

## 5 Comments, Coordination, and Public Involvement

This chapter describes how agencies and members of the public have been involved in the NSCS. It describes agency and public outreach efforts from 2010 to the present (Section 5.1); coordination with cooperating and participating agencies, tribes, and key stakeholders (Section 5.2); and public review of the EIS (Section 5.3). Additional information, including summary reports of the study’s outreach efforts, is provided in Appendix M, *Public Involvement*, and in Appendix N, *Public Hearing*.

### 5.1 Agency and Public Involvement

CEQ regulations for implementing NEPA require agencies to involve the public in preparing their NEPA documents (40 CFR Part 1506). Community outreach has been an integral part of the NSCS since its inception. A comprehensive coordination plan was developed in 2010 (updated in February 2017) and posted on the study website. The coordination plan was implemented to coordinate with and obtain input from the cooperating and participating agencies, stakeholders, and the public for developing alternatives and completing this Tier 1 FEIS and ROD. Public and agency coordination and outreach would continue during Tier 2 studies and during the subsequent design and construction of the proposed freeway, should an action alternative be selected. Table 5.1-1 shows the outreach program objectives.

**Table 5.1-1.** North-South Corridor Study outreach objectives

Major objectives
Educate the public, agencies, tribes, and other stakeholder groups about the existence, purpose, and scope of the study.
Encourage and provide opportunities for public participation throughout the study process.
Report findings of technical analyses at key study milestones.
Comply with Section 6002 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users, including requirements for agency and public involvement.
Document how public suggestions and concerns were considered and incorporated into the study’s planning process.
Provide public involvement opportunities and meaningful access to public information in accordance with requirements of Executive Order 12898, “Federal Actions To Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations” and FHWA Order 6640.23A, “FHWA Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations.”
Comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 United States Code § 2000d et seq., which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance, and with Executive Order 13166, signed in August 2000, which improves access to services for persons with limited English proficiency.
Comply with the Arizona Department of Transportation’s <i>Public Involvement Plan</i> , which provides a framework to create and maintain a transportation system developed from a diversity of voices and viewpoints from across the state that provide valuable insight to help inform the decision-making process.

ADOT has provided opportunities for agency and public involvement throughout the course of the study. Approximately 100 public stakeholder and 90 agency meetings were held between 2009 and 2017, and interested parties had several opportunities to provide input through the study telephone hotline, website, email, traditional mail, and other means. Specific opportunities to provide input included:

- agency and public scoping meetings
- presentations at city council/local agency meetings
- presentations at industry association meetings
- individual agency and stakeholder coordination meetings

- feedback on newsletters
- public information workshops and meetings
- stakeholder agency progress meetings
- workshop and meetings with Native American tribes
- public comment period for action corridor alternatives

ADOT and the study team implemented an extensive public involvement program, meeting with numerous agencies, tribes, special interest groups, civic organizations, and businesses to discuss the study and to answer questions about the corridor and the Tier 1 EIS environmental review process.

Agency and public involvement coordination efforts began with the publication of a Notice of Intent in 2010, which was followed by another Notice of Intent published in 2016 when the study became a Tier 1 EIS effort (Section 5.1.1). The study's scoping phase (conducted in 2010) and early agency and public involvement (conducted from 2010 to 2012) are discussed in Sections 5.1.2 and 5.1.3, respectively. The agency and public outreach conducted after publication of the ASR in 2014 is documented in Section 5.1.4, and Section 5.1.5 discusses outreach conducted when the study changed to a tiered environmental process. Another round of agency and public involvement, held in 2017, presented the action corridor alternatives that were analyzed in the Tier 1 DEIS (Section 5.1.6).

Throughout the study process, news releases, social media, newsletters, brochures, questionnaires, a study website, and public meetings were used to disseminate information about the NSCS and to gather input from the public and other interested parties.

Individuals contacting ADOT about the study were referred to the study website for further information ([azdot.gov/planning/transportation-studies/north-south-corridor-study-proposed-new-transportation-route-pinal](http://azdot.gov/planning/transportation-studies/north-south-corridor-study-proposed-new-transportation-route-pinal)) and were encouraged to subscribe to receive email updates on the study and to participate in public meetings and online comment opportunities. In addition, members of the study team answered individual questions from some of the people who provided comments by phone or email, depending on the nature of the comment.

### **5.1.1 Notices of Intent (2010 and 2016)**

A Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS was published in the *Federal Register* on September 20, 2010. On October 3, 2016, a second Notice of Intent was published in the *Federal Register* to inform the public that the NSCS had been converted from a project-level EIS to a Tier 1 EIS.

