



CN 5101287

NM 554 El Rito Bridge Replacement Project

Public Meeting #2 Summary

July 23, 2026

Prepared For:



U.S. Department of Transportation
**Federal Highway
Administration**

Prepared By:



WSP USA, INC.
2440 LOUISIANA BOULEVARD, SUITE 400
ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87110



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1.0 Introduction

In June 2026, the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) contracted WSP to support with organizing and conducting a second public meeting in El Rito, NM for the NM 554 El Rito Bridge Replacement Project (CN 5101287) and synthesizing public input received. The meeting provided an update about the project progress, reaffirmed its purpose and need, offered construction and completion details from a similar type of project, informed the public about the anticipated construction schedule, and gave community members an opportunity to voice questions and concerns about the project. This Public Meeting Summary Report (Report) provides an overview of the outreach effort and a summary of comments received at the public meeting.

2.0 Public Meeting Overview

In June 2026, the NMDOT held a public meeting in El Rito, New Mexico to gather feedback on project scope, bridge type selection, environmental considerations, and anticipated construction impacts and schedule. The WSP team coordinated logistics with the venue, including room setup and A/V needs, ahead of the meeting. A list of attendees who chose to sign in during the Public Meeting is included in **Appendix A**. Approximately 44 community members attended.

Public Meeting Details:

- Date: June 25, 2026
- Time: 6:00pm – 7:30pm
- Location: Alumni Hall, El Rito Northern New Mexico College, El Rito, NM 87530

2.1 Agenda

Meeting 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

Upon arrival, attendees were welcomed and invited to sign in (optional) and take a seat in the Alumni Hall of the El Rito Northern New Mexico College. Light refreshments were available throughout the meeting.

The meeting began shortly after 6:00 p.m. with opening remarks from WSP facilitator Nick Fazio and introductions of the NMDOT and WSP project team. NMDOT Project Engineer Zack Mondragon then delivered the project presentation, followed by an open question-and-answer session. Project staff documented questions, comments, and recommendations shared during the discussion.

The presentation covered the following:

- Project purpose, improvements, and area.
- A summary of prior public involvement.
- Detailed information about the existing bridge's evaluation, including inspection results and why continued repairs are not viable.
- An overview of the new bridge design.
- An evaluation of a comparable project on NM 50 over Glorieta Creek near Pecos, NM.
- Results of environmental and cultural surveys and resource coordination efforts.
- Traffic management during construction, including temporary detour and signal operations.

- Project schedule and anticipated construction start in early 2027.
- How and when the community can provide feedback.



After the presentation, there was an extended question and answer (Q&A) session facilitated by WSP staff. This Q&A session filled the remainder of the meeting time. Before adjourning, WSP staff reminded attendees that written comments were welcome through July 12, 2026, and provided instructions for submitting feedback.

2.2 Project Team

The project team comprised of the following staff from both the New Mexico Department of Transportation and WSP.

Name	Role	Organization
Zach Mondragon	Project Design Engineer (PDE) & Presenter	NMDOT
Dana Garcia	Project Design Engineer (PDE)	NMDOT
Benjamin Gillock	Public Involvement	NMDOT
Sean Brady	Technical Support Engineer, D5	NMDOT
Tom Cartner	Bridge Bureau	NMDOT
Matthew Haverland	Environmental Coordinator, D5	NMDOT
Nick Fazio	Facilitator	WSP
Haley Steffens	Note-taking & General Support	WSP

2.3 Notifications

To provide notice of the public meeting, NMDOT and WSP worked together to produce the following bilingual materials that are included in **Appendix B**:

- Newspaper advertisement in the Rio Grande SUN, printed on June 18, 2026
- Press Release shared with the NMDOT District 5 Public Information Officer's contact list for news releases
- Social media graphics posted on NMDOT's Facebook page
- Digital and printed flyers distributed via email and placed at several community centers and businesses, such as the El Rito Community Center, the local USPS facility, El Rito Northern New

Mexico College, El Llano Bar and Mercantile, El Farolito, El Rito Ranger Station, and the local public library

- Updated project event page
- (2) Roadside banners
- Mass email notification shared with key stakeholders and local community centers and organizations

2.4 Meeting Materials

In preparation for this Public Meeting, WSP supported the update of the meeting presentation and created an updated fact sheet with QR code sheets directing attendees to the NMDOT project event page. These materials are included in **Appendix C**.

3.0 Public Meeting Input

Following the presentation, NMDOT opened the floor for questions and comments from meeting attendees. WSP facilitated the Q&A session by recognizing participants one at a time, while NMDOT responded to questions and comments throughout the discussion. The summaries below highlight the key topics raised during the public meeting.

Need for Bridge Replacement

A majority of meeting attendees expressed continuing skepticism about the need to replace the existing bridge. One attendee cited decades of heavy truck use over the existing bridge without failure, suggesting that the current bridge is able to handle the traffic it receives. Others expressed concerns about what they perceived as overstatements of failure risk. NMDOT explained that the bridge has been inspected by its bridge engineers and determined to be in unacceptable condition. NMDOT further noted that replacement is required to address the bridge's age and deterioration, meet modern engineering standards, and provide continued safe, reliable access through the area.

