
1.0 Project Summary

1.1 Purpose of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement

The proposed reconstruction of Minnesota Trunk Highway 23 and U.S. Highway 71 (“Highway 23/71”) is considered a Federal Class I Action (Environmental Impact Statement or EIS) because of the potential for significant impacts on the natural and physical environment.

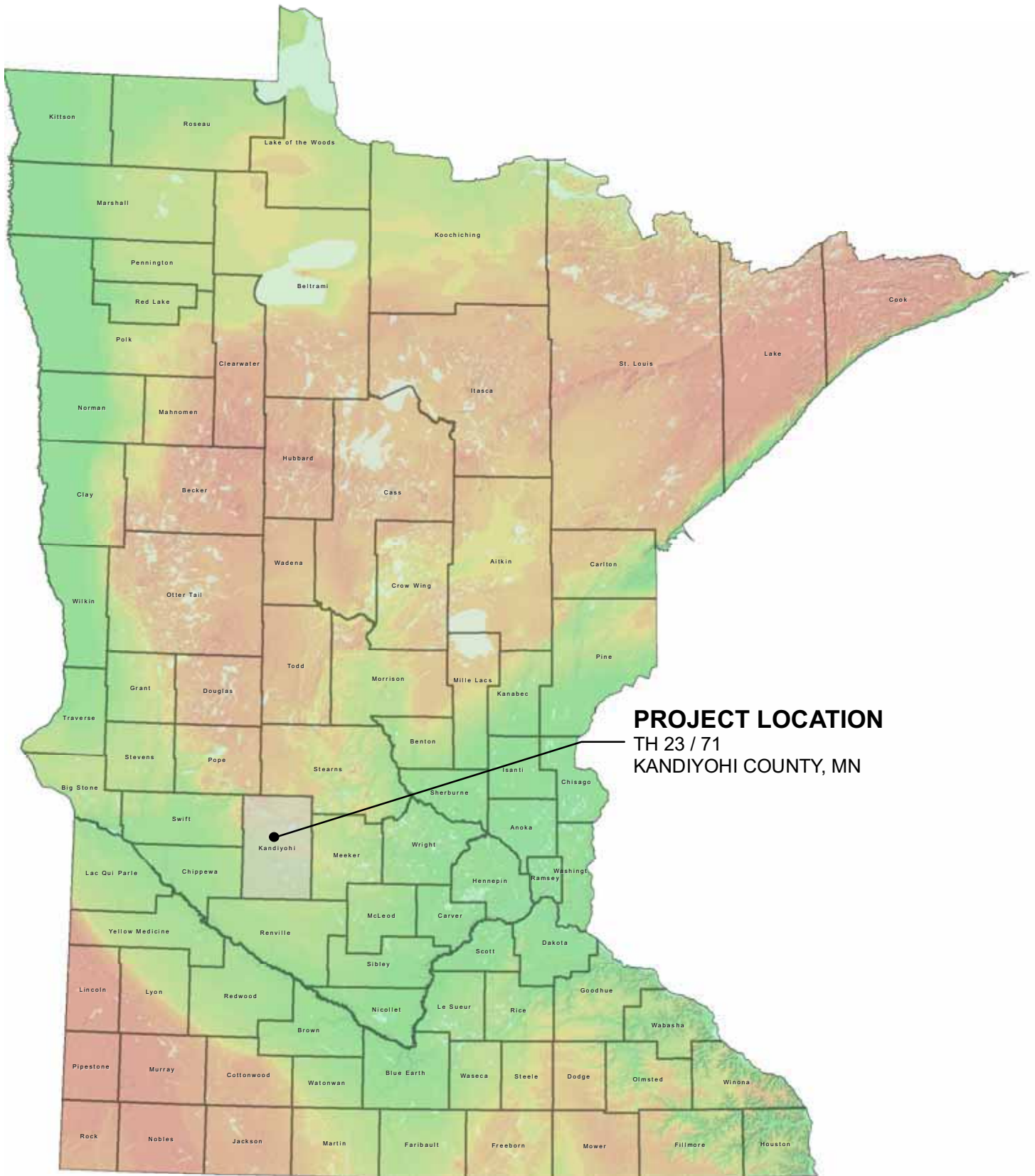
An EIS is a full disclosure document, which discusses the environmental impacts of a proposed Class I action. A Draft EIS discusses all reasonable alternatives to the proposed action and summarizes the results of all studies, reviews, consultation, and coordination conducted on the environmental impacts of the action and all reasonable alternatives. A Final EIS identifies the preferred alternative and describes environmental mitigation commitments.

