

Turquoise Trail Corridor Management Plan
Version 2.0

11.0 Commerce and Highway Service Plan



Fuel, convenience store, rest rooms, and phones in Cedar Crest

11.1 EXISTING CONDITIONS

Simply put, the area is mostly rural, incredibly beautiful, sometimes hazardous due to weather, but always interesting and there's the rub. If you get too interested and drive slower than the jogger next to you or straight ahead when the road veers sharply to the right you could have an unpleasant experience. Before that unexpected event occurs, please stop your vehicle and enjoy the natural beauty of the area. Hey, that's why you came here! The local people behind you on their way to work will be glad you let them pass and you will soon see that you saw what you could have missed.

The entire byway currently has all the facilities to maintain a safe level (safer than the New Mexico average) of highway service, including convenient user facilities; however, the byway facilities can and should be improved to make them even safer, more efficient, and more comfortable for visitors.

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11.2 REST ROOMS

There are free public rest rooms at the Cibola National Forest Ranger Station in Tijeras on NM 337. There are also at least three convenient rest rooms on NM 536 within the National Forest, the first of which is located at Doc Long, and the last located at the top of Sandia Crest. For 2006, there is a nominal user fee of \$3 per car.

The byway has several visitor centers: the ranger station in Tijeras, the seldom open Tijeras town visitor center and a ranger station at the top of Sandia Crest which is usually staffed on weekends. If built, future visitor centers should provide additional free rest room facilities. Madrid is currently using free portable toilets, but permanent rest rooms are expected to be built using a byway grant. Restaurants, filling stations, and many privately operated businesses have rest rooms for their customers.

11.3 FOOD

There are approximately two dozen restaurants, two grocery stores and five gas/convenience stores along the byway that provide low to moderately priced meals. The area currently does not have a nationally recognized upscale (AAA or Mobil four or five star) dining experience. There is one fast food chain on the byway.

11.4 LODGING

There are hundreds of motel rooms on Cerrillos Road (NM 14 north of I-25) in Santa Fe. Those facilities are located starting just one mile from the byway's northern trailhead. There are hundreds more motel rooms in eastern Albuquerque less than 10 miles from the southern trailhead in Tijeras. Including camping, the facilities on the Turquoise Trail itself can accommodate approximately 200 overnight visitors. There is at least one camping and two RV facilities, a modestly priced hostel, and more than a dozen bed and breakfast facilities located on or very near the byway. These facilities can easily handle the existing traffic and would be able to handle increased traffic in the off-season months. Depending on the visitor mix (singles, families, or couples) in the future, more lodging facilities may have to be provided for the high season if the visitors want to experience staying overnight on the byway itself.

11.5 GAS

Filling stations along the Turquoise Trail are more than adequate. There are six filling stations. The longest distance to a filling station is less than 20 miles, or less than one gallon of gas for most vehicles.

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11.6 EMERGENCY ROAD SERVICE

There is no scheduled emergency patrol on the Turquoise Trail. The U. S. Forest Service monitors NM 536. The county sheriff departments and NM State Police monitor NM 333, 337, and 14. There is cellular phone service available on most of the Turquoise Trail, but there are gaps north of Sandia Park. Road service is available on the byway, but you can expect an hours wait or longer during winter snow conditions. There are several car repair facilities in Cedar Crest and parts are easily obtained due to the proximity of the byway to Albuquerque and Santa Fe.

11.7 TOUR BUSES

The entire Turquoise Trail can accommodate tour buses. All the lanes are paved and the combined lane and shoulder width are suitable for buses. Note the altitude for all of the byway is above 6,000 feet and the NM 536 spur to Sandia Crest rises to 10,600 feet, higher than any roadway in the Southwest. Make sure your brakes are in good working order for the trip down NM 536 and for the pass between Golden and Madrid.

