Chapter 1 Summary

Chapter 1 summarizes key findings and the information contained within this Draft EIS.

1 What is the Rhodes Lake Road Corridor Project?

In 2001, the Pierce County Council passed a resolution of intent (Resolution No. R2001-80) to establish a new County roadway, between 198th Avenue East and SR 162, in the vicinity of Rhodes Lake Road. The resolution directed the County Engineer to study the potential corridor and report back to the County Council. The Corridor Study process began in 2003, culminating in this Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS).

The decision on whether to establish a corridor in this area will be made in support of Pierce County's Comprehensive Plan, which has designated most of the plateau area south of Bonney Lake and east of the Puyallup River (referred to as the Orting Plateau) as an Employment Based Planned Community (EBPC). Exhibit 1-1 shows the EBPC and the area designated as the "Orting Plateau" for this Draft EIS. Zoning for the Orting Plateau would accommodate approximately an additional 10,300 residential units and 9,600 jobs by 2030[1].

Project Objectives

The primary objectives for the corridor establishment are to:

- Meet travel demand between land uses
- Strengthen the transportation network
- Minimize impacts to the natural environment
- Minimize impacts to the built environment
- Optimize financial investment in transportation infrastructure

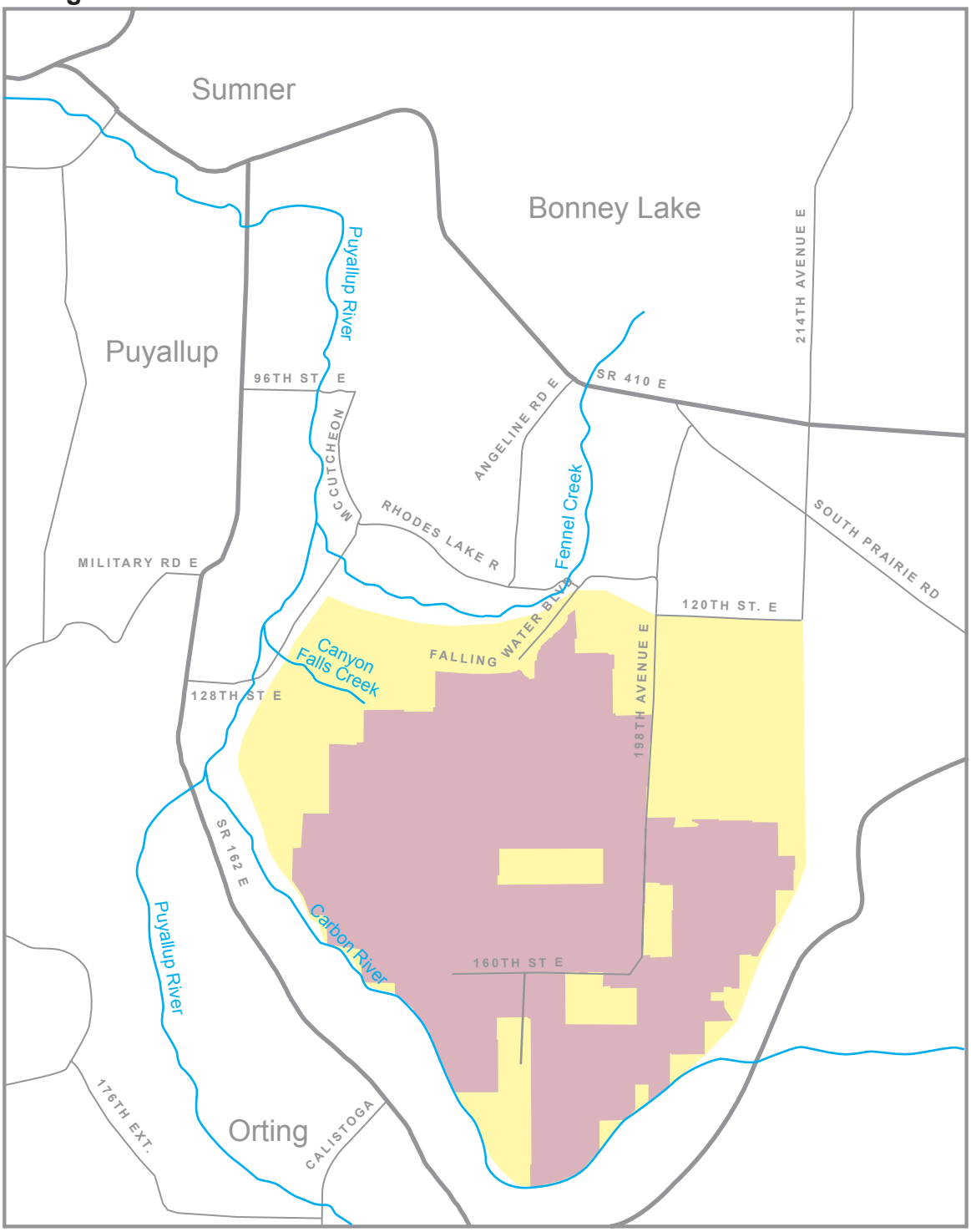
Why is this Draft Programmatic EIS being prepared?