This Draft EIS has been prepared as part of the federal NEPA process and state environmental review process to fulfill requirements of both 42 USC 4321 et Seq. and Minnesota Rules Chapter 4410.2100.

1.2 Description of the Proposed Action

Mn/DOT proposes access management improvements to the Highway 23/71 Corridor in Kandiyohi County, Minnesota. Improvements will include grade-separated bridge crossings of Highway 23/71, driveway and median closures, and adjacent frontage road and local roadway construction. The project limits extend from the Highway 294 and Highway 23/71 divergence, approximately 0.5 miles north of the Civic Center Drive interchange, to the divergence of Highways 23 and 71 in Dovre Township, northeast of the City of Willmar. The total length of the project corridor is approximately 3.5 miles. The project location is illustrated on Figure 1.

Highway 23 is a principal northeast-southwest MN Trunk Highway that serves as a diagonal route between I-35 at Sandstone, Minnesota to I-90 in Rock County, Minnesota. Highway 71 is a north-south U.S. Highway that connects communities in west-central Minnesota, from International Falls to the Iowa border south of Jackson, Minnesota. Both highways connect citizens and communities to jobs, retail centers, and recreational/tourist destinations, and they intersect briefly for 3.5 miles near Willmar. The planning and design of this project will include the identification and analysis of social, economic, and environmental impacts. These impacts consist of adjacent residential and commercial developments, historic and archaeological sites, farmland, wetlands, wildlife, and many other potential impacts that may be caused by project construction or operation.



PROJECT LOCATION
 TH 23 / 71
 KANDIYOHI COUNTY, MN



TH 23 / 71
 ENVIRONMENTAL
 IMPACT STATEMENT

FIGURE 1
 STATE LOCATION MAP



1.3 Purpose and Need for the Highway 23/71 Access Management Project

The purpose of this process is to identify an environmentally and socially sensitive alternative for a transportation system improvement alternative. This transportation alternative will be designed to improve travel safety and efficiency, and meet the identified needs presented below.

Each of the following needs is described further in Section 2.5 of this document.

1. Improve Safety
2. Maintain Performance
3. Address Future Land Use

1.4 Alternatives

1.4.1 Alternatives Carried Forward for Analysis in the Draft EIS

As a result of the alternatives development and screening process (described in Section 3.0 of this document), seven primary alternatives were recommended for further review in the Draft EIS. To facilitate the presentation and discussion of the alternatives, they have been renumbered and defined as listed below. There are two primary build alternatives, each with two variations to account for freeway interchange location shifts. Each of the build alternatives will be adjoined by a local north access connection that will provide access in the Point Lake area, for which four connection alternatives have been developed. There is also a No-Build Alternative. Each Draft EIS alternative is briefly described below and illustrated on Figures 2A and 2B.

Highway 23/71 Freeway Build Alternatives (Figure 2A)

Alternative 1A

Interchange at Relocated County Road (CR) 90 (North Alignment)

- Closure of all at-grade accesses and construction of a single interchange and associated local roadway system including a relocated County State Aid Highway 25 (CSAH 25) that provides for one connection to Highway 23/71.

Alternative 1B

Interchange at Relocated CR 90 (South Alignment)

- Closure of all at-grade accesses and construction of a single interchange and associated local roadway system (including a relocated CSAH 25) that provides for one connection to Highway 23/71.

Alternative 2A

Interchange at Relocated CR 90 (North Alignment) and CSAH 25 Interchange

- Closure of all at-grade accesses and construction of two interchanges (one at a relocated CR 90 and one at CSAH 25) and associated local roadway system.

Alternative 2B

Interchange at Relocated CR 90 (South Alignment) and CSAH 25 Interchange

- Closure of all at-grade accesses and construction of two interchanges (one at a relocated CR 90 and one at CSAH 25) and associated local roadway system.

