Heber Valley Corridor
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Phase One Summary Report

Heber Valley Corridor Environmental Impact Statement

Lead agency:
Utah Department of Transportation

April 12, 2021

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1.0 Introduction

The Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) is planning to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to evaluate transportation solutions to improve mobility through the Heber Valley and the operation of Heber City's Main Street (U.S. Highway 40). Transportation improvements are needed to address the current and projected (2050) travel demand.

What is travel demand?

Travel demand is the expected number of transportation trips in an area. Travel demand can be met by various modes of travel, such as automobile, bus, light rail, carpooling, and bicycling.

UDOT's intent with the EIS is to develop and evaluate alternative solutions that address the transportation needs in the Heber Valley and are an asset to the community. The EIS will evaluate impacts to the natural and human environments from proposed alternatives, including the no-action alternative, and will identify a preferred alternative.

Because UDOT has received National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Assignment from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the environmental review, consultation, and other actions required by applicable federal environmental laws for this project are being or have been carried out by UDOT pursuant to 23 United States Code 327 and a Memorandum of Understanding dated January 17, 2017, and executed by FHWA and UDOT.

1.1 Purpose of This Phase One Summary Report

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) oversees federal agencies' implementation of NEPA. In 2020, CEQ announced a final rule comprehensively updating and modernizing regulations to streamline the development of infrastructure projects. The new regulations establish a 2-year time limit for preparing EISs and require agencies to provide more information and solicit input from the public earlier in the process to ensure and facilitate informed decision-making. Early scoping allows agencies to develop a draft purpose and need statement before publishing the Notice of Intent in the Federal Register to prepare an EIS.

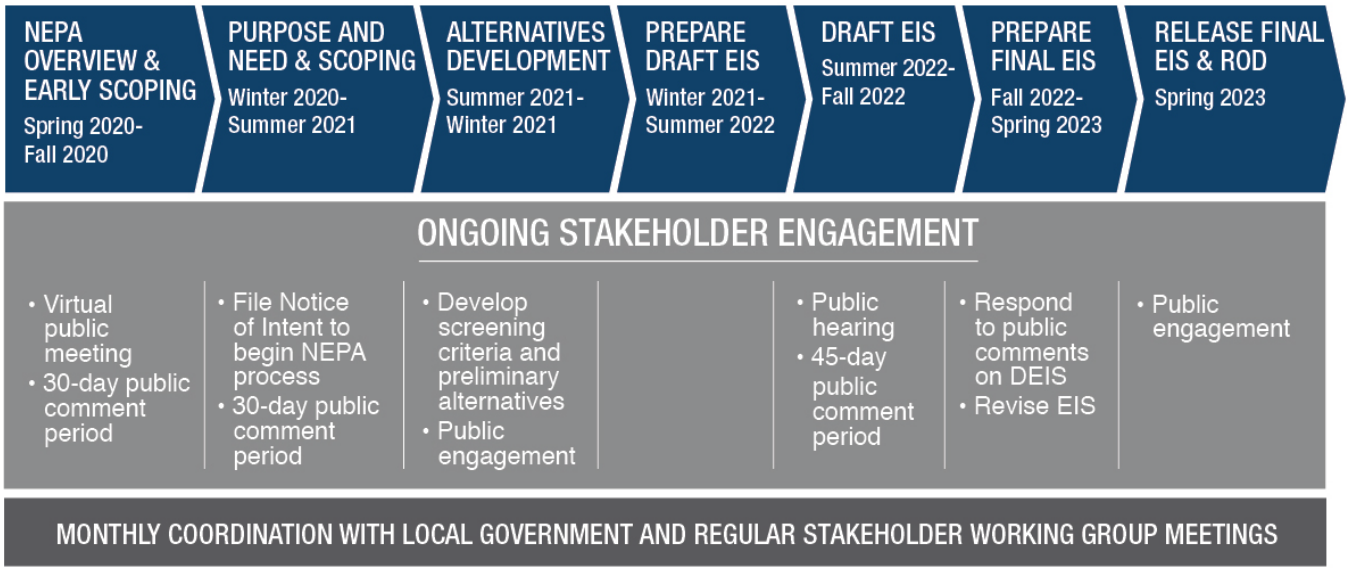
What is scoping?

