

DRAFT SANTA ROSA-LAGUNA SHORTCUT NOMINATION

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The Santa Rosa-Laguna Shortcut is that section of US Route 66 that was shortened by 107 miles due to the independent construction of the Santa Rosa and the Laguna Cut-offs. The two cut-offs were constructed after August of 1926 when Route 66 was officially designated and aligned through New Mexico and up to October of 1937 when Route 66 was officially rerouted along the new shortcut. The initial alignment of Route 66, coming from east to west, was to go through Tucumcari to Santa Rosa, then north to Romeroville, which was near Las Vegas, then to Santa Fe, then south to Bernalillo, Albuquerque, Los Lunas, then west towards Laguna, then to Grants, Gallup, and finally the state line.² The original route had a distance of 506 miles through the state. The final alignment would go from Santa Rosa directly through Albuquerque and follow a new cut-off towards Laguna, where it would conform to the original route west towards Grants. This shortened route would be 399 miles.² Figure 1 shows a map of the shortcut.

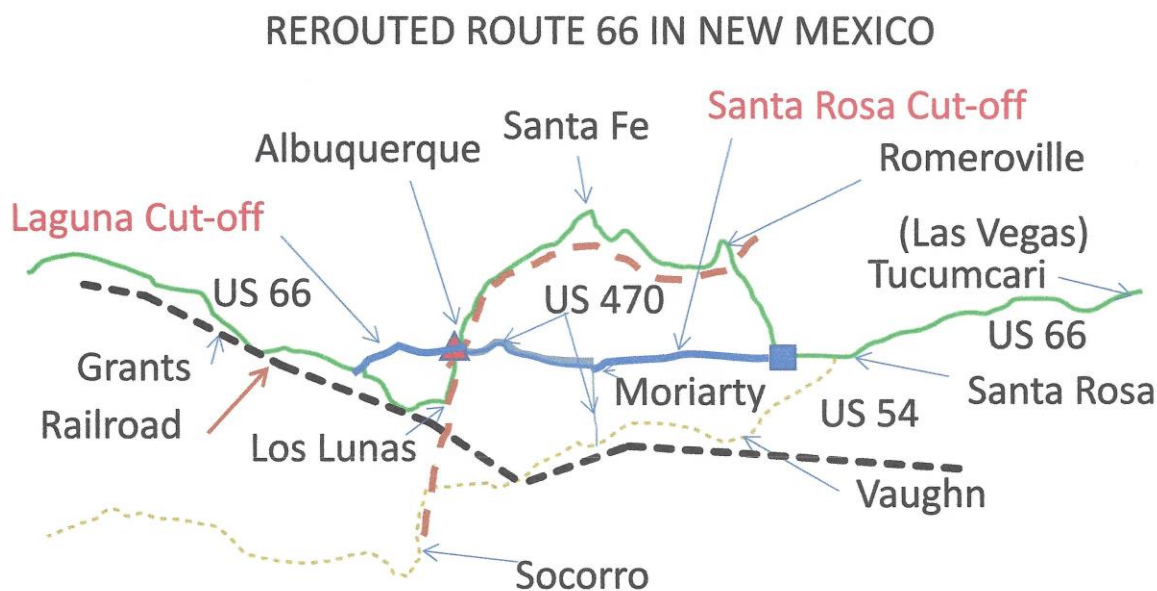


Figure 1 Map of Route 66 between 1926 and 1937.

This document provides background information regarding the formation and implementation of the shortcut and explains the actions taken by the State of New Mexico to make this significant shortening of Route 66 a reality by 1937. It is hoped that this document will provide sufficient stimulus to those reviewing nominations for a listing in the National Register of Historic Places, so that a formal nomination can be made. A recommended place to identify the implementation of the Santa Rosa-Laguna Shortcut is the intersection of 4th Street and Central Avenue in Albuquerque. Fourth Street contained Route 66 from 1926-1937 and Central Avenue from 1937-1985.

The activities devoted to the implementation of the Santa Rosa-Laguna Shortcut are summarized in Table 1. Milestones have been established to highlight key events that chronicle the creation and eventual implementation of the shortcut through New Mexico. These activities will be discussed in detail in this nomination.

