

Northwest Cochise County Long-Range Transportation Plan

Summary Paper #1

Key Issues, Common Themes and Interview Notes

Prepared for:



**Arizona Department of Transportation
Cochise County
City of Benson**

Prepared by:



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1.0 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) is preparing a Long-Range Transportation Plan (Plan) for Northwest Cochise County to identify potential highway and arterial routes to meet anticipated transportation demands. This Plan is being prepared under ADOT's Planning Assistance to Rural Arizona Program (PARA) and will include potential projects, strategies, and actions for the years 2020 and 2040. Local and state trends, citizen and stakeholder visions and goals, and emerging issues are key considerations in the development of this plan.

In order to meet this objective ADOT and URS (the consultant) met with stakeholders to learn how they identified trends, visions and issues for the study area. One of the goals is to define the transportation needs as seen from the community's perspective and to gain understanding of emerging trends, area characteristics, community and investor plans, and local perspectives of how the study area might change and grow in the future.

This Paper summarizes the results of the interviews with thirty stakeholders and provides preliminary input for forecasting future transportation system needs and solutions. Questions to stakeholders addressed future needs for the State Highway System, the local arterial roadway system, pedestrian and bikeways, and local demand responsive transit.

1.2 STUDY AREA OVERVIEW

The study area encompasses about 234 square miles in the northwestern corner of Cochise County (Figure 1-1), and includes the City of Benson and the unincorporated areas of St. David, J-Six/Mescal and Pomerene. Cochise County is geographically located in the southeast corner of Arizona, sharing its eastern border with the State of New Mexico and its southern border with the Mexican states of Chihuahua and Sonora. The County shares its western border with Santa Cruz and Pima counties and its northern boundary with Graham and Greenlee counties.

The study area is at the nexus of three State highway corridors, Interstate 10, State Route 80 and State Route 90. These highways provide access to the rest of Cochise County and to the Tucson metropolitan area to the west. I-10 is a major interstate corridor and provides access to points east and west of the State.

The study area is still experiencing residential and commercial growth, although at a lower rate than in 2007, due to its location between Tucson, Sierra Vista (and Fort Huachuca), and the international ports-of-entry at Douglas and Naco. This allows families to commute in both directions for employment and for shopping in Benson by residents of eastern Pima County. The study area is a popular destination for Arizona's winter residents and has become a renowned location for bird watching due to its location in the north-south flyway.



2.0 PLANNING PROCESS

2.1 PLANNING PROCESS OVERVIEW

Long-range planning is an important element in defining future needs, prioritizing potential solutions, considering available resources and identifying sources for additional revenues. Talking with stakeholders is one step in integrating citizen visions and goals into the transportation plan, protecting community values and for gaining valuable information about existing conditions and future plans for the study area.

The themes identified from these stakeholder interviews will be used to update and/or validate the visions, goals and strategies described in the four prior development plans for the study area. These four prior plans are summarized in the Existing Conditions Report (Technical Report 1). This Summary Paper describes only the themes identified during the stakeholder conversations. **It is important to note that these themes reflect the unique perspectives of the stakeholders and are presented in this summary in order to record their collective opinions.** Similarly, a Public Open House was held on June 30, 2009 to gather input and opinions from citizens. A summary of these comments will also be incorporated into the planning process.

3.0 STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

3.1 STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW PROCESS

Thirty interviews were conducted with stakeholders during the months of June, July and August 2009. The stakeholders were selected by ADOT, the City of Benson and Cochise County and were a representative sample of the land and business owners, elected officials, transportation system operators, planners and public works managers, school district officials, and emergency responders serving the study area.

Based on the stakeholder input, several predominate themes were identified and are summarized in the next section. A map showing these themes was prepared and follows the Summary Section. A list of the stakeholders is included as Appendix A.

4.0 SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER COMMENTS

4.1 FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

General Characteristics

- Neither the City of Benson nor Cochise County has designated future growth boundaries within the study area.
- Pima County is actively purchasing lands along the I-10 corridor and designating them as conservation areas. As available private land is built out developers are seeing the western



end of the study area and City of Benson as the next logical location for future residential and commercial development.

