

**Public Involvement Meeting**  
November 1, 2006 – Tohatchi Middle School

**Information Packet**

Navajo Department of Transportation (NDOT)  
New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT)  
In cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

**US 491 South Corridor Study from  
Navajo 9 (MP 15) to Sheep Springs (MP 46)**



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**Agenda**

**Open House 6:00–6:30 pm**

**Regular Meeting: 6:30 pm**

1. Welcome, Benediction, and Introductions
2. US 491 Background and History
3. Engineering Re-Evaluation Results
4. Environmental Assessment Process
5. Navajo Nation Role in the Project
6. Questions and Comments
7. Closing

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**Meeting Purpose**

To update the public on the current status of the US 491 South Corridor study including plan revisions / environmental studies and to receive input from the public regarding proposed improvements. Updated corridor summaries and graphics are available for public review and comment. Comments will also be received on bicycle, pedestrian, livestock, and equestrian issues as well as natural resources and cultural resources.

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**Written Comments**

A Comment Form and NMDOT Feedback Form are attached. Please provide comments on the US 491 South Corridor by:

1. Completing a **Comment Form** and leaving it in the comment box or mail it to the address shown at the bottom of the form. Please provide comments by **November 15, 2006**.
2. Before leaving this public involvement event, please complete and leave the **NMDOT Feedback Form** in the comment box.
3. Comments may also be provided through the [US491.com](http://US491.com) web site.

**Thank you for attending this NMDOT public involvement meeting!**

**Existing Roadway** US 491 is classified as a rural principal arterial. In general, a rural principal arterial provides for long-distance corridor movements with trip lengths serving primarily statewide and interstate travel. The US 491 South Corridor begins at MP 15 near Navajo 9 and continues north to MP 46 in Sheep Springs. The posted speed limit throughout most of the corridor is 65 mile per hour (mph). However, the posted speed limit decreases to 55 mph or 45 mph in close proximity to connecting access roads and in communities along the roadway such as Tohatchi. Throughout the US 491 South Corridor, the existing roadway is a 2-lane facility with varying shoulders. The existing right-of-way easement, as indicated by the existing fence lines, varies from 100 feet to 200 feet. Although the width of driving lanes varies, the lanes average approximately 13 feet in width, for an overall driving surface width of 26 feet. The outside shoulder width varies from 6 to 10 feet. Roadway location within the right-of-way easement varies throughout the corridor. In some locations, the roadway is centered within the right-of-way easement while at other times it is located either to the left or right of the center of the easement.

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**Project Purpose** The purpose for the proposed improvements to the US 491 South Corridor is to improve travel safety, meet existing and future travel demands, enhance mobility and access along the route, and establish a link that supports the regional transportation system and long range planning goals. A secondary benefit from the proposed improvements is the opportunity to provide a roadway that best serves the traditional, economic, and resource interests of the local communities as well as support potential economic development and anticipated growth in the region.

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**No Build Alternative** The No-Build Alternative maintains the existing 2-lane facility in its current location and condition. In accordance with the Location Study Procedures and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), this option must always be considered as a baseline for comparison with other alternatives. Because the posted speed is 65 mph, we evaluate the corridor for a 70 mph in accordance with AASHTO guidelines. This No-Build alternative would not address existing deficiencies where the existing horizontal curves do not meet the 70 mph design speed standards. This alternative would also not correct the existing stopping sight distance and passing sight distance deficiencies throughout the corridor. Consequently, the design speeds along the corridor would continue to vary, and portions of the corridor would not meet the 70 mph design speed standards. Under the No-Build Alternative, the safety issues within the corridor would not be addressed, and the crash, severity and fatality rates may continue to be above average.

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**Build Alternative** The 4-Lane Facility with Separated Median Alternative (Build Alternative) will establish a 4-lane roadway in place of the existing 2-lane roadway. A new 2-lane roadway will be constructed adjacent to the existing 2-lane roadway. The new roadway will have, at a minimum, two 11.5-foot driving lanes with a 4-foot inside shoulder and a 6-foot outside shoulder on the new 2-lane roadway. Twelve-foot shoulders will be constructed at approaches to turnouts that are used as school bus stops. The northbound and southbound traffic will be separated by a median that would vary from 12 to 46 feet, with a majority of the corridor having a 46-foot wide median. The existing roadway will remain within the existing right-of-way and the new roadway improvements will require additional easements for right-of-way, long-term construction and maintenance activities, and temporary permits for initial construction activities.

Two alignments were considered; an east alignment and a west alignment. The east alignment assumes the use of existing US 491 lanes for southbound travel and the

construction of two new northbound lanes to the east. The west alignment assumes the use of existing US 491 lanes for northbound travel and the construction of two new southbound lanes to the west. The findings of the Engineering Re-Evaluation (Supplemental Phase B Report) indicates that the preferred alignment from the previous study, reconstruction of the proposed roadway along the centerline of the existing facility, is no longer the preferred alternative for the US 491 South Corridor. By shifting roadway construction to the east or west of the existing alignment, maintaining the existing roadway for future use, results in reduced construction costs and fewer impacts to surrounding communities. Therefore, the preferred alternative for the US 491 South Corridor will be a west alignment from MP 15 to MP 22, an east alignment from MP 22 to MP 24 in Tohatchi, and a west alignment from MP 24 to MP 45. North of MP 45, a transition to an eastern alignment is required to match the preferred section being developed for the US 491 North Corridor. This overall alignment would result in fewer easement requirements, reduced earthwork, less archaeological site impacts, and a lesser overall construction cost for roadway improvements.

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### **Intersections**

Along with additional lanes, the Build Alternative will include intersection improvements at seven major intersections at MP 15.1, MP 17.9, MP 23.0, MP 23.5, MP 23.8, MP 41.3, and MP 41.6. At the major intersections, deceleration and storage lanes will also be constructed. Major intersections located within communities will be designed to a 55 mph design speed while the minor intersections in the rural areas of the corridor will be designed to a 70 mph design speed. The layout at these intersections will be consistent throughout the corridor. Median openings will be placed at approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile intervals and will be located at existing turnouts where possible with preference given to major turnouts. Median openings will also be placed in between turnout where the turnouts are spaced at greater than 1.0 mile to provide access for school buses and emergency vehicles.

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### **Drainage**

Widening of the roadway will affect most of the existing drainage structures along US 491. Drainage structure extensions and modifications will be required. Along with these extensions, some of the existing drainage structures will be upgraded or replaced with larger structures to accommodate flows. These improvements are intended to address existing flooding or excessive ponding issues occurring within the corridor such as in low-lying areas south of Tohatchi.

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### **Environment**

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), project planning includes the preparation of an environmental assessment (EA). Key elements of the process used to comply with NEPA include the development of a range of alternatives, environmental investigations, and public involvement. The EA is being prepared in coordination with federal, state, and local agencies. The Navajo Nation Department of Transportation and Bureau of Indian Affairs are cooperating agencies. The environmental analysis process is used to inform the public and elected officials of the consequences of the proposed action and consider their input; therefore, the EA serves as a decision-making document. Separate investigations are being conducted for cultural resources, wildlife, endangered species, wetlands, and hazardous materials.

After the EA has been approved for circulation by the FHWA, a public hearing will be held in the early part of 2007. If no significant environmental impacts are identified, a finding of no significant impact (FONSI) will be prepared and distributed. The FONSI will address any concerns raised during the circulation of the EA, during the public hearing comment period, or regarding coordination or other aspects of the project with appropriate agencies.