

## SECTION I: PROJECT BACKGROUND AND NEED

In accordance with FHWA guidance, this Supplemental Final Environmental Impact Statement (SFEIS) incorporates by reference the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and the subsequent Record of Decision (ROD) for the Appalachian Corridor H Project, both issued in 1996. The Parsons-to-Davis Project Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) was signed and circulated for public and agency comment in December 2002.

In 2003 and 2004, Preferred Alternative Reports were prepared and circulated for agency concurrence. The Revised Original Preferred Alternative (ROPA) has been identified as the preferred alternative for the Parsons-to-Davis Project. This SFEIS incorporates updated information and analysis since the December 2002 SDEIS, as appropriate. Substantive comments received on the SDEIS, are addressed throughout the document and corresponding responses are provided in Appendix A. Substantive comments received on this SFEIS will be addressed in the Amended Record of Decision.

### 1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

The West Virginia Department of Transportation (WVDOT), Division of Highways (WVDOH), in conjunction with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), is proposing to construct an approximately 9-mile long highway between Parsons and Davis in Tucker County, West Virginia. This Parsons-to-Davis Project is a component of the original Appalachian Corridor H Project (Corridor H), which is a proposed east-west route connecting I-79 at Weston, West Virginia to the West Virginia/Virginia state line.

#### 1.1.1 HISTORY OF APPALACHIAN CORRIDOR H

In 1965, Congress enacted the Appalachian Regional Development Act (ARDA). ARDA established the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), which was composed of

the governors of 13 states in Appalachia, plus one member appointed by the President. ARC was given responsibility for coordinating development of the Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS). As authorized by ARDA, the ARC designated 28 corridors as part of the ADHS, including Corridor H, an east-west route connecting I-79 at Weston, West Virginia to I-81 at Strasburg, Virginia. Corridor H has a long history of legislation, planning, environmental documentation, and decision-making (Figure I-1).

### The History of Corridor H

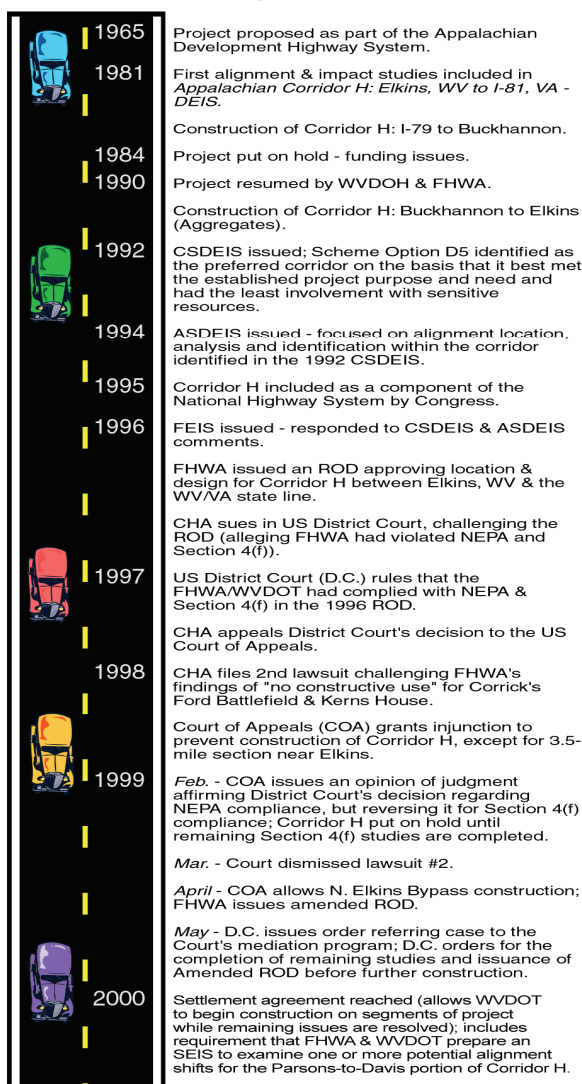


Figure I-1 History of Corridor H

Consistent with the goals of ARDA, the purpose of Corridor H is to stimulate economic development in rural, northeastern West Virginia by linking existing north-south routes in the area with a new east-west highway that meets the design standards adopted by the ARC for all highways in the ADHS.

Between the early 1980s and the early 1990s, WVDOT completed the portion of Corridor H between I-79 and Elkins, West Virginia, a distance of approximately 40 miles. Environmental studies for the remainder of Corridor H, from Elkins, West Virginia to I-81 in Virginia, were conducted during the early 1980s and put on hold until 1990 due to a lack of funding. In 1990, WVDOT, FHWA, and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) began to conduct supplemental environmental studies for the remainder of Corridor H, from Elkins to I-81. Due to the size and complexity of the project, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was prepared in two stages: first, a Corridor Selection Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (CSDEIS), which was issued in 1992, and then an Alignment Selection Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (ASDEIS), which was issued in 1994.

A Preferred Alternative was identified for the project in the 1996 Corridor H Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). In August of 1996, FHWA issued the Record of Decision (ROD) approving the alignment for Corridor H between Elkins and the West Virginia/Virginia state line. (No decision was made on the portion of Corridor H in Virginia because VDOT had withdrawn from the project in January 1995.)

