

Preprint
INTERSECTION THAT SYMBOLIZES MAJOR CHANGES TO
ALBUQUERQUE

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The intersection of Central Avenue and Fourth Street in Albuquerque is a unique intersection that symbolizes the impacts of establishing federal highways in New Mexico. The new Federal Highway System was defined in the Fall of 1926. Two of the major highways that affected Albuquerque were US 66 and US 85. US 66 was an east-west highway that went from Chicago to Los Angeles through an alignment from Tucumcari to Gallup in New Mexico. US 85 went from Denver to El Paso with an alignment from Raton to Las Cruces. Fourth Street in Albuquerque was the host street for both highways in 1926. In 1937, US 66 was formally realigned along Central Avenue. There is some mystery associated with why this change was made, and there are some interesting happenings that highlight actions taken in the integration of these federal roadways into our state highway system. This paper discusses the changes in US 66 and the reasons for the change.

We all know about US 66 being the main street of America. John Steinbeck called it the “Mother Road of Flight.” It is designated as the Will Roger’s Highway. It is the most popular highway in the United States and has been the subject of songs, TV shows, and TV documentaries. There was a special magic about this highway. I have never met a person that has traveled on US 66 who doesn’t have a story to tell about the travels. People still identify with it and want to see where it went. Old properties on US 66 still have a special attraction to tourists. The realignment of US 66 in New Mexico is just another chapter in the storied history of this glorious route.

WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT THIS INTERSECTION?

Fourth Street was the official north-south route for US 66 from August of 1926 to October of 1937. Late in 1926, the Santa Rosa Cut-off, which became NM 6, was hastily constructed and its presence siphoned off travelers from the official north-south route. The increasing numbers of travelers passing over this cut-off during the late 1920s convinced highway planners of the need to realign the longer route to this shorter route: a savings of 90 miles and 2 to 2 ½ hours of travel plus fewer mountains and rivers to cross. The success of the Santa Rosa Cut-off prompted acceptance of another cut-off: the Laguna Cut-off. During the 1931-1937 time period, a Laguna Cut-off was constructed from Albuquerque to an intersection on the original US 66 near Laguna, and this shortened US 66 by another 17 miles. Thus, in October of 1937 the official route was shortened by 107 miles and a new and important roadway went through Albuquerque in a different direction.

When US 66 was officially realigned over the two short-cuts, over 100 miles of length had been eliminated. This was the largest reduction in any of the realignments of US 66. Santa Fe, the state capitol, was no longer on the route, although US 85 remained. Other towns also were bypassed in the

rerouting. There were significant changes in the tourism business in New Mexico when this realignment was finalized. For instance, a new town, Buford, was created near Moriarty and existed from 1935-1953 when it was annexed by Moriarty. The activities leading to this unique realignment provide an interesting insight into New Mexico History.

FEATURES OF THE FEDERAL HIGHWAYS GOING THROUGH ALBUQUERQUE

In the original 1926-1937 alignment, over 120 miles of US 66 shared the road with US Highway 85. Highway 85 continued to function as a major north-south federal highway through Albuquerque. The original US 66 in 1926 went from Santa Rosa to Romeroville (near Las Vegas) through Santa Fe to Bernalillo, Albuquerque, and Los Lunas. All travel was on Fourth Street along with US 85. Both US 66 and US 85 went south from Albuquerque to Los Lunas before separating, and US 66 followed the railroad west towards Laguna Pueblo. After the realignment, US 66 went from Santa Rosa to Buford and Tijeras and then through Albuquerque before heading west towards Laguna. The Appendix provides a sketch illustrating the two alignments.

Figure 1 shows a photograph of traffic on Central Avenue at the intersection of 4th and Central in 1951. This photograph shows the integration of interstate and local traffic in the center of Albuquerque at this special intersection. The bulk of the travel was on US 66 and this required a minimum of two traffic lanes in each direction as is seen in the photograph. The photograph is looking east. Imagine what this photograph would have looked like, if the re-alignment had not taken place.



Figure 1 Traffic on US 66 at 4th and Central (Courtesy of Dick Ruddy)

WHY DID THIS HAPPEN?

The most popular explanation for the significant change in the alignment of US 66 was attributed to revenge associated with politics, but an alternative explanation was simply the desire to offer better highway travel to tourists traveling through the state.