### **5.1.2 Scoping Phase (2010)**

Scoping is an early step in the NEPA process, the results of which are summarized in the *North-South Corridor Study Draft Agency and Public Scoping Summary*, dated February 2011 (Appendix M). The scoping process allowed agencies and the public to identify the range of issues to be addressed during the development of the engineering, planning, and environmental studies. Table 5.1-2 summarizes the scoping meetings conducted. The official scoping comment period ended on November 11, 2010; however, comments received after the comment period were accepted and documented.

**Table 5.1-2.** Agency and public scoping meetings

Date	Meeting type and location	Number of participants
10/5/2010	Agency scoping meeting – Florence Town Hall, Florence	56 <sup>a</sup>
10/19/2010	Public scoping meeting – Union Center at Merrill Ranch, Florence	52
10/21/2010	Public scoping meeting – Picacho Elementary School, Picacho	14
10/26/2010	Public scoping meeting – Apache Junction High School, Apache Junction	55
10/28/2010	Public scoping meeting – Skyline Ranch K-8 School, San Tan Valley	29

Source: Arizona Department of Transportation (2014a)  
<sup>a</sup> representing 28 agencies

### 5.1.2.1 Agency Scoping (October 2010)

#### *Notification*

The study team prepared and distributed a scoping letter inviting agency representatives to participate in the scoping phase of the study. These letters were mailed on September 20, 2010, to 43 agencies. The agency scoping letter and list of invited agencies is included in Appendix M.

#### *Meeting Description*

ADOT held an agency scoping meeting on October 5, 2010, at Florence Town Hall in Florence. The purpose of the meeting was to provide agency representatives with preliminary study information, present the study area, and receive input on issues to be addressed. The meeting was also designed for agency stakeholders to identify any issues, concerns, and opportunities they felt needed to be addressed over the course of the study. Fifty-six individuals representing 28 agencies attended the meeting. A list of attendees and a meeting summary is provided in Appendix M.

Following a presentation, each agency representative was given the opportunity to comment on the study and the information presented. Twenty-five verbal comments were documented during the agency scoping meeting. Written and verbal comments and responses are included in Appendix M.

#### *Summary of Participation*

Comments received during the agency scoping meeting led to further study area refinements. The refined study area reflects comments related to the extremely low development potential of the study area east of the Picacho Mountains and the importance of avoiding adverse impacts on the planned UPRR rail yard at Red Rock, southeast of Picacho.

### 5.1.2.2 Public Scoping (October 2010)

The four public scoping meetings provided an overview of the study process, discussed the environmental and engineering processes and schedule, presented the study area, and provided the public with the opportunity to ask questions and offer feedback.

#### *Notification*

The study team prepared and distributed an informational notification flier inviting recipients to four public scoping meetings hosted at the locations listed in Table 5.1-2. The notification included information about the study and an invitation for recipients to attend any of the four scoping meetings. The flier was mailed on October 5, 2010, to approximately 4,600 residents, businesses, government officials, and other key

stakeholders and interested parties in the study area. It was emailed to approximately 1,950 stakeholders on October 6, 2010.

Four newspaper advertisements announcing the public scoping meetings were published, as noted in Table 5.1-3. Newspaper advertisements can be found in Appendix M.

**Table 5.1-3.** Public scoping meeting newspaper advertisements

Publication date	Newspaper
10/6/2010	<i>Tri-Valley Dispatch</i>
10/21/2010	<i>East Valley Tribune</i>
10/26/2010	<i>Apache Junction/Gold Canyon Independent</i>
10/28/2010	<i>Queen Creek/San Tan Valley Independent</i>

Source: Arizona Department of Transportation (2014a)

### *Meeting Description*

Each meeting was held from 6 to 8 p.m. and was identical in presentation content. At each meeting, attendees signed in and were given packets of information, including an agenda, fact sheet with study area information, frequently asked questions, comment form, and question card.

Each meeting included a formal presentation at 6:15 p.m., followed by a question-and-answer session. Maps and displays were available for review and comment. A copy of the presentation and display boards are in Appendix M. A total of 150 people signed in at the meetings. Attendance at each meeting location is documented in Table 5.1-2.

### *Summary of Participation*

Fifty-six comments were received during the public scoping period through comment surveys, letters, emails, and at the public scoping meetings. Responses were prepared using the communication method in which the comments were received (for example, emailed comments were responded to by email). In addition to the comment surveys that allowed commenters to prioritize issues, comments were submitted at, or following, the public scoping meetings.

A comment survey was distributed at the public meetings where the public could rank environmental and engineering issues by importance, list preferences for evaluating future corridor locations, and write questions and comments to be submitted to the study team. The top three environmental issues identified from the comment survey were: economic development, air quality, and threatened and endangered species. Additional issues of concern listed included: aesthetics/visual resources, water resources, employment, noise, land use, hazardous materials contamination, and community cohesion.