#### **1.1.1.1 Corridor H Lawsuit and Settlement Agreement**

In late 1996, a lawsuit was filed that challenged the 1996 Corridor H ROD in the U.S. District Court in Washington, DC. In 1999, the case was referred to mediation proceedings, which resulted in a Settlement Agreement (filed February 7, 2000, Corridor H Alternatives v. Slater, 96-CV-2622 [TFH], U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia) (Appendix B). The terms of the Settlement Agreement are legally binding with regard to subsequent environmental studies, procedures, and resolutions prescribed.

The Settlement Agreement divides the 100-mile long Corridor H project between Elkins and the West Virginia/Virginia state line into nine separate projects. Figure I-2 shows these nine projects and shows the Northern Elkins bypass, also part of Corridor H, which was constructed under the 1996 ROD as specified by the court. One of these nine projects, the Parsons-to-Davis Project, is the subject of this Supplemental Final Environmental Impact Statement (SFEIS).

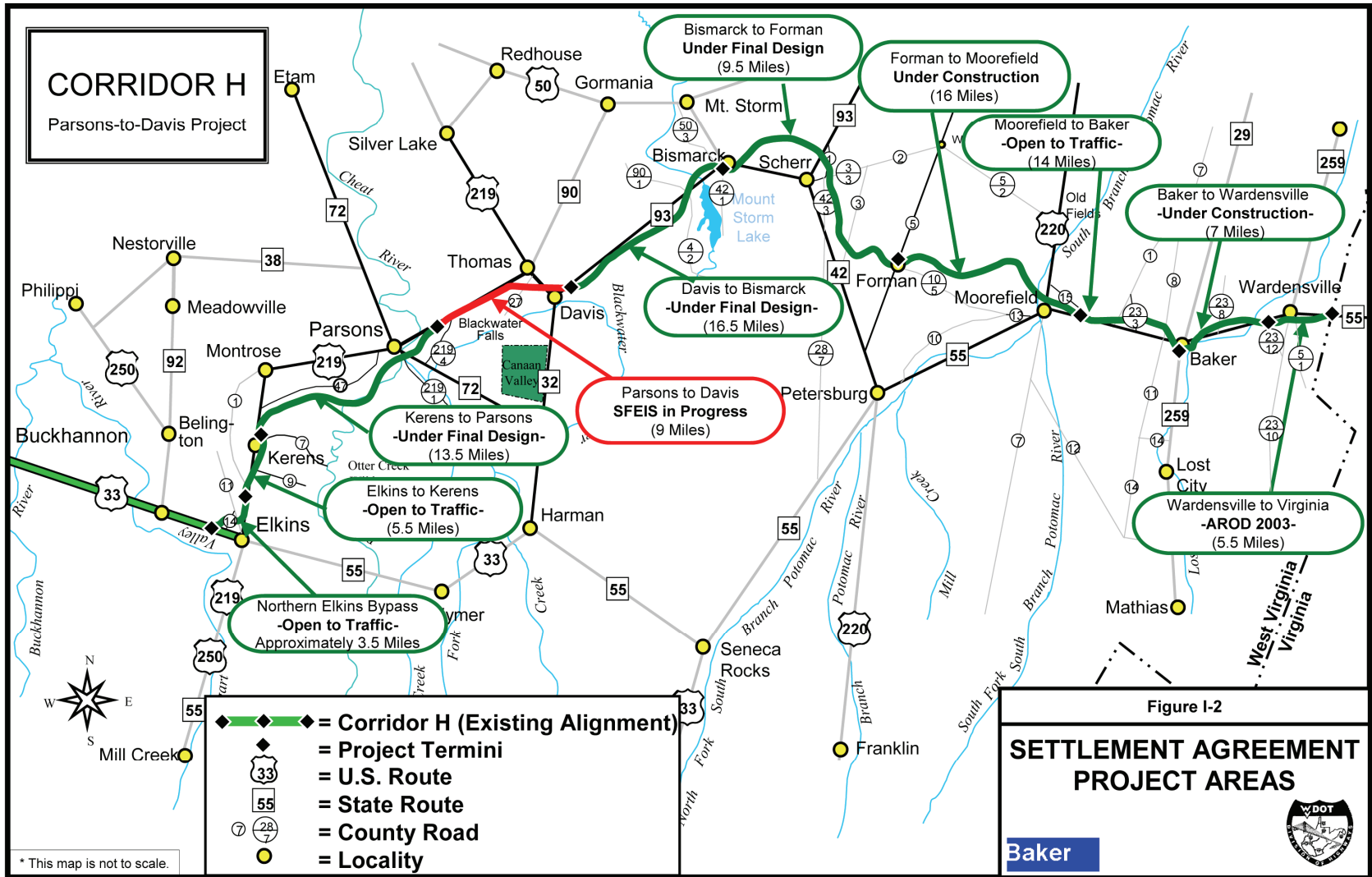
Each of these nine projects: (i) furthers the overall objective of completing Corridor H as a whole in West Virginia, in accordance with the goals of the ARDA; (ii) serves its own independent transportation purposes by providing faster, safer, and higher-capacity transportation linkages between existing transportation routes and population centers; and (iii) is to be approved in an Amended ROD as a stand-alone transportation improvement. The Amended ROD for each project can be issued only after specific requirements listed in the Settlement Agreement and other regulatory requirements for that project, including National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements, have been satisfied.

