



## **Route 66 Centennial Coordination Group & Stakeholder Meeting**

November 19, 2024, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm  
700 E. Roosevelt, Grants, New Mexico 87020

### **Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Vice Chair Raymond Mondragon.

### **Roll Call**

#### *Commissioners Present*

Raymond Mondragon (Vice Chair)  
Elmer Torres  
Evan Williams  
Johnny Pena  
Scott Verhines  
Acting Secretary Lancing Adams (NMTD)  
Angelica Trujillo (Proxy for Secretary Ricky Serna- DOT)  
Daniel Gutierrez (EDD -Designate)  
Deputy Secretary Danielle Gilliam (NMENV - Designate)

#### *Commissioners Not Present*

Chair Bill Lee  
Alicia Ortega  
Deputy Secretary Michelle Roberts (DCA – Designate)

### **Welcome & Introductions**

Vice Chair Mondragon welcomed everybody and thanked everyone for being at the Coordination Group Stakeholder Meeting. He noted that there are sign language interpreters that are available for the meeting. Vice Chair Mondragon then introduced Les Gaines, Executive Director of the Grants/Cibola County Chamber of Commerce to provide a welcome from the community.

Les Gaines welcomed everyone to the community and requested that if the attendees have a moment to spend some time, look around and see how cool Grants really is. He noted that Grants is a great place to do outdoor recreation. Gaines then thanked everyone for coming.

Vice Chair Mondragon thanked Gaines for his welcome and noted that the committee has a quorum and that he will be chairing the meeting since Chair Bill Lee is not at the

meeting. He then noted that we are here to celebrate the spirit of the iconic mother road, its rich history, the cultural landmarks, and the people who bring it to life every day. He stated that this adventure is about more than the mile we travel, rather its about building connections, sharing stories and embracing the unique charm of each community along the way.

### **Motion to Approve the Agenda**

Vice Chair Mondragon directed Coordination Group members to the next item on the agenda—approval of the agenda.

Motion by Member Elmer Torres to approve the agenda, seconded by Member Johnny Pena.

### **Presentation; Lancing Adams, Acting Secretary, NM Tourism Department**

Vice Chair Mondragon introduced NM Tourism Department Acting Secretary Lancing Adams to start off with the first presentation of the day.

Acting Secretary Lancing Adams noted that he wanted to give a quick update on the New Mexico Tourism Department activities related to Route 66. He stated that the department did receive \$2.5 million to support Route 66 promotion in preparation for the 2026 Centennial Celebration. He noted that the funds would be divided into three initiatives, including national, international advertising; New Mexico Magazine Feature; and Route 66 Centennial Grant Program that are eligible for the funds.

Adams noted that they will be doing some international marketing in cooperation with Brand USA. He also stated that they are again asking for another \$2.5 million during this upcoming legislative session. Regarding New Mexico Magazine he stated they will be doing a robust feature of Route 66. He then noted the grant program, which has three tracks, marketing and promotions, infrastructure and destination enhancements, and special events.

Adams spoke about how the department commissioned a study on domestic and international interest in the Route 66 Centennial. He noted they found that about 13 percent of all potential visitors are aware of the Centennial and that when they were made aware, 57 percent said that information made them more likely to travel. Adams stated that this creates an opportunity to create awareness, especially in the southwest. He stated the department is working with partners to make sure everyone is packaging itineraries so that people are including New Mexico on as a destination on their travel.

Adams stated that related to the grant program \$400,000 was allocated to marketing and promotion; \$1.04 million to infrastructure and destination enhancement, and \$70,000 to special events. Adams then went on to show on the slides who the grant recipients were, what the project were, and the specific fund allocations for each project.

Adams noted that we have some solid ideas that are coming out of these stakeholder meetings and have had a lot of engagement from the communities. He stated he is excited about the work and what we will all do in the future.

