

U.S. 95, Thorncreek Road to Moscow Project

Guide to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement



The Idaho Transportation Department invites you to comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) which presents alternatives to improve U.S. 95 between Thorncreek Road and the city of Moscow. The guide provides an overview of the DEIS.

Please attend the public hearing:

Wednesday, Jan. 23, 2013 • 2 – 8:30 p.m.

Best Western Plus University Inn

1516 Pullman Rd., Moscow, ID 83843

U.S. 95, Thorncreek Road to Moscow Project



Thank you for your interest in the U.S. 95, Thorncreek Road to Moscow Project.

The Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) has spent nine years working with local residents and technical experts to determine a possible new alignment for U.S. 95 south of Moscow. The section of highway between Thorncreek Road and Moscow has one of the highest accident rates of any highway in north-central Idaho.

Federal regulations require that ITD prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for this project because a four-lane highway is being proposed on a new alignment. The EIS will contain an in-depth analysis of how the project could affect the environment. Several alternatives have been identified as potential alignments for this section of highway.

The public now has an opportunity to review the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The DEIS identifies the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) and ITD's preferred alternative.

We hope you will take time to read the DEIS and provide your comments.

The final selection of an alternative will not happen until comments on the DEIS have been fully evaluated.

Invitation to Public Hearing

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1516 Pullman Rd., Moscow, ID 83843

At the public hearing, you will have the opportunity to:

- Provide written comments or give verbal testimony to a public hearing officer about the DEIS.
- Give comments during the open-microphone sessions held at 3 p.m. and 5:30 p.m.
- Speak with the environmental and technical experts who conducted studies for the DEIS.
- Learn about the alternatives that were evaluated and their benefits and impacts.
- Look at maps for each of the alternatives analyzed in the DEIS.

Included with this mailing is a project DVD that includes:

- A project overview video
- A PDF of the DEIS
- A PDF of the technical reports

If you cannot attend the hearing, you may send written comments to Adam Rush, ITD Public Involvement Coordinator:

U.S. Mail: P.O. Box 7129, Boise, ID 83707-1129

Fax: (208) 334-8563

Email: comments@itd.idaho.gov

All comments must be received by Feb. 23, 2013.

DEIS Chapter Overview

The DEIS includes an executive summary and nine chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction Presents the project background, purpose and need.

Chapter 2: Alternatives Describes the alternatives that ITD considered and analyzed, as well as what would happen if nothing was built.

Chapter 3: Affected Environment Describes the human and natural environment in the project area that could be affected.

Chapter 4: Environmental Consequences Explains how four alternatives (No Action, W-4, C-3 and E-2) would affect the environment.

Chapter 5: Section 4(f) Evaluation Explains how the alternatives would affect parks, historic sites and other lands protected by Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act.

Chapter 6: Indirect and Cumulative Effects Describes the indirect and cumulative impacts of the project.

Chapter 7: Public Involvement and Agency Coordination Presents ITD's work with the local community, tribes and resource agencies.

Chapter 8: Construction Phasing and Funding Explains the construction process and costs.

Chapter 9: Environmental Commitments Identifies how ITD will minimize and mitigate the effects of the project.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this project is to improve public safety and increase highway capacity on U.S. 95 south of Moscow between Thorncreek Road and the South Fork Palouse River Bridge.

The project is needed for several reasons:

1. Public safety

- The segment of U.S. 95 from Thorncreek Road to Moscow includes three of the worst accident locations in Idaho. Most crashes are related to approaches, sharp curves, narrow shoulders and steep grades.
- Even though U.S. 95 is a major highway, this segment includes 66 driveways and intersections. They create many locations for accidents.
- As traffic volumes increase over time, safety is expected to decrease.
- The road surface is rough and cracking.