To date, Amended RODs have been issued for eight of the nine projects: Elkins-to-Kerens, Kerens-to-Parsons, Davis-to-Bismarck, Bismarck-to-Forman, Forman-to-Moorefield, Moorefield-to-Baker, Baker-to-Wardensville, and Wardensville-to-Virginia State Line. The Parsons-to-Davis Project, which is the subject of this study, is the only section of Corridor H for which an Amended ROD has not yet been issued.

**1.1.1.2 Parsons-to-Davis Project**

The Parsons-to-Davis Project begins east of Parsons, 0.2 mile north of the intersection of Tucker County Route (Tucker Co.) 219/4 and United States Route (US) 219 intersection, and 0.42 mile northeast of the intersection of US 219 and West Virginia State Route (WV) 32. The proposed facility will be a four-lane divided highway with partial control of access. The facility will be built primarily on a new location.

The proposed Parsons-to-Davis project will: expedite the movement of east-west traffic across Backbone Mountain, provide access to and from the communities of Parsons, Thomas, and Davis, and provide access to and from the recreational facilities of Canaan Valley (located south of the project). The project will also contribute to satisfying the purpose and need identified for the entire Appalachian Corridor H Project as provided in the 1996 Corridor H FEIS. The project's purpose and need is discussed in greater detail in Sections 1.2 and 1.3.



**Figure I-2**  
**Appalachian Corridor H Settlement Agreement Project Areas**

### **1.1.2 SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT REQUIREMENTS**

The Settlement Agreement (Appendix B) requires FHWA and WVDOT to prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) for the “Thomas-Davis section” of the Parsons-to-Davis Project. The primary purpose of the SEIS process is to develop and evaluate alternatives for avoiding an area designated in the Settlement Agreement as the “Blackwater Area.” For that reason, the SEIS for the Parsons-to-Davis Project has been referred to as the Blackwater Avoidance Study or Blackwater Avoidance SEIS. The Settlement Agreement contains several important stipulations regarding this SEIS and the Parsons-to-Davis Project.

#### **1.1.2.1 Blackwater Area Avoidance**

The Settlement Agreement requires WVDOT and FHWA to prepare an SEIS for a portion of the Parsons-to-Davis Project to determine if avoidance of the Blackwater Area is prudent and feasible. The Blackwater Area is defined in the Settlement Agreement as “the area within and around the Blackwater Valley, south of Thomas, as depicted on Exhibit 4 [of the Settlement Agreement]” (Appendix B). The SEIS is required to evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives for completing the portion of the Parsons-to-Davis Project that surrounds the Blackwater Area. This portion is referred to as the “Thomas-Davis Section” in the Settlement Agreement; however, for the reasons discussed below, the SEIS will address the entire Parsons-to-Davis Project and therefore will not specifically focus on the Thomas-Davis Section.

The Settlement Agreement requires that the range of alternatives evaluated include at least one alternative that avoids the Blackwater Area. In order to develop one or more “Blackwater Avoidance Alignments,” as defined in the Settlement Agreement, a Study Area was established around the north tip of the Blackwater Area (Appendix B). As discussed in the following section, additional sensitive resources discovered in other parts of the Parsons-to-Davis Project warranted expansion of the Study Area beyond that required by the Settlement Agreement. Because the Thomas-Davis Section is part of the Parsons-to-Davis Project, which is the subject of this SFEIS, this SFEIS satisfies the requirements of the Settlement Agreement.

The range of alternatives evaluated must also include the “Blackwater Alignment,” as defined in the Settlement Agreement. This alignment is the portion of the Build Alternative chosen for the entire Corridor H Project, established in the 1996 Corridor H ROD, which passes through the Blackwater Area. Throughout this document, this alternative is referred to as the Original Preferred Alternative or OPA.

The Settlement Agreement further requires that the SEIS evaluate the alternatives to determine whether there is any alternative that (1) is “feasible” and “prudent” and (2) does not “use” any land protected by Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966, 49 U.S.C § 303(c).

#### **1.1.2.2 Additional Settlement Agreement Requirements**

In addition to the specific requirements associated with the Blackwater Area, the Settlement Agreement also contains the following requirements associated with the SEIS:

- It requires the establishment of a Community Advisory Group (CAG) to provide input into the development of the SEIS. It also establishes a variety of requirements concerning the membership and operations of the CAG.
- It establishes a process for obtaining comments from the cities of Thomas and Davis following completion of the required comment period on the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS), and allows all Blackwater Avoidance Alternatives to be eliminated from further consideration following completion of the SDEIS if Thomas or Davis adopts a resolution either opposing those alternatives or supporting an alignment that passes through the Blackwater Area (referred to Blackwater Alternatives in this SFEIS).

- It establishes a set of decision-making requirements that must be followed in selecting a preferred alternative if the Blackwater Avoidance Alternatives have not been eliminated as a result of a resolution by the city of Thomas and/or Davis. (As explained below, the City of Davis has passed a resolution endorsing an alternative that passes through the Blackwater Area, the ROPA, and opposing the Blackwater Avoidance Alternatives; therefore, the decision-making requirements in the Settlement Agreement do not apply to the selection of a preferred alternative for this project.)
- It requires FHWA and WVDOT to ensure that construction limits for the Parsons-to-Davis Project would be located entirely outside of the drainage area for Big Run Bog National Natural Landmark.
- It establishes conditions that must be met before FHWA can issue an Amended ROD for the Parsons-to-Davis Project.