Bridge Design: Size, Capacity, & Alternatives

The NMDOT addressed two questions about the size of the new bridge, assuring attendees that the new bridge would be wider by about 5' overall, including the slightly larger shoulders proposed. Attendees also asked other questions about the load capacity for the new bridge; many wanted to hear an exact, quantified number. NMDOT explained that the new bridge will be rated for 5x the capacity of the old bridge. While community members in attendance were not fully satisfied with this explanation, NMDOT explained that quantifying an exact number is difficult, due to disparities in trailer size and axle placement of large-load vehicles. Several attendees also asked about the bridge design. To answer this question, NMDOT referred back to the presentation, where an example of a similar project had been conducted in another rural community. NMDOT used the example project to explain how the new bridge might fit within this community. Two attendees also expressed a desire for the community to have been involved earlier in the process and to have seen other alternatives proposed.

Traffic & Enforcement

Attendees raised multiple questions about NMDOT's ability to enforce weight restrictions to prevent heavier trucks from using the route. NMDOT emphasized that the new bridge will not change routing or the permitting process for overweight trucks. They do not expect an increase in traffic volumes through the community.

Environmental Impacts

Throughout the meeting, three attendees expressed a strong interest in cottonwood preservation within the project area, raising questions about the number of trees expected to be removed, as well as the diameter of mature trees affected by the project. They also asked about potential wildlife and habitat

impacts to the riparian ecosystem on the northwest side of the bridge. The project team explained that they are making good-faith efforts to preserve some of the larger cottonwoods on the north side of the project area, noted that one mature tree must unfortunately be removed, and assured community members that mitigation measures, such as planting replacement trees, will be implemented. The team also referred to the completed woody species survey, which catalogued the number and diameter of trees in the project area and affirmed that revegetation efforts will follow the results of that survey. They reaffirmed community members of their intent to replace woody vegetation in-kind, where feasible, and to reseed the area with riparian plant species.

Property Impacts & Construction Risk

Two community members asked questions about project impacts to nearby buildings, especially to an adobe structure on the effected landowner's property. Attendees also wondered if any buildings will be removed during the construction process. NMDOT clarified that no buildings will be removed and that the project will perform seismic vibration monitoring on nearby structures, such as the adobe structure. One attendee wanted to know if damage occurred during construction, who would be liable. The DOT clarified that contractors performing construction are liable and insured for damages.

Temporary Detour & Construction

Attendees raised questions about the temporary detour location, width, and footprint. One individual voiced concerns about the temporary detour height and debris accumulation that can occur during monsoon flooding. NMDOT clarified the detour location and explained that the temporary detour is rated for a 2-year storm event, with overtopping characteristics. The detour should only be necessary for one construction season, but if an event occurred that impacted the detour, it is designed to be repaired quickly.

General

Questions were also asked about the project cost; NMDOT provided information about the current cost estimate, roughly \$5.5 million. Multiple comments from community members suggested that NMDOT should delay this project in favor of addressing other roadway improvements like "Dead Man's Curve" on NM 554, which has fatally impacted several residents in the area. The safety of that segment of NM 554 was described as being of paramount importance to the community. Attendees also consistently expressed a desire for NMDOT to have involved the community earlier in the project so they could have provided input about things like design selection. Project renderings were also requested, which NMDOT explained is outside the scope of the project. Community members felt the sample project NMDOT shared as an example had limited applicability, as it was not specific to their community and needs. There were also questions about the expected longevity of the new bridge structure, which NMDOT clarified is a 75-year lifespan.

Two attendees expressed comments in favor of the bridge replacement project. One expressed the safety of the area's children and youth as a high priority. Another thanked the NMDOT for their efforts, agreeing that something needs to be done to provide a safe bridge.

4.0 Digital Public Input

Prior to the meeting, NMDOT published an event page with meeting details and a digital comment form, allowing community members to submit feedback and sign up for project updates. The public comment period was open from the public meeting date on June 25, 2026 through July 12, 2026.

Comments received were collected and formatted in **Appendix D**.

Many commentors expressed negative feelings or frustration about the project. Feedback included seven requests to either stop or delay the project. One respondent submitted an alternative approach for

NMDOT's consideration. Another commentor wrote twice requesting NMDOT look into a detour up stream from the existing bridge. This, and a few other comments, also expressed a desire to see mature trees in the project area preserved. Some comments expressed opinions that the project will ruin the natural beauty of the community. Several commentors also expressed concern for the landowner whose property NMDOT is seeking to purchase for additional right-of-way. One respondent called the project an overreach, expressing a preference to seeing the existing bridge repaired. Finally, another commentor asked why NMDOT is not repaving and widening CR 142, instead of pursuing the bridge project.

