

PROJECT SCOPING REPORT

**US 93: SR 89 to Wickenburg Interim Bypass
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Prepared for the
Arizona Department of Transportation



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INTRODUCTION

The Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) have begun a study of potential improvements to US 93 beginning at the intersection with State Route (SR) 89 and continuing south to the northern end of the planned Wickenburg Interim Bypass. The study will identify ways of improving traffic flow while avoiding or minimizing environmental, social, and economic impacts within the project limits. The purpose of the study is to evaluate improvements to the existing roadway to meet traffic demand for the next 20 years. The year in the future for which the transportation facility will be designed to operate (known as the “design year”) for this project is 2030.

The study will focus on the portion of US 93 from the SR 89 intersection to the northern limit of the planned Wickenburg Interim Bypass (Milepost 193.0 to 198.2). This portion of US 93 does not currently provide the capacity needed to handle existing or projected traffic volumes. An “Ultimate Bypass” will eventually route traffic completely out of the town of Wickenburg along its western limits and shift regional traffic away from this portion of US 93. However, that project is not anticipated to occur within the next 15 or 20 years. Until that time, this roadway segment will continue to carry US 93 regional and local traffic until the ultimate bypass is constructed. If no improvements are made, traffic congestion within and adjacent to the project limits will worsen due to increased traffic volumes.

THE SCOPING PROCESS

The purpose of the scoping process is to identify potential issues, concerns, and opportunities (ICOs) that should be considered in the development of alternatives and environmental studies for the proposed highway improvements. ICO information was obtained from area residents, business owners, and government agency representatives through public and agency scoping meetings.

Agency Scoping

An agency scoping meeting was held on June 14, 2005, from 1:00 to 3:30 p.m. at the ADOT Phoenix Construction District Office, 4550 North Black Canyon Highway, Phoenix, Arizona. Notice of the meeting was sent to representatives of federal, state, and local agencies. The list of invited agency representatives, the meeting handout, presentation, invitation, agenda, sign-in sheet, and meeting minutes are included in Appendix 1.

The meeting was attended by representatives of ADOT, Town of Wickenburg, Maricopa County, FHWA, Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD), US Army Corps of Engineers, Yavapai County, and Jacobs Civil Inc. The meeting was opened with a discussion of the project, a review of the project area, how the project relates to nearby projects, and the study process. The floor was then opened for the representatives to share their specific issues, concerns, and opportunities for the project.

Agency Issues and Concerns

At the meeting, the agency representatives voiced the following ICOs regarding engineering considerations, social and economic impacts, and environmental impacts of the project.

Engineering Considerations

- Need to verify that the right-of-way (R/W) along old road segments has been abandoned.
- Consider a roundabout intersection at SR 89 as a way of transitioning from a rural to urban roadway.
- Need to consider controlled/limited access and the need for frontage roads. Purchase the R/W needed for access control as early as possible.
- Other types of intersections besides grade-separated should be considered at the US 93/SR 89 junction.
- All intersection types should be considered at Rincon Road and Scenic Loop Road.
- Phase construction to avoid problems with keeping traffic moving during construction.
- Consider a divided highway as well as a five-lane section and determine what is most appropriate given future access control.
- Consider the possibility of long-term turn-back of the roadway after the Ultimate Bypass is built.
- Need to address the transition from rural to urban near the SR 89 intersection and the possible need for traffic control warnings for southbound US 93 traffic.
- Installing a signalized intersection at SR 89 may reduce the footprint of the TI and cause less of an impact to the wash north of the TI.
- There are possible conflicts with extensions of Town water and sewer connections that are planned to the north of Wickenburg along US 93.

Social and Economic

- Minimize R/W take.
- Consider planned development at Vulture Mine Road intersection and Moonlight Mesa area and associated impacts to those intersections.
- Provide access for residences and commercial uses.
- Maintain access during construction.
- The Monte Vista Ranch developer has plans to add commercial and residential construction near US 93 across from the Meadows. This will include low-to-moderate income housing.
- Address how the project will provide access to existing homes and planned development.
- Coordinate with Yavapai and Maricopa Counties regarding developers' plans and access needs.

Environmental

- Minimize the impacts to wildlife by avoiding loss of biodiversity and wildlife strikes.
- Preserve/enhance wildlife connectivity by providing linkages and not creating barriers.

- The time to establish wildlife corridors is now, due to impending development within the project area.
- The wash crossing just north of the existing SR 89 junction is likely to be a wildlife corridor and should be treated as such in the design of the project.
- Wildlife movement along the Hassayampa River and the effects of the Wickenburg Interim Bypass should be considered.
- Fencing may be required to minimize animal mortality and increase safety.
- Coordinate with AGFD regarding the typical species using corridors in the vicinity.
- In vegetated median, use plants that are not attractive to birds.
- Avoid and minimize impacts to waters of the US.
- Begin evaluation of jurisdictional waters, tribal consultation, cultural resources, and biology as early as possible to identify major issues or constraints.

