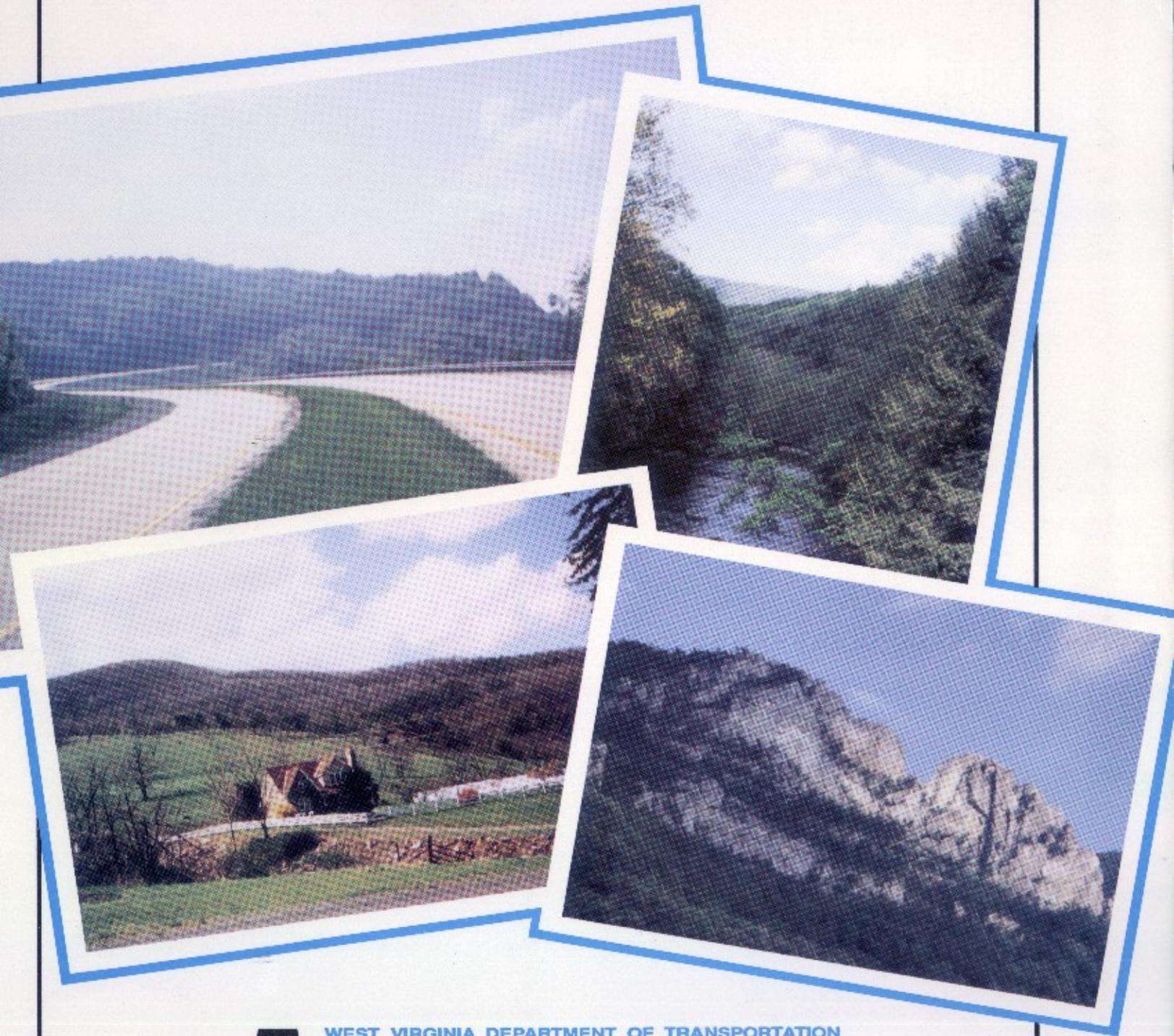


DECISION DOCUMENT
CORRIDOR SELECTION SDEIS



WEST VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
**APPALACHIAN
CORRIDOR H**
Elkins to Interstate 81

State Project: X142-H38.99 C-2
Federal Project: APD-484 (59)





U.S. Department
of Transportation

Federal Highway
Administration

Region 3
West Virginia Division

Suite 300
550 Eagan Street
Charleston, West Virginia 25301

July 26, 1993

IN REPLY REFER TO:

Supplemental Draft EIS/Sec. 4(f)
Corridor H, Elkins/I-81 in Va.
FHWA-WV-EIS-92-01-SD(step 1)

Mr. Fred VanKirk, Commissioner
State Highway Engineer
West Virginia Division of Highways
Charleston, West Virginia 25305

Dear Mr. VanKirk:

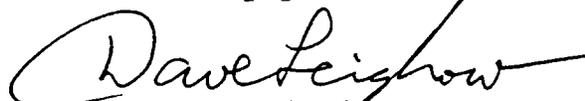
We have completed our review of the April 24, 1993 Decision Document for the subject project, and its June 16, 1993 revisions. We have also reviewed the comments from cooperating and other resource agencies, as well as the State's responses to those comments. Additionally, we reviewed the May 20, 1993 Virginia Commonwealth Transportation Board resolution.

We find that the social, economic and environmental information presented in the document and other items reviewed properly establish the basis for identifying the corridor for the next project development stage.

Accordingly, you are hereby authorized to proceed with development of the Step 2 Supplemental Draft EIS. This next step will be developed consistent with the commitments for further project development in Section VI of the Decision Document.

Should you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact Dave Leighow at (304) 347-5329.

Sincerely yours,


for Billy R. Higginbotham
Division Administrator

FHWA-WV-EIS-92-01-SD
State Project: X142-H-38.99 C-2
Federal Project: APD-484 (59)

APPALACHIAN CORRIDOR H
Elkins, West Virginia to Interstate 81, Virginia

Corridor Selection Decision Document

Submitted Pursuant to : 42 U.S.C. 4332(2)(c), 23 U.S.C. 128(a),
 49 U.S.C. 303(c), and 16 U.S.C. 470(f)
 80 Stat. 931, Public Law 89-670

U. S. Department of Transportation - Federal Highway Administration
and
West Virginia Department of Transportation - Division of Highways

Cooperating Agencies:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Park Service,
U.S. Soil Conservation Service, Environmental Protection Agency, Virginia Department of
Transportation, Virginia Council on the Environment

The following persons may be contacted for additional information concerning this document:

Mr. Ben Hark
WVDOT - Division of Highways
State Capitol Complex
Building Five, Room A-830
Charleston, WV 25305
(304) 558-3236

Mr. Billy R. Higginbotham
FHWA Division Administrator
550 Eagan Street, Suite 300
Charleston, WV 25301
(304) 558-3093

This project consists of a proposal to construct an approximately 110 to 130 mile highway; completing Corridor H of the Appalachian Development Highway System in northeastern West Virginia to Interstate 81 in Virginia. The proposed Corridor H facility would provide a four-lane highway with partial control of access on new and existing location between the towns of Elkins, West Virginia and Strasburg, Virginia. This Decision Document selects corridor Scheme Option D5 for further study in the Alignment Selection SDEIS for this project.

Comments on this Decision Document
are due by **MAY 28, 1993** and should
be sent to:

Mr. Randolph T. Epperly, Jr.
Director, Roadway Design Division
WVDOT - Division of Highways
State Capitol Complex, Building Five
Charleston, West Virginia 25305

ABSTRACT

Appalachian Corridor H is one of the economic growth highways designated by Congress to serve the Appalachian Region. In 1981, a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was prepared and circulated for public review and comment. Following three years of various studies, field reviews and public input, the project was put on hold and a Final EIS (FEIS) was not prepared. In June of 1990, the West Virginia Department of Transportation (WVDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) resumed the project by initiating a written reevaluation of the DEIS. The reevaluation determined that changes in legislation, procedures, and project surroundings warranted the preparation of a Supplement to the 1981 DEIS. In August of 1990, the WVDOT and the FHWA agreed that all of the original schemes in the 1981 DEIS would be equally evaluated based on 2,000 foot-wide corridors and that a preferred corridor would not be identified until after the Corridor Selection SDEIS had been completed and subsequent public meetings and hearings had been held.

The Corridor Selection SDEIS was approved by the FHWA on October 21, 1992. Following the approval of the SDEIS, the WVDOT eliminated all Scheme B and C Options from further consideration due to involvement with Canaan Valley State Park. Public meetings and hearings were held throughout the project area in December, 1992, and January and February, 1993. The official project and SDEIS comment period expired on February 20, 1993.

*Based on information in the Corridor Selection Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement and associated Technical Reports, comments during the public involvement process, and comments and coordination with cooperating and other resource agencies, the West Virginia Department of Transportation has chosen **Scheme Option D5** as the selected corridor for future development of Appalachian Corridor H from Elkins, West Virginia, to Interstate 81 in Virginia. The development of a specific alignment for a limited access, four-lane highway within the selected corridor can meet the project purpose and need while avoiding known Section 4(f) land, and avoiding or minimizing impacts to identified environmental, social and economic resources.*

Construction of Appalachian Corridor H between Elkins, West Virginia, and Interstate 81 in Virginia cannot begin until an Alignment Selection SDEIS, a Final EIS, and a Record of Decision are prepared and approved by the Federal Highway Administration.

*APPALACHIAN CORRIDOR H
DECISION DOCUMENT*

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SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

This is the Decision Document of the *October 21, 1992, Corridor Selection Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS)* prepared for the construction of Appalachian Corridor H from Elkins, West Virginia, to Interstate 81 in Virginia. This document has been prepared in accordance with a two-step study process explained in the Corridor Selection SDEIS on pages S-4 through S-7, and summarized in the Executive Summary of the SDEIS on page 4. The Appalachian Corridor H study process grew from discussions and agreements with the Cooperating Agencies and other resource agencies at project coordination meetings held in Charleston, West Virginia, on May 5 and 6, 1992, and on September 23 and 24, 1992. Authority for this two-step process is found in the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) *Regulations For Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act*, and the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) regulations on *Environmental Impact and Related Procedures* (Federal Register, Vol. 52, No. 167; August 28, 1987, Section 777.111).

The West Virginia Department of Transportation, the FHWA, and the Cooperating Agencies identified this Decision Document as the logical transition from Corridor Selection (Step 1), to Alignment Selection (Step 2). An illustration of the study process is shown in Exhibit 1. The shaded box represents the Decision Document and its relationship to the Corridor Selection SDEIS, the future Alignment Selection SDEIS, Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), and Record of Decision (ROD). The Alignment SDEIS, the FEIS and the ROD must be prepared and approved by the FHWA before any federal funds can be expended for the construction of Appalachian Corridor H between Elkins and Interstate 81. These remaining activities are discussed in Section VI.

The Corridor Selection SDEIS was prepared in compliance with FHWA Technical Advisory 6640.8A and other relevant statutes and orders. Other documents prepared for this project and related to the Corridor Selection SDEIS include the Executive Summary, the SDEIS Appendix, the Natural Resources Technical Report Books I and II, the Traffic and Transportation Technical Report, the Historic and Archaeological Resources Technical Report, the Floodplains Technical Report and the Transportation Needs Study. Information on how to review or obtain these documents is available by contacting the WVDOT in Charleston, West Virginia, or the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) offices in Edinburg, Virginia.

