

The San Luis Valley *Cone Zone* Survival Guide



A guide to helping your business survive during road construction



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SAN LUIS VALLEY
DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES GROUP

TAKE ACTION TO PROTECT YOUR BUSINESS

Attention business owners—if your business is located in a road construction project area, you will likely be financially impacted. According to recent surveys, 68% of the business respondents indicated that their revenues declined during a road construction project.

But just like your building needs a new roof now and then, road construction is necessary every few decades—pavement, sewers and utilities don't last forever.

And remember, once reconstruction is complete, that corridor is likely to be construction-free for years, and your business will benefit from the project's improvements.

So don't panic; there are things you can do to mitigate the effects on your business. It will require patience; unforeseen issues that delay or lengthen projects always arise, so recognize that state and local governments and project contractors are doing their utmost to resolve issues. It's in their best interests, too, to complete projects on time.

To help businesses survive road construction, the San Luis Valley Development Resources Group created this survival guide containing tips and suggestions for surviving the construction process.

Plan carefully so that once the project is completed, your business can continue to thrive.

GET INVOLVED EARLY

The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) typically includes road construction projects within its Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) which can be found at <http://www.coloradodot.info/business/budget> several years in advance of when construction is to occur.

As early as a year in advance of the start of construction, CDOT will start the process of reaching out to businesses within the impacted corridor. This will likely include mailings to business owners inviting them to planning meeting(s) for the project.

Your concerns, questions, and suggestions are very important at this early stage in the planning process as CDOT and local governments still have the greatest flexibility to incorporate changes into the project at this time.

Watch for mailings and public service announcements in your newspapers. Plan to attend these meetings to learn more about the project and to provide any input that you may have.

This is the time to contact your local government official and open the lines of communication. If they are aware of your concerns and wishes early on, they can be a better advocate for your business community throughout the construction planning process.

Reach out to businesses in other neighborhoods that have dealt with construction projects. Discuss how they prepared for the project and what actions they took during and after construction. Ask what worked well and what they'd have done differently—there's no need to reinvent the wheel.

Every December, most counties, cities, and towns adopt a capital budget, which includes the final list of road construction

projects for the upcoming year. At this time, local

Provide a list of special events or other dates that the Contractor can plan to work around as part of the initial project scheduling.

governments will begin preparing bid documents for the projects. For most projects, local governments will release bids and hire a contractor during the spring prior to the start of the summer construction season.

Once a contractor is hired to complete the work, most local governments will host another round of pre-construction meetings with the contractor and business owners. The goal of these meetings will not be to gather input, but rather to ensure everyone is aware of the upcoming construction schedule and pertinent construction contacts.

Disruption from construction can be mitigated if there is proper coordination between business owners, CDOT, local government officials, and contractors.

Remember, the earlier your concerns are voiced, the better prepared the project team will be to respond to them. To this end, it is in your best interest as a business owner to keep abreast of current and upcoming construction projects. Communicate with your local government officials, watch the county and city/town websites for updates, join local business organizations and attend as many meetings as you can.

BUSINESS OWNERS CAN CONTRIBUTE IDEAS AND MAKE CONCERNS KNOWN

- ~ Take note of all communications from the city and/or CDOT and attend all meetings.
- ~ Since projects change, this will ensure you have the most current information and can organize your business accordingly.
- ~ There's strength in numbers. Partner with other neighborhood businesses. Make sure to communicate with other local leaders so you can band together and make concerns heard.
- ~ Develop a group plan for staying in contact with the city, construction project leaders and customers.
- ~ Consider assigning one person from your business organization as liaisons to the city and the construction group. That person can attend planning meetings to funnel business concerns to the groups. *"It's hard for small businesses to find the time; we found the liaison model very effective,"* said Mary Carbine, ED of Madison's Central Business Improvement District.
- ~ Work closely with CDOT and city engineering staff in the pre-bid stage, before construction contracts are written, to ensure the contracts include business friendly requirements. These might include regularly scheduled meetings before and during construction with business owners and construction staff.
- ~ Downtown businesses may be able to negotiate requirements that sidewalk access to businesses be available at all times, that construction be suspended and sites cleaned during critical business days, such as Stampede, and that contractors post "all businesses are open" signs.
- ~ Request **"Business Name – Parking Here"** signs be included in the bid quantities for the project and included in bid documents and project budget. This will create a professional and uniform look to way finding signs for individual businesses along the contractor corridor.
- ~ Be sure to provide business names to the contractor for early fabrication and delivery of the signs.

Create a map of open and closed routes for businesses to keep by their registers so they could guide visitors.

It is a proactive way to counter the perception that you can't find your way around downtown.

