

CHAPTER FIVE

Transportation

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Figure 5-1 Espanola's Main Street District



Source: Tom Leatherwoode

Figure 5-2 Paseo de Onate (Route 285/84) at City Hall



Source: Tom Leatherwood

5.01 Roads

The City of Española is the regional center for the Española Valley and is the gateway to northwestern New Mexico east of the Sangre de Cristo Mountain Range. Two major federal highways—US 285 and US 84—merge into one north-south route just north of the city and bisect the Española's west side. The other major Española route is State Highway 68.

US 84 northbound out of the city connects Española to Abiquiu and then Tierra Amarilla (Rio Arriba County seat) and from there to Chama and into Pagosa Springs in bordering Colorado. US 285 branches off and continues northbound to Tres Piedras and then continues north to Antonito and Alamosa. Southbound, the merged highways intersect the major north-south limited access interstate highway, I-25, located approximately 25 miles south of Española. The merged highways also serve to connect Española to Santa Fe. From Santa Fe, connections can be made southbound to the major east-west interstate highway I-40, which passes through the state's major metropolitan area, Albuquerque, approximately 77 miles south of Española.

Route 84/285 to Santa Fe has become increasingly congested, primarily during prime commuting hours. This is true also of State Route 30 out of Española and State Route 4 off 84/285 at Pojoaque. Española residents commute in large numbers to employment sites in Santa Fe and Los Alamos using these routes. The road 'up the hill' has been improved considerably in recent years and state funds in excess of \$60 million are committed to continuing 84/285 improvements for the next two years. (Collins 2002)

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Figure 5-3 Intersection at Los Alamos Avenue (NM Hwy 30) and Paseo de Oñate (Route 285/84)



Source: Tom Leatherwood

These improvements will increase capacity, efficiency and safety for Española commuters who travel daily along this route.

State Highway 68 runs more or less parallel to the Rio Grande and provides a direct route north from Española 45 miles to Taos. Route 68 within the city becomes Riverside Drive, the city's major business arterial roadway. In recent years, local motorists and pass-through traffic along this route have experienced increased levels of congestion, especially during peak hours. The city is attempting to address this problem using a number of strategies, and has commissioned a traffic analysis by TransCore and Wilson and Company. The traffic congestion has prompted discussion of a possible bypass around the city's east side that was also addressed by the study. However, at the time of this report, no formal analysis has been conducted by the New Mexico State Highway & Transportation Department (NMSHTD). Though a request for funding from the NMSHTD has been made by the Mayor, no provisions for the portion of Route 68 that passes through Española have been included in the state's five year plan. (Collins 2002)

City and state officials have been discussing the transfer of ownership of Paseo de Oñate, between NM Hwy 68 and NM Hwy 30, to the City of Española. This portion of Paseo de Oñate is recognized as Española's Main Street District. In relation to this transfer, the City needs to address intersections of city streets and state highways; the state needs to improve traffic flow and limit commercial traffic along city streets. To address these issues, City and state highway officials have contracted Molzen-Corbin and Associates to develop plans for the intersections at NM Hwy 30. (Collins 2002)

Figure 5-4 Transit Van

Image here

Source: City of Espanola

5.02 Transit

The City of Española operates a transit program that began in 2000 and has enjoyed continued support and increased ridership. The City of Española Public Transit (CEPT) does not have regular routes with buses; instead, vans provide transportation, in response to phone requests, to and from destinations within a service area including Española, San Juan, Santa Clara and Arroyo Seco. Currently, two groups are using this system as a transportation choice—the elderly and school children—primarily for daily shopping needs (or visiting the doctor or for other errands) and for traveling to and from school.

This public transit alternative offers an important service for those who either cannot afford a vehicle, or cannot or do not drive automobiles as their personal transportation mode. The City of

Española is encouraging more widespread use of this transportation alternative. In addition, a park-and-ride program may be established by the summer of 2003 with funding from the National Highway and Transportation Safety Administration. The service would provide rush-hour rides between Santa Fe and Española and Santa Fe and Los Alamos.

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5.03 Pedestrian and Bike Accessibility

The main roads in Española experience heavy vehicular travel, and have few sidewalks or sizable shoulder areas to safely accommodate bike or pedestrian movement. The narrow roads without sidewalks that exist in the areas of older neighborhoods also pose a challenge for safe bicycle and pedestrian travel. In many cases, retrofitting these narrow streets to include sidewalks and bike paths is not an option simply because there is not enough room within the right-of-way. There are no designated off-road pathways for bicycles or pedestrians in Española. Overall, Española's current transportation scenario makes walking and bicycling in the City relatively difficult and in some areas, dangerous.