WHAT HAPPENED?

A major event occurred in early November in 1926 that seriously changed US 66 travel patterns. Democratic Governor A. T. Hannett, former mayor of Gallup, was elected for the period 1925-26. He ran for re-election in 1926 and was defeated by Republican Richard C. Dillon. Republicans and some Democrats in the Santa Fe area, led by Santa Fe New Mexican editor and future US Senator Bronson Cutting, who had supported Hannett in the election of 1924, banded together to defeat him. This was an ugly election. Immediately after the defeat, Governor Hannett realized that he had less than two months in office to do many of the things he had wanted. He decided that he was going to do something, and in his words, "to support a transcontinental road which would eventually attract a large amount of commercial and tourist trade."

Late in November of 1926, he authorized the State Highway Department to construct a short-cut from Santa Rosa to Moriarty. Sixty-nine of the 76 miles had to be cut through essentially virgin landscape. Twenty-seven of the miles had to go through uncut pinon trees. This had to be completed in 31 days! The actual termination point of the 69 miles was at an intersection $\frac{1}{2}$ mile north of the town limits of Moriarty. The intersection was the turning point in new Federal highway US 470, which went north from Willard through Moriarty to the intersection and then west towards Albuquerque over a relatively primitive road leading down Tijeras Canyon.

Now there were some complicating factors. First, the Santa Rosa Cut-off had to be completed by January 1, 1927 as this road was not felt necessary by the incoming Republican Governor. Governor-elect Dillon wanted the original US 66 to continue to support the tourist economy of Santa Fe. There was another feature. The absence of the short-cut would also allow east-west tourists to bypass Albuquerque by going south from Santa Rosa through Vaughn, Encino, home of the Governor-elect Dillon, to Socorro. Travelers could go west from Socorro to Phoenix and eventually Los Angeles. There were political pressures in New Mexico to make this southern route the primary route from Chicago to Los Angeles. Thus, if the Santa-Rosa short-cut wasn't completed, there was the high probability that it would either be abandoned or relegated to being a poorly maintained secondary road.

The goal was to clear and grade this 69 miles in the 31 days of December of 1926. Workers were to work through Christmas season holidays. There were numerous problems including weather, sabotage, lack of good equipment, and lack of right-of way. It was reported that the maximum temperatures were sometimes below 20 °F and there was 10 inches of snow on December 10th. Some people who didn't want the project to be completed tried to sabotage the efforts by putting sugar and sand in equipment gas tanks. Operators had to sleep with their World War I road graders to protect them. Right-of- way had not been procured so some property owners protested, but they didn't take legal action to stop the project. They probably recognized that they would be reimbursed for their land and also they would have a short-cut to Albuquerque.

There was also the human element to the project. It was traditional for new Governors in New Mexico to fire state workers and hire those loyal to their party and cause. Therefore the workers thought they would be out of a job on January 1. They were motivated to play a "joke" on the new Governor and have a completed road that he didn't want. They worked night and day to achieve this. On January 3, 1927, the short-cut was passable. January 3 was the first time that the new Governor could get someone to the project to shut it down. The designated project stopper was authorized to shut it down if it wasn't

completed. Cars were successfully passing over the Santa Rosa Cut-off from Santa Rosa to Moriarty and then to Albuquerque. He called the new Governor and he decided not to shut it down.

These workers had accomplished a near miracle. This accomplishment established a fair-weather short cut from Santa Rosa to Albuquerque that saved 90 miles of travel. In all fairness, new Governor Dillon was impressed with the hard work that went into creating the short-cut and accepted the fait-accompli. He did not fire the workers! The short-cut was designated NM 6 and became an increasingly popular route to travel from Santa Rosa to Albuquerque.