The comment survey also asked respondents to provide feedback regarding issues to be considered as the study team identifies corridor alternatives. Of the comment forms submitted, the following issues received the most responses:

- improving access to US 60 and I-10
- maintaining existing local roads and highways
- improving public transportation services (for example bus, rail)
- improving local traffic and circulation

The comment survey also asked whether respondents agreed with the study’s purpose and need, as presented. The following purpose and need elements received the most responses:

- accommodating projected traffic to relieve anticipated congestion
- relieving I-10 traffic
- providing a direct connection to the eastern portion of the Phoenix metropolitan area

A summary of all comments (comment survey, question-and-answer card, letter, email, etc.) by issue is provided in Appendix M.

### 5.1.3 Early Outreach Activities (2010 to 2012)

Comments received through agency and public involvement activities conducted prior to the 2014 public meetings were instrumental in developing and screening the alternatives presented. Table 5.1-4 lists the major agency and public involvement activities.

**Table 5.1-4.** Early agency and public involvement activities

Type	Dates	Number of participants
Three meetings of Four Southern Tribes Cultural Resources Subcommittee	2010–2012	~10 per meeting
Eight agency progress meetings	2011–2012	37–49 per meeting
Twelve individual agency meetings	January 2011	<15 per meeting
Four mayor/council briefings	2010–2011	Not available
Individual public stakeholder meetings	2010–2012	<10 per meeting
Newsletter distribution	2011	55,000 residents total
Four public workshop meetings	2011	269 total

Source: Arizona Department of Transportation (2014a)

The following discussion provides more detail regarding agency and public meetings held in late 2011 to gather input on potential route alternatives.

#### 5.1.3.1 Agency Progress Meeting (November 2011)

##### *Notification*

ADOT and FHWA met with agencies during the regularly scheduled agency progress meeting in November 2011 to discuss the study’s progress and to obtain feedback on potential route alternatives. Agency feedback is documented in the *Summary of Stakeholder and Public Outreach and Preferences on Possible Route Alternatives, North-South Corridor Study*, dated March 2012 (see Appendix M).

##### *Meeting Description*

The agency progress meeting was held on November 1, 2011. During the meeting, the study team gave an overview of the screening process and the potential route alternatives. The study team requested feedback from the agency representatives on the route alternatives using an eight-page form. The form included each segment of the route alternatives and asked whether that particular segment was “favorable” or “unfavorable,” and why. Only one form was accepted per agency. Completed forms were due by December 12, 2011, and 17 forms were received.

### Summary of Participation

The study team noted that local agencies (representing towns and cities in the study area) had different preferences than regional, state, and federal agencies, as described below:

- In general, local agencies favored:
  - a northern terminus on US 60 near Goldfield Road
  - route alternative segments paralleling the CAP Canal in the central portion of the study area
  - the farthest eastern route alternative segments in the southern portion of the study area
  - a southern terminus on I-10 located 2 miles east of the existing SR 87 traffic interchange
- In general, local agencies did not favor:
  - western route alternative segments
  - the farthest eastern route alternative segments in the northern portion of the study area
- In general, regional, state, and federal agencies favored:
  - a northern terminus on US 60 near Ironwood Drive
  - a southern terminus on I-10 at the existing SR 87 traffic interchange
  - use of existing routes such as Ironwood Road, Hunt Highway, and SR 87 over all other route alternative segments
- In general, regional, state, and federal agencies did not favor:
  - the far eastern route alternative segments in the central portion of the study area

#### 5.1.3.2 Public Workshop Meetings (December 2011)

Four public workshop meetings were held in December 2011 (Table 5.1-5). The objective of the public workshop meetings was to provide an update regarding the study’s progress and timeline and to present the possible route alternative segments for public review and feedback.

**Table 5.1-5.** Public workshop meetings

Date	Meeting location	Number of participants
12/6/2011	Santa Cruz Valley Union High School, Eloy	19
12/7/2011	Moose Lodge, Apache Junction	75
12/8/2011	Coolidge-Florence Elks Lodge, Coolidge	106
12/12/2011	Walker Butte Elementary School, San Tan Valley	69

### Notification

During the week of November 14, 2011, a public workshop meeting notification was emailed to government officials, an internal memorandum was sent to ADOT management, and a notification was posted on the study website. Advertisements were published in local newspapers within the study area (see Table 5.1-6). Additionally, a public workshop meeting invitation/announcement was sent by U.S. mail to approximately 51,500 residents, businesses, and stakeholders in the study area, and a news release was issued to local media in the study area.