5.04 Air Travel

The closest major airport to Española is Albuquerque's International Sunport, approximately 84 miles to the south. The Santa Fe Airport provides commercial flights with connections to Denver and Phoenix. Española could be served most directly by its own local airport and/or the Los Alamos County Airport. However, neither of these options provides significant opportunities for air travel. The Española Airport, at the time of this report, is not serving air traffic, and there is no formal agreement with the City for air service. To accommodate air travel at the Española Airport, significant improvements to the air field would be required, yet state budgets for municipal airports in recent years have not included funds for Española.

The Los Alamos Airport—owned by the Department of Energy—provides limited service to Albuquerque via Rio Grande Air. While there has been some discussion of expanding that service, there is also indication that the service may be discontinued. In recent years, the North Central New Mexico Economic Development District has led efforts to analyze options for a regional airport. However, there has been no funding for such an alternative.

Figure 5-5 A lack of continuous sidewalks along many streets in Espanola makes pedestrian travel difficult.



Source: Tom Leatherwood

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Figure 5-6 Railroad Avenue has replaced the main rail line that passed through the City.



Source: Robert Odland Consulting

5.05 Rail

Espanola does not have rail service. The closest freight and passenger service is south of Santa Fe in Lamy, although passengers are provided shuttle connections from Santa Fe. Santa Fe Southern Railroad out of Santa Fe also moves some limited freight from Lamy to Santa Fe. Burlington Northern Santa Fe provides freight service and Amtrak provides passenger service (with connections) along the Los Angeles/Chicago route of the BNSF.

5.06 Transportation Studies

In 1992, JHK & Associates and Tierra Engineering Consultants completed *A Comprehensive Transportation Study for the City of Espanola and Adjacent Area*. The consultants offered these recommendations to assure favorable and safe traffic operations to the year 2010:

Table 5-1: Description of Major Street System Facilities

1. Widen streets to 4 lanes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Chama Hwy – north of Fairview Ln to Hernandez area ○ Los Alamos Hwy – south of Santa Clara Pueblo to Santa Clara Bridge ○ NM 106 – Santa Cruz Rd. to Santa Fe Hwy ○ Fairview – Chama Hwy to Riverside Dr.
2. Construct new streets:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Connect Santa Cruz Rd. to El Llano Rd. (east relief route) ○ Extend Railroad Ave. north of Fairview Dr. (2 lanes)
3. Add turn lanes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Riverside Dr. and Fairview Ln. (2nd eastbound left) ○ Los Alamos Hwy and Santa Clara Bridge Rd (2nd westbound and southbound left) ○ Santa Cruz Rd. and McCurdy Rd. ((eastbound left) ○ La Joya St. and McCurdy Rd. (northbound left) ○ Fairview Ln. and Railroad Ave. (2nd northbound right)
4. Signalize intersections:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fairview Ln. and Railroad Ave. ○ Santa Cruz Rd. and NM 106 ○ Riverside Dr. and El Llano Rd. ○ Riverside Drive and Upper San Pedro Rd. ○ Fairview Lane and McCurdy Rd. ○ Fairview Lane and El Llano Rd. (planned) ○ Chama Hwy and Vietnam Veteran's Memorial Dr.

Those projects which have been completed are:

- Coordinated traffic signals for Paseo de Onate and Los Alamos Hwy;
- Santa Cruz Road and NM 106;
- and, Paseo de Onate and Riverside Dr.

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Those projects which are programmed are:

- Add turn lane and adjust signal timing at Fairview Ave. and Riverside Dr. (2003)
- Reconfigure the Riverside Dr. and Paseo de Onate Intersection (2004)
- Connect Santa Cruz Rd. to El Llano Rd. (2007)

A. 1992 Study of Relief or Bypass Routes. The JHK & Associates study of 1992 looked at several options for relief or bypass routes of existing bottlenecks. The conclusion was that only one route served enough diverted traffic to justify the cost. The other routes were costly in dollars and to the environment while attracting very small numbers of trips. The consequences to existing retail services in Espanola or the impact on future economic development opportunities were not analyzed.

The following bypass routes were recommended for implementation:

- East Relief Route - From the intersection of NM 106 and Santa Cruz Road extend a north connection to El Llano Road and then along El Llano Road to Riverside Drive.
- Railroad Street Extension - Extension of Railroad Street north of Fairview for one mile. The Study recommends that while this area was not warranted as a relief route, it should be planned as a minor corridor as development comes on line to accessing the properties on the north side of Fairview.

