

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD), in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), is proposing a highway project located in northern Pulaski County, Arkansas. This project, commonly known as the North Belt Freeway, would consist of a four-lane, divided highway constructed to Interstate standards and located between Highway 67 and the Interstate 40/430 Interchange. The completion of the eastern segment of the North Belt Freeway between Highway 67 and the Interstate 40/440 Interchange left this proposed project as the only remaining segment of the urban area's circumferential freeway to be implemented. Although adjacent sections of the circumferential freeway are six-lane, forecast traffic volumes for the proposed project only warrant a four-lane highway. The project is 12.7 miles (20.4 kilometers) in length and would be constructed on new location with an average estimated right of way width of 300 feet (91 meters). Access would be fully controlled with interchanges and grade separations utilized at selected locations.

The funding source for the right of way acquisition and construction of this project has not been determined. The North Belt Freeway project was not placed on the current Central Arkansas Regional Transportation Study (CARTS) Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) or the Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) due to the history of uncertainty related to a Selected Alternative. After receipt of a Record of Decision (ROD), an appropriate development phase will be amended into the TIP/STIP. Tolling is a financing option that could be considered if additional funding is needed. If it was determined that this project would be a toll facility, additional environmental analysis would be conducted to assess any impacts associated with the conversion of this proposed freeway into a toll facility.

The proposed North Belt Freeway is included in the CARTS Metro 2030 Metropolitan Transportation Plan and has been part of the transportation planning efforts in northern Pulaski County since 1941. Since 1979, the Pulaski Area Transportation Study, now expanded to the CARTS, has shown the proposed North Belt Freeway essentially in the same

general corridor as the Selected Alternative identified in the project's 1994 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and ROD.

In 1997, the local metropolitan planning organization, Metroplan, did not include the North Belt Freeway project in the CARTS Transportation Improvement Program. This decision was made because a portion of the Selected Alternative was not compatible with the City of Sherwood's Master Street Plan. Since the AHTD was unable to proceed with activities on the North Belt Freeway within a 3-year period after the ROD, reassessment of the Selected Alternative became necessary.

In 2003, a Preliminary Evaluation was conducted by the AHTD in order to resolve issues necessary to proceed with a FEIS reassessment. Public comment from the expanding residential neighborhoods adjacent to the Selected Alignment and Sherwood's continuing opposition resulted in the necessity to produce a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) as the means of conducting a project reassessment. The SDEIS was completed and approved by FHWA for dissemination on January 31, 2007.

The development of alternatives and detailed environmental study of those alternatives was part of the SDEIS process that resulted in the designation of a Preferred Alternative. Preparation of this new FEIS and a new ROD that fully evaluates the Preferred Alternative and documents the Selected Alternative would complete the environmental process. This process ensures that alternatives meeting the purpose and need of the project are fully evaluated and are developed to minimize the potential environmental impacts.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The following project needs were identified in the project's 1994 FEIS:

- 1) Provide a direct east/west facility connecting the developing northeast and northwest parts of Pulaski County;
- 2) Increase safety and decrease congestion on existing streets and highways, especially on Highway 67 and Highway 107;
- 3) Provide traffic service for local traffic demands; and

- 4) Provide a highway facility consistent with the Pulaski Area Transportation Study and related Land Use Plans by providing a facility which:
 - a) Serves as a bypass for east-west through traffic in northern Pulaski County;
 - b) Provides improved access for the traffic generated by the population growth in northern Pulaski County; and
 - c) Completes the northern link in the Little Rock/North Little Rock metro area's circumferential freeway by providing a more direct connection from Highway 67 to the interchange of Interstate 40 with Interstate 430.

Review of land development and traffic growth in the region since the completion of the 1994 FEIS does not indicate a change in the purpose or need for the proposed North Belt Freeway. Some specific findings include:

- 1) Population growth has continued and even accelerated throughout the project area. Locations at both ends of the project area that provide destinations for the facility's motorists have also continued to grow.
- 2) Traffic growth has continued to reflect the development trends in the region.
- 3) The existing and planned roadway network is not sufficient to provide the desired quality of traffic operations within the Little Rock/North Little Rock urban area.
- 4) The specific proposed project alignment alternatives are being threatened by development.
- 5) Camp Robinson, an Arkansas National Guard training center, continues to create a 10-mile (16-kilometer) long barrier to civilian travel that would continue to focus east-west travel in northern Pulaski County onto Interstate 40 if an alternate route is not developed.