5.0 Conclusion & Next Steps

The public meeting provided community members with an opportunity to learn more about the El Rito Bridge Replacement Project and speak directly with NMDOT and project team members. The discussion helped clarify the project need, design approach, biological and cultural considerations, and anticipated construction schedule. Public feedback received during the meeting and during the comment period will be shared with the design team.

NMDOT anticipates advancing the project into final design in 2026, with construction expected to begin in early 2027 and be completed within one construction season. The project team will continue coordination with local stakeholders, including emergency services and nearby property owners.

Appendix A: Sign-In Sheets

Public Meeting Sign-in Sheet

June 25, 2026

6:00 PM - 7:30 PM | Presentation to start at 6:10 PM

NM 544 El Rito Bridge Replacement Project | CN 5101287



	NAME	PHONE NUMBER	EMAIL ADDRESS	MAILING ADDRESS
1	Max Vigil			
2	Duane Garcia			
3	Matt Haverland			
4	Zachariah Mondragon			
5	Norbert + Carolyn Hufnagel			
6	Ben Gillock			
7	Lynett Gillette			
8	Heleen Vigil			
9	Jodie Vigil			
10	Shannon McCarthy			
11	Viki Edwards			
12	GAFFY & PAT GRIFFIN			
13	CASSIE COHN			
14	Susan C. Boyle			
15				

Public Meeting Sign-in Sheet

June 25, 2026

6:00 PM - 7:30 PM | Presentation to start at 6:10 PM

NM 544 El Rito Bridge Replacement Project | CN 5101287



	NAME	PHONE NUMBER	EMAIL ADDRESS	MAILING ADDRESS
16	Victoria Broadus			
17	Bruce Smith			
18	Marie-Louise Hadden			
19	Barbara Turner			
20	Patty Kent			
21	Michael A Martin			
22	Lucia Vinograd			
23	Moroni P. Herrera			
24	Dennis Martinez			
25	Patty Shure			
26	Mildred C. Valdez			
27	Angela Trujillo			
28				
29				
30				

Public Meeting Sign-in Sheet

June 25, 2026

6:00 PM - 7:30 PM | Presentation to start at 6:10 PM

NM 544 El Rito Bridge Replacement Project | CN 5101287



	NAME	PHONE NUMBER	EMAIL ADDRESS	MAILING ADDRESS
31	Ted Hanks			
32	Bill Thornton			
33	Miguel Garcia			
34	Christine Trujillo			
35	Felipe Martinez			
36	Daniel Archuleta			
37	KT Vanderbrook			
38	Terry Boyle			
39	Christie Garcia			
40	Lina Alvarado			
41	Jack Edwards			
42	Toby Martinez			
43	Lori Parris			
44	Judi Whitch			
45	Sol Trujillo			

Appendix B: Notification Materials

Contents:

- A. Newspaper Advertisement and Proof
- B. Press Release
- C. Social Media Graphic and Post
- D. Flyer
- E. NMDOT Project Event Page
- F. Roadside Banner and Proof
- G. Email Notification

Newspaper Advertisement

NM 554 EL RITO BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT | CN 5101287

YOU'RE INVITED!

PUBLIC MEETING

 Thursday, June 25th

 6:00–7:30 PM (MT)

 Alumni Hall, El Rito Northern New Mexico College,
El Rito, NM 87530

Questions or need ADA accommodations or language assistance? Contact:

 Haley.Steffens@wsp.com



¡ESTÁS INVITADO!

REUNIÓN COMUNITARIA

 Jueves, 25 de junio

 6:00–7:30 PM (MT)

 Alumni Hall, El Rito Northern New Mexico College,
El Rito, NM 87530

¿Preguntas o necesita asistencia relacionada con la ADA o en otro idioma? Comuníquese con:

 Christian.Lopez@wsp.com



Learn more | Más Información:
www.dot.nm.gov/event/el-rito-bridge

Rio Grande Sun Newspaper Proof

Published: June 18, 2026

The Española Division 1 Sundevils-Red won the flag football Zia Bowl Championship, spring season, for the Northern New Mexico Children's Sports League. They defeated the Sundevils-Gold 20-6. The Sundevils were also regular season champs, finishing the season with an 8-1 record. The team is: Back row, head coach Jacob B Martinez (left), team mom Jenay Martinez, assistant coach Charles Romero and assistant coach Justin Salazar-Torrez; middle row, assistant coach Isaiah V. Martinez (left), players Jaxen Valdez, Greyson Romero, Xavier Torrez and Jaylen Sullivan; bottom row, players Julian Lovato (left), Ezariah Montoya, Ayven Martinez, Logan Archuleta, Luke Quintana and Cameron Martinez. Not pictured is Eli Garcia.

(Photo Courtesy: Jacob Martinez)

NM 554 EL RITO BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT | CN 5101287

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Christian.Lopez@wsp.com

Learn more | Más Información:
www.dot.nm.gov/event/el-rito-bridge

FREE YOUTH SOCCER CAMP

DEVELOP SKILLS ★ BUILD CONFIDENCE ★ HAVE FUN!