The purpose of the Corridor Selection SDEIS was to study all Scheme Options to determine the most prudent and feasible 2,000 foot-wide corridor that meets the project purpose and need. Sensitive resources and known Section 4(f) land within these corridors were inventoried and documented in the Corridor Selection SDEIS and accompanying Technical Reports, enabling the West Virginia Department of Transportation to make a corridor decision based on these important resources. Roadway designers can then avoid Section 4(f) land and avoid or minimize impacts to these resources during the development of specific highway alignments for presentation in the Alignment Selection SDEIS.

The general Corridor H study area is shown in Exhibits 2 and 3. A schematic representing the various 2,000 foot-wide corridor Scheme Options is shown in Exhibit 4. Five general schemes, A through E, with various SubSchemes, were presented in the Corridor Selection SDEIS. Twenty-four Scheme Options were formed by the combination of various Schemes and SubSchemes and were studied in the Corridor Selection SDEIS. Table 1 presents the development and components of each Scheme Option that can be used in conjunction with Exhibit 4 to follow the route of each Scheme Option from Elkins to I-81. Scheme Option D5 is highlighted as the preferred Corridor.

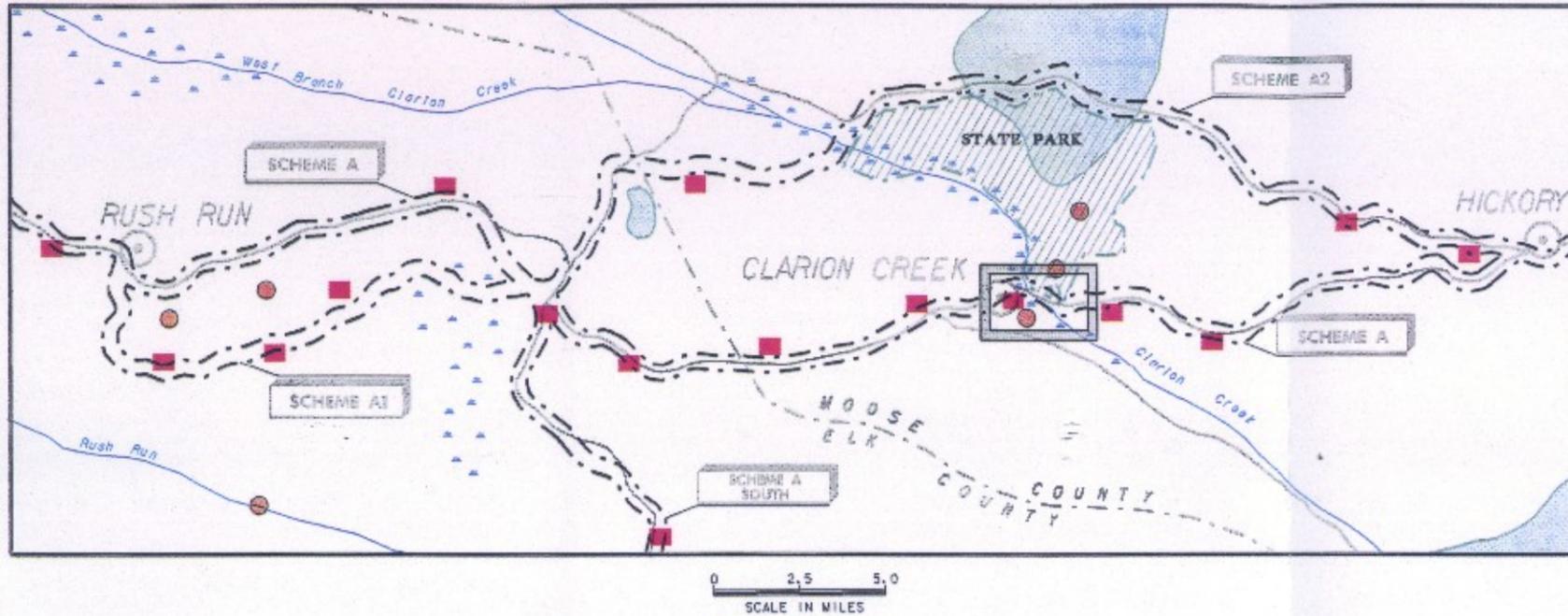
The remainder of this document describes the public involvement process, briefly summarizes Agency and public comments on the SDEIS, summarizes public opinion on the project, outlines the corridor decision-making process, and presents a discussion of and schedule for the Alignment Selection SDEIS, the Final EIS, and the anticipated beginning of construction.

CORRIDOR H STUDY PROCESS

Corridor Selection (Step 1)

Approach

Documents

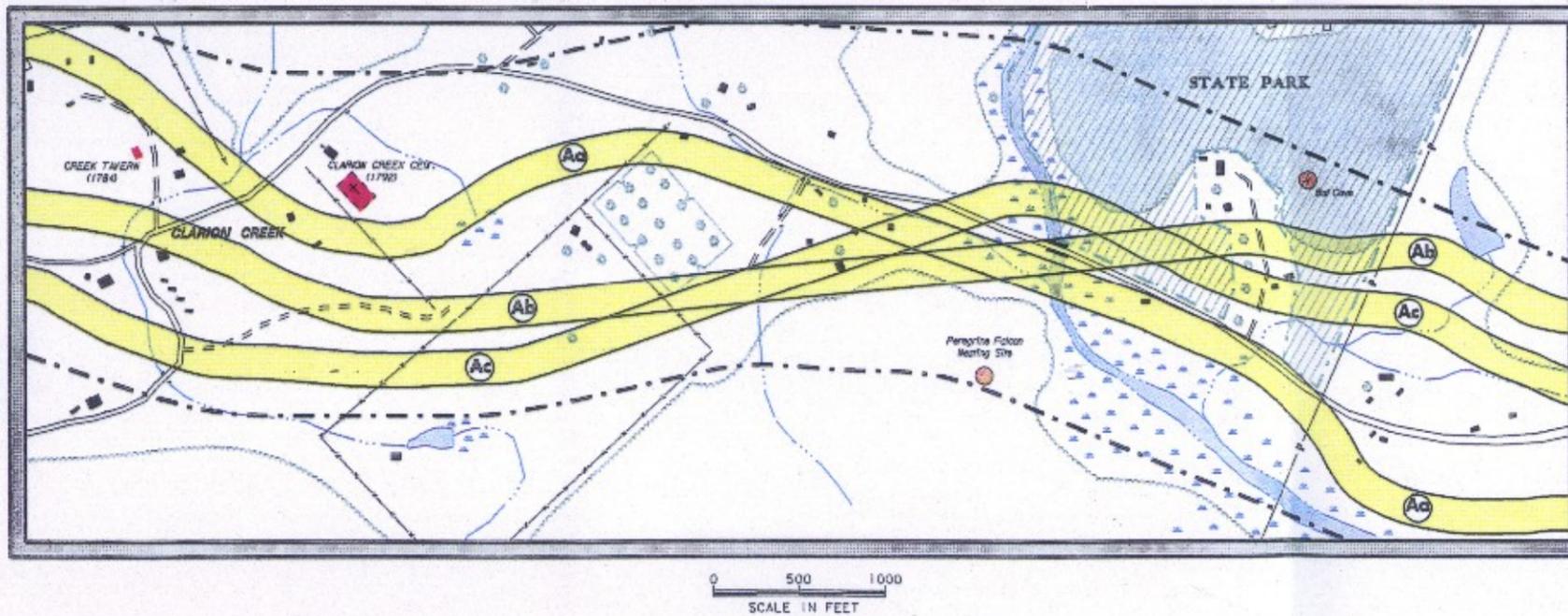


- A. 2000' Wide Corridors
- B. Resource Inventory within each Corridor
- C. Broad Corridor Comparisons of Resources
- D. Preferred Corridor Selection

SDEIS 1

Corridor Selection Decision Document

Alignment Selection (Step 2)



- A. 200'-250' Wide Alignments
- B. Site Specific Resource Analyses (HEP, WET 2.0, STAMINA)
- C. Alignment Impact Comparisons
- D. Preferred Alignment Selection

SDEIS 2

FEIS
Record of Decision (ROD)

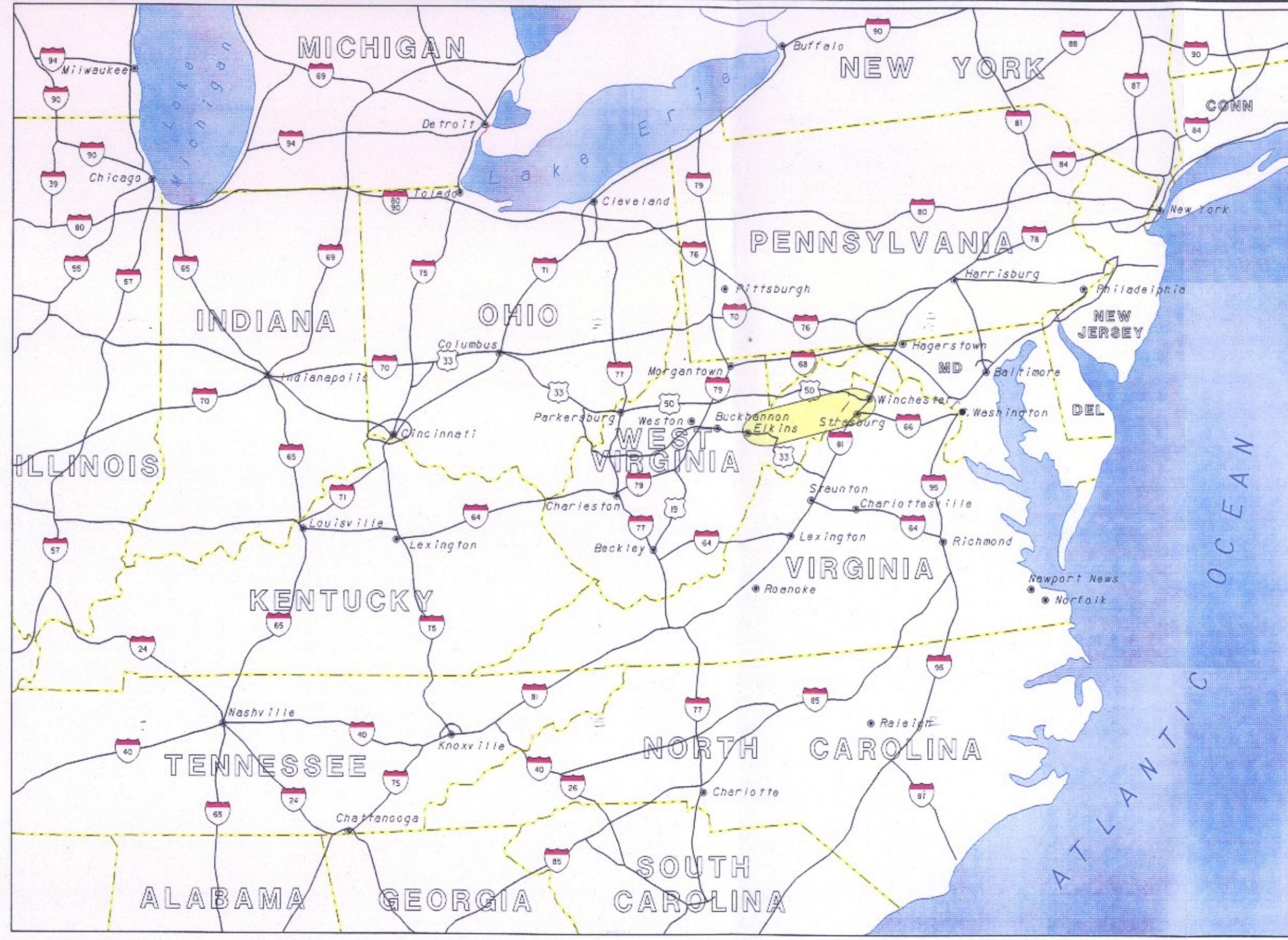
Exhibit 1

LEGEND

-
-
- Wetlands
- Historic/Archaeological Resources
- Section 4f Resources
- Special Botanical Areas
- Threatened/Endangered Species
- Orchard



