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# Chapter One

Introduction to the Project, and Its Purpose and Need

## Environmental Assessment

US Highway 12: Frenchtown Vicinity to Walla Walla

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### What Is the History of the Phase 6 US Highway 12 Corridor Project?

That portion of US Highway 12 (US 12) that traverses the state of Washington begins in the city of Aberdeen on Gray's Harbor near the Pacific Ocean, and ends in Clarkston at the Idaho border (Exhibit 1-1). In 1967, it was designated a Class 1 highway under the Washington Administrative Code, which are defined as follows:

*These Highways have the capacity for safe and efficient speed and/or high volume traffic movements, providing for interstate, interregional, and intercity travel needs and some intracity travel needs. Service to abutting land is subordinate to providing service to major traffic movements. Highways in this class are typically distinguished by a highly controlled, limited number of public and private connections, restrictive medians with limited median openings on multilane facilities, and infrequent traffic signals.*

Since first constructed, traffic volumes throughout the US 12 Corridor from the junction of State Route (SR) 124 to the city of Walla Walla have been steadily increasing. Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) traffic records show that the number of vehicles within this corridor typically exceeds 12,000 vehicles per day, and freight traffic accounts for approximately one-third of the total volume. This increase in traffic has been accompanied by a rise in the number of property and injury related accidents. In response to this increase, the



Exhibit 1-1. Map showing the location of the US Highway 12 Corridor through Washington State.

WSDOT implemented a number of safety measures that included the following improvement projects:

- 1973 – The improvement of US 12 within the Walla Walla city limits to a four-lane facility called the Walla Walla Bypass
- 1993-1996 – The addition of turning lanes and improvements at key intersections within that portion of the US 12 Corridor from the junction of US 12 and SR 124 to Walla Walla
- 1993-1996 – The addition and upgrading of illumination at key intersections throughout that portion of the US 12 Corridor from the Snake River to Walla Walla
- 1996 – The addition of a center-line rumble strip

These safety measures resulted in a short-term reduction in the number of accidents occurring within the corridor. However, even with these improvements in place, property and injury-related accidents began rising within several years of their installation.

A WSDOT **footprint report** was initiated in 1998 to assess the feasibility of various routes for a four-lane divided highway spanning approximately 40 miles of the US 12 Corridor from the Snake River to the city of Walla Walla. The first part of the report was completed in 1999; it assessed the geographic area from the intersection of US 12 and SR 124 south to the intersection US 12 and SR 730 at Wallula Junction. The second part of the report was completed in 2001; it examined the area from the community of Wallula east to the city of Walla Walla.

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**What is a Footprint Report?**

*A footprint report compares different highway routes based on how constructible they are, their costs, right-of-way requirements, access impacts, and their potential for social, economic, and environmental impacts.*

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A number of independent construction projects were identified and developed from the footprint report. Exhibit 1-2 shows the approximate location of each project.

Four projects are in various stages of planning and construction between the Snake River and the intersection of US 12 and SR 730 at Wallula Junction. They include the following:

- Phase 1 – McNary Pool to Attalia (Construction Complete)
- Phase 2 – SR 124 to McNary Pool (Construction Complete)
- Phase 3 – Attalia Vicinity (Scheduled Construction Start – Spring 2006)
- Phase 5 – Attalia Vicinity to the intersection of US 12 and SR 730 (Planning and Design)

Additionally, three other construction projects are in various stages of planning from Wallula Junction to just west of Walla Walla. They include the following:

- Phase 6 – Frenchtown Vicinity to Walla Walla (Planning and Design)
- Phase 7 – Nine Mile Hill to Frenchtown Vicinity (Scoping)
- Phase 8 – From the intersection of US 12 and SR 730 to Nine Mile Hill (Scoping)

Once constructed, these projects will improve the safety, capacity, and mobility of the regional transportation system between the Tri-Cities area and the cities of College Place and Walla Walla.

