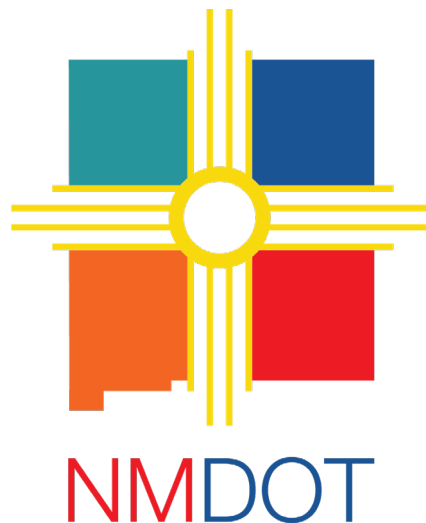




U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Highway
Administration**



NM 554 El Rito Bridge Replacement Project

Public Meeting
Thursday, June 25, 2026

Control Number 5101287

AGENDA

- 1 » Project Background
- 2 » Purpose and Need
- 3 » Bridge Design Overview
- 4 » Environmental Considerations
- 5 » Traffic Impacts
- 6 » Schedule and Next Steps
- 7 » Questions

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT TEAM

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

**New Mexico Department of Transportation
(NMDOT)**

PROJECT PURPOSE

- The purpose of the project is to provide a safe, reliable, and structurally adequate crossing of El Rito Creek.
- **Why This Project is Needed:**
 - The 1957 timber bridge has exceeded its service life and exhibits significant deterioration.
 - No longer meets current standards for width, safety features, or load capacity and has been restricted to 14 tons since 1974.
 - Replacement is necessary to meet modern design and safety standards, restore legal load capacity, and maintain safe travel on NM 554.

PROJECT IMPROVEMENTS

Improvements include:

- New pavement approaches
- Two travel lanes with slightly wider shoulders
- Open bridge railings and roadside safety upgrades
- New signs and pavement markings
- Culvert repairs



PROJECT AREA



- **Replacement of Bridge No. 0338** located near milepost 12.33 on NM 554, in El Rito, New Mexico.
- Located within the Juan Jose Lobato Land Grant and Carson National Forest
- Project limits:
 - ~150 feet south of the bridge
 - ~950 feet north of the bridge

PROJECT AREA



The project area lies within a scenic corridor featuring:

- Open grasslands
- Agricultural fields
- Historic acequias (irrigation ditches)
- River-edge habitat along El Rito Creek

PRIOR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

- First Public Meeting:
 - October 2, 2025, at 6:00pm
 - El Rito Public Library
- Approximately 30 community members attended this meeting.
- Over 25 comments were received during the comment period.
 - Comments addressed:
 - Biological and cultural concerns
 - Local traffic needs
 - Design and load capacity



EXISTING BRIDGE EVALUATION

Existing Timber Bridge #0338

Need for replacement:

- **Service Life:** Built in 1957, the bridge is approaching 70 years in service - nearly 20 years beyond the typical 50-year service life for bridge infrastructure.
- **Load Capacity:** Bridge #0338 has been posted for 14 tons since 1974. All new bridges are designed to have “...*bridge load capacities that are adequate to carry all ‘legal load’ vehicles per NMSA 66-7-5.*”
 - NMDOT State Load Rating Engineer
 - Average weight of a propane truck can range from 16-25 tons
 - Average weight of a flatbed carrying hay is 15-32 tons.
 - Both types of vehicles regularly use the bridge, in violation of its current rating.