- Water for new growth areas will be supplied by the City of Benson. Water quality is an issues outside of the City's water service area.
- Planners believe that future population growth will be at a 2.3 annual rate and may be further depressed if the economic recovery does not take place until late 2010 or later.
- The Arizona State Land Department has no parcels within the study area listed for lease or sale on their five year disposal plan. At this time they are not aware of any potential requests to consider adding lands to their five year plan.

Conflict, Real or Perceived, Regarding Growth

- A divided atmosphere appears to exist between those that already reside in the study area who express that they would like to preserve the rural character of the study area, and developers who are looking to higher densities to be able to economically provide the amenities associated with planned developments.
- Some believe that there is a need to protect the current high level of service on SR90 by controlling access from adjacent developments. Others believe that access should be enhanced to these existing and future developments along SR90.
- ADOT's operation of B-10 as a State Route preempts the City of Benson from managing its main street as a downtown commercial district.
 - The City would like to locate additional traffic signals on B-10 (4th Street) to better manage traffic in the area, but this is counter to ADOT's mandate to facilitate through traffic.
 - ADOT's restrictions on encroachment by local businesses onto the B-10 right-of-way is creating conflicts over banners, flower pots, outside seating and store signs which are used to attract highway traffic.
- Concern has been growing between the county, city and developers over whose responsible for supporting future growth by installing new infrastructure or discouraging it by not improving the existing systems.

Residential Development

- The unique rural character and quality of life associated with the J-Six/Mescal and Smith Ranch areas should be maintained.
- Improvements to the transportation network in these areas should limit truck traffic and be compatible with the use of these facilities by equestrians and pedestrians.
- Commercial development should be clustered at the I-10 J-Six/Mescal interchange.
- The Smith Ranch development is limited to one residence per four acres as long as it remains unincorporated.
- New residential development will likely take place first along I-10 starting at the Smith Ranch interchange and preceding east to the SR 90/I-10 interchange. This would include the North Whetstone Ranch development.



- Residential development will likely also take place within the Whetstone Ranch master planned development progressing south along the SR 90 corridor.
- A limited number of individual housing units will be built south of Old Town Benson and in the St. David and Pomerene communities.

Commercial Development

- Commercial development is planned for the SR90/I-10 interchange and extending south for about two miles.
- Commercial developers believe that there is the potential for the study area to become a regional retail center and are looking for suitable locations for retail and service centers.
- There is a desire to revitalize the Old Town Benson retail district centering on Business - 10 (4th Street) between the I-10/B-10 interchange and Gila Street to the east. The character of the area would build on Benson's historic past and would be oriented towards highway based tourism and social events for the region (Annual Jazz/Blue Grass Concerts).
- The City and business representatives are interested in the "Complete Streets" approach to modernizing 4th Street.

Industrial/Employment Based Development

- New industrial and employment based development is planned for the area south of the Airport along Aviation Drive and Ocotillo Street. Two sectors are being targeted, green energy manufacturers and warehousing/freight transfer facilities (taking advantage of the City's location on Interstate 10, SR80 and 90 and its proximity to Tucson).

4.2 TRANSPORTATION

Safety

- Address the safety issue related to the current practice of routing St. David school buses in a manner that requires them to travel great distances in order to remain on paved roads. This practice increases the daily trip lengths and the potential safety issues due to having to enter and exit I-10. Two options were presented:
 - Develop an east/west connection between SR90 and SR80 through the center of the study area. An alignment using Post Ranch Road was most often referenced.
 - Realign the St. David Unified School District boundaries to allow children on the west side of the study area attend schools west or south on SR90. (This option is outside of the scope of this study and will be passed to the St. David Unified School District.)
- Locate an alternative route which parallels I-10 from SR90/I-10 interchange west to either the J-Six or Marsh Crossing interchanges. This alternative is needed to address emergency responder access needs for I-10 and to provide a bypass when I-10 is shut down due to an accident, construction or other events.
- Upgrade and pave a second alternative route using Sybil Road, thereby providing emergency vehicle access to I-10 from the I-10/Sybil interchange and the I-10/Pomerene interchange. This



route would serve as a bypass when I-10 is closed. Weight restrictions were suggested as a means to prevent the road from becoming a truck bypass to SR80.