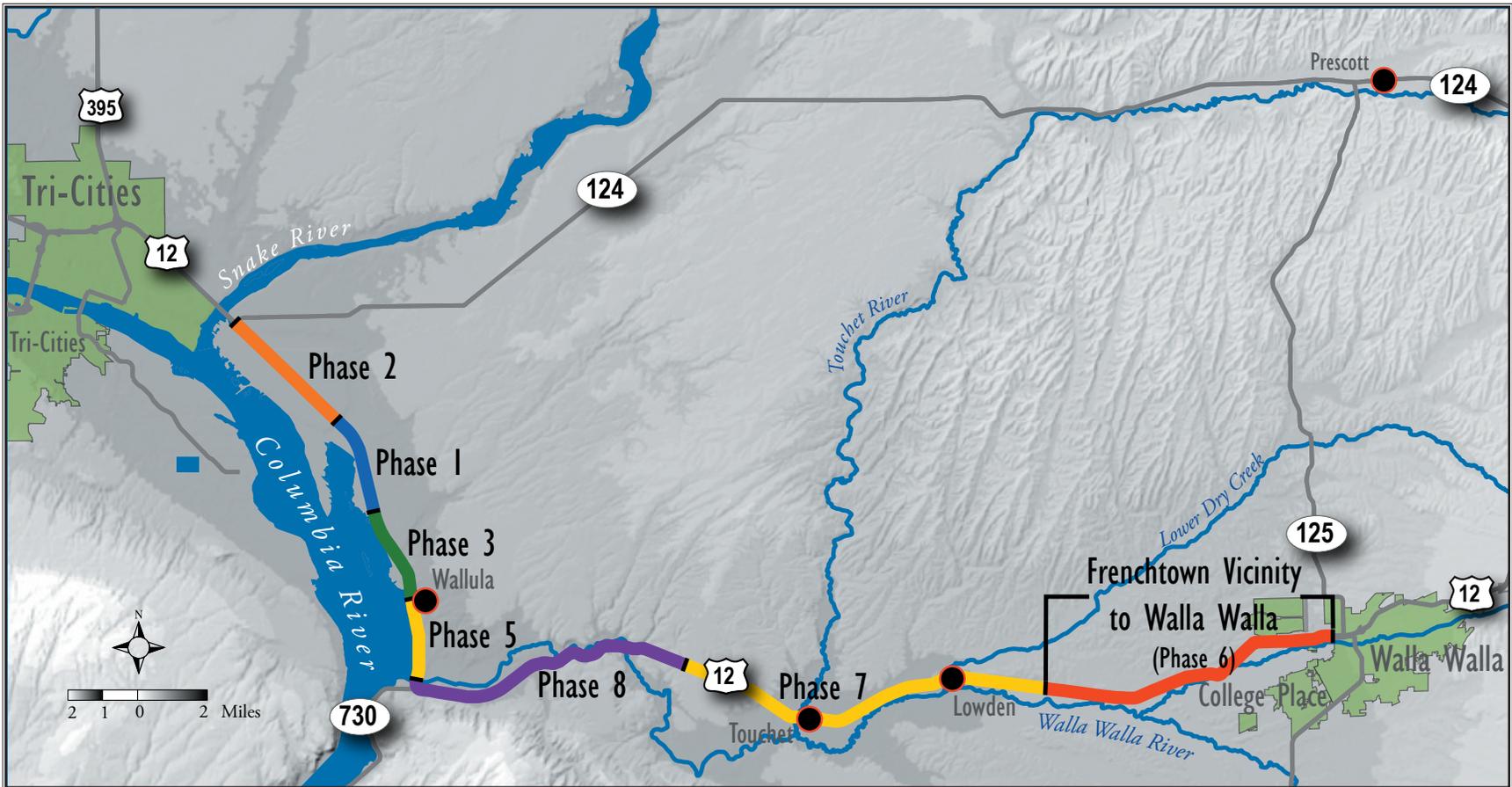


Exhibit 1-2. Map showing the location of construction projects within the US Highway 12 Corridor from the intersection of US 12 and SR 124 to the Walla Walla Bypass.

## **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 included in the current approved State Transportation Plan (STP), the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

The proposed project is located in the south-central part of Walla Walla County, Washington. It begins near an area known locally as Frenchtown at Milepost (MP) 327.2, and extends to just within the western city limits of Walla Walla at MP 335.6 (Exhibit 1-3). The budget for designing, acquiring right-of-way, mitigating for impacts, and construction, is estimated at fifty million dollars.

