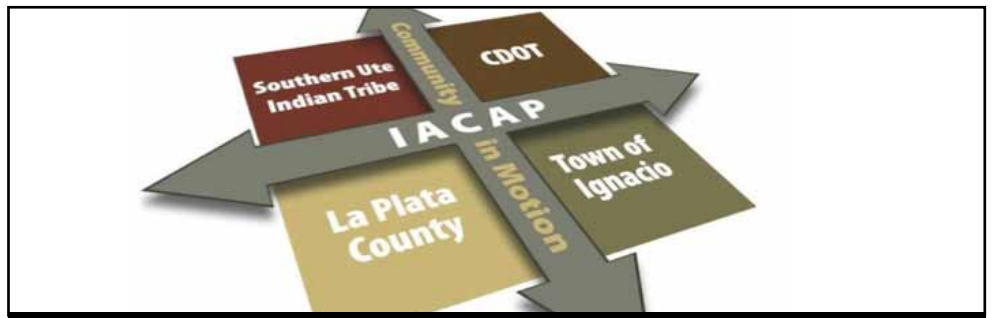


Tribe, Town, County, and State Collaborate on Ignacio Area Corridor Access Plan

In June 2006, the Southern Ute Indian Tribe's (SUIT) Tribal Council approved its Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) update. The LRTP update identified several transportation safety improvements needed along or near Colorado State Highway 172 within the main SUIT Tribal lands. The corridor is undergoing significant redevelopment, as construction of the new Sky Ute Casino and Southern Ute Museum and Cultural Center are underway, and energy development in nearby communities has increased local traffic and brought new opportunities for jobs and businesses to the area.

In order to address safety and Tribal and non-Tribal development in the Highway 172 corridor, the SUIT Tribal Council authorized the development of a corridor access plan. The Tribe acknowledged that such a planning process includes many stakeholders, and invited the town of Ignacio, La Plata County, and the Colorado Department of Transportation's (CDOT) Region 5 Office to join in developing, promoting, and funding a comprehensive plan for the Highway 172 corridor. Named the



This graphic branded the IACAP, highlighting the partnership of the four participating agencies. (Courtesy of the SUIT)

Ignacio Area Corridor Access Plan (IACAP), the plan outlines effective strategies for maintaining mobility for the freight vehicles that use the corridor while also ensuring pedestrian safety. Completed in late 2011, this 14-month comprehensive and collaborative planning effort marked the first time that the SUIT, CDOT, La Plata County, and the town of Ignacio entered into a collaborative agreement to work together on such an extensive transportation planning project.

A Framework for Collaboration

For years leading up to the development of the IACAP, the SUIT Tribal transportation planner worked to develop and expand relationships with the eventual project partners, each of whom viewed improving the Highway 172 corridor as a priority. Since all four partner agencies – the Tribe, town, county, and State DOT

– have jurisdictional authority within the study area, the IACAP partners developed a memorandum of agreement (MOA). This MOA, signed in 2009, stated that each participating agency would each bear equal shares of responsibility and would evenly share the costs for the development of the IACAP.

Though the four partners had common goals in developing the IACAP, each also possessed agency-specific needs. The SUIT initially identified a two-mile corridor along of Highway 172 as the project area for the IACAP. As other entities joined in the development of the plan, the corridor expanded to include four miles of roadway to address the transportation safety problems faced by each of the partner agencies. In addition to Highway 172, the IACAP corridor includes portions of County Road 517 and Colorado State Road 151.

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Respecting Tribal Practices

The partner agencies conducted several public meetings to gather comments and feedback throughout the IACAP planning process. A host of local stakeholders attended the meetings, including representatives from casinos, nonprofits, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, local police departments, public utility companies, and adjacent property owners on both Tribal and non-Tribal lands. In addition to these general public meetings, the partner agencies hosted public meetings solely for Tribal members. These Tribe-specific public meetings provided a familiar space for members of the SUIT to provide their comments on the progress of the plan and to voice their opinions internally.

While the town of Ignacio, La Plata County, and CDOT do not typically host Tribe-specific meetings separate from other public meetings, the partner agencies were cooperative in working with the Tribe's preferences for outreach. As the relationship between the Tribe and partner agencies has developed over time, the partners have increasingly grown aware of the ways in which the Tribal government operates. All partners sought to develop a fair and open planning process, and included Tribal public meetings as part of that inclusiveness.

Working on the IACAP also expanded the partner agencies' understanding of Tribal conventions. The SUIT does not make decisions hastily; the Tribal Council thoroughly considers the long-term effects of initiatives and efforts before committing to a project. The timeframe for decisionmaking varies among the agencies, and the town of Ignacio, La Plata County, and CDOT are now more familiar with the planning style and priority differences of each partner.

Completion and Resulting Benefits

At the conclusion of the planning process, the partners approved the IACAP through an intergovernmental agreement (IGA), signed in late 2011. The completed planning document addresses existing and future needs in the corridor and makes recommendations to balance access to adjacent land and maintaining mobility and safety along the Highway 172 corridor. The IACAP was a landmark partnership for the four participating organizations, as it was the first time the partners collaborated on a planning project. The partner agencies held a ceremonial signing of the IGA with the participation of the Tribal chairman and council; CDOT's chief engineer; county chair and commissioners; town mayor and board; and several other dignitaries.

Continuing the Collaboration

The positive relationships that have formed and continue to grow through working on the IACAP have improved the overall communication between the Tribe and its partner governments. Going forward, when one of the partner agencies chooses to advance an IACAP-approved project, the four partner agencies will reconvene to discuss each agency's roles in planning and funding the project. This ensures that the collaboration among the partner agencies on transportation project will continue for years to come.

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