CORRIDOR H ELKINS to I-81



LEGEND

-  - INTERSTATE HIGHWAY
-  - U.S. ROUTE
-  - STUDY REGION

Exhibit 2

REGIONAL SYSTEM LINKAGE





CORRIDOR H

Elkins to I-81

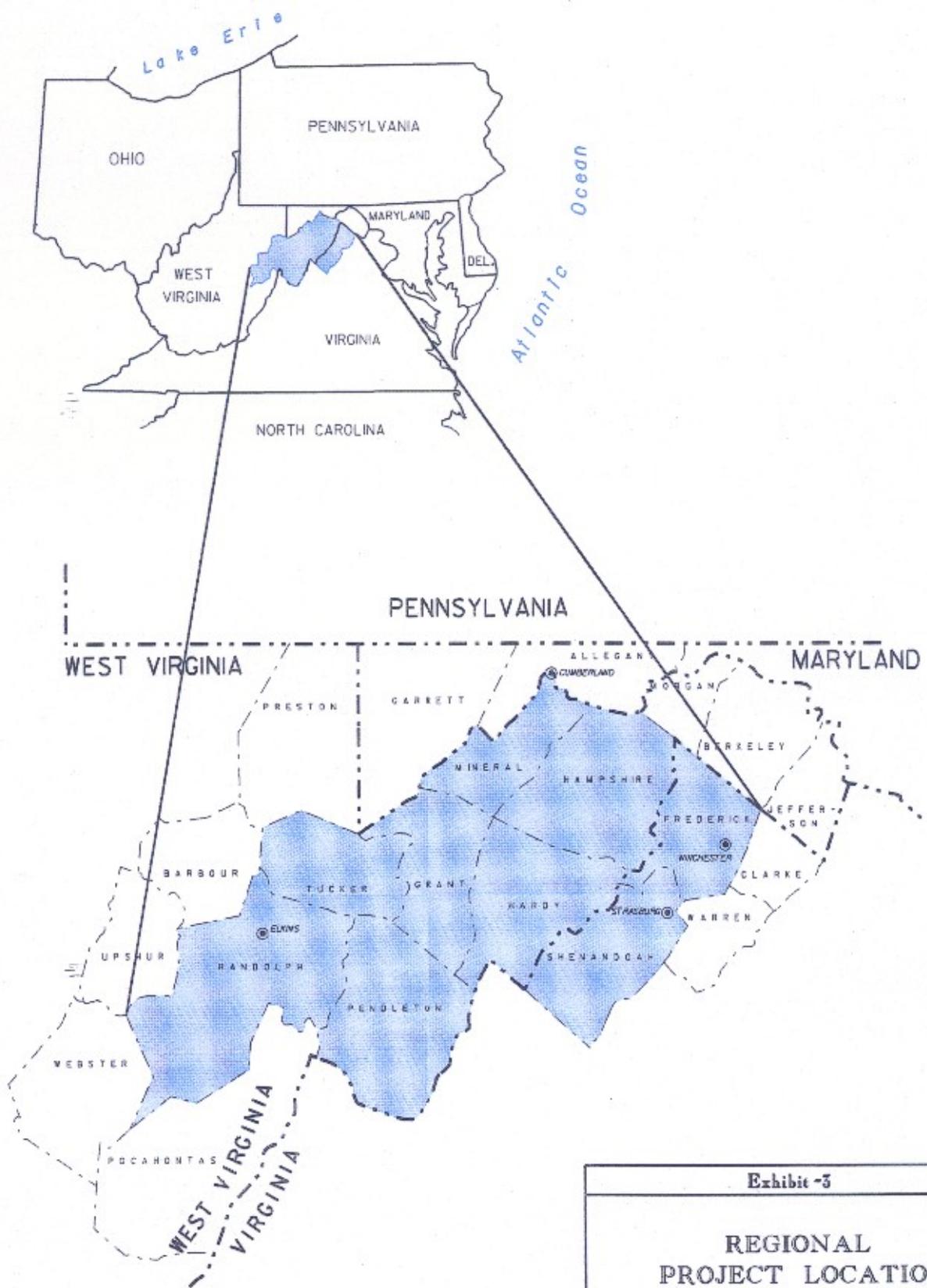


Exhibit -3		
REGIONAL PROJECT LOCATION		
	Not to Scale	



CORRIDOR H

ELKINS to I-81

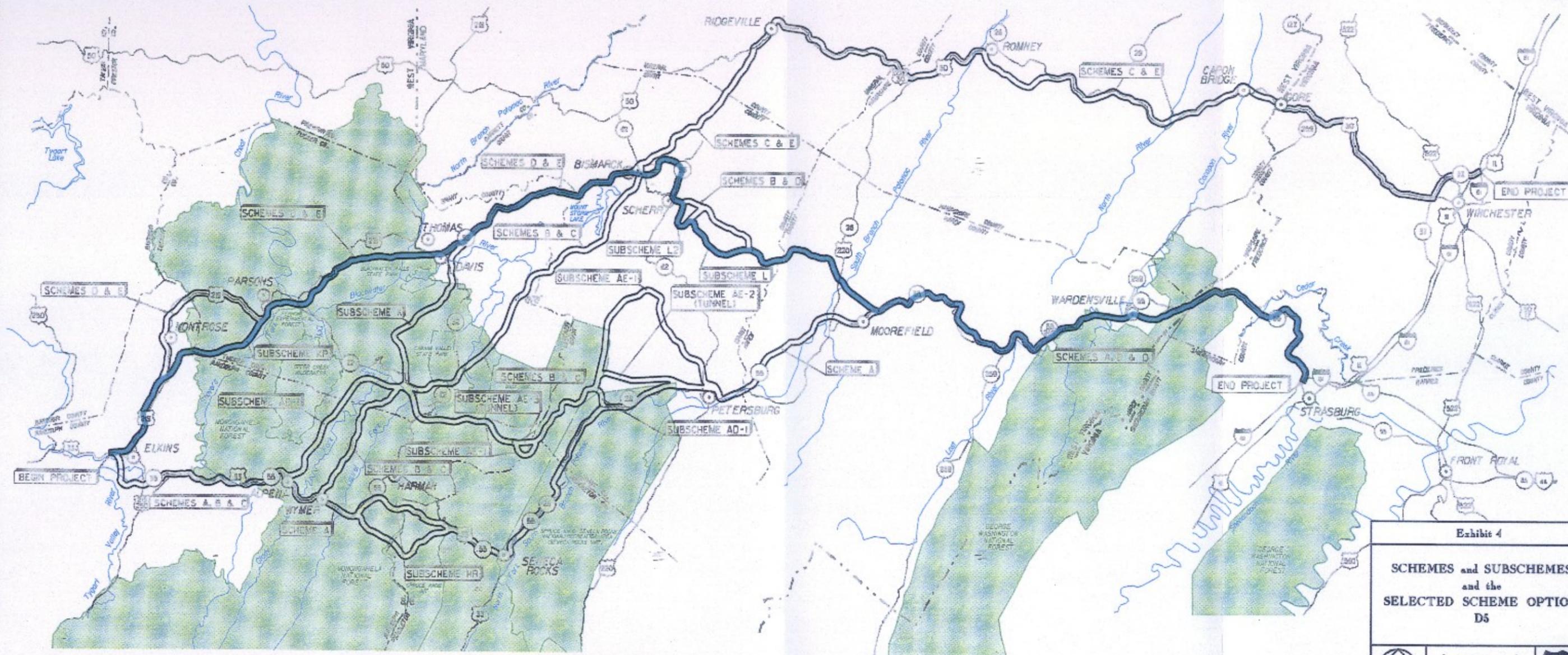
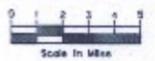


Exhibit 4

**SCHEMES and SUBSCHEMES
and the
SELECTED SCHEME OPTION
D5**


**TABLE 1
SCHEMATIC: DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCHEME OPTIONS**

<i>ALTERNATIVES</i>
No-Build Alternative
Build Alternative



<i>BUILD ALTERNATIVE (1)</i>	
SCHEMES	SUBSCHEMES
A	HR, AE-1, AE-2, AE-3, AD-1
B	K, L, L2
C	K
D	KP, L, L2
E	KP



<i>SCHEME OPTIONS</i>	<i>Descriptions</i>
A1	Scheme A
A2	Scheme A via SubScheme AE-1
A3	Scheme A via SubScheme AE-1, AE-2
A4	Scheme A via SubScheme AE-1, AD-1
A5	Scheme A via SubScheme AE-1, AE-3, AE-1
A6	Scheme A via SubScheme AE-1, AE-3, AE-2
A7	Scheme A via SubScheme AE-1, AE-3, AD-1
A8	Scheme A via SubScheme HR
B1	Scheme B
B2	Scheme B via SubScheme L2
B3	Scheme B via SubScheme L2, L
B4	Scheme B via SubScheme K
B5	Scheme B via SubScheme K, L2
B6	Scheme B via SubScheme K, L2, L
C1	Scheme C
C2	Scheme C via SubScheme K
D1	Scheme D
D2	Scheme D via SubScheme L2
D3	Scheme D via SubScheme L2, L
D4	Scheme D via SubScheme KP, L2
D5	Scheme D via SubScheme KP, L2, L
D6	Scheme D via SubScheme KP
E1	Scheme E
E2	Scheme E via SubScheme KP

(1) Corridor Schemes, SubSchemes, and Scheme Options are 2,000' wide.

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SECTION II: PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

The Corridor Selection SDEIS was approved by FHWA on October 21, 1992, and filed with the Environmental Protection Agency on November 12, 1992. That same week, the SDEIS was mailed to all the parties listed in Section VI of the SDEIS. The following week, the Executive Summary was mailed to everyone on the project mailing list that had been maintained by the WVDOT since the inception of the reevaluation effort in 1990. Altogether, the WVDOT has distributed over 4,000 Executive Summaries, 1,000 SDEISs and 100 sets of Technical Reports.

During December 1992, and January and February 1993, WVDOT and VDOT held a combination of eleven public meetings and hearings in the project area in West Virginia and Virginia. Table 2 below summarizes the dates, locations, attendance and format of these meetings.

