

CROSSBASE CORRIDOR STUDY

COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

January 1998

Draft Environmental Impact Statement Near Completion

A draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is being prepared to thoroughly study all potential impacts to the project area, as required by federal and state regulations. Project alternatives are being evaluated for their possible impact on residential and business communities, wetlands, wildlife, air quality, noise, and transportation.

Much work has been done to address comments and concerns of citizens, agencies, and business owners. The draft EIS is close to completion and is expected to be released in early 1998.

In the American Lake Gardens area, two primary Build alternatives are being evaluated in the EIS, namely the South and South Central alignments. Two variations of the South alignment are also being evaluated: the South A and South B alignments. (See figure at bottom right.) In addition, a "No-Build" alternative and an alternative sponsored by the Tahoma Audubon Society and 1,000 Friends of Washington are also being evaluated. A full description of the alternatives and their potential impacts will be included in the draft EIS.

Providing Better Routes

One of the major benefits of building the Cross-Base Highway would be the creation of a more direct route from areas in mid-Pierce County to destinations along the I-5 corridor. As part of the EIS process, a traffic distribution study was conducted to determine what the distribution of traffic would be if the highway were constructed. The figure on pages 2 and 3 shows the percentage of daily traffic volumes on roadways in the study area. The study determined that a combined total of 42% of traffic heading west from the mid-Pierce County area would be going into the Lakewood community. This traffic, which currently is using SR 7 and SR 512, would benefit from the Cross-Base Highway as a more direct and efficient route.

Project Summary

As existing roadways in mid-Pierce County become increasingly congested and travel patterns change, transportation improvements are needed to move people and goods more quickly and efficiently along an east-west corridor. Cross-Base Highway is a proposed roadway that would provide an east-west transportation link between I-5 and SR 7. The highway would span 6 miles near the boundary between Fort Lewis and McChord Air Force Base and provide two through-lanes in each direction, connecting residential areas and the Frederickson employment center with Lakewood and DuPont and other destinations along the I-5 corridor. Four possible alignment alternatives for the highway are being considered (as shown below.)



Reducing Travel Time

In addition to the Traffic Distribution Study, an analysis was conducted to compare current peak PM travel times between certain destinations. The study concluded that peak hour travel times would be reduced from 9 to 42 percent if the highway were built, depending on the origin and destination of travel. For example, travel from DuPont to Spanaway would take 27.7 minutes without the highway, but only 16.2 minutes if the highway were built - a 42 percent decrease in travel time. Travel from Spanaway to Lakewood at peak hours would take 18.5 minutes with the No Build alternative and 14.2 minutes with the Build alternative - a 23 percent decrease in travel time.

Proposed Wildlife Mitigation

The environmental analysis is also reviewing potential effects of construction of the proposed highway on wildlife in the area. Potential impacts to wildlife include loss of habitat, interruption of movement of wildlife, and the possibility of animals being struck by vehicles while crossing the roadway. Measures would be taken to minimize these effects whenever possible. The following wildlife mitigation measures are being considered:

- Restore and protect remaining prairie habitat
- Restore and manage oak woodlands as habitat for western gray squirrels, listed by Washington State as a threatened species

- Install fencing along the route to control small animals' access to the roadway
- Provide under- or over-passageways to allow small animals to cross the roadway
- Establish other off-site areas to restore and protect wildlife populations