- Place signs and signals on SR80 to alert traffic to the highly congested areas in St. David and at the St. David School. A second set of signs and a special traffic signal should be placed on SR80 at the St. David Fire Station to stop oncoming traffic when a fire truck is exiting the station.
- Additional actions are needed to address the speeding on SR80, particularly through St. David and south of the curve to Country Club Road.
- Widen the shoulders of SR80 and construct protected pedestrian paths or sidewalks along SR80 from Country Club Road through St. David. This would enhance the safety of school children using this route to access the school. An application for a Transportation Enhancement Grant has been prepared by the School District to begin this effort.

Congestion Relief

- Relief is needed for traffic calming and congestion management on SR80 in the St. David area and in front of the St. David School.
- Request ADOT to raise the priority for modernizing and improving safety at the interchanges along I-10, since they are dangerous as they are currently designed.
- Explore the transfer of B-10 (4th Street) to the City of Benson. ADOT currently operates the facility as a state route and not as a main street serving the central business.
 - B-10 is a key element for the redevelopment of the Old Town Business District,
 - The business community and City would like to have parking on the street, increase the flexibility of businesses to occupy the sidewalk and to implement a Complete Streets program.
 - Potential conditions to such a transfer are:
 - Construct an east/west road from the current B-10 to SR90,
 - Provide resources for the City to maintain and operate the traffic signals at Ocotillo and Patagonia streets,
 - Modernize the I-10 interchange at the west end of B-10, and
 - Rebuild the railroad/B-10 underpass and connection to SR80.

Roadways

- Request ADOT to raise the priority for modernizing and improving safety at the interchanges along I-10, since they are dangerous as they are currently designed.
- Extend SR90 north of I-10 to Aviation Street and the Benson Airport.
- Explore the transfer of B - 10 (4th Street) to the City of Benson. ADOT currently operates the facility as a state route and not as a main street serving the central business.
 - B-10 is a key element for the redevelopment of the Old Town Business District.
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 - Provide resources for the City to maintain and operate the traffic signals at Ocotillo and Patagonia streets,
 - Modernize the I-10 interchange at the west end of B-10, and
 - Rebuild the railroad/B-10 underpass and connection to SR80.
- Plan for a third east-west route between SR90 and SR80 near the south end of the study area as a long term alternative for addressing access and emergency response. This planning would guide the approval process for new development along SR90. Some suggested an alignment connecting to West Escalante Road, while others oppose this alignment and suggest a new alignment be found.

Bike and Pedestrian Ways

- Develop bike/pedestrian paths using the abandoned railroad rights-of-way, and explore the Rails-to-Trails Program as a potential source for funding.
- Develop additional pedestrian paths along the San Pedro River for recreational walking and the bird watchers.

Transit

- Explore sources for paying the operating costs to maintain the current demand responsive transit system. This is an important service to the area.

Rail

- Investigate the potential of preserving a right-of-way along the existing Union Pacific Sunset Limited Line for future use as a commuter rail route from Benson to Tucson.

4.3 ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Water

- Besides the City of Benson, the only other two areas with municipal water service are the St. David and Pomerene areas.
 - Kartchner Caverns has its own water.
 - Water quality worsens the farther from the San Pedro you get; arsenic concentrations mentioned.
- Federally designated floodplains do not adequately describe the flooding potential within the study area.
 - Everything is trying to drain in to the San Pedro River.
 - Active or abandoned irrigation ditches exist within the study area causing additional diversion of flood waters.
- There is a lack of adequate emergency response and alternative travel routes during times of flooding. One example is the need for a bridge or culvert on Ocotillo Road north of I-10.