A copy of the Settlement Agreement is provided in Appendix B of this document. A copy can also be viewed or downloaded from the Corridor H website (<http://www.wvcorridorh.com/resource/mediate.html>) or requested from FHWA.

### **1.1.3 WEST VIRGINIA NORTHERN FLYING SQUIRREL AVOIDANCE**

During the preparation of this SEIS, consultation was re-initiated with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This coordination revealed that new habitat information had been developed relative to the endangered West Virginia northern flying squirrel (WVNFS) (*Glaucomys sabrinus fuscus*). Based on this new habitat definition, newly defined potential WVNFS habitat for the entire Parsons-to-Davis Project was identified and studies (live-trapping) were conducted. These studies determined that WVNFS was present in the vicinity of the Parsons-to-Davis Project. In order to assess potential impacts of the project to the species, further study was warranted; therefore, the entire Parsons-to-Davis Project became the subject of the SEIS.

Findings of the WVNFS studies are detailed in Section 3.3.3.3, and details regarding coordination with the USFWS are provided in Appendix A. The Biological Opinion for the WVNFS is provided in Appendix C.

### **1.1.4 SEIS REQUIREMENTS**

FHWA regulations permit the issuance of an SEIS at any time and require an SEIS whenever the FHWA determines that “[n]ew information or circumstances relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the proposed action or its impacts would result in significant environmental impacts not evaluated in the EIS” (23 CFR §771.130 (a)(2)). Further, FHWA’s Technical Advisory T 6640.8A states, “[w]henver there are changes, new information, or further developments on a project, which result in significant environmental impacts not identified in the most recently distributed version of the draft or final EIS, a supplemental EIS is necessary” (FHWA, 1987, p. 49).

In addition to fulfilling requirements of the Settlement Agreement, this SEIS also serves to fulfill the regulatory requirement for supplemental documentation under FHWA’s NEPA regulations resulting from the “new information” regarding the discovery of the WVNFS within the vicinity of the OPA. Additionally, other issues that have arisen out of the assessment of alternatives in comparison to the OPA have been addressed in the SEIS process, including water quality of Slip Hill Mill Run and associated streams, and impacts associated with revisions and shifts in alignments of the alternatives.

With regard to format, applicable regulations specify that an SEIS should address only the relevant changes or new information: “There is no required format for a supplemental EIS. The supplement needs to address only those changes or new information that are the basis for preparing the

supplement and were not addressed in the previous EIS” (23 CFR 771.130 (a)). “Reference to and summarizing the previous EIS is preferable to repeating unchanged, but still valid, portions of the original document” (FHWA, 1987, p. 49-50).

This SFEIS is prepared pursuant to 23 CFR 771 and 40 CFR 1500 and in accordance with FHWA’s Technical Advisory T 6640.8A, the Settlement Agreement, and other binding laws and regulations. This SFEIS incorporates by reference the 1996 Corridor H FEIS and the subsequent 1996 Corridor H ROD. Where appropriate, this document includes cross-references to information in those previous documents.

#### **1.1.4.1 Integrated NEPA/404 Permit Process**

The Corridor H Project, in its entirety, including the 1994 Alignments Selection Draft Environmental Impact Statement (ASDEIS), the subsequent Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) in 1996 was conducted following the guidelines and philosophy of the integrated NEPA/404 process as detailed in FHWA Region 3’s agreement with various federal agencies (i.e. USFWS, USEPA and USACE) entitled Integrating NEPA/404 for Transportation Projects (1992) and USDOT’s publication *Applying the Section 404 Permit Process to Federal-Aid Highway Projects* (1988).

Appropriately, the Parsons-to-Davis SEIS process (including this SFEIS) continues to follow the integrated NEPA/404 process. As summarized in the 1996 FEIS, “This process integrates requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act as they pertain to highway projects with those requirements of Section 404 of the Clean Water Act to facilitate highway planning activities while encouraging the avoidance and minimization of encroachments into waters of the U. S., particularly wetlands. Additionally, state agencies were coordinated with and made part of the process. State and federal agencies were involved at all concurrence points of the project.” A complete list of all coordination meetings, subjects and attendees at those meetings can be found in Section VII: Comments and Coordination. All agency and public comments are provided in Appendix A.

As part of the Integrated NEPA/404 Process, a Section 404 permit application was submitted to the USACE. Additionally, the USACE’s public review process and comment period was integrated into the public review and public hearing process for the proposed highway project. This information is incorporated by reference; detailed information including recordation of the extensive agency coordination and public involvement process, including all meeting dates and comment letters are provided in the 1996 FEIS.