North Access Connection Alternatives (Figure 2B)

Several private properties and a DNR public waters access to Point Lake currently have access to Highway 23/71 from 26th Street NE. These properties will be affected by the proposed project's closure of 26th Street NE access to the highway. As a result of the proposed highway access closure, an alternative street connection to a surrounding local roadway will be provided. The project's Scoping Decision Document stated that alternative access connections would be studied in the Draft EIS. Four alternative north access connection alternatives were therefore developed for this purpose. The north connection alternatives for the project occupy an area generally bounded by Point Lake on the south, Long Lake Road on the west, CSAH 27 on the north, and the Highway 23/71 gore area on the east.

Along with the selection of one preferred project build alternative, a preferred north access connection alternative will also be selected to adjoin to the remainder of the project located to the south.

Alternative N1

Connection to Long Lake Road

- Two-lane collector roadway providing access to Long Lake Road from 26th Street NE.

Alternative N2

Connection to CSAH 27

- Two-lane collector roadway providing access to CSAH 27 from 26th Street NE.

Alternative N3

Connection to County Road 93 (Eagle Road North)

- Two-lane collector roadway and tunnel under existing Highway 23/71 between 26th Street NE and CR 93 (Eagle Road North).

Alternative N4

Connection to 66th Avenue NE

- Two-lane frontage road with either fill or bridge over Point Lake to connect 26th Street with 66th Avenue NE.

No Build Alternative

Alternative 3

No-Build

- Minor reconstruction including general maintenance, highway, and local street turn lane improvements and possible access closures, shoulder widening, and spot safety improvements.

ALTERNATIVE 1A



ALTERNATIVE 1B



ALTERNATIVE 2A



ALTERNATIVE 2B



Map Document: (P:\KOMMNDot\052500\GIS\es\FIGURE 2A 11 x17.mxd)
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TH 23 / 71 DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

FIGURE 2A ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN THE DEIS





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TH 23 / 71 DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

FIGURE 2B
NORTHERN CONNECTIONS CONSIDERED IN THE DEIS



1.5 Project Cost and Funding Source

Construction of the Highway 23/71 Improvement Project will be funded from both federal and state sources. It is anticipated that federal funds will be the primary source of funding (80 percent) with a 20 percent state match. Depending on the chosen alternative, the southern two-thirds of the project (from the Highway 23/71 and Highway 294 split to CSAH 25), will be constructed as Phase 1 after fiscal year 2015. Build alternative variations located at CSAH 25 and to the north will most likely be constructed after 2020. Construction cost estimates for the build alternatives, with the North Connection Alternatives, are presented in Table 1. These cost estimates are based on 2007 dollars and a standard cost per mile of construction.

**Table 1
Construction Cost Estimates**

Highway 23/71 Build Alternative ¹	Including North Connection Alternative			
	N1	N2	N3	N4
Alternative 1A	\$24,025,390	\$24,505,120	\$26,641,825	\$26,869,130
Alternative 1B	\$22,870,060	\$23,349,790	\$25,486,495	\$25,713,800
Alternative 2A	\$26,577,965	\$27,057,695	\$29,194,400	\$29,421,705
Alternative 2B	\$24,836,480	\$25,316,210	\$27,452,915	\$27,680,220

¹ Cost estimates include right-of-way, relocation, and construction based on 2007 dollars.

1.6 Permits/Approvals/Concurrence

It is anticipated that federal, state, and other local permits/approvals/ concurrence will be required for the proposed action. The following permits/approvals/concurrence will likely be required for construction of the proposed action:

- Section 404 Permit from the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
- Section 401 Water Quality Certification from Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)
- National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit from the MPCA
- Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) from Mn/DOT
- Protected Waters Permit from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR)

Other permits and approvals required may include:

- Municipal Consent (City of Willmar)
- Permits from watershed districts
- Approval from ditch authorities

1.7 Coordination

Mn/DOT is committed to public and agency involvement/outreach at all levels in decision-making related to the Highway 23/71 Improvement Project. Mn/DOT will continue to engage community organizations, area property owners, business owners, residents, and local, county, regional, state, and federal agencies in the development of the project.

