

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a summary of the South Medford Interchange *Final Environmental Impact Statement* (FEIS), which identifies and describes potential environmental impacts and mitigation measures of proposed improvements to the South Medford Interchange. The interchange is located on Interstate 5 (I-5) in the City of Medford, Jackson County, Oregon.

The FEIS builds from the *Draft Environmental Impact Statement* (DEIS) issued in October 2001. Consequently, the DEIS is incorporated by reference, and the FEIS focuses on the Preferred (Highland) Alternative that was recommended by the South Medford Interchange Project Solution Team and was chosen by ODOT and FHWA as the alternative to move forward into the FEIS.

The purpose of the South Medford Interchange Project is to improve the safe and efficient movement of goods, people, and services at and through the I-5/Barnett Road interchange area. The long-term improvements are intended to reduce congestion and improve the operation of the interchange in a manner that minimizes adverse impacts to neighborhoods, businesses, and the environment.

The South Medford Interchange Project would relocate the I-5/Barnett Road interchange to the south of the existing interchange in southeast Medford. The existing Barnett Road overpass crossing I-5 would remain, but the existing on- and offramps to I-5 would be removed. To improve highway safety and improve traffic flow, the new interchange would consist of a Single-Point Urban Interchange (SPUI), which would:

- Direct most turning movements associated with the interchange to occur on the interchange structure that would bridge I-5.
- Minimize the amount of land required for onramps and offramps in both the environmentally and developmentally constrained areas associated with Bear Creek, and also in areas to the east and west of the highway.
- Include limited-access new streets connecting the interchange with Oregon 99 and Barnett Road.

Alternatives Considered

Chapter 2 of the DEIS included a discussion of the collaborative process by which several alternatives were identified and evaluated as part of the South Medford Interchange Project. This highly publicized and participatory process of identifying and assessing potential solutions was a major element of project “scoping” and development. The South Medford Interchange Project’s technical team, Solution Team, Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), and the general public considered numerous alternative solutions to the transportation problem at the interchange. During early phases of the project, 22 concepts were reviewed. Numerous concepts that covered a wide range of alternatives that might solve the problems were reviewed and found to neither solve the problems nor meet the project purpose.

Of all the alternatives studied, only two would solve the transportation problems without creating substantial traffic and safety problems elsewhere. Considering the recommendation from the CAC and the Solution Team, as well as the project record, ODOT and FHWA chose the Highland

Alternative and the Ellendale Alternative as the two “Build Alternatives” to advance to the DEIS as a reasonable range of alternatives. The two alternatives considered in the DEIS are described in Chapter 2 of the FEIS. Both Build Alternatives included an Oregon 99 connector street that would provide access between Oregon 99 and the interchange. The Highland Alternative also included a Highland Drive connector street that would provide access between Barnett Road and the interchange. The Ellendale Alternative included an Ellendale Drive connector street that would link the interchange to Barnett Road. The DEIS also assessed the potential environmental consequences of a No-Build Alternative. Based on a preliminary review of the potential environmental consequences of the alternatives, the Highland Alternative appeared to best meet the purpose and need for the project. Consequently, the Solution Team recommended, and ODOT and FHWA designated, the Highland Alternative as the “Preferred Alternative” in the DEIS.

Preferred Alternative

On January 29, 2002, the South Medford Interchange Project’s Solution Team and CAC jointly met to decide which of the alternatives considered in the DEIS they would recommend to forward onto this *Final Environmental Impact Statement* (FEIS). They considered the No-Build, Highland, and Ellendale alternatives with respect to the project’s purpose and need, evaluation criteria developed for review and evaluation, and public comments on the DEIS. The group unanimously chose the Highland Alternative as the locally preferred alternative and recommended to ODOT and the FHWA that the alternative be forwarded to the FEIS as the Preferred Alternative. After considering the record of the project, ODOT and FHWA advanced the Highland

Alternative as the Preferred Alternative in the FEIS.

The Preferred Alternative was advanced because it would do the following:

- Cause the least harm to the natural environment, with the least adverse impacts to wetlands and riparian areas, and would cause the least increase in impervious surface (water quality/quantity issues);
- Cause the least overall harm to the socioeconomic environment by minimizing adverse impacts relative to residential displacements (to the extent possible); direct displacements of minority or low-income populations/communities; business displacements, reduced access to businesses, and the least impact to recreational resources;
- Require substantially less public funds for construction, and
- Address, through feasible mitigation measures, public concerns regarding localized and community-wide impacts, as expressed in public comments.