ALTERNATIVES DEVELOPMENT AND THE SDEIS

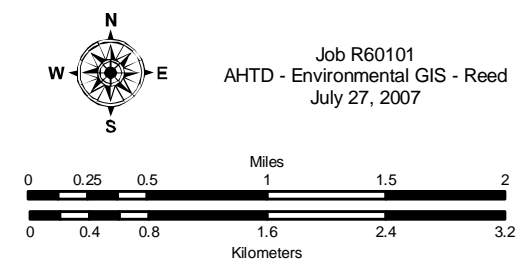
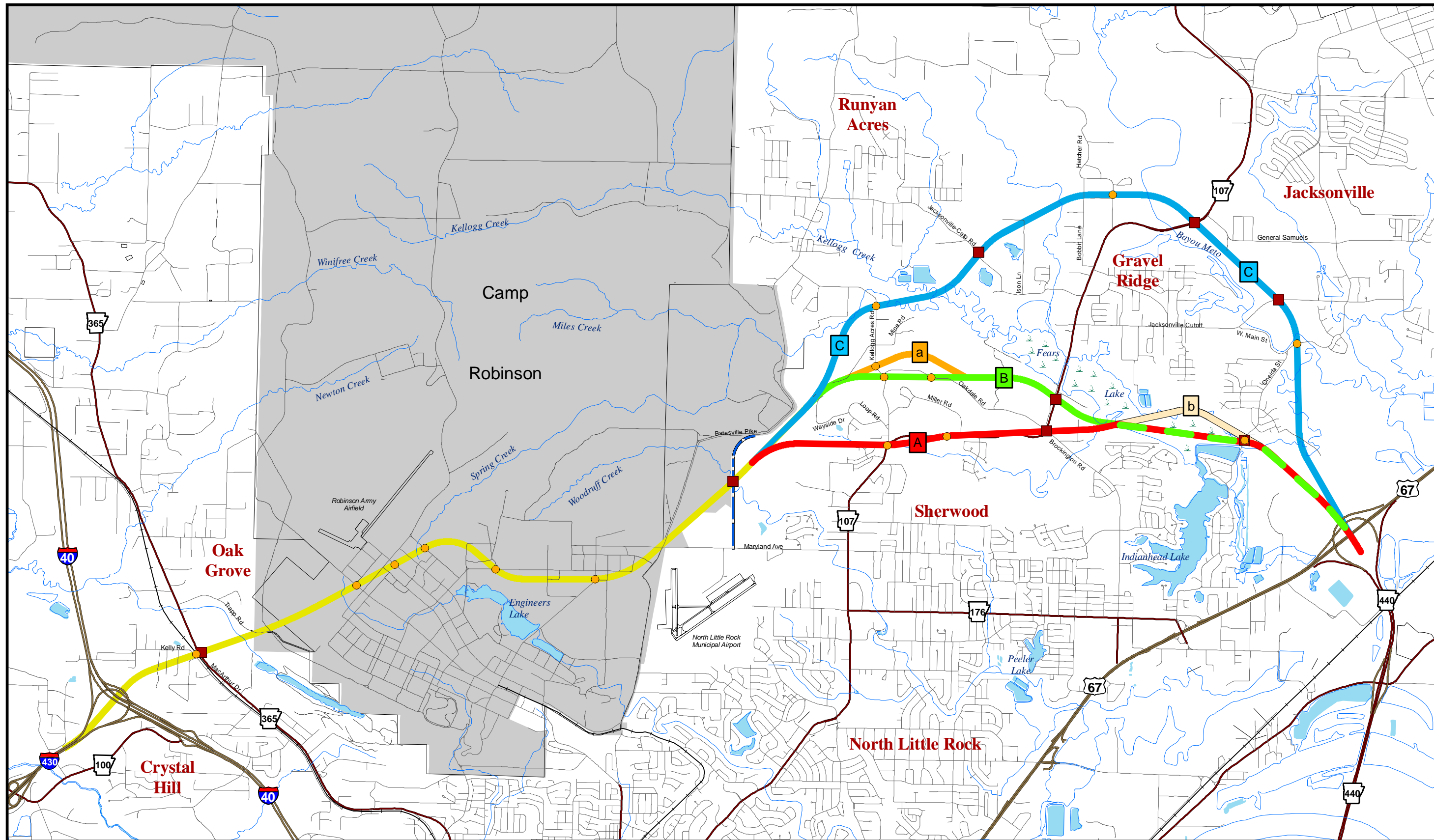
Development of alternatives for the SDEIS was conducted in a manner that considered the history of the project while also taking into account the amount of time that has passed since