OHKAY OWINGEH ATHLETIC COMPLEX

SESSION 1:
JUNE 22ND, 25TH, 26TH

SESSION 2:
JUNE 29 - JULY 3

TIME: 9:00 AM - 12 NOON

NO FEE FREE TO ATTEND!

REGISTER ON ARRIVAL

PLAY HARD. RESPECT ALL. REPRESENT

OPEN TO YOUTH PLAYERS OF ALL SKILL LEVELS

LEARN:

- SOCCER FUNDAMENTALS
- BALL CONTROL & PASSING
- TEAMWORK
- SPORTSMANSHIP
- GAMING

HAVE FUN. LOVE IT.

Social Media Graphics

Published on NMDOT's Facebook: June 22, 2026

English

NM 554 EL RITO BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT | CN 5101287



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PUBLIC MEETING

 Thursday, June 25th

 6:00–7:30 PM (MT)

 Alumni Hall, El Rito Northern
New Mexico College, El Rito, NM

Questions, ADA accommodations, or language assistance?
Haley.Steffens@wsp.com



LEARN MORE: www.dot.nm.gov/event/el-rito-bridge

Spanish

PROYECTO DE REEMPLAZO DEL PUENTE EL RITO EN NM 554 | CN 5101287



¡ACOMPÁÑANOS!

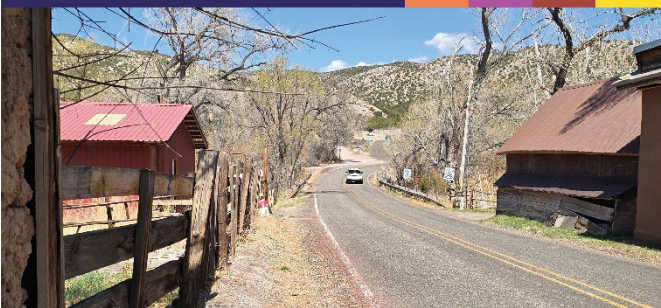
REUNIÓN COMUNITARIA

 Jueves, 25 de junio

 6:00–7:30 PM (MT)

 Alumni Hall, El Rito Northern
New Mexico College, El Rito, NM

¿Tiene preguntas o necesita adaptaciones conforme a la ADA o asistencia en otro idioma? Comuníquese con Christian.Lopez@wsp.com



PARA MÁS INFORMACIÓN: www.dot.nm.gov/event/el-rito-bridge

Printed & Digital Flyer

NM 554 EL RITO BRIDGE REPLACEMENT | CN 5101287 | NM 554 PROYECTO DE REEMPLAZO DEL PUENTE EL RITO

YOU'RE INVITED!

PUBLIC MEETING



Thursday, JUNE 25th



6:00-7:30pm (MT)



Alumni Hall, El Rito Northern New Mexico College, El Rito, NM 87530

The New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) is planning to replace the existing bridge to improve safety, maintain access, and meet current engineering standards.

Attend the meeting to:

- » Receive project updates about the bridge design
- » Learn about cultural and natural resource considerations
- » Ask questions and share your input with the project team

Public comments are being accepted through Sunday, July 12, 2026, on the event page or at the public meeting.



New Mexico DEPARTMENT OF
TRANSPORTATION
MOBILITY FOR EVERYONE



U.S. Department of Transportation
**Federal Highway
Administration**



¡ACOMPÁÑANOS!

REUNIÓN COMUNITARIA



Jueves, 25 de junio



6:00-7:30pm (MT)



Alumni Hall, El Rito Northern New Mexico College, El Rito, NM 87530



El Departamento de Transporte de Nuevo México (NMDOT) está planificando el reemplazo del puente existente para mejorar la seguridad, mantener el acceso y cumplir con las normas de ingeniería vigentes.

Acompáñenos en la reunión para:

- » Informarse sobre el proyecto y el diseño del puente
- » Conocer las consideraciones culturales y ambientales
- » Hacer preguntas y compartir sus comentarios

Se recibirán comentarios del público hasta el domingo, 12 de julio de 2026, a través de la página del evento o durante la reunión pública.

