
Executive Summary

Environmental Assessment

US Highway 12: Frenchtown Vicinity to Walla Walla

Introduction

This National Environmental Policy Act Environmental Assessment records the evaluation process used to address impacts for the proposed project under the Preferred Alternative for the 8.4 mile portion of US Highway 12 from the Frenchtown Vicinity to the Walla Walla Bypass.

Positive and negative effects, and their impacts to key social, economic, and natural resources were evaluated based on best available science, and in accordance with federal, state, and local regulations. Every effort was made to avoid and minimize negative effects to these resources during the project's planning and design phases. As a result, the proposed project will not substantially impact any of the resources evaluated.

Where Is Phase 6 of the US 12 Corridor Project Located and How Much Will It Cost?

The WSDOT is currently designing the US Highway 12: Frenchtown Vicinity to Walla Walla project (Phase 6). The proposed project is located in the south-central part of Walla Walla County, Washington. It begins near an area known locally as Frenchtown and extends to just within the western city limits of Walla Walla (Exhibit E-1). The budget for designing, acquiring right-of-way, mitigating for impacts, and construction, is estimated at fifty million dollars.

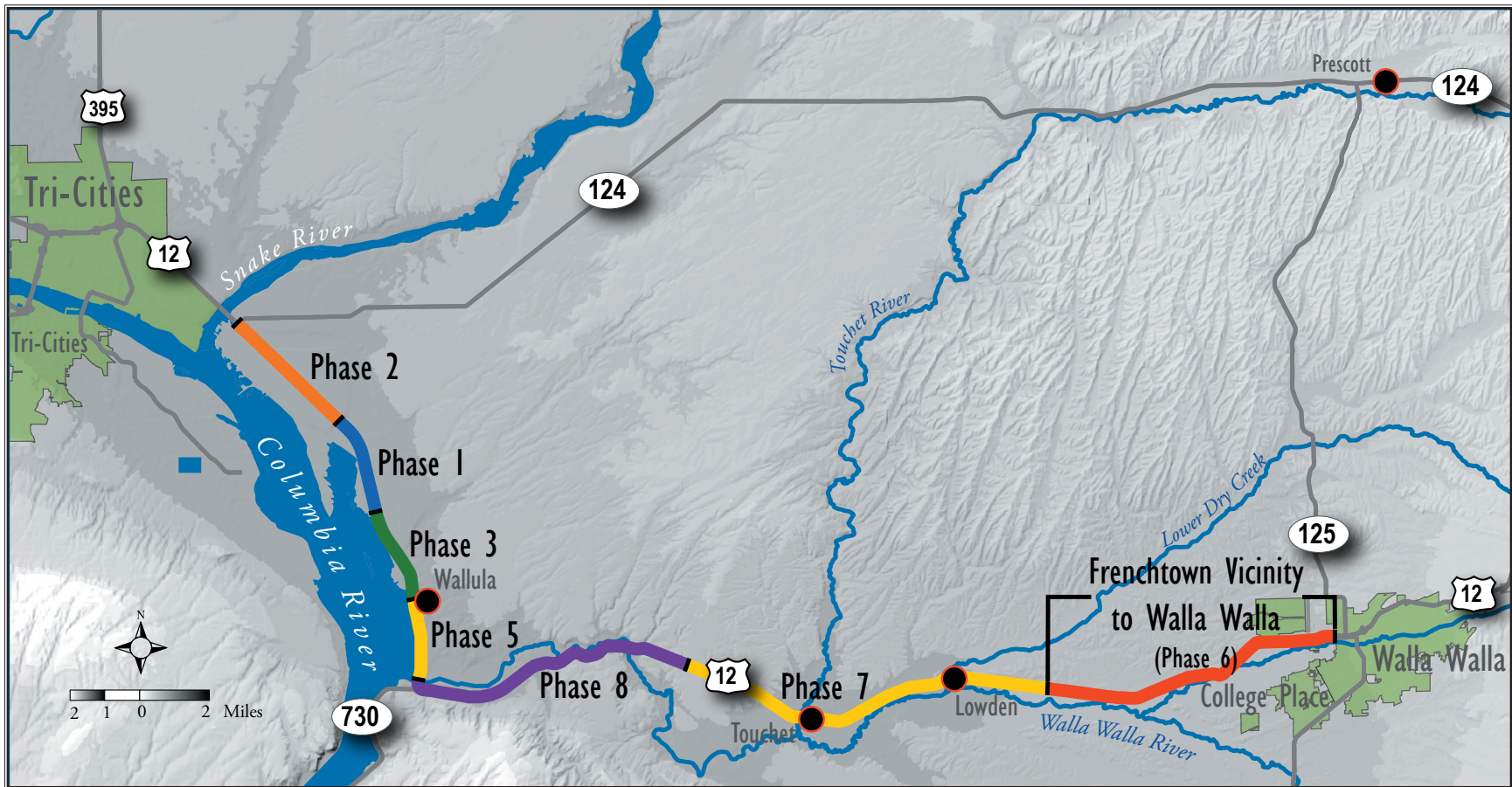


Exhibit E-1. Map showing the location of the proposed project (US Highway 12: Frenchtown Vicinity to Walla Walla) within the US 12 Corridor from the intersection of US 12 and SR 124 to the Walla Walla Bypass.

What Is the Purpose of the Phase 6 US 12 Corridor Project?

The principal goal of the US Highway 12: Frenchtown Vicinity to Walla Walla project is to improve motorist safety, accommodate increasing traffic volumes, and maintain mobility along this portion of US 12 over the long-term.

Why Do We Need Phase 6 of the US 12 Corridor Project?

The need for the US Highway 12: Frenchtown Vicinity to Walla Walla project is based on the increased use of US 12 that has been accompanied by a rise in the number of accidents occurring within the project area. Eliminating roadway deficiencies and increasing capacity will lower the number of both property and injury accidents while maintaining mobility.

What Alternatives Were Considered for This Environmental Assessment?

The project design team identified four preliminary alternatives for consideration in this EA, they include the following:

- Alternative 1: The No-Build Alternative
- Alternative 2: Widen the Existing US Highway 12
