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# Executive Summary

## Environmental Assessment

US Highway 12: Frenchtown Vicinity to Walla Walla

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### Introduction

This National Environmental Policy Act Environmental Assessment records the evaluation process used to address positive and negative effects for the proposed project under the Preferred Alternative for the 8.4-mile portion of US Highway 12 from the Frenchtown Vicinity at Milepost (MP) 327.2, to the Walla Walla Bypass (MP 335.6).

Positive and negative effects and their impacts to key social, economic, and natural resources were evaluated based on best available science, and in accordance with federal, state, and local regulations. Every effort was made to avoid and minimize negative effects to these resources during the project's planning and preliminary design phases. As a result, the proposed project will not substantially affect any of the resources evaluated.

### Where Is Phase 6 of the US 12 Corridor Located and How Much Will It Cost?

The WSDOT is currently designing Phase 6 of the US 12 Corridor. The title of the proposed project is US Highway 12: Frenchtown Vicinity to Walla Walla. This project is located in the south-central part of Walla Walla County, Washington. It begins near an area known locally as Frenchtown and extends to just within the western city limits of Walla Walla (Exhibit E-1). The budget for designing, acquiring right-of-way, mitigating for impacts, and construction, is estimated at fifty million dollars.

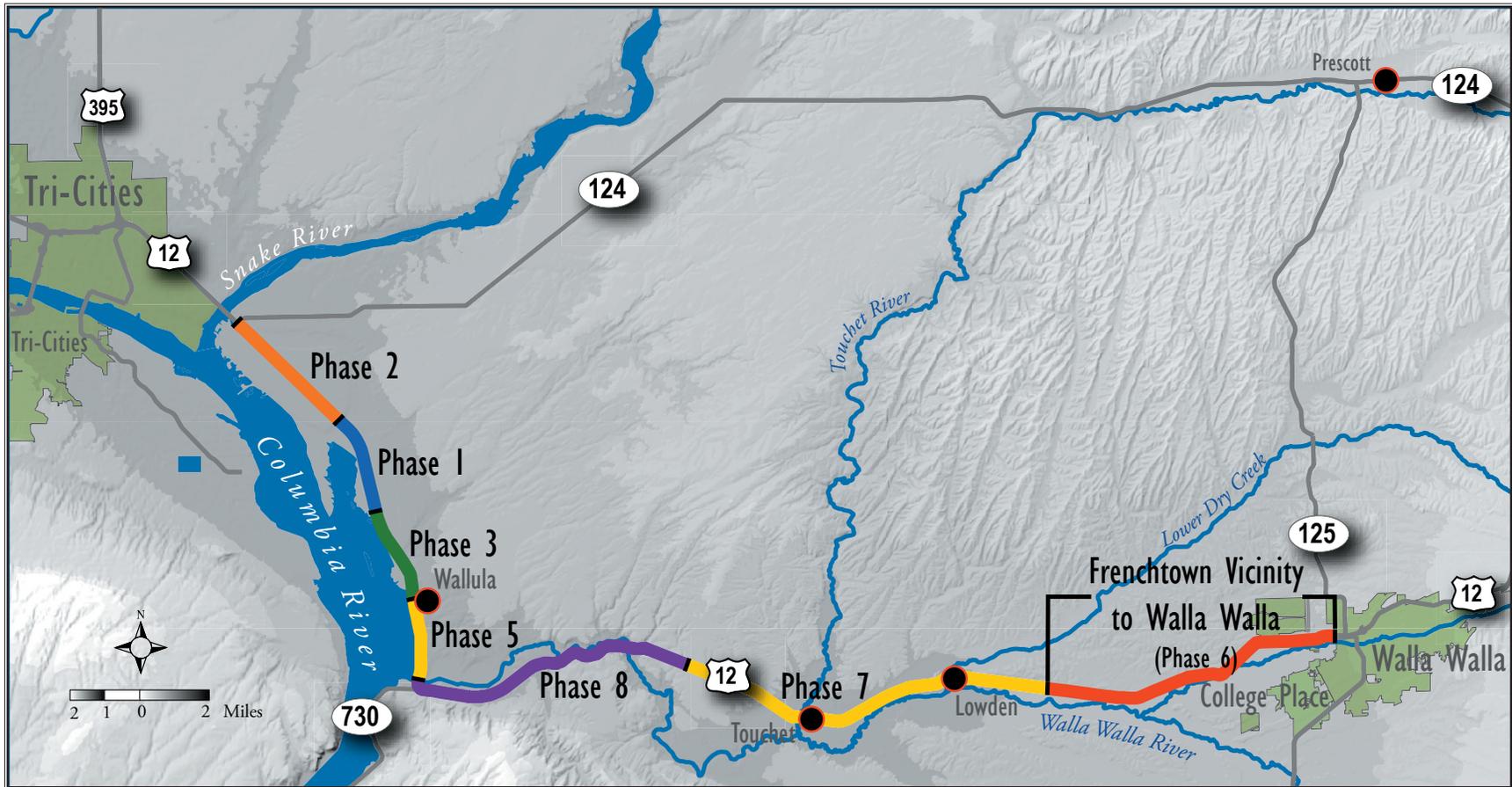


Exhibit E-1. Map showing the location of the proposed project (US Highway 12: Frenchtown Vicinity to Walla Walla) within the US 12 Corridor from the intersection of US 12 and SR 124 to the Walla Walla Bypass.

