

Parks and Recreation Impacts Technical Memorandum

I-25 Improvements Through the Colorado Springs Urbanized Area Project

CDOT Project No. IM 0252-316

Project Control No. 12210

Colorado Department of Transportation

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1.0 Project Description

The Proposed Action would widen Interstate 25 (I-25) from South Academy Boulevard (Exit 135) to State Highway 105 (Exit 161, Monument), a distance of approximately 26 miles. Within these limits, a six-lane cross-section (three through-lanes in each direction) would be built south of the U.S. Highway 24 Bypass to South Academy and north of Briargate to SH 105. Additionally, for the 12-mile central portion from the US 24 Bypass (Exit 139) to Briargate Parkway (Exit 151), the Proposed Action consists of an eight-lane cross section (four through-lanes in each direction).

In the eight-lane cross-section, the inside (left-most) lane in each direction would be open to general traffic during off-peak hours; during morning and evening peak hours, this lane would be reserved for use by carpools and buses only. To accommodate this flexible use, the high-occupancy-vehicle (HOV) lane would not be barrier-separated from the general-purpose lanes, but would be demarcated by appropriate signage and striping.

The non-barrier HOV treatment also allows for decommissioning of the lanes back to general-purpose operation in the event that the lanes do not result in adequate peak-period usage to justify HOV operations. This will depend in part upon public willingness to fund expanded transit operations that would use the HOV lanes. The HOV lanes are projected to be marginally successful without transit system expansion, but could become solidly successful if used by buses on hypothetical future routes (currently unfunded). Express bus service between Colorado Springs and Monument began in 2002 as a 3-year "demonstration project."

In conjunction with the additional laneage, the Proposed Action includes interchange reconstruction at several locations. These include major reconstruction of existing interchanges at:

- Exit 141 – Cimarron (U.S. Highway 24)
- Exit 142 – Bijou Street
- Exit 145 – Fillmore
- Exit 147/148 – North Nevada Avenue and Rockrimmon Boulevard (consolidated)
- Exit 156 – North Gate Road, plus freeway-to-freeway ramps for Powers Boulevard
- Exit 158 – Baptist Road

For each of the interchange reconstruction projects, numerous design alternatives were considered and evaluated. These alternatives were presented for review and input at advertised public meetings.

Additionally, minor geometric changes will be made at Exit 146, Garden of the Gods Road. The existing southbound-only ramps at Exit 147 A (Corporate Centre Drive) will be closed, with access via a local street connection to the reconfigured Nevada/Rockrimmon interchange. In conjunction with freeway widening on U.S. Air Force Academy property, the Ackerman Overlook will be relocated to a safer location.

2.0 Existing Conditions

The rapid population growth in El Paso County has created an increasing demand for recreational facilities, while at the same time depleting the available land for recreation areas. In an effort to maintain the area's natural environment, local, state, and federal agencies, as well as community volunteers and organizations, are working together to retain recreation areas, trails, and open space throughout the County.

I-25 provides access to many popular recreation areas adjacent to and beyond the project area. These recreation areas include Monument Valley Park, Bear Creek Park, Garden of the Gods, and many other county, municipal, and local parks and trails. Trails, recreation areas, and open space within the project area are reviewed in detail below.

2.1 Recreational Trails

Hiking and biking are popular activities in El Paso County. There has been a concerted effort by governmental agencies, private citizens, and local organizations to preserve and improve existing trails, as well as plan for future trails in the area. Numerous county, regional, and municipal plans envision an extensive system of interconnected trails throughout the project area. The plans include the following: *PPACG Destination 2025*; *City of Colorado Springs Intermodal Transportation Plan*; *El Paso County Parks, Trails, and Open Space Master Plan*; *Pikes Peak Greenway Master Plan*; *Colorado Springs Open Space Plan*; *Tri-Lakes Comprehensive Plan*; *USAFA General Plan*; and *Town of Monument Comprehensive Plan*.

The City of Colorado Springs also maintains an extensive trail system consisting of more than 100 trails. This system includes 70 park trails and 40 urban trails.