the original ROD in 1994. Input from Agency Scoping, Public Officials meetings, and Public Involvement meetings also played a role in the development of the alternatives that were evaluated in the SDEIS.

The Notice of Intent for preparation of the SDEIS, published in April 2004, stated that the entire length of the project would be reassessed due to the amount of time that had passed since the ROD. The reassessment of the project area began with a meeting with Army National Guard officials in March 2004 regarding Camp Robinson's development plans. From this meeting and subsequent meetings, the officials updated their preferred alignment for the North Belt Freeway through Camp Robinson related to land use changes that have occurred since the original alignment was set in the early 1990s. A corridor was developed for the alignment through Camp Robinson and added to a project area east of Camp Robinson to create the project area for the SDEIS. An Agency and Public Officials Scoping meeting was held in March 2005 to obtain information about current issues and constraints in the proposed project study area.

Alignment alternatives were developed in the project area based upon alignments from previous environmental documents, existing highways, facilities, landforms, and other known constraints. The option for construction of either a grade separation or an interchange was included for the alignment alternatives that crossed Oneida Street in response to public and community comments. The alignment alternatives were presented for public comment in November 2005. Revisions to the alignment alternatives presented at the public involvement meetings were made after analyses of public comments and preliminary constraints (Figure S-1). A public officials meeting was held in January 2006 to discuss the revised alignment alternatives.

The No-Action Alternative was retained throughout the study as a basis for comparing the relative benefits and impacts of the alignment alternatives. The No-Action Alternative consists of no improvements to the present system and no expenditures other than regular maintenance of the existing route.



Legend*

	Common Alignment		Interchange
	Alignment Alternative A		Grade Separation
	Alignment Alternative B		Interchange or Grade Separation (...to be determined)
	Alignment Alternative C		Relocated Batesville Pike
	Segment a		Camp Robinson
	Segment b		

*Colored Lines Represent a 300 ft. Wide Corridor

Figure S-1
Alignment Alternatives
North Belt Freeway

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The SDEIS was completed and approved for public dissemination in January 2007. Location Public Hearings were held in March 2007 to display the SDEIS study information and maps of the alignments.

FEIS ALTERNATIVE SELECTION PROCESS

The comments received from the SDEIS Location Public Hearings and the information in the SDEIS were used to choose an alignment alternative to be carried forward into the FEIS. The Interdisciplinary Staff, composed of representatives from various disciplines of AHTD and FHWA, met and considered the potential impacts, advantages, and disadvantages of the various alignment alternatives before the identification of a Preferred Alternative. The Impact Summary in Table S-1 was utilized, as well as Table S-2, the Alignment Alternative Comparison Table, which illustrates the major advantages and disadvantages for each alignment alternative. The various alignment alternatives were compared and Alignment Alternative Bab was recommended for combination with the Common Alignment and designation as the Preferred Alternative. The Preferred Alternative is shown in Figure S-2 and updated impact information for the Preferred Alternative is shown in Table S-3.

This alternative:

- 1) Meets the project purpose and need;
- 2) Minimizes overall impacts;
- 3) Best balances the benefits expected from the project with the overall impacts; and
- 4) Provides good access to communities and other regional highway facilities.

The Preferred Alternative is 12.7 miles (20.4 km) in length, with five interchanges and eight grade separations proposed. An interchange is not proposed at Oneida Street in order to minimize residential relocations, wetland impacts, and impacts to the surrounding subdivisions. Additionally, interchange constructability issues exist due to the proximity of Kellogg Creek and Fears Lake, and spacing with the Highway 67 Interchange would not be optimal for traffic operations. The Preferred Alternative avoids recreation areas and the

Kellogg Mine area, while minimizing relocations, wetland, and noise impacts to the maximum extent possible.

