

XII. Conclusions and Recommendations

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, Camino Carlos Rey, Avenida de Las Campanas 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 and around the City of Santa Fe, St. Francis Drive is expected to remain a vital travel corridor for Santa Fe 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.

A. 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 for a regional facility) 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 for the NM Rail Runner Express, 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 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, as a transit system option needs to be available. Without a convenient choice for transit, the land use changes by themselves will not result in the desired travel behavior. This will require a substantial local and regional commitment 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.

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 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. 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, requiring 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 begin to consider the process to develop a regional integrated transit plan.

Targeted Intersection Improvements

As the shift to transit alone will likely not 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. These improvements to the State highway system will be the responsibility of the NMDOT, working in conjunction with the local governments.

These 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 illustrates the 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 Metropolitan Planning Organization, 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 before 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 56 for further consideration in Phase B.

Table 56 – 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, NCRTD, 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, Enhanced Local and Regional Transit, and Lane Conversion to Bus Lane, require substantial local commitments that extend beyond the St. Francis Drive Corridor Study, or improvements to St. Francis Drive, to achieve. As the 2010-2035 Santa Fe MPO MTP is developed, it is recommended that these alternatives 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.

Appendix A
Rail Runner Correspondence and Traffic Counts

Appendix B
Bridge Inspection Reports

Appendix C
Existing/Horizon Year Conditions Analysis Report

Appendix D
Subsurface Utility Engineering Report

Appendix E
Preliminary Construction Cost Estimate Spreadsheets