

Eastside Corridor EIS Interdisciplinary Team Recommended Alternatives

The purpose of the Eastside Corridor study is to identify a transportation alternative that will enhance safety and increase mobility, including the movement of people, goods, and services on the Sunset Highway Corridor (SR 28) in the East Wenatchee urban area from 9th Street to the Odabashian Bridge. Any proposal must also meet the needs of the community and comply with all Federal and State environmental laws. The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) has contracted with URS Corporation (URS) and their subconsultants (the project team), to develop an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which would assess the environmental impacts of a range of transportation alternatives and ultimately identify a preferred alternative.

A screening analysis, which was carried out in two stages was used by the project team to select the alternatives for detailed assessment in the EIS. The initial screening analysis involved brainstorming conceptual alternatives within the East Wenatchee urban area and the creation of rating criteria with input from WSDOT, the interdisciplinary team (IDT), and the community. The conceptual alternatives were then rated against the screening criteria and the most promising alternatives were selected for further engineering consideration and analysis. This initial screening is documented in the, "Initial Screening Analysis Report".

The second stage of the screening process involved more focussed analysis and discussion in order to develop more detailed screening criteria and determine the weight to be applied to each criterion. Development of the detailed screening criteria involved expanding the criteria, which had been used in the initial screening analysis, and incorporating feedback received from the community. It was determined that there were four major categories that the criteria would fall under; Transportation, Community/Land Use, Environmental and Engineering Feasibility. It was determined that each of the four major categories was of equal importance and would receive equal weighting.

The draft second level screening was completed and the results were presented to the interdisciplinary team, the Citizens Advisory Committee, and to the public at an open house. The second level screening is documented in the, "Second Level Screening Analysis Report". Based on the results of the second level screening analysis, and input received from the IDT and the community, the project team recommended the following conceptual alternatives be considered for detailed study in the EIS:

- 1f: Western Route 300' from Columbia River OHWM, Parkway.
- 4a: One-Way Couplet – Sunset Highway/ Cascade Avenue
- 5i: Sunset Highway Four Lane Freeway.
- 6d: Cascade Avenue Improvements and Widening.

The Draft Second Level Screening Analysis Report, including the recommendations for the four alternatives was distributed to the IDT members for review. The IDT met to discuss the report and recommendations on July 25, 2001. The purpose of the meeting was to reach a consensus and endorsement of the alternatives to be recommended for detailed analysis in the EIS process and document.

The IDT agreed with the overall screening process and with minor exceptions, the content and presentation of the Draft Second Level Screening Analysis Report and associated rating criteria matrix. However, the IDT felt that the technical aspects of the project, such as mobility and engineering feasibility, may be outweighing the “community needs” portion of the purpose and need statement. After considerable discussion, the IDT agreed that additional emphasis with respect to the “community needs” portion of the purpose and need statement must be incorporated into the determination of the recommended alternatives.

The principle of “Context Sensitive Design”, which is promoted by the Federal Highway Administration, United States Department of Transportation, and the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials was discussed by the IDT. Context Sensitive Design principles include such items as; the project is in harmony with the community, the project is designed and built with minimal disruption to the community, and the project is seen as having added lasting value to the community. These principles along with the idea of livable community and sustainable community were debated with respect to the alternatives being recommended for detailed analysis in the EIS. The IDT felt that alternatives must meet this type of principle to be carried forward into the EIS and satisfy the portion of the purpose and need statement relating to “community needs”.

The IDT determined that alternatives which dramatically change or alter the character of the community should not be carried forward into the EIS. Facilities such as a fully access controlled freeway or a seven-lane arterial were judged to not fit within the character of the community. The same conclusion was drawn concerning alternatives that shift the major transportation facility away from the established state highway and impact added neighborhoods. These alternatives would create a physical barrier separating the community and in turn severely impacting the character, livability, and sustainability of those neighborhoods.

Two of the project team’s recommended alternatives met both the technical requirements of the project, as exhibited by the rating criteria matrix, and the community needs aspect based on the “Context Sensitive Design” as outlined above. The IDT concurred with the project team’s recommendation to carry forward the western route 300-feet from the ordinary high water mark of the Columbia River and the one-way couplet of Sunset Highway and Cascade Avenue. The IDT did request minor modifications to the descriptions of these two alternatives which are discussed later in this report.

However, from the IDT’s perspective, two of the project team’s recommended alternatives met only the technical aspects of the project, but not the community needs aspect as defined by the “Context Sensitive Design” outlined above. The alternatives proposed as a fully access controlled freeway along the existing Sunset alignment and shifting of the highway facility from Sunset to an existing street, in this case Cascade Avenue, were deemed to have severe impacts on the neighborhoods and would not be consistent with the character of the East Wenatchee/Douglas County community.

The IDT then proposed that other options should be considered in lieu of the project team’s recommendations of a freeway along Sunset Highway and the relocation of the highway to a widened Cascade Avenue. The portion of Alternative 6e – Widening Sunset Highway to five-lanes combined with making less dramatic improvements to other existing streets was determined by the IDT to offer the best opportunity to satisfy both the technical requirements and the community aspects of the purpose and need statement.