**Table 5.1-6.** Public workshop meeting newspaper advertisements

Publication date	Newspaper
11/16/2011	<i>East Valley Tribune</i>
11/16/2011	<i>Tri-Valley Dispatch</i>
11/16/2011	<i>Apache Junction/Gold Canyon Independent</i>
11/16/2011	<i>Queen Creek/San Tan Valley Independent</i>

### *Meeting Description*

All meetings were held from 6 to 8 p.m. and were identical in content. Each meeting began with an open house format. Displays were available for attendees to view, and take-home information was available regarding the study’s purpose and need, engineering and environmental elements, schedule, and process. Attendees received a packet of information that included a comment form, agenda, fact sheet, frequently asked questions, and glossary of terms. Attendees were seated randomly in groups at tables, where detailed aerial maps of the study were available for reference.

A presentation was given at 6:15 p.m. to provide an overview of the action corridor alternatives. After the presentation, study team members circulated throughout the room to answer questions as attendees filled out their comment forms.

Most workshop participants chose to take the comment forms with them after the workshop to complete at a later time. The comment form was also available online. The study team requested that comment forms be returned by January 12, 2012, and 205 comment forms were received by that deadline.

### *Summary of Participation*

The top five factors that influenced people’s preferences for route alternative segments were:

- has least impact on existing development (103 responses)
- best connects to other major routes (94 responses)
- best relieves traffic on local streets (62 responses)
- best connects to cities/towns (55 responses)
- best relieves traffic on other highways/freeways (51 responses)

Public preferences for route alternative segments were not as clear-cut as those of the agencies, particularly when considering route alternative segments in the southern portion of the study area. The public preferences that did emerge are discussed below:

- In general, public respondents favored:
  - a northern terminus on US 60 near Goldfield Road
- In general, public respondents did not favor:
  - the farthest eastern route alternative segments in the northern portion of the study area

In response to a question about whether they would support and/or use the proposed corridor as a tolled facility, 77 respondents expressed support, and 102 respondents expressed opposition.

### 5.1.4 Alternatives Selection Report Phase (2014)

The ASR public meetings were held to provide information about the recently completed ASR, which identified reasonable route alternatives to be carried forward for detailed assessment (see Section 2.2.2, *Alternatives Selection Report*, for more information). The public was invited to attend the meetings and learn more about the recently completed ASR, which identified reasonable route alternatives to be carried forward, and to give comments. Seven route alternatives that included 36 segments and the No-Action Alternative were presented at the meetings.

#### 5.1.4.1 Public Meetings (November 2014)

The four ASR public meetings are summarized in Table 5.1-7.

**Table 5.1-7.** *Alternatives Selection Report* public meetings

Date	Meeting location	Number of participants
11/17/2014	Walker Butte Elementary School, Queen Creek	Total attendance was 361
11/18/2014	Santa Cruz High School, Eloy	
11/19/2014	Apache Junction High School, Apache Junction	
11/20/2014	Coolidge-Florence Elks Lodge, Coolidge	

#### *Notification*

The study team published five newspaper advertisements inviting the public to attend any one of four public meetings (Table 5.1-8).

**Table 5.1-8.** *Alternatives Selection Report* public meeting newspaper advertisements

Publication date	Publication
11/4/2014	<i>Casa Grande Dispatch</i>
11/5/2014	<i>Coolidge Examiner</i>
11/6/2014	<i>Eloy Enterprise</i>
11/6/2014	<i>Florence Reminder and Blade-Tribune</i>
11/7/2014	<i>Gila River Indian News</i>

Source: Arizona Department of Transportation (2014a)

ADOT issued a news release on November 6, 2014, providing public meeting details and the methods to provide comments. A copy of the news release is included in Appendix M. The news release was distributed to more than 4,000 people, news organizations, professional journalists, and others subscribed to ADOT's GovDelivery system. Additionally, the study website provided details regarding the meetings, and the web address was published on all informational materials.

#### *Meeting Description*

Each meeting was held from 6 to 8 p.m. and was identical in presentation content. At each meeting, attendees signed in and were given a handout. A formal presentation was given at 6:15 p.m. Study information, maps, copies of the ASR, and other resources were provided. The ASR public meeting summary can be found in Appendix M.



### Summary of Participation

For each outreach technique for the ASR public meetings, the number of participants was tracked using sign-in sheets, visual counts, tallies, and computer reports. Table 5.1-9 shows the number of participants during the 30-day comment period, organized by participation method. It should be noted that the cumulative total does not represent “unique” participants (for example, a single person could be counted in multiple categories—for attending one of the public meetings, providing public testimony, and submitting written comments).

