



PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING

APRIL 10, 2002

US 93 – WICKENBURG TO SANTA MARIA RIVER LOCATION/DESIGN CONCEPT STUDY

WELCOME! The Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT), in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), is conducting a Corridor Improvement Study of US 93 between State Route (SR) 74 and the Santa Maria River (Figure 1). The study will determine the optimum location and design concept for a proposed bypass around Wickenburg and the widening of 35 miles of US 93 north of town. In addition, a separate Interim

The purpose of tonight's meeting is to present information and receive public comments on:

- ▶ the status of the proposed US 93 bypass around Wickenburg
- ▶ bypass-related issues and concerns of Morristown area residents

Improvement Design Concept Study is underway to investigate alternatives to alleviate traffic congestion in downtown Wickenburg until the ultimate bypass is completed.

This is the second in a series of public information meetings designed to update Morristown area residents on the progress of the studies and to gather your input. Tonight's meeting will focus on the status of the proposed US 93 bypass around the Wickenburg area.



FIGURE 1 – STUDY LIMITS

NEED FOR THE PROJECT

US 93 is the primary highway route linking the metropolitan Phoenix area to northwest Arizona and beyond. It is also part of the National Highway System and has been designated as a North American Free Trade

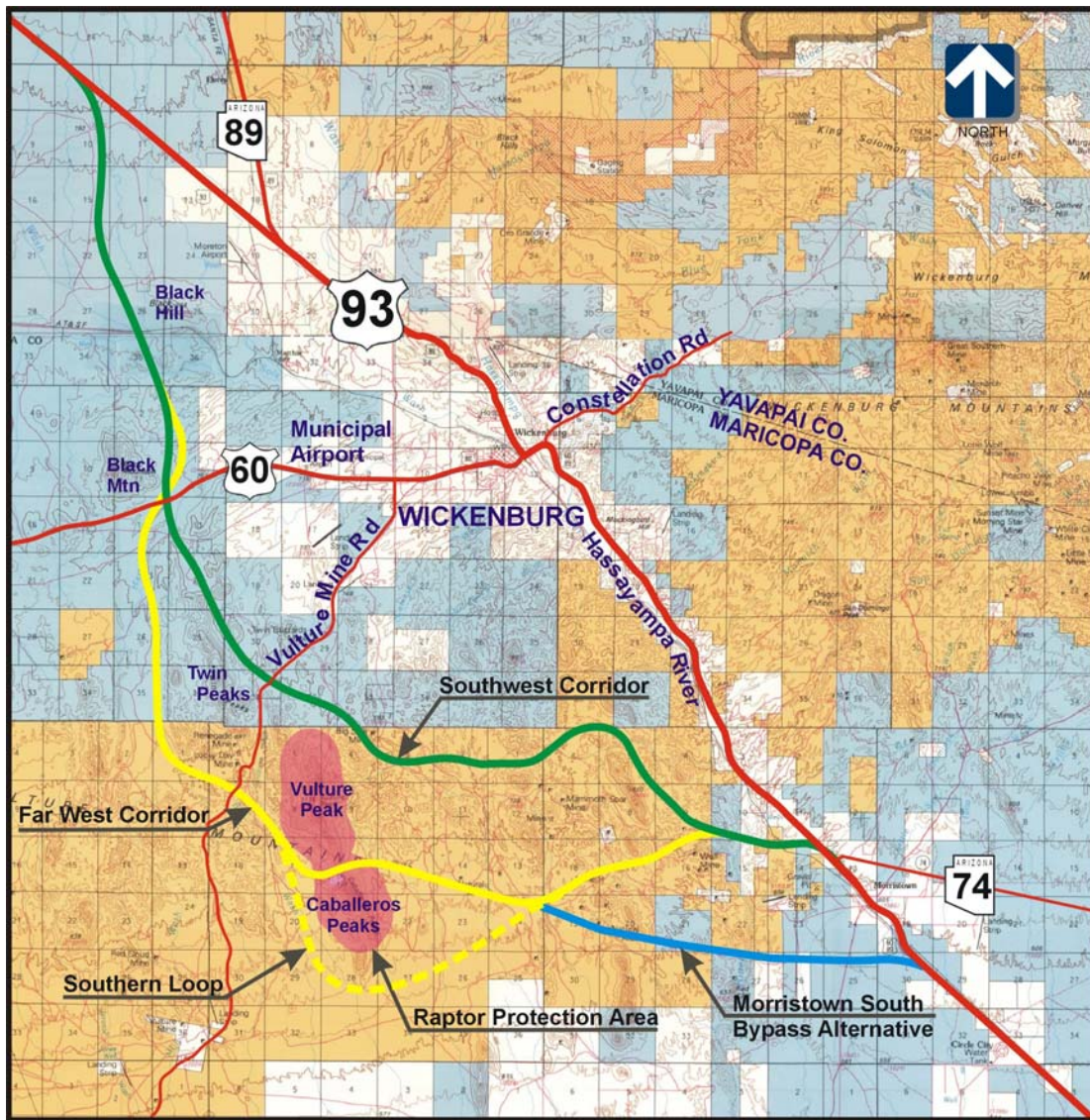


FIGURE 2 – WICKENBURG BYPASS CORRIDORS

Agreement route. ADOT’s long-range plan is ultimately to provide a four-lane highway from Phoenix to the Nevada state line. Improvements to the route are being made as traffic conditions warrant and as funding becomes available.

The portion of US 93 between Wickenburg and the Santa Maria River is currently operating near capacity and it is expected that traffic volumes will increase markedly over the next 20 years. Given these conditions, together with the congestion on US 93 within Wickenburg, ADOT has determined that there is an immediate need to initiate route improvements.

BYPASS STUDY

At the last public information meeting in Morristown, held on December 13, 2000, ADOT presented the findings of the initial analysis of several Wickenburg bypass alignments suggested by the public and ADOT. The Southwest and Far West bypass corridors were presented as the most appropriate for a bypass (Figure 2), with the Far West being the preferred option. It was also stated that additional development and evaluation of specific highway alignments within each corridor is needed.