Improvements to Cascade Avenue and to Eastmont Avenue, such as a three-lane section combined with widening of the existing Sunset Highway would meet the technical aspects required in the purpose and need statement while minimizing the overall modification of the community character, community livability, and community sustainability. The City/County pointed out that Eastmont Avenue is programmed for widening to three-lanes from Grant Road to Valley View Drive. This widening would satisfy a portion of the improvements that would be required along Eastmont Avenue. This would then only require the extension of a three-lane section from Valley View Drive to the intersection of SR2/SR28/SR97.

After considering these factors the IDT's consensus was to replace the project team's recommended alternative 6d – Widening Cascade to five-lanes and Sunset to three-lanes with two alternatives that are very similar but place a greater emphasis on the community character, livability, and sustainability. One of these alternatives involves widening Sunset Highway to five-lanes from 9th Street to Odabashian Bridge and extending and widening Cascade Avenue between 15th Street and Odabashian Bridge with a connection to Sunset Highway near 15th Street. The other alternative is to widen Sunset Highway to five-lanes from 9th Street to Odabashian Bridge and extend Eastmont from the City/County Eastmont widening project north to the intersection of SR2/SR28/SR97.

IDT Recommendations

Based on the recommendations of the project team, community input, and the discussions at the IDT meeting held July 25, 2001, the IDT recommends the following four concept alternatives be carried forward for detailed study in the Eastside Corridor Environmental Impact Statement

A Western route 300-feet from the Ordinary High Water Mark (OHWM of the Columbia River). This is an alignment that is west of the existing Sunset Highway. The alignment would tie-in at the north end at a logical termini location based upon traffic analysis, geometric considerations, and environmental analysis. The southern terminus would tie-in to the existing Sunset Highway in the vicinity of 15th Street. Existing Sunset Highway would be widened to five-lanes from the tie-in point near 15th Street to 9th Street. The widening along the existing Sunset Highway would occur to the east of the existing alignment. The alignment was selected on the basis that it falls outside of the 300-foot zone of the OHWM and thereby complies with the provisions of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The southern end of the route would be within the 200-foot shoreline management act jurisdictional zone since a portion of the existing Sunset Highway falls within the 200-foot shoreline management act jurisdictional zone. This alignment would maximize the use of the existing state highway right-of-way, while remaining outside of the shoreline and ESA regulatory jurisdictional area where possible.

A one-way couplet utilizing Sunset Highway and Cascade Avenue. This would be a one-way couplet (a pair of one-way streets) with the existing Sunset Highway as the northbound route and Cascade Avenue as the southbound route. The alignment would tie-in at the north end at a logical termini location based upon traffic analysis, geometric considerations, and environmental analysis. Cascade Avenue would be extended at the south end to connect with the existing Sunset Highway in the vicinity of 15th Street. Sunset Highway would be widened to the east between this connection point and 9th Street. This alternative would be analyzed to ensure access and connectivity between the one-way streets. This route would have managed access control (access at all intersections) with three lanes in each direction. Access to existing properties along the alignment would remain.

Widening of Sunset Highway to five-lanes and widening of Cascade Avenue to three-lanes. This would require the widening and the extension of Cascade Avenue to three lanes between a logical termination point at the north end of the project and a point along Sunset Highway on the south end in the vicinity of 15th Street. Sunset Highway would be widened to five-lanes between the SR2/SR28/SR97 intersection and 9th Street. The widening of Sunset Highway would be designed to minimize impacts to the residences and businesses located along the existing alignment. Widening of Sunset Highway would be to the east of the existing alignment in the area where the existing facility is within the 200-foot shoreline management act jurisdictional zone. Sunset Highway would have managed access control with existing access remaining to residences and businesses where possible. Cascade Avenue would have managed access control with retention of access to existing properties (including homes and orchards) along the alignment.

Widening of Sunset Highway to five-lanes and the extension of three-lane Eastmont Avenue from approximately Valley View Drive to the SR2/SR28/SR97 intersection. This would require the extension of Eastmont Avenue from the existing three-lane section at Valley View Drive (project programmed by the City/County) to the SR2/SR28/SR97 intersection. Sunset Highway would be widened to five-lanes between the SR2/SR28/SR97 intersection and 9th Street. The widening of Sunset Highway would be designed to minimize impacts to the residences and businesses located along the existing alignment. Widening of Sunset Highway would be to the east of the existing alignment in the area where the existing facility is within the 200-foot shoreline management act jurisdictional zone. Sunset Highway would have managed access control with existing access remaining to residences and businesses where possible. Eastmont Avenue would have managed access control with retention of access to existing properties along the alignment.

It is important to note that the above recommendation was made based on preliminary environmental information, traffic data and engineering considerations. While this level of information is appropriate for carrying out a screening analysis of conceptual alternatives, the project team recognizes that additional environmental or design information may arise as a result of the detailed environmental studies and design work which will be carried out as part of the EIS process. Further evaluation of the recommended alternatives may warrant adjusting the original conceptual alignment of an alternative. Additionally, elements of some of the alternatives discounted during the second level screening process may be incorporated in order to overcome environmental or design constraints, and avoid potential impact issues.