BUSINESS PLANNING: WHAT YOU CAN DO BEFORE CONSTRUCTION BEGINS

As a business owner, you are always planning and improving on your business model. When you're informed ahead of time, road construction is something you can prepare for. Here are some

suggestions from business owners who've been through the construction process already.

- **Work with your employees to develop a game plan.** Talk to your employees about the process and strategies to stay prosperous during construction. Discuss marketing efforts and allow employees to offer ideas and share any concerns they may have. Your employees will appreciate the opportunity, and the dialogue may spark new ideas that will benefit your business.

- **Identify marketing, advertising and design firms** in the neighborhood that might provide pro bono assistance.

- **Keep your staff lean.** It's an unfortunate reality, but if you expect a significant decrease in customers once construction begins, you may need to consider keeping a lean staff. If someone quits in the spring, you may decide to keep the position vacant if there is a construction project coming up that summer. Other options might include job sharing or reducing hours.

- **Reduce inventory.** When possible, reducing inventory can be a useful strategy to respond to slower periods due to construction.

- **Contact lenders.** Inform current lenders of the upcoming project and see if there are opportunities to restructure existing debt and lines of credit in light of potentially diminished revenues. It's important to get a line of credit during a good time when sales are up. That way you'll have it when and if there's an emergency.

- **Gather customer contact information.** Donna Wehe, Director of the San Luis Valley Small Business Development Center, advises that you work on gathering customers' contact information before construction begins so you can keep them apprised of road conditions, best routes and promotional specials during the construction period. You might consider sending weekly e-mails to customers with the idea that if you keep them informed and in the loop, they won't be as likely to change their buying habits during construction.

- **Give the Contractor a contact list of emails and** phone numbers of all businesses so they can be sent weekly updates by the contractor. These updates should be delivered no later than Friday morning for

weekend or a day before a holiday or other prime shopping period.

- **Inform customers months in advance.** Keeping your customers informed gives them the ability to maneuver construction and access your business. Examples can include putting up signs or passing out copies of alternative routes to the business before the project.

- **Use Facebook, Twitter and other social media.** These are excellent channels for providing updates and reminding customers you are open for business.

- **Keep your vendors in the loop.** Just like your customers, your delivery persons will need to know how to get product to your store. If you can, stock up or arrange for deliveries to be less frequently. Otherwise, give your delivery person alternative routes to the store before the project begins so they will have the ability to maneuver construction and access your business.

- **Investigate whether grants** are available through philanthropic organizations, nonprofit organizations or local government to assist with your communications campaign.

- **If Park Here** signs are not part of the construction budget, strongly urge each business to pool their assets to get signs made PRIOR to the start of construction.

Inform your customers months in advance

Plan ahead for cash flow issues

Send a newsletter to customers weekly

Develop coupon books usable at area businesses

Don't relocate!

WHAT TO EXPECT ONCE CONSTRUCTION BEGINS AND HOW TO MITIGATE PROBLEMS

Make sure signs put up by construction crews make sense for your business. If they don't, contact the project supervisor.

Dust and noise are both inevitable during a construction project and areas where you will not have a great deal of control. Traffic delays and blocked access routes are also

difficulties that may arise during construction. Here are some ideas to deal with these issues.

- **Allocate more time and money to cleaning.** While there's little you can do to reduce the dust and noise of a construction site, you can focus on keeping your own business as dust-free as possible. If you only clean your windows once a week right now, you might consider increasing that during the construction period. You may also decide to allocate more time or money for general cleaning and upkeep, in order to keep construction dust to a minimum.
- **Create a friendly rapport with construction workers.** While the on-site construction workers aren't the appropriate people to contact about concerns, it can only improve the situation if you create a friendly rapport with them. You might supply complimentary ice water to crews in the summer. This said, it is important to emphasize that **construction workers are following instructions from their supervisors, and communicating concerns to supervisors and project leaders is the best way to get results.** Know who those supervisors are and keep their contact information close at hand.
- **Make sure signage is clear.** Traffic delays will also be inevitable during a construction project, but signage can help a great deal. **See what sort of signs are going up to direct traffic and make sure they make sense for your customers.** Construction crews aren't aware of your needs and often it's just a matter of asking. Also, make sure there's signage properly directing your customers to parking spaces. The issuance of temporary signage is usually the

responsibility of the local government project manager who will be different for each project. There are three types of temporary business signs that can be installed to assist customers: driveway signs, alternate business access signs, and directional signs.

- **Driveway Signs** help to tell motorists where to turn since construction can make it difficult for motorists to find the driveway.

- **Alternate Business Access Signs** are installed by the contractor. These signs state "Alternate Business Access" and have an arrow on them. They are placed in advance of intersections to inform motorists where to turn.

- **Directional Signs** are used to direct the motorist using a side street or alley toward your business. The business provides and installs these signs.