11.8 FOOT TRAFFIC

There is light foot traffic on the byway, except in Madrid which does not have shoulders, sidewalks, or any traffic controls other than speed limit signs and a few cross walks. There is no separation of pedestrians and traffic in Madrid. Please give all pedestrians on the byway the right of way and be careful of the cars, if you are on foot, on a horse, or on a bicycle.

The newly constructed portions of the byway have wider shoulders and are better for pedestrians than the previous design, but foot traffic is not separated and both drivers and pedestrians should be cautious.

There are several miles of sidewalks on NM 14 in Cedar Crest, but nowhere else on the byway. There is foot traffic near the Sandia Peak Ski area with skiers walking to and from their cars. Other foot traffic may be found in the parking lots in the National Forest. Make sure you go slow in those areas, because young children are on the loose!

11.9 TRUCKS

Truck traffic on the byway is primarily local, and not limited by any overpasses except by I-40 and I-25. The truck traffic is light, because it's not the fastest way to anywhere and most take the interstate when traveling between Albuquerque and Santa Fe. The local community has made it known that truck traffic on the byway should be for local use only. The only shortcut would be from Santa Fe to points east on Interstate 40. Trucks tend to use an even "shorter cut" by taking US 285 to Clines Corner or NM 41 to Moriarty.

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Trucks used in the mineral extraction industry, the largest private industry in New Mexico, can be found on the byway. Tourism is the second largest private industry. In addition, you might see maintenance vehicles for the natural gas industry and specialized vehicles used by the phone and electric companies. Sometimes, you may get a chance to see ranchers dealing with their livestock adjacent to the byway.

In the San Pedro and Paako subdivisions and on the north end of the byway, as with most of the country, trucks are common during the summer construction months. Most of the vehicles are pickups. You can tell it's a construction worker, because a dog is hanging its head out the window to check the air temperature.

11.10 LOCAL TRAFFIC

Ninety-five percent of the traffic on the byway is local. In some locations, such as Madrid and Cerrillos, the tourist traffic is heavier. Ninety-nine percent of the traffic on the upper portions of NM 536 is tourist. The other one percent is due to travel made by employees of the National Forest Service, communications industry, Sandia Ski and Tram, and the Sandia Crest House. In winter, the snow removal crews also add to that figure.

11.11 SCHOOL BUSES

School buses are commonly seen on the byway, because the schools are on the byway and it's the primary school route. To avoid buses, travel when school is out and between the hours of 9 AM and 2 PM or between 5 PM and 6 AM. Public school entrances are located on NM 337 (Roosevelt Middle School, and A. Montoya Elementary) in Tijeras, NM 14 (San Antonito Elementary School) in Sandia Park, and NM 14 (Turquoise Trail Elementary) in San Marcos. There are also a few private schools along the highway. Pay special attention to the school signs and do not speed in school zones.

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11.12 CYCLISTS

Cyclists are commonly seen, since biking is a promoted form of recreation on the byway. Drivers of motorized vehicles should pay special attention to them especially on weekends. On some weekends, special events attract hundreds of cyclists. A plan is in the works to put in bike paths, but that is still years away. Cyclists and drivers are sometimes at odds and road rage occurs. For example, drivers sometimes honk their horns and cyclists sometimes respond graphically. The newly designed segments of the byway consider the road to be shared by both cyclists and motorized vehicles, however those design goals still have safety limitations, such as uneven shoulders in some areas. When riding in groups, cyclists often ride abreast causing a dangerous condition, especially when there is only a single lane in each direction. Drivers should note that they will likely have to fulfill a higher standard than the cyclist if there is a crash. Cyclists should note that they will lose (injury or death) any battle with a motor vehicle.

11.13 CROSS COUNTRY SKIERS

There is a limited number of cross country skiers on the byways. The snow melts quickly at the lower elevations and the traffic crews work diligently to remove the snow, so the opportunity to ski on the byway is limited. Watch for the skiers during the winter months on NM 536. There is a lot more snow up there.