**Table 5.1-9.** *Alternatives Selection Report* outreach participation

Participation method	Number of participants
Email	41
Website comments	64
Telephone comments	0
Written comments	11
Public meeting attendance	361
<b>Total</b>	<b>475</b>

Source: *North-South Corridor Study Alternative Selection Report Public Meeting Summary Report*, dated July 2015 (Appendix M)

Over 100 comments were received in response to the outreach efforts. Responses were grouped into general categories (for example, “Objections to proposed alternative and/or alternative segment”). Comments may have been related to more than one issue (for example, noting objections to a proposed alternative and/or alternative segment, while also specifying an alternative preference). More than one-third of respondents (37 percent) offered general support for roadway infrastructure improvements to improve the region’s transportation network. A similar number expressed their interest for an alternative or alternatives (34 percent), while a smaller number of respondents voiced opposition to one or more of the alternatives (26 percent). The alternative segments receiving the most preference included O3, V, X, and AO (the eastern alternative segments in the Florence area). The alternative segments receiving the most opposition included E2, G, Q, and AB (the western alternative segments in the Queen Creek/Florence area).

Following the ASR public meetings, the study team presented the same information from the public meetings to the Gila River Indian Community at community meetings in District 1 (January 5, 2015), District 2 (February 2, 2015), and District 3 (January 6, 2015), and to the Tohono O’odham Nation Agricultural/Natural Resources Committee (February 5, 2015).

#### 5.1.5 Conversion to a Tiered Environmental Process (2016)

In November 2016, the study team issued a news release and a GovDelivery notice regarding the decision to convert the study from a project-level EIS to a Tier 1 EIS. The study website was updated with information regarding the transition to a tiered environmental process, which could be completed over a longer period of time while pursuing funding for further studies and construction of the Corridor.

#### 5.1.6 Alternatives Update (2017)

As the NSCS progressed, changes were made to the proposed alternatives subsequent to agency and public outreach and publication of the ASR. As a result, ADOT, in coordination with FHWA, opened a comment period to solicit input on the new action corridor alternatives. The comment period was open from November 14 to December 14, 2017.

Since the ASR was presented in late 2014, some of the proposed alternatives were modified to avoid sensitive resources. In the fall of 2017, those modified action corridor alternatives were presented for public review through an online mapping and comment tool, accessed from the study website: [azdot.gov/planning/transportation-studies/north-south-corridor-study-proposed-new-transportation-route-pinal](http://azdot.gov/planning/transportation-studies/north-south-corridor-study-proposed-new-transportation-route-pinal). Cooperating and participating agencies—which include federal, state, and local agencies and Native American tribes—were invited to fill out a corridor preference form to provide input on their preferences regarding the revised alternatives.

During the 30-day comment period (November 14 to December 14, 2017), the online mapping tool allowed users to drop a pin and comment on a specific area, or to provide general comments on the action corridor alternatives. All comments received by December 14, 2017, were considered during preparation of the *Corridor Selection Report*, which was included in Appendix C, *Alternatives Screening*, of the DEIS (see Appendix A, *Agency and Public Comments*, of the report) to incorporate this phase of the public outreach effort into the study.

Comments are accepted at any time during all phases of this study. The website mapping tool is still available, and comments can be provided by email, letter, or telephone using the contact information noted on the study website.

#### 5.1.6.1 Notification

In addition to the study website, which included the online mapping tool, an email blast was sent to stakeholders listed in ADOT's GovDelivery system, and a press release was sent to statewide news organizations on November 14, 2017. Members of the study team answered individual questions from some of the people who provided comments by phone or email, depending on the nature of the comment.

#### 5.1.6.2 Summary of Participation

The number of participants was tracked based on the participation method used. The online mapping and comment tool used an automated spreadsheet to record website comments received. Emailed comments were received at the study email address ([northsouth@azdot.gov](mailto:northsouth@azdot.gov)), and completed comment forms were submitted to ADOT by U.S. mail.

At the cooperating and participating agency meeting held on December 14, 2017, agencies were invited to provide feedback on their preferred alternative through a survey form. A total of 14 agency replies were received, included survey forms and emailed comments (see Appendix C, *Alternatives Screening*, for more detail regarding the agency preferences).

Table 5.1-10 shows the number of participants during the 30-day comment period, organized by participation method. Note that the cumulative total does not represent “unique” participants (for example, a single person could comment multiple times and use multiple methods).

**Table 5.1-10.** Alternatives update public participation

Participation method	Number of participants
Email	25
Online map tool comments	203
Online comment form	74
Written comments	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>305</b>

## *Public Comments*

Members of the public provided comments related to the following issues:

- general comments on the action corridor alternatives, including perceived benefits or disadvantages (133 comments)
- property impacts (91 comments)
- connectivity (41 comments)
- traffic congestion (22 comments)
- environment (20 comments)
- economic development (18 comments)
- roadway design (10 comments)

## **5.2 Agency Coordination**

### **5.2.1 Cooperating Agencies**

At the study's onset in 2010, FHWA asked cooperating agencies to participate during the study's environmental evaluation process. NEPA regulations—codified at 23 CFR § 771.111(d)—require those federal agencies with jurisdiction by law (with permitting or land transfer authority), or with special expertise regarding any potential project-related environmental impact, be invited to serve as cooperating agencies for an EIS. A state or local agency with similar qualifications may also become a cooperating agency. When the potential impacts occur on land of tribal interest, a Native American tribe may become a cooperating agency.