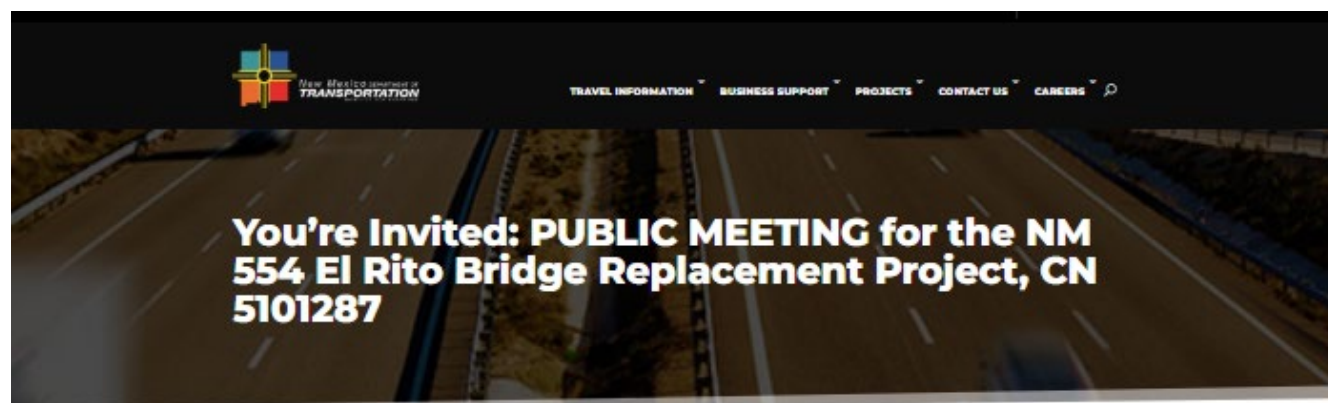
LEARN MORE | OBTENGA MÁS INFORMACIÓN

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

For Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or Civil Rights Title VI accommodations and/or hard copies of the presentation contact **Haley Steffens** at haley.steffens@wsp.com.

Para solicitar adaptaciones conforme a la Ley para Estadounidenses con Discapacidades (ADA) u otra asistencia, comuníquese con **Christian Lopez** a Christian.lopez@wsp.com.

NMDOT Public Meeting Event Webpage



THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING!

NM 554 EL RITO BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT

On June 25, 2026, the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) hosted a second public meeting to discuss the NM 554 El Rito Bridge Replacement Project in El Rito, NM.

At the meeting, attendees had an opportunity to receive updates about the project, hear more about the project need and the bridge design, learn more about cultural and natural resource considerations, and to ask questions and provide input with the project team.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR INPUT

The comment period for this portion of the project closed Sunday, July 10, 2026. NMDOT thanks everyone who contributed comments, questions, and other feedback during this time.



MEETING MATERIALS

Presentation PDF - June 2026 Public Meeting

June 25, 2026
@ 6:00 pm - 7:30 pm
at Alumni Hall, El Rito Northern New Mexico Community College
+ Google Map

Add To Calendar



Back to Events

Roadside Banner

NM 554 EL RITO BRIDGE REPLACEMENT	NM 554 PROYECTO DE REEMPLAZO DEL PUENTE EL RITO	 
<i>Please join us!</i> PUBLIC MEETING  Thursday, June 25th  6:00 PM (MT)  Alumni Hall, El Rito Northern New Mexico College	<i>¡Acompáñanos para:</i> REUNIÓN COMUNITARIA  Jueves, 25 de junio  6:00 PM (MT)  Alumni Hall, El Rito Northern New Mexico College	 For more information Para más información: www.dot.nm.gov/event/el-rito-bridge
CN 5101287		

Photos of installed Roadside Banners





Email Meeting Invitation

Distributed: June 18, 2026

You're Invited!

In-Person Public Meeting for El Rito Bridge Replacement Project

Where: Alumni Hall, El Rito Northern New Mexico College, El Rito, NM 87530

When: Thursday, June 25, 2026 | 6:00 PM – 7:30 PM

The New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) invites you to attend a public meeting regarding the NM 554 El Rito Bridge Replacement Project in El Rito, NM.

The existing bridge is in poor condition and is being replaced to improve safety, maintain long-term access, and meet current engineering standards. The project area is located within a scenic corridor characterized by grasslands, agricultural fields, acequias, and riparian habitat. As part of the planning process, both cultural and natural resources are being carefully evaluated and incorporated into the final design.

Why Attend?

Join us to:

- Receive key updates on the project and planned bridge improvements
- Learn more about cultural and natural resource considerations
- Ask questions and share your input with the project team

Questions, ADA accommodations, or language assistance?

Contact: Haley Steffens: Haley.Steffens@wsp.com

We hope to see you there!

You're Invited! In-Person Public Meeting for the El Rito Bridge Replacement Project

From Steffens, Haley <Haley.Steffens@wsp.com>

Date Thu 6/18/2026 8:26 AM

To Steffens, Haley <Haley.Steffens@wsp.com>

Bcc

You're Invited!**In-Person Public Meeting for the El Rito Bridge Replacement Project**

Where: Alumni Hall, El Rito Northern New Mexico College, El Rito, NM 87530

When: Thursday, June 25, 2026 | 6:00 PM – 7:30 PM

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Questions, ADA accommodations, or language assistance?

Contact: Haley Steffens: Haley.Steffens@wsp.com

to see you there!

