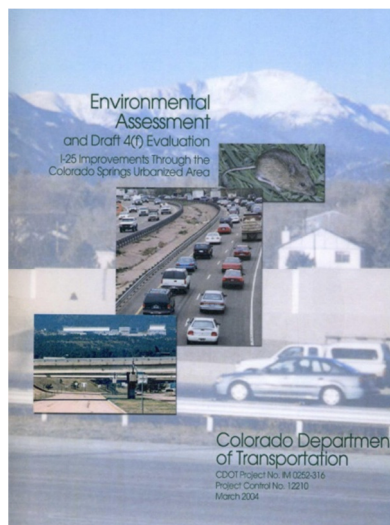




RE-EVALUATION, Mileposts 149 to 161

Interstate 25 Improvements through the Colorado Springs Area Environmental Assessment



SECTION 4(f) TECHNICAL MEMO

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CDOT Region 2

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Introduction

The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) has prepared this technical memorandum to update findings of the Section 4(f) Evaluation described in the original 2004 I-25 Environmental Assessment (EA) with regard to the portion of the Proposed Action between Woodmen Road (Exit 149) in Colorado Springs and State Highway 105 in Monument (Exit 161). The purpose of the EA's Proposed Action is to relieve existing traffic congestion and address project future congestion on I-25 within the Colorado Springs Urbanized Area.

The I-25 EA originally evaluated impacts for the widening of I-25 between South Academy Boulevard (Exit 135) and SH 105, together with reconstruction of various I-25 interchanges within this corridor. Page 2-10 of the EA stated that, "Consistent with projected traffic demand in the I-25 corridor, the conceptual phasing for the Proposed Action calls for:

- (1) initially six-laning through central Colorado Springs, then
- (2) six-laning in northern El Paso County, and finally
- (3) adding HOV [High-Occupancy Vehicle] lanes through central Colorado Springs and widening to six lanes south to South Academy Boulevard."

The first of these conceptual phases was undertaken in central Colorado Springs, completed in 2007. The so-called COSMIX project resulted in 12 miles of six-lane freeway, between South Circle Drive (Exit 138) and North Academy Boulevard (Exit 150). It included major reconstruction at several interchanges, notably not including the Cimarron interchange (Exit 141) or the Fillmore Street interchange (Exit 145). Additional funding will be needed to complete Phase 1.

For the year 2012, CDOT has received funding to begin the second phase, meaning to widen I-25 to six lanes in northern El Paso County, within the area shown in Figure 1. The EA calls for eventually widening I-25 all the way to SH105. Total funding for this project is yet to be determined. Currently enough is available to widen I-25 from Woodmen Rd to Interquest (Exit 153). Nevertheless, to be prepared for possible additional funding being available to complete the widening to SH 105 with this project or available in the near future, CDOT's current EA re-evaluation effort is covering all Phase 2

Figure 1. I-25 EA Re-evaluation Project Vicinity



improvements. Therefore, the study area for this re-evaluation extends northward all the way to Monument.

The I-25 EA included a new connection with Powers Boulevard (now State Highway 21), following SH 21 eastward to just past the Powers Boulevard/Voyager Boulevard interchange. The design and analysis of this connection in the I-25 EA superseded what was proposed earlier in the North Powers Boulevard EA that was approved in 1999. The current EA re-evaluation also includes this portion of SH 21 from I-25 to just east of Voyager Parkway.

Summary of the 2004 EA Section 4(f) Resources, Impacts, and Mitigation

The Department of Transportation Act (DOT Act) of 1966 included a special provision - Section 4(f) - which stipulated that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and other DOT agencies cannot approve the use of land from publicly owned parks, recreational areas, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, or public and private historic sites when certain conditions are met (impacts are adverse under Section 106 of NHPA). The I-25 EA included the Draft Section 4(f) evaluation and the I-25 Finding of No Significant Impact contained the Final Section 4(f) Finding for the I-25 Proposed Action.

The 2004 EA for I-25 identified potential Section 4(f) resources along the corridor and determined whether or not they would be adversely affected as a result of the proposed improvements. Within the re-evaluation area from Woodmen Road north to SH105, the EA identified a transportation use to one Section 4(f) resource, the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA), which is considered to be historic (5EP595).

