



Preferred Alternative Updates for Public Comment

March 30, 2021

Since publication of the I-69 Ohio River Crossing (ORX) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) in December 2018 and the January 2019 public hearings that followed, the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) and the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) have been reviewing comments received on the DEIS and further evaluating the project's design. The purpose of this document is to provide:

- An update to project stakeholders regarding how the project team has addressed comments received on the two preferred alternatives presented in the DEIS,
- The states' basis for the recommendation of a Single Preferred Alternative,
- The states' plan to construct the project in two phases, and
- A summary of modifications made to the design of the Single Preferred Alternative in response to comments and further engineering analyses.

The project team requests comments from project stakeholders on each of the above elements. Based on comments provided on the Single Preferred Alternative, the project team proposes to publish a combined Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) that selects an alternative for final design and construction. By combining the FEIS and ROD, there will be no future opportunities for public comment beyond that proposed in this memo. Section 304a(b) of Title 49 U.S.C. and 23 U.S.C. 139(n)(2) provides that the lead agency (FHWA, in the case of this project) shall, to the maximum extent practicable, combine the FEIS and ROD unless (1) the FEIS makes substantial changes to the proposed action that are relevant to environmental or safety concerns; or (2) there is a significant new circumstance or information relevant to environmental concerns that bears on the proposed action or the impacts of the proposed action. INDOT and KYTC will combine the FEIS and ROD unless they propose new substantial changes to the project or become aware of a significant new circumstance or information relevant to environmental concerns.

Two Preferred Alternatives

The DEIS evaluated a range of alternatives and identified two Preferred Alternatives:

- Central Alternative 1A
- Central Alternative 1B

Both alternatives would include upgrades to approximately 2.8 miles of existing US 41 and construction of 8.4 miles of new highway, including a new bridge over the Ohio River, to connect I-69 in Evansville, Indiana to I-69 in Henderson, Kentucky. Both alternatives would include new interchanges at existing I-69 in Indiana, and US 60 and US 41 in Kentucky and would remove the



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existing US 41 southbound bridge, converting the existing northbound bridge to two-way traffic. The only difference between the two Preferred Alternatives would be in the application of tolls: Central Alternative 1A would toll both the new I-69 bridge and the remaining US 41 bridge; Central Alternative 1B would toll only the new I-69 bridge.

The DEIS included two additional build alternatives: West Alternative 1 and West Alternative 2. Both of these alternatives would generally follow the existing US 41 corridor and include a new bridge over the Ohio River. These alternatives were not identified as preferred alternatives because they would result in higher residential and business relocations and higher impacts to wetlands, streams, forested habitat, and floodways.

Public Comments Received on the Preferred Alternatives

Following publication of the DEIS, INDOT and KYTC provided a 45-day public comment period, which included public hearings held on January 7 and 8, 2019 in Henderson and Evansville, respectively. In addition to the public hearing testimony, comments were accepted via mail, email, and phone. In total, the project team received over 500 comments on the DEIS. The majority of comments received concerned the selection of the two Preferred Alternatives. The most common comments regarding the two Preferred Alternatives were:

- Most supported the Central Alternative 1A/1B corridor over West Alternative 1 or West Alternative 2.
- Most supported keeping the US 41 crossing non-tolled, as in Central Alternative 1B. Their concerns were primarily focused on the potential economic impact on businesses in the US 41 commercial strip in Henderson, local drivers who regularly cross the Ohio River, and on low-income drivers (i.e., environmental justice populations).
- Many supported keeping both existing US 41 bridges operational (neither of the two preferred alternatives retained both existing US 41 Ohio River bridges) and non-tolled.
- A number of people recommended prohibiting heavy trucks, or discouraging them through the use of higher tolls on the US 41 Ohio River bridge, to reduce long-term maintenance costs.
- Many suggested providing a discounted or toll-free option for local drivers.

All comments received since publication of the DEIS will be included and summarized, along with responses regarding their disposition, in the FEIS.