A programmatic or non-project EIS is prepared early in project development to help provide information decision-makers can use to make decisions. This Draft Programmatic EIS is being prepared to consider broad corridor-wide issues related to transportation systems and transportation system performance.

[1] TDA Inc. et al. 1998

Exhibit 1-1

Orting Plateau



Based on expected land use, the east-west travel demand in 2030 will be greater than the capacity provided by a new four-lane roadway. The recommended action to the Pierce County Council in this Draft EIS is to establish of a corridor with two travel lanes in each direction plus auxiliary lanes, running from SR 162, across the Puyallup Valley via 128th Street E and up to the Orting Plateau. This corridor would be a substantial first step toward meeting the ultimate east-west travel demand to and from development on the plateau, but would likely need to be supplemented with other facilities at some point in the future.

The corridor is being considered in order to address the following conditions:

- **Future Growth** – there is a significant amount of new residential and employment growth that is planned to occur on the plateau south of Bonney Lake.
- **East/West Demand** – as growth occurs, there will be increasing east/west travel demand in addition to the current north/south movement between homes and jobs.
- **Inadequate Network** – there are a limited number of existing and planned routes to accommodate planned growth and meet the east/west travel demand needs.

2 What is the purpose of the Rhodes Lake Road Corridor Study and this Draft EIS?

The purpose of the Corridor Study and Draft EIS is to determine if a new roadway corridor in the vicinity of the Orting Plateau is needed and if so, to recommend a preferred alignment.

3 Who is leading the project?

Pierce County is serving as the lead agency for this document. As such, the County will publish this document, solicit input from the public, address comments, and prepare a Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS).

4 Where are the project boundaries and why were they selected?

The project area is illustrated in Exhibit 1-1. The area is generally bounded by the SR 410 to the north, SR 162 to the west, Orting City Limits to the south, and 214th Avenue E to the east. Earlier phases of the Corridor Study considered alternatives beyond this area. This large study area was established in order to capture the full picture of where traffic is generated, and where that traffic is moving.

5 What alternatives are evaluated in this Draft EIS?

Between 2003 and 2006, numerous alternatives were considered, evaluated, and screened. Throughout this time, significant public input has been incorporated in the process, including four Open House meetings, five informal community forums, and numerous neighborhood and property owner meetings and correspondence.