Interstate 25 was built during the same timeframe as USAFA, on an easement running for about seven miles through USAFA land. For this stretch, between north of Woodmen Road and south of Baptist Road, USAFA owns the land on both sides of I-25. Thus, any improvements to I-25 that require additional right-of-way along these seven miles would necessarily impact USAFA property.

The locations of resources discussed in this memo, whether protected under Section 4(f) or not, are depicted in a map in Figure 2.

Historic Resources

The proposed construction of additional lanes within the existing I-25 easement was determined to have no adverse effect on the USAFA. The reconstruction of the interchange at I-25 and North Gate and the relocation of the Ackerman Overlook were found to be adverse, since these improvements will require additional easements from the USAFA in order to construct.

In 2002, a design charrette with the USAFA, FHWA, and CDOT was conducted and an interchange concept design selected that would minimize the visual impacts from the reconstructed North Gate interchange. The selected interchange design concept (4b) was developed to minimize the visual impacts from the new interchange by constructing most of the new ramps below grade. This interchange would require an estimated 48.4 acres of additional easement from USAFA.

The proposed new overlook to replace the existing Ackerman Overlook was sited to use existing topography to minimize visual impacts. This overlook concept was developed in coordination with the USAFA. The new overlook would require an estimated 5.2 acres of USAFA property. The overlook itself is not a Section 4(f) recreational resource; the land required to build a new overlook is part of an historic resource, the U.S. Air Force Academy.

Figure 2. Location of Resources Considered



Additionally, measures to minimize harm include:

- interchange design to minimize land take
- revegetation with native species
- review of final design plans by USAFA and by Colorado's State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO)
- archival photography of I-25 through the USAFA property prior to construction.*

**Level II archival photography of the I-25 corridor on the USAFA easement was completed in December 2004.*

Both the interchange reconstruction and the relocation of the Ackerman overlook require the modification of the I-25 easement. During the eight years since the EA was approved, the needed easement modifications have not been made, primarily because only Phase 1 has been constructed and easement from the USAFA was not needed.

The 2004 EA identified no Section 4(f) use of the NHRP-eligible New Santa Fe Trail (5EP 1003.9, Santa Fe RR grade). For clarification, it is the railroad grade that is historic. Despite the name of it, the modern bike/pedestrian trail on this alignment is completely unrelated to the Santa Fe Trail that was used by pioneers to settle the American West.

Regarding archaeological resources, the I-25 EA stated that the Proposed Action would affect one prehistoric site. The location of that site was not divulged, to protect the resource. It can now be reported that the site was in the central Colorado Springs area, and was addressed in the I-25 COSMIX construction project. There would be no Section 4(f) use of known archaeological sites in northern El Paso County. A separate technical memorandum on archaeological resources is available as part of the I-25 EA re-evaluation.

Recreational Resources

Page 3-69 of the EA, regarding traffic noise, stated that, "Portions of bicycle and pedestrian facilities that cross or parallel I-25 currently experience noise levels in excess of CDOT noise abatement criteria. By 2025, even larger portions of these facilities will experience noise exceeding the criteria. However, no bicycle or pedestrian facility will experience noise levels so severe that the facility would become unusable for its intended use." This conclusion is applicable to the New Santa Fe Trail and other trails within the re-evaluation study area.

Impacts regarding recreational resources were discussed on page 3-44 of the EA. The Proposed Action would temporarily affect the existing LaForet Trail crossing on USAFA property by lengthening the existing culvert under I-25 and improving the entrance/exit points. In addition, the Proposed Action includes construction of a new recreational trail along North Gate Boulevard to connect the planned Smith Creek Trail (east of I-25) to the existing New Santa Fe Trail (west of I-25).

The Final Section 4(f) Finding in 2004 concluded that the I-25 Proposed Action would have no Section 4(f) impacts on recreational resources.

Changes to the Project that Would Affect the Resource Differently

Based on current design, CDOT has not proposed to change the project in any way that would affect Section 4(f) resources differently from what was described in the EA.

Currently, the proposed I-25 improvements remain at the Conceptual Design stage. CDOT is likely to select a design-build contractor to construct the project. During the design-build process, there may be opportunities to further reduce the amount of additional easement that will be needed for the proposed improvements.