El Paso County's Parks and Leisure Services Department maintains three major regional trails and eight regional parks and open space facilities. Two County trails, the New Santa Fe Trail in northern El Paso County and the Fountain Creek Regional Trail south of Colorado Springs, are within the I-25 Study Area. Figure 1 illustrates the El Paso County and Colorado Springs trail systems.

Within the I-25 Study Area, there are three sports complexes, portions of eight trails, eight parks, and three open space areas.

During the 1990s, a major north-south trail system was constructed parallel to I-25. This includes the County's New Santa Fe Trail (extending from Palmer Lake and Monument to the south end of the U.S. Air Force Academy), the City's Pikes Peak Greenway (from that point south to about Circle Drive), and the County's Fountain Creek Regional Trail (from that point south to Fountain Creek Regional Park, near State Highway 16). This trail crosses I-25 only once, but throughout the corridor there are east-west trails that cross or are planned to cross I-25 to access the north-south spine trail. These crossings include multi-use trails, on-street bike lanes, and/or sidewalks.

2.2 Recreation Areas

El Paso County contains some of Colorado's most significant landscapes. The convergence of high plains and Rocky Mountains is more dramatic here than at any other point along the Front Range. The land rises abruptly to more than 14,000 feet, and well-known landmarks such as the Garden of the Gods mark the transition between the mountains and the plains. El Paso County also provides the setting for a convergence of ecosystems, a place where extensive pinyon-juniper forests and grasslands with candelabra cactus and other southern species reach their northern limits. Projected population growth and continuing urbanization are creating a need for additional recreational opportunities and spurring efforts to protect some of the County's distinctive landscapes.

In 1997, El Paso County prepared the Parks, Trails, and Open Space Master Plan. The Master Plan provides a long-term vision that addresses expansion of the existing system of regional parks and trails, and recommends that additional emphasis be placed on protection of important natural areas and other forms of open lands. Goals and objectives were developed that state more specifically the types of actions that the Department of Parks and Recreation will take in support of its mission. These goals are to:

- Provide a coordinated system of parks, trails, and open space that is equitably distributed and serves the needs of county residents.
- Protect and enhance El Paso County's legacy of unique natural features, open areas and natural areas.
- Create a continuous system of regional trails.
- Provide high quality and safe recreational and educational experiences for users of county park facilities.
- Acknowledge the importance of parks and open space in El Paso County by providing adequate funding to develop, operate and maintain these resources.

The City of Colorado Springs also maintains a sizable park system. The Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services Department manages seven regional parks, eight community parks, 123 neighborhood parks, six sports complexes and 40 open space areas. Combined, there are more than 12,000 acres of parks, trails, and open space, and the City continues to acquire and maintain additional land, enhancing the quality of life for the citizens of Colorado Springs. Existing parks and trails are illustrated in Figure 2.

Monument Valley Park, one of the City's largest and oldest parks, centrally located just west and north of downtown Colorado Springs, is a linear park that is located just to the east of Interstate 25, approximately from Bijou Street to Fontanero Street. Due to its location, size and amenities, it is one of the City's most heavily used parks.

Also close to I-25 are Dorchester Park and the planned Confluence Park. Confluence Park is under construction just northeast of the I-25/Cimarron interchange. Confluence Park is intended to be an important amenity that will bolster planned redevelopment of lower downtown Colorado Springs. Dorchester Park is an existing park located north of I-25,

across Monument Creek, in the block bounded by South Nevada and Tejon Streets. Unlike Monument Valley Park and the future Confluence Park, which have regional appeal, Dorchester Park functions more as a local neighborhood park. None of the parks mentioned above were acquired using Land and Water Conservation Act Fund monies.

3.0 Methodology

Data collection for this report included review of adopted planning documents, supplemented by meetings with local trail authorities.

Meetings were conducted with the following individuals:

Mr. Chris Lieber, Trails Coordinator for the City of Colorado Springs
Mr. Rich Havel, El Paso County
Mr. Dan Cleveland, Executive Director, Trails and Open Space Coalition

A number of recent trail-related documents were obtained and reviewed, including the trail master plans from the City of Colorado Springs and El Paso County, as well as the long-range transportation plan of the Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments. All documents reviewed are listed below.