Furthermore, the Highway 23/71 alternatives development was discussed with the Highway 23/71 Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), Project Advisory Committee (PAC), and a group of Participating Agencies. This was to ensure compliance with FHWA requirements (SAFETEA-LU Section 6002), which provides for efficient environmental reviews for project decision-making, new guidelines, roles and responsibilities to encourage participation, and new deadlines and limitations on agency reviews. The TAC was formed to engage local agency staff and officials from Kandiyohi County, the City of Willmar, and Dovre Township in guiding the development of local roadway connections to access alternatives. The PAC was formed to establish a communication link with the affected communities, organizations, and agencies. The Participating Agencies were assembled from local, State, and Federal agencies for briefings on project activities and to discuss the project's purpose, need, and methodologies in assessing the impacts of the project alternatives. These working groups represent a wide range of special interest groups and ensure local, state, and federal interests are being addressed.

In addition, informational and coordination meetings were held with representatives from local, state, and federal agencies with approval and/or permit authority to discuss appropriate analysis methodology for different resource areas.

1.8 Schedule for Environmental Review

Completion Dates (Actual or Anticipated)	Task/Activity
June 2006	Release of SD/DSDD for public comment; begin 30-day comment period
July 2006	Public Scoping Meeting
January 2007	Scoping Decision Document
May 15, 2006	Federal Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS
February 2008	Distribute Draft EIS for agency/public comment; start of Draft EIS comment period
February 2008	Notice of Availability
March 2008	Public Hearing on Draft EIS
May 2008	Identification of Preferred Alternative by Mn/DOT and FHWA
July 2008	Distribute Final EIS
September 2008	Mn/DOT Adequacy Determination
October 2008	FHWA Record of Decision
November 2008	Project Study Report Approved for Phase 1
2009 - 2015 and beyond	Final Design and Right Of Way Acquisition
2015 and beyond	Construction

1.9 Major Proposed Actions by Other Agencies

Currently, there are no major projects being proposed by other agencies within the Highway 23/71 project area. A 60-acre gravel mining operation (Eagle Lake West) was recently approved adjacent to Highway 71 north of the common section of Highway 23/71 in Green Lake Township. An Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) was prepared in 2003 and updated in 2006. The proposed mining operation will be operable for 10 years, beginning in 2007, and close with a reclamation plan of natural turf rather than other types of development. The proposed Highway 23/71 project schedule will allow the construction of project improvements on the south side of the Highway 23/71 Corridor to occur without disturbing the mining operation. The proposed gravel mining

operation's EAW also indicated that no adverse impacts to the Highway 23/71 Corridor would result or be induced by the proposed project. Proposed north connection alternative improvements will not likely be constructed prior to 2020, which indicates the gravel mining reclamation will be completed by that time.

1.10 Unresolved or Controversial Issues

Section 8.0 provides a description of the public and agency coordination that has occurred during the development of this Draft EIS. Among the concerns expressed by the agencies and members of the public are:

- Local accessibility when access closures occur;
- Safety for vehicles pedestrians, bicyclists, and school buses crossing Highway 23/71;
- Private property impacts, especially acquiring and/or partially acquiring any remaining residential properties near a build alternative;
- Effects of project sound (noise) levels;
- Emergency service vehicle travel time changes when accesses to the highway are reduced;
- Effects on property values;
- Desire to make no changes in the highway corridor;
- Economic development/redevelopment opportunities in commercial and vacant lands adjacent to the highway corridor;
- Impacts to existing farming operations and loss of farmland;
- Impacts to existing businesses, including highway exposure and acquisitions; and,
- Water quality effects (Eagle Lake) and roadway drainage onto private properties.

1.11 Summary of Environmental Consequences

A summary of the Highway 23/71 project's known or estimated environmental consequences by DEIS alternative is presented in Table 2. In many cases, the potential effects are common among one or more alternatives because several alternatives share portions of the same alignment corridor(s).