Subsequent to the public meeting, the BLM found that the Far West Corridor would pass through a protected area that

surrounds the cliff areas of Vulture Peak and Caballeros Peaks. The area was established by BLM's Lower Gila North Management Framework Plan (MFP), which was approved in March 1983, to protect the nesting habitat of the prairie falcon, golden eagle, barn owl, and great horned owl. This area, labeled on Figure 2 as a Raptor Protection Area (RPA), is designated as a "significant special habitat feature" in the MFP.

Without a change to the BLM's plan, the Far West alternative cannot be considered a feasible alternative. If ADOT were to proceed with the corridor selection process at this time, the Far West Corridor would have to be dropped from further consideration, resulting in the selection of the Southwest Corridor by default. However, the Study Team feels that the Far West Corridor should be fully analyzed due to the public support for that route and the advantages that the Far West offers in comparison to the Southwest Corridor. Another consideration is that the ultimate location of the proposed Canamex Corridor, which has not yet been resolved, could influence the alignment and selection of the bypass route.

In order to consider ADOT's request for a transportation corridor across the RPA, the BLM would need to initiate a proposal to amend the current MFP. The amendment process involves full public participation and an environmental analysis. The analysis would determine whether the existing RPA designation is appropriate and whether it should be modified to allow the proposed transportation corridor. It is important to note that carrying out the BLM's amendment process would not ensure approval of the Far West bypass corridor. In order to change the MFP, the BLM must demonstrate that the RPA designation is no longer valid or that the change in the plan is warranted by the need for the bypass to be located within the protected area.

Before the BLM will agree to begin the amendment process, the agency must have a compelling reason to justify the change to its current land use management plan. Therefore, ADOT has agreed to prepare a detailed

Feasibility Report regarding the various bypass routes, including a new Southern Loop (Figure 2), as a basis for the BLM to consider revisiting the RPA designation status.