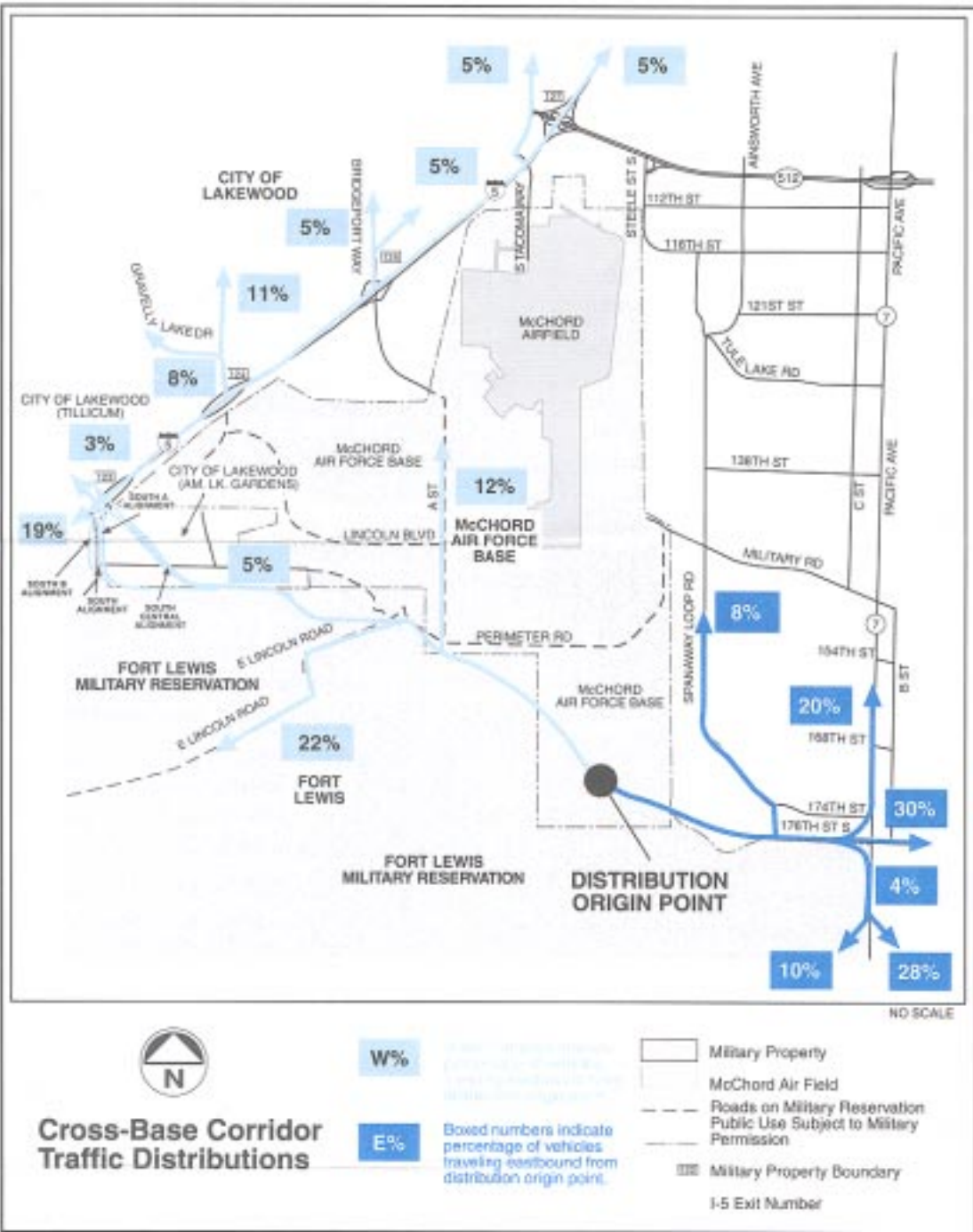
EIS Highlights

Project Benefits

- Improved access between the I-5 corridor (including the cities of Lakewood and DuPont) and mid-Pierce County
- Improved public transit access including possible express bus service as part the Regional Transit Authority plan
- Connections to Lakewood commuter rail station
- Faster and more direct response for emergency vehicles

Environmental Issues

- Displacement of residences and businesses in American Lake Gardens, an area with the highest proportion of low-income households in Pierce County
- Potential impacts to wildlife and habitat areas near the proposed highway, including impacts on the western gray squirrel
- Potential impacts to wetlands near the proposed highway



Possible Mitigation Measures (currently under consideration)

- Wetland enhancement or replacement
- Use erosion control practices during construction
- Plant grassy areas to filter highway runoff before it enters groundwater
- Restrict construction near bald eagles nesting areas to specified time periods
- Construct noise barriers where reasonable and feasible
- Provide relocation assistance for displaced homes and businesses

Steering Committee: Agencies & Citizens Coordinate Efforts

Throughout the Cross-Base study process, citizens, civic groups, elected officials and public agencies have contributed input and provided comments on the project as it has developed. The Cross-Base study team has assembled representatives from several agencies to assist in providing input to the project as part of the Cross-Base Steering Committee. This group began meeting in late 1995.