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

The purpose of the 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 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

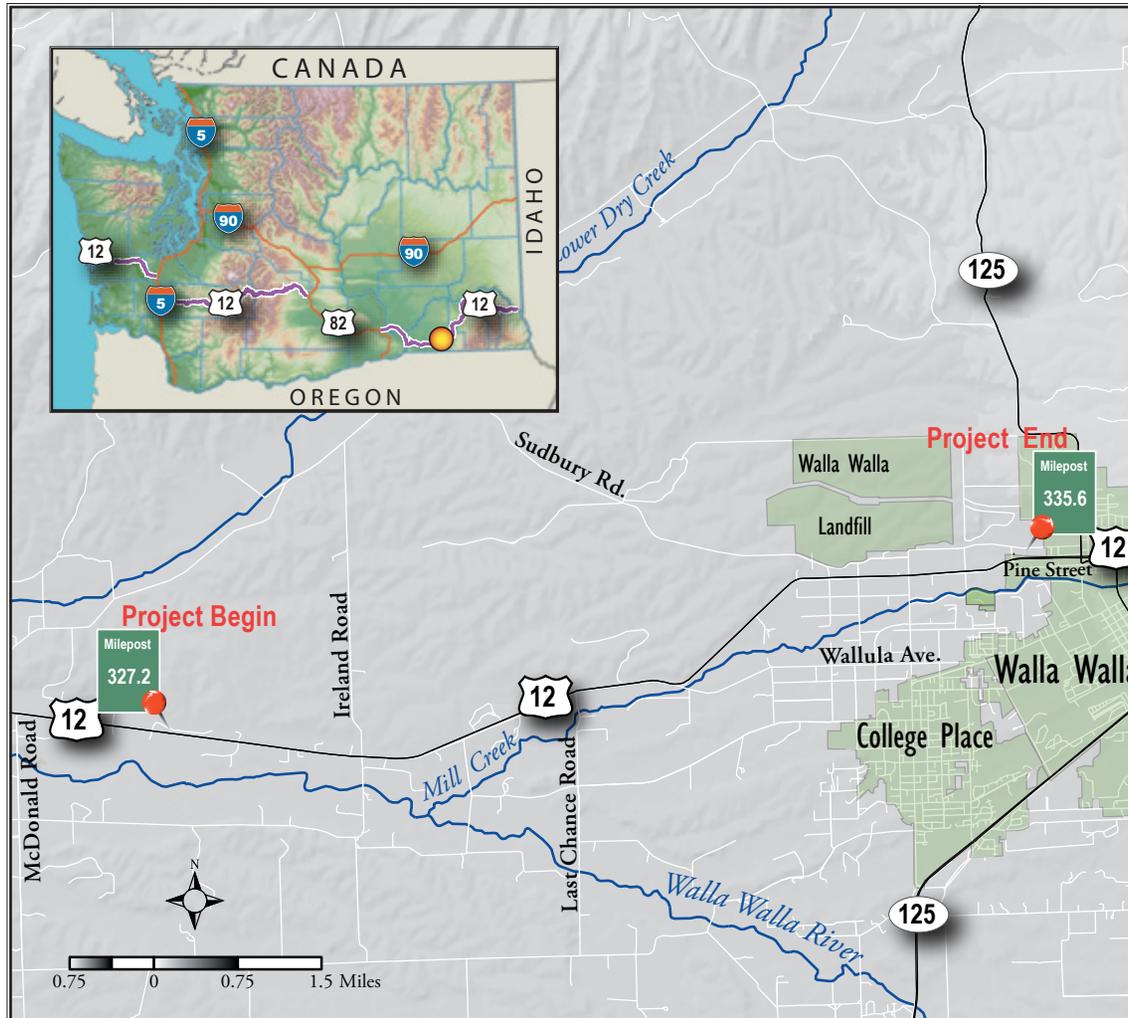


Exhibit 1-3. Map showing the location of the proposed US Highway 12: Frenchtown Vicinity to Walla Walla project.

while maintaining mobility. If not corrected, the combined effect of increasing traffic volumes and roadway deficiencies will continue eroding the level of safety on this section of US 12.

## Why Do We Need the Frenchtown Vicinity to Walla Walla Project? (Continued)

### To Improve the Safety of the Traveling Public

The increased use of US 12 between the Tri-Cities and Walla Walla has been accompanied by a rise in the number of accidents occurring within the project limits. Washington State Department of Transportation accident records reveal the number and location of these accidents; they are summarized as follows:

- A total of 144 accidents occurred within the project limits from 1993 to 2003.
- Of the total number of accidents, 83 took place at intersections and 61 occurred on roadway segments.
- These accidents resulted in a total of 106 injuries and 3 fatalities.
- Fifty-seven of these injuries were associated with intersection accidents, while the remaining 49 injuries occurred on the main roadway. All three fatalities occurred at intersections.