If a federal agency chose to decline cooperating agency status, that agency would automatically be considered a participating agency, whether a written response is provided or not. If a federal agency chooses to decline both cooperating and participating status, that agency must submit a written response stating that it (1) has no jurisdiction or authority with respect to the project, (2) has no expertise or information relevant to the project, and (3) does not intend to submit comments on the project.

Cooperating agencies have a higher degree of authority, responsibility, and involvement in the environmental review process. A distinguishing feature of a cooperating agency is that the CEQ regulations (40 CFR § 1501.6) permit a cooperating agency to “assume on request of the lead agency responsibility for developing information and preparing environmental analyses including portions of the environmental impact statement concerning which the cooperating agency has special expertise.”

### **5.2.2 Participating Agencies**

Section 6002 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users created a new category of agencies to participate in the EIS environmental review process: federal, state, tribal, regional, and local governmental agencies with an interest in the project. Agencies invited to participate in the environmental review process shall be designated as participating agencies, unless the invited agency informs the lead agency, in writing by the deadline specified in the invitation, that it (1) has no jurisdiction or authority with respect to the project, (2) has no expertise or information relevant to the project, and (3) does not intend to submit comments on the project. Nongovernmental organizations and private entities cannot serve as participating agencies.

State, tribal, and local agencies were asked to respond affirmatively to the invitation to be designated as a participating agency. If an agency failed to respond by the stated deadline or declined the invitation, the agency would be considered a stakeholder and would continue to receive periodic study information.

Tribal governments that were invited to be participating agencies, but chose not to respond, continued to receive invitations to participating agency meetings throughout the duration of the study.

Participating agencies with expertise or jurisdiction relevant to the project may be invited by the lead agency (pursuant to 23 USC § 139) to respond to requests for technical assistance, attend scoping and coordination meetings, attend joint field reviews, provide substantive and early input on issues of concern, review agreements for issues and required technical studies, and review lead agency-approved draft and final environmental documents. (Designation as a participating agency does not indicate project support and does not provide an agency with increased oversight or approval authority above its statutory limits.)

In 2016, with the conversion of the study to a Tier 1 EIS, FHWA sent a letter to the cooperating and participating agencies asking them to reaffirm their role with the study. Table 5.2-1 identifies the current lead, cooperating, and participating agencies involved with the Tier 1 EIS. More information regarding the lead, cooperating, and participating agency meetings is in Appendix M.

**Table 5.2-1.** Lead, cooperating, and participating agencies

Lead agency	
Arizona Department of Transportation	
Cooperating agencies	
Federal Railroad Administration	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs – San Carlos Irrigation Project	Western Area Power Administration
U.S. Bureau of Land Management	Arizona Game and Fish Department
Participating agencies	
Arizona Department of Public Safety	Maricopa County Department of Transportation
Arizona State Historic Preservation Office	National Park Service
Arizona State Land Department	Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport Authority
Arizona State Parks	Pinal County
Central Arizona Governments	Salt River Project
City of Apache Junction	San Carlos Apache Tribe
City of Casa Grande	Sun Corridor Metropolitan Planning Organization
City of Coolidge	Town of Florence
City of Eloy	Town of Queen Creek
Flood Control District of Maricopa County	U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs – Western Regional Office
Hopi Tribe	U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Source: Arizona Department of Transportation (2017a), agency correspondence

Throughout the study process, ADOT met regularly with NSCS agency stakeholders to discuss the study’s progress and obtain feedback. Cooperating and participating agencies were responsible for:

- participating in the scoping process
- providing comments on the purpose and need, study methodologies and criteria, and alternatives

- identifying issues of concern regarding the proposed corridor's impacts on the natural and human environments
- providing timely input on unresolved issues

### 5.2.3 Tribal Coordination

#### 5.2.3.1 Participating Agency Invitations

The sovereign nations invited to be participating agencies included the Ak-Chin Indian Community, Gila River Indian Community, Hopi Tribe, Pascua Yaqui Tribe, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, San Carlos Apache Nation, Tohono O'odham Nation, Tonto Apache Tribe, White Mountain Apache Tribe, and Yavapai-Apache Nation.