2. Highway capacity

- The narrow section between Thorncreek Road and Moscow creates a bottleneck for travelers.
- The roadway does not include adequate shoulders or protection for cars that run off the road.
- Speeds are restricted, drivers spend more time behind slower vehicles and there are few gaps in traffic for passing.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The U.S. 95, Thorncreek Road to Moscow project would replace approximately 6.5 miles of the existing two-lane roadway with a new four-lane divided highway. The project is expected to improve safety and highway capacity by:

Adding two lanes in each direction. The lanes would be divided by a 34-foot median in the rural section.

Adding a 12-foot center turn lane and curbs, gutters and sidewalks in the urban section just south of Moscow.

Improving many of the curves and make the grade less steep.

Widening the shoulders.

Adding right and left turn lanes at county road intersections.

Adding ditches that will keep rain and snowmelt from collecting on the roadway.

Combining current access points when possible and limiting the number of new intersections and driveways.

Adding a 30-foot clear zone. The clear zone is the area outside the shoulder. It provides a safe area if a vehicle goes off the road.

Improving stopping sight distance by reducing curves. This will allow drivers to see more of the roadway ahead.

Chapter 2: Alternatives

The process of identifying FHWA's and ITD's preferred alternative included:

- Identifying broad transportation concepts. For example, these concepts determine whether ITD should consider a new alignment or simply improve the existing roadway.
- Identifying public issues and concerns. This process involved several rounds of public and agency meetings, one-on-one interviews, publications and workshops.
- Generating 11 possible alternatives for the roadway. The alternatives were divided into three corridors: western, central, and eastern. The No Action Alternative is one of the alternatives in the DEIS. The No Action Alternative would keep the existing alignment of U.S. 95. It would include small projects such as repaving, but no major construction. The existing sharp curves and steep grades would remain.
- Evaluating the Alternatives based on the purpose and need, public input and potential effects to the environment.
- Advancing four alternatives for detailed analysis in the DEIS: No Action, W-4, C-3 and E-2.

The next three pages of this guide provide more information about the W-4, C-3 and E-2 alternatives.

Final selection of an alternative will not happen until comments on the DEIS have been fully evaluated.

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What we heard

ITD has received over 2,000 comments during the environmental analysis. Frequent comments included:

Safety concerns about:

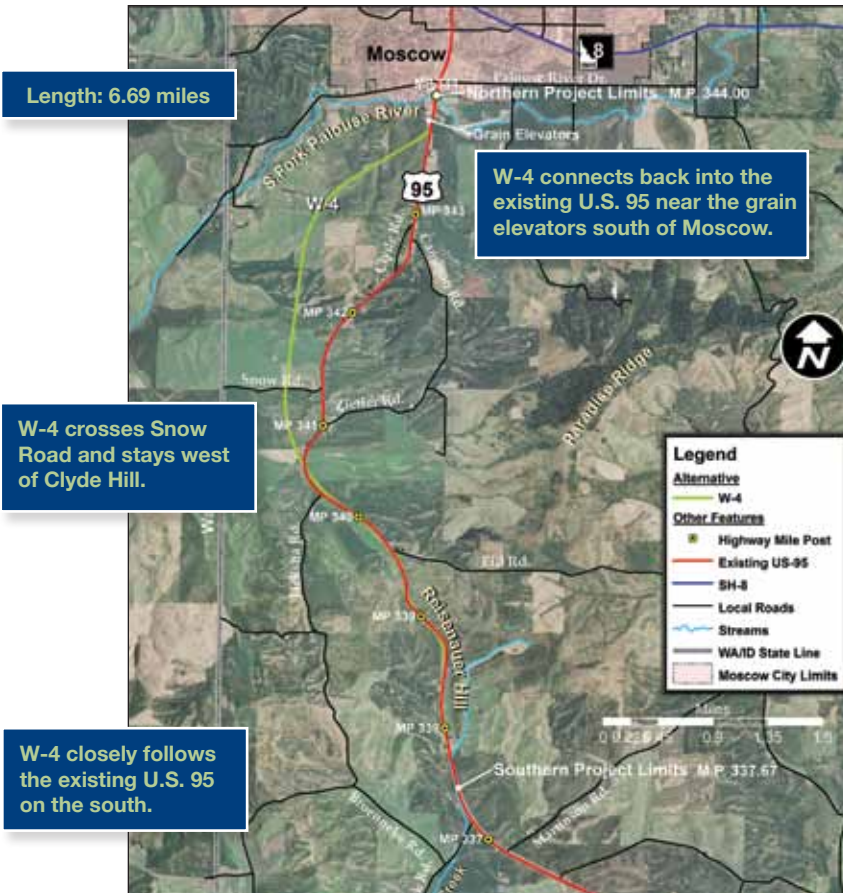
- Curves that do not meet current standards
- Weather
- Steep approaches and grades

