



**US 50 Corridor  
Pueblo To Kansas**

# **A Community-Based Vision for US 50**



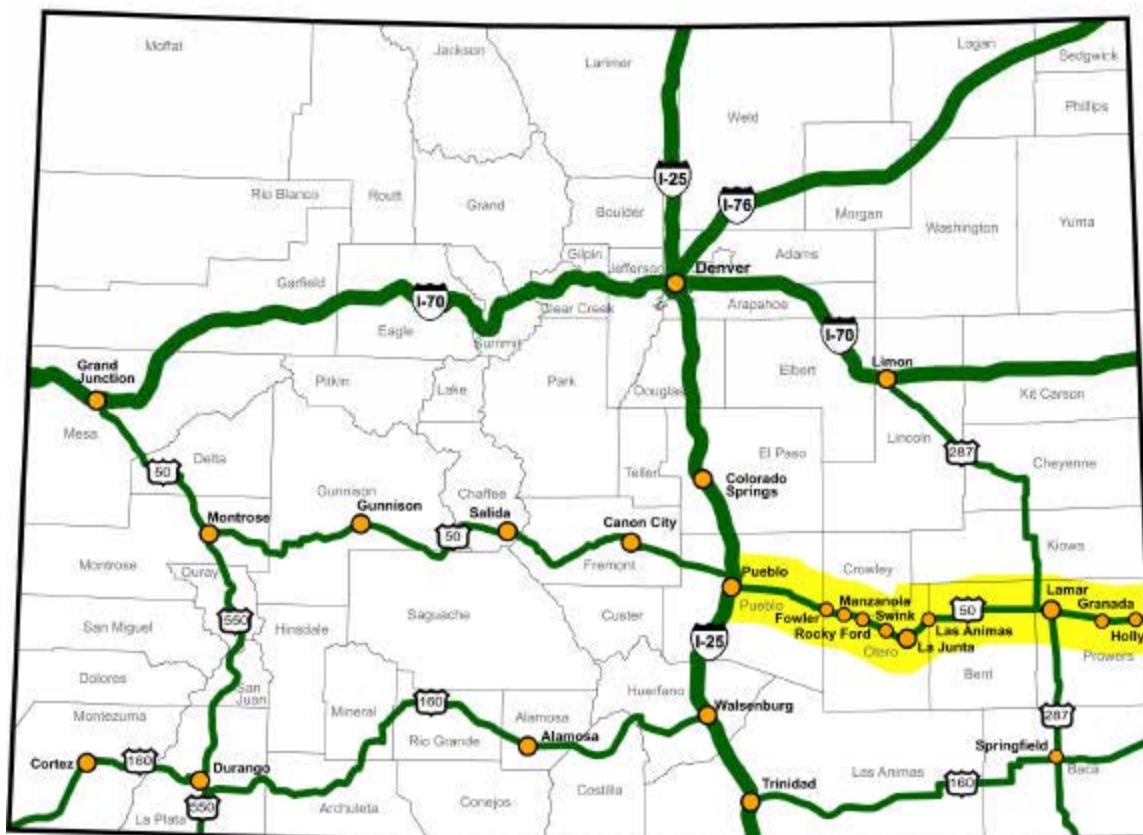
**URS**

**WILSON  
& COMPANY**

## A COMMUNITY-BASED VISION FOR US 50

### BACKGROUND:

The US 50 Corridor from Pueblo, Colorado to the Kansas State Line is a 150-mile transportation facility (US 50) that complements Interstate 70 to the north and US 160 to the south; and links the Ports to Plains corridor along SH 287 on the east and Interstate 25 on the west. As part of this regional transportation system, US 50 holds the possibility of delivering alternate routes for other congested corridors such as I-70 and, ultimately, the national transportation network.



US 50 transects an agricultural community experiencing economic and population decline. With limited transportation dollars and identified needs in the State of Colorado much greater than available dollars, US 50 has not ranked high in transportation investment funding as compared to other major corridors in the state. Some sections of US 50 have not had major reconstruction since 1936. Even though the corridor has not ranked high for investment, US 50 does have safety and mobility issues that need to be addressed.

## Some of the significant safety issues facing US 50 include:

- Inadequate or limited passing opportunities exist. No passing zones account for approximately 55 miles of the 150 corridor.
- Roadway configurations, including vertical and horizontal sight distances; and vertical and horizontal curves that do not meet current design criteria.
- Numerous access points (county roads, field approaches, private drives) to US 50.
- Inadequate horizontal separation between railroad tracks and US 50 on cross streets for semi-trucks and school buses (i.e. either the back end of the vehicle is overhanging the tracks, or the front end is encroaching into the roadway).
- 25 miles of the 2-lane sections do not meet acceptable levels of service (LOS).
- In the 20-year planning horizon all of the 2-lane sections will be at unacceptable LOS.
- Inadequate clear zones.
- Inadequate shoulders, medians and passing lanes to handle the heavily mixed vehicle usage, including trucks, farm equipment, recreational vehicles and passenger cars.