#### **1.1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE PARSONS-TO-DAVIS PROJECT SEIS PROCESS**

The objectives of the Parsons-to-Davis Project SEIS include:

- To develop one or more alternatives that avoid the Blackwater Area;
- To develop alternatives that minimize impacts to and/or avoid habitat known to be occupied by the endangered WVNFS;
- To consider a range of alternative(s), including the OPA, the Revised OPA or ROPA, Blackwater Avoidance Alternatives as required by the Settlement Agreement, WVNFS avoidance alternatives, and other alternatives as required by applicable laws, regulations, and guidance;
- To determine which alternatives will be carried forward for detailed analysis (Section II: Alternatives Analysis);
- To evaluate and compare the environmental consequences of all reasonable alternatives carried forward for detailed analysis (Section III: Existing Environment and Environmental Consequences);

- To assess whether there is a “feasible” and “prudent” alternative in the Parsons-to-Davis Study Area that does not “use” any land protected by Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966, 49 U.S.C § 303(c) (*Section IV: Section 4(f) and 6(f) Analyses*); and
- To identify a Preferred Alternative for the Parsons-to-Davis Project.

### **1.1.6 THE STUDY AREA**

As a first step in preparing the SEIS, FHWA and WVDOT identified the Study Area for the project. The Study Area (Figure I-3) was developed in accordance with the Settlement Agreement and known environmental constraints. The Study Area comprises approximately 14 square miles. The Study Area boundaries are discussed below:

- West – The Study Area boundary to the west was defined in the Settlement Agreement (see Appendix B, Settlement Agreement, p. 10) as “from Parsons (at County Route 219/4, 0.2 miles south of US Route 219)...”.
- North – The Study Area boundary to the north was determined by the presence of known WVNFS habitat, high-value wetlands and by transportation function (access and economic development). Because no population center is located north of William, an alternative any farther north would not provide the proper access to Thomas or to recreational areas to the south.
- East – The Study Area boundary to the east was expanded from the definition in the Settlement Agreement in order to accommodate alignment development to the east of the Tucker County Landfill, which is located near the Tucker County Industrial Park along WV 93.
- South – The Study Area boundary to the south corresponds roughly to the southern cut/fill boundary of the OPA, with a buffer zone of approximately 200 feet. This boundary delineation follows the Blackwater Area boundary, as defined in the Settlement Agreement.

The project termini are located in Parsons, West Virginia to the west and Davis, West Virginia to the east.



