

## I-69 SECTION OF INDEPENDENT UTILITY 13 EL DORADO TO MCGEHEE, ARKANSAS

### Final Environmental Impact Statement

Submitted Pursuant to: 42 U.S.C. 4332(2)(c)

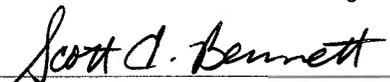
by the

*U.S. Department of Transportation - Federal Highway Administration  
and the  
Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department*

Cooperating Agencies:

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – Vicksburg District  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
U.S. Coast Guard – Eighth District  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

8-18-05  
Date of Approval

  
Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department

August 17, 2005  
Date of Approval

  
Federal Highway Administration

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This project is a proposal to construct a four-lane, divided, fully controlled access highway facility located on new alignment from U.S. 82 near El Dorado, Arkansas to U.S. 65 near McGehee, Arkansas. The proposed highway would be approximately 100 miles in length and would pass through the Arkansas Counties of Ouachita, Union, Calhoun, Bradley, Drew, and Desha. Several alternatives were considered including the No-Action alternative.

Comments on this EIS are due by 10-24-05,  
and should be sent to:

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# SUMMARY

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## THE I-69 LOCATION STUDY

The proposed I-69 Location Study from El Dorado to McGehee, Arkansas, represents one section (Section of Independent Utility No. 13) of the nationally designated I-69 Corridor that reaches from Port Huron, Michigan to the Texas/Mexico border (Exhibit 1-1). This project, hereafter referred to as the SIU 13 Project, would provide a divided four-lane fully controlled access facility, constructed on new location. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issued a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for this project in the December 7, 2001 Federal Register.

The SIU 13 Project Area is approximately 110 miles long and encompasses all or portions of Columbia, Ouachita, Union, Calhoun, Bradley, Ashley, Drew, Chicot, and Desha Counties (Exhibit 1-2). Construction of the SIU 13 Project would:

- ▶ Complete a portion of the Congressionally-designated Interstate 69 Highway, expanding Interstate linkage between El Dorado and McGehee, Arkansas and the rest of the Nation.
- ▶ Support the North American Free Trade Agreement by expanding the I-69 trade corridor.
- ▶ Improve international and interstate movement of freight and people.
- ▶ Facilitate economic development and enhance economic growth opportunities in the Lower Mississippi Delta Region.

- ▶ Support the Southeast Arkansas Regional Intermodal Facility.
- ▶ Improve efficiency of travel.
- ▶ Improve traffic safety.
- ▶ Improve emergency vehicle response times and access to medical facilities.
- ▶ Improve access to education and recreational facilities
- ▶ Support the locally based needs identified by community leaders and the public.

The SIU 13 Project will function as a critical link in the Interstate system that will serve travel, economic development, and commercial demands of not only the Project Area, but also the south-central United States. The current study of alternatives and the environmental consequences of the proposed action were initiated in December 2001 by the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). This study is fully documented in the remaining sections of this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

## ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The development of alternatives for the SIU 13 Project followed a multi-step study approach that evaluated possible highway locations in several stages so that only the most practicable alternatives, i.e., those that met the project purpose and need and that had the potential to minimize