Recommendation for a Single Preferred Alternative

INDOT and KYTC have reviewed all the comments received on the alternatives. Both the comments and the reasons noted in the DEIS support the states' preference of the Central Alternative 1 corridor over the West Alternative corridors. That decision remains unchanged.

INDOT and KYTC are sensitive to the potential impacts associated with introducing tolls to the Evansville-Henderson region. Many comments addressed the potential impacts of tolling the US

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41 crossing on businesses located in the US 41 corridor and on local users, especially low-income drivers, who must cross the river to reach work, school, and/or other essential services.

With regards to the removal of one of the existing US 41 Ohio River bridges, INDOT and KYTC have a responsibility to meet future traffic demands in a fiscally responsible manner. Since publication of the DEIS, INDOT and KYTC have continued to evaluate the need for cross-river mobility, the associated long-term maintenance costs, and the states' funding options over the next decade. Travel demand modeling indicates that, even by 2045 and with the completion of I-69 throughout Kentucky and Indiana, six lanes of cross-river capacity would provide an acceptable level of service. As a result, the long-term cost of maintaining both aging US 41 bridges in order to provide excess capacity is not justified. The states will continue to monitor both travel demand and funding opportunities as the project moves toward construction.

Based on DEIS comments and subsequent engineering analyses, the states made several design modifications to Central Alternative 1B in order to further reduce costs and improve traffic performance and access. These modifications, and their impacts, are described in the "Design Modifications" section below. The modified alternative has been named Central Alternative 1B Modified and was subsequently recommended by the states as the Single Preferred Alternative for the following reasons:

- It provides acceptable cross-river capacity for future traffic demands in a fiscally responsible manner.
- It reduces economic impacts to businesses along the US 41 commercial strip and to local users that regularly cross the Ohio River by keeping the US 41 bridge toll free.
- The majority of the public comments preferred no tolls on the US 41 bridge and providing a toll-free option would avoid disproportionate high and adverse impacts to environmental justice populations.

Phased Construction

In 2020, the Kentucky legislature adopted *Kentucky's FY 2020 – FY 2026 Highway Plan* that included funding for the first section of the I-69 ORX project. Section 1, which will be constructed first, includes all project work from KY 425 to US 60, including the upgrades to existing US 41 and the first 2.9 miles of new terrain highway. Section 2 of the project will include the remainder of the project from US 60, across the Ohio River, and connecting to I-69 in Indiana. Upon completion of Section 1, drivers will be able to utilize future I-69 as far north as US 60, but cross-river traffic will still utilize US 41 to cross the river.

Design Modifications

In March 2019, the project team held a value engineering (VE) workshop to independently review the project's conceptual design and identify opportunities to potentially reduce cost, improve the quality and value of the design, and/or shorten the schedule, while still meeting the project's purpose and need. Based on the recommendations in the VE Study Report and agency and public comments received on the DEIS, the project team made several design modifications to Central Alternative 1B. These modifications would have been made to either Central Alternative 1A or

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1B, regardless of which had been identified as the Single Preferred Alternative. Changes in impacts associated with these modifications are still being calculated and will be reported in full in the FEIS/ROD. A preliminary qualitative assessment of impacts is provided below.

- Interchange with existing I-69 in Indiana: The revised design for this interchange, shown in the figure to the right, eliminates the loop ramp that was previously included to provide access for eastbound traffic from Veterans Memorial Parkway heading north on I-69. The revised design includes a signalized intersection of two ramps: (1) eastbound Veterans Memorial Parkway to northbound I-69 and (2) northbound I-69 to westbound Veterans Memorial Parkway. These changes provide a more direct route and reduce impacts to wetlands and the Ohio River floodplain. Evaluation of this interchange, and other viable alternatives, is ongoing, and the final layout will require approval of an Interchange Access Document by the Federal Highway Administration.



