

## Comments & Responses To Environmental Issues

### Background:

The comments included in this document were derived from several sources, including the Public Hearing for the New Mexico Rail Runner Express service extension to Santa Fe held on August 21, 2007 and two more public meetings held on October 23, 2007 and October 30, 2007 respectively. Some comments were also generated from emails or phone calls as a result of these meetings. Specific references to home addresses or names have been omitted from the comments for privacy reasons. For further information on project plans and updates please consult the New Mexico Rail Runner Express website at [www.nmrailrunner.com](http://www.nmrailrunner.com)

### Comments on the Environment and Prairie Dogs

**General:** *Consideration of impacts to the natural environment has been a primary consideration in the decision process, beginning with the identification and selection of route alternatives and continuing into the assessment and mitigation of impacts for the preferred route. To minimize new impacts, alternative routes were identified and selected that followed existing transportation corridors. In addition, many refinements have been made to the rail alignment and profile to avoid sensitive environmental areas and minimize impacts. An environmental assessment was prepared in collaboration with the Federal Highway Administration, US Fish & Wildlife Service, US Army Corps of Engineers, and NM State Historic Preservation Officer. Extensive coordination also occurred with many other federal, state, local, and tribal agencies and jurisdictions to ensure that the concerns of these entities were addressed.*

*In addition to avoiding impacts, several measures have been identified and included in the project to mitigate and compensate for unavoidable impacts. Some of the major mitigation measures include the creation of wetland habitat at Alamo Creek (the stream south of the La Cienega Interchange), creating a 2.5 acre habitat enhancement area surrounding the wetland, collecting data and other information to enhance the historical record and knowledge of the Camino Real in the vicinity of La Bajada Escarpment and the Santa Fe Southern in Santa Fe, and other measures to protect water quality in Alamo Creek and other tributaries. In addition, limits have been imposed on vegetation removal and ground disturbance. All disturbed areas will be reseeded to restore the natural habitat. A tree enhancement program is also included and will involve planting trees in the portions of the SFS railway that are adjacent to residential neighborhoods.*

*Several substantive efforts to minimize impacts to prairie dogs have been conducted and will continue into next spring. Even though there is no requirement to avoid impacts to prairie dogs inhabiting the I-25 median, the project team has voluntarily captured and relocated over 130 of these animals to date. Relocation efforts will continue next spring after prairie dogs emerge from hibernation. In addition, a plan has been developed and implemented to minimize impacts to prairie dogs living within construction zones. This*

*plan includes delaying construction of a 2,000 foot segment of the railway that passes through a high density prairie dog colony near Zia Road, limits imposed on vegetation removal and ground disturbance, prohibitions on the storage of construction materials and equipment within prairie dog colonies, and reseeding disturbed areas with plants used by prairie dogs. The delay of construction near Zia Road will be in effect until late April 2008 so that the NMDOT can capture and relocate the prairie dogs in this area that would otherwise be impacted by construction.*

1. I am concerned about the plight of the prairie dog colony at the intersection of Zia and St. Francis and urge that the continuation of the railroad tracks at that location be postponed until May of next year to give us time to move the colony once they emerge from hibernation.

*Construction of the track segment in the area approximately 1,000 feet south of Zia Road to approximately 1,000 feet north of Zia Raod will not start until April 22, 2008. The NMDOT will work with local prairie dog advocate groups to capture and relocate the prairie dogs inhabiting this area as soon as they emerge from their winter torpor.*

2. Are DOT, the State and the City and their contractors subject to the ordinance protecting the prairie dogs?

*The City ordinance applies to public agencies as well as private developers.*

3. We are concerned about the exhaust that will be emitted from the train and what effects it will have on our well being. We live very close to the tracks.

*Train locomotives are powered by modern diesel-electric engines. The engines meet the latest EPA emission standards and use low sulfur biodiesel fuel. The pollutants emitted by locomotives comply with all federal requirements and will not cause pollutant levels that exceed ambient air quality standards.*

4. Our home is located on Via Venado. The tunnel (dirt removal) is now taking place and crews work until 4:30 a.m. The lights, noise, and dust are not allowing us to sleep or breathe clean air. Something needs to be done to mask the lights, put up noise barriers and use water trucks to keep the dust down. All of this is being done right behind our house.

*Night construction in the area between I-25 and the Santa Fe Southern railway will continue through November. Night construction is occurring in this area because of the need to transport construction materials and equipment from the median to outside of the highway right-of-way. By performing this at night, less traffic is disrupted on I-25 and the safety of workers is improved. Construction crews have agreed to point lights away from residential areas, install sound blankets on generators, use the low setting for backup horns on construction*

*vehicles, and to increase dust control efforts. These measures went into use on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. Noise monitoring is being performed to evaluate the added efforts.*

5. I fully support relocating prairie dogs. The rock squirrels are also hibernating and many live in the field south of Rosemont. Will they be relocated?

*There are no plans to relocate rock squirrels or other small animals that live within the project alignment.*

6. Will there be fencing to protect people, dogs and animals from the trains along the Rail Trail? And to protect them from the tunnel from I-25 during the construction phase in the Rosemont to I-25 area?

*Fencing will be installed in areas where slope and grade presents a potential hazard to the public.*

7. What will happen to the Prairie dogs that still live in the I-25 median?

*Approximately 130 prairie dogs were relocated in late summer of this year before construction started. The focus of that effort was burrows that were within 75 feet of the track centerline. Field investigations have been done to identify the general location and boundaries of major active colonies. This information has been provided to the contractor so that construction activities can avoid these areas, to the extent practical and reasonable. Any prairie dogs remaining within areas that cannot be avoided will likely be destroyed by project construction. This is an unfortunate but unavoidable consequence of the project.*

8. Will the State be able to find a relocation place for the Prairie dogs?

*The NMDOT is investigating several sites for possible relocation. We are also working with prairie dog advocate groups to identify suitable relocation sites.*

9. What about other animals other than the prairie dogs such as some nesting birds and some foxes seen near the rail line.

*Birds and mammals that do not hibernate or enter a torpid state will be able to move away from construction vehicles. Because most vegetation removal will occur prior to the nesting season for birds, active nest sites will not be affected.*

10. We think the little varmints are cute and if they can be moved economically, then move them. However they are rodents that carry plague and other diseases to the domestic animals in the area – so this concern must be balanced for the good of the citizens of Santa Fe.

*Your comment and concerns are noted. The NMDOT and MRCOG agree that public health is a concern and will take precedent, as needed and appropriate.*