Table 1 Milestones associated with implementation of Santa Rosa-Laguna Shortcut into U S 66 alignment

No.	Date	Activity
1	June 9, 1925	NM Legislature approval of Santa Rosa Cut-off as NM 6 and Clyde Tingley's proposal for the Laguna Cut-off
2	Jan. 3, 1927	Recognition of the initiation of US 66 as a Federal Highway, Governor R. C. Dillon's acceptance of Governor A. T. Hannett's accelerated construction of Santa Rosa Cut-off, and NM State Highway Commission approval of Laguna Cut-off for addition to NM 6
3	June, 1930	Completion of N M construction of Central Avenue Bridge over the Rio Grande as part of Laguna Cut-off
4	October 1931	Completion of final alignment of Laguna Cut-off beyond Central Avenue Bridge and acceptance of NM 6 as a certified public highway that could receive Federal Funds
5	1933	Completion of Rio Puerco Bridge as part of Laguna Cut-off
6	July 11, 1937	Completion of Central Avenue Underpass as final structure in Santa Rosa Cut-off
7	Oct. 14, 1937	Acceptance by the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads of the paved roadways, bridges and underpass of NM 6 as the official reroute of U S 66

Some background is necessary to explain the origin and function of this important undertaking. The state was actively looking at several east-west routes that would carry traffic from Chicago to Los Angeles. Competitive routes were routed through Albuquerque and another through Socorro.² In August of 1926, Route 66 was established, and the route selected involving using existing roads that go through Albuquerque.

Governor A. T. Hannett took office on January 1, 1925 for a two-year term with the option to serve a second term if re-elected. Governor Hannett had served on the State Highway Commission for two years before he took office so he was familiar with the emerging federal highway system roadways that were being defined and partially funded with federal monies. He knew that the initial alignment of Route 66 could be shortened by approximately 90 miles by constructing a shortcut from Santa Rosa to Albuquerque.² The shortcut could be achieved with the implementation of two cut-offs: the Santa Rosa and the Laguna.

Milestone 1 was selected to document events that occurred before Route 66 even existed. The Santa Rosa Cut-off, designated as NM 6, was defined and approved by the NM legislature in March of 1925.³ It would be located in two counties: Guadalupe and Torrance. Each of these counties would raise funds for construction of the cut-off. Guadalupe County did raise funds while Torrance County did not.³ Torrance County had 27 miles of virgin land that needed to be cleared and graded, and this would have been costly for a county budget. When Route 66 was established in 1926, the federal government started US 470, which later became US 366, to go from Willard, NM north through Moriarty and then west down Tijeras Canyon to Albuquerque. The eastern advancement of the Santa Rosa Cut-off started where US 470 turned west just north of Moriarty. US 470 became US 366 in 1931.⁴ The Santa Rosa-Laguna Shortcut was composed of NM 6 from Santa Rosa to Moriarty, US 366 from Moriarty to Albuquerque, and NM 6 from Albuquerque to near Laguna.

Clyde Tingley, who was ex-officio mayor of Albuquerque and was also Director of District 3 Maintenance for the State Highway Department, wrote a letter to Governor Hannett on Highway Department stationery proposing the Laguna Cut-off on June 9, 1925.⁵ The new cut-off would be a direct route from Albuquerque to a place near Laguna, which would bypass Los Lunas and save 17 miles for Route 66. Thus, Milestone 1 identifies the time when the Santa Rosa Cut-off was authorized and when the Laguna Cut-off had been proposed.

Political actions after an election in 1926 started the work to initiate the construction of the Santa Rosa Cut-off. In November of 1926, Governor Hannett was not re-elected, and he was motivated to do some unfinished work on Route 66 before he left office. He decided to construct the cut-off from Santa-Rosa to Albuquerque. Sixty-Nine miles of the 76 miles of road between Santa Rosa and Moriarty would have to be constructed during the month of December of 1926 using state funds, or it could be terminated by incoming Republican Governor Richard Dillon, who had campaigned to keep the existing route through Santa Fe.⁶ Governor Hannett was afraid that the cut-off would be lost in politics for an undeterminable period of time, so he authorized construction of the Santa Rosa cut-off with the provision that it had to be operable by January 1, 1927, when he went out of office. There are several articles that discuss this decision as "Hannett's Joke." This document will not dwell on the details of why and how the Santa Rosa Cut-off was established. Governor Hannett said in his memoirs: "Several writers have considered my project and the method by which I completed the project as a joke on the small towns of New Mexico; they are entirely wrong. I was wide awake to the possibilities of a transcontinental road which would eventually attract a large amount of commercial and tourist trade." ⁷

Governor Hannett's decision to construct the shortcut before his term ended had difficulties. Included in the segment was a 27 mile stretch, primarily in Torrance County that had to be cut over virgin land. Right-of-way had not been obtained. ASCE Member E. B. Bail, who was Santa Fe District Construction Engineer, was appointed as the Project Leader.⁶ E. B. organized the project as being constructed by two teams, one being initiated to go west from near Santa Rosa and the other being initiated with an eastward direction starting at a point just north of Moriarty. Highway department maintenance personnel did the construction work with the thought that they would be out of a job in 1927 as new Governors usually replace maintenance personnel as well as some management when they come into office.⁶ Funding for the accelerated project was to be charged to the State Maintenance Department and maintenance department equipment was to be used in the construction.⁸