Table 2 - Summary of Impacts by Alternative

DEIS Issue	Environmental Consequences		Affected DEIS Alternative(s)										Discussed on DEIS Page			
			Build Alternatives				No Build	North Connection Alternatives (Attach to Either Build Alternative 1A, 1B, 2A, or 2B)								
			1A	1B	2A	2B	3	N1		N2		N3		N4		
Land Use	May create change in public policy in planning for long-range land uses.		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		51
Social and Community Environment	Minutes of additional emergency service responder travel time (modeled example).	Law Enforcement	1.08	1.08	0.78	0.78	Negligible	1A/1B	2A/2B	1A/1B	2A/2B	1A/1B	2A/2B	1A/1B	2A/2B	43
		Fire	2.28	2.28	1.15	1.15	Negligible	3.65	3.65	2.57	2.57	2.02	1.23	1.42	0.63	
Right-of-Way and Relocation	Number of acres of land potentially needing to be acquired.		53.8	58.0	38.9	40.1	0.0	6.1		6.7		2.4		1.4		65
	Residential units potentially needing to be acquired.		8	8	3	3	0	0		1		3		0		
	Residents potentially displaced.		18	18	9	9	0	0		3		8		0		
	Businesses potentially needing to be acquired.		5	0	7	2	0	0		0		0		0		
	Employees potentially displaced.		32	0	38	6	0	0		0		0		0		
Economic Environment	Conversion of farmland; residential and commercial business acquisitions (agricultural production and taxable property losses).		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes		Yes		Yes		No		68
Parks and Public Recreation Areas	Point Lake Public Waters Access closure of direct access from Highway 23/71.		No	No	No	No	No	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		70
Pedestrian and Bicycle Movements	Opportunities to construct pedestrian and bicycle facilities with new associated roadways and bridges.		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		72
Transit Services	Potential improvement in efficient transit service delivery with improved traffic operations.		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		72
Utilities	Electric, gas, telephone, water, and sewer facility temporary service disruption for the construction of supporting roadways.		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		73
Farmland	Acre losses of prime farmland.		12.0	17.0	11.0	15.0	0.0	3.0		2.0		0.0		0.0		74
Noise	Exceedences of current State and Federal daytime and nighttime noise standards (in 2007 and 2030)		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		78
Wetlands	Acres of wetlands impacted.		3.15	3.86	3.87	4.3	0.0	1.50		0.0		0.0		0.0		91
Surface Water Drainage	Areas of higher peak flows at culvert crossings as a result of additional impervious surface (new pavement); rerouting of Hawk Creek.		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		95
Air Quality (Mobile Source Air Toxics (MSATs))	Potential for higher level of MSATs		No	No	No	No	Yes	No		No		No		No		115
Water Quality	Potential water quality changes to Hawk Creek and Point, Eagle, Swan, and Skataas Lakes due to additional impervious surfaces and		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		104

DEIS Issue	Environmental Consequences	Affected DEIS Alternative(s)									Discussed on DEIS Page
		Build Alternatives				No Build	North Connection Alternatives (Attach to Either Build Alternative 1A, 1B, 2A, or 2B)				
		1A	1B	2A	2B	3	N1	N2	N3	N4	
	associated runoff contaminants.										
Geology/Groundwater/Aquifers	Abandonment of private wells and drain tile system relocations associated with right-of-way acquisitions and relocations.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	109
State/Federal Threatened and Endangered Species	State-listed Special Concern Species - Sea Naiad in Point Lake; Revisitation of Federal concerns (Section 7 Consultation) prior to construction.	Revisit Federal concerns	Revisit Federal concerns	Revisit Federal concerns	Revisit Federal concerns	No	Revisit Federal concerns	Revisit Federal concerns	Revisit Federal concerns	Sea Naiad; Revisit Federal concerns	110
Fish & Wildlife	Fish passage between Eagle and Swan Lakes with a realignment of Hawk Creek for a relocated CR 90 interchange with Highway 23/71.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	112
Vegetation	Invasive species control within new right-of-way.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	114
Energy	Consumption of less non-renewable energy resources due to improved traffic flow, reduced delays, and fewer intersection queues.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	120
Visual Quality	Aesthetic treatments of elevated structures (bridge crossings), landscaping uniformity; future identification signage	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	121
Architectural and Archaeological Resources	Additional archaeological survey with the selection of preferred alternative for three sites where property access was not permitted.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	124
Contaminated Properties	26 potentially contaminated sites in project area (14 low risk, 11 medium risk, 1 high risk)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	127
Construction	Temporary impacts associated with construction activities: noise, dust and vibrations, traffic congestion and detours, business access.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	129
Indirect Effects	Locally impacted business relocation and attraction of new businesses due to improved access; increased travel time for area residents and business patrons due to highway access closures; short-term effect of construction stimulation of local economy (jobs, products, services).	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	133
Cumulative Impacts	Higher potential for cumulative impacts related to land development; vegetation, wildlife, and threatened/ endangered species; wetlands; parks, trails and outdoor areas; and cultural resources.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	135