

Comments on BLM DEIS

Impact on NM Highway 152 due to Copper Flats Mining Operation

Highway 152 was designed and built for rural (low density) use.

Trucks hauling concentrate from the mine to Interstate-25 would be heavier than the combined load of 35 tons in the DEIS. The loaded truck/trailer will be closer to 43 tons because the tare weight of the truck and trailer was not considered.

For trucks that have a max load capacity of 25 tons, the tare weight (unloaded) is ~8 tons. Gross weight is then 31 tons. For trailers that have a maximum load capacity of 10 tons, the tare weight is ~2 tons. Gross weight is then 12 tons for a total of 43 tons.

Based on 8 trips/day,¹ District One Transportation Maintenance Funding gross weight on Road 152 from the mine to I-25 would be: $43 \times 8 = 344$ tons/day loaded; the return trip to the mine would be: $10 \times 8 = 80$ tons/day empty. Traffic impact on Highway 152 just from concentrator hauling would be: $344 + 80 = 424$ tons/day for an estimated 350 days/year of production.

Since “NM 152 is a chipseal route and is not designed for a specific load carrying capacity, it does not meet minimum design specifications.”² District One Transportation Maintenance Funding

Consequently a steady stream of 43-ton trucks would quickly destroy the road and should not be allowed unless the roadway is rebuilt from Mile Marker 55 east to the Interstate. Therefore (at minimum) a study needs to be made regarding the cumulative impact of a greatly increased maintenance cost. Could New Mexico State allocate funds to meet this need? The chart with NM Transportation Department Budget³ Sierra & Grant Counties Budget Summary indicates that District One, (which includes Sierra County) funds have already decreased and will continue to drop into 2017 and beyond.

Hazardous materials, which will be hauled to the mine, are: Diesel fuel, gasoline, propane, explosives, solvents and laboratory chemicals.

The all-volunteer crew in the Hillsboro Fire and Rescue Department (HFRD) are not trained or will likely be trained to safely handle these hazardous materials. This is because:

- Expensive special HAZ-MAT truck(s) and equipment would be needed. HFRD has neither.
- The current Hillsboro station house is packed and cannot accommodate any more trucks or equipment.
- Sierra County does not have the funds to supply the equipment or the necessary special training. Because of the current and expected lack of state funds, new safety equipment is not likely to become available for many years.

Because safely handling spilled/released hazardous material requires so much special equipment and continuous personnel training, a thorough assessment of HazMat due to mine operation needs to be addressed because any spill or release of toxic compounds along Highway 152 must be quickly controlled by trained personnel. **Not being prepared for even one hazardous incident is unacceptable.**

Highway 152 has no shoulder. “No improvements are planned or proposed for that portion of the highway east of Hillsboro.” (Koglin 1995)⁴ Copper Flat Final EIS 1999, Section 3.10 Transportation. This is a particularly dangerous condition because the highway is regularly used by bicyclists since the road has for many years been a nationally designated cross-country touring route.⁵ Southern Tier through New Mexico As a resident on Highway 152 I met and have ridden with dozens of these cyclists every year.

Mine employees: Contrary to the statement in the DEIS, virtually no one from Hillsboro and few would come from Truth or Consequences. Hillsboro is occupied entirely by retired personnel and most of the residents in Truth or Consequences are retired, on disability or already employed within the community. It’s more likely that a large number of employees would come from Silver City, which would significantly impact Highway 152 from its beginning at Highway 180 east to the mine because 152 climbs up to and back down from the summit at 8,200 feet. That section of 152 is subject to major travel limitations all year round.⁶ NM152 Maintenance. 1998 to 2015 summary

Vehicle accidents on Highway 152 would greatly increase with preparations to open the mine and then during its operation. Based on a summary of the reports from the highway department in Sierra County, more users of the road would accelerate deterioration of the surface, especially the commuters from the Silver City area.⁷ NM152 Maintenance 1998-Dec. 15, 2015

Because Highway 152 was designed and built for rural (low density) use, the anticipated 77% increase in traffic due to full mine operation would render the ten miles from Mile Marker 55 east to the Interstate a dangerously congested route for every driver.

The DEIS states that, “the New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department (NMSHTD) has indicated that Highway 152, in its current state, could not withstand increased heavy truck traffic associated with the proposed Action.” For this reason, a careful assessment of the capability of Highway 152 needs to be addressed by the BLM without waiting for the NMSHTD to complete their review of a traffic impact study, which could take longer than the proposed start of construction.