Concerns that the project would affect:

- Paradise Ridge
- Wildlife habitat and movement (including pygmy nuthatch, Palouse giant earthworm, Palouse remnants and the potential for weeds)
- Wetlands, floodplains and tributaries
- Views

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W-4: The Western Alternative



W-4 was not identified as ITD's and FHWA's Preferred Alternative because:

It would not have the greatest safety benefit.

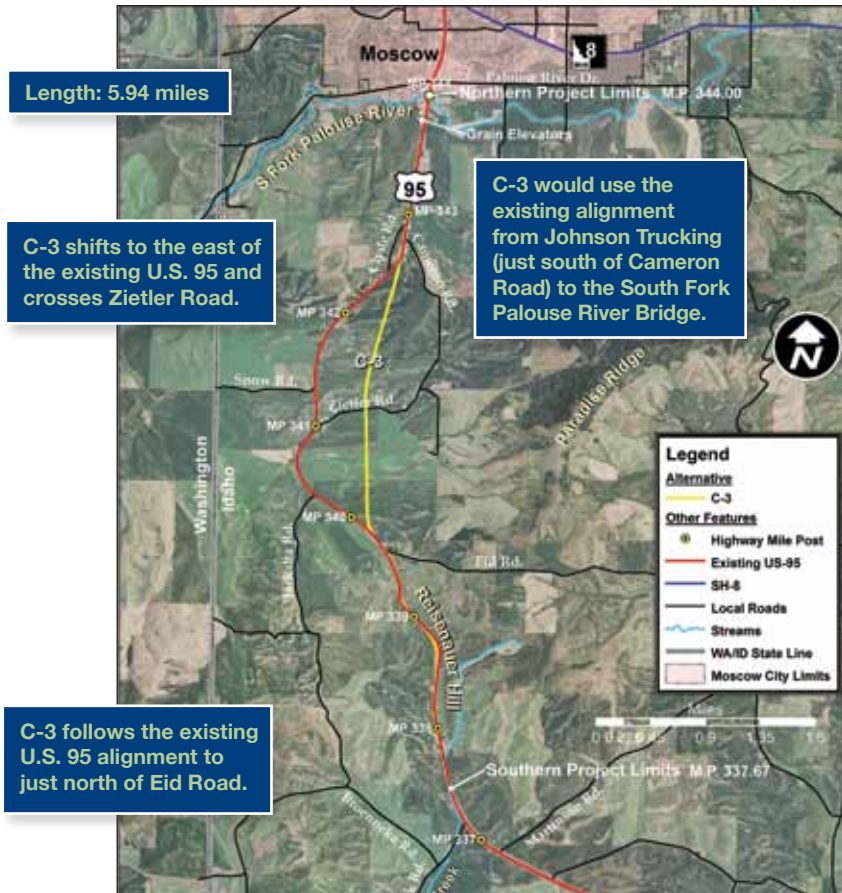
It would have the greatest effects to wetlands, floodplains and cultural/ Section 4(f) resources.

It would have the greatest number of tributary crossings and would require the greatest amount of new right-of-way.

It would be the least consistent with land use plans.