**TABLE 2
SUMMARY OF PUBLIC MEETINGS**

Date	Location	Attendance (Approx.)	Format
December 8, 1992	Romney, WV	250	Informational Meeting
December 9, 1992	Moorefield, WV	350	Informational Meeting
December 15, 1992	Canaan Valley State Park	250	Informational Meeting
December 16, 1992	Elkins, WV	300	Informational Meeting
January 4, 1993	Moorefield, WV	450	Public Hearing
January 5, 1993	Romney, WV	200	Public Hearing
January 6, 1993	Keyser, WV	300	Informational Meeting
January 11, 1993	Canaan Valley State Park	200	Public Hearing
January 12, 1993	Elkins, WV	350	Public Hearing
February 9, 1993	Middletown, VA	120	Meeting and Hearing
February 10, 1993	Winchester, VA	200	Meeting and Hearing
		Total 2,970	

Representatives of the WVDOT, along with the VDOT in Virginia, conducted these meetings and hearings and provided information in the form of displays, presentations and open question and answer periods. In West Virginia, the format of the public meeting involved an overall discussion of the project, an in-depth discussion of the contents of the Executive Summary, funding, and a discussion of recent project activity. The WVDOT informed the public that all Scheme B and C Options had been eliminated from further consideration due to involvement with Canaan Valley State Park, an area protected by Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act. As stated previously, these Options were evaluated in the 1981 DEIS and warranted evaluation in the SDEIS. Additionally, the public was informed that certain Scheme A Options (A1, A4, A7, and A8) required the use of property located within the Spruce Knob - Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area (NRA), a protected Section 4(f) area, and could only be selected if there was conclusive evidence to indicate that there were no other prudent and feasible alternatives. The general schedule for the Corridor H project was explained, including the selection of the preferred corridor.

The public response and interest in the project were extensive, with the meetings generally running for three to four hours. In all, the WVDOT and the VDOT met with nearly 3,000 people during this three month public involvement period. Requests for additional meetings and extension of the comment period were acknowledged by the addition of a public meeting in Keyser, West Virginia, and the extension of the SDEIS comment period from January 25, 1993 to February 20, 1993. The SDEIS was available for review for approximately 110 days, instead of the required 45 days. Comment sheets to provide written testimony on the project were distributed at all meetings. These comment sheets, written letters and stated testimony during the hearings have been made part of the project record at the WVDOT. This record is public information and is available for review at the WVDOT offices in Charleston, West Virginia. A summary of the public comments received is discussed in Section IV of this document.

The Virginia Department of Transportation prepared a summary of the meetings and hearings held in the Virginia project area and provided a copy to WVDOT. This information is also part of the project record and is available for review at VDOT or WVDOT. Approximately 15% of the citizens attending the Virginia meetings were residents of West Virginia. Additionally, West Virginia residents representing organizations formed on the Corridor H issue were present at these meetings. Further information on the response at the Virginia meetings is contained in Section IV of this document.

SECTION III: SDEIS COMMENTS

In accordance with FHWA's Technical Advisory, the Corridor Selection SDEIS was made available to the public and circulated for comments to all public officials, private interest groups, and members of the public known to have an interest in the proposed action or the SDEIS. Also, the SDEIS was circulated for comments to all federal, state, and local agencies expected to have jurisdiction, responsibility, interest, or expertise in the proposed action; and to state and federal land management entities that may be affected by the proposed action of any of the alternative Scheme Options. As indicated previously, the required 45-day comment period was extended to an approximately 110-day comment period.

In accordance with FHWA's *Environmental Impact and Related Procedures*, (Section-by-Section Analysis of Section 771.111(g) and Section 771.125(a)(1)) all of the specific Corridor Selection SDEIS comments, as well as comments from the next phase Alignment Selection SDEIS, from agencies and the public, will be addressed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

A. AGENCY SDEIS COMMENTS

Twelve agencies filed written comments on the SDEIS. The West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (WVDEP) and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) stated that all Options under Schemes A, B, or C were unacceptable. The WVDEP further suggested that "...the corridors under consideration be narrowed to Scheme D and E within which a more detailed evaluation be conducted through the use of the GIS database." (The GIS database has been utilized further to refine potential impacts within Schemes D and E, and the results of that analysis are discussed in Section V of this document.)

The Department of the Interior (DOI) expressed concerns about the potential relocation and channelization of the Lost River (Schemes A, B and D) and Shavers Fork (SubScheme KP), as well as possible impacts to a known population of running buffalo clover (SubScheme KP). The WVDOT has determined that design engineers can avoid relocation and channelization of the Lost River and Shavers Fork and that necessary crossings would be perpendicular. The small population of running buffalo clover located near the junction of Schemes D and E, and SubScheme KP can be avoided. The DOI recommended the selection of Scheme Option E1.

The Region 8 Planning and Development Council, covering Grant, Pendleton, Hardy, Mineral and Hampshire Counties, is responsible for preparing economic development plans to develop the region in an efficient and desirable manner. This Council supports the construction of Corridor H along any Scheme Option and believes that "...Corridor H is the district's single most important infrastructure project."

The West Virginia Division of Culture and History (WVDCH) and the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources (WVDNR) did not object to the selection of Scheme D; however, the agency stressed the importance of developing specific cultural resource evaluation requirements for the Alignment SDEIS. The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries stated that Scheme E was more acceptable, but requested that additional studies be done within Scheme D, and that consideration be given to moving outside the 2,000 foot-wide corridors during the development of alignments.

The US Forest Service, Monongahela National Forest, expressed concern over four historic sites located on Forest Service land. The WVDOT will work with the Forest Service and the WVDCH in order to avoid these sites during the development of alternative alignments.

Several agencies, including the DOI, the EPA, the WVDNR, the WVDEP, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and the Virginia Water Control Board expressed concern over possible impacts to water quality and fisheries. The DOI, the EPA, the WVDNR, and the WVDEP requested that secondary and cumulative impacts on natural resources be thoroughly investigated during the next phase of the project.

The Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR) asked that a complete Phase I architectural survey be conducted in Virginia prior to the selection of a corridor. This additional level of detail is not required for a broad comparison of key environmental factors having a bearing on an early corridor location decision. The Corridor Selection SDEIS does include known National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) listed, NRHP eligible, or potentially eligible cultural resources within all of the 24 Scheme Options. Additional, detailed cultural resource surveys are required and will be conducted during the Alignment Selection SDEIS in compliance with all provisions of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act.

No regulatory agency expressed a preference for the No-Build Alternative.

B. PUBLIC SDEIS COMMENTS

Thirty letters from private citizens, private interest groups, businesses and quasi-public agencies offered specific comments on the Corridor Selection SDEIS. Generally, questions were raised concerning the need for additional levels of detailed study regarding cumulative and secondary impacts; surface or groundwater quality impacts; economic growth impacts; and the impacts of an improved roadway alternative.

Of the 30 SDEIS comment letters, six were opposed to any of the Options under Schemes A, B and C. Two public SDEIS comment letters supported Scheme A, and three supported Scheme D. Eight supported the improved roadway alternative or other transportation options such as rail or mass transit. Four of the public SDEIS comment letters favored the No-Build option. The remaining letters did not state a Scheme Option preference.

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SECTION IV: SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

The WVDOT and the VDOT have received over 6,700 letters or signatures on petitions from private citizens, local governments, special interest groups, public officials, businesses and other concerned parties since the circulation of the SDEIS in early November 1992. Each letter has been acknowledged by the WVDOT and the party's name has been placed on the Corridor H mailing list to receive future documents and project information. Included in the above totals are the following Virginia figures: approximately 190 written comments, 60 verbal statements and 260 petition signatures. In addition to written comments, concerns raised verbally during the public meetings have been noted and made a part of the project record.

The form and content of the comment letters varied but could be categorized as follows:

- ◆ Preference for the "Southern" Alternative (Options under Scheme A, or the eastern portion of Scheme D)¹
- ◆ Preference for the "Northern" Alternative (Options under Scheme E, or the western portion of Scheme D)¹
- ◆ Preference for the No-Build Alternative
- ◆ General inquiries requesting information or extension of the comment period
- ◆ Questions or comments concerning the SDEIS (summarized in Section III of this document)
 1. Scheme D could be considered a northern route from Elkins to Bismarck, and a southern route between Moorefield and Interstate 81.

Of the 6,700 letters and signatures, approximately 72% were categorized for the Build Alternative, and 28% for the No-Build Alternative. The No-Build percentage reflects only those letters specifically stating opposition to the construction of Corridor H. Of those clearly in favor of the project, 54% support the construction of Corridor H along a northern route, 46% support construction along a southern route. It is difficult to breakdown the northern and southern positions as they relate to Scheme D, because very few letters refer to it specifically by name. Of the 34 letters that specifically mention Scheme D, 33 support it and one business stated concerns to construction of this Scheme. Some letters and comments favor the construction of Corridor H along any route. Of the Virginia respondents, 87% oppose the construction of Corridor H, 9% favor construction and 4% support the improvement of existing roads. The majority (85%) of the citizens responding to the project in Virginia were Virginia residents.

Special interest groups representing the three general positions on the project developed, the Go South Corridor H - Southern Coalition, the North for Corridor H Alliance, the H - No Fix Local Roads, and the Down the Road Highway Alternative. These groups utilized media such as newspaper ads, flyers and bumper stickers to gain support for their position. Some of these groups distributed form letters and circulated petitions that were signed by private citizens. Approximately 2,400 petition signatures were received; 1,200 of these favor the southern route, 900 of these oppose Scheme E, and 300 of these oppose construction of Corridor H along any route. Additionally, over 300 form letters and newspaper clip and mail coupons were received that oppose construction of Corridor H along any route.

Representatives from some of the interest groups (primarily from H - No Fix Local Roads) formed a new group in the Spring of 1993; Corridor H Alternatives. On April 24, 1993, three representatives from the new group reviewed the public comment letters. The Corridor H Alternatives group suggested that many people who wrote letters in opposition to specific Scheme Options were actually opposed to the project in general and favored the No-Build. If all the letters received in opposition to specific Scheme Options were categorized as No-Build, the breakdown between Build and No-Build would be 57% and 43% respectively (as opposed to the 72%/28% referenced on page 15).

Single issue groups also developed. For example, virtually the entire town of Montrose, West Virginia, sent form letters urging the use of SubScheme KP to avoid their town, should a northern route be chosen. Nearly 300 Montrose letters were received.

A. PREFERENCE FOR "SOUTHERN" ALTERNATIVES

Those in support of construction of a southern alternative, representing 46% of those who support the Build Alternative, cited the following major reasons for their position:

- ◆ The southern alternative has less potential to impact wetlands than northern options.
- ◆ The southern alternative has better potential for economic development due to higher population than northern options.
- ◆ The southern alternatives would result in improved safety over northern options due to less severe weather conditions.

- ◆ Lower maintenance costs would result if southern alternatives were selected over northern options due to less severe weather conditions.
- ◆ Scheme A was the preferred scheme in 1981 DEIS.
- ◆ Existing 6.6 mile segment and 5.5 miles of right-of-way acquired from Bowden to Alpena could be utilized if Scheme A was selected.
- ◆ Scheme A is located more centrally between Interstates 64 and 68.
- ◆ Southern alternative would provide more direct route to I-81.
- ◆ Southern alternative would provide better access to health care facilities.

Scheme A was commonly referred to as the "southern" route. Most of the Go South citizens favored the use of the original Scheme A (now designated Scheme Option A1) as the corridor that would provide the most opportunity to meet all of the transportation needs in the project area and to realize the greatest economic growth. Of the 1,800 letters and form letters specifically mentioning Scheme A, 87% supported it while 13% opposed it.

