

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Project Overview

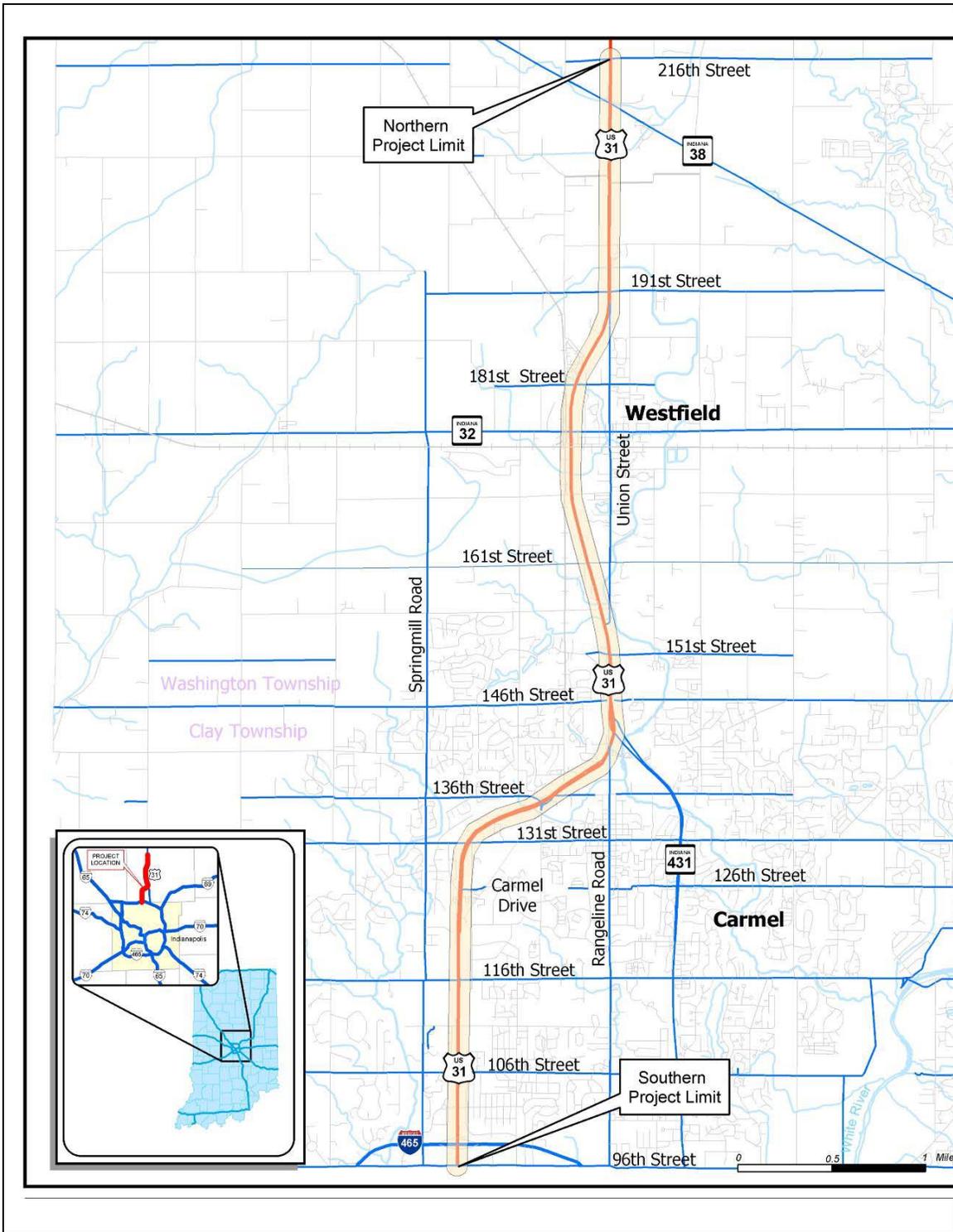
In accordance with 23CFR771.130, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is circulating this Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) for the US 31 Hamilton County Improvement Project in order to update the public and agencies on changes to the design of the Preferred Alternative and its associated impacts. This SDEIS serves as a supplement to the original Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) published in 2003. A copy of the DEIS is available at www.us31hamiltoncounty.in.gov. A detailed comparison of changes between the F Preferred Alternatives identified in the DEIS and the current Major Moves Preferred Alternative is outlined in Chapter 3. The most notable changes center around the type of interchange design recommended at various locations due to the increase in traffic volumes in the project area. These traffic volumes are the direct results of the rapid growth in Hamilton County in the past five years. Other additional changes since the DEIS were the result of public and agency comments. Key design changes include: the addition of over/underpasses at 111th Street, Greyhound Pass, Union Street and 169th Street; alternative interchange designs for 131st, 136th 146th/151st Street interchanges; a small shift in the existing alignment of 136th Street; and changes in the mainline profile.