Consider the following sentence in the DEIS, “The current state of disrepair of the highway further compounds the risk of a serious accident to a level that is considered significant and therefore would require mitigation.” Ending the issues of increased traffic impacts cannot be concluded with, “would require mitigation”. What entity, when and at what cost would mitigation be carried out?

1 Copper Flat Final EIS 1999, Section 2.2.11 Transportation

2 District One Transportation Maintenance Funding

3 Sierra & Grant Counties Budget Summary

4 Copper Flat Final EIS 1999, Section 3.10 Transportation

5 Southern Tier through New Mexico

6 NM152 Maintenance 1998 to 2015 summary

7 NM152 Maintenance 1998-Dec. 15, 2015

8 Traffic Safety and Planning Divisions, Data Management Bureau, under Contract 5801, University of New Mexico Geospatial and Population Studies, Traffic Research Unit:

<http://tru.unm.edu/Crash-Reports/Annual-Reports/annual-report-2013.pdf>

<http://nmtrafficrecords.com/resources/new-mexico-uniform-crash-report/>

<http://tru.unm.edu/Crash-Maps/2013-Maps/index.html>

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#sent/1535d3110e1ef66c>

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existing wells downslope from the dam can be used as monitor wells. Any additional requirements for groundwater monitoring as required by NMED would be met. The surface and groundwaters of the Copper Flat area are described and analyzed in detail in the Hydrologic Assessment Report (Shomaker and Newcomer 1993).

2.2.11 Transportation

Vehicular access to the site is along State Highway 152 to the mine turnoff located about 10 miles west of I-25. Traffic associated with reestablishment of the Copper Flat Project would be broadly grouped as follows:

- **Concentrate Shipments** - Shipment of concentrates by truck to smelters in El Paso, Texas, or Hurley, New Mexico. Trucks would be hydraulic dump trucks with 25-ton capacity towing 10-ton trailers. Tonnage of concentrate produced yearly is expected to be 98,000 wet tons. At a 35-ton concentrate capacity per trip, this would require 8 trips per day (i.e., 280 tons/day) on a 350-day production year. Concentrate loading stations would be constructed on the project site near the concentrator building. The concentrate loading station would be designed to minimize the emission of fugitive dust from concentrate transfer operations with the use of water and surfactants. Truck traffic would use I-25 and Highway 152 to access the mine site. Concentrate haul trucks would use Highway 152 and I-25 to transport concentrate to El Paso, Texas, or Highway 152, I-25, State Highway 26, and U.S. Highway 180 to Hurley, New Mexico. No traffic would be routed through Hillsboro. Truck transport on any of these routes would comply with all applicable safety, environmental, and other requirements imposed by the State of New Mexico and U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT).
- **Incoming Supplies** - An average of 10 to 15 trips per day by truck of vendors and equipment and service suppliers. Most deliveries, which would include equipment parts, reagents, oil, and miscellaneous office supplies, would be made during the day shift. Title 49 CFR regulates the transportation of hazardous materials in commerce. Anyone who offers for transportation, transports, packages, loads, unloads, or in any way assumes responsibility for marking, labeling, or handling of any regulated hazardous materials must comply with 49 CFR. In addition, carriers must comply with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations of the DOT (parts 383, 390-397, and 399). Hazardous materials required for operation of the Copper Flat Project include gasoline, diesel fuel, propane, and other petroleum products, explosives, solvents for degreasing of machinery and equipment, and laboratory chemicals. These materials would be purchased from various vendors and delivered to the site by truck. Alta would ensure that the Hillsboro volunteer fire department and the Sierra County fire district are aware of the nature of the materials routinely being transported to the site, and that they have appropriate response training in the event of a spill or other accident involving hazardous materials.
- **Employees and Visitors** - It is expected that full operations would start up with 170 employees. The majority of employees are expected to commute from Truth or Consequences or Hillsboro. An additional 15 to 20 trips could be expected by visitors and sales representatives. Alta would encourage employee car pooling.

District One Transportation Maintenance Funding

District One in New Mexico includes Sierra and Grant Counties. Information responsive to this item is attached in the Excel spreadsheet and contains the Local Government Road Fund (LGRF) Project amounts. There are two tabs you can click on in the spreadsheet. In addition to the spreadsheet, you can also obtain additional information for legislative approved funds on the NM Legislature website, which can be accessed using this web address http://www.nmlegis.gov/lcs/session_locator.aspx.