SUMMARY OF BENEFICIAL AND ADVERSE IMPACTS

Construction of the proposed project would provide the following benefits:

- 1) Provide a highway directly connecting the rapidly growing northeast and northwest parts of Pulaski County;
- 2) Mitigate the impact of Camp Robinson on travel in the region;
- 3) Increase safety by decreasing congestion on existing streets and highways, especially on Highway 67 and Highway 107;
- 4) Provide traffic service for local traffic demands; and
- 5) Provide a highway facility consistent with the Central Arkansas Regional Transportation Study and related plans by providing a facility which:
 - a) Serves as a bypass for through traffic in northern Pulaski County;
 - b) Provides improved access to northern Pulaski County; and
 - c) Completes the northern link in the Little Rock/North Little Rock urban area's circumferential highway network.

A summary of other impacts is also included in Table S-3.

**Table S-1
Alignment Alternative Impact
Summary - 2006[†]**

The Preferred Alternative is highlighted in yellow

Alignment Alternative	Length miles (kilometers)	Acreage (hectares)	Total Cost (in million \$)	Weighted Traffic Volume [#] (2030) vehicles per day	Existing Land Use Converted to Highway Right of Way					Cultural Resources-Direct Impacts				Noise Impacts* Estimated Receptors 2030 Traffic	Hazardous Materials Impacts		
					Commercial/ Residential acres (hectares)	Military Base acres (hectares)	Miscellaneous ^{††} acres (hectares)	Undeveloped/ Agricultural acres (hectares)	Prime Farmland acres (hectares)	Recorded Archeological Sites	Historic Structures	Historic Bridges	Historic Roads		Illegal Dumps	Landfills	Underground Storage Tanks
Common	6.9 (11.1)	398 (161)	135	-	21 (8)	151 (61)	49 (20)	190 (77)	0	4	10	1	3	5-6**	5	2	2
A	5.3 (8.5)	305 (123)	136	36,216	17 (7)	0	51 (21)	238 (96)	139 (56)	1	0	0	0	51	0	0	0
Ab	5.4 (8.7)	319 (129)	131	36,216	31 (13)	0	58 (23)	229 (93)	111 (45)	2	0	0	0	51	0	0	0
B	5.7 (9.2)	315 (127)	146	34,978	19 (8)	0	47 (19)	249 (101)	98 (39)	1	2	0	0	13	1	0	0
Ba	5.8 (9.3)	318 (129)	146	34,978	14 (6)	0	43 (17)	260 (105)	97 (39)	2	0	0	0	7	2	0	0
Bb	5.7 (9.2)	326 (132)	141	34,978	33 (13)	0	52 (21)	241 (98)	110 (44)	2	2	0	0	13	1	0	0
Bab	5.8 (9.3)	330 (134)	141	34,978	28 (11)	0	50 (20)	252 (101)	114 (46)	3	0	0	0	7	1	0	0
C	7.9 (12.7)	444 (180)	205	32,315	24 (10)	0	34 (14)	386 (156)	108 (43)	1	1	0	0	37	1	1	0

Continued	Relocations							Floodplain Impacts		USACE Section 404 Impacts			Surface Water Quality Impact Ratings
	Residential Owners	Residential Tenants	Businesses	Total	Minority Households	Elderly Households	Low-Income Households	Special Flood Hazard Area linear feet (linear meter)	Floodway linear feet (linear meter)	Stream Crossings		Wetlands acres (hectares)	
										Intermittent	Perennial		
Common	20	3	8	31	0	3	0	0	0	12	0	0	1.2
A	30	7	0	37	0	0	2	12,700 (3,870)	0	8	3	52 (21)	2.5
Ab	30	7	0	37	0	0	2	13,400 (5,000)	0	9	2	30 (12)	2.5
B	12	8	0	21	0	4	2	13,100 (4,000)	600 (183)	8	3	55 (22)	2.5
Ba	6	8	0	14	0	2	3	13,100 (4,000)	0	9	3	55 (22)	2.3
Bb	12	8	1	21	0	4	2	13,600 (4,150)	0	9	2	32 (13)	2.5
Bab	6	8	0	14	0	2	3	13,600 (4,150)	0	10	2	32 (13)	2.3
C	27	14	0	41	0	0	0	9,400 (2,900)	4000 (1,200)	6	11	30 (12)	2.9

† For alignments A, Ab, B, Ba, Bb, and Bab, the traffic and impacts outlined in the table are with an interchange at Oneida Street. With a grade separation at Oneida Street, the traffic and impacts would vary slightly. These differences are outlined in Sections 2 and 3 of the SDEIS.

