

1 A MEMORIAL

2 REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION TO MOVE FORWARD
3 WITH SAFETY MEASURES AT THE RIO GRANDE GORGE BRIDGE, TO
4 PROVIDE SUICIDE BARRIERS ON THE BRIDGE AND TO CREATE SAFE
5 ACCESSIBILITY TO THE BRIDGE FOR ALL VISITORS THAT IS
6 COMPLIANT WITH THE FEDERAL AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF
7 1990.

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9 WHEREAS, the Rio Grande Gorge bridge was designed in
10 1963 and was completed in 1965; and

11 WHEREAS, the Rio Grande Gorge bridge has pedestrian
12 walkways with forty-seven-inch railings; and

13 WHEREAS, the Rio Grande Gorge bridge has become an
14 "attractive nuisance" that can tempt persons with suicidal
15 thoughts to jump to their deaths; and

16 WHEREAS, this was underscored in 2016 by the death of a
17 fourteen-year-old boy who jumped from the bridge; and

18 WHEREAS, fourteen people have committed suicide at the
19 Rio Grande Gorge bridge since 2012, an average of two and
20 one-half deaths from suicide a year; and

21 WHEREAS, a total of forty-two deaths from suicide at the
22 Rio Grande Gorge bridge have been recorded by the office of
23 the state medical investigator; and

24 WHEREAS, the suicide rate in Taos county is higher than
25 the state average, and suicides at the Rio Grande Gorge

1 bridge account for fifty percent of all suicides in the Taos
2 county area; and

3 WHEREAS, the number of suicides at the Rio Grande Gorge
4 bridge detrimentally affects community morale; and

5 WHEREAS, recovery efforts from the Rio Grande Gorge
6 drain emergency and law enforcement resources, are physically
7 dangerous and create emotional and mental stress for
8 emergency responders; and

9 WHEREAS, the Rio Grande Gorge bridge has historically
10 been a tourist destination, and its international visibility
11 was enhanced when it was included in the Rio Grande del Norte
12 national monument created in 2013; and

13 WHEREAS, the Rio Grande del Norte national monument
14 attracts an average of three hundred thousand visitors
15 yearly, most of whom visit the Rio Grande Gorge bridge,
16 creating a level of traffic and pedestrian traffic possibly
17 not contemplated in the original design; and

18 WHEREAS, designed and built in the 1960s, the Rio Grande
19 Gorge bridge is not easily accessible for people with
20 disabilities and does not meet the standards for structures
21 under the federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990;
22 and

23 WHEREAS, heightened barriers have proven to be
24 successful suicide deterrents at bridges throughout the
25 United States, including the Memorial bridge in Maine, the

1 Vista bridge in Oregon and the Cold Spring Canyon bridge in
2 California; and

3 WHEREAS, the Taos county board of county commissioners
4 adopted a resolution regarding safety at the Rio Grande Gorge
5 bridge and supporting the efforts of both the United States
6 department of transportation and the state department of
7 transportation to allocate funding for the design and
8 installation of protective safety measures at the bridge; and

9 WHEREAS, the Taos county resolution states that:
10 "Towards this end, Taos County desires to work
11 collaboratively with the State of New Mexico, Federal
12 agencies, Town of Taos, Taos Municipal School District and
13 local non-profits such as the Gorge Bridge Safety Network, to
14 fund improvements at the Bridge, in order to ensure greater
15 safety and the prevention of suicide"; and

16 WHEREAS, the department of transportation has previously
17 produced a report titled "Structural Feasibility Analysis,
18 Rio Grande Gorge Bridge Suicide Deterrent System, January
19 2015" that identified five alternatives regarding public
20 safety at the bridge; and

21 WHEREAS, on June 7, 2017, the department of
22 transportation awarded a contract to the engineering firm HDR
23 to create a structural analysis for three of the identified
24 alternatives: "no build", replacement of the existing
25 forty-seven-inch railing with an eight-foot railing and the

1 installation of a horizontal net system;

2 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE
3 STATE OF NEW MEXICO that the department of transportation be
4 requested to continue to work toward the installation of
5 bridge barriers, safety-enhancing improvements and
6 modifications to comply with the Americans with Disabilities
7 Act of 1990 to the Rio Grande Gorge bridge on United States
8 highway 64 in Taos county; and

9 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the department of
10 transportation report the findings of the structural analysis
11 by HDR to the appropriate legislative interim committee prior
12 to that committee's final meeting in 2018; and

13 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this memorial be
14 transmitted to the secretary of transportation and the
15 secretary of public safety. _____

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