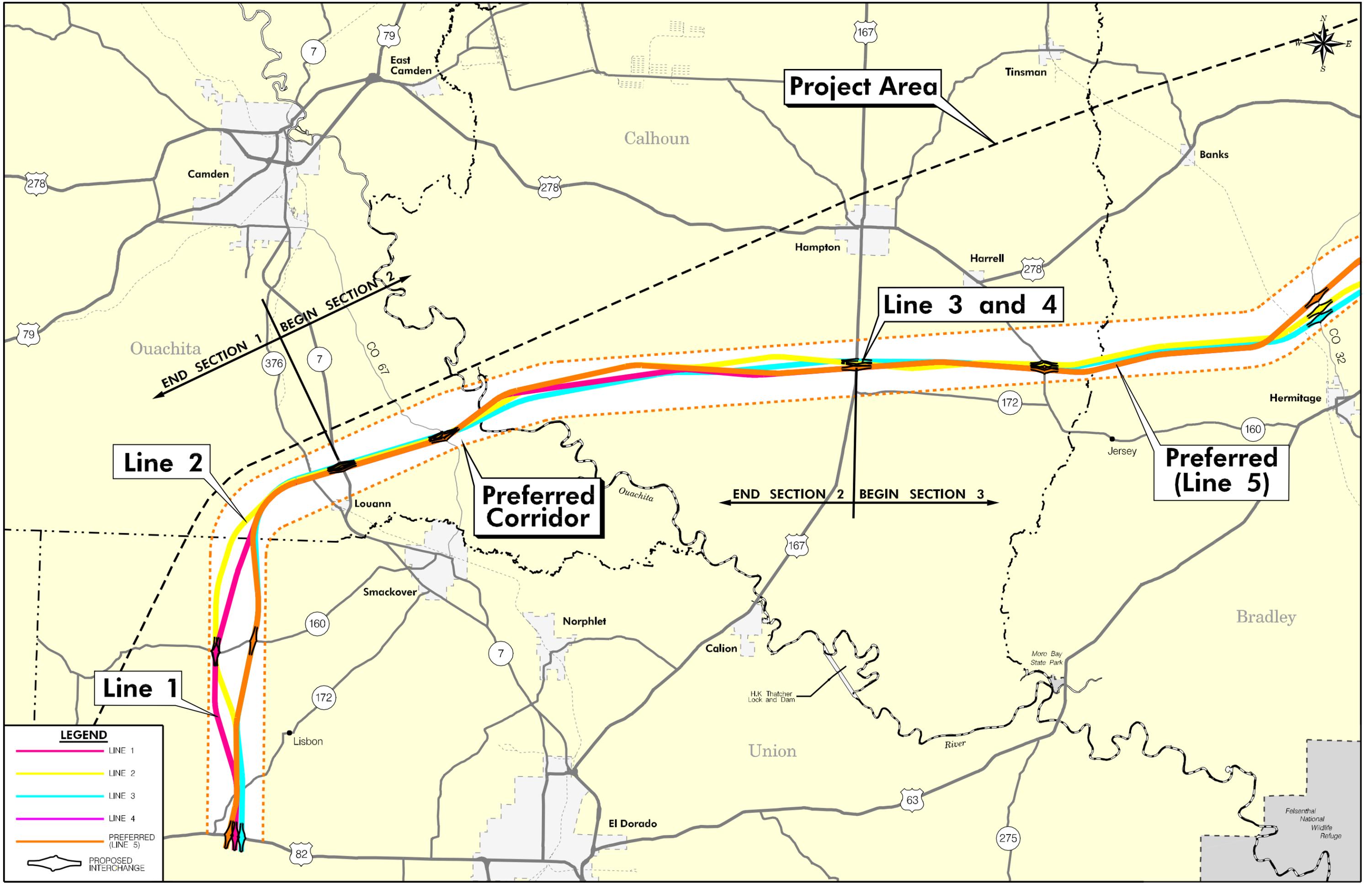
environmental impacts, were advanced to the next phase of study. Initially, an environmental resource map was created for the Project Area by collecting available environmental information from state and federal sources. Using this resource map, key environmental issues were identified for consideration throughout the study process.

The Corridor Study involved the development of four full-length corridors two miles in width within the Project Area. Corridor development used the environmental resources mapping as a guide to avoid and minimize impacts to sensitive resources in addition to consideration of appropriate engineering design criteria and local community leader concerns. These four corridors were analyzed and screened against the sensitive resources, and reviewed by the public, local community leaders, and resource agencies, including the cooperating federal agencies. Once individual corridors or portions of corridors were eliminated from further study, a multi-corridor combination (the Preferred Corridor) was identified that provided the best opportunity to develop highway alignments within it which would avoid or minimize impacts to the social, natural, and cultural environments. Additionally, highway alignments were developed to enhance the transportation services and economic vitality of the Project Area, and accommodate the overall purpose of the National I-69 Corridor. This process provided sufficient information to identify and advance a Preferred Corridor to the more detailed Alignment Study.

The Alignment Study initially developed four preliminary alignment alternatives, approximately

300 feet in width, within the Preferred Corridor. The alignment development process first emphasized avoidance, if practical, and then considered efforts to insure that the alternatives minimized impacts to sensitive resources such as wetlands, threatened and endangered species, and residential areas. This phase of study also included updating and refining the environmental inventory based on specific field investigations within the Preferred Corridor.