EXISTING BRIDGE EVALUATION

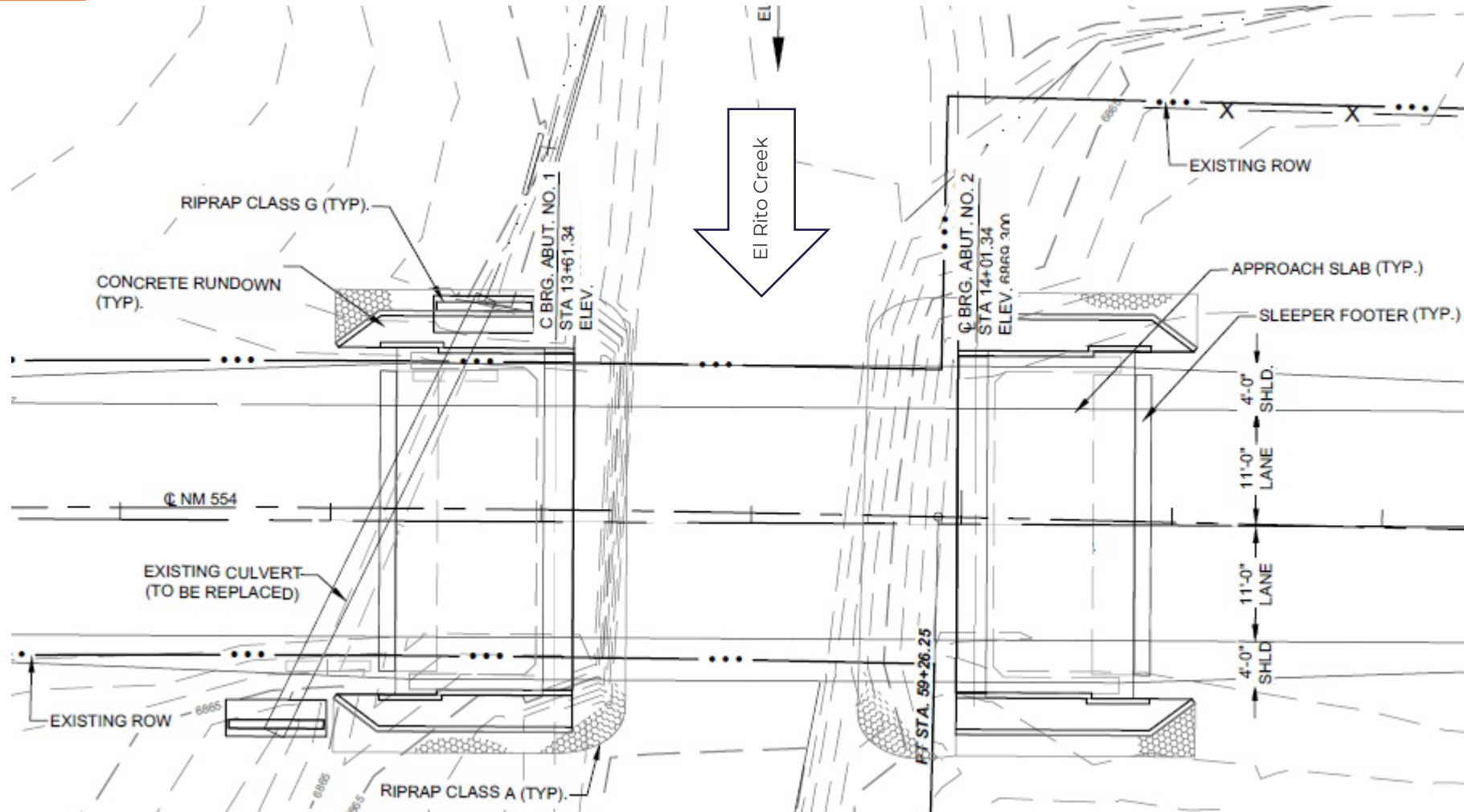
- **Inspections:** Recent inspections by Bridge Engineers have found all timber beams to be weathered with checks and splits. Some beams have more severe defects such as full-depth horizontal splits, heavy wood rot and section loss. In addition, some piles were found to have heavy to severe wood rot.
- **Repairs:** The bridge has had already major repair work to keep it in service until now. Further repair is infeasible due to the extent of the degradation.
- **Conclusion:** To allow Bridge #0338 to remain in its current state would create an unacceptable risk to the public. The only options are to replace it with an improved structure that meets current standards or to close it down.