### **Presentation: Nate Huff, President, Tourism Exchange USA**

Vice Chair Mondragon welcomed second guest speaker for the meeting—Nate Huff, President, Tourism Exchange USA. Vice Chair Mondragon noted that the Exchange is a B2B digital tourism marketplace that facilitates real time exchange of live inventory between suppliers and distributors for whole worldwide distribution across multiple categories of tourism products. He also noted that Nate and his team are working to support Route 66 during the Centennial and beyond with the Tourism Exchange. Vice Chair Mondragon also noted the Exchange is all about helping small and mid-sized businesses to get their tourism offerings connected to potential visitors locally, nationally and around the world.

Nate Huff stated that he will give a little bit of background just to sort of ground us in why we're even talking about this and why New Mexico and Brand USA and the Commission are looking at tourism exchange to help power economic impact through Centennial.

Huff introduced Tourism Exchange USA, a digital marketplace designed to connect small and medium-sized tourism businesses with global travel distributors. He emphasized the growing demand for digital accessibility in tourism, noting that 80% of travel bookings are now conducted online. Huff discussed the platform's ability to bridge the digital divide, providing free booking systems for small businesses and enabling them to showcase their services on major travel platforms like TripAdvisor, Google, and Expedia.

Huff highlighted Route 66 as a key opportunity for attracting international visitors. The Tourism Exchange focuses on actionable solutions to integrate small businesses into global distribution channels, fostering economic growth along the iconic highway. Upcoming efforts include onboarding Route 66 businesses by June 2025 and promoting itineraries at global trade shows. The initiative also aims to provide accessible resources, such as educational Zoom sessions and templates, to help communities and businesses participate effectively.

### **Presentation: Matt Robinson, Gallup-McKinley County Route 66 Committee**

Vice Chair Mondragon welcomed the third guest speaker for the meeting—Matt Robinson, Gallup-McKinley County Route 66 Committee.

Matt Robinson shared Gallup's strategic initiatives, emphasizing the city's role as a cultural and economic hub along Route 66. Robinson described Gallup's rich history as a trading post and its integration of diverse tribal cultures. Current projects include downtown revitalization through signage updates, public art installations, and event

programming that celebrates Gallup's unique heritage. He noted the city's growing reputation as a gateway to Route 66, drawing visitors for its cultural showcases and vibrant community events.

Robinson discussed specific beautification and branding efforts, such as new signage, mural projects, and cultural sculptures made from reclaimed materials. He highlighted collaborations with state programs and local artists to strengthen Gallup's identity as a destination for Route 66 tourism. Future plans include expanding outdoor recreational opportunities and maintaining Gallup's historic significance in promoting Route 66 as a vital tourist attraction.

**Presentation: Rose Eason, Executive Director, GallupARTS**

Vice Chair Mondragon welcomed the fourth guest speaker for the meeting—Rose Eason, Executive Director, GallupARTS.

Rose Eason emphasized the pivotal role of arts and culture in Gallup's Route 66 Centennial preparations. Gallup Arts' flagship project is the Gallup New Deal Art Virtual Museum, which unites a collection of over 120 artworks from the 1930s and 1940s into a digital platform. This initiative, supported by \$500,000 in grant funding, aims to make Gallup's artistic heritage accessible for education and tourism. Complementing this effort are in-person tours, allowing visitors to experience Gallup's art in its original settings.

Eason highlighted Gallup Arts' contributions to downtown revitalization through public art installations and exhibits at Art 123 Gallery, which regularly showcases local talent. Other initiatives include augmented reality projects and interactive art experiences like the Art-o-mat, a retrofitted vending machine selling miniature works of art. These efforts aim to attract Route 66 travelers, showcase Gallup's cultural vibrancy, and position the city as a key destination for Centennial celebrations.

**Presentation: Denise Hanson, Grants MainStreet and Les Gaines, Grants/Cibola County Chamber of Commerce**

Vice Chair Mondragon welcomed the fifth set of guest speakers for the meeting—Denise Hanson, Grants MainStreet and Les Gaines, Grants/Cibola County Chamber of Commerce

Les Gaines and Denise Hanson outlined Grants-Cibola County's rapid progress in beautification and tourism development for the Centennial. Mural projects, supported by matching grants, have transformed downtown Grants with three completed murals and more in progress. They highlighted collaborations with local and state organizations to enhance visitor experiences, including digital marketing campaigns and signage improvements. They also introduced new long-term initiatives, such as infrastructure upgrades to Fire and Ice Park, which will feature improved lighting and sound systems for events.

