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**JULY 17, 2018**

**Contacts**

Juan Reynosa, Deputy Director  
SouthWest Organizing Project  
505.907.3788

Jon Block, Staff Attorney  
New Mexico Environmental Law Center  
505.629.4748 x122

Esther & Steven Abeyta  
South Valley Residents  
505.440.1669

**Sunport Boulevard and Woodward Road Project Still a Bad Idea**

*“Road to Nowhere” No Longer Has City Support; Never Had Community Support*

ALBUQUERQUE, NM – Bernalillo County and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) are moving ahead with a project that the City no longer supports, the County’s own 2010 study said was pointless, and that residents have never wanted.

The County recently released its third attempt at writing an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Sunport Boulevard Extension/Woodward Road Improvements project.

On May 1, 2018, Mayor Tim Keller publicly stated that the City of Albuquerque was withdrawing its support for the Sunport Boulevard Extension Project. The project, including the Woodward Road Improvements, is almost entirely on City property so there is a serious question as to how the County can continue the project.

Esther Abeyta, a resident living on Woodward Road, said, “Every public meeting on the Sunport Extension and Woodward Improvements project has been met with significant public opposition. Public comments sent in for the three Environmental Assessments have been overwhelmingly negative.”

In 2015, the County offered its second EA. This was rejected by the FHWA because the County proposed to include the so-called Woodward Improvements project, but as a separate project. The FHWA said this was “segmentation” (artificially splitting projects that are really one whole project), which is not permitted under federally-funded projects.

As part of the EA public comment process in 2015, Human Impact Partners (HIP) assessed the EA and supporting documentation and found them seriously lacking. HIP’s 2015 analysis detailed several problems with the EA, including:

- faulty transportation usage analysis that did not justify the project
- failure to consider air quality impacts from future industrial sources
- failure to provide monitoring and modeling data on air quality impacts

- failure to address cumulative impact environmental health problems in the area

Juan Reynosa, Deputy Director of the SouthWest Organizing Project (SWOP), said, “The EPA has recognized neighborhoods in the South Valley as Environmental Justice communities that are disproportionately burdened by pollution, with two Superfund sites and a high concentration of industrial facilities. The South Valley has the worst air quality in the County and residents have inordinately high rates of serious health problems linked to poor air quality. The County and the FHWA have consistently ignored this problem when they defend the project.”

The road project also poses significant problems with noise pollution. There are a number of residences that will likely experience increased noise from the project, both while construction goes on and from increased truck traffic after completion. The EA assesses projected noise volume in 2040 based on the “no build” alternative projected noise level. However, it is very likely that the noise pollution would increase much sooner than 2040 if the project goes through.

A 2010 “Alignment Study” looked at the possible connection of Sunport Boulevard west to 2nd Street, which was initially addressed in early project planning between 1989 and 1991. The segment of Sunport Boulevard from 2nd Street to Broadway was dropped because of low traffic volume projections and because of the potential impacts to the neighborhood that would result from constructing this segment of the roadway. The Study noted that the extension of Sunport Boulevard to 2<sup>nd</sup> Street was related to a bridge crossing the Rio Grande and stressed that there is no longer a planned river crossing at that point.

Steven Abeyta said, “Many people have asked the County if the project is being done because there will be a bridge over the river, maybe for Santolina. But the County always says there are no plans for a bridge because it would be too expensive and impact neighborhoods on the West side. So if the only reason originally to go to 2<sup>nd</sup> Street was a bridge and there won’t be a bridge, this sounds like ‘a road to nowhere’.”

Jon Block, staff attorney at the New Mexico Environmental Law Center representing the Abeytas and SWOP, stated, “There was a 1991 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Sunport Extension project that concluded it was unwise to move forward because of a Superfund site and other problems. When there is a prior EIS and a significant amount of time has occurred, subsequent environmental analysis needs, at a minimum, a Supplemental EIS (SEIS). A new EIS or SEIS is not only required here, but it would force the County and the FHWA to explain in detail how the project has taken ‘all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm’ and how they have addressed environmental justice concerns.”

There will be a public meeting to discuss the EA on Thursday, July 19<sup>th</sup>, at the Mountain View Community Center at 6:00pm.

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