

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the alternatives analysis, as discussed in the previous sections of this report, and on stakeholder and general public input obtained over the course of the study, the MRCOG and Village of Los Lunas identified the Morris B Alternative as the locally-preferred alternative. The primary factors that led to this finding are as follows:

- *Purpose and Need* – The need for a new east-west roadway between I-25 and NM 47 is based on existing and projected congestion on NM 6/Main Street through the Village of Los Lunas and the lack of alternative river crossing routes that are in reasonable proximity to the population served by the existing bridge. Both the Miller and Morris Alternatives meet the project purpose and need. However, the Morris B/D Alternatives provide a better level of traffic performance and provide better access to developing and planned growth areas within and near the Village of Los Lunas.
- *Cost and Right-of-Way* – The cost and right-of-way needs of the Miller A Alternative and the Morris B Alternative are similar. The cost and right-of-way needs of the Morris D Alternative are approximately 12% more than the Miller A and Morris B Alternatives.
- *Community Impacts* – Impacts to neighborhoods and community facilities are greater with the Miller Alternative and the Morris D Alternative, when compared to the Morris B Alternative. While impacts to community access and cohesion are similar for all alternatives and are relatively minor, given the magnitude of the project, the number of residential/business relocations is much lower with the Morris B Alternative.
- *Impacts to Environmental Resources* – Impacts to environmental resources, including aquatic, riparian, and wetland habitats, are similar for all alternatives. The Morris B/D Alternatives would acquire more acres of riparian habitat than the Miller A Alternative; however, the quality of riparian habitat acquired by the Miller A Alternative includes more old growth cottonwoods and higher quality bosque. The Miller A Alternative would affect slightly more aquatic and wetland habitat than the Morris B/D Alternatives. Because the differences in impact are minor, neither alternative is appreciably better than the other with regard to this category of evaluation factors.
- *Cultural Resources* – Impacts to cultural resources are greater with the Miller A Alternative and the Morris D Alternative due to the number of historic buildings that would be affected by these routes. Impacts to other cultural resources are anticipated to be minor and would be similar for all alternatives.
- *Other Environmental Factors* – None of the alternatives would have major impacts on noise or air quality, although traffic noise impacts would likely occur at several residential areas adjacent to the alternatives. These impacts can be mitigated with noise walls, privacy walls, and/or other abatement measures.
- *Public Comment* – Based on community input obtained from public meetings and a public opinion survey, a new roadway between I-25 and NM 47 has strong support from the community and elected officials. Public opinion on the three alternatives evaluated in detail strongly favored the Morris B Alternative. Of the written comments that expressed an alignment preference at the last public meeting, 61% preferred Morris B. In contrast, 13% preferred Miller A, 10% preferred Morris D, and 8% preferred either Morris B or D. Eight percent of comments received advocated for a No-Build Condition.

- *Agency Involvement* – Coordination with stakeholder agencies resulted in strong support for the Morris B/D Alternatives by the New Mexico State Corrections Department and New Mexico State University Agricultural Science Center. These two entities were strongly opposed to the Miller A Alternative due to impacts this route could have on the agricultural research facility and the Central New Mexico Correctional Facility. Coordination with the US Army Corps of Engineers did not identify a preference by this agency and concluded that the Morris B/D Alternatives would meet their requirements for the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative. The NMDOT, City of Belen, and Valencia County were members of the project technical steering committee and were involved in the review of analyses and recommendations of the project team.
- *Elected Officials* – The findings of the alternatives analysis and public comment were presented to the respective councils and commissions of the Village of Los Lunas, City of Belen, and Valencia County. These three elected bodies unanimously supported the selection of the Morris B Alternative as the locally-preferred alternative. Resolutions passed by the various elected bodies are included in Appendix A.

5.1 Corridor Preservation

Funding for the implementation of the proposed roadway is not yet programmed, and the source of needed funds has not been determined. Thus, implementation of the preferred alternative is likely to take many years. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this report, past and projected growth trends within the LLCS area will likely result in additional development that could make implementation of the proposed roadway more difficult and more costly. In addition, the identification of a preferred route can impose hardship on some landowners in the interim period until the project is implemented. For this reason, the Village of Los Lunas intends to take steps to preserve the corridor through advance acquisitions to limit development that would make future implementation more difficult and costly.