## **What Is the Purpose of the Frenchtown Vicinity to Walla Walla Project?**

The principal goal of the US Highway 12: Frenchtown Vicinity to Walla Walla project is to improve motorist safety, accommodate increasing traffic volumes, and maintain mobility along this portion of US 12 over the long-term.

## **Why Do We Need the Frenchtown Vicinity to Walla Walla Project?**

The need for the US Highway 12: Frenchtown Vicinity to Walla Walla project is based on the increased use of US 12 that has been accompanied by a rise in the number of accidents occurring within the project area. Eliminating roadway deficiencies and increasing capacity will lower the number of both property and injury accidents while maintaining mobility.

## **What Alternatives Were Considered for This Environmental Assessment?**

The project design team identified four preliminary alternatives for consideration in this EA; they include the following:

- Alternative 1: The No-Build Alternative
- Alternative 2: Widen the Existing US Highway 12
- Alternative 3: Last Chance Road Vicinity to the Walla Walla Bypass
- Alternative 4: Frenchtown Vicinity to the Walla Walla Bypass

### **Alternative 1: The No-Build Alternative**

No major construction activities would occur under the **No-Build Alternative**. US 12 would remain at its present location and the highway would continue being maintained to current standards.

### **Alternative 2: Widen the Existing US Highway 12**

Widening US 12 to four lanes in its current location would require constructing lanes both north and south of the existing highway. This alternative necessitates building frontage roads for those residents that currently access the highway directly, and therefore, would result in a wider footprint than other build alternatives.

### **Alternative 3: Last Chance Road Vicinity to the Walla Walla Bypass**

This alternative would widen the existing highway from the Frenchtown Vicinity (327.2) to the area near Last Chance Road (MP 331). From here, a new roadway would be constructed north of existing US 12 to the Walla Walla Bypass (335.6). A cul-de-sac would be constructed just east of the point where this alternative would leave existing US 12 near MP 331, and ownership of the highway from there to the Walla Walla Bypass would be transferred to the county and city of Walla Walla. Widening the existing highway to the vicinity of Last Chance Road would also require constructing frontage roads, and therefore, would result in a

wider footprint from the beginning of the project to near the intersection of Last Chance Road and US 12.

#### **Alternative 4: Frenchtown Vicinity to the Walla Walla Bypass**

This alternative would construct a new roadway north of existing US 12 from the Frenchtown Vicinity (MP 327.2) to the Walla Walla Bypass (335.6). A cul-de-sac would be constructed just east of the point where this alternative would leave existing US 12 at MP 327.2, and ownership of the highway from there to the Walla Walla Bypass would be transferred to the county and city of Walla Walla. Because frontage roads would not be necessary, this alignment would result in a narrower footprint than any other alignment.

### **What Criteria Were Used for Assessing the Preliminary Alternatives?**

Each of the preliminary alternatives described above were evaluated by assessing their respective potential to meet the following screening criteria:

- Does the alternative effectively improve motorist safety, capacity, and mobility?
- Is the alternative feasible from an engineering standpoint?
- Does the alternative avoid or minimize negative effects to social, economic, and environmental resources?
- Is the alternative reasonable from a cost perspective?

## Which Alternatives Were Eliminated from Further Study and Why?

Of the four preliminary alternatives evaluated, the project design team identified two alternatives that were considered but rejected from further study; they include the following:

- Alternative 2: Widen the Existing US Highway 12
- Alternative 3: Last Chance Road Vicinity to the Walla Walla Bypass

The WSDOT determined it was both reasonable and prudent to eliminate alternatives two and three from further study for the following reasons:

- Both alternatives would displace a greater number of residents and businesses than either the No-Build Alternative or Alternative four.
- They would result in greater Right-of-Way costs than either the No-Build Alternative or Alternative four.
- Alternative two would negatively affect more acres of Mill Creek's regulatory floodplain than the No-Build Alternative or Alternative four; however, this difference would not be substantial.
- Alternatives two and three would negatively affect more acres of the Mill Creek and Walla Walla River **alluvial floodplains**. Because these floodplains are directly and indirectly connected to the waterways that create them, their structural and functional attributes are essential to the health of a river's ecology, even though they are not regulated.
- While none of the alternatives would directly affect threatened or endangered species, Alternatives two and three have a greater potential to indirectly affect Summer steelhead habitat and bull trout habitat in both Mill Creek and the Walla Walla River.