#### 5.2.3.2 Outreach

In addition to consultation—which is a process of seeking, discussing, and considering the views of other participants and, where feasible, seeking agreement with them regarding matters arising in the Section 106 process (Protection of Historic Properties, 36 CFR Part 800)—FHWA and ADOT regularly reported on the study's progress at the Four Southern Tribes Cultural Working Group meetings (see Appendix M). Additional information on consultation with the tribes is found in Section 3.14, *Cultural Resources*.

During the outreach associated with the ASR public meetings, the study team reached out to the Four Southern Tribes and offered to conduct the same presentation and provide the opportunity for questions and comments. At the request of the tribes, presentations were made to three of the Gila River Indian Community Districts and to the Tohono O'odham Nation Agricultural/Natural Resources Committee.

State, tribal,<sup>1</sup> and local agencies that were invited to serve as participating agencies, but did not respond to the invitation, and members of the public who expressed an interest in the study and provided contact information, are included in the list of stakeholders and receive email updates and other notifications as the study progresses. Anyone can subscribe to receive email updates at any time by logging on to [www.azdot.gov](http://www.azdot.gov) and clicking on the "Subscribe for updates" button on the home page.

### 5.2.4 Summary of Agency Coordination

Between October 2010 and early 2016, the NEPA EIS phase of the NSCS progressed with developing and evaluating alternatives as documented in the October 2014 ASR; advancing environmental technical studies for the alternatives to the project-level EIS; and preparing conceptual designs to support the EIS. Throughout this time, ADOT and FHWA held regular meetings with cooperating agencies, participating agencies, and key stakeholders, and conducted public meetings, along with individual stakeholder meetings.

In October 2016, at the time the study converted to a Tier 1 EIS, FHWA contacted the cooperating and participating agencies to reaffirm their interest in being engaged in the study process. Since that time, the meetings have been referred to as cooperating and participating agency meetings.

Table 5.2-2 summarizes the meetings held with the lead agencies, cooperating and participating agencies, and stakeholders. Complete lists of the specific meetings are in Appendix M.

---

<sup>1</sup> Tribal governments that were invited to be participating agencies but did not respond continued to receive invitations to cooperating and participating agency meetings throughout the duration of the study.

**Table 5.2-2.** Coordination meetings

Cooperating and participating agencies		Stakeholders	
Year	Number of meetings	Year	Number of meetings
2009	3	2009	1
2010	4	2010	8
2011	4	2011	19
2012	5	2012	19
2013	2	2013	3
2014	2	2014	2
2015	1	2015	17
2016	1	2016	15
2017	3	2017	14
2018	2	2018	2
2019	7	2019	12
2020	5	2020	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>

Cooperating and participating agency meetings were held to communicate information and to solicit input. These meetings were originally referred to as “progress meetings.” In preparation for the public release of the Tier 1 DEIS, the cooperating agencies met more regularly, and independently of the joint cooperating and participating agency meetings, which were held infrequently through this same period.

### 5.2.5 Agency Coordination and Input after Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Follow-up coordination with various agency stakeholders between publication of the Tier 1 DEIS and preparation of the Tier 1 FEIS and ROD was used to obtain updated information to respond to public comments on the DEIS and consider revisions to the DEIS; this information is reported in Section 6.3.3, *Post DEIS Review of the Preferred Alternative*. Additionally, standing meetings with the cooperating agencies were held to review the public comments on the Tier 1 DEIS. During this period, joint meetings of the participating and cooperating agencies were also held.

## 5.3 Public Review of the Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement

The Tier 1 DEIS was released for a public comment on September 6, 2019. The comment period was held from September 6 to October 29, 2019. During that time, three public hearings were held (see Table 5.3-1).

**Table 5.3-1.** Public hearings

Date	Time	Location	Attendance
Tuesday, October 1, 2019	5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.	Florence High School 1000 South Main Street, Florence	75
Thursday, October 10, 2019	5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.	Eloy City Hall 595 North C Street, Eloy	33
Tuesday, October 15, 2019	5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.	Poston Butte High School 32375 North Gantzel Road, San Tan Valley	135

The Tier 1 DEIS document is available for download from the study website at [azdot.gov/planning/transportation-studies/north-south-corridor-study-proposed-new-transportation-route-pinal](http://azdot.gov/planning/transportation-studies/north-south-corridor-study-proposed-new-transportation-route-pinal).