Scoping is an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying the significant issues related to a proposed action.

UDOT is completing the EIS in two phases (see Figure 1). Phase one (early scoping) began in March 2020 and extended through December 2020. During early scoping, UDOT conducted a traffic and safety technical analysis and coordinated with agencies, stakeholders, and the public to identify transportation needs, preliminary alternatives, and potentially significant environmental issues. Based on this technical analysis and input received, UDOT developed a draft purpose and need statement. The purpose of this report is to summarize the work completed in phase one and provide references and/or links to the documents that were produced.

Phase two will begin with publication of a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS in spring 2021, which will start a 30-day scoping period. At that time, the draft purpose and need statement will be published for public and agency review and comment. UDOT will review and consider comments before finalizing the purpose of and need for the project. Phase two will include finalizing the purpose and need, developing and screening preliminary alternatives, evaluating action alternatives in detail, identifying resources and evaluating impacts,

Figure 1. Project Timeline



and selecting a preferred alternative. Opportunities for public and agency involvement will be provided at project milestones. An EIS will be prepared and published for review and comment. Phase two is expected to take 2 years and culminate with a Final EIS and Record of Decision in early 2023.

2.0 Public and Agency Involvement

Early scoping activities included soliciting public and agency input to develop a draft purpose and need statement, identify a preliminary range of alternatives, and identify potentially significant environmental issues. UDOT prepared an *Early Scoping Summary Report, Heber Valley Corridor Environmental Impact Statement* (UDOT 2020a) to document public and agency involvement. The report includes detailed information such as meeting presentations, meeting summaries, and comments submitted. It is available on the project website at https://hebervalleyeis.udot.utah.gov/. A high-level overview is provided below.

2.1 Public Early Scoping

A series of stakeholder interviews was conducted to help UDOT understand and obtain technical information related to transportation, planned development, and resources that are important to the community. A total of 18 interviews were conducted between May 27 and June 24, 2020. Stakeholders were identified by UDOT and its consultant through experience with previous projects in area, discussions with Heber City and Wasatch County, and discussions with other stakeholders.

UDOT held an early public scoping meeting on August 27, 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting was held from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM virtually using the Zoom platform. The UDOT project manager presented project information including the project background and an overview of the project, the stakeholder working group, preliminary traffic information, and how to submit a formal public comment.

During the early scoping process, UDOT presented at one city council meeting, one county council meeting, and one interlocal government meeting. UDOT presented to the Wasatch County Council on September 9, 2020; the Heber City Council on September 15, 2020; and the Wasatch County Interlocal Meeting on September 30, 2020.

UDOT also developed a stakeholder working group that includes 18 representatives representing trucking, agriculture, open lands, emergency services, schools, residents, developers, local government staff, and businesses. The group serves as a communication conduit to the community and helps inform the decision-making process. Stakeholder working group meetings were held on August 20 and October 19, 2020.

The early scoping comment period for the Heber Valley Corridor EIS extended from August 27 through October 3, 2020. Nearly 300 comments were received related to transportation needs, traffic analysis, safety, growth, alternatives to consider, and resource considerations. Common themes include the following:

- Desire to improve safety and walkability of Main Street
- Bypass route is needed/unneeded
- Divert truck traffic
- Need for intersection improvements to Main Street
- Community and environmental impacts
- Congestion
- Alternative route suggestions

All comments received during the public comment period are included in the *Early Scoping Summary Report*. The report identifies the key natural and community issues identified by the public and agencies along with potential alternatives that should be considered when developing the EIS.

2.2 Agency Coordination

The agency coordination meeting was held on August 27, 2020, at 10:30 AM. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting was held virtually using the Zoom platform. The following agencies participated:

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Utah Division of Wildlife Resources

These agencies were identified because there is a large wetland complex northwest of Heber City, and it is possible or likely that these agencies would have jurisdiction by law or special expertise with respect to the environmental impacts of the project. A larger group of federal and state agencies, local governments, and Native American tribes will be consulted during the EIS process when the purpose and need statement and the project study area are more clearly defined. A summary of the agency coordination meeting is included in the *Early Scoping Summary Report*.