- Colorado Springs Parks, Recreation and Trails 2000-2010 Master Plan, EDAW, January 2000
- Parks, Trails and Open Space Master Plan, El Paso County, August 1997
- Trails and Open Space Coalition Outlook, Fall 2002
- 2000 Tri-Lakes Comprehensive Plan, El Paso County, 1999
- Intermodal Transportation Plan, City of Colorado Springs, April 2001
- Comprehensive Plan, City of Colorado Springs, March 2001
- Destination 2025 Regional Transportation Plan, Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments (PPACG)
- A Master Plan for the Pikes Peak Greenway, City of Colorado Springs, January 1994
- United States Air Force Academy General Plan, 1998

4.0 Impacts of No-Action Alternative

Under the No-Action Alternative, there would be no direct impacts to parks or recreation facilities near the I-25 corridor. However, additional I-25 congestion would lengthen the time for rush hour periods which would result in longer exposure of highway noise and emissions to parks and recreation facilities such as trails. The improvements to bicycle and pedestrian facilities that are included in the Proposed Action would not be competed at this time.

5.0 Direct Impacts of the Proposed Action

5.1 Parks

The Proposed Action would not require the acquisition of any park land. Three parks would be impacted by noise or visual issues. The Proposed Action would result in noise impacts to Monument Valley Park, located just east of I-25 between Bijou Street and just north of Fontanero Street, Dorchester Park, located near the Nevada-Tejon Interchange, and Confluence Park, currently under construction between Cimarron Street and Colorado Avenue. These three parks would be expected to experience noise levels in excess of FHWA noise abatement criteria in the year 2025 if no mitigation strategies were provided. Details of noise impacts and mitigation for these parks can be found in the “Noise” section of this document.

Monument Valley Park would experience visual impacts as a result of adding noise walls to the west edge of the park. The noise walls will block mid-range views to the west. The “Visual Resources” section of this document contains details on visual impacts to this park as well as visual impacts throughout the study corridor.

5.2 Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

The Proposed Action will maintain or improve bicycle, pedestrian, and multi-modal trail crossings of I-25 (as listed in Table 1) – all beneficial impacts. There will be no permanent closure or circuitous rerouting of a bicycle or pedestrian facility. The following improvements are included (and are illustrated in Figure 1):

1. **Baptist Road** (Exit 158): A 10-foot sidewalk will be added to the north side of Baptist Road to link users of the Jackson Creek Trail east of I-25 to the New Santa Fe Trail west of I-25.
2. **North Gate** (Exit 156): A 10-foot multi-use trail will be provided to link the Smith Creek Trail to the trailhead of the New Santa Fe Trail on the grounds of the Air Force Academy.
3. **La Foret Trail**: The existing drainage structure that enables this trail to cross under I-25 will be lengthened, and the entrance/exit points will be improved.
4. **Rockrimmon/ North Nevada** (Exit 147): When these two non-standard interchanges are reconstructed and connected, a 6-foot sidewalk will be provided at Nevada and a 10-foot sidewalk will be provided at the Rockrimmon interchange.
5. **Ellston Road** (half-mile north of Fillmore): The existing Ellston Road crossing under I-25 will be widened, providing more room and better visibility for users of the existing on-street bike lanes.
6. **Fillmore Street** (Exit 145): Where a narrow sidewalk exists today, only on the south side of the Fillmore bridge over I-25, the reconstructed interchange will have standard 10-foot sidewalks on both sides of the new Fillmore bridge structure.

7. **Bijou Street** (Exit 142): Existing narrow sidewalks along Bijou Street over I-25 are in poor condition and will be replaced with new handicap-access sidewalks.
8. **Midland Trail**: Just north of the Cimarron Interchange (Exit 141), a new 16-foot multi-use trail crossing of I-25 will be provided along Fountain Creek, connecting the Midland Trail west of I-25 to the Pikes Peak Greenway east of the freeway.
9. **Bear Creek Trail**: Just south of the Cimarron Interchange (Exit 141), the existing Bear Creek Trail crossing under I-25 will be improved. The trail currently runs under I-25 through an existing drainage culvert. This will be replaced with a bridge, improving visibility and openness for trail users.