Printed copies of the Tier 1 DEIS were made available for review only and at no charge at:

Eloy Santa Cruz Library  
1000 North Main Street  
Eloy, Arizona 85131  
520.466.3814

Apache Junction Public Library  
1177 North Idaho Road  
Apache Junction, Arizona 85119  
480.474.8558

Coolidge Public Library  
160 West Central Avenue  
Coolidge, Arizona 85128  
520.723.6030

Queen Creek Library  
21802 South Ellsworth Road  
Queen Creek, Arizona 85142  
602.652.3000

Florence Community Library  
778 North Main Street  
Florence, AZ 85132  
520.868.7500

Ira H. Hayes Memorial Library\*  
94 North Church Street  
Sacaton, AZ 85147  
\* location available only to members  
of the Gila River Indian Community

Notification for review of the DEIS was advertised in the following local newspapers:

- *Arizona Republic* (Zones 6, 11, and 10) – English-language ad (published September 6, 2019)
- *Gila River Indian News* – English-language ad (published September 6, 2019)
- *Prensa Arizona* – Spanish-language ad (published September 12, 2019)
- *Tri-Valley Dispatch* – English-language ad (published September 1, 2019)

Copies of print advertisements can be found in Appendix N, *Public Hearing*.

The publication and comment period for the Tier 1 DEIS, along with the public hearings, were announced through news releases, email updates, social media, website updates, mailers, etc. An interactive web map was available on the NSCS website at: [azdot.gov/NorthSouthStudy](http://azdot.gov/NorthSouthStudy).

### 5.3.1 Public Comment Review

All comments received were reviewed for the specific issues or recommendations raised by the commenter. A total of 406 comments was received by October 29, 2019, the last day of the comment period, through the following methods:

- No comments were received through the study information line: 855.712.8530 (bilingual).

- 218 comments were received through the study email: [northsouth@azdot.gov](mailto:northsouth@azdot.gov).
- 154 comments were submitted through the study website: [azdot.gov/NorthSouthStudy](http://azdot.gov/NorthSouthStudy).
- 9 comment forms were submitted at the public hearings and through U.S. Mail c/o ADOT Communications, 1655 W. Jackson Street, Mail Drop 126F, Phoenix, AZ 85007.
- 23 public statements were made at the public hearings recorded by a court reporter: in the public statements area of the public hearings, commenters were allotted 3 minutes to provide verbal comments to a court reporter.

### 5.3.1.1 Public and Agency Comments on Tier 1 Draft EIS

Comments received on the Tier 1 DEIS included comments received during public testimony at the three hearings (October 1, 2019, in Florence; October 10, 2019, in Eloy; and October 15, 2019, in San Tan Valley), written comment forms, emailed comments, voice messages, and online comment form submittals. Table 5.3-2 summarizes the comments received, by category.

**Table 5.3-2.** Summary of DEIS comments, by source

Date	Comment count
Agency representative	26
Business representative	11
Member of public	356
Elected official	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>406</b>

Overall, expressed support for construction of the Corridor was substantial, with 285 commenters (approximately 70 percent) stating their general support for the proposed freeway.

Appendix O of this Tier 1 FEIS and ROD documents and provides responses to all comments received during the Tier 1 DEIS public review and comment period.

## 5.3.2 Final Environmental Impact Statement/Record of Decision

After the comment period for the Tier 1 DEIS, the study team reviewed the comments received, conducted additional analyses as needed, and revised the DEIS to address the comments. This Tier 1 FEIS was prepared and issued in combination with a ROD. The ROD represents ADOT’s final decision on the project. Transcripts of the public hearings and comments gathered on the Tier 1 DEIS are included in this combined Tier 1 FEIS and ROD, along with responses to the comments received.

A Notice of Availability for the Tier 1 FEIS and ROD will be published in the *Federal Register*. This information will also be published in local newspapers, and will be posted on the study website. Email notification will be sent to cooperating and participating agencies, stakeholders, and those on the study distribution list. There is no comment period associated with the release of the combined Tier 1 FEIS and ROD.

### 5.3.2.1 Document Availability

The Tier 1 FEIS and ROD are available online at:

[azdot.gov/planning/transportation-studies/north-south-corridor-study-proposed-new-transportation-route-pinal](http://azdot.gov/planning/transportation-studies/north-south-corridor-study-proposed-new-transportation-route-pinal)



It is also available for review only and at no charge at the following locations:

Eloy Santa Cruz Library  
1000 North Main Street  
Eloy, Arizona 85131  
520.466.3814

Coolidge Public Library  
160 West Central Avenue  
Coolidge, Arizona 85128  
520.723.6030

Florence Community Library  
778 North Main Street  
Florence, AZ 85132  
520.868.7500

Apache Junction Public Library  
1177 North Idaho Road  
Apache Junction, Arizona 85119  
480.474.8558

Queen Creek Library  
21802 South Ellsworth Road  
Queen Creek, Arizona 85142  
602.652.3000

Ira H. Hayes Memorial Library\*  
94 North Church Street  
Sacaton, AZ 85147

\* location available only to members  
of the Gila River Indian Community

*This page is intentionally left blank.*