Exhibits 1-4 and 1-5 show the number and location of all accidents, and the injuries and fatalities associated with those accidents from 1993 to 2003. The accidents occurring within this part of the US 12 Corridor not only show where roadway deficiencies exist, but also demonstrate the effect of those conditions on the safety of the traveling public.



Traffic delays on US 12 involving passenger vehicles and tractor-trailers reduce the level of safety to the traveling public.

Exhibit 1-4. Map showing the location of accidents, associated injuries, and fatalities within the rural portion of the project area from 1993 to 2003.

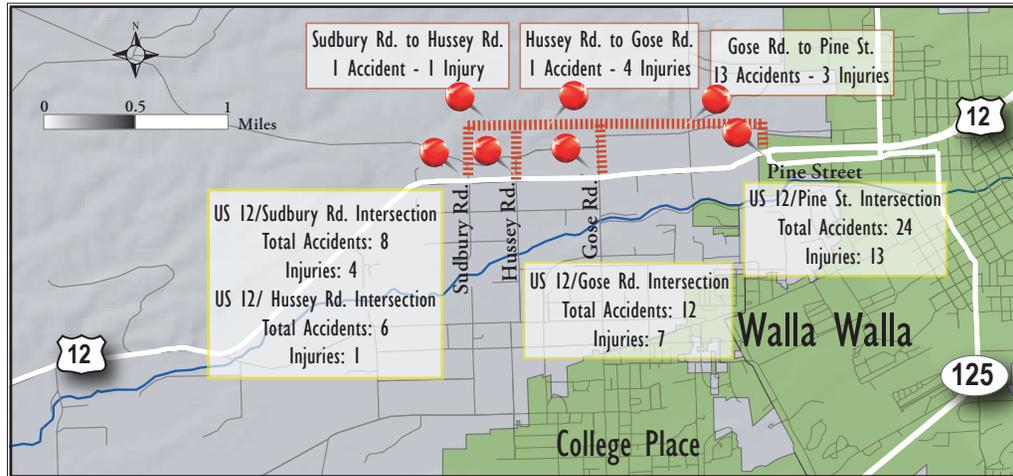
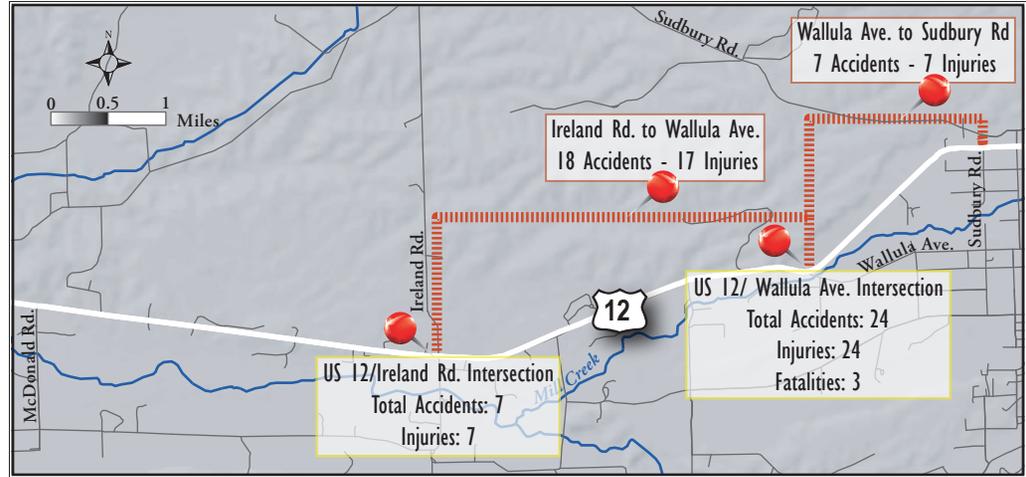


Exhibit 1-5. Map showing the location of accidents and associated injuries within the suburban portion of the project area from 1993 to 2003.