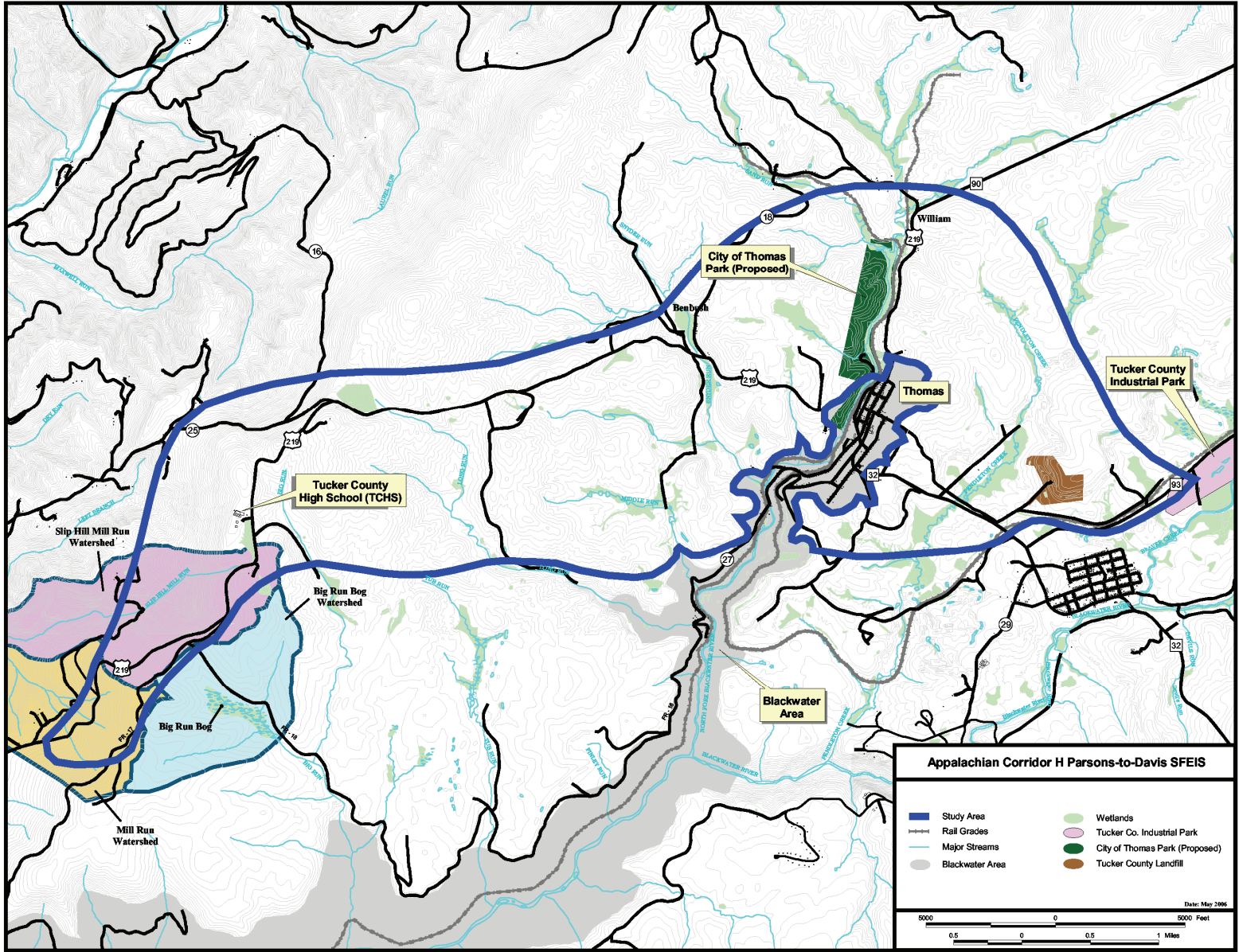


Figure I-3  
Parsons-to-Davis Study Area

### **1.1.7 INITIATION AND SCOPING OF THE SEIS**

On May 2, 2000, FHWA issued a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the Federal Register to advise the public that an SEIS would be prepared for the Thomas-Davis Section of the Parsons-to-Davis Project.

On June 14, 2000, an agency scoping meeting was conducted and a public information meeting was held in Canaan Valley, West Virginia. At that time, as stipulated in the Settlement Agreement, the focus of the SEIS was concentrated in the vicinity of the cities of Thomas and Davis, West Virginia. In December 2000, an additional agency coordination meeting was conducted.

On January 19, 2001, a public information meeting was held to educate the public and resource agencies about the environmental constraints associated with the project as well as preliminary Build Alternative alignments under consideration.

In May 2001, the federally endangered WVNFS was discovered in the vicinity of the Parsons-to-Davis Project. Additional studies were conducted to evaluate the potential habitat for the WVNFS and any potential impacts that might be associated with the Parsons-to-Davis Project. In August 2001, an additional agency coordination meeting was conducted to discuss the presence of the WVNFS in the vicinity of the project.

Because of potential impacts to a federally listed endangered species, FHWA issued a revised NOI on October 9, 2001 to advise the public that the limits of the SEIS Study Area were expanded from the original Thomas-Davis Section of the Parsons-to-Davis Project to include the entire Parsons-to-Davis Project. Information regarding the expanded SEIS Study Area was also presented at an additional public information meeting held on October 23, 2001.

*Section VII: Comments and Coordination* provides more detailed information on the scoping process and initiation of the SEIS.

## **1.2 NEEDS ANALYSIS**

The Parsons-to-Davis Project is a component of the Appalachian Corridor H Project. As a section of that corridor, it is expected to address the needs identified in the 1996 Corridor H FEIS, which include:

- Improving east-west transportation through northeastern West Virginia.
- Promoting economic development in the region.
- Preserving or improving the quality of life in the region.

Additionally, at the local level, communities have identified two specific “quality of life” needs that could be addressed by the Parsons-to-Davis Project:

- Reduce truck traffic through the City of Thomas.
- Improve emergency response times and access to emergency facilities.

These needs are discussed below.

### **1.2.1 IMPROVE EAST-WEST TRANSPORTATION**

#### ***1.2.1.1 System Linkage***

System linkage refers to the role of a proposed project in closing gaps in the existing transportation network. At the local level, there is a need for a better link between Parsons, the Tucker County seat; Elkins, the Randolph County seat and the location of the closest hospital facility; and the communities of Thomas and Davis. The Study Area is the intersection of several major regional transportation routes – US 219, WV 93, and WV 32 – and is the northernmost access point to various recreational facilities (e.g., Canaan Valley State Park and Blackwater Falls State Park).

The need for improved system linkage at the local level reflects the deficiencies of the existing east-west route: US 219-to-WV 32-to-WV 93. The existing east-west route consists of two-lane

roadways with numerous design deficiencies (e.g., narrow shoulders and sharp curves), few passing opportunities, and no control of access. An inventory of design deficiencies indicated:

- Over 80% of the route is designated “no-passing” zones (roughly 9 of 11 miles);
- Over 50% of the horizontal curves are geometrically deficient (45 out of 80) when compared to current design standards (AASHTO, 1994); and
- Over 80% of the route has inadequate stopping sight distances when compared to current design standards (AASHTO, 1994).

These deficiencies contribute to poor driving conditions. The average safe travel speed on the existing east-west route is 35 to 45 mph for passenger vehicles and 30 to 40 mph for trucks. The average travel time between Parsons and Davis is 21 to 27 minutes for passenger vehicles and 24 to 32 minutes for trucks.

As shown in Table I-1, traffic volumes on this existing east-west route are moderate but the percentage of truck traffic is relatively high. The existing Level of Service (LOS) of the route ranges from LOS C to LOS D. LOS is a measurement of traffic congestion on a scale from LOS A (free-flowing conditions) to LOS F (severe congestion). Generally, in rural areas, the lowest acceptable LOS is LOS C (AASHTO, 1994). While the LOS on some parts of the existing east-west route is not expected to worsen, the Average Daily Traffic (ADT) is expected to increase over time. By 2013, all parts of the route will be operating at LOS D or worse, which are considered unacceptable in rural areas.

The completion of a four-lane, divided highway between Parsons and Davis would address the system linkage, roadway deficiency, and level of service problems identified here.

