

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## **What Is I-69?**

Interstate 69 is a proposed, new interstate highway that would connect Mexico and Canada. The general alignment passes through nine states: Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan.

## **What's an SIU?**

Because the I-69 highway is so long, it cannot be constructed as a single project. Instead, it is being developed in a series of sections called Sections of Independent Utility, or SIUs. Also, needed improvements vary along the route. Some sections require widening, reconstruction, or relocation of existing roadways, while other sections require development of an entirely new highway in a new location. All Sections or SIUs must be functional on their own - even if the adjacent section(s) or none are built.

## **Are Interstate 69 and the I-69 Corridor the same thing?**

Yes. The I-69 Corridor title refers to the general location of the highway as defined by legislation with the stipulation that specific route locations must be determined through route location and environmental screening processes. I-69 may also be referred to as the "NAFTA Corridor" or "NAFTA Superhighway" as one if the project's main goals is to increase both interstate and international trade among US, Mexican, and Canadian industries.

## **I heard about this project 10 years ago...is it the same?**

The Intermodal Surface and Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) identified 21 corridors for development because the existing Interstate system did not well serve some regions of the United States. Of the 21 corridors, No. 18 was designated between Indianapolis to Memphis. In 1993, after the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Corridor No. 18's span was extended from Memphis to Houston. The National Highway System Designation Act of 1995 further extended the corridor to include the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. When the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA 21) was signed into law in 1998, Corridor No. 18 was officially designated as Interstate 69. Because the legislation for Corridor No. 18 includes language that designates a section entry point near Shreveport, Louisiana, studies have been conducted to determine the alignment from Texas to the Shreveport region.

## **What's an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)?**

An EIS is a detailed written report that is required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) on proposals for legislation and other major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. The EIS addresses the following:

- The purpose and need for the action;
- Development of alternatives to meet the purpose and need for the action;
- The existing conditions of the human, physical and natural environment;
- The effects of the action to these environments;
- Mitigation of adverse effects from the action;
- The relationship between local short-term uses of man's environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity; and
- Any irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources which would be involved in the proposed action should it be implemented.

## **What's an impact?**

An "impact" is a consequence that results from an activity. Impacts can be positive or negative or both. An EIS describes impacts, as well as ways to "mitigate" impacts. To "mitigate" means to lessen or remove negative impacts.

### **What's the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)?**

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, or NEPA, is a federal law that requires all proposed federal actions to consider and formally conduct an inventory and assessment of potential impacts on the quality of the human and natural environments. Efforts to resources and issues that must be evaluated include:

- Air Quality
- Land Use
- Water Quality
- Social and Economic Conditions
- Secondary and Cumulative Effects
- Noise and Vibration
- Short-term Construction Effects
- Historical, Historic Architectural and Archeological Resources
- Visual or Aesthetic Effects
- Effects to and/or from Hazardous Material Sites
- Effects to Threatened and Endangered Species and their Habitats
- 100-Year Flood Plains
- Wetlands
- Impacts on Agricultural Lands and Prime and Unique Farmlands
- Energy Use
- Irreversible and Irrecoverable Commitments of Resources

### **Is there a difference between Public Hearings and Public Meetings?**

Yes. Hearings are formal proceedings that are required by law, and typically held only once during a project – at the point where a final decision is to be made. As part of the legal requirement for public hearings, all comments must be transcribed, and announcements advertising the time and location for the hearing must meet certain minimum requirements.

Public meetings are less formal and typically held more frequently. Public meetings are held throughout the study process to gather useful information and receive comments/input on progress. Public meetings can be held in many different formats, with small or large groups.

### **What is scoping?**

Scoping is the process of defining the range of actions, alternatives, and issues to be considered in an EIS. Scoping takes place at the beginning of an EIS and involves the public and government agencies. The intent is to refine the scope, or range, of issues and analyses to those issues/resources viewed by the project team, public, and resources agencies as potentially important for evaluation.

### **What is a "Purpose and Need Statement"?**

The Purpose and Need statement is a discussion that serves as the basis for evaluating alternatives in an EIS. It outlines the intended goals of a project with supporting data that will be used to screen possible alternatives for selection of the best alternative to implement an action.

### **What is an alternative?**

An alternative is one of a number of choices to be considered in an environmental study. Alternatives can require new construction, rehabilitation of existing facilities, or implementation of management measures that would improve the benefits of existing facilities. The common thread of all reasonable and feasible alternatives is that they meet the intended purpose and need for the actions. For this project, an alternative is a 300-foot-wide route identified within a 2-mile-wide corridor. An alternative is a refinement of a corridor. Alternatives are evaluated in engineering line and grade studies, as well as in the EIS that the alternatives analysis will be presented to the public for comment in Spring 2004. For the sake of comparison, a "No Action", "No Build" or "Do Nothing" alternative is always evaluated in a NEPA document, as well.

**What is the "no build" alternative?**

Under the terms of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), all actions must be compared against the base case of doing nothing. For transportation studies, this base case of doing nothing is called the "No Build" or "No Action" alternative. The impacts, benefits, and costs of all alternatives associated with each alternative are compared to the "No Build" alternative. The "No Build" alternative, however, does not imply that existing facilities will not be maintained as needed. Maintenance of existing facilities will continue no matter what alternative is selected.