While design elements were refined and impacts recalculated, the essence of the project remains the same. Project termini, purpose and need statements, and the nature of the current facility have not changed since the DEIS. The US 31 Hamilton County Improvement Project will be an upgrade of the existing facility to freeway standards including grade separated interchanges, controlled access, and removal of traffic signals on the mainline. A considerable amount of alternatives evaluation and environmental documentation has been completed over the past eight years on this project. Major historical developments, as well as recent developments are detailed below (Sections 1.3-1.4).

The US 31 Hamilton County Improvement Project is on track to complete final environmental documentation by the end of 2008. This SDEIS is inclusive of impacts associated with the Major Moves Alternative. Findings and recommendations outlined in this document will be subject to formal public review and comment at an upcoming public hearing in the summer of 2008. Upon public and agency input, a Record of Decision will be issued on the Selected Alternative and documented in a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). Construction is targeted to begin in 2011.

1.2 Project Description

The New US 31 Hamilton County Project is located in Hamilton County, Indiana between I-465 (north leg) and SR 38, a distance of approximately 12.5 miles. (Figure 1.1-1). The project traverses the City of Carmel, Clay Township, the City of Westfield, and Washington Township. Interstate 465 was designated as the southern project terminus because it represents a major origin and destination point for US 31. SR 38 was designated as the northern project terminus because it represents the next significant east-west arterial that intersects with US 31 north of Westfield. In addition, traffic patterns and volumes on US 31 along with land use and roadway characteristics change significantly beyond these termini. As such, this segment of US 31 has “independent utility”. Due to the potential for construction and easement impacts, the area of study extended beyond the termini south, approximately one-quarter mile, to 96th Street and north, approximately one-half mile, to 216th Street.



**Figure 1.1-1
Project Location
Draft Environmental Impact Statement
Hamilton County, Indiana**

This Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) for the New US 31 Hamilton County Project has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969; Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) *Procedural Manual for Preparing Environmental Studies (December 2004)*; the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) *Indiana's Streamlined EIS Procedures (July 2001)*; INDOT *Public Involvement Procedures (Draft May 2007)*; FHWA (Indiana) *Section 106 Procedures (March 2002)*; INDOT *Traffic Noise Policy (February 2007)*; and, the FHWA Technical Advisory T 6640.8A - *Guidance for Preparing and Processing Environmental and Section 4(f) Documents (1987)*.

1.3 Project History

Several legislative initiatives and subsequent legislative actions recognized and elevated US 31 to an essential facility within the State's transportation infrastructure. US 31's status as a Statewide Mobility Corridor has resulted in extensive study of the area, recommendations for potential improvements, and a formal alternatives and impacts evaluation compliant with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The *Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)* for the New US 31 Hamilton County Project was published in June 2003, identifying Alternatives F1 through F6 as the Preferred Alternatives. A public hearing for the New US 31 Hamilton County Project was held on June 30, 2003 at Carmel High School in Carmel, Indiana.

Following the 45-day comment period for the DEIS, which extended from June 20 to August 4, 2003, Alternative F4 was initially identified as the single preferred alternative. In response to comments received from the public, however, the following, initial modifications were made to the design of the F4 Alternative in 2004:

- Addition of 111th Street overpass
- 146th Street diamond interchange modified to a split diamond, collector-distributor interchange with 151st Street
- Addition of 169th Street underpass
- 191st Street interchange shifted north

As part of the design modifications to the 146th Street interchange, a public officials meeting and a stakeholder meeting were held on June 23, 2004 to discuss these modifications and obtain preliminary input. Design plans of the modified 146th Street interchange were also posted on the project website for public review and comment. The posting of this modification was not widely publicized; therefore it elicited limited public comment.

While preparation of the Final Environmental Impact Statement began in 2004, the State of Indiana experienced a gubernatorial change and subsequent restructuring of the Indiana Department of Transportation. Significant budgetary concerns resulted in the US 31 Hamilton County Improvement Project, and several other roadway projects, being put on hold indefinitely. No further design development, public involvement, or decisions were made over the next several years.

1.4 Recent Events

The infusion of funds from the State's Major Moves initiative reinvigorated the US 31 Hamilton County Improvement Project in late 2007. Other US 31 projects including the Plymouth to South Bend segment and the Kokomo segment were also revitalized to help insure the future of the US 31 Statewide Mobility Corridor. Due to the amount of time that had passed between the original environmental evaluations and the growth in Hamilton County, several of the assessments needed to be updated or recalculated due to their regulatory shelf life, as well as the changing demographics in the neighboring communities.