A comprehensive public involvement program was conducted during the Corridor and Alignment Studies that involved the public, local community leaders, appropriate state and federal resource agencies, and participating Native American Tribes. Comments from those involved resulted in revisions to the preliminary highway alignments in several areas and the addition of a fifth alignment, which incorporated these changes. Additionally, the development of this fifth alignment combined portions of the four preliminary alignments to further reduce social and environmental impacts.



**Project Area**

**Line 3 and 4**

**Preferred (Line 5)**

**Preferred Corridor**

**Line 2**

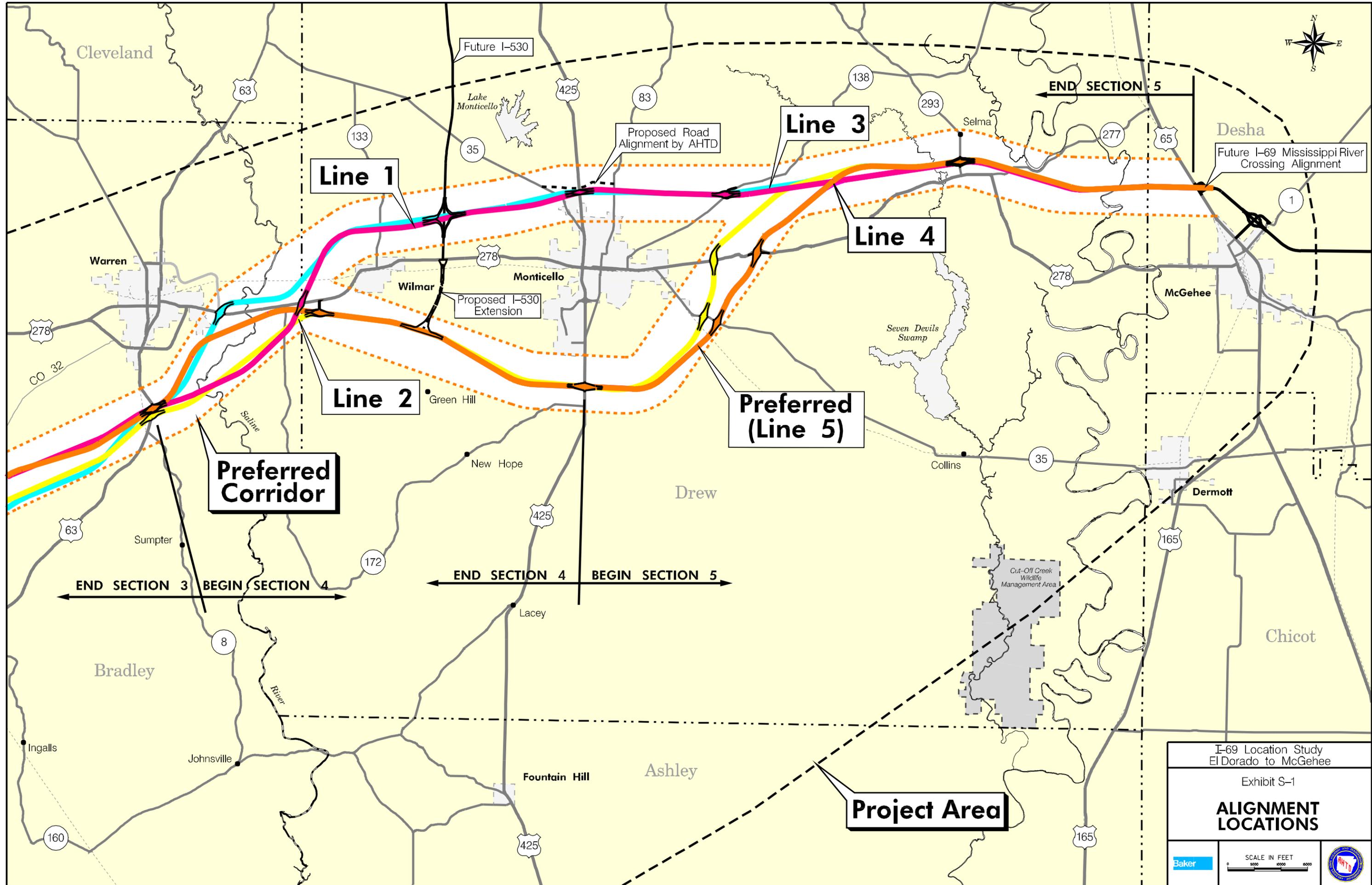
**Line 1**

**LEGEND**

- LINE 1
- LINE 2
- LINE 3
- LINE 4
- PREFERRED (LINE 5)
- PROPOSED INTERCHANGE

END SECTION 1  
BEGIN SECTION 2

END SECTION 2  
BEGIN SECTION 3



**Line 1**

**Line 3**

**Line 4**

**Line 2**

**Preferred (Line 5)**

**Preferred Corridor**

**Project Area**

Future I-530

Proposed Road Alignment by AHTD

Proposed I-530 Extension

Future I-69 Mississippi River Crossing Alignment

Cut-Off Creek Wildlife Management Area

I-69 Location Study  
El Dorado to McGehee

Exhibit S-1

**ALIGNMENT LOCATIONS**

Baker

SCALE IN FEET  
0 5000 10000

A No-Action alternative was retained throughout the study as a basis for comparing the relative benefits and impacts of the alternatives. Under this alternative, the only projects undertaken would be currently planned safety and capacity improvement projects in the Project Area. Safety projects generally involve shoulder widening and curve realignment where necessary and would be implemented regardless of the decision to construct the proposed highway. Widening projects are currently being constructed for US Highway 278 near Wilmar and Warren. This project would be completed under the No-Action alternative.

Active involvement and participation by community leaders, state and federal agencies, and the public provided sufficient information and comments to identify Line 5 as the Preferred Alignment for the SIU 13 Project. The developed alignments, including the Preferred Alignment, are shown in Exhibit S-1. The basis for identification of the Preferred Alignment is discussed in Section 2. The Preferred Alignment meets the project Purpose and Need and minimizes wetland impacts to the greatest extent practicable in accordance with 404 b(1) guidelines. In addition, the Preferred Alignment would impact the fewest residences (5) over the 103 mile long project. The Preferred Alignment best balances the expected project benefits with the overall project impacts. The final selection of a highway alignment for the SIU 13 Project will not be made until comments received on this Final Environmental Impact.

## SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Table S-1 summarizes the project impacts for the developed alignment alternatives discussed in Section 4. Impacts to the social, economic, natural, and cultural environments would result if any of the SIU 13 alignments were constructed. The alignments were developed in a corridor that allowed impact avoidance and minimization for a number of resources, while addressing the project Purpose and Need and providing feasible engineering alternatives. It should be noted that while many resource impacts are similar for the alignment alternatives, they are also relatively minor for a 100 - mile highway project on new location.

All highway alignments would avoid businesses, churches, community facilities, regulatory floodways, cemeteries, and known locations of endangered species, natural areas, and hazardous waste sites. Preliminary project costs range from approximately \$779 million to \$791 million. Line 1 and Line 2 would impact the greatest number of residences, while the Preferred Alignment (Line 5) would impact the least (5 residences over the 100 mile length of the project). Line 1 and Line 3 would impact the greatest wetland acreage, while the Preferred Alignment (Line 5) would impact the least. Line 1 and Line 2 would impact the greatest floodplain acreage and Lines 2, 3, and 4 would all impact known red-cockaded woodpecker habitat.

## OTHER STATE AND FEDERAL ACTIONS REQUIRED

The following actions must occur in order to implement this project:

- ▶ The issuance of a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit for the placement of dredged or fill material in waters of the United States by the US Army Corps of Engineers and a related Section 401 Water Quality Certification issued by the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality.
- ▶ A Bridge Permit issued by the US Coast Guard for crossing the Ouachita River.
- ▶ Coordination of the Section 106 process for consideration of archeological and historic resources with the Arkansas State Historic Preservation Officer and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.
- ▶ A National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit required by Section 402 of the Clean Water Act issued by the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality.
- ▶ The National I-69 Corridor – SIU 12. A NOI was issued in December 2000 by FHWA to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement on a proposal to construct SIU 12 of the National I-69 Corridor from US Highway 65 in Desha County, Arkansas to State Highway 1 in Bolivar County, Mississippi, including a crossing of the Mississippi River. A Record of Decision for this project was signed on June 24, 2004.
- ▶ Southeast Arkansas I-69 Connector – In October 2001 the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department received approval from the Federal Highway Administration on the Selected Alignment for the construction of the I-69 Connector from I-530 at Pine Bluff to US Highway 278 between Monticello and Wilmar. Portions of this project are now under construction.