†† Miscellaneous includes railroads, cemeteries, roadways, utility right of ways, ponds, reservoirs, borrow areas, sewage ponds, levees, ditches, and towers.

*10 dBA level receptors and receptors that approach the noise abatement criteria (66 dBA).

** A range is indicated because the receptor count changes based upon which alignment is combined with the Common Alignment.

Traffic volumes are for the entire alignment alternative including the Common Alignment section.

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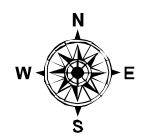
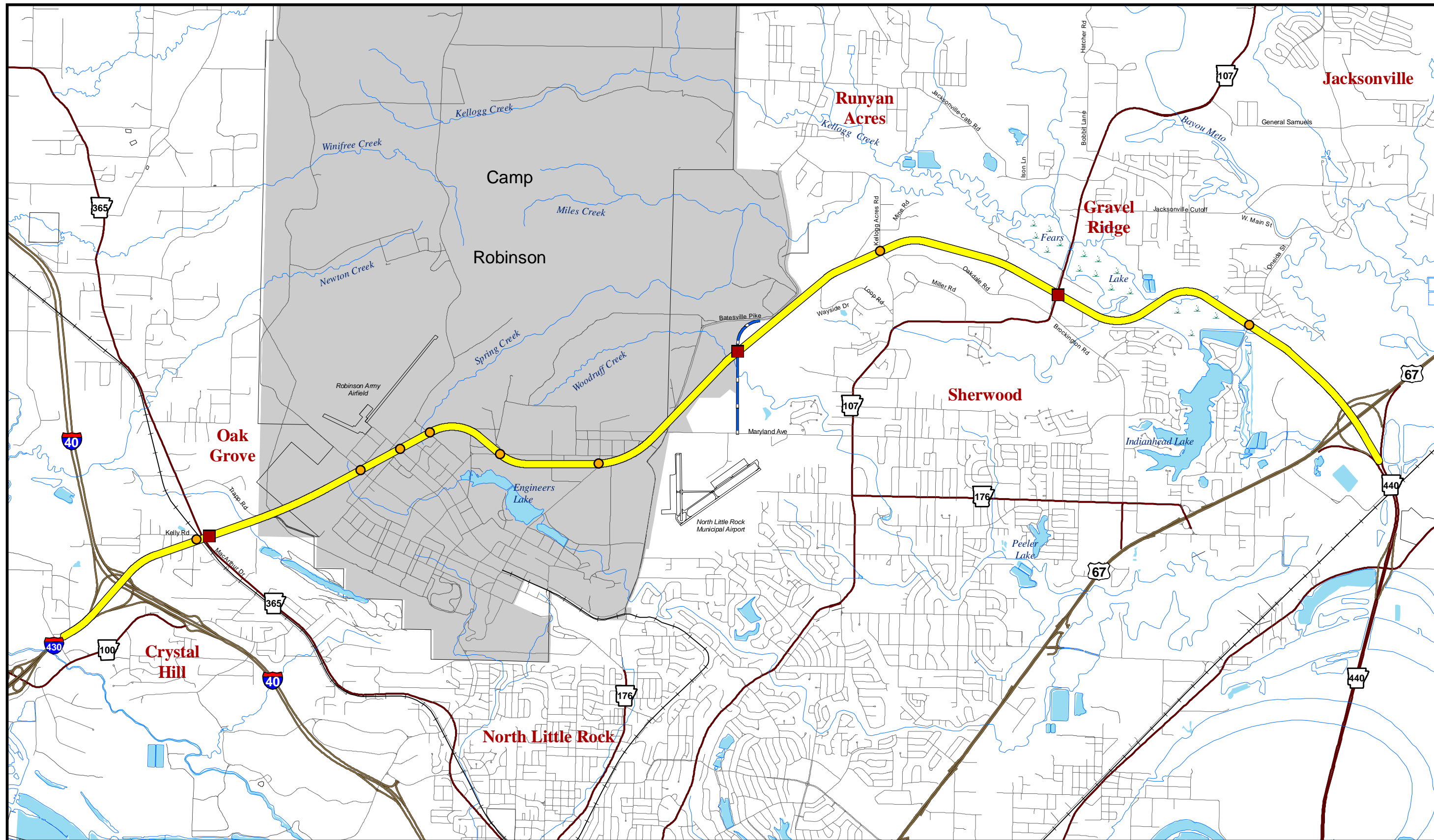
Table S-2