**Table I-1  
Levels of Service on the Primary Existing East-West Route**

Segment	Length (in miles)	1999		2013 No-Build		2020 No-Build	
		ADT	LOS	ADT	LOS	ADT	LOS
US 219—from CR 31 (East of Parsons) to WV 32 (Thomas)	9	2,300	D	3,200	D	3,700	D
WV 32—from US 219 W (Thomas) to WV 93 (Davis)	2	4,200	C	5,900	D	6,700	D

**1.2.1.2 Safety**

Accident and injury rates, typically expressed as the number of accidents or injuries per 100 million vehicle miles of travel, can indicate the safety of existing roadways.

Table I-2 illustrates the projected accident and injury rates for the existing east-west route (US 219-WV 32-WV 93) (utilizing the statewide average between 1996 and 1998) and the projected accident and injury rates for similar road types in West Virginia during the same projected periods.

The construction of the Parsons-to-Davis Project is expected to reduce accident and injury rates in two ways:

- By lowering the number of accidents on the existing east-west route because fewer cars will use this route; and
- By shifting a majority of the east-west traffic to a new route designed to meet current safety and geometric design standards with a lower accident rate.

**Table I-2  
Accident and Injury Rates for the Principal Existing East-West Route  
(US 219-WV 32) in the Study Area**

Segment	Year	Total Accidents	Total Injuries	Accident Rate <sup>1</sup>	Injury Rate <sup>2</sup>
US 219/WV 32 (Parsons-to-Davis) No-Build	Avg. 96-98	17	11	196	131
	2013	26	18	196	131
	2020	31	20	196	131
Corridor H (Parsons-to-Davis) <sup>3</sup> Build	2013	30 <sup>4</sup>	18	68 <sup>5</sup>	41
	2020	38 <sup>4</sup>	23	68 <sup>5</sup>	41

<sup>1</sup>Rate per 100 million vehicle miles of travel.

<sup>2</sup>The injury rate for Corridor H was assumed to be 0.6. This was based on the assumption that the injury rate for Corridor H would be between the rate for rural primary routes (0.667 injuries per accident) and the rate for rural interstates, which have full access control (0.53 injuries per accident).

<sup>3</sup>Accident/Injury Rate for Corridor H only.

<sup>4</sup>The total number of accidents on Corridor H is higher than the total number on existing routes (US 219 and WV 32) because Corridor H carries more traffic than those existing routes. The higher traffic volumes result in more total accidents, even though Corridor H provides a safer experience for each individual driver. The increased safety provided by Corridor H is reflected in its lower accident rate, which is shown in the above table.

<sup>5</sup>The accident rate for Corridor H is based upon the completed section of Corridor H from I-79 to Norton, West Virginia, west of Elkins.

### **1.2.2 PROMOTE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PRESERVE/IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE**

At the local level, the communities have identified two specific “quality of life” needs that could be addressed by the Parsons-to-Davis Project:

- Reduce the truck traffic through Thomas; and
- Improve emergency response times and access to emergency facilities.

In addition, a safer east-west transportation route would improve the quality of life for residents in the area. If all of these “quality of life” issues were improved, the Study Area would be more attractive for future economic development.

#### **1.2.2.1 Truck Traffic**

The completion of the project will reduce truck traffic through Thomas and on the existing roads in the Study Area in general, by attracting a substantial percentage of regional truck traffic onto the new facility. However, the ability of the project to achieve a reduction in truck traffic depends on the location and accessibility of the new highway. If the route provides significant time savings for truck trips, it will tend to divert truck traffic off existing roadways. However, if the route is too indirect, truck traffic will tend to remain on existing roadways and continue to inhibit quality of life in the City of Thomas.

#### **1.2.2.2 Emergency Services Access**

Tucker County does not have a hospital. The nearest full-service West Virginia hospital is Davis Memorial Hospital, located in Elkins, West Virginia. While Garrett Memorial Hospital in Maryland is 11 miles closer to Thomas than Davis Memorial, only 20 percent of emergency patients are transported to Garrett Memorial, while 40 percent are transported to Davis Memorial. The remaining 40 percent are either transported to other medical facilities or not transported (Stemple, 2001). The only medical facility in the Study Area is Cortland Acres Nursing Home, west of Thomas on US 219.

Emergency care and transport in Tucker County is provided by the Tucker County Emergency Ambulance Authority with stations in the following locations:

- Parsons Emergency Medical Service (EMS), Main Street (two ambulances);
- Thomas EMS, US 219 west of Thomas next to Courtland Acres (one ambulance); and,
- Canaan Valley EMS, WV 32 across from Deerfield Village (one ambulance).

Response times vary according to emergency location and road conditions. According to EMS licensure procedure, all of the Tucker County stations arrive on scene in less than 40 minutes, which is considered the middle range for a rural station (Stemple, 2001).

The trip from the Study Area to Davis Memorial requires approximately 50 minutes on the existing road network. Because the existing roadways are winding, the ability of technicians to administer care in transit is limited.

Law enforcement services are provided by the West Virginia State Police and the Tucker County Sheriff's Office, both dispatched from Parsons. Tucker County fire protection is provided by four Volunteer Fire Departments (VFDs): Parsons, Thomas, Davis, and Canaan Valley. While the Thomas VFD is the most likely to respond to an incident in the Study Area, others are dispatched if necessary.