Based on further design review and on public/agency comments on the DEIS, some design refinements were made to the Preferred Alternative. As the project develops and new or more detailed information becomes available, additional minor refinements may occur with respect to facility design and/or mitigation measures. Such minor refinements typically occur on projects and are not expected to change the overall scope of the project or result in additional impacts that cannot be adequately mitigated. The most notable refinements to the Preferred Alternative addressed in the FEIS are summarized below.

Description of Project Changes

The DEIS considered a “primary footprint” and a “buffered footprint.” Subsequent design refinements allowed for a single project footprint to be considered in this FEIS. This footprint is shown in Figure 1. For a complete description of project changes, please see Chapter 2 of this FEIS.

The primary refinements to the Preferred Alternative include:

- Extension of Oregon 99 improvements south to Charlotte Anne Road and at the intersection with Stewart Avenue;
- Replacement and widening the Barnett Road Bear Creek Bridge, rather than widening the existing bridge;
- More specificity with respect to bridge pier locations; and
- Use of stormwater treatment/detention ponds, rather than biofiltration swales.

The roadway extension improvements would occur mostly within the existing right-of-way.

Impact Summary of the Preferred Alternative

Traffic, Transportation and Safety

The volume-to-capacity (v/c) ratios or levels of service at all major intersections in the project area would be as good as or better than those that would occur under the No-Build Alternative. At some of the major intersections in the project area, other local street system problems (that are beyond the scope of this project) need to be solved before the intersections would reach standard v/c ratios. Under the Preferred Alternative the interchange itself would operate better than the v/c standard, whereas under the No-Build Alternative the existing

interchange would operate substantially below this standard. Highland Drive at Barnett Road would become a four-leg intersection via the extension of Highland Drive south to the proposed new interchange location. Traffic levels on Highland Drive north of Barnett Road would increase and would result in secondary impacts to development and uses along the street. These impacts would be minimized by improvements to Highland Drive. Highland Drive at Barnett Road would become a four-leg intersection via the extension of Highland Drive south to the proposed new interchange location. This would establish an additional east-west connection for traffic, which would help draw traffic away from Highland Drive and adjacent side streets.

Land Use

The Preferred Alternative would be consistent with relevant land use plans with minor exceptions, such as a possible City of Medford conditional use permit for proposed bridge construction over Bear Creek.

The Preferred Alternative also would divide a Medford Urban Renewal site that fronts Center Drive, into several parcels. The remaining sites may no longer be suitable for a single large-scale retailer.

The new interchange is not expected to induce major commercial development other than what would occur under the No-Build Alternative.

The greatest direct impact would be to lands that are presently designated for urban residential development. Both connectors would pass through undeveloped urban residential land. In addition, the Garfield connector would run south of the RRRink, creating a parcel that would not have legal

access. The greatest direct impact would be to lands designated for urban residential development. The Garfield connector would pass through undeveloped land located south of the RRRink, creating a parcel that would not have legal access. Typically, loss or change in access is noncompensable. However, in this situation, if it is concluded that reestablishing legal access is not feasible, such as the cost to provide access were found to exceed the value of the land, and the property was determined to be landlocked, the owner would be compensated for the loss of access. Also, if it is determined that the remnant property is uneconomic to the owner, an offer would be made to acquire the remnant.

Socioeconomics

Under the Preferred Alternative, an estimated 33 tax lots and four buildings would be impacted. No residential displacements would occur. Four business displacements would occur.

Increased traffic volume on the Highland Drive side of Bear Creek Park could reduce neighborhood access to the park. However, improvements to Highland Drive would substantially offset these effects.

Sixty people with full- or part-time jobs would be affected by businesses being displaced.

Existing access for property on Barnett Road, east of I-5, would be right-in/right-out only, except at median breaks. The planned median on Barnett Road, east of I-5, would have the greatest impacts on highway-related businesses and on businesses that rely on spontaneous driver decisions on or near I-5.