11.14 EQUESTRIAN TRAFFIC

Yes Virginia, we do have horses. There are several signs on the highway noting horse trails. To keep a horse from being scared, you should stop your vehicle and take it apart to show the horse there is nothing to fear! If you are not good with tools, just pay attention, slow, and keep your distance.

11.15 TRAIN TRAFFIC

You can see train tracks in Cerrillos and along the east side of the roadway in some sections north of Cerrillos. There is a bridge over the tracks in Cerrillos. If you look carefully in Madrid, you will see the remnants of tracks that carried coal, but unless you stop at the Coal Mine Museum in Madrid, you will not see a locomotive in Madrid. You will never directly cross over (except by an overpass) any train tracks on the byway, but you can certainly dream about when the trains were a major economic pump for the area as you pass by some of the local Madrid housing--a box car or a caboose!

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11.16 BOTTLENECKS

There is only one bottleneck on the Turquoise Trail, but if you are from the city (something bigger than 5,000 people) you will not even know it's there. That bottleneck is in Madrid (population also greater than 300), during the evening rush hour, but primarily on beautiful weekend days as the pedestrians take to the streets to shop. The only other bottlenecks occur from time to time when there is major road construction, as there is now north of Cerrillos. That project should be completed in 2006.

11.17 WILD AND DOMESTIC ANIMALS

Wild animals such as raccoon, squirrel, rabbits, fox, bobcat, and deer can commonly be seen on the highway, especially at dawn and dusk. Please pay attention. Animals, especially deer, are a major contributing factor in crashes on the byway. Domestic animals such as cattle, which graze along the byway, sometimes get loose through a broken fence and enter the roadway. Pay attention.

11.18 MEDICAL FACILITIES

There are few non-emergency medical services on the byway. A doctor, dentist, chiropractor, and pharmacy can be found in Cedar Crest. The Ortiz Mountain Health Center in Cerrillos is open, but has limited hours. Emergency medical services are handled by calling 911. The local fire departments, many of which employ EMTs, provide emergency medical care. The fire departments also contract for services with ground and air transport. Individuals can usually be transported to Albuquerque or Santa Fe hospitals in less than one hour.

11.19 COMMERCE AND HIGHWAY SERVICE GOALS

- Make the byway as safe as possible
- Build and maintain the best user facilities
- Accommodate both local and visitor traffic

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11.20 COMMERCE AND HIGHWAY SERVICE OBJECTIVES

- Reduce unsafe passing
- Reduce unsafe speeding
- Reduce crashes from mismatched speeds such as slow and fast drivers
- Restrict byway use by non-local trucks
- Minimize increases in byway traffic, while allowing increased visitorship
- Provide public rest rooms
- Provide visitor information centers
- Provide the minimum number of signs with the maximum amount of information
- Develop small upscale restaurants, not national chains
- Increase the number of beds using small facilities to maintain rural character
- Develop inns rather than motels
- Minimize the bottleneck in Madrid
- Separate non-similar traffic such as vehicles, pedestrians, bicycles, and equestrian traffic.
- Provide passing lanes

11.21 COMMERCE AND HIGHWAY SERVICE STRATEGIES AND PROJECTS

To provide the most efficient use of limited resources, some of the following projects may be listed in other chapters when they fulfill more than one objective.

- North interpretive/visitor center with rest rooms
- Madrid interpretive/visitor center with rest rooms
- Road side turnouts
- Continue to work with the NMDOT to create scenic pullouts
- Medical facility
- Traffic study to increase traffic mix efficiency
- Safety study to maximize traffic mix safety
- Build parking facility(s) in Madrid
- Work to obtain private investment in visitor food and lodging facilities
- Work with local phone companies to provide full cellular service
- Work with local law enforcement and private towing/service companies to patrol the highway at regular intervals
- Work with gas stations and restaurants to provide pay phone service
- Create a medical plan to conveniently service visitors