Public Scoping

A Public Scoping Meeting was held on August 10, 2005, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the Wickenburg Community Center, 160 North Valentine Street, Wickenburg, Arizona. The purpose of the meeting was to provide information about the study process to the general public and to provide an opportunity to gather public input on ICOs for the proposed study. The public meeting notice and presentation are provided in Appendix 2.

Notice of the meeting was provided in the *Wickenburg Sun* on July 27 and August 3 and in the *Arizona Republic* on July 23. The meeting notice included a brief description of the study corridor and the purpose of the study. It also listed persons to contact for more information or to send comments on the study. An article about the public meeting was also published in the *Wickenburg Sun* on August 10, 2005. This article described the background of the study and provided details of the meeting. In addition, postcards were sent out to 2,619 households in Wickenburg and the surrounding area on July 23, 2005, to provide notification of the public scoping meeting.

Study Team members were available before and after the meeting to informally discuss the project. Four exhibits were utilized to facilitate discussion: a US 93 map showing the other studies around Wickenburg, an exhibit showing the different levels of service, and two exhibits showing potential future interchange concepts. Three handouts were made available to the public at the meeting: the project description, project area map, and comment sheet (Appendix 2).

One hundred twelve people attended the meeting. The meeting began with an introduction of the Study Team followed by a slide presentation. The presentation included a discussion of the study background, activities to date, design issues and impacts, and the study process. After the presentation, an open question-and-answer session was held. The questions and answers are provided in Appendix 2.

Public Issues and Concerns

Twenty people submitted comments either by returning the comment form provided at the meeting or by sending in a letter. The comment form provided at the public meeting requested

comments on the following: environmental, social, or economic concerns; concerns about specific areas along the roadway; planned development; and any other comments on the study. The comments are summarized below. A detailed list of comments is provided in Appendix 3.

Environmental/Social/Economic Concerns

- Make sure there is still traffic flow during construction.
- Restricting access to the roadway from adjacent properties should be considered.
- The driveways are too close together and do not have proper signage.
- Safety and noise reduction need to be improved.
- Access to local businesses will be restricted.
- Roundabouts are not the answer. Cloverleaves or diamonds are more effective.
- Boxing up trees is a waste of time and money.
- There is the possibility of big problems where four lanes of traffic decrease to two lanes at the junction of the Wickenburg Interim Bypass at MP 198.2; this area is very dangerous. The present speed limit is 55 mph but most drive at 65 mph.
- There is currently inadequate traffic control at US 93 and Vulture Mine Road. This area will be further affected by subdivisions under construction.

Areas of Concern along the Roadway

- Encourage cities/counties to build local use roads.
- The Wickenburg Interim Bypass should not be completed before the "gap" widening.
- Through-traffic never slows down between Vulture Mine Road and Wickenburg Way. Residents have a difficult time accessing their driveways.
- The area of Matthie Ranch Road and BNSF Railroad is a concern.
- A five-lane road at North Cope Road would greatly improve safety; a right-turn lane would improve the traffic flow.
- Traffic needs to be routed out of downtown Wickenburg.
- Accessing US 93 between Camino Blanco and Vulture Mine Road (Coyote Run area) is very difficult. A parallel access road would be a great improvement.
- Make provisions to allow residents on the west side of US 93 to turn left into their driveways.
- There should be a controlled access road with a controlled intersection for residents to access US 93.
- The Sanborn Road turnoff must be addressed and fixed.
- The area of access to Coyote Run lacks adequate speed control and dedicated turn lanes.

Planned Development

- Grantham Project
- Possible annexations by the Town of Wickenburg might occur.
- Strip development should have limited roadway access.
- Wickenburg Ranch
- Subdivisions under development along Vulture Mine Road.

Additional Comments

- The speed limit is too high on existing US 93.
- A five lane highway in section A would be better.
- Construct this project as quickly as possible to keep traffic disruptions to a minimum.
- Limited access should be a priority.
- The roundabouts should be built.
- The roundabouts will not work because of the number of large trucks and heavy traffic.
- Coordinate this study with the Ultimate Bypass study.
- An overpass is needed at the intersection of SR 89/US 93.
- The southwest bypass is the best option.
- A pedestrian corridor should be further considered.
- Excessive semi-truck braking is a problem; a solution to this might be speed reduction, grade changes, or rubberized asphalt.

In addition, a letter from Gerald M. Robbins was sent on September 6, 2005. In this letter, Mr. Robbins discusses the impacts that a grade-separated interchange at US 93/SR 89 would have on the Wickenburg Ranch development. The grade separated interchange would encroach on this property. M3 Companies is currently planning to start construction of 2,327 new homes in summer 2006. He proposes that a roundabout be used to improve the intersection, instead of the grade-separated interchange.