Consider this scenario. If the Santa Rosa Cut-off had not been completed, Governor Dillon could have stopped work and relegated whatever was done to a low priority effort with a limited future. He could please his political constituents and, assuming no changes to this attitude, US 66 would still go through Santa Fe during his 4 years of office. Democrat Arthur Seligman, former mayor of Santa Fe, won the election in 1930 and was the governor until his untimely death in 1933. There is a strong possibility that he would not have been in favor of US 66 bypassing Santa Fe to the advantage of Albuquerque. Thus there is the scenario that the realignment could have been delayed up to 6 years. Without some actual travel over the Santa Rosa Cut-off establishing the need and demonstrating the advantages of the shorter route, it is thought that the federal monies could have been spent on the original US 66 and that the realignment would have been delayed for some time. Then there was World War II. The question remains: Would Albuquerque have changed like it had if interstate travelers had not had an established presence passing through Tijeras Canyon before the war?

Table 1 provides a summary of key activities related to the Santa Rosa Cut-off. The first three items have been discussed. The next items summarize the key milestones related to the integration of NM 6 into becoming part of US 66.

TABLE 1 IMPORTANT DATES ASSOCIATED WITH SANTA ROSA CUT-OFF

Date	Action
March 19, 1925	New Mexico 6, from Santa Rosa to Moriarty, was authorized by the NM Legislature
December 1, 1926	NM 6 was initiated after authorization from outgoing Governor A. T. Hannett
January 3, 1927	NM 6 was reluctantly accepted by new Governor Richard C. Dillon
1927-1931	NM 6 was known as the Santa Rosa Cut-off and received state funds for improvements
1931	NM Highway Commission made NM 6 eligible for Federal Aid Project funding
1931-1937	NM 6 was receiving Federal Funds for improvements
1937-1985	NM 6 became part of US 66

With this background, I can better address the question of why this happened. Was the motivation for the first short-cut caused by political revenge or the desire for better transportation?

Many call the Santa Rosa Cut-off “Hannett’s Joke.” The antics and political rhetoric developed during the election highlight the partisan politics and problems in multi-cultural assimilation that dominated the pre-election environment in 1926. Thus, there is the revenge reason. People felt he wanted to get back on those politicians in the Santa Fe and Las Vegas areas that had killed his chances of being re-

elected. There is also the aspect that “Hannett’s Joke” was indirectly the “joke” that the workers were playing on new Governor Dillon.

The revenge reason is the most popular. The New Mexico State Bar in 2000 reinforced the notion that the change in the alignment of Route 66 was “Hannett’s Joke.” The Bar accepted that political payback by Governor Hannett to Santa Fe and Las Vegas was the focus of the joke. As recent as 2013, the city of Moriarty suggested that the Santa Rosa Cut-off be called “The Retribution Road.” They wanted something catchy to highlight the revenge aspect of the Governor’s decision in 1926.

The other reason for the realignment is that Governor Hannett and others, like Clyde Tingley and long-term State Highway Commission Chairman Charles Springer, sought to provide a good highway system through New Mexico for interstate travelers.

Now this thinking leads to a red or green question. New Mexico is known for its red and green chili and the official state question deals with deciding on whether to choose “red” or “green.” **Red**-Should Route 66 be kept long so that tourists would have more opportunities to stop and spend money? **Green**- Should Route 66 be as short as possible so that tourists can have a pleasant trip through the state? Believe me you can get passionate answers to both questions.

There were some engineering features associated with the establishment of the eastern part of NM 6. The new Santa Rosa Cut-off joined a wagon road north of Moriarty to complete the journey to Albuquerque on US 470. This latter road went through Tijeras Canyon, which was considered an improvement to going over La Bajada Hill, which is between Santa Fe and Albuquerque. La Bajada Hill was a major challenge to automobile travel. It had a drop of about 800 ft from the rim of the mesa to the foot of the hill. In the 1920s it had 23 hairpin turns. The grade was as high as 28% when it was constructed by the military in the 1860s. The grade was reduced to 8% using convict labor in the 1920s and it was over the federal limit for the 11 years that original US 66 was in use. Tijeras canyon could be within the 6% grade limitation, but it had possible flooding as a threat.

The establishment of the Santa Rosa Cut-off launched efforts to shorten US 66 further after 1926. Albuquerque recognized the advantages of the short-cut and started lobbying for realignment. With the increased traffic along NM 6 from Santa Rosa, Albuquerque, under the leadership of Clyde Tingley, started pushing for acceptance of the other cut-off, the Laguna Cut-off. Tingley had been promoting the Laguna Cut-off as early as 1925, but it took about 4 years before it came into wide acceptance.