3.0 Purpose and Need

Creating the purpose and need statement is one of the most consequential decisions that is made during the NEPA process, because the project's purpose and need provides the foundation for determining which alternatives will be considered and for selecting the preferred alternative. Alternatives that do not meet the project's purpose and need can be eliminated without detailed study. The purpose defines the transportation problem to be solved and describes goals and objectives that should be included as part of a successful solution. The need provides data that there is a problem to be solved, and should explain the underlying causes of these problems (for example, growth trends).

3.1 Traffic and Safety Analysis

Travel demand forecasting and traffic analysis often lay the foundation for the purpose of and need for transportation projects. Because transportation projects are expensive to construct, they are designed to last for many years. For this project, traffic and safety conditions were analyzed in the study area for current conditions and for projected conditions in 2050. The *Existing and 2050 No-build Traffic and Safety Analysis* (Parametrix 2020) documents the data, methodology, and results of this analysis. The report is available on the project website at https://hebervalleyeis.udot.utah.gov/.

3.2 Draft Purpose and Need

UDOT prepared a *Draft Purpose and Need Technical Report* (UDOT 2020b) describing the draft purpose and need for the EIS. This report is available on the project website for public review and comment during the 30-day EIS scoping period. The purpose and need are summarized below.

3.2.1 Purpose of the Project

The primary purpose of the Heber Valley Corridor Project is to improve regional and local mobility on U.S. 40 from State Route (S.R.) 32 to U.S. 189 through 2050 while allowing Heber City to meet their vision for the historic town center.

The criteria for the primary purpose will be used to screen out alternatives that are not reasonable or practicable. If an alternative cannot meet the primary purpose, it will be eliminated from further consideration.

The project will also evaluate the following secondary objectives:

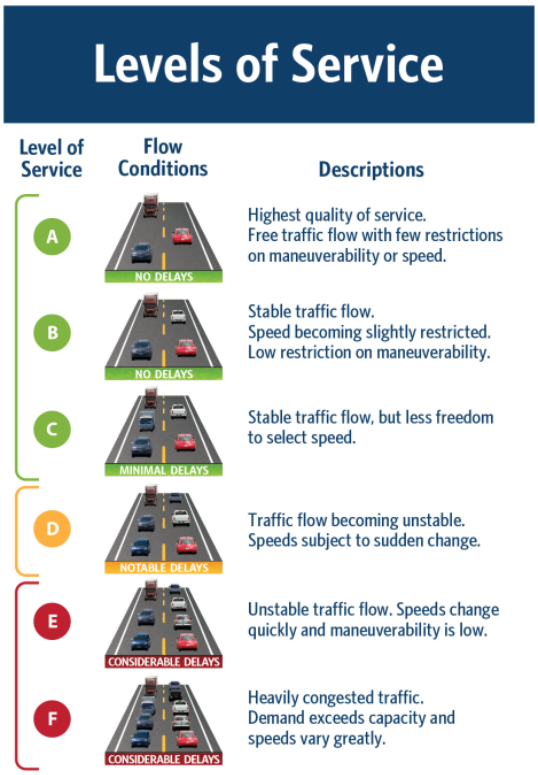
- Provide opportunities for more active transportation.
- Develop alternative designs that blend with the natural and built environment.

The secondary objectives will not be used to screen or eliminate alternatives. Rather, they will be incorporated into all alternatives as the alternatives are developed and will be used to compare alternatives.

3.2.2 Need for the Project

The transportation needs are related primarily to traffic during peak periods, which is expected to get worse with increasing population. The traffic and safety analysis identified the following deficiencies:

- The character and function of U.S. 40 changes from a 65-miles-per-hour (mph) limited-access freeway north of town to a 35-mph Main Street in Heber City with signalized intersections. Throughput on U.S. 40 is traded for increased access within Heber's historic core, resulting in congestion and delay.
- U.S. 40 is currently operating at failing conditions (level of service F) from 100 North to 100 South during the PM peak hour, and these conditions will continue to get worse by 2050.
- All signalized intersections on U.S. 40 are currently operating at acceptable conditions, but they are expected to operate at failing conditions during the PM peak hour by 2050 if no improvements are made.
- Southbound travel time on U.S. 40 from S.R. 32 to U.S. 189 during the PM peak hour will double by 2050 if no improvements are made.
- Queue lengths (vehicles backed up waiting to get through an intersection) during the PM peak hour will increase and spill back to other intersections and onto U.S. 40 north of town where the posted speed is 55 mph, resulting in safety concerns.