Some members of the organized Go South group also supported Scheme Options A2, A3, A5 and A6 as prudent and feasible alternatives to the use of Section 4(f) property located within the NRA.

As indicated, Scheme D is coincident to all Scheme A Options from Moorefield to I-81, but Scheme D would not utilize the existing four-lane section between Canfield and Bowden.

B. PREFERENCE FOR "NORTHERN" ALTERNATIVES

Those in support of construction of a northern alternative, representing 54% of those who favor the Build Alternative, cited the following major reasons for their position:

- ◆ The northern alternatives are the least costly of all Scheme options.
- ◆ The northern alternatives reach more areas identified for growth as compared to southern options.
- ◆ There is reduced potential along northern alternatives for environmental impact to streams, wildlife, and Threatened and Endangered Species as compared to Scheme A options.
- ◆ Lesser involvement with National Forests exists along northern alternatives.
- ◆ Scheme E would utilize existing four-lane section of Route 50 in Virginia.

- ◆ Schemes D or E would serve more people in more incorporated communities than options under Scheme A.
- ◆ Schemes D or E would avoid Bowden Fish Hatchery.

The most divided public opinion came from citizens who would be most affected by an option under Scheme E, the northernmost route. Of the 1,100 letters and petition signatures specifically mentioning Scheme E, 30% supported it, while 70% opposed it. The majority of the opposition to Scheme E was noted in the form of petition signatures from citizens who reside east of Bismarck.

Some organized environmental groups, such as Trout Unlimited and the West Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club, specifically objected to the use of any of the Scheme A, B, or C Options, but did not specifically support the selection of another Scheme Option. These objections focused primarily on potential disruptions to the Monongahela National Forest, the NRA, the Bowden National Fish Hatchery, the Otter Creek Wilderness area, Dolly Sods, and native brook trout streams.

Those who favored a northern route often cited that it would best serve future economic development, without the potential adverse environmental effects associated with the Scheme A Options. Several supporters of the northern route pointed out the specific ability of Scheme E to use the existing 4-lane section of US 50 between Gore and Winchester, Virginia.

Scheme D is a northern route from Elkins to Bismarck, then turns southeast to join Scheme A, forming the southern route from Moorefield to I-81.

C. OPPOSITION TO THE PROJECT

Those respondents considered in support of the No-Build Alternative represented a wide variance in their positions. Some respondents clearly opposed the construction of Corridor H. Others were opposed to the Build Alternative as proposed, but were in favor of some alternative that would improve existing roadways in the project area. Others expressed localized concerns over certain resources or sites in a particular area.

1. SUPPORT FOR THE NO-BUILD ALTERNATIVE

Those clearly in support of the No-Build Alternative represent approximately 28% of the citizens who expressed an opinion regarding the construction of Corridor H, and cited the following general reasons for their position:

- ◆ All Scheme Options are environmentally damaging.
- ◆ There is no need for the project.
- ◆ The construction is too costly.
- ◆ The project will cause an increase in crime and pollution.
- ◆ The project will result in loss of character of the area.

The citizens of Virginia and West Virginia attending the Strasburg public hearing voiced nearly unanimous opposition to the construction of Corridor H. Their objections were primarily based on the opinion that any advantages of Corridor H would be outweighed by the disruption to homes, businesses and the environment.

Like those Virginia and West Virginia residents who attended the Strasburg hearing, those who attended the Winchester public hearing spoke almost unanimously in favor of the No-Build Alternative.

2. SUPPORT FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF EXISTING ROADWAYS

Those opposed to the Build Alternative, but expressing support for some improved roadway alternative, cited these reasons for their position:

- ◆ The 20% state matching funds could be better spent by providing improvements such as localized widening, realignments and provision of passing lanes to improve safety.
- ◆ Improvements mentioned above would cost less than the 20% state matching funds.
- ◆ The Build Alternative would be environmentally damaging.
- ◆ The Build Alternative would change the character of the area.

The improvement of local roads as a method of reducing potential environmental impacts was the subject of considerable discussion throughout the public involvement process.

The Improved Roadway Alternative is discussed in the Corridor Selection SDEIS as an alternative that does not meet the purpose and need of the project. The potential displacement impact of improving local roads to current design standards is qualitatively discussed on page II-5 of the SDEIS. Because of the interest in the improvement of local two-lane roads, these potential relocation impacts have been quantified to define the potential impact of widening, truck climbing lanes, and curve realignments on total residential and commercial displacements. The general design criterion was assumed to be two 12-foot lanes and shoulders suitable for a 50-mph design speed.

For the existing southern routes, improving local roads could potentially cause over 300 displacements. This number assumes that no widening of lanes or shoulders would occur within the limits of Elkins, Seneca Rocks, Petersburg, Moorefield, Wardensville, or Lebanon Church, because of the additional displacements that would be required.

For the northern routes, improving local roads to 12-foot lanes would potentially require 460 displacements. This estimate assumes that nothing would be done through established neighborhoods in Elkins, Leadsville, Parsons, Thomas, Burlington, Romney, Capon Bridge, or along the 4-lane section of US 50 from Gore to Winchester, Virginia.

Based on an average construction cost of \$2,000,000 per mile, the cost of these improvements would likely range from \$250,000,000 to \$500,000,000, depending on the exact number of miles of existing local roads improved on both northern and southern routes.

During the Alignment Selection SDEIS, the need for, and impact of, improving local roads, in combination with the alignment alternatives, will be investigated.

SECTION V: CORRIDOR DECISION

FHWA guidelines require the analysis of the following seven factors in establishing project need: legislation; social demand and economic development; system linkage; capacity and level of service; regional planning demands; safety considerations; and roadway deficiencies. The Transportation Needs Study for Corridor H analyzed these seven factors and determined that a transportation need existed in the project area. The legislation establishing Corridor H recognized the need to provide a transportation system to support economic development. The Needs Study evaluated several different methods to meet the project need and determined that building a new highway (the Build Alternative) was the only alternative that met the transportation needs of the region. The SDEIS evaluated 24 different Build Alternatives, along with the No-Build Alternative. All Build Alternatives meet the overall project purpose and need. The decision process for selecting a preferred corridor revolved around three questions:

- A. **TRANSPORTATION NEEDS** - *From an operational point of view, which Scheme Option best meets the identified transportation-related needs in the study area?*

- B. **ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES** - *Considering the important sensitive environmental resources identified in the Corridor Selection SDEIS, which Scheme Option best meets the transportation needs in the study area while avoiding or minimizing adverse environmental and social impacts, and providing positive economic benefits?*

- C. **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT** - *Considering the input from the public involvement process, which Scheme Option best meets the transportation needs in the study area in an environmentally responsible manner, and appropriately responds to the expressed desires of the public most affected by the construction of Corridor H?*

The facts developed in addressing each of these issues are summarized below.

A. TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

In considering the ability of any of the 24 corridors to meet the transportation-related needs identified in the project area, six primary elements of the existing transportation system were evaluated: total length; vertical alignment (grades); horizontal alignment (curves); average travel speed; average accident rates; and Level of Service (LOS). Level of Service is a qualitative measure that describes operational conditions of a traffic stream along a roadway. Levels of Service are defined as A, B, C, D, E, or F, with LOS A being the best and LOS F being the worst. In general, highway designers strive to provide the highest Level of Service that is both feasible and consistent with anticipated conditions. For acceptable degrees of congestion, rural arterials should be designed for LOS B. In mountainous areas, LOS C is considered acceptable. Table 3, Existing Roadway Characteristics, presents the results of an evaluation of the existing roads that presently carry traffic between Elkins and Strasburg, and Elkins and Winchester.

**TABLE 3
EXISTING ROADWAY CHARACTERISTICS**

	Elkins to Strasburg	Elkins to Winchester
Total Length	121 miles	139 miles
Vertical Alignment:		
Total miles of Grade > 7% (50 mph; mountainous terrain)	29 miles	12 miles
Total miles of Grade > 4% (50 mph; level terrain)	48 miles	38 miles
Horizontal Alignment:		
No. of curves > 5° 30' (55 mph; all rural terrain)	188 curves	155 curves
Average Speed (mph):		
Automobiles	35 mph	38 mph
Trucks	24 mph	26 mph
Average Accident Rates: (accidents per million vehicle miles traveled)	3.24	2.63
1992 Level of Service (LOS): Percent at LOS D or LOS E	82%	57%

As this table indicates, the shortest distance between Elkins and I-81 is along the existing Elkins to Strasburg route. Additionally, for every primary factor listed, these roads collectively exhibit more deficiencies than those currently existing between Elkins and Winchester. In comparing the existing Elkins to Strasburg route (via US 33 and State Route 55) with the existing Elkins to Winchester route (via US 219, State Route 93, and US 50), US 33 and State Route 55 between Elkins and Strasburg represent the greatest need for improvement and are characterized by the:

- ◆ Existing poorest grades (vertical alignment)
- ◆ Existing worst curves (horizontal alignment)
- ◆ Existing slowest overall travel speeds
- ◆ Existing poorest overall Level of Service
- ◆ Existing highest overall accident rate

From an operational viewpoint alone, Scheme Option A1, the most direct economical route from Elkins to I-81 at Strasburg, best satisfies all of the transportation-related needs in the project area. Scheme Option A1, the preferred option in the 1981 DEIS, would provide an improved transportation network that would best make use of the existing roads in the project area, including the existing 6.6-mile section of 4-lane highway between Canfield and Bowden. The area to the west of the 4-lane section, between Elkins and Canfield, would experience the combined highest traffic volumes and worst Level of Service of any single existing segment in the project area if the No-Build Alternative was selected (13,700 vehicles per day at LOS F). Scheme Option A1 could also utilize the 5.5 miles of right-of-way between Bowden and Alpena purchased nearly twenty years ago by the West Virginia Division of Highways.

Scheme Option A1 also meets the legislative, social and economic, and regional planning needs in the project area. Therefore, Scheme Option A1 best meets all the needs based on the seven factors discussed previously and analyzed in the Transportation Needs Study.

The No-Build Alternative would not address the overall regional need for transportation improvements in the project area, and, as stated in the Corridor Selection SDEIS, would not meet the purpose and need of the project.

B. ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

1. SECTION 4(f)

As described in the Corridor Selection SDEIS and at all of the public meetings and hearings, Section 4(f) applies to any publicly owned parks, recreation areas, and wildlife and waterfowl refuges, as well as historic and archaeological sites listed or considered eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The Secretary of the US Department of Transportation cannot approve the use of federal funds for the construction of a highway through a Section 4(f) property unless it has been conclusively demonstrated that there are not any prudent or feasible alternatives, and that all steps have been taken to minimize harm to the Section 4(f) land.

The known Section 4(f) properties within the study area are:

- ◆ The Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area (NRA), (affected by Scheme Options A1, A4, A7, and A8)
- ◆ Canaan Valley State Park (affected by all Scheme B and C Options)
- ◆ Individual historic sites or districts listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (located within the 2,000 foot-wide corridor of all Scheme Options)

Additionally, lands designated within the Monongahela National Forest as Management Prescription 6.2 (MP 6.2) areas may be determined to be Section 4(f) land based on the use of each specific 6.2 area. These areas are located within all the Scheme A Options. Other property within the boundaries of the Monongahela and George Washington National Forests is not Section 4(f) land.

The Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks NRA is the only Section 4(f) property that could not be avoided during the development of alternative alignments for the Alignment Selection SDEIS if Scheme Option A1, A4, A7, or A8 was selected.

In accordance with the FHWA's regulations governing Section 4(f) evaluations, an analysis required by Section 4(f) may involve different levels of detail where the Section 4(f) involvement is addressed in an EIS using a tiering process, such as the two-step process being used for the development of Corridor H. The process recognizes that the Corridor Selection SDEIS may be limited to an evaluation of potential impacts that the project may have on Section 4(f) land, and whether those impacts could have a bearing on the decision to be made (23 CFR 771.135 (o)).

The regulations further provide that the information contained in the Corridor Selection SDEIS may be used to make a determination as to whether prudent and feasible locations or alternatives exist to avoid the use of the Section 4(f) land. Such planning at this stage is normally limited to ensuring that opportunities to first avoid, then minimize, harm at subsequent stages in the development process, have not been precluded by decisions made at the corridor selection stage.

While Scheme Option A1 best meets the transportation needs in the project area, significant lengths of this Scheme Option, as well as Scheme Options A4, A7, and A8, are entirely within and bordered by the NRA. The selection of any of these Options would preclude the possibility of developing an avoidance alternative and opportunities to minimize harm to Section 4(f) land during the development of the Alignment Selection SDEIS.

There are four Scheme A Options that could avoid the NRA; Scheme Options A2, A3, A5 and A6. Any of these would generally provide the same transportation improvements as Scheme Option A1 without increasing the likelihood of additional adverse environmental impacts. In fact, these Options potentially affect fewer residences, fewer known potential historic sites, less total wetland acreage, less exceptional resource value wetland acreage, and fewer streams than Scheme Option A1. However, the construction costs of these options range from \$539,000,000 (A2) to \$655,000,000 (A6) *more than* Scheme Option A1. Additionally, Scheme Options A2, A3, A5, and A6 could impact MP 6.2 areas that are potentially Section 4(f) properties.

2. PRUDENT AND FEASIBLE ALTERNATIVES

This Decision Document contains an analysis of prudent and feasible alternatives to the use of the NRA property, and provides supporting information to demonstrate whether or not there are any unique problems or unusual factors involved in the use of those alternatives. Unique problems or unusual factors are considered to be cost, social, economic, and environmental impacts, or community disruption of extraordinary magnitude (23 CFR 771.135 (a) (2)).

a. Prudent and Feasible Scheme Options

The six Scheme D Options and the two Scheme E Options are considered to be prudent and feasible alternatives to the use of the Section 4(f) property within the NRA, and cost anywhere from \$590,000,000 to \$693,000,000 *less than* the least expensive Scheme A Option, A2, which avoids the NRA.

The Scheme D Options provide an Elkins to Strasburg route, as do the Scheme A Options that avoid the NRA. Although the total length of the Scheme D Options ranges from 5 to 8 miles longer than these Scheme A Options, there is a \$600 to \$700 million cost differential. The six Scheme D Options range in cost from \$840,000,000 to \$913,000,000, while the remaining Scheme A Options range in cost from \$1,533,000,000 to \$1,649,000,000.

Additionally:

- ◆ The potential number of displacements along Scheme Options A2, A3, A5, and A6 is nearly equal to or *higher than* any of the Scheme D Options.
- ◆ Scheme Options A2, A3, A5, and A6 have potential major involvements with the Monongahela National Forest's MP 6.2 areas, which have been determined to be potential Section 4(f) resources; while none of the Scheme D Options involve MP 6.2 areas.
- ◆ Scheme Options A2, A3, A5, and A6 involve nearly 400 more acres of 100-year floodplain than any of the Scheme D Options.
- ◆ The Scheme D Options contain nearly 600 more acres of total wetlands within the 2,000 foot-wide corridor than Scheme Options A2, A3, A5, and A6.

With the exception of the total potential wetland inventory, the Scheme D Options provide more advantages than any of the remaining Scheme A Options, and do so at a considerable cost savings. Therefore, the Scheme D Options were considered to be the only prudent and feasible Elkins to Strasburg Options, and Scheme Options A2, A3, A5 and A6 were dropped from further consideration for the location of Appalachian Corridor H.

In addition to Scheme D Options, the Scheme E Options, with an I-81 terminus at Winchester, Virginia, also remain as prudent and feasible, because they do not require the use of property within the NRA. Scheme Options E1 and E2 would cost \$943,000,000 and \$944,000,000, respectively.

b. Final Prudent and Feasible Scheme Options

The final remaining prudent and feasible alternatives to the use of any Section 4(f) property are the six Scheme D Options, the two Scheme E Options and the No-Build Alternative.

This Decision Document contains the results of additional analyses using the Geographic Information System (GIS) developed for the project to further narrow the remaining

prudent and feasible alternatives to a single Scheme Option that neither precludes opportunities to avoid known Section 4(f) property, nor creates any unique problems regarding cost, social, economic, or environmental impacts, or significant community disruption. Therefore, alternative alignments within the selected corridor can be developed to avoid Section (4) land.

c. Narrowing the Scheme D Options

There are two primary environmental issues affecting the Scheme D Options; the town of Montrose, West Virginia, and the Greenland Gap, a National Natural Landmark.

Montrose is a small community (Population 140) located north of Elkins, and just south of Parsons, West Virginia. The entire community is located within the 2,000 foot-wide corridor of Scheme Options D1, D2 and D3, and has strongly supported the use of SubScheme KP, should a northern route be chosen. Although alternative alignments could be developed along Scheme Options D1, D2, and D3, that would completely avoid disruption to Montrose, there are other Scheme D Options that completely avoid the town of Montrose.

Scheme Options D4, D5 and D6 utilize SubScheme KP, an alternative developed specifically to avoid Montrose. While avoiding Montrose, Scheme Option D6 would require construction through the Greenland Gap, an area of unique geological features in the study area, and a registered National Natural Landmark. Scheme Options D4 and D5 use SubSchemes that were specifically developed to avoid the Greenland Gap.

Scheme Options D4 and D5 essentially follow the same alignment except in the area just southeast of Scherr. In this area, Scheme Option D4 uses SubScheme L2 to avoid Greenland Gap. Scheme Option D5 in this area uses SubScheme L2 to avoid Greenland Gap and also uses SubScheme L to avoid Falls Gap and the unincorporated community of Falls, West Virginia. Following SubScheme L avoids the potential displacement of 20 residential or commercial structures and avoids two high quality streams. Therefore, of the two remaining Scheme D Options, D5 is less environmentally and socially damaging.

Based on the desire to avoid disrupting the communities of Montrose and Falls, West Virginia, and the unique geologic formations of Greenland Gap and Falls Gap, Scheme Option D5 was selected as the most viable Scheme D Option.

d. Narrowing the Scheme E Options

There are only two Scheme E Options, E1 and E2. Scheme Option E2 uses SubScheme KP, thus avoiding disruptions to Montrose. Neither Scheme Option E1 nor E2 would involve the Greenland Gap. Therefore, Scheme Option E2 remains as the most viable Scheme E Option.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: D5 VS. E2

Scheme Options D5 and E2 are coincident west of Bismarck. In this reach, these corridors utilize SubScheme KP which has potential involvement with Shavers Fork, a National Resource Water, and a known population of running buffalo clover, a federally designated Endangered plant species. The WVDOT has determined, based on additional information provided by recent aerial photography, that relocation of Shavers Fork can be avoided and that necessary crossings could be perpendicular. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has determined that the population of running buffalo clover along Shavers Fork in SubScheme KP is relatively small. The location of this population is near the junction of SubScheme KP and Schemes D and E, and can be avoided during the development of highway alignments.

Because Scheme Option D5 and Scheme Option E2 are coincident from Elkins to Bismarck, the difference in important environmental resource involvements between the two Scheme Options need only be evaluated east of Bismarck. A comparison of these sensitive natural, social, economic and potential Section 4(f) resource involvements is shown in Table 4, page 29. This information was generated using the Geographic Information System (GIS) developed for the Corridor Selection SDEIS.

TABLE 4
D5 VS. E2, EAST OF BISMARCK
A COMPARISON OF SENSITIVE NATURAL
SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RESOURCE INVOLVEMENTS*
(within the 2,000 foot-wide corridor)

Natural Resource Involvement:	SCHEME OPTION	
	D5	E2
Wetlands (Acres) ¹		
Palustrine Forested	17	36
Palustrine Scrub Shrub	5	6
Palustrine Emergent	46	37
Palustrine Open Water	<u>38</u>	<u>41</u>
Total	106	120
High Impact Potential for all Wetland Types (Acres) ²	3	30
National Resource Waters ³	13	3
High Quality Streams ³	16	25
Total Floodplains (Acres) ⁴	908	1,590
Section 4(f) Land:		
Historic Sites ⁵	36	86
Impacts to Section 4(f) Land	0	0
Social Resource Involvements:		
Potential Residential, Commercial, Facility and Service Displacements ⁶	370	1,081
Economic Resource Benefits:		
Industrial Parks ⁷	5	2
Best Access to Virginia Inland Port	Yes	No

* A similar table illustrating actual impacts of the alternative alignments will be presented in the Alignment SDEIS.

1. SDEIS Natural Resources Technical Report, Book I, Appendix C-1, Table C1-1 through Table C1-5.
2. SDEIS Natural Resources Technical Report, Book I, Appendix C-1, Table C1-10.
3. SDEIS Natural Resources Technical Report, Book I, Appendix B-1, Table B1-2.
4. These figures represent all floodplain involvements, including 100-year floodplain.
5. Includes all known Archaeological and Historical Sites that are either listed, eligible or potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Data derived from the SDEIS, Section III, R97, Exhibit III-12, p. 173.
6. Potential number of involvements represents a subset of those data presented for the same category in SDEIS, p. S-15.
7. SDEIS, Section III, Table III-19, p. III-58.

a. Natural Resources

While the total wetland acreage difference between the two Schemes is only 14 acres, the difference in potential involvement among the wetland types is important. Specifically, Scheme Option E2 has the potential to involve more than twice the acreage of palustrine forested wetlands as compared to Scheme Option D5 (36 acres vs 17 acres). Forested wetlands are important because of the maturation time required for these systems to develop their unique set of functions and values.

Finally, the possibility of avoiding wetland systems is greater within Scheme Option D5 than Scheme Option E2. Scheme Option E2 contains 30 acres of wetlands that have a high probability of being impacted by any highway due to their location in the corridor and the topography of the corridor itself. Scheme Option D5 only contains 3 acres of such wetland systems.

Scheme Option D5 contains significantly fewer high quality stream and floodplain involvements as compared to Scheme Option E2.