Las Vegas District Maintenance Supervisor, Sam Fulton, was to head the westward leg and Grant County Engineer, Burton Dwyer, who was an ASCE member that was not a member of the Highway Department, was selected to head the eastward leg. This latter leg included the 27 miles of virgin land and Dwyer was familiar with clearing and grading needs of undeveloped land in his role as Grant County Engineer.⁶ As a side note, in 1935, Dwyer was appointed as the State Highway Engineer by Governor Clyde Tingley and continued in that role for 17 years.

The cut-off was to be constructed in 31 days. There would be no time-off for workers over Christmas or New Years. Equipment available was blade graders, drags, and surplus World War I Caterpillar tractors. The Moriarty leg had open country for 8 miles and then 27 miles of pinon covered hills. Pinon trees were pulled out with a tractor and the team would do rough and finish grading. The Santa Rosa leg would use existing Route 66 for 7 miles and then would grade a primitive trail for 34 miles with a steep grade near Palma. ⁶ With regard to right-of-way, teams were to secure permission of ranchers and tear down fences and cut across pastures. Fences would be replaced with gates over the roadway.

The teams worked through a major snowstorm and sabotage by personnel from towns that would be bypassed with the installation of the shortcut. Equipment operators often had to sleep in their vehicles to protect them. New Santa Fe District Construction Engineer (Frank Kimball) was dispatched by Governor Dillon on January 1, 1927 to shut the project down. His departure was delayed a couple of days because of weather. His first official workday was January 3, 1927. When he arrived that day, he found that there was traffic on the Santa Rosa Cut-off. Governor Dillon accepted the shortcut and it remained as part of the NM highway system as NM 6 thereafter.⁶

The successful progress of construction activities of the Santa Rosa Cut-off was watched closely, and the State Highway Commission met to take actions before the change in state governors. On December 28-29, 1926, near the end of the Santa Rosa Cut-off construction period, the State Highway Commission approved the Laguna Cut-off. ⁹ It appears that the commission thought that the Santa Rosa-Laguna shortcut was feasible and that the Laguna Cut-off should be defined and initiated to complete the overall shortcut.

January 3, 1927 was an important date in Route 66 history and is considered as Milestone 2. On this date new Republican Governor Richard Dillon accepted the accomplishment of the outgoing governor and was committed to furthering the shortcut.⁶ The Santa Rosa Cut-off had been successfully cleared and graded, and construction of the Laguna Cut-off had been approved by Governor Hannett's highway commission just a few days before. Governor Dillon retained Charles Springer as Chairman of the State Highway Commission in order to provide some continuity as Route 66 was being activated in the state.⁸ With the action by the commission, use of state funds to survey and initiate work on the Laguna Cut-off was started early in 1927.^{1a} Governor Dillon did not fire the workers who had worked so hard to build the Santa Rosa Cut-off⁶ He did reassign E. B. Bail within the highway department where he continued to work on Route 66 shortcut projects. Frank Kimball became his replacement.

Proponents of a shortcut through New Mexico had to deal with several issues. The shortcut would change the direction of Route 66 in Albuquerque. The original route went north-south along 4th street and was parallel to the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway (AT&SF). Realigning Route 66 in an east-west direction would make four changes necessary. The first was that Central Avenue would be the designated street to carry transcontinental traffic. This was an advantage because downtown Central

Avenue had a 80 ft. right-of-way while other streets, like 4th Street had 60 ft. widths.¹⁰ Additional lanes could be added as the cross-state traffic increased. A continual thorn in the side of the rerouting efforts in the state highway department, was the fact that businesses along the original Route 66 north-south route would be bypassed. Shortcut supporters came from Route 66 officials in other states and towns in New Mexico. For instance, a new community of Buford was created near Moriarty, and existed from 1935 to 1953, when Moriarty expanded to the north and engulfed Buford.¹¹

Use of Central Avenue brought about the need for two major engineering projects in Albuquerque: a new bridge on the Rio Grande to carry Central Avenue over the river to support the Laguna Cut-off (Milestone 3), and construction of a grade separation between highway traffic on Route 66 and the AT&SF tracks (Milestone 6) to support the Santa Rosa Cut-off. Final acceptance of this cut-off would also require construction of a major bridge across the Rio Puerco some 20 miles to the west (Milestone 5).¹²

As ex-officio mayor of Albuquerque, Clyde Tingley arranged to get the State Highway Department to authorize construction of the bridge across the Rio Grande on Central Avenue in 1929.¹³ An additional need for the bridge was for citizens to be able to get to the airport, which was west of the Rio Grande. This bridge was finished June of 1930.