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### What is an Alluvial Floodplain?

*Alluvial floodplains are landscape features comprised of soils that contain clay, silt, sand, gravel or cobbles, and are deposited by running water.*

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- Since a larger portion of the roadway would be located within the floodplain of Mill Creek and the Walla Walla River, and because both native peoples and early Euro-Americans traveled through, resided on, and utilized floodplains extensively, the potential for disturbing archeological, historic, and cultural resources is greater under Alternative two or three than either the No-Build Alternative or Alternative four.

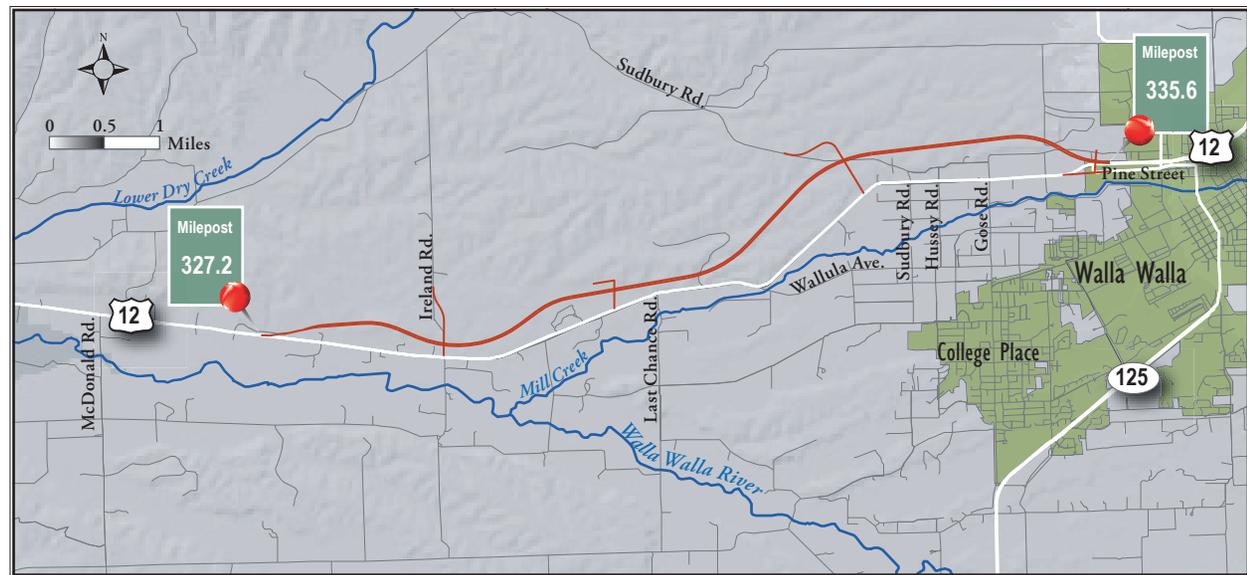
## **What Is the Preferred Alternative?**

Working with federal and state agencies, tribal, county, and city governments, and the public, the WSDOT has identified Alternative 4, constructing an alignment from the Frenchtown Vicinity to Walla Walla, as the preferred alternative (Exhibit E-2). This alternative satisfies the project's purpose and need at the lowest cost, while generating the fewest negative effects to social, economic, and environmental resources.

## **What Would Happen If Nothing Were Built?**

No major construction activities would occur under the No-Build Alternative; therefore, substandard roadway conditions would persist, as would the need for increasing traffic capacity and mobility. As such, the No-Build Alternative would not resolve the safety, capacity, or mobility issues associated with this section of US 12.

Exhibit E-2. Map showing the location of US Highway 12 under Alternative 4: Frenchtown Vicinity to the Walla Walla Bypass; the preferred alternative.



## Which Social, Economic, and Natural Resources Would Be Impacted, and What Mitigation Will Occur?

Several social, economic, and natural resources would experience unavoidable, adverse impacts from constructing the preferred alternative. The following list describes those resources and the mitigation that would occur:

### Social Resources

#### Cultural, Historic, and Archaeological Resources

At a minimum, the following measures will be implemented to reduce the likelihood of negative effects to historic, cultural, and archaeological resources.