Five property accesses on Belknap Road and two on Barnett Road, east of I-5, would be eliminated or combined.

There could be an annual property tax revenue loss of about \$76,000.

There would be no impacts to environmental justice populations.

Cultural Resources

The Preferred Alternative would not adversely affect the historic railroad or Veterans Park, and would not affect the Southern Oregon Sales buildings. The planned pedestrian and bicycle safety mitigation measures would not adversely affect the historic Veterans Park. No known archaeological sites would be affected.

Visual Resources

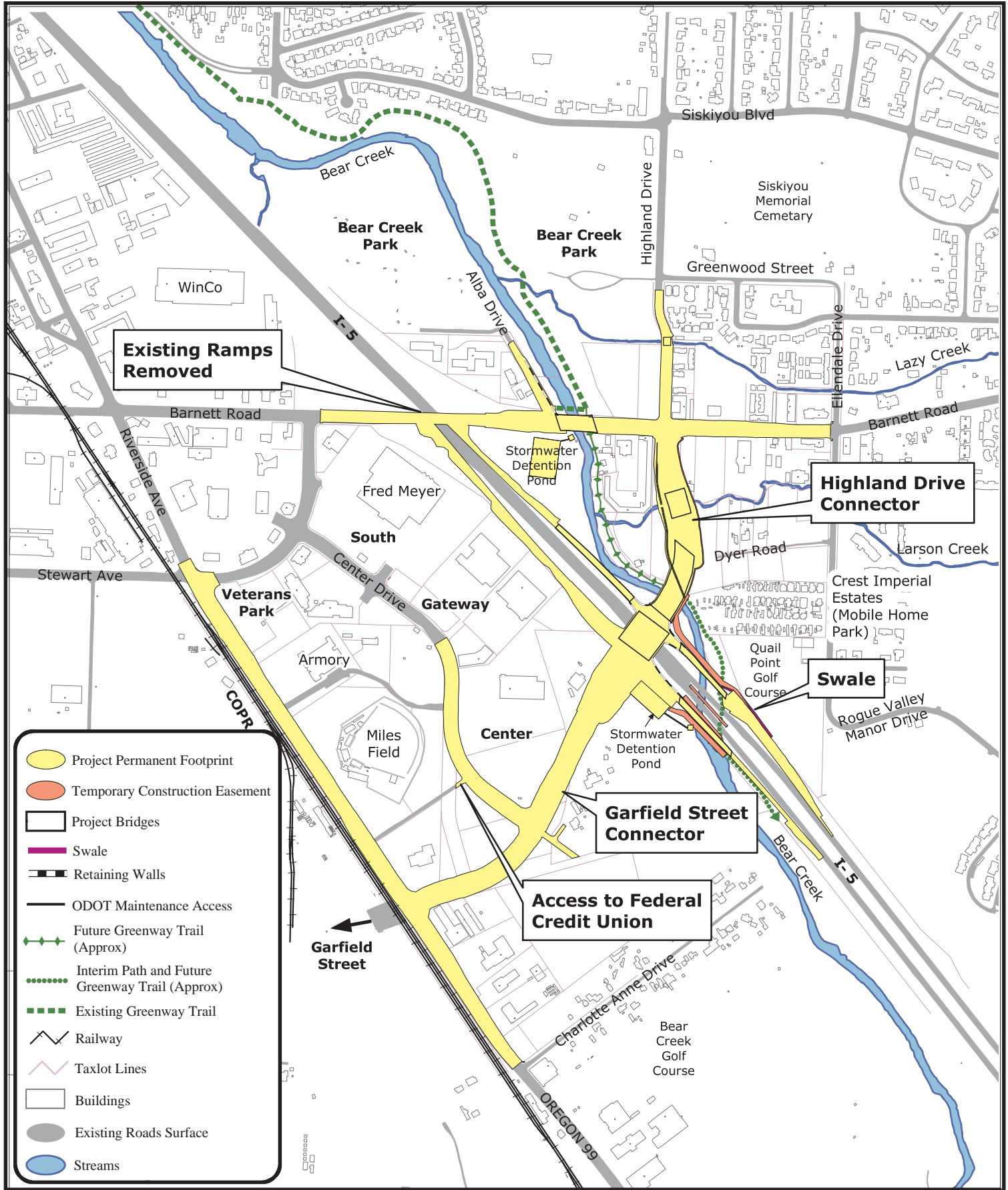
Views of undeveloped land would be replaced with views of connector roadways, elevated ramps, traffic, and pavement. The project would include impressed designs on bridges and retaining walls to lessen visual impacts.