W-4 would displace the fewest homes. It would have the fewest noise impacts. It is the farthest from Paradise Ridge.

C-3: The Central Alternative



C-3 was not identified as ITD's and FHWA's Preferred Alternative because:

It would have the highest crash rate of any of the alternatives.

It would have the greatest number of access points of all the alternatives.

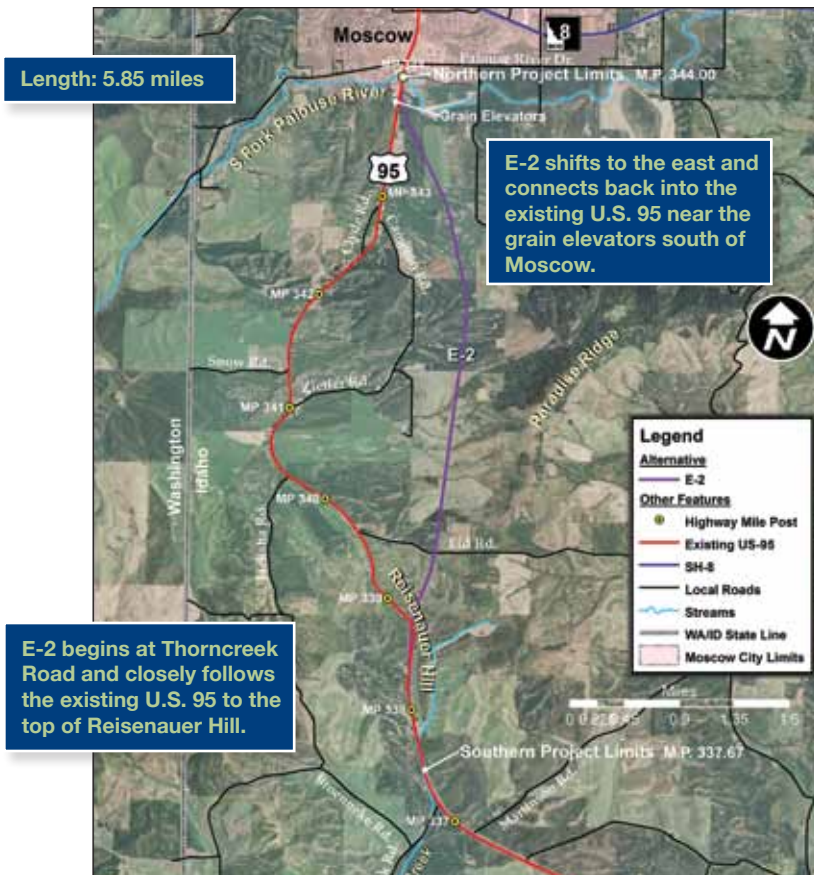
It would displace eight businesses.

It would have the greatest effect on residences and hazardous material sites.

C-3 would affect the least amount of prime farmlands and wetlands. It would require the least amount of right-of-way.

E-2: The Eastern Alternative

E-2: The Eastern Alternative (FHWA's and ITD's Preferred Alternative)



E-2 is FHWA's and ITD's Preferred Alternative because:

It is the safest alternative.

It includes the fewest number of access points (driveways and intersections). Access points increase the risk of crashes.

It would have the shortest travel time.

It would have the least effect on streams.

It avoids businesses, cultural resources and floodplains.

E-2 affects more farmland than the other alternatives and it will create more noise impacts than W-4 and C-3. It involves the most visual changes. It is also located closest to Paradise Ridge and could affect wildlife habitat.

Chapters 3–6

Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 describe the project area and how the alternatives would affect both the human and natural environment. The DEIS includes an analysis of all four alternatives. The information here focuses only on the Preferred Alternative.