They described ongoing efforts to integrate local history and culture into Route 66 attractions. Projects include a planned loop trail connecting key sites, interactive QR codes for murals, and new branding for Grants Main Street. Partnerships with local artists and organizations have been key to these initiatives, ensuring that Grants is prepared to host Centennial events and attract tourists seeking authentic Route 66 experiences.

**Presentation: Thomas Elliot Fite, Director of Marketing, FocalShift Media**

Vice Chair Mondragon welcomed the sixth guest speaker for the meeting— Thomas Elliot Fite, Director of Marketing, FocalShift Media.

Thomas Elliott Fite outlined an ambitious vision for Route 66's Centennial celebrations, emphasizing the transformative potential of combining traditional and digital marketing strategies. He began by showcasing a promotional video, highlighting the opportunity for New Mexico to lead the national Centennial festivities. Key elements of this initiative include a series of festivals centered in Albuquerque, featuring local culture, music, classic car shows, and immersive digital experiences. Augmented reality applications were a standout feature, designed to bring Route 66 landmarks to life while bridging the historical significance of the highway with modern technology. Fite stressed that these events aim to foster economic growth, national recognition, and community pride, leaving a lasting legacy beyond the Centennial.

Fite also shared the potential development of a comprehensive digital platform to enhance visitor engagement. He noted that the platform seeks to integrate augmented reality experiences, walking tours, and a seamless interface for users to explore local attractions, events, and businesses. He stated the potential creation of an app will enable communities to upload their content—such as restaurant listings and event details—ensuring a tailored experience for visitors. Additionally, Fite highlighted plans for consistent branding across Route 66 communities to deliver a unified yet locally distinctive experience. He underscored the importance of collaboration and adaptability, suggesting that the app and associated marketing materials could evolve to sustain tourism interest long after 2026. His presentation called on stakeholders to leverage these tools and opportunities to maximize the Centennial's impact for years to come.

**Presentation: Daniel Gutierrez, Director, New Mexico Main Street**

Vice Chair Mondragon welcomed the seventh guest speaker for the meeting— Daniel Gutierrez, Director, New Mexico Main Street.

Daniel Gutierrez, Director of New Mexico MainStreet under the Economic Development Department, shared insights into the organization's extensive work in revitalizing downtown districts across the state. MainStreet, which has been active since 1985, supports 32 designated MainStreet programs and 13 affiliated arts and cultural districts

statewide, focusing on creating vibrant, economically thriving communities. Gutierrez emphasized their holistic approach, providing resources not only for comprehensive downtown revitalization but also for project-specific initiatives. He highlighted ongoing efforts to partner with communities like Edgewood and others, aiming to establish both long-term development and immediate improvements as the Route 66 Centennial approaches.

Gutierrez shared key projects that include a mix of infrastructure improvements, branding updates, and strategic initiatives. For example, they created a rack card for communities to use and shared with a partner attending a Route 66 Conference in Germany. The organization also launched a Centennial preparation plan in 2023, uniting various community programs under a shared vision. Gutierrez invited attendees to visit MainStreet's website, which offers detailed updates on local initiatives and their collective impact on downtown economic development. He emphasized the importance of partnerships, encouraging continued collaboration between communities, MainStreet, and other stakeholders to ensure the success of Route 66 Centennial celebrations.

### **Stakeholder Roundtables & Working Groups**

Vice Chair Mondragon invited Jason Espinoza to speak about the working group discussion instructions and how the Coordination Group will gather ideas and information.

Jason Espinoza introduced the structure and goals of the stakeholder working groups designed to support Route 66 Centennial projects. He emphasized the importance of collaboration and community engagement in shaping initiatives across the Route 66 corridor. Espinoza described the groups as platforms for communities to exchange ideas and work together on shared objectives, with a focus on leveraging local energy and resources to sustain project momentum leading up to 2026. The working groups are structured around five key topics: consumer experiences, product development, marketing and promotion, infrastructure, and special events.