The screening process, described in detail in Chapter 2 and Appendix A of this document, ultimately resulted in the four alternatives evaluated in this Draft EIS. These alternatives are described below and depicted in Exhibit 1-2:

Alternatives Evaluation

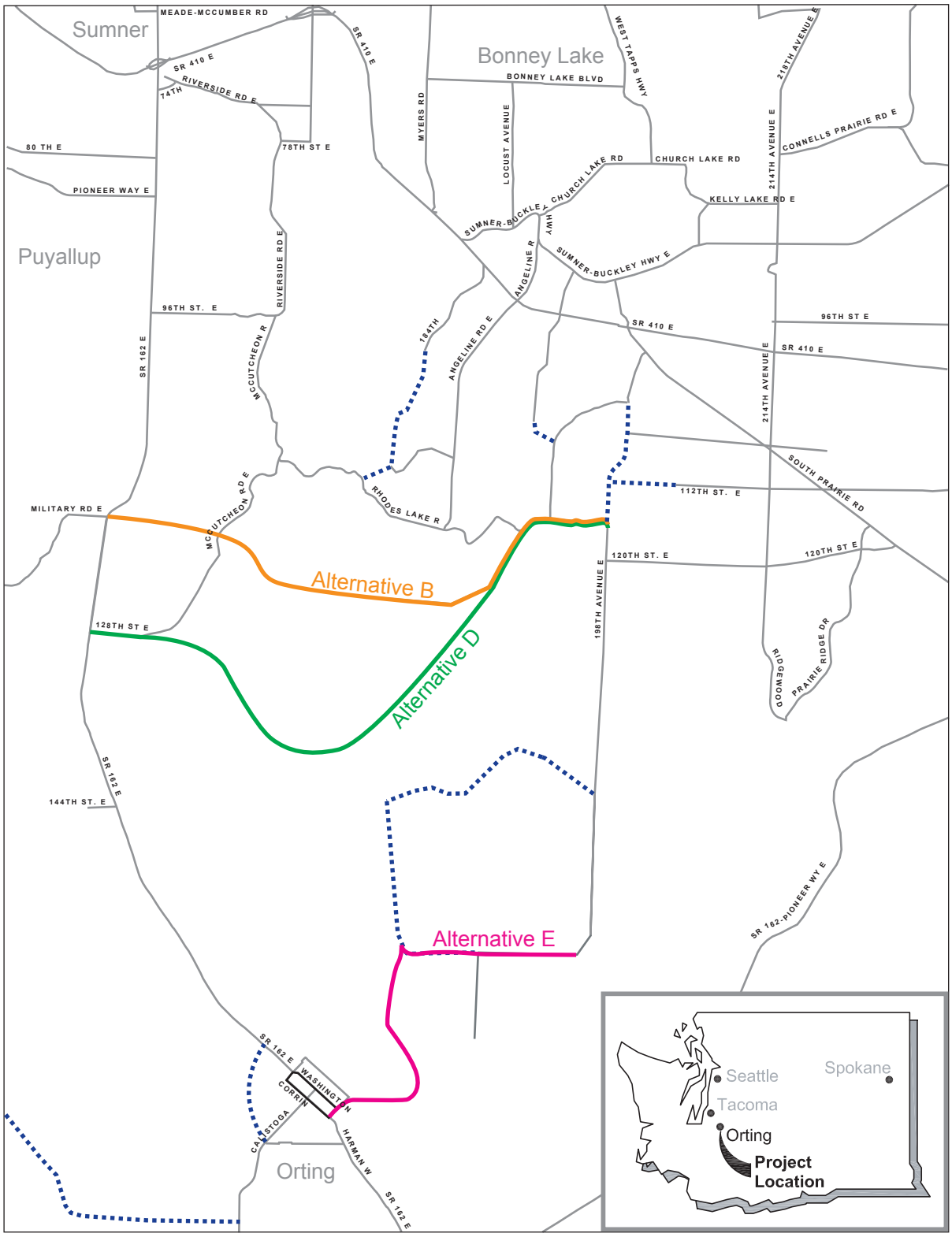
Additional detail on the Alternatives Evaluation process is included in Chapter 2, and in Appendix A, of this Draft EIS.