Alignment Alternative Comparison

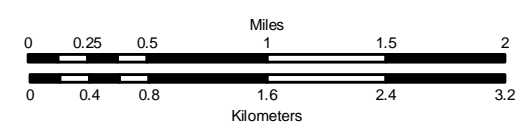
The Preferred Alternative is highlighted in yellow

Alignment Alternative	Advantages	Disadvantages
Common	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approved route through Camp Robinson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bisepts Crystal Hill neighborhood
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortest alignment alternative • Lower cost estimates • Highest traffic volume 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High number of relocatees • High number of noise receptors • Impacts several subdivisions • Higher wetland impacts • Highest prime farmland impacts
Ab	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowest cost estimates • Lowest wetland impacts • Highest traffic volume 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High number of relocatees • High number of noise receptors • Impacts several subdivisions
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower number of relocatees • Lower number of noise receptors • Lower prime farmland impacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest wetland impacts • Impacts one subdivision
Ba	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowest number of relocatees • Lowest number of noise receptors • Lowest impact on commercial/residential land • Lowest prime farmland impacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest wetland impacts • Separates Kellogg Acres neighborhood from Oakdale community
Bb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower number of relocatees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts two subdivisions
Bab	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowest number of relocatees • Lower number of noise receptors • Lower wetland impacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separates Kellogg Acres neighborhood from Oakdale community
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowest wetland impacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longest and most expensive alignment alternative • Most relocatees • Impacts one subdivision • High floodplain and stream crossing impacts resulting in greatest potential for water quality impacts • Lowest traffic volume

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Legend*

- Preferred Alternative
- Interchange
- Grade Separation
- Relocated Batesville Pike
- Camp Robinson

*Colored Line Represent a 300 ft. Wide Corridor

Figure S-2
Preferred Alternative
North Belt Freeway

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**Table S-3
Preferred Alternative Impact Summary - 2007**

Length miles (kilometers)	Acreage (hectares)	Total Cost[#] (in million \$)	Weighted Traffic Volume(2030) vehicles per day	Noise Impacts[*] Estimated Receptors
12.7 (20.4)	707 (286)	347	34,468	19

Existing Land Use Converted to Highway Right of Way				
Commercial/ Residential acres (hectares)	Military Base acres (hectares)	Miscellaneous[†] acres (hectares)	Undeveloped/ Agricultural acres (hectares)	Prime Farmland acres (hectares)
35 (14)	151 (61)	92 (37)	428 (173)	89 (36)

Cultural Resources-Direct Impacts			Hazardous Materials Impacts		
Recorded Archeological Sites	Historic Structures	Historic Roads	Dumps and Storage Areas	Landfills	Underground Storage Tanks
8	16	2	7	2	2

Relocations						
Residential Owners	Residential Tenants	Businesses	Total	Minority Households	Elderly Households	Low-Income Households
29	4	9	42	0	10	0

Floodplain Impacts		USACE Section 404 Impacts		
Special Flood Hazard Area linear feet (linear meter)	Floodway linear feet (linear meter)	Stream Crossings		Wetlands acres (hectares)
		Intermittent	Perennial	
12,800 (3,900)	0	22	3	32 (13)

Cost estimates for the Preferred Alternative were updated in 2007 and increased from \$271 million to \$347 million as outlined in Section 2.4.2.3 of the FEIS.

*10 dBA level receptors and receptors that approach the noise abatement criteria (66 dBA).

† Miscellaneous includes railroads, cemeteries, roadways, utility right of ways, ponds, reservoirs, borrow areas, sewage ponds, levees, ditches, and towers.

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