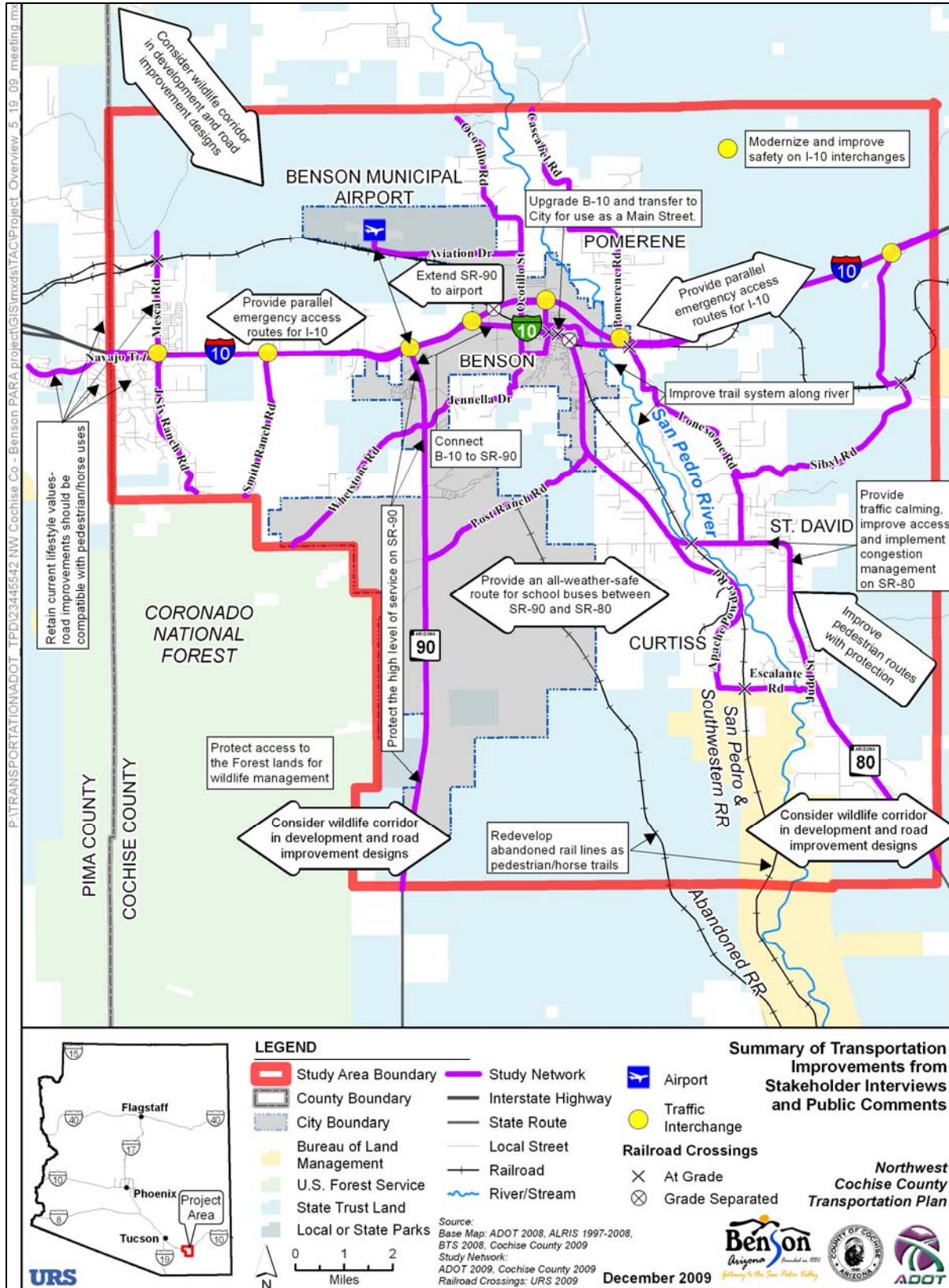


Wildlife Corridors

- Consider a wildlife crossing for deer, antelope and other big game animals as future improvements to I-10 are planned. The Arizona Game and Fish Department, in cooperation with US Game and Fish, ADOT and other federal and state agencies, designated a wildlife corridor between the Rincon and Whetstone Mountains. This corridor passes between the J-Six/Mescal and the SR90 interchanges on I-10. Two additional corridors have been identified but do not have detail studies; Dragoon – San Pedro River and Wetstone – San Pedro River. They should be noted for future planning purposes.
- Preserve and gate the access routes for the Arizona Game and Fish Department to the northwest corner of the Coronado National Forest and from SR90 to Dry Gulch and French Joe Springs.
- Monitor the Nature Conservancy/Cochise County study which is to define corridors used by large animals as they access the San Pedro River from the Whetstone Mountains. These wildlife corridors will cross SR90 and are considered a safety issue, for both the wildlife and motorists.
- The existence of environmentally sensitive riparian areas within and adjacent to the study area (i.e. the BLM Cienega) may be limiting factors to the development of the study area and placement of transportation routes.



5.0 GENERAL THEME MAP





APPENDIX A. LIST OF STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWED

Interviews took place in June, July and August 2009

Cochise County

Richard Searle
Cochise County Board of Supervisors
District 3
1415 Melody Lane, Building G,
Bisbee, AZ 85603

Susan Buchan, Planning Director
Mike Turisk, and Susana Montana
County Planning Staff
Cochise County Planning and Zoning
1415 Melody Lane, Building E,
Bisbee, AZ 85603

Benny Young,
Highway and Floodplain Director
Cochise County,
1415 Melody Lane, Building F,
Bisbee, AZ 85603

Karen Riggs, PE, LS,
Floodplain Engineer
Cochise County,
1415 Melody Lane, Building F,
Bisbee, AZ 85603

**Southeast Arizona Governments
Organization**

Randy Heiss
Executive Director, SEAGO
118 Arizona Street
Bisbee, AZ 85609

City of Benson