The 2004 modifications to the F4 Alternative, noted above, have since been further revised to accommodate current traffic volume and forecasts, thus resulting in the current Preferred Alternative, the Major Moves Alternative, outlined in this document. This Alternative has been developed, evaluated and compared to the F4 Alternative originally presented in the DEIS creating the basis for this Supplemental DEIS (SDEIS). The evaluation of the current Major Moves Alternative along with all of the DEIS alternatives will be presented in the upcoming Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), expected in late fall of 2008. A summary of impacts associated with these alternatives is included in Table 1.4-1.

Since some of the interchange designs have changed from the DEIS F4 Alternative *and* the regulatory environment has affected how some impacts are calculated, the preparation of this document and subsequent public hearing are intended to elicit current public comment and agency review on the Major Moves Preferred Alternative. The Major Moves Preferred Alternative includes several necessary changes needed to meet the project's Purpose and Need, as well as function as an efficient Statewide Mobility Corridor and fit into local transportation plans. In addition to the changes noted in the above bullets (Section 1.3), other notable changes since the 2004 modifications include:

- Addition of Old Meridian slip ramp
- Addition of round-about interchange design option for 131st and 136th St.
- Small shift in alignment/skew of 136th Street south of its existing alignment
- Further modification of the 146th Street split diamond alternative to: reduce a segment of the collector-distributor system, add an overpass bridge at Greyhound Pass, add a southbound entrance ramp at 151st St (to US 31 southbound) and a northbound entrance ramp at 146th St. (to US 31 northbound)
- Addition of Union St. bridge
- Dismissal of earlier proposed northern shift of 191st St.

A detailed description of the Major Moves Alternative is described in Chapter 3. A variety of interchange designs were considered as part of the most recent traffic analyses and environmental evaluations. An Interchange Recommendations Report was developed by the project team and delivered to INDOT to document what additional design alternatives were considered and why various options were either dismissed or recommended for inclusion into the Major Moves Alternative.

Table 1.4-1 Potential Impacts of Alternatives

Category	Unit	Alternatives			
		F4 (original)*	F4 (current)	Major Moves	
Land Use	Agricultural	acres	102.3	72.0	81.0
	Commercial	acres	86.9	78.0	94.3
	Industrial	acres	18.1	13.6	15.6
	Institutional	acres	21.7	22.5	27.4
	Mixed Urban	acres	0.3	43.2	45.7
	Residential	acres	26.8	17.08	34.8
	Forestland	acres	30.7	29.8	30.9
	Herbaceous	acres	2.7	6.6	7.3
	Scrub-Shrub	acres	10.3	16.9	17.3
	TOTAL	acres	299.7	299.7	354.3
Relocations	Single Residence	number	52	52	55
	Multiple Residence	number	1	1	1
	TOTAL	number	53	53	56
	Commercial	number	27	28	28
	Office	number	13	14	17
	Public Facilities	number	0	0	0
	Industrial	number	5	5	5
	TOTAL	number	45	47	50
	Churches	number	2	2	1
	School Properties		number	2	2
		acres	2.1	3.17	7.29
Cemeteries		number	0	0	0
Section 4(f) Properties		number	0	1 (net benefit)	1 (net benefit)
		acres	0	0.0	0.0
Emergency Facilities		number	0	0	0
Hazardous Materials Sites		number	13	30	34
Noise Receptors		number	74	74	28
Major Utilities		number	14	14	14
	Geodetic Monuments	number	5	5	5
	TOTAL	number	19	19	19
Wellhead Protection Zones		number	4	4	4
Wetlands	Forested	acres	0.06	0.48	2.00
	Scrub Shrub	acres	0.05	0.41	0.47
	Emergent	acres	0.60	4.65	4.30
	TOTAL	acres	0.71	5.54	6.77
Open Water	(ponds, lakes)	acres	3	4.54	3.55
Streams/Ditches		crossings	11	28	31
		linear feet	3,165	7,882	8,313
Floodplains	Floodways	number	7	4	4
		acres	103	17.76	23.28
	100-yr Floodplains	number	14	14	16
		acres	35	35.12	45.33
Soils	Prime farmland	acres	95	62.3	68.61
Archaeological	sites	number	7	7	10
		acres	1.1	1.1	4.3
	High probability	acres	42	42	54
Historic	Section 106	number	2	1	1
Planned Future Development		acres	13	12	12
Costs	Construction	\$ million	316	316	353
	Right-of-way	\$ million	118	118	130
	TOTAL	\$ million	434	434	483

* Impacts as provided in the DEIS (June 2003)

** Using TNM