National Resource Waters (NRW) is a West Virginia stream classification. The closest equivalent Virginia classification is Outstanding State Resource Waters (OSRW). Streams are designated as National Resource Waters if they have one or more of the following characteristics:

- ◆ Located within a National or State Forest or National or State Recreation Area
- ◆ Federally designated Wild and Scenic River
- ◆ Contain Threatened or Endangered Species
- ◆ Contain naturally reproducing trout populations

The OSRW designation differs from the NRW designation in that a stream does not qualify due only to its location in a forest or recreation area. None of the streams in Scheme Options D5 or E2 are federally designated Wild and Scenic Rivers and none contain Threatened or Endangered Species. All 16 of the NRW streams in these Scheme Options are designated as such due in part to their location in either a National Forest or National or State Recreation Area. It was previously determined that there were no OSRW in the Virginia project area. However, recent information provided by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries identifies Duck Run, located in the Virginia portion of Scheme Option D5, as a Class II native brook trout stream, qualifying Duck Run as an OSRW. A total of 4 of the 16 streams in question contain populations

of naturally reproducing trout: Edwards Run located in Scheme Option E2; and Elk Lick Run, Trout Run, and Duck Run located in Scheme Option D5. Elk Lick Run extends longitudinally within Scheme Option D5 and can be avoided during the development of highway alignments. However, Edwards Run in Scheme Option E2 and Trout Run and Duck Run in Scheme Option D5 cross the entire width of each corridor and cannot be avoided.

The Lost River, located within Scheme Option D5, is a National Resource Water due to its location within the George Washington National Forest. This river is important due to its unusual flow characteristics. The Lost River parallels the Scheme Option D5 corridor for approximately six miles. The WVDOT has determined, based on additional information provided by recent aerial photography and field reviews, that relocation or channelization of the Lost River can be avoided and that necessary crossings can be perpendicular.

b. Section 4(f) Properties

Within Scheme Option D5, 36 properties may potentially qualify as Section 4(f) land; all are known historic sites. Nine do qualify because they are properties currently eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The remaining 27 are potentially eligible for listing. There are not any known sites or districts within Scheme Option D5 that are currently listed on the Register.

There are 86 properties within Scheme Option E2 that may qualify as Section 4(f) land. These are also all known historic sites. Of the 86, four are currently listed on the National Register, and are Section 4(f) properties. The remaining 82 are potentially eligible for listing, and depending on a final determination, could be Section 4(f) properties.

All of the known historic sites, whether listed on, eligible for listing, or potentially eligible for listing, are included in the Geographic Information System used for the development of the Corridor Selection SDEIS. Based on the topographic characteristics of both Scheme Option D5 and E2, it is possible to develop alternative alignments in either Scheme Option that would avoid the use of these known and potential Section 4(f) properties. These historic sites are the only known or potential Section 4(f) lands within Scheme Option D5 and E2. There are not any known publicly owned parks or recreation areas, or wildlife and waterfowl refuges located within Scheme Options D5 or E2.

Based on the presence of over three times the number of residences, businesses and public facilities within Scheme Option E2 as opposed to Scheme Option D5 (1,081 vs. 370), and the higher potential of impacting wetlands (30 acres vs. 3 acres), there is a greater likelihood of creating unique problems by the development of alternative alignments in Scheme Option E2. Within Scheme Option D5, it is apparent that alternative alignments can be developed to avoid Section 4(f) land without creating any unique problems regarding cost, social, economic, or environmental impacts, and without community disruption of extraordinary magnitude.

c. Socioeconomics

Scheme Option D5, east of Bismarck, West Virginia, has fewer negative social and economic involvements when compared to Scheme E2. There are 370 residences and commercial establishments located within Scheme Option D5 east of Bismarck, while there are 1,081 within Scheme Option E2. Additionally, information obtained during the public involvement phase has revealed that while Scheme Option E2 serves the most people, those citizens and communities located along or close to Scheme Option D5 (Moorefield, Wardensville, Petersburg) have the greatest need for improved access to health care facilities.

Two of the seven factors studied to determine the project need in the Corridor H Transportation Needs Study are: social demand and economic development, and regional planning demands. Social demand and economic development refer to the types of social and economic traffic generators, existing and future, that exert a demand on a facility. The level of social demand would be relative to a corridor's proximity to population centers, employers and public facilities and services. Economic development is related to a region's potential for growth, normally indicated by its excess infrastructure in the form of water supply and wastewater facilities, land use plans and controls, and land suitability. Regional planning demand is determined by regional planning organizations such as the Region 7 and Region 8 Planning and Development Councils which cover the Corridor H project area. These councils have identified a new regional highway as an important element in their development plans and agree that improved east/west access would open markets to the east coast and midwest business and tourism opportunities.

Scheme Option D5 and Scheme Option E2 reach similar numbers of population centers and population. However, Scheme Option D5 reaches these population centers and also demonstrates potential for development in the form of industrial parks. Scheme Option D5 contains or is in close proximity to five of the seven industrial parks located east of Bismarck. These include Hardy County Industrial Park in Moorefield, Wardensville Industrial Park, the new

Moorefield Industrial Park, the new Hardy County Industrial Park, and the Grant County Industrial Park located in Petersburg, less than 20 miles from Scheme Option D5. These five parks have 500 acres available to support development as do the two industrial parks located along Scheme Option E2, east of Bismarck: Hampshire County Industrial Park in Romney and the Mineral County Industrial Park in Keyser, containing 170 combined acres available.

Additionally, Scheme Option D5 would provide the best access to the Virginia Inland Port, located in Front Royal, Virginia. The Virginia Inland Port (VIP) is a truck-rail intermodal facility whose success relies on incoming motor carriers. Truck traffic from northeastern West Virginia is a small but growing part of the VIP business. The Needs Study indicates that a beneficial relationship could be developed between the Corridor H study area in West Virginia and the Inland Port. Increased access to the Inland Port would be provided by the construction of Corridor H with a Strasburg terminus. This access would open up a customer market for raw natural resources such as timber, coal, and limestone that would be delivered by the 50 motor carriers based in the study area to this port facility. Additionally, the largest frozen food customer of the Inland Port is Wampler-Longacre Chicken, Inc. This company's current plans include a \$42 million expansion of their Moorefield, West Virginia facility, which is expected to create 850 direct jobs and over 500 additional secondary jobs. Increases in additional personal income generated by these jobs is estimated at \$28 million.

In consideration of potential natural, social, and economic resource impacts, both positive and negative, Scheme Option D5 is the least environmentally damaging of the remaining prudent and feasible alternatives that meets most of the project's transportation-related needs. Additionally, alternative alignments developed within Scheme Option D5 present the most apparent opportunities to avoid all known Section 4(f) land without creating any unique cost, social, economic, or environmental problems.

C. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

As discussed in Section IV, over 6,700 letters or petition signatures have been received from the public regarding the construction of Corridor H. Of those, 72% favor the construction of the road, and 28% favor the No-Build Alternative or the improvement of local roads as an option to the construction of a four-lane highway.

Of those who submitted letters in support of the construction of Corridor H, 54% favored a northern route and 46% favored a southern route. The public's overwhelming tendency to categorize the Scheme Options as "northern" or "southern" routes presented a dilemma, since this terminology is not officially linked to any of the 24 Scheme Options presented in the Corridor Selection SDEIS.

The Scheme A Options are clearly southern routes. However, from Moorefield, West Virginia to Interstate 81 in Virginia, the Scheme D Options are also southern routes. For reasons previously specified in this Decision Document, none of the Scheme A Options are recommended as the preferred corridor. The two Scheme E Options are clearly northern routes. However, the Scheme D Options are also northern routes from Elkins to Bismarck.

As discussed in Section V.B.3. Environmental Resources, Scheme Option D5 best meets the transportation needs in the project area and provides the greatest opportunity to avoid or minimize impacts to identified sensitive environmental resources, as compared to Scheme Option E2.

D. SELECTING THE CORRIDOR

In comparing the final Scheme Options, D5 and E2, Scheme Option D5 was chosen as the selected corridor for the following reasons:

1. Scheme Option D5 addresses the identified transportation needs in the project area.
2. Scheme Option D5 best meets the social and economic development needs set forth in the Transportation Needs Study.
3. Scheme Option D5 can avoid known Section 4(f) land.
4. Scheme Option D5 provides a greater opportunity to avoid and minimize potential impacts to sensitive environmental resources.
5. Scheme Option D5 is not the subject of any substantial public debate and is not opposed by resource agencies.
6. Scheme Option D5 best satisfies the combined public support for the construction of Corridor H, regardless of a northern or southern position.

7. Scheme Option D5 accomplishes all of the above, while being next to the least expensive of all the Scheme Options (\$1,000,000 more than Scheme Option D3).
8. Scheme Option D5 does not require channelization or relocation of the Lost River.
9. Scheme Option D5 can avoid impacts to Shavers Fork, a known population of running buffalo clover, and the town of Montrose.

Sufficient information is contained in the Corridor Selection SDEIS, the Technical Reports, agency comments, and comments generated through the public involvement process, to select Scheme Option D5 as the corridor to be advanced to the Alignment Selection SDEIS stage, as called for in the two-step study process. The selected corridor can avoid all known Section 4(f) land. During the Alignment Selection SDEIS, specific environmental impact analyses will be conducted and compared to the No-Build Alternative. Should the identified environmental impacts of all the alternative alignments outweigh the advantages of constructing Corridor H, the No-Build Alternative can be selected as the preferred alternative in the Alignment Selection SDEIS.

E. REMAINING TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

Section V.A. Transportation Needs, identified the existing routes from Elkins to I-81 at Strasburg, Virginia, as those most in need of improvement. Scheme Option A1 was further identified as the alternative that best met the transportation needs in the study area; however, it was not selected for reasons previously stated. While the remaining Scheme Options will meet the transportation needs throughout the entire study area, certain localized transportation needs, identified during the development of the Corridor Selection SDEIS, still need to be addressed. The three most specific localized remaining transportation needs are located:

- ◆ Along US 33 to the east of Elkins
- ◆ Along State Route 55 between Petersburg and Moorefield
- ◆ Along US 50 between Ridgeville and the Virginia State Line

West Virginia DOT expects to develop these projects separately from Corridor H, though they may be developed simultaneously with the alignment study. The following discussion describes existing conditions on these sections of US 33, Route 55, and US 50.

Without any improvements, the section of US 33 between Elkins and Canfield will operate at Level of Service E, approaching stop-and-go conditions by the year 2010. In order to provide an adequate transportation network for the public traveling US 33, the Elkins Bypass will continue to be developed as a viable project, eventually connecting the 4-lane section of US 33 west of Elkins, to US 33 east of Elkins.

Construction of the Elkins Bypass would allow traffic into and through the Elkins area to be handled at an efficient Level of Service. Based on the information contained in the Corridor Selection SDEIS, the Elkins Bypass could possibly follow the general location of Scheme Option A1 from Elkins to Canfield, and avoid Section 4(f) land and minimize potential impacts to sensitive environmental resources. The further development of an Elkins Bypass will comply with all applicable regulations for environmental documents and public involvement. This portion of Scheme Option A1 east of Elkins does not involve the use of any property from the Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks NRA, and does not involve either Whites Run or Horsecamp Run.

The highest accident rate on State Route 55 in the project area is between Petersburg and Moorefield (3.94 accidents/million-vehicle-miles traveled). This section is west of the junction of Scheme Option D5 and the Scheme A Options near Moorefield. This section of State Route 55 will operate at a Level of Service E in 2010. Because of the high accident rate, this section of State Route 55 will continue to be studied for potential improvement. Any improvement to State Route 55 between Petersburg and Moorefield can be made without involving property located within the NRA. The further development of any improvements along State Route 55 between Petersburg and Moorefield would be in accordance with applicable regulations for environmental documents and public involvement.