Haley Steffens

Intermediate Professional, Communications and Public Involvement

PhD English

T +1 505-878-6521

M +1 575-309-6734

WSP

2440 Louisiana Blvd NE, Suite 400

Albuquerque, NM 87112

wsp.com



Appendix C: Supporting Materials

Contents:

- A. Public Meeting Presentation
- B. Fact Sheet



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

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.

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

EXISTING BRIDGE EVALUATION

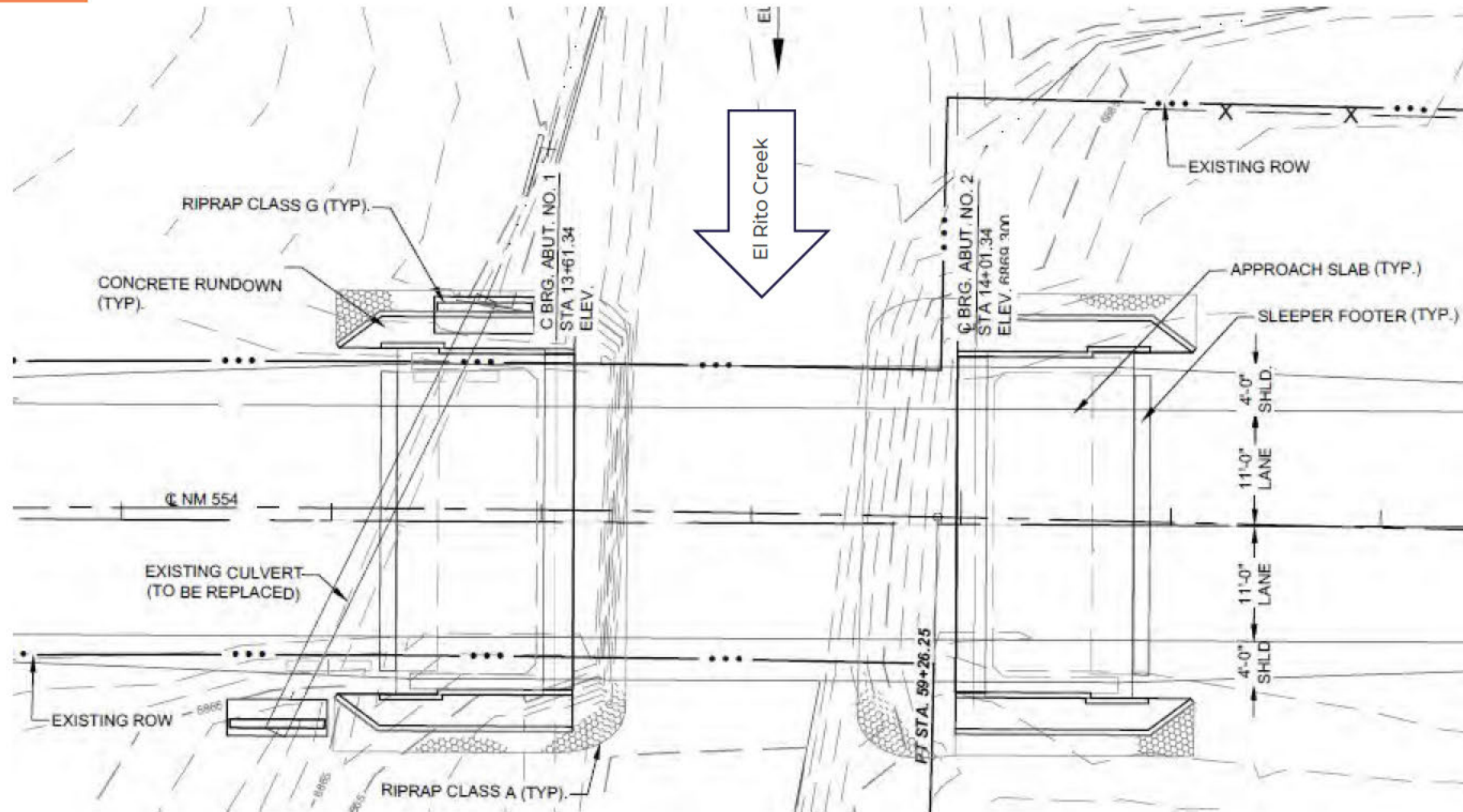
- **Inspections:** Recent inspections by Bridge Engineers have found all timber beams to be weathered with checks and splits. Some beams have more severe defects such as full-depth horizontal splits, heavy wood rot and section loss. In addition, some piles were found to have heavy to severe wood rot.
- **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/



2440 Louisiana Blvd NE, Suite 400
Albuquerque, NM 87112
C/O Haley Steffens



Haley.Steffens@wsp.com



Comment deadline:
Sunday, July 12, 2026



NMDOT Project Website



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Highway
Administration**



Thank You!



NMDOT Project Website

Factsheet (English)

NM 554 EL RITO BRIDGE REPLACEMENT | CN 5101287

NM 554 EL RITO BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT



PROJECT OVERVIEW

The New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) is replacing the existing El Rito Bridge on NM 554 at El Rito Creek in Rio Arriba County to improve safety, maintain access, and meet current engineering standards.

