scale of the problem facing the region. The schedule of the next MTP development coincides with the current Phase B schedule and will allow the policy that is considered for adoption for the region to influence the improvements recommended for the corridor. The policy, and the plans in place for changes and improvements for the region, should direct improvements on the corridor, as opposed to improvements on the corridor leading the regional policy.

Continued coordination with the Santa Fe MPO and its member governments will be essential in developing coordinated solutions that serve a common goal of improved transportation efficiency and options in the region, while also serving the needs of those closest to St. Francis Drive who are affected on a neighborhood scale by the corridor.

**B. Recommendations**

As discussed in Section XI.D, the range of initial alternatives considered has been reduced to those presented in Table 1 for further consideration in Phase B. The Reduced Lane Width and Complete Streets alternatives will be considered as part of any improvements recommended from those below.

Table 1 – Secondary Screening Matrix Summary By Segment		
Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3
No Build	No Build	No Build
Intersection Improvements	Intersection Improvements	Intersection Improvements
Trail Connectivity	Trail Connectivity	Trail Connectivity
Transportation Systems Management	Transportation Systems Management	Transportation Systems Management
	Access Control	Access Control
Enhanced Transit To Be Studied By NMDOT, Santa Fe Trails, NCRD, SF RPA, MRCOG and SF MPO		
All of the Alternatives Will Accommodate Implementation of Enhanced Transit		
Complete Streets and Reduced Lane Widths are options that will be considered with all roadway improvement alternatives		

Other alternatives discussed that are of a regional nature such as, Enhanced Local and Regional Transit, and Lane Conversion to Bus Lane, requires substantial local commitments that extend beyond the St. Francis Drive Corridor Study. This study process has been initiated. As the 2010-2035 Santa Fe MPO MTP is developed, these alternatives can be further investigated within the regional context so that the results are consistent with the needs of the State and represent the plans for the future of the region. The MPO and NMDOT is committed to moving forward on a comprehensive study of the local and regional transit and rail system and how it can be improved to not only impact St. Francis Drive, but to provide a viable alternative to driving in the Santa Fe area in general. For this reason this concept will be included for all segments during Phase B.