Along the Pikes Peak Greenway, in the vicinity of the Colorado Avenue bridge, a minor realignment of the trail would be needed between I-25 and Monument Creek. This realignment is related to the mainline freeway design that would be cantilevered over the WPA floodwall.

6.0 Mitigation

6.1 Parks

CDOT discussed the impacts to Monument Valley Park and explored mitigation options with the City's Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services staff, the Recreation staff, and the City's Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. The result of this process was the identification of four mitigation actions that will be included in the project. Figure 3 depicts the locations of the mitigation actions described below.

- A sound barrier 20 feet high and 1,060 feet long (in two segments) on CDOT property will provide noise mitigation for Willow Haven Lake (the Duck Pond just south of Uintah Street).
- A sound barrier 20-feet high and 625 feet long on CDOT property will provide noise mitigation for the Demonstration Garden.
- Planting of additional trees on park land near the volleyball court will provide a visual screen by filling in the view between existing cottonwood trees.
- Landscaped berm 5- to 25-feet high on CDOT property will provide noise mitigation for the baseball field and nearby gardens to the south.

Mitigation measures for noise at Dorchester and Confluence parks were found to be infeasible.

6.2 Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

The changes to bicycle and pedestrian facilities as described above have been coordinated with City and County planning and recreation staff. Continued coordination will occur during final design.

To address temporary construction impacts to bicycle and pedestrian facilities, CDOT will provide signs, fencing and barricades for safe, temporary detour routes. Additionally, advance notification will be placed in the local media. All detours and temporary closures will be coordinated with appropriate City and County offices.

TABLE 1
Existing Bicycle and Pedestrian Crossings of I-25

Location (north to south)	None	Sidewalk	On-Street Bike Lane	Trail/ Other	Details
State Highway 105 (Monument)		X			Now under reconstruction
Baptist Road	X				Rural area
North Gate Road	X				Air Force Academy property
La Foret Trail (Milepost 154)				X	Multi-use trail
Interquest	X				Air Force Academy property
Briargate	X				Air Force Academy property
North Academy Boulevard	X				Air Force Academy property
Woodmen Road		X	X	X	Now under reconstruction
North Nevada Avenue	X				No through-street to west
Commerce Center	X				No through-street to east
Pikes Peak Greenway (I-25 at Monument Creek)				X	Trail crosses under I-25
Rockrimmon	X				Street does not cross I-25
Mark Dabling Road			X		
Garden of the Gods Road		X			
Ellston Road			X		Street crosses under I-25
Fillmore Street		X			Sidewalk on south side only
Fontanero Street		X	X		Provides trail connection to Pikes Peak Greenway Trail
Uintah Street		X	X		Serves Colorado College campus
I-25 Pedestrian Overpass				X	Links Monument Valley Park with neighborhood west of I-25
Bijou Street		X			Heavily used; not in good repair
Colorado Avenue		X			
Cimarron (US 24)					Midland Trail crossing proposed
Bear Creek				X	Bear Creek Trail
S. Nevada Avenue		X			Newly reconstructed
S. Tejon Street		X			Newly reconstructed
Martin Luther King Jr./US 24 Bypass	X				No through-street to west
Circle Drive/Lake Avenue		X		X	Includes pedestrian overpasses
South Academy Boulevard	X				