Mark Fenn
Mayor
City of Benson,
120 W. 6th Street
Benson, AZ 85602

John Lodzinski
Member,
Benson City Council
City of Benson,
120 W. 6th Street,
Benson, AZ 85602

Al Sacco
City Council Member,
City of Benson
120 W. 6th Street,
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Michelle Johnson
City of Benson Planning Department
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Public Safety

Mark Genz, Lt and Tal Parker, Sgt
Cochise County Sheriff's Office
126 W. 5th Street, Suite 2
Benson, AZ 85602

Chief Gephart
St. David Volunteer Fire Department
Fire House
St. David, AZ

State Agencies

Catherine Balzano
Arizona State Land Department
177 North Church, Suite 1100
Tucson, AZ 85701

John Windes
Habitat Program Manager
Region V
Arizona Department of Game and Fish
555 Greasewood Road
Tucson, AZ 85745

Matthew Walton
Landowner Relations Coordinator
Region V
Arizona Department of Game and Fish
555 Greasewood Road
Tucson, AZ 85745

Tim Bolton
Principal Planner
AZ State Land Department
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Bill Harmon
District Engineer
Safford Engineering District Office
Arizona Department of Transportation
2082 US Hwy 70
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Business Community

George Scott
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Benson, AZ 85602

Bob Mucci
Executive Director,
Benson Chamber of Commerce
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Large Land Holders and Developers

Ernie Graves and Jim Lynch
Whetstone Development Company
Tucson, AZ

Jerry DeGrazia and Hal Ashton
San Pedro Partners LLC,
3237 E. Ft. Lowell Rd.,
Tucson, Arizona 85716



Jerry DeGrazia
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4030 N. Painted Quail Place
Tucson, AZ 85750

Bob Iannarino
VP, Infrastructure Development
Diamond Ventures
2200 E. River Road, Suite 115
Tucson, AZ 85718

Jim Lynch and Michael Mathieu
Representing Dr. Kartchner
Mathieu Engineering Co
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Interviewed by telephone:

Kate Mueller
Superintendent,
St. David School District, Unified School
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