They include the following:

- The WSDOT is working directly with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR), the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), and a local group of individuals and organizations known as the Frenchtown Historical Foundation (FHF). The goal of this partnership has been to determine the boundaries of the Frenchtown Cemetery and other potential historic, cultural, and archaeological resources so they can be avoided, to develop inadvertent discovery and monitoring protocol, and to assist the interest groups in their effort to preserve sites of local heritage and historical significance.
- WSDOT consultation efforts and field research have resulted in design variances of the proposed project that will minimize ground disturbing activities, especially where the highway nears areas with a high potential for historic, cultural, and archaeological resources.
- The WSDOT, FHWA, and CTUIR will abide by the 2004 *Programmatic Memorandum of Agreement for Coordination and Consultation of State Transportation Activities*. This agreement covers the WSDOT and FHWA's commitment to ongoing consultation and has provisions for "Reparation of Ancestral Human Remains and Funerary objects."
- The WSDOT will develop and implement an archaeological monitoring plan for all ground-disturbing construction activities in the proximity of both the Frenchtown Cemetery Site and the Battle of the Walla Walla Site prior to the beginning of construction that includes a provision for monitoring by a qualified archaeologist, and that is consistent with the WSDOT, FHWA, and CTUIR operating agreement.

## Economic Resources

### Economics and Land Use

At a minimum, the following measures will be implemented to reduce unavoidable adverse affects to residents, retail and commercial businesses, and farm operations. They include the following:

- Plan construction activities to minimize disruptions to residents, businesses, and farm operations where and when feasible.
- Ensure continued access through the project area during construction where and when feasible.
- Provide information in a timely manner regarding transit and pedestrian re-routes, schedules of operation, road closures, and alternative modes of transportation.
- Ensure continued access to businesses and farm fields during construction where and when feasible through as much of the construction window as possible.
- Provide financial compensatory mitigation for reconfiguring irrigation systems and any loss of crops that result from temporary construction easements.
- The preferred alternative was designed to avoid and minimize relocations. For the properties (approximately 4) that will be fully or partially acquired the WSDOT will administer acquisition and relocation assistance in accordance with the *Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970*, as amended by the *Surface Transportation and Uniform Relocation Act Amendments of 1987*. The WSDOT will provide relocation assistance to all displaced business owners without discrimination.
- Work with each displaced property owner to help minimize the amount of disruption that may result from the need to relocate or acquire property.

- Allow for the installation of tourist activity signs that show a business's logo through the WSDOT's Motorist Information Sign Program before key intersections and interchanges.

At a minimum, the following measures will be implemented to reduce negative effects to the city of College Place. They include the following:

- Identify one or more specific exit(s) as the College Place exit(s), with off-highway directional signs on old US 12.

## Natural Resources

### Soil, Water Resources, Wetlands, Fish, Wildlife, and Vegetation

At a minimum, the following measures will be implemented to reduce unavoidable adverse affects to soil, water resources, wetlands, fish, wildlife, and native vegetation. They include the following:

- To reduce erosion to soils from wind and water the WSDOT will develop a *Temporary Erosion and Sediment Control (TESC) Plan* as outlined in chapter six of the *Highway Runoff Manual (HRM)* (WSDOT 2004).
- The WSDOT will acquire adequate right-of-way for design and construction of three horizontal units-to-one vertical unit (3H:1V) loess cut slopes and embankment slopes throughout the preferred alternative, as this design will substantially reduce the likelihood of severe erosion from wind and water.
- To preserve water quality and quantity of all waters within the project area, the WSDOT will follow all *Best Management Practices (BMPs)* as outlined in the *2004 Highway Runoff Manual (HRM)* for developing this project's *Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP)*, including a *Temporary Erosion and Sediment Control Plan (TESC)* and *Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasures Plan (SPCC)*, as required

for the *National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System* (NPDES) stormwater discharge permit. Together with low annual precipitation and the deep, permeable soils within the project area, these measures will greatly reduce or eliminate potential negative effects.

- The WSDOT design team has developed and implemented avoidance and minimization strategies, such as constructing steeper side-slopes that reduce the extent of fill and ground disturbance near wetlands, and will continue to develop avoidance and minimization strategies through the contract development process. Further, all necessary regulatory permits will be acquired for unavoidable negative effects to wetlands. Following guidelines established by the State Department of Ecology, the Army Corps of Engineers, Walla Walla County, and the WSDOT, a combination of wetland preservation, wetland enhancement, wetland restoration, and wetland creation will be implemented as mitigation for those wetlands impacted by the proposed project.
- No substantial temporary or long-term effects to fish, wildlife, or native vegetation will occur from constructing the preferred alternative. In addition, the *Biological Assessment* (David Evans and Associates, Inc. 2006a) for this project shows that no threatened or endangered species would be affected by the proposed project.

## Conclusion

Construction of the preferred alternative will improve the level of safety for the traveling public on this section of US Highway 12 by increasing capacity and maintaining mobility. The proposed project has been planned and designed to avoid and minimize negative effects to social, economic, and natural resources.