After this bridge completion, the city dealt with pressures to run the cut-off traffic away from local communities where tourism could flourish. Highway 66 officials wanted the shortcut to be as traffic friendly as possible. On one exchange, in 1931, the officials criticized the protesters saying: “they were wrong; that the building of a better road would bring more tourists to all parts of the state, and that if Highway 66 were improved, it would be getting more tourists right now.”^{1c}

Milestone 4 came when the federal officials included NM 6 in roads that could be funded under the 7% provision in the Federal Highway Act.^{1d} As background, the Federal Highway Act of 1921 expanded the role of the federal government to ensure that roads were state to state. The federal government established Federal Aid Projects (FAPs) to help fund highway developments. A total of 3/7 of state roads could receive federal funding for construction. Minimum federal contributions would be 50%. Seven percent of certified public road mileage in a state could be included in a FAP. States would maintain the roads after they were built. In 1931, NM 6 became part of this certified public road mileage.^{1e}

After 1931, the Route 66 officials released funds for the final grading and eventual paving of NM 6 so it could be reconfigured as part of US 66. One of the early commitments was construction of the Rio Puerco Bridge. The Rio Puerco had become a difficult river to cross with vehicle traffic, and a special bridge was needed for expected heavy Route 66 traffic. The Rio Puerco bridge is a Parker through-truss bridge that spans 250 ft (Milestone 5). It has been recognized in the National Register of Historic Places.¹²

Construction of the Central Avenue Underpass as the grade-separation structure for the railroad occurred in 1937 as the last structural project needed to complete the Santa Rosa Cut-off (Milestone 6).¹¹ Clyde Tingley was governor and Works Progress Administration (WPA), later to be the Work Project Administration in 1939, monies were used for the construction. Actually, three projects that helped Albuquerque were undertaken with these funds: the Central Avenue Underpass, the Tijeras Avenue Underpass, and the Coal Avenue Viaduct.^{1d} An underpass was constructed rather than a viaduct

because of right-of-way considerations as Central Avenue entered downtown Albuquerque from the east.^{1e}

The major north-south street, 1st Street was located less than 300 feet from the tracks. The Alvarado Hotel and YMCA were on 1st Street and bordered the Central Avenue right-of way. Commercial properties, with track sidings, were located next to the tracks on the east side and bordered the Central Avenue right-of-way. The city, state and AT&SF highway officials worked together to reach a feasible underpass solution. Because of considerations to protect the Central Avenue-1st Street intersection, the tracks were raised 4-5 feet to improve the street grade going from the underpass into the 1st Street intersection. The AT&SF designed the underpass and made the track raising accommodations.^{1f}

The final milestone, Milestone 7, occurred on October 14, 1937.^{1g} This was when NM 6 was officially designated as a federal highway and was designated as U S 66. Since 1933, traffic along the route had increased and there probably was more ceremony occurring than increase in traffic on that day. Route 66 now covered 399 miles through the state of New Mexico. By 1938, the entire length of Route 66 in New Mexico had been graded and paved.

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.¹¹ This intersection is symbolic of a place that identifies this marvelous realignment of US 66. 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. Initially, US 66 was an east-west highway that went from Chicago to Los Angeles through a 506 mile 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, and US 66 covered just 399 miles. The story of the realignment of US 66 in New Mexico is just another chapter in the storied history of this glorious route.

The nomination of the Santa Rosa-Laguna Shortcut for the National Register of Historic Places is highlighted by the following:

1. The Santa Rosa-Laguna shortcut provided the most efficient method to reduce the distance for transcontinental highway traffic through New Mexico on Route 66.
2. The shortcut involved major civil engineering design and construction projects: Central Avenue Bridge; Rip Puerco Bridge, and the Central Avenue Underpass.
3. The shortcut construction was accelerated soon after the inauguration of U S 66 traffic in 1926 because of political pressures resulting from an election in November of that year.
4. The establishment of the Santa Rosa-Laguna shortcut was the largest rerouting process associated with Route 66.
5. Highway travel on a wider Central Avenue through Albuquerque was changed significantly to improve transcontinental traffic.
6. The shortcut, which was about 150 miles long, saved 107 miles of travel over Route 66.
7. The shortcut utilized the best street in Albuquerque (Central Avenue) to align Route 66.

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