The Laguna Cut-off started at this special intersection of 4th and Central and went west along Central Avenue to connect with the original US 66 in about 30 miles. It would be a straight shot west through the hills and over the Rio Puerco.

There were some minor modifications to US 66 and US 85 traffic patterns in the early 1930s. In 1926, Routes 66 and 85 both went directly south on Fourth Street to Bridge Avenue, where it crossed the Rio Grande and went south to Isleta. The routes then intercepted NM 47 and followed it to Los Lunas. At Los Lunas, US 66 separated from US 85 and went west. It generally followed the railroad towards Laguna, Grants, and Gallup.

This original route south to Los Lunas required two crossings of the Rio Grande below Albuquerque. A bridge was constructed across the Rio Grande on Central Avenue in 1931, Thus, after 1931, travelers could turn west at the 4th and Central intersection on a bypass and go about a mile west before turning south. Both US 66 and US 85 could go south with less congestion, and two bridge crossings of the Rio Grande were eliminated.

After 1933, NM 6 to the west was improved and travelers could go directly to Laguna from 4th and Central. Travel was greatly facilitated by the completion of the bridge over the Rio Puerco in 1933. Federally supplied funds, starting in 1931, were used to build this bridge and improve the short-cut. The Rio Puerco was a wide arroyo full of sand and proved to be serious hazard to automobile travel. It would take a major bridge to span it. The bridge was a 250 ft long "Through Truss." At the time, it was the longest single-span bridge of this type in the southwest. You can still see the bridge as you are traveling west on Interstate 40.

In 1937, the official US 66 alignment was officially changed. US 66 went from Santa Rosa through Albuquerque and proceeded on West Central up 9-mile hill towards Laguna. This was the formal realignment that permanently changed the function of the intersection at 4th and Central.

Table 2 summarizes the key activities associated with the development of the Laguna Cut-off. In 1925, Albuquerque Councilman and ex-officio mayor, Clyde Tingley, had proposed that the state construct a cut-off from Albuquerque to Laguna. Another important date in Table 2 is December 30, 1926. The State Highway Commission was meeting at the end of the Hannett administration. Charles Springer was the Chairman. They were aware of the progress of the construction of the Santa Rosa Cut-off and decided to authorize the Laguna Cut-off before the next administration took over. It appears they were committed to the goal of having a short east-west route through New Mexico. It is also recognized that they didn't know their own future within the commission when Governor Dillon came into office. The table shows some of the major follow-up actions that were taken after Governor Hannett left office.

TABLE 2 IMPORTANT DATES ASSOCIATED WITH LAGUNA CUT-OFF

Date	Action
June 8, 1925	Albuquerque Mayor Clyde Tingley Proposes Laguna Cut-off to Gov. Hannett
December 30, 1926	State Highway Commission approved the Laguna Cut-off as an extension of NM 6 just before Governor Hannett left office
April 1927	State Highway Commission authorized surveying of the Laguna Cut-off
1928	Three bridges on the Laguna Cut-off were constructed with state funds
1931	NM Highway Commission put western part of NM 6 in Federal Aid Projects
1931-1937	Laguna Cut-off was receiving Federal Funds for improvements
1933	250 ft. long Single Span Through Truss Bridge across the Rio Puerco was completed with Federal funds
1937-1985	Laguna Cut-off (western part of NM 6) became part of US 66

The federal government was completing the paving of its federal highways in 1937 and the two cut-offs were included. The new distance for Route 66 was 399 miles and this shorter distance was greatly appreciated by the interstate travelers. It is interesting to note that Clyde Tingley was the Governor of New Mexico when this final realignment occurred.

The after effect of this last realignment eliminated Isleta and Los Lunas from Route 66 tourist travel. They joined Santa Fe, Las Vegas (by proximity), and Bernalillo in losing this tourist revenue. These cities had to adjust to a greatly reduced tourist income. Santa Fe had lost the railroad and how a major east-west highway. It became "The City Different."

Increased traffic along NM 6 caused the town of Moriarty to change. The Santa Rosa short-cut terminated ½ mile north of Moriarty. There was a gas station at the intersection of the short-cut and US 470. Its owner had lobbied Governor Hannett to construct this short-cut in 1926. After it came, Mr Crossley, owner of the gas station, improved the area around the intersection and created a new town, called Buford, which was named for his son. Buford existed from 1935 until 1953, when Moriarty had moved far enough north to envelope Buford.