Noise

Approximately 60 residences or residential equivalents would be impacted. Noise abatement would not be feasible and is not planned.

Air Quality

Air quality impacts under the Preferred Alternative have been determined to conform with the Regional Transportation Plan, Metropolitan Transportation Implementation Plan, and State Implementation Plan. No new carbon monoxide hot spots would be created.



- Project Permanent Footprint
- Temporary Construction Easement
- Project Bridges
- Swale
- Retaining Walls
- ODOT Maintenance Access
- Future Greenway Trail (Approx)
- Interim Path and Future Greenway Trail (Approx)
- Existing Greenway Trail
- Railway
- Taxlot Lines
- Buildings
- Existing Roads Surface
- Streams

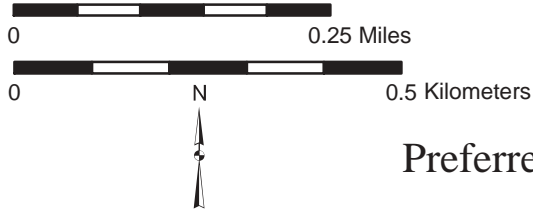


Figure 1

Preferred Highland Alternative

Hazardous Materials

There could be subsurface contamination by petroleum products in the project area, although the extent of impact is not expected to be substantial. Prior to property acquisition, further testing would be done to confirm the presence or absence of contamination and, if encountered, to estimate the extent of the contamination and the cost of the remediation.

Geology and Soils

Clay soils are common in the Preferred Alternative footprint. Post-construction movements caused by the shrinking and swelling of these clays could affect pavement and embankment structures, although engineering/design procedure would be employed to minimize such impacts.

Hydraulics

ODOT's refined project design for the Preferred Alternative would place most permanent bridge piers outside of the Bear Creek two-year flood channel. However, three piers must be placed within the two-year flood channel because of engineering necessity. These include:

- For the I-5 Southbound onramp one pier would be located in the two-year flood channel
- For the I-5 Northbound offramp two piers would be located in the two-year flood channel

The project, in combination with an associated project, would result in "no-rise" of floodway elevations.

Water Quality

Under the Preferred Alternative, the project would increase net impervious surface area, which in turn would result in larger runoff

volumes and higher peak flow rates of stormwater. The stormwater treatment and detention ponds and biofiltration swale that would be provided as part of the project would be designed to receive and temporarily store the runoff, then would slowly empty water into Bear Creek, and would allow settling of pollutants prior to water discharge. The ponds would collect and control both runoff and pollutants from existing as well as new impervious surfaces.

Biological Resources

The Preferred Alternative would remove riparian forest habitat, cause localized impacts to streams, and create minor wetland impacts. Although the project would affect coho salmon protected by the federal Endangered Species Act, implementation of conservation measures during construction are reasonably expected to adequately minimize these impacts.

Public and Agency Involvement

The public involvement and outreach program included:

- Direct mailing to the entire project area, as well as specific neighborhoods, stakeholders, businesses, and special interests;
- Formation of the Solution Team;
- Coordination of a representative Citizen Advisory Committee
- A community forum for the National Environmental Policy Act scoping process;
- Outreach meetings targeting various specific interests;
- Door-to-door canvassing in the study area;
- Hosting a community Open House information session;

- Preparation and distribution of project-specific newsletters;
- A project Web site (www.odot.state.or/region3public/smedfordinterchange/),
- Preparation and distribution of project-specific press releases;
- Participation in several local television programs;
- Distribution and regular review of public feedback forms; and
- Federal and State agency consultations.

Future Actions

Following issuance of this FEIS, ODOT and FHWA will consider the administrative record for the project. No sooner than 30 days after the FEIS distribution, and following completion of ESA consultation, FHWA will likely issue a Record of Decision that will document selection of an alternative. As required by federal and state laws and regulations, ODOT and FHWA will continue to coordinate with appropriate agencies as needed to obtain all necessary permits and approvals.