Likewise, the "No Build" or "No Action" alternatives also does not assume that planned projects for which funds have been committed for construction would be abandoned. Rather, the "No Build" or "No Action" alternative assumes that committed projects would be constructed; however, no new projects, including the subject project, would be implemented. In this way, various build alternatives under consideration will have reasonable and realistic conditions to which alternatives' projected effects can be compared.

**What is a corridor and corridor selection?**

Corridor selection is the next phase in the study being conducted on the proposed highway project between Shreveport and El Dorado – SIU 14. Corridors are 2-mile-wide routes identified as potential locations within which the approximately 300-foot-wide interstate highway can be designed and constructed.

The identified corridors are evaluated for potential benefits and environmental consequences. Based on the findings, the corridor having the best potential to yield the least environmentally damaging, practicable alternatives will be chosen. It is expected that corridor evaluation will be presented to the public for comment in the Fall of 2003. Public meetings, like those held during the scoping period in March 2003, will serve as formal opportunities for comment and input, while the hotline, website and program office are available at regular daily business hours. Updates to the corridor evaluation will be posted on the website as well as available at the program office in Homer.

**What are the primary influences in the decision of corridor placement?**

Development of the 2-mile-wide Corridors will be drawn by the constraints identified through the Scoping Process. Good potential waterway crossings (both existing and new locations) will be identified, followed by segment development extending from these natural "pinch points." Connecting corridor segments will be chosen to minimize the potential for adverse effects to identified resources (e.g., towns, churches, schools, hospitals, cemeteries, and other). Connections to abutting sections' terminus points with SIU No. 14 will then be drawn, within which the terminus design will be developed.

**What does the phrase "right of entry" mean?**

"Right of entry" is a phrase that refers to a state highway department's procedures for private property access when owner request for access has been denied. Private property access or "right of entry" is conducted to fulfill a project's necessary environmental studies and may include surveying, examination, photography, testing, or sampling.

Further explanation of the terms of "right of entry" can be found in the following documentation:

[Arkansas Statute, Title 27, Chapter 27, Subchapter 3](#)  
[Louisiana Revised Statute, Title 48, Section 217](#)

**What is a line and grade study?**

A line and grade study is a document that summarizes the engineering evaluations conducted for the build alternatives under study. This document will present details on the locations of right-of-way lines and the extent of construction for each alternative.

**How does this study affect me, as a landowner, now? When will I know if it will affect me in the future?**

Because it is uncertain where the corridors will be located until the corridor study is complete, it is hard to tell how much or where private or commercial property could be affected within the study area. The project team will keep you informed of study developments via this website, our toll free hotline (877-886-9233), the program office at 425 West Main Street in Homer, as well as direct mailings.

**How does the involvement of the I-69 Coalition compare to the I-69 Study Team that is a combination of URS, LDOTD, AHTD, and FHWA?**

The I-69 Study Team that consists of representatives from URS Corporation, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (LDOTD), Arkansas Highway Transportation Department (AHTD), and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is conducting an EIS as part of the federal requirements of NEPA. The EIS will document the Team's evaluation of where a section of the I-69 highway could be built between Shreveport, Louisiana and El Dorado, Arkansas. The study being conducted is sponsored by the FHWA and managed jointly at the state level by the LDOTD and the AHTD.

The I-69 Coalition is a private interest group comprised of community and business members who are supportive of improvements to the National Highway System between the Mexican and Canadian borders.

**Why not route the corridor through Kisatchie National Forest, it already is federal land?**

The Kisatchie National Forest is part of the U.S. Department of Forestry's National Forest Lands. Because these lands have been identified as worthy of federal management and because of the public resource and recreational benefits, avoidance of these lands is deemed beneficial.

**How will local roads be affected?**

Right now it is hard to tell which roads, if any, will be affected by the proposed highway because it is uncertain where the corridors, and ultimately the alternatives, will be located. It is possible that once corridors have been refined to the point of designating alternative alignments for the proposed interstate highway, existing roads could be improved to interstate status and used for the highway project in certain locations.

**How will planning be coordinated with local economic/industrial development organizations so that all concerned will benefit in the future?**

The Project Team has and will continue to coordinate with local economic and industrial development organizations and investment entities. Information from businesses, community groups and individuals regarding the details or features of the local area are extremely important in identifying the best transportation options to meet the purpose and need for this project. Your comments, ideas and questions help create better transportation solutions. By joining our mailing list you can keep informed of project developments via newsletters and postcards, and our program office is open from 8-5 pm each business day at 425 W Main Street in Homer. Additionally, we have a toll-free hotline you can call with questions (877-886-9233) and this website is updated to keep you informed as well. You are encouraged to attend the public meetings that are held each time enough data is collected to make a critical decision for the study. At the meetings you will have the opportunity to speak with the project team and let your voice be heard.

**What is a Record of Decision?**

A Record of Decision, or ROD, is issued at the end of an EIS conducted under the NEPA. It states both federal and state approval for the alternative that has been selected for a given action. A ROD also provides documentation and assurances that required federal laws and regulations have been abided by in the selected alternative.