#### OTHER PROPOSED MAJOR ACTIONS

Other proposed federal and state actions in the Project Area include:

- ▶ The National I-69 Corridor – SIU 14. A Notice of Intent (NOI) was issued by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in March 2003 to prepare an EIS on a proposal to construct SIU 14 of the National I-69 Corridor from I-20 near the town of Haughton in Bossier Parish, Louisiana to US Highway 82 near El Dorado in Union County, Arkansas. SIU 14 lies to the south of SIU 13. Currently, this project is in the highway alignment selection phase of study.
- ▶ Southeast Arkansas Feasibility Study – The US Army Corps of Engineers, the Arkansas Soil and Water Commission and the Boeuf-Tensas Regional Irrigation Water Distribution District is evaluating water resource needs throughout the 1.2 million acre Boeuf-Tensas Basin, which includes Bayou Bartholomew in the Project Area counties of Drew, Ashley, Chicot, and Desha Counties. This project is still in progress.
- ▶ Southeast Arkansas Regional Intermodal Facility – The Southeast Arkansas Regional Intermodal Facilities Authority was established in 1997 to create a regional intermodal

industrial park within the Project Area. The facility will be located on the southern side of US Highway 278 near the Wilmar, Arkansas area. An environmental assessment was conducted for this project in April 2002 and resulted in the finding of no significant impact (FONSI). Acquisition of right-of-way for this project has been initiated and is on-going.

### ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENTS

The AHTD and FHWA have consulted and coordinated with appropriate state and federal agencies and Native American Tribes, as well as the public regarding important project issues. Many issues have been resolved throughout the course of the preparation of the Draft and Final EISs by agreeing to the manner in which they will be treated or handled at a later date. The resolution of other issues cannot be completed until the project moves into the next phase of design, when additional information becomes available. The following list summarizes the agreements and commitments that have been reached.

- ▶ The AHTD, FHWA, Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the consulting Native

American Tribes will develop and sign a memorandum of understanding prior to issuance of the Record of Decision (ROD) for completion of the Section 106 process with respect to the project's effect on cultural resources. A report detailing the results of the Phase I cultural resources survey will be submitted to the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program for review and concurrence.

- ▶ The AHTD will avoid wetland impacts to the extent practicable and efforts will be made to minimize unavoidable impacts during the design phase of this project. Mitigation for unavoidable wetland impacts will be provided by AHTD through coordination with the Corps of Engineers (COE) and other appropriate resource agencies. Final mitigation ratios and requirements will be determined after issuance of the Record of Decision.
- ▶ Following issuance of the ROD, AHTD will hold Design Public Hearings to receive public comments on the final design of the highway.

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**Table S-1  
IMPACT SUMMARY**

