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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

ORIGINAL DATE 2/7/22

SPONSOR Schmedes LAST UPDATED _____ HB _____

SHORT TITLE Restoration of Route 66 Musical Highway SM 11

ANALYST Chilton

ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL OPERATING BUDGET IMPACT (dollars in thousands)

	FY22	FY23	FY24	3 Year Total Cost	Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
Initial Reinstallation		\$750.0	\$0.0	\$750.0	Nonrecurring	General Fund
Annual Maintenance		\$0.0	\$25.0	\$25.0	Recurring	General Fund
Total		\$750.0	\$25.0	\$775.0		

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

LFC Files

Responses Received From

Department of Transportation (DOT)

Department of Tourism (NMTD)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Memorial

House Memorial 11 asks the Department of Transportation to restore the “Musical Highway,” a short section of NM 333 that, when driven over at precisely 45 miles per hour, played the tune “America the Beautiful,” and became a tourist attraction, the only such highway segment in the United States, other than the one in Lancaster, California, recently moved and reinstated there.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

There is no appropriation in Senate Memorial 11.

DOT estimates its costs to restore the musical highway:

“NMDOT would need to procure a contractor to perform the work to restore the musical highway. Estimates from the initial installation many years ago were around \$400,000. Installation would likely be higher today, with costs estimated at around \$750,000. There would also be perpetual annual maintenance costs to maintain the highway.”

DOT does not estimate the annual cost, but one estimate would be \$25 thousand per year.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

Many tourists from around the country and the world travel through New Mexico, seeking out remaining sections of the old, fabled Route 66. One of the many attractions has been the “Singing Highway,” which occupied a short section of what is now New Mexico Route 333, part of the old US 66, a segment about midway between the east edge of Albuquerque and the town of Tijeras.

In a 2020 article, reporter D’Val Westphal in the *Albuquerque Journal* wrote the following:

In 2014, the National Geographic Channel got permission from the New Mexico Department of Transportation to build 1,300 feet of “singing roadway” in Tijeras Canyon that played “America the Beautiful” if your tires hit the rumble strips at 45 mph.

It was part of a social experiment that cost New Mexico taxpayers nothing and drew attention from tourists as far away as Australia, according to a story by now-Journal reporter Elise Kaplan, who was writing for the Mountain View Telegraph at the time.

An DOT spokeswoman said then, “It was a really cool idea. It promotes public safety because the goal is to have people drive the speed limit. Plus, it can be an attraction along Route 66.” Kaplan wrote, “The song is played as a car’s tires hit grooved metal plates underneath the asphalt. Each plate produces a musical note that come together to play the song. The road is only one of six of its kind in the world and the second in the United States. A road in Lancaster, California, plays the ‘William Tell Overture’ and was created by Honda.

According to Atlas Obscura (<https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/musical-highway>), “The “Musical Highway” was installed in 2014 as part of a partnership between the New Mexico Department of Transportation and the National Geographic Channel. It’s designed to encourage drivers on the otherwise unremarkable stretch of the historic road to slow down and adhere to the speed limit.

“Getting the rumble strips to serenade travelers required a fair bit of engineering. The individual strips had to be placed at the precise distance from one another to produce the notes they needed to sing their now-signature song.”



The signs portrayed above are no longer in place on the section of the old route 66 between the east end of Albuquerque and the town of Tijeras, and much of the pavement grooving that produced the sounds has been paved over.

Senate Memorial 11 would seek to reinstate the musical highway.

DOT notes that “In the past, NMDOT - District 3 received complaints from members of the bicycle community who oppose the singing highway due to its location, which is in a high use bicycling area.” However, the grooves were near the line demarcating the shoulder, and bicycles traveling uphill on NM 333 could pass the section to its right.

The Department of Tourism indicates the economic impact of tourist activity along the NM 333/old US 66/Interstate-40 corridor as follows:

Drive travel to New Mexico makes up the majority of all visits to the state. On average, 80 percent of visits in New Mexico involve driving a personal vehicle or rental vehicle according to data from Longwoods International.

A 2011 study from Rutgers University estimates that Route 66 as a whole is responsible for \$132M in economic activity annually.