Maintenance funds are not legislatively appropriated by route. It is appropriated by lump sum for the entire agency for the entire fiscal year. Below are the Contract Maintenance and Field Supplies funding (both are maintenance activity-type funding) for fiscal years FY10-FY15. Note, the below figures are total annual district-wide "maintenance-type" funding which must be prioritized and allocated where needed, we do not allocate/appropriate by route. As the name implies, Contract Maintenance is for "contracted" maintenance activities such as overlays or mill/inlays, etc. Field Supplies is for in-house maintenance activities such as chip seal, pothole patching, guardrail repair, etc.

FY10 District One Contract Maintenance:	\$4.331M
FY10 District One Field Supplies:	<u>\$3.958M</u>
[Total	\$8.289M]
FY11 District One Contract Maintenance:	\$1.708M
FY11 District One Field Supplies:	<u>\$4.594M</u>
[Total	\$6.302M]
FY12 District One Contract Maintenance:	\$2.894M
FY12 District One Field Supplies:	<u>\$4.925M</u>
[Total	\$7.819M]
FY13 District One Contract Maintenance:	\$8.020M
FY13 District One Field Supplies:	<u>\$5.584M</u>
[Total	\$13.418M]
FY14 District One Contract Maintenance:	\$7.315M
FY14 District One Field Supplies	<u>\$6.103M</u>
[Total	\$13.418M]
FY15 District One Contract Maintenance:	\$5.866M
FY15 District One Field Supplies	<u>\$5.539M</u>
[Total	11.405M]

NM 152 is a chipseal route and is not designed for a specific load carrying capacity.

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(New Mexico Department of Finance and Administration 1996). Sierra County, Truth or Consequences, and Williamsburg each contribute 0.25 percent of sales tax for hospital funding (Rush 1997).

3.10 TRANSPORTATION

Access to the proposed Copper Flat Mine is provided via Interstate 25 (I-25), New Mexico State Route 152, and a gravel road (Copper Flat Road). The Copper Flat Road from Route 152 to the intersection north of the tailings impoundment is maintained by Sierra County under a ROW agreement (Parshley 1995b). I-25 is the primary north-south highway in New Mexico and connects the Truth or Consequences, New Mexico area with Las Cruces, New Mexico and El Paso, Texas, to the south, and with Albuquerque, New Mexico and other destinations farther north. State Highway 152 (formerly State Route 90) is a two-lane paved road that runs from east to west from I-25 connecting the communities of Hillsboro, Kingston, and Silver City, New Mexico; it intersects I-25 approximately 15 miles south of Truth or Consequences. Highway 152 is a designated Back Country Byway (see Section 3.12, Recreation).

Travel distance on Highway 152 to the Copper Flat Road from I-25 is approximately 10 miles. This portion of the highway traverses a gradual uphill grade to the west, contains no sharp turns, and has a posted speed limit of 55 miles per hour (mph). Highway 152 west of the Copper Flat Mine area; however, has relatively steep grades and several tight turns that require vehicles to slow to as little as 30 mph.

I-25 is the most travelled road in Sierra County with approximately 3,300 vehicles per day traveling in both directions near its junction with Highway 152. Highway 152 from I-25 west toward the Copper Flat Mine area was estimated to have carried 532 vehicles per day in 1994 (NMSHTD 1995a). Highway 152, from Kingston to I-25, is traveled twice each weekday from approximately 7:00 - 7:30 a.m. and 4:00 - 4:30 p.m. by school buses carrying children to schools in Truth or Consequences.

According to the New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department Transportation Planning Bureau, Highway 152 is a lightly traveled roadway with a level of service rating of "A", a free traffic flow condition that allows the highest level of service. This lack of traffic makes Highway 152 attractive to touring bicyclists, even though the highway lacks adequate shoulders and, as such, presents a safety hazard to bicyclists. No improvements are planned or proposed for that portion of the highway east of Hillsboro (Koglin 1995).

Other transportation serving the Truth or Consequences area includes bus service and the Truth or Consequences Municipal Airport. The airport can be reached by private airplane charter and is the only major public airstrip in Sierra County (BLM 1987). An airstrip is located immediately east of the existing tailings impoundment on State-owned land (T155, R6W, Section 32). A second airstrip is located on the Ladder Ranch northeast of the proposed project area. The closest commercial air service is located in Las Cruces, New Mexico. No railroad service is available in the project area or at Truth or Consequences. The closest rail depot is approximately 25 miles to the south, near the intersection of State Highways 26 and 27.

Cross Country Cycling Route Along the Southern Tier through New Mexico



This routes takes cyclists through Silver City to Highway 152, over the Black Range Mountains through Hillsboro, past the access road to the Copper Flats Mine to Highway 87 south.

Map courtesy of Adventure Cycling Association

<https://www.adventurecycling.org/guided-tours/self-contained-tours/2016-southern-tier/>