Section	Alignment	Length (miles)	Construction Cost in (000s)	Right of Way/Utility Cost in (000s)	Structures				Total Noise Impacts	Natural Resources						Cultural Resources			Known Hazardous Waste Sites
					Residences	Businesses	Churches / Community Facilities	Cemeteries		Wetlands (acres)	Known Red-cockaded Woodpecker Habitat (acres)	100 Year Floodplains (acres)	Prime Farmlands (acres)	Statewide Farmlands (Acres)	Active Oil and Gas Wells	Recorded Archeology Sites	Recorded Historic Structures	Arch. High Probability Area (acres)	
1	Line 1	15.5	\$ 108,671	\$ 3,951	4	-	-	-	2	22	-	115	255	-	-	1 UN	-	49	-
	Line 2	15.7	\$ 110,416	\$ 3,797	1	-	-	-	3	26	-	104	261	-	1	-	-	45	-
	Line 3	15.3	\$ 109,129	\$ 3,980	4	-	-	-	4	28	-	96	178	-	-	-	-	84	-
	Line 4	15.3	\$ 109,129	\$ 3,980	4	-	-	-	4	28	-	96	178	-	-	-	-	84	-
	Preferred (Line 5)	15.2	\$ 109,419	\$ 3,543	1	-	-	-	2	28	-	109	160	-	-	-	-	86	-
2	Line 1	19.2	\$ 164,425	\$ 4,296	-	-	-	-	1	92	-	184	389	2	-	-	-	205	-
	Line 2	19.2	\$ 165,804	\$ 4,338	1	-	-	-	-	78	-	164	394	8	-	-	-	202	-
	Line 3	19.0	\$ 167,183	\$ 4,265	-	-	-	-	-	120	-	174	387	8	-	-	-	201	-
	Line 4	19.0	\$ 167,183	\$ 4,265	-	-	-	-	-	120	-	174	387	8	-	-	-	201	-
	Preferred (Line 5)	19.3	\$ 165,269	\$ 4,312	-	-	-	-	1	78	-	170	390	2	-	1 UN	-	199	-
3	Line 1	25.2	\$ 163,574	\$ 5,636	-	-	-	-	3	65	-	145	494	12	-	-	-	109	-
	Line 2	24.8	\$ 163,621	\$ 6,021	4	-	-	-	3	69	30	140	586	3	-	-	-	123	-
	Line 3	25.2	\$ 166,164	\$ 5,813	2	-	-	-	3	75	34	152	595	13	-	-	-	178	-
	Line 4	25.2	\$ 166,164	\$ 5,813	2	-	-	-	3	75	34	152	595	13	-	-	-	178	-
	Preferred (Line 5)	25.2	\$ 163,965	\$ 5,642	-	-	-	-	3	65	-	143	439	12	-	-	-	108	-
4	Line 1	18.2	\$ 168,619	\$ 5,416	8	-	-	-	2	149	-	260	452	57	-	2 NE	-	184	-
	Line 2	17.1	\$ 150,863	\$ 3,824	-	-	-	-	4	134	-	250	615	113	-	1 NE	-	207	-
	Line 3	18.4	\$ 165,925	\$ 4,985	4	-	-	-	11	103	-	236	377	50	-	2 NE	-	218	-
	Line 4	17.4	\$ 148,457	\$ 3,900	-	-	-	-	4	75	-	205	587	92	-	1 NE	-	198	-
	Preferred (Line 5)	17.4	\$ 149,516	\$ 3,904	-	-	-	-	4	75	-	204	589	91	-	1 NE	-	198	-
5	Line 1	22.3	\$ 148,708	\$ 5,338	4	-	-	-	7	22	-	152	547	73	-	1 UN	1*	87	-
	Line 2	26.1	\$ 175,154	\$ 7,045	10	-	-	-	6	23	-	193	662	175	-	1 UN	-	127	-
	Line 3	22.3	\$ 148,196	\$ 5,662	4	-	-	-	9	23	-	162	567	76	-	1 UN	1*	88	-
	Line 4	25.5	\$ 171,500	\$ 6,128	4	-	-	-	6	22	-	143	607	160	-	1 UN	-	97	-
	Preferred (Line 5)	25.6	\$ 172,136	\$ 6,159	4	-	-	-	5	23	-	151	621	154	-	1 UN	-	99	-
Totals	Line 1	100.4	\$ 753,997	\$ 24,637	16	-	-	-	15	350	-	856	2138	145	-	2 UN, 2 NE	1*	634	-
	Line 2	102.9	\$ 765,858	\$ 25,025	16	-	-	-	16	330	30	850	2517	299	1	1 UN, 1 NE	-	704	-
	Line 3	100.2	\$ 756,597	\$ 24,705	14	-	-	-	27	349	34	820	2104	146	-	1 UN, 2 NE	1*	769	-
	Line 4	102.4	\$ 762,433	\$ 24,086	10	-	-	-	17	320	34	769	2353	273	-	1 UN, 1 NE	-	759	-
	Preferred (Line 5)	102.7	\$ 760,305	\$ 23,560	5	-	-	-	15	270	-	778	2199	259	-	2 UN, 1 NE	-	690	-

Source: Michael Baker Jr., Inc.

NOTE: The No-Action alternative would result in environmental impacts associated as minor safety improvements and additional widening or passing lane projects are implemented within the Project Area, although the extent of these impacts is not known at this time.

\*This structure is no longer standing.

UN = Undetermined status for eligibility for National Register of Historic Places, more work needed

NE - Archeology sites previously surveyed and determined not eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.