BRIDGE DESIGN OVERVIEW

Precast Prestressed Concrete Slab Girder

- Best overall balance of function, durability, and construction efficiency
- 40-foot single-span bridge
- 21" x 4' -8" precast prestressed concrete slab girders
- Concrete abutments with 42" diameter drilled shafts
- Type A 42" open metal railing
- Upgraded guardrails and pavement approaches
- New striping and signage

BRIDGE DESIGN OVERVIEW



COMPARABLE PROJECT

NM 50 Bridge over Glorieta Creek near Pecos

- Bridge in poor condition, had reached the end of its service life, and had load restrictions that necessitated replacement.
- Narrow road easement within the National Park Service, Pecos National Historical Park.
- NM 50 follows portions of historic Santa Fe Trail and Route 66 alignment.
- The area had significant cultural and historic resources, including an 1862 historic structure at the roadway edge.
- A pre-cast concrete bridge was used to shorten construction duration and minimize impacts to surrounding resources.
- The new structure was designed to reflect the scale, character, and rural aesthetic of the Pecos National Historical Park.

NM 50 – BRIDGE REPLACEMENT

BEFORE



AFTER



NM 50 – BRIDGE REPLACEMENT

BEFORE



AFTER



ADDRESSING ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Environmental:

- Impacts to trees will be avoided or minimized where possible. However, there will be some unavoidable tree removals.
- NMDOT will replace vegetation disturbed during construction, including along the temporary detour, with appropriate plant and tree species, such as cottonwood and willow poles.
- Wildlife that avoids the area during construction activity is anticipated to return once the habitat stabilizes.
- Measures will be taken to minimize dust, noise, and vibration during construction.

ADDRESSING HISTORICAL CONCERNS

Historic Resources:

- NMDOT has conducted detailed cultural resource surveys and consultations for the project.
- Project is designed to avoid impacts to historic properties and will conduct vibration monitoring using seismograph instruments throughout construction.
 - If effects are noted, NMDOT has a policy of immediate notification.
- Bridge remains on its current alignment with two travel lanes, slightly wider shoulders, and open railings to maintain historic aesthetics.

ENVIRONMENTAL & HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Protecting both the environment and the cultural heritage of the area is a key part of this project.

Surveys of natural and cultural resources have been completed.

Coordination is ongoing with landowner to ensure existing irrigation ditch remains open and operable, during and after construction.

Nearby descansos (roadside memorials) will be protected and restored after the work is completed.

Consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) has been completed.

Section 404/401 permitting, which allows work to be conducted within El Rito Creek, is underway.

ADDRESSING TRAFFIC CONCERNS

Traffic:

- The new bridge will not increase the number or type of vehicles allowed through El Rito.
- Legally overweight trucks require state permits and will be rerouted as needed.
- Traffic-calming measures are outside the scope of this bridge project but can be considered separately.
- The bridge will include 4-ft shoulders to improve safety.
- Replanting with native vegetation will help visually narrow the roadway, encouraging slower speeds.

TRAFFIC IMPACTS DURING CONSTRUCTION

A temporary detour will reroute traffic to the northwest side of the existing bridge.

One-lane of traffic will be maintained using a temporary signal.
No full road closures are expected during construction.

Emergency services access will be maintained throughout the project.

This approach allows NMDOT to:

- Avoid a detour route of approximately 53-miles one way
- Maintain the rural nature of the area, by keeping the detour to one lane
- Minimize the construction footprint and environmental impacts to the project area

SCHEDULE AND NEXT STEPS

Project Scoping

- Complete

Preliminary Design Development

- Complete

Final Design

- Summer 2026

Project Advertised and Awarded to a Contractor

- Late 2026

Anticipated Start of Construction

- Early 2027

Public Comment Period

For any comments or questions:



www.dot.nm.gov/event/el-rito-bridge/



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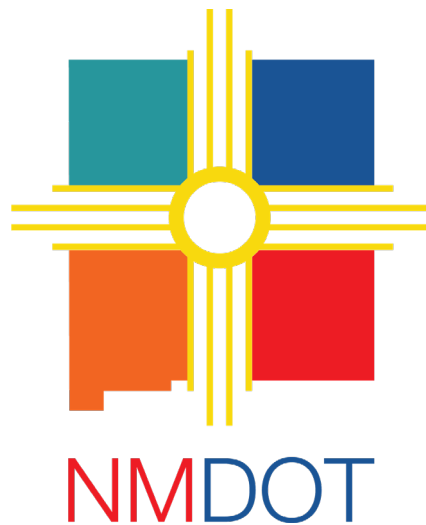
Haley.Steffens@wsp.com



Comment deadline:
Sunday, July 12, 2026



NMDOT Project Website



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Thank You!



NMDOT Project Website