Alternative A

Alternative A is the "Baseline," or "No Build" alternative. The no build alternative has always been included in the process, and is a requirement of the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). This alternative assumes that several planned roadway improvements will be in place by 2030. The planned projects are illustrated in Chapter 2, Exhibit 2-6. In addition to these improvements, if Alternative A is selected by Pierce County, there is a strong possibility that a local developer would extend westerly the currently constructed section of Falling Water Boulevard into McCutcheon Road. The latter would be a 2-lane roadway. Should this road be built as currently conceived, the Cascadia development would need an alternative means of bringing its traffic from the Plateau to the Valley.

Exhibit 1-2

Alternatives Evaluated



Alternative A is the Baseline or No-Build Condition

New Road

Alternative B

Alternative B would connect with SR 162 at Military Road, an existing signalized intersection. This alignment would continue east generally along the 116th Street E right-of-way. This alternative would require a new river crossing over the Puyallup River, and from there would climb up the hill through a gravel quarry. The route would then head east, where it would connect to Falling Water Boulevard.

Alternative D

Alternative D would connect with SR 162 at the existing signalized intersection at 128th Street East, and follow 128th Street east across the Valley to the Puyallup River. Both 128th Street and the river crossing would be widened to accommodate the 4-lane road. This alignment would continue east across the western face of the Plateau and connect to Falling Water Boulevard.

Alternative E

Alternative E would connect with SR 162 at Bridge Street in Orting. Bridge Street would be widened to 5 lanes and a new 4-lane bridge would be built over the Carbon River. This new alignment would continue as a 4-lane segment up the hill where it would connect with the Orting Plateau at 160th Street E., which would be widened to 3 lanes.

6 How do impacts to the built environment compare between the alternatives?

The built environment includes the social, economic, and cultural elements of the environment. Exhibit 1-3 and the text below describe elements of the environment studied in this Draft EIS and expected project impacts. Detailed information about each element studied is included in Chapter 3, Built Environment.

Built Environment

Additional information on the Built Environment can be found in Chapter 3.

Exhibit 1-3
Summary of Impacts to the Built Environment

Element Studied	Alternative B	Alternative D	Alternative E
Traffic	See discussion below	See discussion below	See discussion below
Noise	Noise levels on 116th Street E near SR 162 are expected to increase by about 18 dBA over the 2030 Baseline, resulting in a noise level of 72 dBA.	Noise levels along 128th Street E. near SR 162 are expected to increase by about 8 dBA over the 2030 Baseline, resulting in a noise level of 73 dBA.	Noise levels on Bridge Street are expected to increase by 9 to 13 dBA over the 2030 Baseline, resulting in a noise level of 68 to 72 dBA.
Land Use			
Farmlands impacts	3.05 acres	6.20 acres	0 acres
Residential displacements	14	8	10
Commercial displacements	1	0	1
Other business impacts	Could impact a gravel pit	No impacts expected	No impacts expected
Public Services	No impacts expected	No impacts expected	No impacts expected
Parks and Recreation	No impacts expected	No impacts expected	No impacts expected
Archaeological Resources	Moderate to low probability of impacts	Moderate to low probability of impacts	Moderate to low probability of impacts
Historic Resources	Moderate to high probability of impacts	Moderate to high probability of impacts	Moderate to high probability of impacts
Visual Quality	See discussion below	See discussion below	See discussion below
Utilities	No impacts expected	No impacts expected, a bridge must be built to protect a water transmission line.	No impacts expected

Traffic Operations

Traffic volumes are expected to increase significantly by 2030, and even with the assumed 2030 Baseline improvements in place, there will be substantial congestion on key corridors in the area. Any of the three build alternative will greatly reduce overall delay, but there are differences in the amount of benefit, with Alternative B providing the most and Alternative E the least. There are also tradeoffs between build alternatives in terms of which existing corridors receive the most benefit.

Visual Quality

Any of the build alternatives would change the views from the Puyallup Valley floor, in that no roadway currently exists in these locations. However, as shown in the photo below, there is already substantial residential development underway, and these new homes and roadways can be seen from throughout the study area.

Looking east across the Puyallup Valley, a substantial amount of development has already replaced previously forested areas.

7 How do impacts to the natural environment compare between the alternatives?

Exhibit 1-4 and the text below shows the elements of the environment studied in this Draft EIS and expected project impacts. Detailed information about each element of the environment studied is included in Chapter 4, Natural Environment.

Natural Environment

Additional information on the natural environment is provided in Chapter 4.

Exhibit 1-4
Summary of Impacts to the Natural Environment

Element Studied	Alternative B	Alternative D	Alternative E
Water Quality and Floodplains			
New impervious surfaces	21.4 acres	25.1 acres	18.7 acres
Floodplain fill	1.6 acres	3.5 acres	0 acres
Fish and Aquatic Resources			
No. of new in-water columns	0	0[1]	2
Overwater shading	0.48 acres	0.17 acres	0.35 acres
Vegetation and Wildlife			
Riparian buffer impacts	0.31 acres	1.98 acres	0.36 acres
Wetland and wetland buffer impacts	0 acres	0.11 acres	0.55 acres
Geology and Soils			
Steep slope disturbance	10.4 acres	23.4 acres	23.3 acres
Hazardous materials	2 parcels nearby with suspected contaminants	1 parcel nearby with suspected contaminants	3 parcels nearby with suspected contaminants
Air quality	No impacts expected	No impacts expected	No impacts expected

1 No new in-water columns would be required, but two existing pier walls in the Puyallup River would be lengthened.

8 What adverse impacts from the project may not be mitigated?

Most of the adverse impacts from the build alternatives would be mitigated. The only exception might be noise. Traffic noise levels will be higher in 2030 than they are today, with or without a new corridor. However, constructing a new route will change traffic patterns and increase noise levels in areas where roads currently don't exist or in areas where traffic levels are much lower today than they would be in 2030 with the project.

9 What are the tradeoffs between alternatives?

Alternative A (the Baseline Alternative) does not propose building a new roadway corridor to support planned development in the Orting Plateau. If this alternative were selected, traffic congestion would be expected to increase substantially on many roads in surrounding areas causing increased travel times and delay compared to any of the proposed build alternatives. Roadways that would be the most affected include 198th Avenue E, Rhodes Lake Road, and SR 410. In addition, if Alternative A is selected by

Pierce County, it is likely that private developers would build a road from the Falling Water development connecting into McCutcheon Road. There is also a possibility that a second new road would be built from the Cascadia development directly or indirectly connecting to SR 162.

The majority of drivers heading to and from the Plateau are expected to come from the South Hill area, lower Puyallup/Sumner Valley, and south King County as shown in Exhibits 3-1 and 3-2. For these destinations, Alternative B provides the most direct route, resulting in the least amount of overall travel delay in the transportation network. Alternative D provides the second best option, but ends up creating additional congestion on a small segment of SR 162 between 128th Street E and 116th Street E. Alternatives B and D provide more benefit for traffic operations than Alternative E; however, they do require impacting rural-designated properties in the Puyallup Valley.

Alternative E provides the least overall benefit to mobility because it forces trips between the Plateau and South Hill to take a more circuitous route through the City of Orting. As a result, drivers would be expected to experience more delay and would travel more miles than with the other two build alternatives. As with Alternative A (Baseline Alternative), roadways that would be the most affected include 198th Avenue E, Rhodes Lake Road, and SR 410. Alternative E would avoid impacting properties in the rural Puyallup Valley and would instead shift impacts to the City of Orting.

10 What is the Preferred Alternative?

The preferred alternative, and the recommended action of this Draft EIS, is establishment of a corridor as shown on Alternative D. Alternative D would connect with SR 162 at the existing signalized intersection at 128th Street E, and follow 128th Street east across the Valley to the Puyallup River. Both 128th Street and the river crossing would be widened to accommodate the 4-lane road. This alignment would continue east across the western face of the Plateau and connect to Falling Water Boulevard.

Alternative D Preferred

Alternative D is the Preferred Alternative. Information on the selection process is provided in Chapter 6.

Alternative D was judged to offer the best combination of effectiveness, impacts, and ability to be successfully implemented.

11 What are the significant or controversial issues?

Like any major project, this corridor study has several issues that can be considered to be significant or potentially controversial. These include:

Alternatives Presented in this Draft EIS

The alternatives evaluated in this EIS are controversial in that Alternatives B and D are firmly opposed by many residents living in the rural area north of Orting, and Alternative E is firmly opposed by the City of Orting and the City of Bonney Lake. Residents in the rural area oppose Alternatives B and D because they are concerned about how these alternatives might affect the rural environment in which they live. In developing the Draft Community Plan, the Alderton McMillin Community Planning Board had expressed its opposition to alternatives such as B and D that would be constructed on the Valley floor. (See Appendix A – "Alternatives" for additional information on this issue.) The City of Orting opposes Alternative E (and has formally passed a City Council Resolution against this alternative) because it would impact residential neighborhoods and would increase traffic volumes in Orting's downtown core. The City of Bonney Lake opposes Alternative E (and has formally passed a City Council Resolution against this alternative) because it would result in more traffic on roads such as SR 410 and 198th Avenue E in Bonney Lake, compared with Alternatives B and D.

Baseline Network Assumptions

All of the alternatives assume a baseline 2030 transportation network (see Chapter 2, Exhibit 2-6), which includes the current system plus several planned improvements by Puyallup, Sumner, Bonney Lake, and Orting, Pierce County, and the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). These projects are all included in approved long range planning documents. This list of projects is not

Appendix B

Appendix B, Exhibit 2 contains a complete list of the improvements included in the proposed 2030 baseline. A map of these improvements is contained in Chapter 2, Exhibit 2-6.

financially constrained, and therefore is subject to the funding conditions and priorities of each agency.

Of the many projects assumed in baseline 2030 transportation network, many people have expressed concern about WSDOT's ability to fund additional general purpose lanes on SR 162 and the addition of HOV lanes on SR 410. For the analysis conducted in this EIS, both of these projects were assumed to be constructed in the 2030 baseline transportation network.

Current funding proposed as part of the Regional Transportation Investment District (RTID) includes funding for SR 162, but does not include funding for HOV lanes on SR 410. This Draft EIS does not analyze the scenario in which SR 410 is never widened. However, it is reasonable to say that the inability to upgrade the most congested facility in the study area (SR 410), will just accentuate the need for alternative routes such as those being considered in this Draft EIS.

Appendix B

Appendix B contains additional traffic information that considers what would happen to traffic in the study area if SR 410 is not widened by the year 2030.

The analysis of alternatives is based on a future condition where all of these improvements are complete. This document does not evaluate scenarios where only a portion of the baseline improvements are completed before one of the build alternatives is constructed.

Land Use Plan Implementation

The EBPC zoning assumes a strong "internal attraction" of vehicle trips, due to the quantity and proximity of employment to the residential area. The traffic model used for the Draft EIS estimates that in 2030, there will be more than 9,200 peak-hour trips that will originate or arrive on the Plateau. The model also estimates that 27% of these trips will be internal (with both the origination and arrival points on the Plateau), as people make work and housing choices to achieve a short commute. For this to occur, it will be important to ensure that employment sites develop concurrently with residential units. Otherwise, it is likely that additional traffic volumes will be experienced on the roadways leading to and from the Plateau.

What is the PM Peak Hour?

The PM peak hour is the period when traffic is heaviest during the late afternoon commute. In the study area, this period occurs for about one hour between the hours of 4:00 and 6:00 p.m.

Transportation Facilities in Rural and Urban Areas

One concern that has been voiced by some area residents is the potential impact to the community's rural character once a new roadway connects from the Plateau to the Valley. This roadway is intended to serve planned growth as prescribed in the County Land Use Plan, and as such is supported by various regional and county planning policies.

Both state routes in the study area (SR 410 and SR 162) are considered by the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) to be "Tier 2" Regionally Significant Highways. Tier 2 routes serve the "outer" urban areas, connecting main urban growth areas (UGA) to "satellite" UGAs[2]. As such, SR 162 traverses from the Orting UGA, through rural Pierce County, and connects to the Puyallup and Sumner UGAs. Regional and countywide policies support this connection. A corridor making the east-west connection from the satellite urban area (Orting Plateau) to SR 162 will intersect the highway in rural Pierce County. Regional and countywide policies support transportation connections through rural areas; however, these same policies are also concerned with preserving farmlands and the character of rural areas. Therefore it will be important to implement and enforce policies to ensure preservation of existing rural land uses.

Regional Planning

PSRC serves as the Metropolitan Planning Organization for Pierce, King, and Snohomish Counties, and as such has the mandate to comply with requirements of the Growth Management Act (GMA) and to implement regional policies.

Alternatives Previously Eliminated

During the course of the corridor study, dozens of potential routes have been identified, evaluated, and screened. Several of these concepts were eliminated for reasons ranging from high environmental impact to poor mobility performance. Some of the routes that were initially considered were north-south connections, including an improved 214th Avenue E corridor and a new Angeline Rd Interchange on SR 410. In addition to other issues, these improvements in particular did not provide sufficient benefit to the predominantly east-west traffic patterns expected in the future.

Alternatives Screening

Appendix A includes additional information on alternatives that were eliminated from further consideration in this Draft EIS.

[2] Puget Sound Regional Council 2006

Puyallup River Crossing

The Puyallup River supports species currently listed under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). Permitting a new river crossing (Alternatives B and E) or expanding an existing bridge (Alternative D) will be a significant undertaking that will require close coordination with several federal and state agencies and Tribes.

Selection of the Preferred Alternative

Alternative D was judged by the Project Leadership Team (PLT) to offer the best balance between the goals of improving mobility, minimizing impacts to the built and natural environment, and being implementable.

12 What issues need to be resolved and what decisions need to be made?

There are two primary issues that need to be resolved during the EIS process. The first is to decide whether Alternative D is the best roadway alignment for this corridor. Then the Pierce County Council will decide whether or not to establish a roadway on that alignment. The County encourages public input to these decisions by commenting on the Draft EIS during the public comment period and/or by attending public meetings.

13 How can I make comments on this Draft EIS?

You are encouraged to provide comments to Pierce County by attending our upcoming open house or by providing comments in writing.

An open house will be held from 5:00 pm to 7:30 pm, Thursday, June 21, 2007 at McAlder Elementary School, 15502 96th Street E, Puyallup, Washington 98372.

You may submit written comments to the Environmental Official, c/o Jan Verone, Pierce County Department of Public Works and Utilities, Transportation Services, 3619 Pacific Avenue, Tacoma, WA 98418-7921.

Written comment must be received no later than 4:30 pm, July 23, 2007.

14 What are the next steps?

The County will consider all public comments received during the formal review process of this Draft EIS. These comments will be reviewed and addressed to the greatest extent possible, and responses will be provided in the Final EIS. The Final EIS is expected to be published later in 2007.

At that time, a final staff recommendation of a preferred alternative will be made to the Pierce County Council. If a build alternative is selected, the roadway corridor may be formally established. This would allow the County to move forward with a project-specific environmental process that would involve developing additional and specific design detail, detailed environmental impacts analysis, and the development of specific mitigation strategies.

Next Steps

Chapter 7 includes additional information on the process that could ultimately lead to establishment and construction of a new corridor.