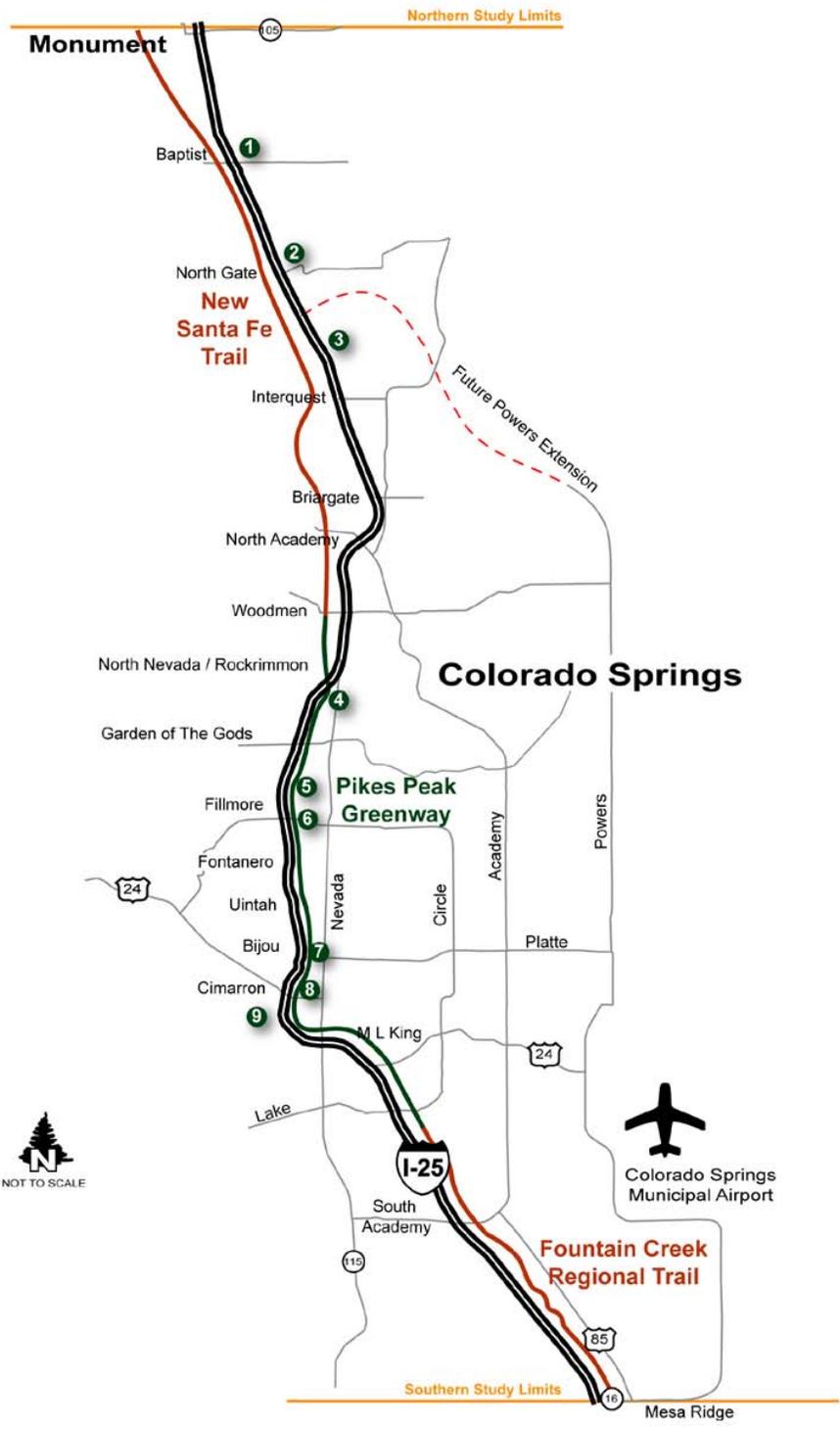


FIGURE 1
Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Multi-Modal Trail Crossings of I-25