Example of Clear Zone Constraint

## Anecdotal safety issues present on US 50 that were related to the Project Team include:

- Passing on the shoulders.
- Slow moving school buses, trucks, and farm equipment entering the highway crossing bi-directional high speed traffic with no median refuge areas and minimal or no shoulders.
- Traffic not pulling over for emergency vehicles.
- Numerous accounts of near-misses that are never reflected in the accident data.
- Encountering oversized, slow moving farm machinery.



Farm Equipment on US 50

## US 50 also presents mobility issues:

- Truck percentages today range from 16 to over 25% -- this will be exacerbated by the addition of 4,000 trucks a day projected for US 287 in the next 10 – 20 years with the potential diversion to US 50.
- The current average travel speed along this 150-mile corridor is less than 40 mph.

**In order to address the safety and mobility issues on US 50, the following constraints need to be resolved or considered:**

- The railroad abuts the roadway for a significant portion of the project.
- The instability of the Arkansas River and its related flood plains confine and impinge the roadway options.
- Major utility lines, both above and below ground.
- Numerous irrigation wells, canals, and structures that parallel and cross US 50.
- Uncontrolled access.
- Irrigated farmland abuts the roadway.
- Narrow right-of-way widths.
- Many older communities with business and residential developments adjacent to the highway, as well as numerous potentially historic structures



Arkansas River with Associated Flood Plains

US 50 connects four counties and ten municipalities, each historically with its own voice and vision for addressing their wants and needs. CDOT has responded with local improvements, as funds became available, over the last half century. With approximately \$30 million a year since 1998 allocated to CDOT Region 2 for prioritized projects within the 13 counties opportunities for major improvement have been minimal.

**Identifying potential funding sources:** In 1996 the Colorado Transportation Commission developed the Colorado Strategic Transportation Project Program. The Commission created this program to respond to the ever-increasing demands placed on Colorado's transportation system. The initial projects had existing plans that demonstrated benefits to statewide transportation; had local and regional support; improved safety and/or mobility; and offered a potential economic benefit to the region.

The program has been very successful and substantial progress has been made toward completing the first set of 28 projects. The State Transportation Commissioners are now identifying the next set of statewide strategic projects. Any proposed projects must have grassroots support and address compelling System Quality, Mobility or Safety needs and are of a scope that cannot be addressed in a timely fashion with existing resources.

Responding to the demands for improved safety and mobility throughout the region, and to the increased usage of US 50 as a local roadway, as well as a major trucking corridor, CDOT commissioned a study to provide a long range plan for improvements to the highway. This plan will develop a unified vision and a single voice for long term improvements along the Corridor and position US 50 to compete for future funding through the 2003 Strategic Investment Plan.

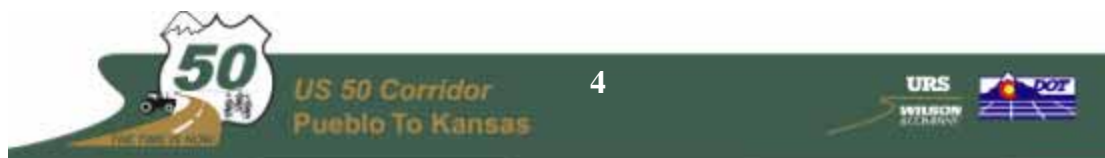
### ***THE PROJECT BEGINS:***

As the Project Team began a dialog with the communities through the Coffee Klatches, it came to the realization that US 50 is an integral part of the daily lives of all of the communities and citizens along the Lower Arkansas Valley. The towns and the surrounding areas function as one community with US 50 as one of the threads that ties them together. The quality of life experienced by these citizens is enhanced or degraded by the condition of the road itself. Based on the input from local citizens it was clear that the plan would need to address the regional issues which include the Ports to Plains Initiative, as well as the linkage at these communities.

An educational and communication campaign was developed to explain to the public how CDOT develops and funds projects and for the team to understand the communities needs and desires for this corridor. Initially, the Project Team encountered significant skepticism about “promises made and not kept” and “studies that never accomplished anything.” The campaign included a goal to gain the trust of the citizens by striving for an open, responsive dialog to ensure that their issues and concerns were heard and addressed.

