

## II. Project History

### A. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

The development of this Guanella Pass Road project began approximately 15 years ago, when Clear Creek County officials began seeking federal funding assistance for improving the road's condition and began attending the annual Forest Highway Program meetings in 1987. Park County became involved in the process in 1990. Through those meetings the two counties requested that the Guanella Pass Road receive consideration for improvements under the Forest Highway Program.

The Forest Highway Program provides federal funding for capital improvements of a special category of public roads that directly serve National Forest lands nationwide. This roadway system is designated as the Forest Highway road system. A three-agency group known as the Program Agencies administers the Forest Highway (FH) Program. The function of the Program Agencies is to maintain the FH Program and to make major decisions concerning projects in the program. The Program Agencies in Colorado are the FHWA, the FS, and the CDOT. The three Program Agencies share the stewardship responsibilities for the Forest Highway road system and accountability for the program accomplishment. Highways designated for reconstruction and rehabilitation under the FH Program are selected at an annual Program Agency meeting. The routes selected are those that serve both the National Forests and the State (or Counties where appropriate) and have the greatest need for improvement. Forest Highway Program meetings are held annually to review the program accomplishment, current project status, and to assign priorities for use of anticipated future allocations of the federal funding.

Although federal funds are used for the projects, the maintenance and control of the roads as well as the joint approval of the project details remain with the FS and the State or local entity having jurisdiction - in this case Clear Creek County, Park County, and the Town of Georgetown. The annual program meetings have involved the Program Agencies as well as Clear Creek County, Park County, and the Town of Georgetown.

Guanella Pass Road was recommended for reconnaissance and scoping at the March 1992 FH Program meeting. Initial field reconnaissance studies were conducted with representatives from the Program Agencies, Clear Creek County, and Park County to assess the condition of the road and identify needed improvements. Guanella Pass Road was approved for Forest Highway funding in 1993 after an evaluation of the *Reconnaissance and Scoping Report* (FHWA 1993), the FS's transportation needs, and a presentation by the Town of Georgetown, Clear Creek County, and Park County in support of improvements to Guanella Pass. Due to the complexity of the project, a seven-year development time was anticipated and the route was tentatively programmed for construction funding beginning in 2000.

A Social, Economic, and Environment (SEE) Study Team was established to aid in the coordination and project development. The SEE Team is composed of one or more members from each of the Program Agencies. The function of the SEE Team is to guide the proposal through the project development process and to provide a point of contact within each agency through which other disciplines and individuals may be accessed. Coordination included interagency meetings, field reviews, and correspondence.

## **B. PROJECT SCOPING**

The *Reconnaissance and Scoping Report* (FHWA 1993) recommended a 7.8-meter (26-foot) roadway width and reconstruction of the entire route. This was followed by meetings and correspondence with the cooperating agencies and the public as follows:

- Interagency scoping meetings were held in late 1993 to discuss the proposal with other government agencies.
- Public scoping meetings were held in early 1994 in Shawnee and Georgetown.
- A newsletter was mailed to the public in May 1994.
- Public scoping workshops were held in early 1995 in Georgetown and Shawnee.
- Additional interagency meetings were held in the spring and summer of 1995.
- A second newsletter was mailed in July 1995.
- In August 1995, options for the Georgetown terminus were discussed in meetings attended by the Georgetown Planning Commission, Georgetown Board of Selectmen, and the Clear Creek County Commissioners.
- Additional public information meetings were held in Georgetown and Shawnee in July 1996.
- An interagency meeting with the Georgetown Planning Commission was held in the fall of 1996.

## **C. DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

The FHWA released the *Colorado Forest Highway 80, Guanella Pass Road, Draft Environmental Impact Statement* (FHWA 1999) (DEIS) in June 1999, with the comment period originally scheduled to end August 30, 1999. The DEIS identified a No-Action Alternative and four build alternatives as potential solutions to the need for road improvements. Public, agency, and local government comments were received in the following ways:

- Public hearings were held on August 3, 4, and 5, 1999, to receive public input on the DEIS.
- At the request of the public and congressional representatives, the comment period for the document was extended to October 15, 1999.
- A series of additional public meetings, sponsored by Clear Creek County and Park County, were held in September 1999 to obtain comments on the DEIS.
- Approximately 890 comments were received during the DEIS comment period. The comments received include written comments, e-mails, form letters, telephone conversations, petition signatures, and verbal comments recorded at the public hearings.

## **D. DEVELOPMENT OF NEW ALTERNATIVE – SUPPLEMENTAL DEIS**

During the comment period for the DEIS, several major concerns were identified, resulting in the decision to develop a new alternative. The majority of commenters agreed with the need for repair of the road, but not to the extent described by the build alternatives in the DEIS. The commenters indicated that a new alternative should be developed that emphasizes rehabilitation or minimal improvements to Guanella Pass Road.

A new alternative was developed by the FHWA in cooperation with Clear Creek County, the Town of Georgetown, Park County, the FS, and the CDOT. These agencies participated in numerous work group sessions to coordinate a response to public comments and develop a new alternative for public consideration. The work group sessions focused on addressing the major issues identified during a review of the DEIS comments. These work group sessions were held from February through May 2000 and were open to the public for observation. The work groups addressed major issues that were identified in the public and agency comments on the DEIS. The major issues pointed to the need for the development of a new alternative that is more sensitive to the environmental setting and the rustic and rural character of the road than the DEIS build alternatives.