The three lead agencies heading the EIS process include Pierce County, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Other participating agencies and organizations include City of Lakewood, Fort Lewis, McChord AFB, the Environmental Protection Agency, Puget Sound Regional Council, Pierce Transit, the Tahoma Audubon Society, 1000 Friends of Washington, the Tacoma/Pierce County Chamber of Commerce, and the Lakewood Chamber of Commerce. Agencies that are included on the Steering Committee but have not regularly attended meetings include the Port of Tacoma, the Puyallup Tribe, the Nisqually Tribe, and the Washington Department of Ecology.

The Steering Committee meets monthly to discuss issues related to the project. All meetings are open to the public. For more information on Steering Committee meetings, please call Patrick Baughman, P.E., Pierce County Public Works and Utilities, (253) 798-7250.

What Happens Next

The Cross-Base study team has been working to respond to comments and concerns of involved groups and individuals as the team moves forward in completing the draft EIS. The document is expected to be released for public review in early 1998. Once the draft EIS is prepared, there will be a 45 day public comment period before a final EIS is written. Two public meetings (one in American Lake Gardens and one in Spanaway) will be scheduled in the spring to provide the community with the opportunity to review the draft EIS and comment on the alternatives proposed. Watch for your notice to be mailed out announcing the meetings!

All comments gathered during the review period will be taken into consideration in drafting the final EIS.

Tell Us What You Think!

The project steering committee would like to hear what you think about the proposed highway! We encourage your comments on the proposed improvements. Please direct your comments to Patrick Baughman at the address below:

Patrick Baughman, P.E.
 Pierce County Public Works & Utilities
 Transportation Services
 2401 South 35th St.,
 Room 150
 Tacoma, WA 98409

Tahoma Audubon Society/ 1,000 Friends of Washington

The Tahoma Audubon Society, in conjunction with 1,000 Friends of Washington (a civic environmental advocacy group) developed a proposal as an alternative to building the Cross-Base Highway. The proposal included the following recommendations:

- Fully implementing the state's Commuter Trip Reduction Program at large and medium-sized companies
- Developing improved local transit and new regional transit service, and bicycle/pedestrian improvements in the Frederickson area
- Encouraging use of freight movement by rail to businesses in the Frederickson area
- Discouraging trips by single occupant vehicles by offering free bus passes,

encouraging carpooling and vanpooling, and creating additional HOV lanes on Canyon Road and SR 512

For more information, contact Kirk Kirkland, Tahoma Audubon Society, (253) 761-1693.

City of Lakewood

In May 1997, the Lakewood City Council passed a resolution supporting the Cross-Base Highway concept provided certain measures were incorporated into the project. The measures are intended to reduce impacts to the American Lake Gardens community and equestrian businesses there, as well as the Tillicum businesses located west of I-5. These measures include constructing noise barriers, providing for equestrian access to Fort Lewis, and providing acceptable access from the highway to the American Lake Gardens community.

For more information, contact Bill Larkin, City of Lakewood, (253) 512-2261.

South Pierce County Chamber of Commerce

As a major supporter of the Cross-Base Highway, the South Pierce County Chamber Division of the Tacoma-Pierce County Chamber of Commerce has formed an advocacy group to provide broad-based support for the project as an essential transportation link between I-5 and SR 7.

Businesses involved in the advocacy group thus far include Toray Composites, the Port of Tacoma, Associated General Contractors, Parametrix, Intel Corporation, Puget Sound Energy, LeMay Enterprises, Economic Development Board, Bogel & Gates, Matsushita Semiconductor Corporation, and The Boeing Company.

For more information, contact Paul Ellis, Tacoma-Pierce County Chamber of Commerce, (253) 627-2175.

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2401 S. 35th St., Room 150
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