There are two areas on US 50 where the average accident rates are higher than those normally experienced on other West Virginia primary routes. These areas are between Ridgeville and Romney, and between Capon Bridge and the Virginia state line (2.98 and 4.02 accidents/million-vehicle-miles traveled respectively). In 2010, both of these sections of US 50 will operate at a Level of Service E. The accident rate and the undesirable Level of Service of these sections on US 50 warrant such local improvement projects.

The construction of Appalachian Corridor H, along with the above mentioned projects, will not address all of the regional transportation needs on all of the existing roads throughout the entire study area. The WVDOT will continue to define additional transportation needs in the region as part of the annual planning and programming process.

SECTION VI: FURTHER PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

The two-step study process for the development of Corridor H is shown in Exhibit 1. Specific activities and a general schedule of the project are shown in Exhibit 5, page 40. Exhibit 5 illustrates the completed activities as shaded boxes, with the unshaded activities yet to occur.

With the approval of the selected Scheme Option, the WVDOT will initiate the second step, or the Alignment Selection SDEIS. The Alignment Selection SDEIS will begin with the development of highway alignments at a scale of 1" = 200', based on the resource inventory developed and maintained for the Corridor Selection SDEIS. All resources within the selected corridor will be transferred from the GIS database onto current mapping prepared from 1992 aerial photography. This initial resource inventory will be used to develop alignments that avoid Section 4(f) land, avoid or minimize impacts to other known sensitive social and environmental resources, and to any resources identified through the photointerpretation of the 1992 aerial photography.

Because of the increased level of detail required for the Alignment Selection SDEIS, field evaluations and studies will be conducted throughout the remainder of 1993 and early 1994 to assess specifically the potential impact of various alignments. In some instances, it may become necessary to develop a specific alternative alignment outside, but in the general vicinity, of the selected corridor for the express purpose of avoiding important sensitive resources, or meeting acceptable, safe design criteria. This situation would occur in response to additional information that would only become available during the Alignment Selection SDEIS stage.

During the development of alternative alignments within Scheme Option D5, the WVDOT intends to:

- ◆ Avoid all known Section 4(f) land
- ◆ Avoid channelization or relocation of Shavers Fork, Lost River, Trout Run, Cedar Creek, and Duck Run
- ◆ Avoid all known populations of Threatened or Endangered species
- ◆ Avoid, or minimize and mitigate, impacts to wetlands
- ◆ Avoid or minimize impacts to established neighborhoods

Based on current information from recent aerial photography, there is no reason to believe that these commitments cannot be met. However, should the development of information during the alternatives analysis for the next phase identify new areas of concern or environmental resources previously unrecorded, then every attempt will be made to avoid them. Should for some unforeseen reason, it becomes impossible to meet the above commitments, then the project could recycle back to the Decision Document for the selection of a new or modified Scheme Option.

For the Alignment Selection SDEIS, wetland boundaries within anticipated construction limits will be identified and delineated. Impacted wetland functions and values will be determined using WET 2.0. Wildlife impacts and impacts to upland habitat will be determined with the assistance of data developed using an acceptable habitat evaluation procedure. Water quality will be analyzed utilizing the EPA's rapid bioassessment protocols to determine the project's specific potential effect on streams and watersheds.

A detailed noise study will be conducted for the Alignment Selection SDEIS to document ambient noise levels, anticipated future traffic generated noise levels, and the necessity for noise abatement measures. An emission inventory and analysis will also document the project's potential effect on primary and secondary standards for transportation-related air pollutants.

An extensive pre-Phase I cultural resource survey will be conducted, and an agreement on the process for conducting a complete Phase I survey will be developed between the WVDOT, the WVDCH, the VDHR, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Phase II survey and Phase III data recovery efforts would be conducted as required. The Advisory Council will be invited to participate in all agency coordination meetings held throughout the development of the Alignment Selection SDEIS in order to assure that all provisions of Section 106 are properly met.

The number of homes, businesses, and public facilities that would be relocated by any alternative alignment will be determined. Additionally, the availability of decent, safe, and sanitary housing, or the need to provide last resort housing, will be determined and presented in the Alignment Selection SDEIS. The need to functionally replace any public services affected by right-of-way acquisition will also be presented.

In response to comments on the Corridor Selection SDEIS, and in agreement with the level of detail to be addressed in the Alignment Selection SDEIS, a separate Secondary and Cumulative Impact Assessment Technical Report will be prepared and summarized in the Alignment SDEIS.

As shown in Exhibit 5, after completion of the Alignment Selection SDEIS, additional public meetings and hearings will be held to discuss the specific potential impacts of alternative alignments developed within the selected corridor. These meetings and hearings are expected to occur in the Spring or Summer of 1994. Upon completion of the Alignment Selection SDEIS and the public involvement process, a Final EIS will be prepared addressing all of the comments on both the Corridor Selection and Alignment Selection SDEISs.

The Final EIS must be approved by the FHWA and a Record of Decision issued before the WVDOT or VDOT can proceed with the construction of Appalachian Corridor H.

Should a preferred alignment be selected in the Alignment Selection phase, right-of-way acquisition could occur in late 1994 and early 1995, followed by construction starting in late 1995. The first construction section could be complete by 1997. It is likely that simultaneous construction of various sections will take place. Appalachian Corridor H could be completed by the year 2001.



West Virginia Appalachian Corridor H Project Development Process

Corridor Selection
SDEIS* 1
Preparation

Oct 90 - Oct 92

Corridor Selection
SDEIS 1
Public Involvement

Dec 92 - Jan 92

Corridor Selection
Decision

March 93

Alignment Selection
SDEIS 2
Preparation

April 93 - March 94

Alignment Selection
SDEIS 2
Public Involvement

April 94 - May 94

Alignment Selection
Decision

June 94

FEIS**

July 94

Record of Decision

August 94

Design Engineering
& Right-of-Way
Acquisition

Nov 94 - June 95

Construction Start

October 95

* SDEIS - Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement

** FEIS - Final Environmental Impact Statement

 - Completed

Exhibit 5

SECTION VII: DECISION DOCUMENT COORDINATION

On March 11, an agency coordination meeting was held in Charleston, West Virginia to provide an opportunity for the regulatory agencies to comment on the draft Decision Document. On April 23, 1993 the revised Corridor Selection Decision Document was circulated to the regulatory agencies for formal review and comment. Five written comments were received prior to the established cut-off date of May 28, 1993, and three shortly thereafter. These comments and the resolution of the Commonwealth Transportation Board are summarized below with responses where necessary.

1. United States Environmental Protection Agency

EPA supports the decision to move forward with the Alignment Selection SDEIS. In the event that an alignment cannot be located within Scheme Option D5 which sufficiently addresses environmental and social concerns, alternative alignments in other northern corridors should be evaluated.

2. Monongahela National Forest

This agency is in full agreement with the information presented in the Decision Document, and supports the advancement of the project to the Alignment Selection SDEIS.

3. Corps of Engineers

The Corps supports the process that was used to select a corridor for future development in the Alignment Selection SDEIS.

4. Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Environmental Quality

This agency recognizes that Scheme Option D5 represents the corridor with the fewest overall impacts. However, this agency stated that a comparison of impacts in Virginia was difficult, because the Corridor Selection SDEIS includes total impacts for both West Virginia and Virginia. The agency also suggested that the Alignment Selection SDEIS include a

comprehensive alternatives analysis for Scheme Option E2. Alternative alignments should be studied to avoid impacts to Duck Run and Cedar Creek.

Response - The decision to select a corridor has been made based on the potential environmental impact of constructing the complete project. It has been demonstrated that Scheme Option D5 is the corridor which provides the best opportunities to avoid or minimize environmental and social impacts over the entire length of the project. As indicated in Section VI on page 38, should the development of the Alignment Selection SDEIS produce new information indicating that the commitments contained in this Decision Document cannot be met, then the project could recycle back to the selection of a new or modified Scheme Option.

As stated on page 37, the WVDOT will study alternative alignments to avoid impacts to Duck Run and Cedar Creek.

5. Department of the Interior

The Department of the Interior prefers Scheme Option E1, but does not object to the continuation of the study, for Scheme Option D5. The Department of the Interior expressed concern that the No-Build Alternative be fully considered as a means of avoiding adverse impacts to fish and wildlife resources; that potential impacts to fish and wildlife resources of the Improved Roadway Alternative be compared against those associated with construction of a new four-lane facility (the Build Alternative); that secondary and cumulative impacts to water quality in the South Branch Potomac River due to the planned Wampler-Longacre expansion be assessed. Statements made previously in this document regarding avoidance of Section 4(f) land; channelization or relocation of the Lost River, Shavers Fork, Trout Run and Duck Run; known populations of threatened or endangered species; and avoidance, minimization and mitigation impacts to wetlands and established neighborhoods were emphasized in the DOI comments.

Response - The WVDOT is fully prepared to meet the commitments made in this document and to follow the course of action described previously herein should this not be possible. The WVDOT will consider the No-Build Alternative, the Improved Roadway Alternative and the Build Alternative in the Alignment Selection SDEIS.

6. West Virginia Department of Natural Resources

The WVDNR concurs with the continuation of the project development process and the preparation of the Alignment Selection SDEIS. This agency reiterated the concern that the No-Build Alternative be maintained throughout the next phase of study.

7. West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection

The WVDEP, Office of Water Resources, agrees with the selected Scheme Option. They stated concern that impacts to National Resource Waters be limited and temporary in nature and that all alternatives that avoid and minimize impacts to National Resource Waters, wetlands, high quality streams and floodplains be evaluated. The DEP expects re-evaluation of other corridors should the adverse impacts be significantly greater than anticipated.

8. Advisory Council on Historic Preservation

The Advisory Council expressed concern that the premature selection of a preferred alignment would hamper the consideration of feasible alternatives, and restrict the Council's opportunity to offer meaningful comment.

Response - The WVDOT and the Council discussed the Council's comments in a telephone conversation on June 3, 1993. The Council was assured that an alignment would not be selected until after the completion of the Alignment Selection SDEIS. Further, the Council was assured that all applicable provisions of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act would be followed, and the Council would be invited to comment on the project and participate in all agency coordination meetings throughout the development of the Alignment Selection SDEIS. The Alignment Selection SDEIS will include an evaluation of improving local roads as an alternative.

The Advisory Council was also assured that the public would be kept fully informed throughout the development of the Alignment Selection SDEIS. This will be accomplished through the use of the WVDOT's extensive Corridor H mailing list, and through informal public meetings and formal public hearings.

9. Commonwealth of Virginia Transportation Board

On May 20, 1993, the Commonwealth Board approved a resolution concurring with the selection of Scheme Option D5 and the advancement of the project to the Alignment Selection SDEIS. In doing so, however, the Board made it clear that the resolution was not an endorsement for the construction of Corridor H, but only an agreement that the study process should continue in order to develop the factual data necessary for the analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the project to the citizens of Virginia.

The Board further directed that the Alignment Selection SDEIS evaluate the improvement of existing roads as an alternative method of satisfying the objectives of Corridor H, and that the project seek to develop alternatives that could facilitate designs of the highway in keeping with broad community goals. The Board also directed VDOT to work with local governments in the region to establish an appropriate advisory committee to participate in the development of the Alignment Selection SDEIS.

Response - The WVDOT is committed to fully meeting the spirit and intent of the resolution adopted by the Commonwealth Transportation Board, and will work closely with VDOT throughout the development of the next phase of study.