

Shining a Light on Health: How the Sunport Boulevard Extension Project will Affect Health and Well-Being



The Problem

The Bernalillo County Public Works Division in New Mexico proposes to extend Sunport Boulevard from a nearby highway to the San Jose neighborhood, an environmental justice community. However, residents of San Jose are concerned that the project, planned as a four-lane divided road that will connect to streets going through the neighborhood, will increase traffic, harming their health and well-being.

What We Did

HIP and partners – residents of the San Jose community in south Albuquerque, SouthWest Organizing Project, Bernalillo County PLACE MATTERS, New Mexico Department of Health, and New Mexico Health Equity Partnership – submitted a comment letter that included an analysis of the likely impacts of the extension on health. The comment letter also highlighted significant issues that were not adequately addressed in the County’s Environmental Assessment document for the proposed project. The expertise, experiences, and perspectives of a panel of residents who could be affected by the road extension guided our process, findings, and recommendations.

What We Found

In analyzing the County’s Environmental Assessment for the proposed road project, we found insufficient evidence to justify the officially stated purpose and need for the project, which was to reduce congestion. We also found that the proposal would add to the unfair environmental burden of a community already besieged with hazardous chemicals and air pollution. Despite requirements from the Council on Environmental Quality that cumulative impacts be considered, the Environmental Assessment also failed to undertake meaningful cumulative impacts analyses – an important omission given that the community has been next door to industrial and commercial operations for over a century.

“Not only does the San Jose neighborhood not appear to suffer from the traffic congestion used to justify the extension, but the extension could harm public health, through increased air emissions and unsafe streets.”

– Comment letter submitted by HIP and partners

Impact

HIA partners included the comment letter and report in a packet submitted in September 2015 as public comment on the revised Environmental Assessment document. We are waiting to hear back from the County.

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For more information, contact:

sara@humanimpact.org