- I-69 bridge: In order to reduce bridge costs, the width of the I-69 bridge shoulders were reduced from 12 feet to 10 feet on the outside and from 8 feet to 4 feet on the inside. Future traffic projections determined that the option to expand the bridge from four to six lanes via restriping the lanes was not needed. This modification will reduce the size of the bridge's substructure, reducing impacts in the Ohio River and adjacent floodplain and wetlands.
- Bowling Lane extension: In order to eliminate the long-term maintenance costs that would be associated with the local access bridge over I-69 located north of the US 60 interchange shown in the DEIS, the bridge was replaced with an extension of Bowling Lane (see figure to right), to provide a driveway access east of and parallel to I-69 to the



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gas transmission pipeline and the remainder of a private property. This modification will result in a small increase in the amount of farmland impacts.

- US 60 Interchange: As shown in the figure below, the modified design at this interchange improves the connection of Tillman-Bethel Road to the relocated US 60. To the west of I-69, the US 60 alignment was modified to avoid impacts to a cemetery.

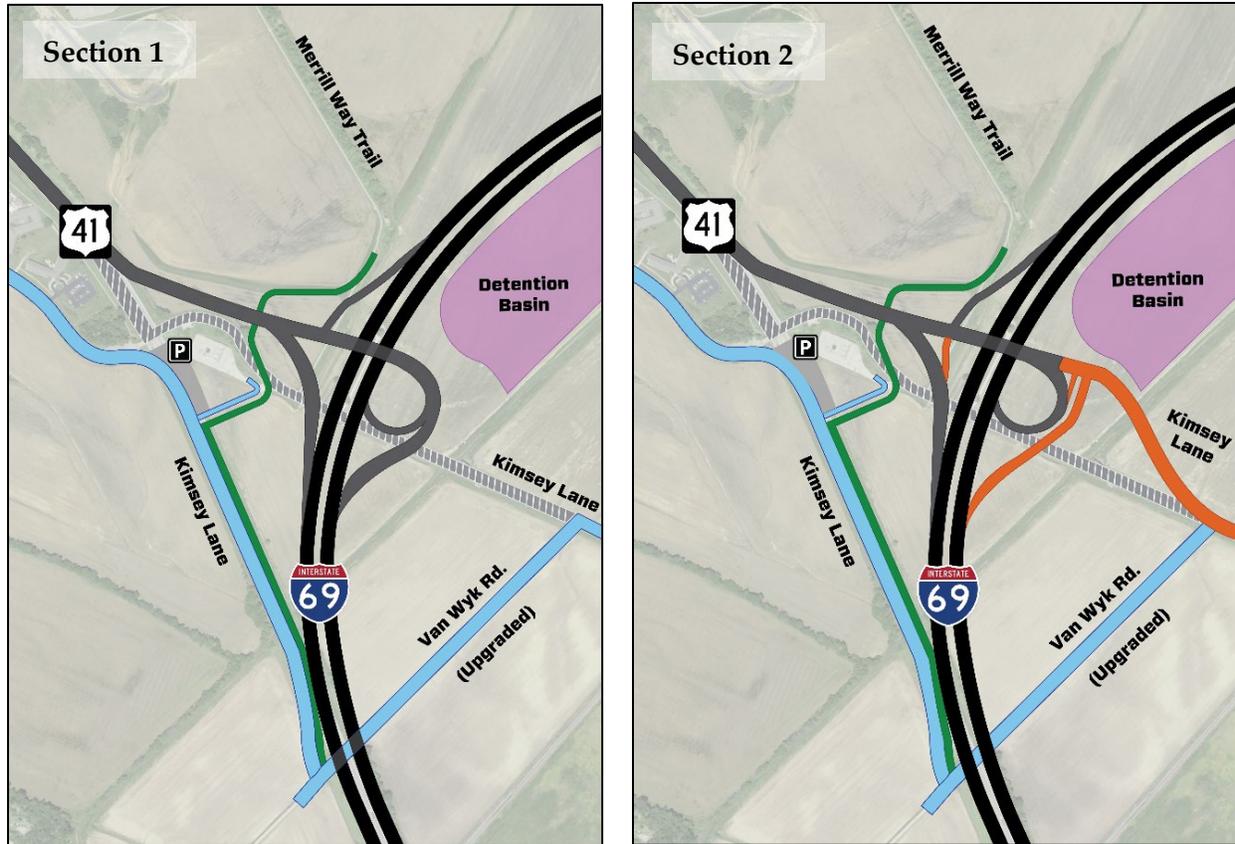


- Stormwater Detention Basins: Central Alternative 1B Modified includes the construction of an approximately 175-acre detention basin adjacent to and south of I-69 between the US 41 and US 60 interchanges. This basin was added for three reasons: (1) it mitigates the impacts of constructing I-69 across the floodplain and provides for the project's stormwater management requirements, (2) it provides most of the fill material for construction of Section 1 of the project, and (3) it reduces the potential for downstream flooding in Henderson. Because the existing use of this area is agricultural, this modification will increase impacts to farmland by approximately 175 acres.
- US 41 Interchange: A revised design for the I-69/US 41 interchange eliminates the long flyover bridges that were shown in the DEIS, substantially reducing the cost of the interchange and providing a flexible design that better supports the community's vision for future growth.

The modified design US 41 interchange will be phased to ensure efficient cross-river travel. As shown in the figure below at left, a trumpet-style interchange will be constructed at this location during Section 1 construction. The trumpet-style interchange maintains two lanes of free-flow traffic on the connection to existing US 41 for both northbound and southbound cross-river traffic.