~ If you wish to place any temporary signs—highly recommended to provide easier access for your customers during construction—you must contact

Expect the Unexpected

Good planning and preparation for construction is critical to a successful project. Still, things will come up during construction that you don't expect such as unexpected rain, buried utility lines, or underground fuel tanks that aren't shown in the records.

Construction crews do their best to stay with the plan they laid out when the project started, but sometimes adjustments in schedules are necessary when the unexpected happens.

your local public works department to find out if you need a temporary permit.

- **Consider using a back entrance for better customer access.** Make sure there are signs directing your customers to the right entrance, and, if you have a back door, consider using it. A True Value hardware store that suffered through a long construction project in Lansing, Michigan, credits its survival to having a back entrance to their store.

TIPS FOR SURVIVAL ONCE CONSTRUCTION BEGINS

Communication will be critical during the entire construction project. As a business owner, you must communicate with the construction project managers, your employees, other businesses and, most importantly, your customers.

- **Keep project manager's contact information close at hand.**
- **Provide directions and access information for your employees.** Don't let them make the area more congested. Depending on the number of people you employ, you might consider offering a carpool from an agreed upon location.
- **Join local business organizations or consider forming one.** Strength is found in numbers. Make sure to communicate with other local leaders so you can band together and make concerns heard.
- **Provide signs to guide customers to your business.** Once again, go out and make sure signs put up by construction crews make sense for your business. If they don't, contact the project supervisor.
- **Deliver products to your customers.** To reach customers unable or unwilling to navigate the construction area, institute a catering business to bring your products to your customers.
- **Keep on Message.** Consider keeping a script next to your phone, so that you and your employees have quick and easy directions to provide to customers. Make sure all your employees know what to say and how to say it.
- **Stay informed!** Attend all public meetings relating to the construction project. Be sure to open all city correspondences.

The business owner made sure to advertise this rear entrance and parking in every radio spot and newspaper ad the company purchased.

Invite the contractors into your businesses – considering staying open later or opening earlier if construction crews will be around – after all, they have to eat too!

The City of Monte Vista created a map of businesses that were willing to work with the construction crews.

- **Extend business hours.** Consider being open later in the evening after construction crews are finished for the day. Be flexible to accommodate customer demands and other perceived needs.
 - **Make the construction work for you.** If you were considering a remodel for your business, why not do it during the construction period. Use this slower period to get things done that you haven't had time to address.
 - **Consider pooling advertising resources with other businesses** in the construction zone to let the public know you are still open for business.
 - **Create a professionally prepared local guide map** showing location and types of businesses. Make it colorful, compact, easy to read, carry, and distribute.
 - **Be positive.** Encourage and generate a positive, healthy environment to support your staff and ensure retention of valued employees.
 - **Be creative with your Promotions.** Businesses have come up with lots of creative ways to make the construction period fun for customers.
- ~ Establish your own version of "Where's Waldo," inviting customers to search store windows each week for a hidden character. People then submit the location into an orange barrel and these names were used for a drawing every week.

~ Some businesses have used prize drawings to attract customers. Do something above and beyond what you

would usually do in your business to attract customers.

YOU MADE IT! POST-CONSTRUCTION— NOW WHAT?

Once construction is over, it's time to focus on recapturing market share and winning back customers.

- **Consider promotion and advertising** to let customers know the roadways are free. Promote the new image and convenience of the completed roadway.
- **Celebrate the project's completion.** Take advantage of your Chamber membership by holding a ribbon cutting ceremony and invite the news media to the ceremony. Or consider pooling resources with local businesses for a grand celebration and/or shared advertisement.
- **Host a Grand Reopening Event.** Sponsor a grand reopening for all businesses impacted by the project. Invite members of the media, elected officials, businesses and the general public. A ribbon-cutting was a great opportunity to celebrate the completed road construction project with the businesses and their customers.
- **Support other businesses** that undergo a similar process. Give them your patronage and provide helpful feedback based on your experiences

ADDITIONAL BUSINESS RESOURCES

Local Business Resources:

San Luis Valley Development Resources Group
Michael Wisdom, Executive Director
610 State Avenue, Suite 200 - PO Box 300
Alamosa, CO 81101
719-589-6099, 719-589-6299 (fax), www.slvdrq.org

Small Business Development Center
Donna Wehe, Director
The Depot
610 State Avenue, Suite 120
Alamosa, CO 81101
719-589-3682
donna@slv-sbdc.com

Local Project Coordinator:

Invite a construction crew to sit outside of your shop during the lunch break and talk to kids and families about the ongoing project. Trucks and heavy equipment are a big draw for kids.

Construction Contractor:

Colorado Department of Transportation:

To get involved with the state transportation planning process:

<http://www.coloradodot.info/programs/statewide-planning/mpo-rural-planning.html>

Other Important Names, Addresses, Phone Numbers, and Emails



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