PURPOSE AND NEED

The New Mexico Department of Transportation is conducting a study to evaluate alternatives for a potential physical suicide deterrent system for the Rio Grande Gorge Bridge in Taos County, New Mexico, the goal being to improve bridge safety while preserving its history and structural integrity. The purpose of the study is to understand the structural feasibility of adding a suicide deterrent system to the bridge.

CONSIDERATIONS

There are several factors NMDOT is considering to determine the next steps regarding the addition of a potential suicide deterrent system.

- Maintenance
- Inspection Access
- Structural Feasibility
- Constructability
- Historic Resources
- Community Values
- Visual Impacts
- Cost
- Cultural Resources

ALTERNATIVES EVALUATED

NO-BUILD ALTERNATIVE – The no-build alternative would leave the structure in its existing condition.  

VERTICAL RAILING ALTERNATIVE – The vertical railing alternative, 8 feet and 3 inches tall, would replace the existing pedestrian rail.  

HORIZONTAL NET ALTERNATIVE – The horizontal net alternative would be installed approximately 15 feet below the existing railing and would extend out 15 feet from the edge of the bridge.

RESULTS OF EVALUATION

- Evaluation of the alternatives showed that the HORIZONTAL NET ALTERNATIVE would require more significant and costly modifications to the bridge; therefore, it was eliminated from consideration.
- The no-build alternative would not make changes to the existing suicide deterrent system, such as the suicide hotline, and the existing occurrence of incident response and recovery would not change.
- The no-build alternative would require improvements to bridge members that either require repair or replacement and painting to extend the life of the existing structure.
- The NO-BUILD ALTERNATIVE and the VERTICAL NET ALTERNATIVE will continue to be viable options under consideration.
PHOTO SIMULATION ILLUSTRATING THE PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES LOOKING TOWARDS THE BRIDGE AND FROM THE BRIDGE.

NO-BUILD ALTERNATIVE

VERTICAL RAILING ALTERNATIVE

HORIZONTAL NET ALTERNATIVE—NOT RECOMMENDED FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

Once complete, the study will be available to inform further discussions within the regional planning process, and for potential inclusion in the State Transportation Improvement Plan for funding next steps.