Regardless of whether or not the BLM amends the MFP to allow road construction through the RPA, continued consideration of a bypass route will take several years to complete. With the Canamex Corridor Study lagging well behind the bypass study, and with the uncertainty regarding a transportation corridor through the RPA, not enough information is available at this time to clearly define the ultimate bypass route. ADOT is committed to developing the Wickenburg bypass; however, a final decision on the route selection will now be several years in the future.

BYPASS/US 60 CONNECTION

During the December 13, 2000, public meeting in Morristown, ADOT presented two possible alternatives for providing a traffic interchange connecting the Wickenburg bypass route with US 60 and SR 74 just north of Morristown. These two concepts, identified as Interchange Alternatives 1 and 2, are illustrated in the exhibits attached to this handout. During the meeting, ADOT was asked to investigate an alternative bypass route that would merge with US 60 at the railroad overpass south of Morristown. A potential location for this route is shown on Figure 2 as the Morristown South Bypass Alternative.

Assuming that the Morristown South Bypass Alternative could be utilized as a bypass route, several interchange configurations were developed and investigated that would connect this bypass route with US 60 and SR 74. Two possible configurations, Interchange Alternatives 3 and 4, are shown in the exhibits attached to this handout and will be discussed this evening.

Analysis of the four interchange alternatives revealed the following reasons why Interchange Alternative 1 is preferred:

- ▶ Interchange Alternative 1 is the least costly and requires the least amount of

new right-of-way from the Morristown area of any of the alternatives.

- ▶ Interchange Alternatives 3 and 4 are more complex and costly than Interchange Alternatives 1 and 2.
- ▶ Interchange Alternative 3 involves the most out-of-direction travel for motorists.
- ▶ Interchange Alternative 4 requires the greatest amount of new right-of-way from the Morristown area.

Initial analyses of the Morristown South Bypass Alternative showed that although the alternative avoids a railroad crossing, it involves a major bridge crossing of the Hassayampa River floodplain. Therefore, the route would be longer and more costly than either the Far West or Southwest corridor. Because of this finding, either the Far West or Southwest route is preferred.

HOW CAN YOU PARTICIPATE?

Your input this evening is very important to the outcome of the study. Before and after tonight's presentation, Study Team representatives will be available for you to discuss the study project and ask questions. Following the presentation, the meeting will be opened for comments and questions from the audience.

Your input can also be noted on the attached comment sheet. Please hand it to a Study Team representative tonight or send it to Bert Bertleson by May 1, 2002.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Following tonight's meeting, the Study Team will review the input received from the public. The information will be used in completing the feasibility report for the bypass.

An Initial Design Concept Report and a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) are nearing completion for the Interim Improvement Project and will be made available to the public this spring, followed by a public hearing where we will present our final recommendations. In addition, the

design concept for improving US 93 north of Wickenburg is continuing, with a public information meeting also planned for early summer.

No final decision or endorsement of any of the study alternatives has been made at this time by ADOT, the FHWA, or the BLM. An official decision will not be made until the alternatives evaluation process has been documented in an EA; a public hearing has been held to present recommendations; and the agencies and the public have had an opportunity to comment. These steps are required for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act.

NEED MORE INFORMATION? CONTACT:

Bert Bertleson, Project Manager
Jacobs Civil Inc.
875 W. Elliot Road, Suite 201
Tempe, Arizona 85284
Phone: (480) 763-8800; fax: (480) 763-8601
Email: bert.bertleson@jacobs.com

George Wallace, Project Monitor
ADOT Studies Section
1739 W. Jackson St., MD 050P
Phoenix, Arizona 85007
Phone: (602) 712-7467; fax: (602) 712-8992
Email: gwallace@dot.state.az.us

VISIT THE PROJECT WEB SITE!

www.wickenburg.civilnet.sverdrup.com