### ***THE TIME IS NOW . . .***

The idea that ***The Time is Now*** to make long-term decisions for the future of transportation in the Lower Arkansas Valley was introduced at the first series of open houses. The communities would need to focus on the development of an overall common vision for US 50; a definition of the needs; alternative solutions; a recommended plan and the adoption of the plan. The Project Team shared with the communities the existing funding scenarios, and the success of the initial Strategic Investment Plan. The Project Team demonstrated what it would take to have the US 50 Plan considered for the 2003 Strategic Investment Plan. The Project Team stressed that regardless of whether the US 50 project qualifies for the Strategic Investment Plan,



a community supported, organized, improvement plan was needed. The Project Team was asked by the citizens to provide information about the existing conditions and forecasted conditions of US 50. The citizens and their community leaders asked numerous questions and requested immediate, interim improvements. The response to the first question was a promise to come back with answers; and the response to the latter was that there was no money for significant improvements at this time. The plan, which could include interim improvements, should be developed first.

***REGIONAL ADVOCACY GROUP:***

In addition to holding the first set of public open houses, the Project Team began working with Action 22, an advocacy group for 22 southeastern Colorado counties, consisting of elected officials and community leaders. Action 22 is a beneficial partner to the Project Team in understanding the local communities' values and needs while having a regional perspective. In exchange, Action 22 became a resource within the communities to encourage a single voice and vision for US 50, while ensuring that the local needs would be met. After the Project Team shared the proposed project goals and the methods to achieve them, the community leaders began to understand that a plan would benefit the state and the region. A plan could also assist them in creating local development scenarios and economic initiatives. Ultimately, this plan will allow US 50 to compete for limited transportation dollars.

***BUILDING TRUST:***

The second series of public open houses focused on answering the community questions regarding traffic counts (including the truck traffic); CDOT's existing right-of-way; accident history; speed zones; location of two lane and four lane sections; and traffic characteristics. In addition, the citizens shared with the Project Team how US 50 functions for them – both locally and regionally, and specific safety concerns. Some citizens expressed an interest in regional bypasses to serve the state, while maintaining the existing US 50 for their local needs.

The Project Team learned about the importance of US 50 within these communities and developed an open dialog. The Project Team also clarified for the communities that the guidelines for a safe and efficient highway (particularly speed design and access restrictions) must be met; the natural and human environment must be protected; and that alternatives must accommodate the growth and the changing needs of the Arkansas Valley. A rapport was being established.

### ***TO BYPASS OR NOT TO BYPASS?:***

The third series of open houses incorporated the concepts of regional bypass systems as suggested by the citizens in the previous set of open houses. The systems could go either north or south of the existing corridor and/or use the existing corridor. In response to the citizens' request to see a wide range of possibilities of widening the existing alignment, multiple concepts were developed. The citizens responded with their preferences and values. They also gained an understanding of the issues associated with widening the existing highway through their communities.

The citizens became more aware of the local benefits of an improved regional facility. In doing so, the communities' values moved closer to those of a regional perspective. While there was some residual interest in regional bypasses, the overwhelming majority (76%) of the comments indicated that the existing corridor was preferred. In addition, three City Councils passed resolutions favoring the existing corridor. Based on the community outreach, involvement of Action 22, and the relationships established, the third series of public open houses brought forth a resounding 451 attendees and a subtle shift in the attitude toward the project. The citizens welcomed the Project Team's collaborative approach.

### ***GETTING THE LOCAL PERSPECTIVE – THE COMMUNITY DRIVES THE BUS:***



Community Bus Tour Participants  
Reviewing Aerial Maps

In response to the issues and concerns raised at the third series of open houses, the Project Team realized that they needed more understanding of the local conditions -- what the local community wanted to protect, enhance, and, essentially, what they valued.

The Project Team worked with Action 22 to develop the Community "Bus Tours." Action 22 coordinated the selection of citizens to participate -- the communities selected the individuals they trusted to advocate their local values and concerns. These hands-on community bus tours provided an opportunity for the Project Team to meet with the citizens in

their town. It was also a conducive environment for the Project Team to develop relationships with the stakeholders and to gather a deeper understanding of specific community needs (community context, i.e., how would they like the improvements to fit and serve their community).

The community bus tours involved a half day tour in the nine communities with an opportunity in the evening to share with the community-at-large the results of the day. The agenda for the bus tours was to spend some time reviewing aerial maps, identifying community resources and asking them to show preferences for potential improvements. The Project Team and local participants then drove and walked the areas of most concern to them, pointing out and discussing future plans and specific issues. As a result of collaborating with the local participants, the Project Team gained not only knowledge of the resources valued by the community and the local functionality of US 50, but also many of the underlying values of the communities.