Roadway deficiencies within this part of the US 12 Corridor are partly responsible for the number of accidents occurring there and are summarized as follows:

- Curves that limit a driver’s line of sight when turning onto or off US 12 just west of the intersection of US 12 and Sudbury Road, at the intersection of US 12 and Wallula Avenue, and just east of the intersection of US 12 and Ireland Road (Exhibit 1-6).
- Wallula Avenue intersects US 12 at an angle and on a substandard curve, which limits a driver’s line of sight when turning onto or off US 12 at this intersection (Exhibit 1-6).
- Spacing between the intersections of US 12 and Pine Street, Duncan, Gose, Hussey, Cambell and Sudbury roads, and Wallula Avenue and Last Chance Road, is less than the standard set by Washington State’s Administrative Code (Exhibit 1-7).<sup>1</sup>
- The number of private drives, 28 on the north side of the highway and 27 on the south side, with direct access to US 12 exceeds the standard set by the Washington State’s Administrative Code (Exhibit 1-7).<sup>1</sup>
- Spacing between 38 of the total 55 private drives with direct access to US 12 is less than the standard set by Washington State’s Administrative Code (Exhibit 1-8).<sup>1</sup>
- A lack of acceleration and deceleration lanes for vehicles entering US 12 from private drives and intersecting side roads, or for vehicles exiting US 12 onto private drives and intersecting side roads

If not corrected, the combined effect of increasing traffic volumes and roadway deficiencies will continue eroding the level of safety on this section of US 12.

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<sup>1</sup> State of Washington Administrative Code, Chapter 468-52:

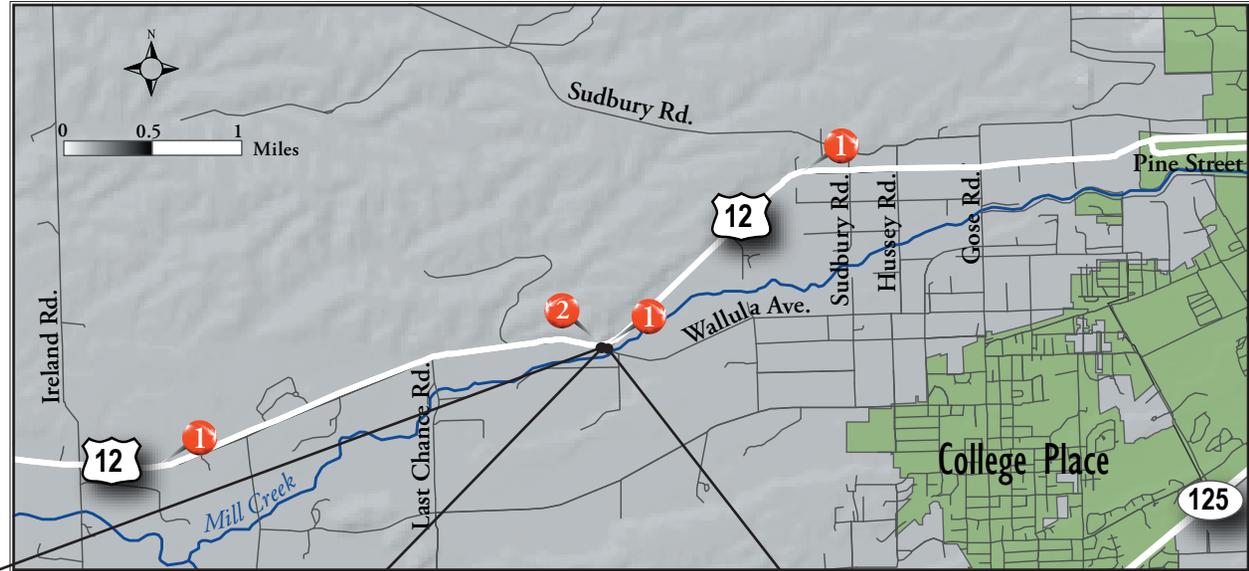
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**What are Roadway Deficiencies?**

*We use the term Roadway Deficiencies in reference to Highway Access Management Standards as set by the state of Washington Administrative Code. For example, the number and spacing of intersecting streets, roads, highways, and private drives shall be planned.*

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Exhibit 1-6. Map showing locations of substandard roadway conditions within the project area. Those sites labeled (1) show where substandard curves limit sight distance to the next intersecting road or driveway; the site labeled (2) shows where Wallula Avenue intersects US 12 at an angle and on a curve, which limits a driver's sight distance.