The existing bridge was built in 1957 and has been in service for nearly 70 years. Based on the bridge's deterioration level, limited functionality, obsolete safety features, and inadequate load ratings, NMDOT has determined Bridge #0338 has reached the end of its useful service life.

DESIGN IMPROVEMENTS

The replacement bridge is designed to meet current engineering standards while maintaining the historic character of the area. Project improvements include:

- » New bridge on the current alignment
- » Two travel lanes with slightly wider shoulders
- » Open bridge railings
- » Meets national bridge design specifications, including bridge load capacity

TIMELINE & TRAFFIC

Construction is anticipated to begin in Spring 2027. To maintain access during construction:

- » A detour will be built northwest of the existing bridge
- » Single-lane access will be maintained using a temporary traffic signal



ENVIRONMENTAL & CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

NMDOT has coordinated cultural resource surveys and consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office and interested tribes for historic and community landmarks. Project considerations include:

- » Designed to avoid impacts to historic properties
- » Vibration monitoring throughout construction
- » Minimize impacts to trees where feasible
- » Disturbed and temporary access areas will be restored with appropriate vegetation

LEARN MORE

Visit the project website for additional information:

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



For Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodations and/or language assistance contact **Haley Steffens** at haley.steffens@wsp.com.

Factsheet (Spanish)

NM 554 PROYECTO DE REEMPLAZO DEL PUENTE EL RITO | CN 5101287

PROYECTO DE REEMPLAZO DEL PUENTE EL RITO EN NM 554



U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway
Administration

DESCRIPCIÓN GENERAL DEL PROYECTO

El Departamento de Transporte de Nuevo México (NMDOT, por sus siglas en inglés) reemplazará el puente existente El Rito en NM 554 sobre El Rito Creek, en el condado de Río Arriba, para mejorar la seguridad, mantener el acceso y cumplir con los estándares actuales de ingeniería.

El puente existente fue construido en 1957 y ha estado en servicio durante casi 70 años. Debido al nivel de deterioro del puente, su funcionalidad limitada, características de seguridad obsoletas y clasificaciones de carga inadecuadas, NMDOT ha determinado que el Puente #0338 ha llegado al final de su vida útil.

MEJORAS DE DISEÑO

El puente de reemplazo está diseñado para cumplir con los estándares actuales de ingeniería, a la vez que mantiene el carácter histórico del área. Las mejoras del proyecto incluyen:

- » Nuevo puente sobre la alineación actual
- » Dos carriles de circulación con acotamientos ligeramente más anchos
- » Barandales abiertos en el puente
- » Cumplimiento con las especificaciones nacionales de diseño de puentes, incluyendo la capacidad de carga del puente

CRONOGRAMA Y TRÁFICO

Se anticipa que la construcción comenzará en la primavera de 2027. Para mantener el acceso durante la construcción:

- » Se construirá un desvío al noroeste del puente existente
- » Se mantendrá el acceso de un solo carril mediante un semáforo temporal



CONSIDERACIONES AMBIENTALES Y CULTURALES

NMDOT ha coordinado estudios de recursos culturales y consultas con la Oficina Estatal de Preservación Histórica y tribus interesadas en relación con lugares históricos y comunitarios. Las consideraciones del proyecto incluyen:

- » Diseño para evitar impactos a propiedades históricas
- » Monitoreo de vibraciones durante la construcción
- » Minimizar los impactos a los árboles cuando sea posible
- » Las áreas afectadas y de acceso temporal serán restauradas con vegetación adecuada

MÁS INFORMACIÓN

Visite el sitio web del proyecto para obtener información adicional:

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



Para solicitar adaptaciones conforme a la Ley para Estadounidenses con Discapacidades (ADA) u otra asistencia, comuníquese con **Christian Lopez** a Christian.lopez@wsp.com.

Appendix D: Public Comments

Digital Public Input Received: June 25, 2026 – July 12, 2026

#	Name	Contact	Source	Date Received	Comment
1	Julie Feldman		Web Form	6/25/2026	If the DOT closes the bridge during construction it will creat an already disastrous traffic situation on County Road 142, which will be the only route to access Hwy 84 going south. CR 142 is basically a one and a half lane road designed for a fraction of the traffic it how has. The edges are broken off, the road is full of potholes and the traffic going 40plus MPH has increase many many times over what this little back road was designed for when it was paved 30 plus years ago!! Why isn't the DOT repaving and widening this road instead of using our tax dollars to fix what's not broken?
2	C.A. Martin		Web Form	6/26/2026	Thank you for time. There are other ways to update bridges: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devil%27s Bridge (Welsh bridge) Consider this approach Also the road could be closed and traffic diverted 40 minutes through Ojo Caliente as needed to avoid the impact on the El Rito Creek habitat and the residents nearest to the bridge construction site. People have to endure inconvenience in their lives at certain points. The amount of refuse of the removal and the fuel consumed to dispose of the old bridge should be considered. Installing a new bridge deck over the old bridge would remedy that issue. There is enough elevation in the bridge location to accommodate that. These approaches to updating the bridge could be calculated by competent engineering estimators. Thank you. C.A. Martin
3	KT Vanderbrook		Email	7/7/2026	I was at the meeting for the new bridge, but I wasn't able to leave my comment at the dot web site, I hope you can add it for me, THANKS. One size does NOT fit all! That new extra wide bridge for El Rito is a waste of money!