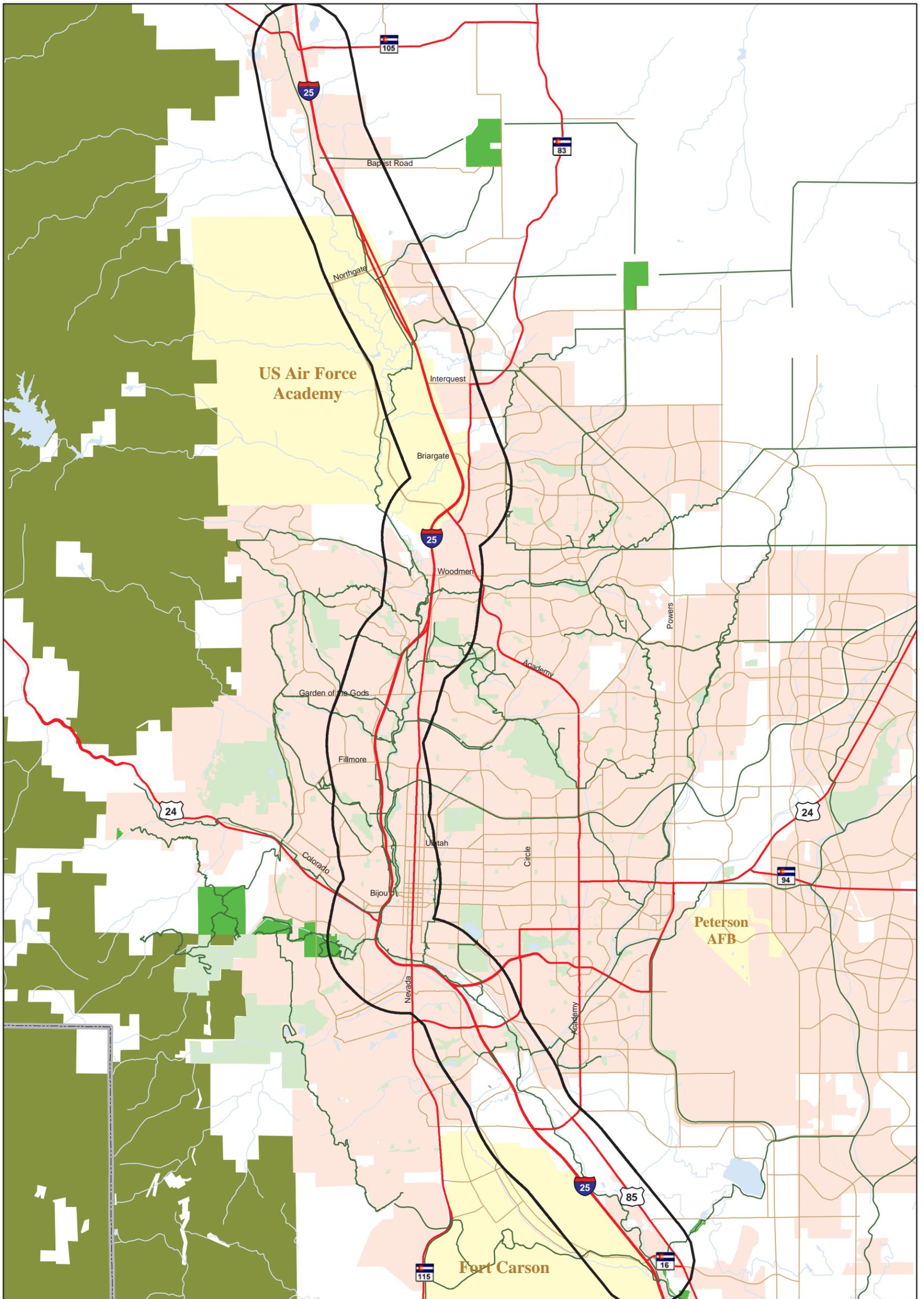
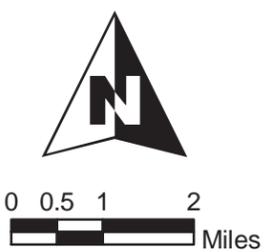


Figure 2 Parks and Trails

I-25 Environmental Assessment

Legend

- | | |
|---|---|
|  Study Area |  Military Bases |
|  City Parks |  Municipalities |
|  County Parks |  National Forest |
|  Recreational Trails | |



Projection:
Colorado State Plane Central Zone
North American Datum 1983 (NAD83)

Sources:
City of Colorado Springs
Colorado Springs Utilities

PHOTO SIMULATIONS OF PROPOSED MITIGATION



FIGURE 3
Monument Valley Park Mitigation



Noise Barrier Protecting Willow Haven Lake



Noise Barrier Protecting Demonstration Garden



Enhanced Visual Screen for Volleyball Courts



Earth Berm Protecting Baseball Field