- Alternative 3: Last Chance Road Vicinity to the Walla Walla Bypass
- Alternative 4: Frenchtown Vicinity to the Walla Walla Bypass

Alternative 1: The No-Build Alternative

No major construction activities would occur under the **No-Build Alternative**. US 12 would remain at its present location and the highway would continue being maintained to current standards.

Alternative 2: Widen the Existing US Highway 12

Widening US 12 to four lanes in its current location would require constructing lanes both north and south of the existing highway. This alternative necessitates building frontage roads for those residents that currently access the highway directly, and therefore, would result in a wider footprint than other build alternatives.

Alternative 3: Last Chance Road Vicinity to the Walla Walla Bypass

This alternative would widen the highway from the Frenchtown Vicinity to near Last Chance Road (near MP 331). From here, a new roadway would be constructed north of existing US 12 to the Walla Walla Bypass. Widening the existing highway to the vicinity of Last Chance Road would also require constructing frontage roads, and therefore, would result in a wider footprint from the beginning of the project to near the intersection of Last Chance Road and US 12. A cul-de-sac would be constructed from just east of the point where this alternative would leave US 12, and ownership of the existing highway from here to the Walla Walla Bypass would be transferred to the county and city of Walla Walla.

Alternative 4: Frenchtown Vicinity to the Walla Walla Bypass

This alternative would construct a new roadway north of existing US 12 from the Frenchtown Vicinity to the Walla Walla Bypass. Because frontage roads would not be necessary, this alignment would result in a narrower footprint. A cul-de-sac would be constructed from just east of the point where this alternative would leave US 12, and ownership of appropriate portions of the existing highway from here to the Walla Walla Bypass would be transferred to the county and city of Walla Walla.

What Criteria Were Used for Assessing the Preliminary Alternatives?

Each of the preliminary alternatives described above were evaluated by assessing their respective potential to meet the following coarse screening criteria:

- Does the alternative effectively improve motorist safety, capacity, and mobility?
- Is the alternative feasible from an engineering standpoint?
- Does the alternative avoid or minimize negative effects to social, economic, and environmental resources?
- Is the alternative reasonable from a cost perspective?