The construction of the proposed Parsons-to-Davis Project would decrease the travel time from the far end of the Study Area to the hospital in Elkins by approximately 10 minutes. It would also provide a less winding, more consistent roadway that would interfere less with medical technicians' efforts to administer care in an ambulance. It would improve travel times between Parsons and the Study Area, such that the response of law enforcement would be improved. Finally, it is expected to improve the response for VFDs located outside the Study Area when they are needed to assist the Thomas VFD.

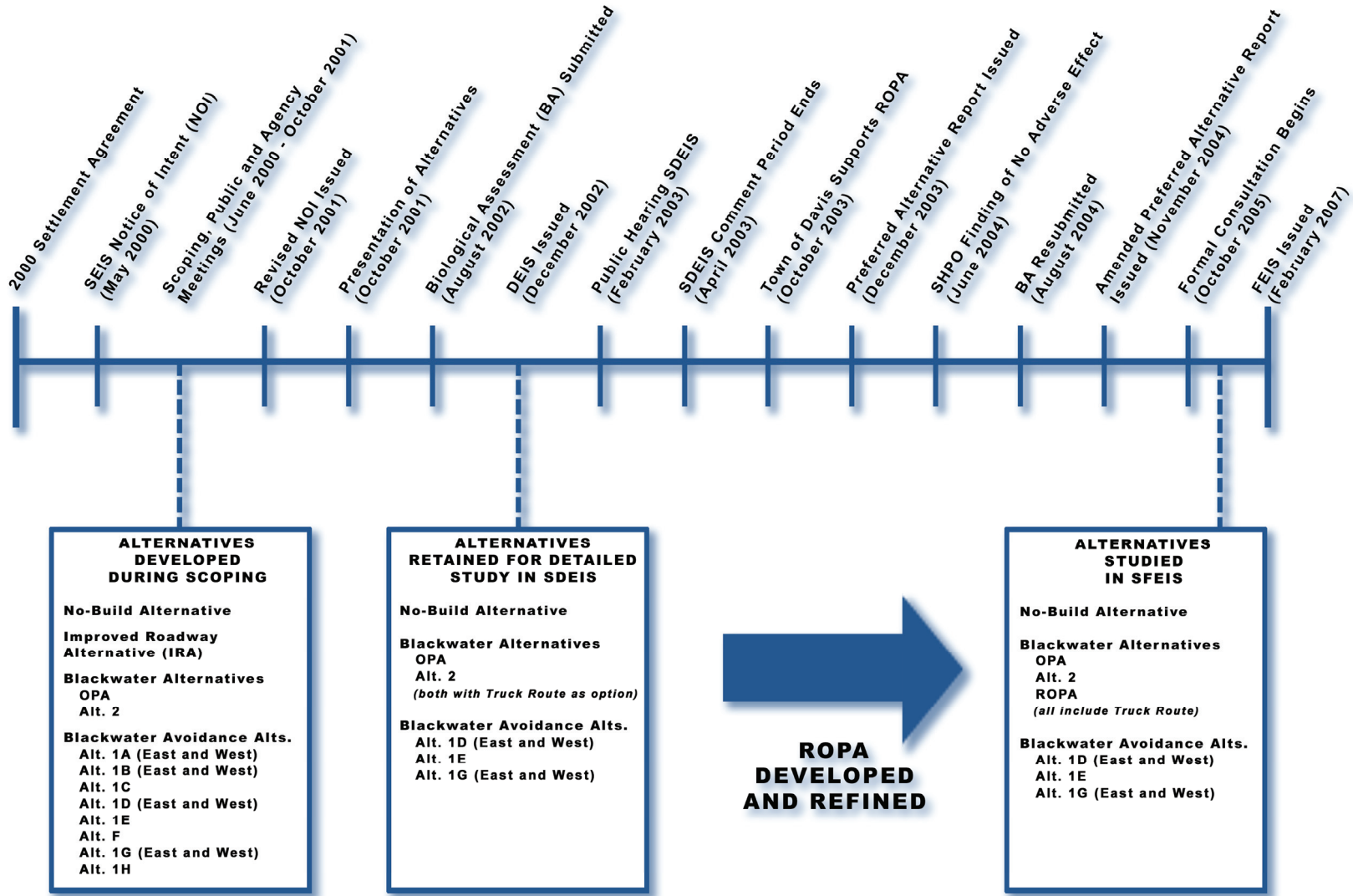
### **1.3 PURPOSE OF THE PARSONS-TO-DAVIS PROJECT**

Based on the identified needs discussed above, the purpose of the Parsons-to-Davis Project is to:

- Improve east-west transportation through northeastern West Virginia.
- Promote economic development in the region.
- Preserve or improve the quality of life in the region in general, and specifically by:
  - reducing truck traffic through the City of Thomas.
  - improving emergency response times and access to emergency facilities.

### **1.4 PARSONS-TO-DAVIS PROJECT SEIS STATUS**

The Supplement Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) for the Parsons-to-Davis Project was approved by FHWA and circulated for agency and public comment in December 2002. In 2003 and 2004, Preferred Alternatives Reports (original and amended) were prepared and circulated for agency review and concurrence. The Revised Original Preferred Alternative (ROPA) has been identified as the preferred alternative for the Parsons-to-Davis Project. Comments received on this SFEIS will be reviewed and substantive comments will be addressed in the Amended Record of Decision (AROD). Figure I-4 presents a timeline of the project.



**Figure I-4  
Parsons-to-Davis Project Timeline**