Wallula Avenue intersects the highway on a curve and at an angle, making it difficult for oncoming traffic to see vehicles turning onto US 12. This is just one of three substandard curves within the project area.



A short line of sight makes it difficult for drivers turning onto US 12 from Wallula Avenue to see oncoming traffic traveling westbound or eastbound.



Approaching the intersection of US 12 and Wallula Avenue from the east. Substandard curves limit a driver's sight distance to the intersection, increasing the likelihood of an accident.

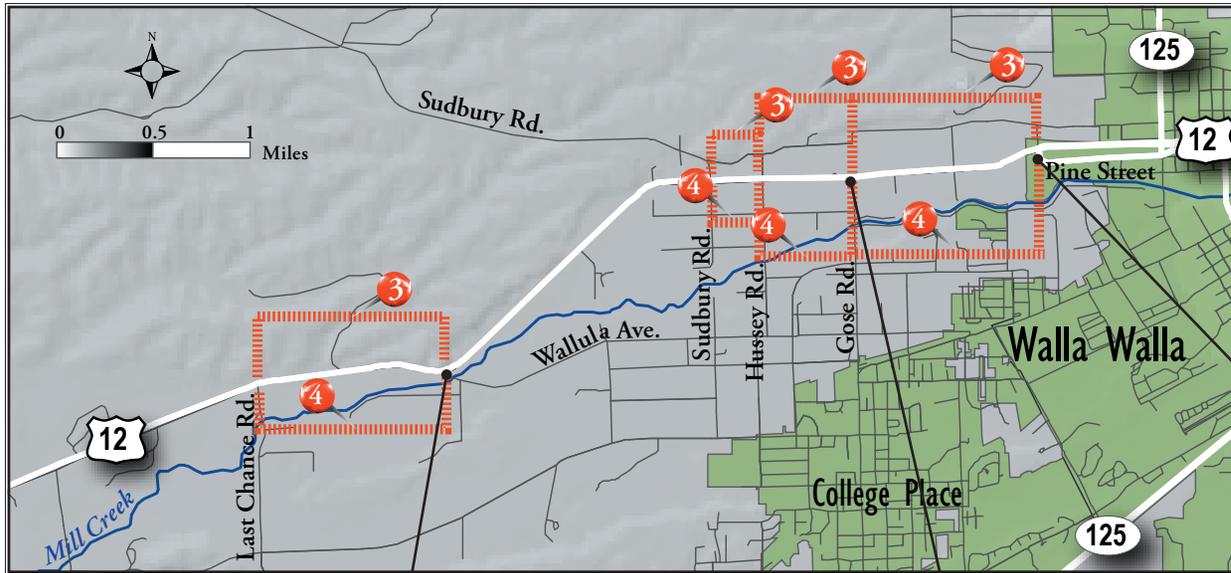


Exhibit 1-7. Map showing the location of substandard roadway conditions within the project area. Those sites labeled (3) show where substandard spacing exists between county and city roads intersecting US 12; sites labeled (4) show where substandard spacing exists between private driveways with direct access to US 12.



Short distances between county and city roads intersecting US 12 limit a driver's sight distance, and reduce their response time to changes in traffic conditions, increasing the likelihood of a collision.



"Rush hour" commuter traffic waiting to turn onto US 12 at the Gose Road intersection. Turning across traffic to the west is especially hazardous because of the number of large trucks traveling at high speeds.



Truck traffic turning onto US 12 is a common occurrence during the morning and evening commute. The lack of acceleration lanes increases the likelihood of an accident where public roads and private drives intersect US 12.

Exhibit 1-8. Map showing the location of substandard roadway conditions. Sites labeled (5) mark the beginning and end points of an area where 55 private driveways have direct access to US 12 throughout the project. Substandard spacing exists between thirty-eight of these driveways and the next road or private drive.



## Why do We Need the Frenchtown Vicinity to Walla Walla Project? (Continued)

### To Improve Capacity and Mobility

WSDOT traffic records show that traffic volumes within this part of the US 12 Corridor have been increasing at approximately 2.0 percent per year from 1993 to 2003. Additionally, the Benton-Franklin Council of Government's (BFCG) Regional Travel Demand Model indicates that volumes will continue rising from 2.0 to 2.9 percent per year through 2028 (The Transpo Group 2004). This means that the traveling public will experience a 46 to 67 percent increase in the number of vehicles driving on US 12 by 2028.