The first step in the corridor preservation process included engineering refinements of the preferred alternative to define its drainage and right-of-way needs. This information was used to prepare preliminary right-of-way plans that define the specific parcels needed for the proposed roadway and associated drainage concept. The parcels were then evaluated to identify: (1) parcels with a higher potential to be developed in the near future and (2) privately owned properties whose owners could incur a financial hardship as a result of the preferred route selection. The owners of the identified parcels were interviewed and initial market appraisals were prepared to develop initial cost estimates. The Village of Los Lunas intends to use this information to proceed with the early acquisition of parcels. The early acquisition of parcels is limited by the funds currently available for the LLCS and by future funds which may become available through other sources. Preliminary engineering plans and right-of-way plans are included in Appendix B.

5.2 Future Steps

Several steps remain before the LLCS can be fully implemented. Once a source of construction funds is identified, the Village of Los Lunas (or other implementing agency) will be required to complete the federal environmental process (for projects implemented using federal funds or that require other federal authorizations). Given the setting and context of the project, it is anticipated that this will involve the preparation of an environmental impact statement in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The LLCS Alternatives Analysis, as documented herein, will provide the planning information required by NEPA and FHWA's Planning and Environmental Linkages process,

although some updates may be required if this step does not occur in the near future. The LLCS Alternatives Analysis will also satisfy the consultation required for compliance with the USACE Section 404(b)(1) requirements. Again, some updates may be needed depending on when implementation occurs. It is important to note that the acquisition of some right-of-way prior to the NEPA process cannot be used as justification for the preferred alternative. However, the level of investigations and analyses conducted for the alternatives analysis and the coordination with the USACE, other agency stakeholders, and the general public minimizes the risks associated with the early acquisition of right-of-way for corridor preservation purposes.

Given the relatively high cost of the overall project, the project can be implemented in phases if full funding is not available. If this occurs, the recommended approach is to separate the project into two major phases. Table 14 summarizes the cost for each of these phases.

Table 14: Estimated Cost by Major Phase

Phase 1 – I-25 to NM 314	
Interchange and Frontage Roads	\$6,833,130
I-25 to NM 314	\$6,289,820
Drainage	\$2,600,000
Miscellaneous	\$3,077,900
25% Contingency	\$4,700,212
8% Engineering & Design Contingency	\$1,504,068
Phase 1 Total (Not including NMGR)	\$25,005,130
Phase 2 – NM 314 to NM 47	
NM 314 to Rio Grande Bridge	\$2,401,570
Rio Grande Bridge	\$15,730,000
Rio Grande Bridge to NM 47	\$4,454,445
Drainage	\$2,600,000
Miscellaneous	\$3,077,900
25% Contingency	\$7,065,978
8% Engineering & Design Contingency	\$2,261,113
Phase 2 Total (Not including NMGR)	\$37,591,006

Note: The frontage roads included in Phase 1 could be deferred to a third phase.

- The first project phase would include the construction of the interchange at I-25 and the segment of the roadway between the interchange and NM 314. This phase would provide relief for the most congested segments of I-25 including the area between NM 314 and I-25 and the area west of I-25, assuming Huning Ranch Road west of I-25 is extended to connect to the new interchange.
- The second phase would include the construction of the bridge across the Rio Grande and the roadway between NM 314 and the river, and from the river east to NM 47.

5.3 Access Management

The analysis of the Morris B Alternative assumes this roadway would be a limited access arterial. Access would be limited to existing cross streets and several new roadways serving existing and planned developments. Recommended access points are listed below and are shown in the preliminary design plans in Appendix B:

- Sichler Road/Central NM Corrections Facility Main Driveway (north and south)
- Future Access Road between Sichler Road and NM 314 to access GSD lands south of Morris Road (south side only)
- Connection to existing Morris Road immediately east of the Valencia County Courthouse to provide access to the lands along the north side of Morris Road (north side only)
- Los Lentos Road (north and south)
- Driveway to the Los Lunas Water Treatment Plant property (south side only)
- Edeal Road (north and south)
- Future Access Road serving the planned master plan east of Edeal Road (north and south)
- Access road between the Peralta Main Canal and La Costancia Acequia (north and south)
- NM 47

Additional access points should be considered only if the access will not diminish the function of the proposed roadway and if it meets the spacing criteria for a small urban principal arterial as specified in the NMDOT Access Management Manual.