After the interstate connection to I-69 in Indiana is completed as part of the construction of Section 2 of the project, the US 41 interchange will be modified to provide a direct connection to Kimsey Lane to the east as shown in the figure below at right. These modifications will not substantially alter environmental impacts in this area.

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- KY 351 Interchange:** Further analysis of this area indicated that the close proximity of the KY 351 interchange to the partial interchange with KY 2084 did not meet interstate design standards. Rather than build an auxiliary lane between KY 2084 and



KY 351 as proposed in the DEIS, the revised design removes the KY 2084 partial interchange altogether, and instead reconfigures the KY 351 interchange. As shown in the figure below, the revised design includes three roundabouts, one at each of the ramp intersections and another at the KY 351/KY 2084 intersection. The three roundabouts will support the City of Henderson's vision for this gateway corridor as well as provide improved safety and access in this area. These modifications will require acquisition of small amounts of additional right of way.

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- Northbound auxiliary lane between the Henderson Bypass and Audubon Parkway interchanges: In order to provide for safe movements between these adjacent interchanges, an auxiliary lane was added in the northbound direction between the Henderson Bypass and Audubon Parkway (see figure to right). While these changes will occur entirely within existing right of way, they have the potential to cause noise impacts to an existing residential community; these impacts are being analyzed and will be reported in the FEIS. Evaluation of noise barriers to mitigate any impacts will follow KYTC's policies.

Opportunity to Comment on the Single Preferred Alternative

With the recommendation of Central Alternative 1B Modified as the Single Preferred Alternative, INDOT and KYTC are providing both the public and governmental agencies an opportunity to comment prior to publishing the combined FEIS/ ROD later this year.

The project team will hold a joint meeting of the project's River Cities Advisory Committee (RCAC) and Environmental Justice (EJ) Subcommittee and will host a virtual public meeting to inform the public and stakeholders of the reasons for recommending this Single Preferred Alternative. Notifications to the public and stakeholders will be made through the project's website, email newsletter, social media accounts, a media releases, newspaper advertisements, with postcards mailed to all residences in the project area and all nearby areas with EJ populations. There will be a 15-day public comment period following the meeting for interested parties to provide comments. All comments received during this period will be documented, along with responses, in the FEIS/ROD.