					Arizona is planting trees, to lower temps. NM is cutting trees!!! There is another route on Martin's property, but at the meeting they only mentioned the 50 mile detour! I think we are not being listen too. It is criminal the way we are being treated. Do NOT ruin our town!!! sincerely, KT Vanderbrook
4	Victoria Broadus		Web Form	7/9/2026	Hello, First of all, I have been told by inside sources that this project is low priority, so I beg you to delay and reconsider. There's absolutely no reason for a bridge in that location to have the weight capacity proposed at the meeting. Secondly, despite your claims that you're determined to save the large cottonwood on the north side, I'm sure you're aware that the contractors won't give a damn about that or any other tree. Thirdly, another engineer has judged the bridge stable, so why are you determined to ignore his assessment, when your engineers are certified after only a two-week course. Finally, if you insist on proceeding and are successful in seizing the land, which I hope you aren't, then at the very least you should offer to pay for repair of the fallen adobe wall on the Martin property as a token of good faith. Again, put the project on pause and reconsider! Thanks, Vicky Broadus
5	KT Vanderbrook		Web Form	7/10/2026	Another "comment" on the last bridge meeting in El Rito...we were told it was a 50 mile detour if the temporary bridge was not next to the old bridge as planned. Last Spring, several concerned citizens & I were at the bridge site to see if there was another possibility In Mike Martin's land on both sides of the road beyond the trees, there is a natural clearing...up stream from the bridge A perfect spot for the temporary bridge I looked again yesterday, there are wide gates for access. It would be only a small drive. That detour makes much more sense. Only a few young trees, instead of all the older trees would need to be cut down. Thanks for looking into this. Sincerely, KT Vanderbrook

6	William Page
7	David Warren
9	Claudia Page
10	Judith Shotwell

Web Form	7/10/2026	My wife Claudia and I strenuously object to the bridge project, to the "eminent domain" vehicle DOT is using, to the destruction of the pond and its cottonwood trees or any of the Martin property buildings at the East entry to the town of El Rito on NM 554. We use the Bridge every week
Web Form	7/10/2026	NMDOT has a dismal history with bridges, and the El Rito project is another example of their overreaching. Simple repair of the existing pylons is all that is required. Independent research has shown slight deterioration of the pylons. Your attempt to seize private property under the guise of widening the bridge is criminal and subject to both civil and criminal prosecutions. Your widely criticized study is flawed beyond belief. And the lies told by your so-called experts only make a court case a losing proposition. I strongly urge to curb this project and avoid further embarrassment with the release of internal documents via the legal system
Web Form	7/11/2026	Please don't rebuild the bridge over El Rito creek! The current bridge is working fine and taking the Martin property by eminent domain is a devastation of a beautiful cottonwood area that needs to remain! Find another bridge to replace that won't destroy the natural beauty of our El Rito!
Web Form	7/11/2026	NO to the Bridge Replacement Project proposed for El Rito. It will destroy the most charming area of our small town while introducing heavier and potentially destructive traffic right into the heart of our main street. Independent analysis shows the current bridge is adequate with some relatively minor repairs. And it is wrong to deprive the landowner of his property by the force of Eminent Domain. He will not recoup the value of this property which will be greatly harmed by the Project. Frankly it feels like a boondoggle ---some road construction company will benefit from a DOT contract while the town itself will be harmed. The greater concerns about safety on 554 have still not been addressed despite two projects in the past two years.

11	Jake Arnold		Web Form	7/11/2026	This project should be terminated. Stop it. The NM DOT has not provided any justification for dismantling the existing bridge and constructing new one. The existing bridge is capable of handling all traffic that currently passes over it. The 6/25/26 meeting sponsored by NM DOT was a sham, a charade. The NM DOT staff failed to any documentation supporting this proposed project at this meeting. NM DOT staff were unable to answer simple queries from the audience. Who is/was in charge of this proposed project at NM DOT? The Transportation Commission?, Former/fired Cabinet Secretary Ricky Serna? Acting Cabinet Secretary David Quintana? Come January 1, 2027, the NM DOT lineup will be answerable to the incoming govenor (most likely Deb Haaland). Hold on to your bureaucratic pants.
12	Gloria McFarland		Web Form	7/12/2026	How could you, have you no decency? You propose to ruin a home and barn and many priceless 100 year old trees just to fix a bridge that is sufficient for the traffic it gets. Surely you have better projects to do.