The new alternative, Alternative 6, was presented in the *Colorado Forest Highway 80, Guanella Pass Road, Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement* (FHWA 2001) (SDEIS) released to the public in November 2000 with the comment period ending January 16, 2001. Alternative 6 includes a change in the functional classification of the roadway from a rural collector road, as proposed in the DEIS, to a rural local road. The change in functional classification allows a lower design speed with sharper roadway curves and a narrower roadway width than the DEIS build alternatives. In addition, a smaller design vehicle is used which allows a sharper switchback curvature. Each of these changes in the design criteria allows Alternative 6 to follow more closely the existing roadway. Alternative 6 includes additional management responsibilities for Clear Creek County, Park County, and the Town of Georgetown. In the SDEIS, Alternative 6 divides the road into 36 segments in a combination of surface types and extent of construction (rehabilitation, light reconstruction, and full reconstruction). The rehabilitation sections constitute 64 percent of the roadway, light reconstruction 18 percent, and full reconstruction 18 percent.

Other issues discussed in the SDEIS that were not specific to Alternative 6 included the potential for winter closure of Guanella Pass Road, alternative surface types for both paved and gravel road sections, retaining wall design and materials, drainage structures, and guardrail design and materials. These issues apply to Alternatives 2-5 as well as Alternative 6.

The FHWA, in conjunction with the cooperating and local agencies, held public hearings to present the new alternative and to receive public comments on December 4, 2000 (in Bailey), December 5 and 7, 2000 (in Georgetown), and December 6, 2000 (in Lakewood). The hearings consisted of presentations made by FHWA personnel and members of the cooperating and local agencies, followed by a comment/question and answer session involving the audience.

Again, at the request of the public and congressional representatives, the FHWA extended the comment period to February 2, 2001. The FHWA received approximately 810 comments during the SDEIS comment period. The comments received include written comments, e-mails, form letters, telephone conversations, petition signatures, and verbal comments recorded at the public hearings.

## **E. ALTERNATIVE SURFACE TEST STRIPS**

Guanella Pass Road currently consists of several stretches of road with gravel surfaces. These gravel sections require frequent maintenance and, thus, are more costly over the life cycle of the road than the paved sections. The increased sedimentation into nearby streams and wetlands resulting from these gravel sections is also of concern. The FHWA considered several alternative surface options as part of the Guanella Pass Road Improvement Project in an effort to provide a low-maintenance, durable roadway that reduces sedimentation resulting from the roadway surface while retaining the road's current rustic character.

As part of the continuing effort to address public concerns regarding maintaining the rustic character of the road, while at the same time addressing the Counties' and FS's maintenance and water quality concerns, the FHWA constructed road surfacing test strips on Guanella Pass Road south of the Cabin Creek hydroelectric power plant. Construction of the test strips was completed on August 9, 2001. The purpose of the test strip construction was to provide the agencies and the public the opportunity to experience the look and feel of the five different alternative surface types being considered for use on most of the existing gravel portions of the road. The five alternative surface types demonstrated were a PennzSuppress D/magnesium chloride combination, macadam, Road Oyl, Perma-Zyme, and recycled asphalt. In addition to the five alternatives to gravel, an asphalt pavement with chip seal test strip was constructed as a possible alternative to plain asphalt pavement. This surface is being considered for use on the paved sections of the road. Roadway users were asked to complete a comment sheet indicating their preferred surface type and any additional comments they had.

One hundred and one comment sheets were received during the official test strip survey period, which ended on October 15, 2001. The results show that the most popular test strip surface was the asphalt with chip seal overlay treatment, which was indicated as preferred by 28 respondents. Of the gravel alternative test strips, the PennzSuppress D/magnesium chloride and the recycled asphalt surfaces were preferred by 22 respondents each.

## **F. FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

The majority of the comments received on the SDEIS requested the FHWA to consider further reducing the scope of the project to further minimize environmental impacts and reduce projected traffic increases. Based on these comments, the FHWA again revisited its design standards to determine if there was any way to reduce them further. The FHWA determined that no further reduction in design standards can be made without undermining the FHWA's stewardship responsibilities described in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) at 23 CFR part 625.2 which states that the FHWA will “. . . provide for a facility that will (1) Adequately serve the existing and planned future traffic of the highway in a manner that is conducive to safety, durability and economy of maintenance; and (2) Be designed and constructed in accordance with criteria best suited to accomplish the objectives described in paragraph (a)(1) of this section [above] and to conform with the particular needs of each locality.”

Prior to the release of the FEIS, the FHWA held interagency meetings with the FS, Clear Creek and Park Counties, and the Town of Georgetown to discuss the comments received on the SDEIS and the identification of a preferred alternative in the FEIS. The agencies provided their support to continue with the process and identify Alternative 6 as the preferred alternative in the FEIS.

Also, the counties and the FS agreed to identify macadam as the preferred alternative surface type for some portions of the road that are currently gravel and dirt.

The FHWA released the FEIS designating Alternative 6 as the preferred alternative on September 27, 2002. The FEIS version of Alternative 6 differs slightly from what is presented in the SDEIS. In the FEIS, Alternative 6 contains 38 segments to account for more variability in surface type. Also, Alternative 6 consists of approximately 63 percent rehabilitation, 18 percent light reconstruction and 19 percent full reconstruction. Based on requests from the public and congressional representatives, the FHWA agreed to delay publication of its decision by 30 days beyond the required period in order to provide the public and interested agencies ample opportunity to review the document and provide comments.

## **G. FOREST SERVICE ROADS ANALYSIS**

The FS has completed a Roads Analysis for the Guanella Pass Road. Roads analysis is an integrated ecological, social, and economic approach to transportation planning that addresses both existing and potential future roads. The objective of roads analysis is to provide decision makers with critical information to develop road systems that are safe and responsive to public needs and desires, are affordable and efficiently managed, have minimal negative ecological effects on the land, and are in balance with available funding for needed management actions. The proposed Guanella Pass Road project is consistent with long-range Forest transportation needs.

**THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK**