

1.1. Introduction

1.1.1 Regional Context

The transportation system, perhaps more than any other part of the infrastructure, operates as a system for the entire region. People and goods move from county to county and city to city, creating demand for an integrated transportation network that provides mobility for passengers and freight by car, bus, truck, rail, and bicycle. Because of the interconnected nature of the transportation system, a proposal such as the Cross-Base Highway project has to be considered in a broader context, that of the entire Puget Sound region. The Puget Sound region has grown dramatically, increasing by 508,633 persons between 1980 and 1990, an annual growth rate of more than 2 percent. Another 526,912 persons were added to the region by 2000. By 2020, the area is expected to grow another 26 percent, adding 840,016 persons and 531,660 jobs. This section describes the plans and policies directing growth and development in the Puget Sound region and Pierce County.

In 1990, the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) adopted the VISION 2020 Growth Strategy and Transportation Plan for the Central Puget Sound Region. The plan called for growth containment, limiting urban sprawl, and preserving open space. The VISION 2020 strategy concentrated new employment into major activity centers that are connected by a regional rapid transit system. In May 2001, the PSRC unanimously adopted *Destination 2030*, which is intended to support and expand upon the regional vision. The continued development and support of centers are core components of the region's growth strategy. Within Pierce County, major growth is directed to urban centers¹ in Tacoma, Lakewood, and other cities and to large planned employment centers,² as discussed below.

Also in 1990, the Washington State Legislature enacted the Growth Management Act (GMA), requiring the development of rational policies to manage growth in Washington State. All urban counties and their cities and towns were required to develop comprehensive plans and the regulations necessary to implement them. The plans also included provisions prohibiting development approval if the development causes the level of service (LOS)³ on a transportation facility to decline below the standards adopted in the transportation element of the

¹ An urban center is an area designated in the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan for concentrated development of employment, shopping, services, and multi-family housing.

² An employment center is an area designated in the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan for industrial, light industrial, assembly, office, and similar land uses with supporting services and infrastructure.

³ LOS is a measure of the quality of flow and overall congestion on a particular section of road or at a specific intersection. The degree of congestion and quality of flow are rated using the letter "A" for the least amount of congestion and a relatively free-flowing condition to the letter "F" for the highest amount of congestion and operational breakdown. LOS D, which represents operations just below capacity, is usually considered the minimum acceptable standard for most jurisdictions.

comprehensive plan. Comprehensive planning under the GMA also includes evaluating sensitive areas, natural resources, and the capacity of public services and utilities. Counties are required to establish urban growth boundaries (UGBs) that separate areas to remain at rural levels of development and those where urban developments and services will be allowed. A fundamental component of all planning under the GMA is the 20-year population growth projected by the Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM) for each county. This growth must be accommodated by each county and its cities while meeting the other requirements and goals of the act.

The Comprehensive Plan for Pierce County, adopted in 1994, updated in July 1996, and subsequently amended, includes the area south of the city of Tacoma to 208th Street E in the UGB of Pierce County. The plan complies with the GMA. The city of DuPont is an employment center south of Lakewood, and the Frederickson area in Pierce County is designated as a large employment center in the Comprehensive Plan. Of the eight employment centers identified in the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan, three (Frederickson, Thun Field, and North McChord) are served by the proposed Cross-Base Highway project.

The mid-Pierce County area referred to in this environmental impact statement (EIS) is one of six focus areas selected for the Comprehensive Plan. These areas were defined by unique travel and development patterns, population growth, and travel constraints. The mid-Pierce County area is one of the fastest-growing areas in the county and includes Parkland, Spanaway, Puyallup, and Graham.

The Pierce County Comprehensive Plan was developed over more than 4 years, with extensive involvement from all parts of the county. A Citizens Advisory Group was formed with representation from across the county to provide advice on the new plan. Early in the process, this group mailed a questionnaire to every address in the county. More than 8,000 responses were received. As the plan was developed, the group sponsored 10 public workshops around the county to brainstorm issues and concerns associated with the comprehensive plan. Nearly 600 residents attended. Follow-up workshops were held as the planning policies were developed. A series of five open-house forums were then held throughout the county to present the draft plan for public review and comment. In addition to meetings on the overall plan, advisory committees were formed for each of the nine plan elements. More than 800 citizens attended meetings on the plan elements.

In developing the Comprehensive Plan, Pierce County prepared a residential and commercial land capacity analysis to verify that the land use designations will allow for the future growth (20-year planning period) allocated to Pierce County under the GMA. To account for areas where development will not be allowed by development regulations (e.g., critical areas), the residential and commercial land capacity analysis deducts 20 percent of the vacant area. An additional 15 percent is deducted for new public infrastructure, such as roads. To avoid inhibiting the real estate market, an oversupply (known as market or safety factor) of 25 percent is included to ensure continued affordability of developable land. The market factor helps balance the GMA goals of encouraging the availability of affordable housing and promoting environmental protection. The excess capacity will also reduce pressure to extend the urban growth area (UGA) and promote infill development in areas supported by public infrastructure.

In order to size the UGAs so that the population could be accommodated, Pierce County also conducted a population capacity analysis. The UGAs are based on the projected 20-year population growth forecast for the county and its cities and towns, as generated by the OFM. In combination, these capacity analyses seek to determine how much population could be accommodated in a given area based upon the availability of developable land (Pierce County 2002a).

The capacity analyses are titled the Buildable Lands Program, initiated by the Buildable Lands Amendment (Senate Bill 6094) to the GMA in 1997. Collectively, the statistics derived from the Pierce County Buildable Lands Report, completed in September 2002, indicate that Pierce County's existing UGAs contain sufficient land to accommodate the planned growth, and that sufficient housing units and employment capacity exist within the UGAs to meet the county's overall needs (Pierce County 2002b).

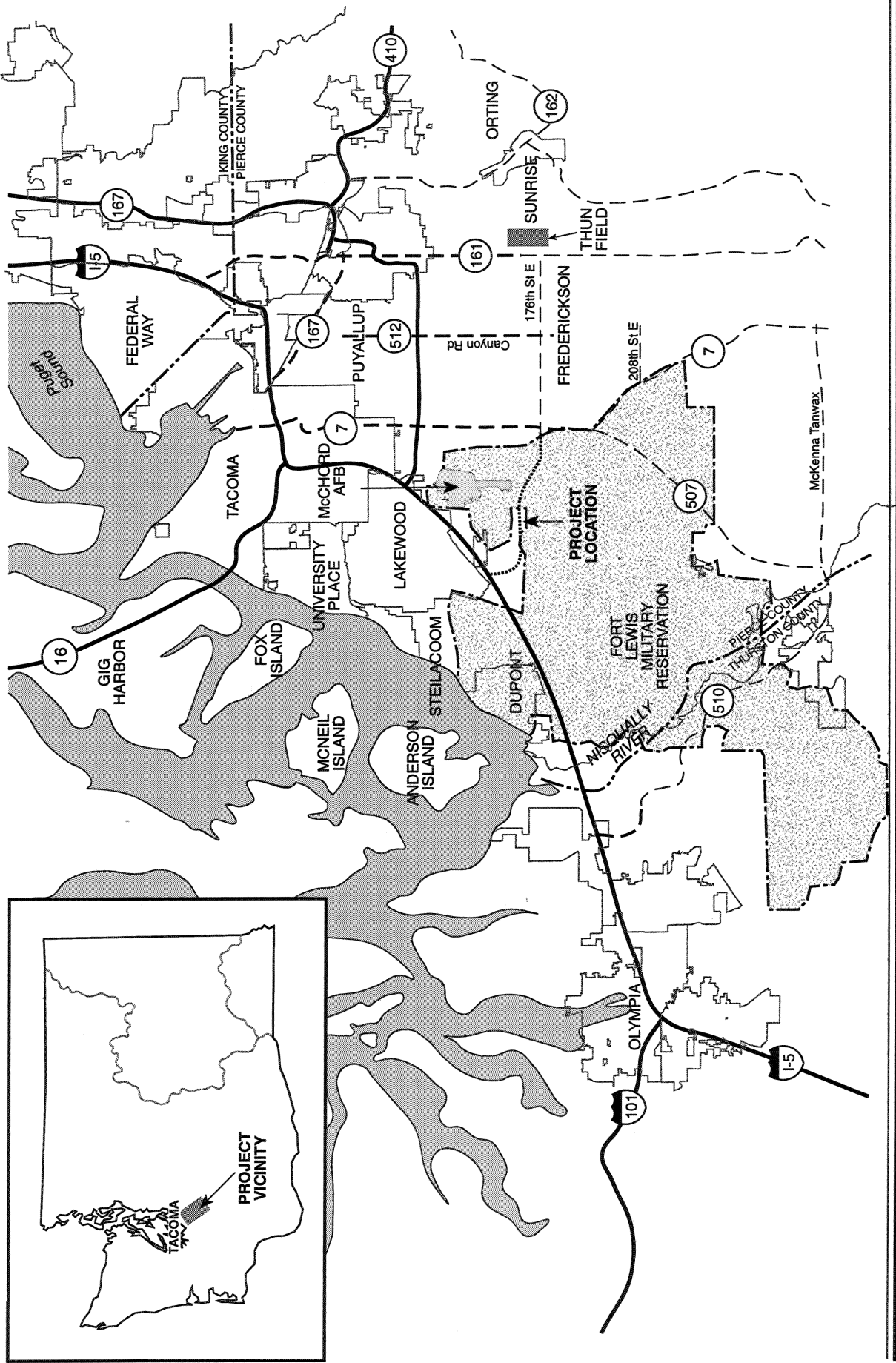
A non-project action EIS was prepared for the Comprehensive Plan in 1993, and periodic amendments to the Comprehensive Plan have subsequently been adopted. Development regulations based on the plan's policies are now in place.

Pierce County's long planning process has led to development of a land use plan that incorporates the citizens' values and vision for the county, while protecting the resources and natural qualities of the area. The land use designations and policies contained in the plan are fundamental to the need for transportation system improvements.

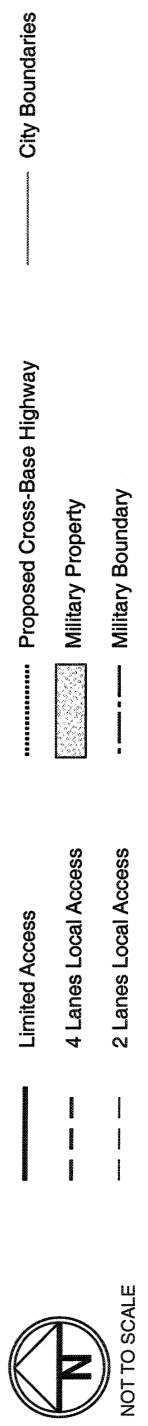
The Pierce County Transportation Plan, a component of the Comprehensive Plan, is consistent with PSRC *Destination 2030* goals. Travel forecasts used in plan development were based on land use concepts described in *Destination 2030* and the Pierce County land use plan. The transportation element of the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan includes policies and principles that focus on the following:

- Moving people and goods rather than vehicles.
- Developing an integrated, multimodal transportation system.
- Completing the roadway network.
- Linking land use and transportation decisions.
- Developing financing strategies to implement Pierce County's transportation program.

The Cross-Base Highway project is identified as a premier priority project in Pierce County's Transportation Plan; this is the highest priority category. The highway is listed as a new east-west arterial between I-5 at the City of Lakewood and State Route (SR) 7 (Pacific Avenue) at 176th Street E (Figures 1.1-1 and 1.1-2). The Cross-Base Highway project is specified in the South Hill Community Plan as one of the highest-priority corridor improvements. The project is also listed in the PSRC Metropolitan Transportation Plan, *Destination 2030*, as a missing link in the region's transportation system. It would complete the missing arterial link between Frederickson, Lakewood, and DuPont. The Cross-Base Highway project is also designated as a premier priority non-motorized facility in the Pierce County Non-

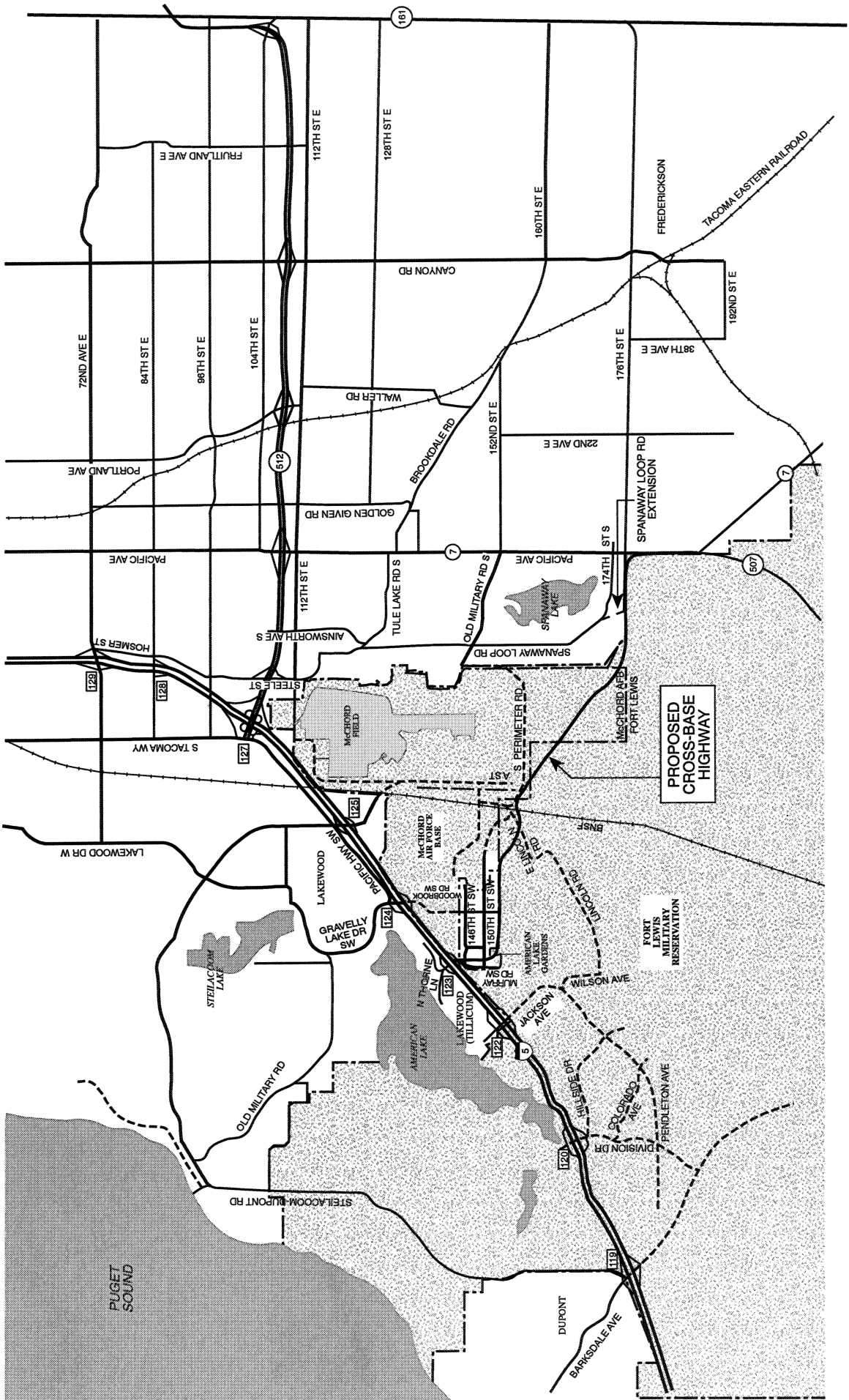


Parametrix Cross-Base 554-1588-03003(09) 8/03 (K)



NOT TO SCALE

**Figure 1.1-1
Project Vicinity**



**Figure 1.1-2
Regional Highway
and Arterial Network**

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NOT TO SCALE

- Military Property Boundary
- ▭ Military Property
- Roads on Military Property Public Use Subject to Military Permission
- 122 I-5 Exit Number

Motorized Transportation Plan. In 2002, the planned highway was designated SR 704 by the Washington State Legislature.

In 1996, voters approved the Regional Transportation Authority's (RTA) plan for developing a coordinated transit system for the most populated portions of the Puget Sound region. The RTA (now called Sound Transit) plan includes light rail, commuter rail (passenger service on existing heavy rail lines), and express bus service. In Pierce County, the Sound Transit plan includes light rail in downtown Tacoma, a commuter rail extending from Seattle through Tacoma south to Lakewood, and express bus service on I-5 and several state routes and county arterials. The Sound Transit plan includes express bus service between Lakewood and the Frederickson area via the proposed Cross-Base Highway. This express bus service will connect to the planned commuter rail station in Lakewood.

1.1.2 Study Area

The study area includes areas contributing to the need for the project and where indirect effects of the project may be felt. The project area is more narrowly defined to include where direct impacts of the highway (both construction and operation) would occur. The project area is bordered by I-5 on the west and SR 7 to the east, with north and south boundaries adjacent to the proposed alignment.

The study area contains existing and planned urban development, including Pierce County's Frederickson employment center east to SR 161, and the I-5 corridor between south Tacoma and DuPont, as well as Lakewood on the west side. The study area is bounded on the north by SR 512 (the primary east-west highway in the area) and on the south by the city of Eatonville.

Within the study area, the Fort Lewis Army Reservation and McChord Air Force Base (AFB) occupy large areas of land mostly unavailable for public transportation facilities or other development. Many parts of the study area are expected to grow substantially during the next 20 years. Almost all of this growth will be within the UGB, where public services are provided, and zoning designations support increasing densities of residential and employment-based land uses. Figure 1.1-3 shows forecasted growth in population and employment in the study area between 2000 and 2030. This growth is anticipated and directed by land use plans and recognizes the existing types of activities in the area and potential for higher densities of housing and employment.

1.2. Need for Transportation Improvements

This section discusses the need for transportation improvements in the study area. Section 1.2.1 discusses the interconnection of roadway segments that compose the local transportation network. Section 1.2.2 reviews current capacity utilization of roadways. Section 1.2.3 assesses current and predicted traffic volumes and congestion. Section 1.2.4 summarizes roadway deficiencies in the project area. Refer to the Transportation Discipline Report (Appendix G) for further information.

1.2.1 System Linkage

Existing east-west arterials in the study area connecting to I-5 are limited to SR 512 north of McChord AFB in Pierce County (at Exit 127 on I-5), and SR 510, which connects to I-5 south of Fort Lewis in Thurston County at Exit 111 (see Figures 1.1-1 and 1.1-2). These east-west routes and the north-south connecting routes are becoming increasingly congested, since they provide the only access between growing areas in mid-Pierce County and activity centers in Pierce County and beyond.

Figure 1.2-1 shows 2005 (opening year) daily traffic volumes, and Figure 1.2-2 shows year 2025 (design year) daily traffic volumes without the Cross-Base Highway project (No Build Alternative) near the proposed Cross-Base Highway project. Significant traffic volume growth is expected on all major freeways and arterial streets near the proposed Cross-Base Highway project.

SR 512 is a limited-access highway that connects SR 7 and I-5. SR 7 provides access to the east side of McChord AFB and Fort Lewis. SR 510 provides an alternative access to the east side of the military installations from the south via SR 507 and SR 7. This alternative access provided by SR 510 is a long, indirect route between Pierce County and north Thurston County and Olympia. A local circuitous east-west road system provides access between Pierce County and the I-5 corridor via Murray Road SW, 150th Street SW, Perimeter Road, Old Military Road S, Spanaway Loop Road S, and 174th Street S (see Figure 1.1-2). Perimeter Road is under military jurisdiction and is subject to closure by McChord AFB and Fort Lewis at their discretion. In the past, this route has been closed for military training or troop and supply movement during national emergencies. The Pierce County Transportation Plan identifies 176th Street E as a major arterial planned for future improvement from SR 7 to SR 162. The limited east-west access and circuitous nature of existing routes results in poor transportation system linkage. The poor system linkage has these effects in the study area:

- The limited number of east-west arterials connecting to I-5 creates additional congestion on other roads in the study area by forcing traffic onto these few corridors. This congestion, in turn, hinders the movement of people and goods both within and to and from the mid-Pierce County area.
- Emergency vehicle access to Pierce County, and to medical facilities such as Madigan Army Hospital, is currently limited to the circuitous route between Fort Lewis and McChord AFB from I-5 and SR 512 or the local road systems described above. Spanaway Loop Road/Steele Street, SR 7, Canyon Road E, and SR 161 (Meridian Avenue) are the existing north-south roadways connecting the mid-Pierce County area with SR 512.
- Direct access to either military installation is limited from the mid-Pierce County area, particularly for those military personnel who are required to live within 20 minutes' travel time to their assigned post. The McChord AFB East Gate provides reasonable access from the mid-Pierce County area; however, this gate is planned for closure, with or without the project. The Fort Lewis East Gate on SR 507 is a long distance from the main Logistics Center and the Madigan Hospital area.

- Pierce Transit does not currently operate direct transit routes between I-5 and SR 7 through McChord AFB and Fort Lewis. Public transit between Pierce County and the I-5 corridor follows SR 7 to the Parkland Transit Center, where passengers can transfer for travel to Tacoma Mall, Puyallup, or Lakewood.
- Freight and goods moving to and between the Frederickson, North McChord, and Thun Field employment centers are currently impeded by the lack of east-west roadways between I-5 and SR 7, and further east to SR 161. All of these areas are designated as large planned employment centers by the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan. The lack of a direct east-west transportation facility in this area limits the movement of goods and increases the cost of moving goods for many Pierce County businesses and ultimately the general public.
- Regional bicycle travel between the mid-Pierce County area and other subareas is impeded by the lack of appropriate facilities and routes. The Pierce County Non-Motorized Transportation Plan identifies the Cross-Base Highway project corridor as a premier priority project for regional bicycle trips.
- Access to and between the military installations for military personnel during national emergencies can be impeded by traffic congestion on I-5.

1.2.2 Capacity

The two existing east-west routes on SR 512 and SR 510 are operating at, or are approaching, capacity during peak periods. SR 512 interchanges at I-5 and SR 7 are presently operating at or over capacity. Arterials leading to SR 512, including SR 7, are also operating at or over capacity. The SR 510 interchange with I-5 and portions of SR 510 in Thurston County are operating over capacity and would continue to do so even with proposed improvements to reconstruct the I-5/SR 510 interchange, due to the proposed land use changes occurring under Thurston County's and Pierce County's Comprehensive Plans.

1.2.3 Transportation Demand

Traffic volumes and congestion will continue to increase over time, as indicated on Figures 1.2-1 and 1.2-2. By 2025, most of the freeway and arterial street systems will operate at LOS F conditions with volume/capacity (V/C) ratios well above 1.0.⁴ This means very heavy congestion and gridlock during most of the day. Table 1.2-1 summarizes the PM peak-hour LOS and V/C ratios for existing and 2025 No Build conditions. In 2025, with many roadways at V/C ratios significantly higher than

⁴ Volume to capacity ratios compare expected demand, or volume, with designed capacity. If volumes are lower than capacity, the ratio is below 1.0. If volumes exceed capacity, the ratio is greater than 1.0.

1.0, congested conditions would continue to spread beyond the more typical 2 peak hours of the day⁵ to many hours of the day.

Fort Lewis and McChord are two of the area’s largest employers; however, the City of DuPont and the Frederickson community are also large employment centers and are growing rapidly. By 2025, SR 512 east of I-5 and west of SR-7 will be operating at or over capacity for extended periods of the day. These forced flow conditions will also occur at the I-5/SR 510 interchange. The resultant delays in traveling through these congested intersections and roadways would encourage drivers to seek the alternative circuitous route via Murray Road SW, 150th Street SW, Perimeter Road, Military Road S, Spanaway Loop Road S, and 174th Street S. The military can close this route to increase security. Additional information on transportation demand is provided in the Transportation Discipline Report (Appendix G).

Table 1.2-1. PM Peak-Hour Level of Service Summary

Facility	Existing (1997)		2025 No Build	
	LOS	V/C	LOS	V/C
SR 512 west of SR 7 (Eastbound)	C	0.67	F	1.01
SR 512 west of SR 7 (Westbound)	B	0.43	C	0.66
SR 512 east of I-5 (Eastbound)	D	0.81	F	1.34
SR 512 east of I-5 (Westbound)	C	0.56	E	0.93
Spanaway Loop Road south of Tule Lake Road	F	1.07	F	1.51
SR 7 north of 112th Street	F	1.04	F	1.21
Canyon Road E north of 112th Street ¹	D	0.81	E	0.98
Military Road east of Perimeter Road	C	0.69	F	1.33

¹ Assumes widening to seven lanes by 2025.

1.2.4 Roadway Deficiencies

Although there is no direct roadway link between I-5 and SR 7, between the city of Lakewood and 176th Street S, an indirect roadway link exists via Murray Road SW, 150th Street SW, Perimeter Road, and Military Road S. The circuitous link currently carries about 4,510 vehicles per day and provides the only normally unrestricted connection open to non-military personnel between I-5 and SR 7 across the military installations. As noted above, Perimeter Road is under military jurisdiction and can be closed at their discretion to increase security. Shoulder widths vary, but are generally very narrow and inappropriate for pedestrian and bicycle travel.

⁵ Peak hours have traditionally included 1 hour during the AM and 1 hour in the PM. As traffic volumes increase and people shift their commute patterns, peak hours expand into peak periods lasting more than the traditional hour.

1.3. Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the proposed action is to improve transportation system linkage and capacity between Pierce County and destinations along the I-5 corridor for the efficient movement of people and goods. These areas are expected to grow substantially and are designated by local and regional land use plans as centers for future development. In general, the purpose of the project is to address the following needs:

- Reduce projected traffic volumes and congestion, particularly during peak periods, on existing roadways such as SR 7, SR 512, SR 507, Spanaway Loop Road S, and 174th Street S. All of these facilities are projected to operate at, near, or over capacity in the year 2025 if additional east-west capacity is not added. Figure 1.3-1 shows the year 2025 daily traffic volumes for the Build Alternative in the vicinity of the proposed Cross-Base Highway project. As shown in Figure 1.3-1, the proposed Cross-Base Highway project is projected to have a 2025 volume of 43,500 vehicles per day (vpd) just east of I-5 and 44,900 vpd just west of SR 7. Figure 1.3-2 shows the travel patterns of these vehicles using the corridor. Table 1.3-1 summarizes the resulting LOS improvement on the major existing roadway facilities in Pierce County with the Build Alternative (with the Cross-Base Highway project), compared to the No Build Alternative in the year 2025.
- Full implementation of Pierce County’s Comprehensive Plan assumes an arterial link between the mid-Pierce County area and the cities of Lakewood and DuPont. This connecting link is needed to provide a more direct route and shorter travel times between residences in Pierce County and employment and shopping opportunities in Lakewood and DuPont. All three of these areas are designated as major urban centers (Lakewood) or employment centers (Frederickson and DuPont) in the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan. Table 1.3-2 shows some of the anticipated travel time differences with and without the proposed Cross-Base Highway project.

Table 1.3-1. PM Peak-Hour LOS Summary – Roadway Links

Facility	2025 No Build		2025 Build		Reduction
	LOS	V/C	LOS	V/C	
SR 512 east of I-5 (Eastbound)	F	1.34	F	1.20	14
SR 512 east of I-5 (Westbound)	E	0.93	E	0.91	2
Spanaway Loop Road south of Tule Lake Road	F	1.51	F	1.26	25
SR 7 north of 112th Street	F	1.21	F	1.11	10
Canyon Road E north of 112th Street ¹	E	0.98	E	0.91	7
Military Road east of Perimeter Road	F	1.33	A	-- ²	N/A

¹ Assumes widening to seven lanes by 2025.

² With Cross-Base, Military Road east of Perimeter Road would be restricted to residential/local access only. All through traffic would likely divert to Cross-Base.

Figure 1.3-2 continued.

Table 1.3-2. PM Peak-Hour Travel Time Differences in 2025

From	To	No Build (minutes)	Build (minutes)	Percent Decrease ¹
DuPont	Frederickson ²	33.1	22.8	31%
DuPont	Spanaway ³	30.6	17.2	44%
Frederickson ²	DuPont	29.3	21.5	27%
Spanaway ³	DuPont	25.8	16.2	37%
Lakewood ⁴	Frederickson ²	24.0	21.4	11%
Lakewood ⁴	Spanaway ³	23.2	15.8	32%
Spanaway ³	Lakewood ⁴	18.8	14.4	23%

¹ Percent decrease compared to the No Build Alternative.

² Frederickson area was assumed to be at the Canyon Road E/176th Street E intersection.

³ Spanaway area was assumed to be at the SR 7/176th Street E intersection.

⁴ Lakewood area was assumed to be at the Bridgeport Way/Lakewood Drive intersection.

- Provide a more direct east-west connection for efficient movement of freight and goods between I-5 (north and south), SR 7, SR 161, and the Frederickson, North McChord, and Thun Field employment centers. All of these centers have to move freight by truck in a timely manner, and the proposed action would significantly improve freight mobility to these areas. The travel time reductions resulting from the proposed Cross-Base Highway project shown in Table 1.3-2 would benefit freight and goods movement as well. Finally, regional freight and goods movement between I-5 to and from the south and the Frederickson area would benefit from a 6- to 11-minute reduction in travel time.
- Improve public transit access between I-5 and SR 7, and to McChord AFB, Fort Lewis, and American Lake Gardens. Pierce Transit routes would benefit from the increased accessibility between I-5 and SR 7 and to McChord AFB and Fort Lewis. Better transit service could, in turn, help reduce single-occupancy vehicle use and further reduce congestion.
- Enable provision of regional express bus service on the Cross-Base Highway project, as included in the Sound Transit *Sound Move* Plan. This new service would connect to the Commuter Rail station in Lakewood, providing high-capacity transit access to Seattle and Everett.
- Improve pedestrian safety in American Lake Gardens by reducing pass-through traffic. American Lake Gardens would also benefit from improved access to employment centers in mid-Pierce County.
- Improve public safety by providing faster emergency vehicle access. Faster and more direct emergency access to Pierce County and to medical facilities such as the Madigan Army Hospital would improve public health and safety. Travel time reductions shown in Table 1.3-2 would also decrease emergency vehicle response times to and from the hospital.
- Improve regional bicycle travel between the mid-Pierce County area and other parts of the county.

- Improve access to and between the military installations by providing an exclusive roadway passing under the proposed Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) overcrossing. This would reduce the military installations' dependence on I-5 for troop and supply movement.

1.4. Transportation Goals

Pierce County's transportation goals are reflected in the goals for the proposed Cross-Base Highway project. Goals outlined in the County's Transportation Plan that serve as the umbrella for the project goals include the following:

General

- Provide adequate mobility for all people, goods, and services.
- Provide a transportation system that supports economic growth and vitality in Pierce County.
- Minimize negative environmental impacts on the physical and social environment.
- Provide transportation alternatives for moving people and goods.

Coordination

- Facilitate effective use of the transportation system through coordination of transportation facilities and services for all types of motorized and non-motorized transportation.

Standards and Capacity

- Reduce energy consumption through efficient and convenient transportation.
- Keep travel time for people and goods to a minimum.

Land Use and Transportation Planning

- Support and enhance the type of development that is desired in Pierce County.
- Encourage compatibility between transportation facilities and surrounding development.
- Secure adequate land for needed transportation system improvements.

Specific goals have also been established for the Cross-Base Highway project by the project's Steering Committee. Not only do objectives reflect the transportation goals of Pierce County and the County's Comprehensive Plan, but they reflect the interests and concerns of the City of Lakewood, Fort Lewis, and McChord AFB. The goals are summarized as follows:

- Minimize property impacts and neighborhood disruption.
- Avoid, minimize, or mitigate impacts to unique habitats, plants, and animals.
- Accommodate existing and planned operations of the military bases.
- Maintain security for military operations.

1.5. Planning Context

1.5.1 Planning and Project Development Process

A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Cross-Base Highway project was issued in May 1998 (FHWA et al. 1998a). The DEIS included a Major Investment Study (MIS) designed to satisfy Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) requirements for an MIS issued in 1993.⁶ An MIS study process develops or refines the long-range transportation plan and leads to a decision (by Pierce County, FHWA, Washington State Department of Transportation [WSDOT], PSRC, other participating agencies, and the public) on the design concept and fiscal scope of an investment. Information on the likely impacts and cost-effectiveness of proposed investment strategies and their consistency with local, state, and national goals and objectives are included in the MIS. The MIS also considers the direct and indirect costs of reasonable alternatives and factors such as mobility improvements; social, economic, and environmental effects; safety; operating efficiency; land use and economic development; and energy consumption.

A Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) for the Cross-Base Highway project was issued in June 2002 (FHWA et al. 2002). The SDEIS:

- Identified additional alternatives that were considered, based on comments received on the DEIS, but that were not evaluated in detail due to higher levels of environmental impacts than the proposed project.
- Provided the results of further alternative evaluation, including the identification of a preferred alternative.
- Identified modifications to the western terminus of the three Build Alternatives, including modification of the configuration of the Thorne Lane interchange, the addition of a new one-way roadway connecting the Gravelly Lake Drive and Thorne Lane interchanges, and the addition of meters to the I-5 southbound on-ramps at four interchanges.
- Incorporated the results of additional studies, such as the Western Gray Squirrel Genetic Study and Oak Habitat Study (FHWA et al. 1999). The SDEIS also included a conceptual management plan for a large mitigation site south of Roy, Washington.
- Provided current information where conditions or applicable policies and regulations changed.

The SDEIS did not respond to comments received on the 1998 DEIS. The SDEIS had to be considered, together with the 1998 DEIS, for a complete discussion of impacts.

This Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) is intended to achieve the following:

⁶ An MIS is no longer required as a separate study; however, FHWA rules require that the substance of the MIS study process be included as part of a project's NEPA review. All sections of the Cross-Base Highway project MIS, updated with current information, are included in Chapter 2.

- Combine the information contained in the 1998 and 2002 documents to provide a complete discussion of impacts, updated as necessary, based on current conditions and additional analysis.
- Respond to comments received on the 1998 DEIS, the Oak Habitat Study, the Western Gray Squirrel Genetic Study, and the 2002 SDEIS.
- Supplement the information contained in the earlier documents, as needed to respond to comments received.

The EIS evaluation process comprises three milestones. These include screening to identify reasonable alternatives that address the purpose and need for the project, selection of a preferred alternative, and a commitment to implementation.

Following the release of the FEIS, the public and affected agencies will have another opportunity to comment on the document. After reviewing the comments, FHWA will issue a Record of Decision (ROD) that will include responses to comments and any final changes resulting from the comments. The mitigation measures may be revised, based on comments. The ROD will describe the lead agencies' selected alternative, explain the reasons for the decision, and summarize any mitigation measures and monitoring that will be incorporated into the project. The ROD is the commitment to implementation, and stakeholder agencies may pursue securing easements from Fort Lewis and McChord AFB, private property acquisition, final design, permitting, and construction.

1.5.2 Coordination With Agencies

The Cross-Base Highway project EIS has been developed in close coordination with several agencies through the Cross-Base Steering Committee. This committee convened in late 1995 and will continue to exist through the design and possibly the construction phase of the project, if one of the Build Alternatives is selected as the preferred alternative. As the project continues to move forward towards construction, specific members of the Steering Committee may be replaced to include people with design/construction skills as opposed to planning skills.

The three lead agencies for the EIS are FHWA, WSDOT, and Pierce County. Cooperating agencies represented on the Steering Committee include the following:

- McChord AFB
- City of Lakewood

Other participating agencies and organizations on the Steering Committee include the following:

- Fort Lewis
- Puget Sound Regional Council
- Pierce Transit
- Tacoma/Pierce County Chamber of Commerce
- Tahoma Audubon Society

Representatives of these agencies have attended most Steering Committee meetings. Other agencies with Steering Committee members, but which have not regularly attended meetings, include the following:

- United States Environmental Protection Agency
- Port of Tacoma
- Puyallup Tribe
- Nisqually Tribe
- Washington State Department of Ecology

These agencies receive a copy of the Steering Committee meeting minutes to remain informed on project issues. The meetings are open to the public, and they are sometimes attended by interested citizens from the project area and members of local community, business, and environmental organizations.

All lead agencies, cooperating agencies, and participating agencies represented on the Steering Committee have met regularly to discuss and help resolve technical issues through the process.

1.5.3 Decision at Hand

The next step in the project development process will be to hold public meetings and accept public and agency comments on the FEIS. The comments will be evaluated and used to help select and refine the alternative to be implemented. Responses will be incorporated into the ROD. The selected alternative will be one of the following, or a hybrid alternative combining various components of two or more alternatives:

- No Build with currently implemented or planned transportation demand management/transportation system management (TDM/TSM) strategies only.
- A specific build Cross-Base Highway project alignment with or without specific new TDM/TSM strategies.