USAFA staff reports that consideration is being given to moving their Visitor Center from the southwestern edge of their main cadet area to the vicinity of the I-25/Northgate interchange, the current site of an existing parking lot and trailhead for the New Santa Fe Trail. If this occurs west of I-25 and north of Northgate Boulevard, USAFA would likely move the trailhead/parking lot to the south, across Northgate Boulevard. This, in turn, could result in moving the planned new Smith Creek Trail from the north side of Northgate Boulevard to the south side of the road, to keep trail users separated from Visitor Center traffic. This hypothetical change is unlikely to result in any change in impacts to cultural or environmental resources in the project vicinity.

Changes in Resources, Analysis Data, Analysis Methods or Applicable Regulations

Since 2004 there have been changes to Section 4(f) regulations. Section 6009(a) of SAFETEA-LU in 2005 established a *de minimis* Section 4(f) use and the development of the least harm analysis. In April 2008, the Final Rule was published establishing the regulations for implementing SAFETEA-LU changes to 23 CFR 771 and 774 and 49 CFR 622. FHWA issued a new Section 4(f) Policy Paper in 2005. The policy paper addresses the use of Section 4(f) properties for non-transportation uses and clarifies that use of Section 4(f) properties for water quality features or erosion control features are not related to transportation. Therefore Section 4(f) requirements do not apply to these features.

No additional analysis is required due to these new regulations. Although changes to the regulations have occurred since the 2004 EA, the Section 4(f) analysis, determination of impacts and mitigation remain valid. No new public parks or wildlife refuges have been identified along I-25 in the study area since the I-25 EA was completed in 2004.

Historic Resources

With the passage of time since the 2004 EA, the 50-year age threshold for considering potential historic sites has changed from circa 1954 to circa 1962. Land adjacent to I-25 was reviewed by CDOT's historian as part of this re-evaluation. CDOT is consulting with the State Historic Preservation Office regarding potential eligibility and effects of any resources nearby resources from this timeframe. The U.S. Air Force Academy falls into this time frame, but was previously assessed in the 2004 EA. Section 4(f) impacts cannot be fully determined until resources for the 1954 to circa 1962 timeframe are examined with regard to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Recreational Resources

Regarding recreational resources, a new soccer field approximately 200 feet east of I-25 and 0.9 mile south of SH105 belongs to the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), which charges a monthly membership fee (e.g., \$26 per month in 2012 for persons under age 18, and higher rates for adults). No land is needed from the YMCA property for the Proposed Action. As this is *not a publicly owned recreation facility*, it is not considered a Section 4(f) resource. A separate technical memorandum on traffic noise explains anticipated noise impacts at the soccer field.

Changes in Proposed Mitigation

No change to the mitigation proposed in the 2004 EA is anticipated. Changes in mitigation would be considered if the USAFA does not want the Ackerman Overlook relocated or requests changes to the North Gate interchange design.

Conclusion

At this time, with the assumption that the USAFA will not require any changes to the interchange design or want the overlook permanently closed, no new findings are needed or anticipated.

Summary of Previously and Currently Identified Section 4(f) Impacts and Mitigation

EA 2004 – No-Action Alternative	EA 2004 – Impacts of Proposed Action	EA 2004 - Mitigation	2012 – What Has changed	Re- evaluation 2012 – No Action	Re- evaluation 2012 – Impacts of Proposed Action	Re- evaluation 2012 – Mitigation
The No-Action Alternative would result in no new use of Section 4(f) resource.	The Proposed Action would use land from the USAFA in two locations. 48.2 acres of additional easement from USAFA are needed at the planned North Gate/ Powers Interchange Complex. 5.2 acres of additional USAFA easement are needed for the proposed new Ackerman overlook .	Measures to minimize harm include: interchange design to minimize land take and visual impacts; re-vegetation with native species; archival photography of all I-25 miles on USAFA property prior to construction. Final design plans will be forwarded to SHPO & USAFA for comment. Level II archival photography of all I-25 miles on USAFA property was completed in December 2004.	Since 2004, FHWA has revised the Section 4(f) regulations to address SAFETEA-LU and to establish procedures for <i>de minimis</i> impacts. FHWA also updated its Section 4(f) Policy Paper. A new (2007)YMCA soccer field, on Jackson Creek Parkway south of SH105, is not publicly owned and therefore not a Section 4(f) resource. With the passage of time, the 50-year threshold for historic sites has changed from circa 1954 to circa 1962. No land is needed from any newly identified historic resources.	No additional taking of land from 4(f) resources.	No changes to EA-identified Section 4(f) impacts.	No changes to EA-identified mitigation requirements.