Espinoza highlighted the necessity of aligning local efforts with national and international marketing opportunities. He encouraged participants to submit projects for review and potential endorsement by the Centennial Commission, which would ensure inclusion in broader marketing campaigns. Additionally, he stressed the value of storytelling in showcasing project outcomes. By documenting successes through social media and other platforms, the groups aim to amplify the impact of local initiatives and connect them with statewide and national efforts. Espinoza concluded by encouraging continued collaboration, feedback, and active participation to maximize the Centennial's economic and cultural benefits.

Vice Chair Mondragon thanked Espinoza for the instructions and encouraged folks to get started in their small groups, as well as encouraged Coordination Group members to circulate with each group as they have in the past.

The attendees broke into three small group discussions to discuss the identified work group topics and the facilitators recorded project ideas and questions. At 11:45 p.m. the stakeholder discussion wrapped up.

### **Approval of the Santa Fe Meeting Minutes**

At 11:49, Vice Chair Mondragon brought the attendees attention back to the Route 66 Corodination Group so that they could complete the rest of their agenda.

Vice Chair Mondragon asked the Coordination Group to review the meeting minutes from Santa Fe that were sent out in the meeting packet.

Motion by Member Daniel Gutierrez to approve the minutes, seconded by Member Elmer Torres. Motion carried; none were opposed.

### **Coordination Group Member Updates**

Vice Chair Mondragon asked members if they had updates they wanted to share. He stated that there were no updates at this time.

### **Update from Route 66 Centennial Coordination Group Meeting Facilitator Member Updates**

Vice Chair Mondragon asked Jason Espinoza to present on the next agenda item.

Jason Espinoza provided an update on the Route 66 Centennial Coordination Group's progress, focusing on the recent launch of a Centennial Project Submission Page. This platform allows communities to submit finalized projects for review and potential endorsement. Endorsed projects will be moved on for consideration by the National route 66 Commission where they have the chance to gain access to national and international marketing efforts, creating opportunities to amplify the Centennial's impact. Espinoza demonstrated how the submission page works, encouraging stakeholders to scan the QR code provided and explore submission guidelines. He emphasized the importance of including detailed budgets and clear project outlines to streamline the review process.

### **Looking Forward: Coordination Group Workplan**

Vice Chair Mondragon asked Acting Secretary Lancing Adams and Jason Espinoza to present on the next agenda item.

Acting Secretary Adams and Jason Espinoza spoke that the Route 66 Centennial Coordination Group will continue meeting next year to keep up the momentum. They spoke about several items the Coordination Group will continue to work on including, review and endorsement of projects to be passed onto the National 66 Commission, opportunity for New Mexico to host a National Route 66 Centennial Summit, status

updates and Presentations from NMTD Route 66 Grant Recipients, collaboration and communication with local/regional Route 66 Committees, updates on NMTD activities related to international marketing and travel trade, status updates from NMDOT, DCA, EDD on activities related to Route 66 Centennial, further develop initial project ideas into actionable initiatives, identification and collaboration with industry association partners.

Additionally, Adams and Jason noted that they are going to continue to enhance the Coordination Group's work with tribal partners. Member Elmer Torres noted that the Coordination Group is going to continue to support efforts to facilitate conversations with tribal partners. They noted that they are committed to hosting the next meeting with tribal partners.

Adams thanked the tourism staff for all their hard work. He also thanked all the attendees for taking time out of their day to attend the meeting.

Vice Chair Mondragon recognized Cal Curley from Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernandez's Office. Curley noted that Congresswoman Leger Fernandez is now a cosponsor of House Resolution 4338, which would designate Route 66 as a National Historic Trail. He noted that Congresswoman Leger Fernandez plans to reintroduce the bill in the next congress.

Vice Chair Mondragon asked if there was any additional public comment. There was not.

### **Adjournment**

Motion by Member Johnny Pena to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Member Daniel Gutierrez. Motion carried; none were opposed. Chair Lee adjourned the meeting at 12:07 p.m.

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Approved by Coordination Group vote at public meeting held on October 20, 2025.

Signed by:  
  
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Coordination Group Chair Bill Lee