In addition, the *Heber City Envision 2050 General Plan* identifies the following deficiencies:

- Increased traffic on Main Street has disrupted the traditional feel with increased noise and pedestrian safety concerns.

4.0 Preliminary Identification of Alternatives

As part of the early scoping process, UDOT asked the public and agencies what alternatives should be considered. The *Early Scoping Summary Report* identifies the alternatives that were suggested during the early scoping process. In general, the basic concepts for alternatives included:

- Improvements to U.S. 40 such as adding lanes and intersection improvements, or making it a tunnel or double-decker road
- Improvements to existing roads other than U.S. 40
- A one-way couplet system
- A new bypass west of U.S. 40
- A new bypass east of U.S. 40
- Transportation System Management
- Transit

5.0 Preliminary Resource Identification

Resources are generally identified after alternatives are developed enough to understand where they would be located and how large their footprint would be. Field surveys can be time-consuming and expensive, so detailed surveys are conducted only where impacts could occur. However, a few key resources should be considered during alternatives development and screening. Two environmental laws include requirements for analyzing alternatives: Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, which protects wetlands and other waters of the United States, and Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966, which protects certain park and recreation lands, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, and historic sites.

UDOT conducted preliminary resource identification as described below to understand the potential for impacts to these resources. The evaluation area was nearly 10,000 acres, large enough to encompass potential alternatives. Once alternatives are more fully developed, more-detailed field surveys will be conducted.

5.1 Aquatic Resources

Aquatic resources include wetlands, streams, lakes, ponds, and canals. A high-level inventory was conducted to preliminarily identify these resources. The inventory was generally based on a desktop review of available data followed by a site visit to spot-check portions of the evaluation area that were visible from public roads. The inventory identified about 823 acres of apparent aquatic resources including wetlands, riverine features, and freshwater ponds. The inventory is documented in the *Aquatic Resources Baseline Inventory* (HDR 2020a). After project alternatives are identified, a more detailed wetland identification will be conducted in the area of the proposed alternatives.

What is a desktop review?

A desktop review is an assessment of existing documentation where available information is collected, organized and synthesized.

5.2 Biological Resources

Biological resources include plant communities, threatened and endangered species, species under conservation agreement, and migratory birds. A high-level inventory was conducted through literature reviews, interpreting aerial photographs, and conducting a site visit to spot-check portions of the evaluation area that could be viewed from public roads. The inventory identified potential suitable habitat for one federally listed plant, two conservation agreement species, and migratory birds. The inventory is documented in the *Biological Resources Baseline Inventory* (HDR 2020b). After project alternatives are identified, a more detailed identification will be conducted in the area of the proposed alternatives

5.3 Cultural Resources

Cultural resources include archaeological sites and historic structures that are included in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. A high-level inventory was conducted to preliminarily identify these resources. The inventory was generally based on a desktop review of existing data. Few archaeological surveys have taken place in the project area, so little is known about the potential archaeological resources. Well over 1,000 historic buildings are present that could be eligible. Most of these are located in the core platted area of Heber City, but additional clusters are present along the main north-south and east-west roads in the community of Daniel. The inventory is documented in the *Cultural Resources Scoping for Heber Valley Parkway Project* (Certus 2020). After project alternatives are identified, a more detailed cultural resource identification will be conducted in the area of the proposed alternatives.

6.0 References

Certus Environmental Solutions

2020 Cultural Resources Scoping for Heber Valley Parkway Project. July 3.

HDR, Inc.

2020a Aquatic Resources Baseline Inventory, Heber Valley Corridor Environmental Impact Statement. July 2.

2020b Biological Resources Baseline Inventory, Heber Valley Corridor Environmental Impact Statement. July 2.

Parametrix

2020 Existing and 2050 No-build Traffic and Safety Analysis. October 29.

[UDOT] Utah Department of Transportation

2020a Early Scoping Summary Report, Heber Valley Corridor Environmental Impact Statement. November 13.

2020b Draft Purpose and Need Technical Report, Heber Valley Corridor Environmental Impact Statement. March 24.