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The routes not recommended for the 20-year horizon period included:

- North Relief Route - Connects Riverside Drive to Chama Highway approximately one mile north of Fairview Lane
- West Relief Route - Connects Industrial Park Road (roughly Fairview) to the Los Alamos Highway in the vicinity of the Santa Clara Pueblo.
- South Relief Route - Connects Los Alamos Highway in the vicinity of Santa Clara Pueblo to NM 581 at its intersection with NM 399.
- Riverside Drive - New road west of Riverside Drive along Rio Grande area
- Relief Route
- (Levee Road)
- Upper San Pedro - Connect Riverside Drive to Santa Cruz Road

Table 5-2:Transportation Studies

Other local access improvements recommended in the study were:

- Tesuque Drive - Extend drive between McCurdy Road and El Llano;
- and, La Joya Street - Consider construction La Joya Street between McCurdy Road and El Llano

Alternative Corridors	2010 PM Peak Hour Travel Demand	Nature of Traffic (Local or Through)	Estimated Cost \$ Millions 1992 \$	Special Considerations	Recommended (Yes or No)
East Relief Route	1662	Mostly Through	\$2.1		Yes
Railroad Extension	313	Local	\$1.33		In future, as a minor corridor
North Relief Route	314	Local	\$2.5	Environmental impact on Rio Grande and wetlands	No
West Relief Route	167	Through	\$2.1		No
South Relief Route	1292	Local, with 35% Through	\$3.6	Environmental impact on Rio Grande and wetlands	No
Riverside Drive Relief Route (Levee Road)	1894	Local	\$7.5	Extensive flood control; impact on wetlands	No
Upper San Pedro Connection	Less than 100	Local	\$1.27	Environmental impact on Rio Grande and wetlands	No
Corlette Road Extension	200	Local and Through	\$2.0	Previous neighborhood opposition; environmental impact on Rio Grande and wetlands	Potential key transportation corridor

B. Wilson and Company Relief Route Study. Wilson and Company is conducting a relief route study with the main intent to relieve Riverside Drive. The State Highway Department provided funding for the study based on the premise that the relief route would produce a better outcome than continued traffic control improvements to Riverside Drive. It is thought that a relief route could be more economical than signal and median improvements to Riverside Drive. Furthermore, it may be difficult to overhaul Riverside Drive to the point that it meets federal standards for a state highway. If a relief route is built, the State would turn the operational responsibilities for Riverside Drive to the City of Espanola.

Wilson and Company has completed Phase One which is a review of Existing Traffic Conditions. Their Phase 2 study will examine relief corridors. Since the El Llano extension is already programmed, it is anticipated that a relief route east of El Llano is a likely candidate for the relief route. Once a preferred corridor is selected, economic and cultural impacts of the relief route will be assessed.

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C. Traffic Volume Changes. The JHK and Wilson studies both include annual average weekday traffic counts for various segments. Those figures which are exact are actual traffic counts. Those which are rounded are estimates based on traffic counts. While the figures are not 100% comparable, they give general indication of traffic volume changes as shown in the table below.

Table 5-3: Traffic Volume Comparisons: 1992 to 2001

	1992	2001	% Change
Riverside Drive	29,934	31,406	+ 5
Paseo de Onate (Bridge)	13,985	12,889	- 8
Paseo de Onate (by City Hall)	14,679	18,100	+ 23
Fairview Lane	11,068	16,305	+47
Santa Fe Hwy	15,215	21,712	+43
Los Alamos Hwy	6,153	11,312	+84
Chama Hwy	8,327	13,091	+58
Taos Hwy	13,207	14,351	+ 9

Table 5-4: Existing conditions:

Major Street	Type of Facility	*	Posted Speed
US 84/285	4-lane, divided	Principal Arterial	35 / 45 mph
Riverside Drive	4-lane, divided	Principal Arterial	45 mph
Stanley Griegos (SG) Bridge Los Alamos Hwy	4-lane, divided	Principal Arterial	35 /40 mph
Paseo de Oñate	4-lane, divided	Principal Arterial	25 / 35 mph
NM 68 (Riverside Dr., Taos Hwy)	4-lane, divided	Minor Arterial	35 /45 mph
NM 30 (Los Alamos Hwy)	2-lane, undivided	Minor Arterial	40/50 mph
NM 584 (Fairview Drive)	2-lane, undivided	Minor Arterial	35 /45 mph
NM 583	2-lane, undivided	Collector	35 mph
Fairview Lane	2-lane, undivided	Collector	20/ 25 mph
McCurdy Road			
NM 291 (El Llano Road)	2-lane, undivided	Collector	15 / 35 mph
NM 76 (Santa Cruz Road)	2-lane, undivided	Collector	30 mph
NM 106	2-lane, undivided	Minor Collector	35 mph
NM 399	2-lane, undivided	Minor Collector	35 mph

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