IMPACTS ON ALBUQUERQUE

Travel on the cut-offs was a boon to interstate tourists. Automobiles entering the state from the east went from under 200 vehicles per day in 1926 to nearly 1000 by 1940. From the west, crossings of the state line went from below 600 vehicles per day to nearly 1600 in the same time period. Clearly there were increases in the interstate traffic through New Mexico and tourism flourished. Evidence of this is reflected in the number and distribution of tourist courts. In 1935, there were 3 tourist courts on Central and 16 along Fourth Street. In 1941, there were 37 tourist courts on Central and this increased to 98 in 1955.

The increased east-west travel through Albuquerque caused it to change from being a linear city, with economic growth being focused along a north-south highway to a cruciform shaped city where there were two major highways providing pathways for tourists to travel through the city. Increased east-west traffic and the addition of the activities at Kirtland Air Force base in the 1940s brought an explosion in population to the northeast quadrant of Albuquerque. Central Avenue became the primary corridor for any travel downtown or through the city. In 1938, the State Fair was located on Central Avenue in what was thought to be open space. After the war, the State Fair area was surrounded by residential and commercial areas.

This change to the physical setting of Albuquerque caused another problem: **traffic congestion**. Figure 1 shows a photograph of traffic on Central Avenue at the 4th street intersection in 1951. The photograph shows two lanes of traffic in each direction and the evidence of parallel parking. Central Avenue had been widened and the old diagonal parking was replaced by parallel parking to provide the additional traffic lanes.

The photograph in Figure 1 shows a nice pattern of automobiles traveling on Central. This photo under-represents the traffic problem. Every motor vehicle possible: cars, trucks, semi-trucks, moving vans, ambulances, and motorcycles traveled along Central and 4th Street because they were the US highways supporting increasingly popular interstate travel. Figure 2 shows a photograph of Central Avenue near 1st street in 1950. This figure shows many of the different types of vehicles that were going through Albuquerque on US 66. The congestion is clearly evident.

Between 1940 and 1950, the city's population grew almost three times. This population explosion flooded the downtown shopping areas. In 1947, Erna Ferguson, granddaughter of New Town founder Franz Huning, wrote: "The downtown seemed to lure motorists 'to dash unsuspecting into a town that

seems to have ways in, but none out,' a dilemma confronting drivers that she attributed to the absence of 'well thought out controls.'"

The revised traffic lanes, as shown in Figure 1, led to reduced parking in the downtown area and this situation made things even more difficult for retail merchants. As time went on, downtown shoppers had to walk further distances to get to their favorite stores and this situation led to merchants trying to find locations that were more accessible. Retail businesses sought locations to the east in shopping centers and malls. Nob Hill, Winrock, and Coronado Shopping Centers emerged and a lot of downtown shopping moved uptown.



Figure 2 Photograph of First and Central in 1950 (Courtesy of Dick Ruddy)

Thus, the intersection of 4th and Central is a place of significant historical importance when considering the changes to the state tourist business and the development of the City of Albuquerque. Many interstate travelers were truly appreciative of the efforts that were undertaken to shorten the distance and travel time, but congestion as a result of conflict between local traffic and interstate traffic needs

became serious to residents and travelers. In later years, interstate travelers dreaded going through downtown Albuquerque. Albuquerque had to make radical adjustments to alleviate the burgeoning problems.

CONCLUSIONS

The establishment of US 66 in New Mexico had a profound impact on the state. The Intersection at 4th and Central reflects effects of actions caused by political philosophies and pressures. The Route 66 highway improvement in 1926 was generated by what some call a joke. Clearly the workers on the Santa Rosa Cut-off were participating in a joke. Whether Governor A. T. Hannett was seeking to get even with adversaries in Santa Fe or trying to improve interstate travel through New Mexico is left to the reader to judge. This is another mystery about Route 66 in the "Land of Enchantment." The unique intersection symbolizes major improvements to interstate travel through the state and also major changes to the layout of the City of Albuquerque in its need to accommodate increased traffic and provide viable retail opportunities.

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Appendix