What Is the Preferred Alternative?

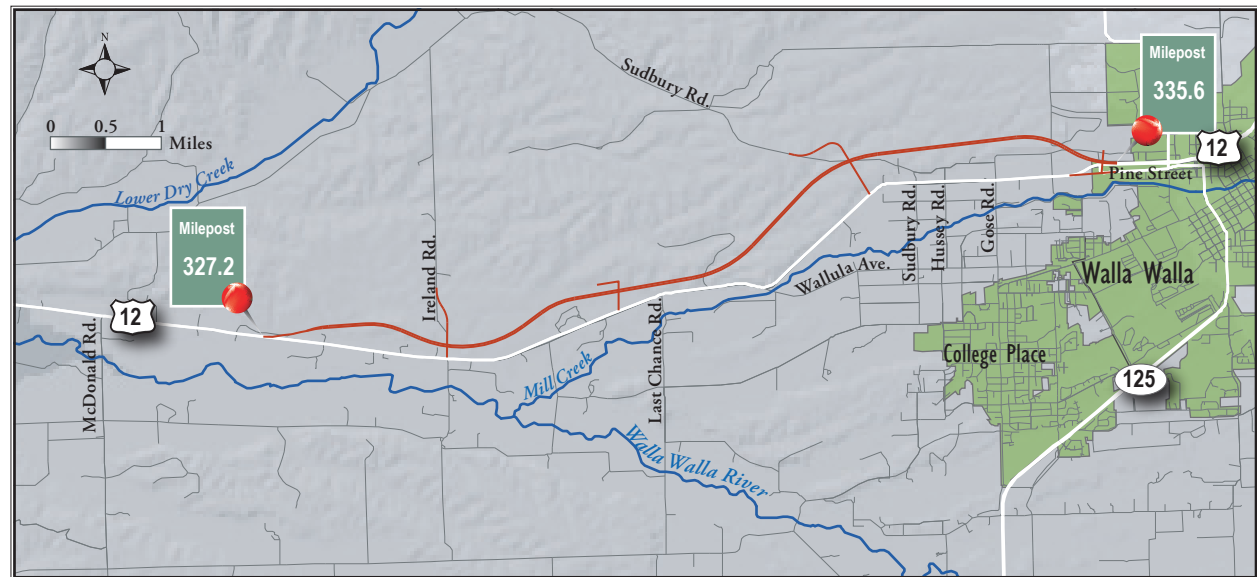
Working with federal and state agencies, tribal, county, and city governments, and the public, the WSDOT has identified Alternative 4, constructing an alignment from the Frenchtown Vicinity to Walla Walla, as the preferred

alternative (Exhibit E-2). This alternative satisfies the project’s purpose and need at the lowest cost, while generating the fewest negative effects to social, economic, and environmental resources.

What Would Happen If Nothing Were Built?

No construction activities would occur under the No-Build Alternative; therefore, substandard roadway conditions would persist, as would the need for increasing traffic capacity and mobility. As such, the No-Build Alternative would not resolve the safety, capacity, or mobility issues associated with this section of US 12.

Exhibit E-2. Map showing the location of US Highway 12 under Alternative 4: Frenchtown Vicinity to the Walla Walla Bypass; the preferred alternative.



What are the Project Impacts, and What Mitigation Will Occur?

The only resource that would be negatively impacted by the proposed project is wetlands. Results from the *Wetland Biology Discipline Report* (WSDOT 2006a) show that four of the six wetlands found within the project area would be affected from constructing the preferred alternative. However, only three of these would be negatively impacted and would require mitigation. The total wetland impacted area is under one-half of an acre. Appropriate measures are being developed through a conceptual wetland mitigation plan to offset these unavoidable impacts from the proposed project on this effected resource.

Conclusion

Construction of the preferred alternative will improve the level of safety for the traveling public on this section of US Highway 12 (US 12) by increasing capacity and maintaining mobility. The proposed project has been planned and designed to avoid and minimize negative effects to social, economic, and natural resources. Where unavoidable impacts to a resource do occur, mitigation plans have been developed to offset negative effects.

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