**For instance:**

- If impacting irrigated farmland, be aware of irrigation patterns or flows and avoid impacts to head water areas.
- If a natural barrier exists locate roadway as close as possible to the barrier to make best use of that area and maximize the community growth potential.



**Two specific examples include:**

- The Town of Fowler is thinking about reconfiguring its golf course which would provide the Project Team with additional flexibility in designing a northern realignment.
- The Towns of Las Animas and Holly desire the realignment of US 50 to be next to the existing Arkansas River levee.



Community Bus Tour – Field Review of Potential Corridors

While the primary purpose of the community bus tour was to understand each community's values, the Project Team also used this opportunity to share information, again, about the project's goals, guidelines and constraints. The development of the plan will position US 50 for the next phase, the environmental process.

The bus tour attendees then asked the Project Team to continue the dialog developed during the day by conducting individual community meetings for the next series of general open houses and continuing the bus tour idea throughout the next phases of the project. These bus tours were invaluable in building community consensus for the vision.



**THE MATRIX REVEALED:**

In response to the request made at the community bus tours, the fourth series of public open houses was held in **each** of the nine communities along the corridor. Lamar was not included because it was developing its own alternatives for a bypass and was involved in its environmental process at the time. The focus of the meetings was to share the regional corridor evaluation matrix as shown at right.

Evaluation criteria was derived from the public’s input, comments and expressed desires, as well as CDOT’s guidelines and responsibilities. The regional bypasses going north and south of the existing corridor were eliminated for several reasons; primarily, the public was overwhelmingly in favor of staying on the existing corridor. The remaining concepts showed the functionality of the existing corridor with options going locally north, south and through the communities.

The Project Team shared with the citizens that these concepts, that they helped develop, will be carried forward into the environmental phase of the project.

**TAKING OWNERSHIP OF THE VISION:**

At the conclusion of this last set of open houses, the public had demonstrated their understanding of the process and their ownership in the common vision they developed for the corridor. This was confirmed by the communities’ continued involvement in the meetings, the comments received and observed through the actions of the community bus tour participants walking their neighbors through the presentation boards. They pointed out how their community’s issues drove the development of corridor location options and how they participated in their development.

# Regional Corridor Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Criteria	Regional Corridor Alternatives		
	Existing	Northern	Southern
Public Acceptance	●	◐	○
Utilization of Existing Infrastructure/Right-of-Way	●	◐	○
Ability to Phase Construction to Match Funding	●	◐	◐
Consistency/Conformity with Local/Regional Plans	●	○	○
Maintenance of Traffic During Construction	◐	●	●
Potential Economic Benefit to Local Communities	◐	○	○
Minimize Potential Impacts to Built Environment (Business/Residential)	◐	●	●
Meets Local Mobility Needs	●	○	○
Future Flexibility	◐	●	●

Scale



Best meets the criteria or local potential impact



Somewhat meets the criteria or moderate potential impact



Least able to meet criteria or least potential impact

**Therefore:**  
the existing US 50 corridor best meets the needs of the communities.



Community Bus Tour Members Explain Project to Neighbor

The Pueblo Area Council of Governments (PACOG – MPO), South Eastern Transportation Planning Region and the Central Front Range Transportation Planning Region also believe in this vision for US 50. They have demonstrated this by requesting the inclusion of US 50 in the 2003 Strategic Investment Plan.

CDOT has the grassroots support to continue with the refinement of the vision.

***NEXT STEPS: WHAT AND WHY NOW***

The next steps or phases for this project involve the environmental investigations and processes. We are proposing the development of a Tiered Environmental Impact Statement (Tiered EIS) for the following reasons:

- The length of the Corridor.
- The uncertain funding streams
- Need to identify and address major environmental concerns with coordinating agencies for the entire corridor.
- Potential environmental streamlining opportunities with other agencies.
- The need to develop a corridor-level location decision and approach to facilitate long term planning.

A Tiered EIS needs to be initiated now in order to:

- Identify and coordinate the development of potential long-term strategies for managing environmental issues along the Lower Arkansas Valley.
- Identify and prioritize segments of independent utility based on need to match future funding streams.
- Select and implement Tier 2 safety and capacity improvements.
- Maintain the momentum of the public support garnered through the first phase of the study, build on the trust and partnerships established with the communities, refine their vision and implement the ultimate plan. “Do something.”
- Provide a framework for the communities’ future development and economic growth. A definitive corridor location is needed to plan local roadway improvements and networks.

CDOT believes US 50 is a vital link in the regional and statewide transportation network and proposes the development of a Tiered Environmental Impact Statement to address long-term transportation and environmental issues related to this corridor.