The environmental analyses included:

Air quality— Additional traffic from this project would not substantially affect air quality. *Read more: Page 127, page 186*

Cultural resources— The E-2 Alternative would not affect cultural resources. *Read more: Page 75, page 148*

Energy— The E-2 Alternative is the shortest alignment, so drivers will use the least amount of fuel. *Read more: Page 132, page 191*

Farmland— All of the alternatives would affect farmland. The E-2 Alternative would cross nine farms and split four farms. ITD will work with farmers to construct slopes that can be farmed. New accesses or approaches to farmland will be avoided where possible. *Read more: Page 72, page 144*

Floodplains— The E-2 Alternative is not located in a floodplain. *Read more: Page 80, page 148*

Groundwater— Drinking water comes from underground aquifers and several wells. Pollutants could be washed off the new pavement and into the ground during storms regardless of the alternative. The E-2 Alternative would require two well relocations. *Read more: Page 93, page 159*

Hazardous materials— The E-2 Alternative would affect four fuel storage tanks. Some buildings may contain lead and asbestos. *Read more: Page 128, page 188*

Land use and recreation— The E-2 Alternative is consistent with county plans and city development goals. ITD will build six to eight foot shoulders for bicyclists and pedestrians and sidewalks in the urban section just south of Moscow. All existing access to Paradise Ridge and other recreation areas will stay open. *Read more: Page 67, page 142*

Noise— Traffic noise would increase substantially near two residences as a result of the E-2 Alternative. *Read more: Page 119, page 182*

Chapters 3–6

Socio-economic and environmental justice— The E-2 Alternative would displace five mobile homes and one garage. ITD will identify scenic turnouts and possible signage for the University of Idaho and Paradise Ridge.

Read more: Page 56, page 136

Threatened and endangered species— The W-4, C-3 and E-2 alternatives would affect Spalding’s catchfly as a result of indirect effects. However, the effects are not great. The E-2 Alternative would be the farthest alternative from known Spalding’s catchfly plants. *Read more: Page 108, page 171*

Transportation (Safety, Weather and Highway Capacity)— The E-2 Alternative would reduce crashes by 69 percent. E-2 would have the greatest reduction in travel times, the fewest access points and it is the shortest length. There is not a great difference in weather-related safety between all the alternatives. ITD will combine some existing access points and limit new ones. The speed limit will be 45 mph in the section closest to the city of Moscow and 65 mph in the rural section. *Read more: Page 111, page 173*

Vegetation, fish and wildlife— All alternatives would affect farmland, riparian areas and poor to moderate quality wildlife habitat. The E-2 Alternative would not directly impact Paradise Ridge, but it is closer to Paradise Ridge than the other alternatives. It would affect a pine stand. ITD will minimize impacts by installing nest boxes and controlling weeds. *Read more: Page 94, page 16, page 248*

Visual quality— The E-2 Alternative would change the view from Paradise Ridge, the University of Idaho Golf Course, and residences near Moscow, Cameron Road and Eid Road. ITD will minimize visual impacts by re-seeding with native grasses and contouring new slopes to blend into the existing terrain. *Read more: Page 117, page 179, page 228*

Wetlands and tributaries— The E-2 Alternative would require five stream crossings and would affect the least amount of stream channel. It would also affect 3.61 acres of wetland. ITD will develop a mitigation plan that may involve enhancing existing wetlands or constructing new wetlands. *Read more: Page 81, page 151, page 230*

Section 4(f) Evaluation— Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act protects public parks, historic sites, and wildlife and waterfowl refuges. The E-2 Alternative would not use any of these areas. *Read more: Page 194*

Indirect and Cumulative Effects— Building any of the alternatives could have indirect effects to many resources. There could also be cumulative effects when this project is added to past, present or future projects in the area. *Read more: Page 200*

Chapters 7–9

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 explain the project’s public involvement process, construction phasing and funding and ITD’s environmental commitment.

Public Involvement and Agency Coordination

Chapter 7 outlines each of the public involvement activities and agency coordination for this project.

- **Public meetings and workshops:** About 500 people helped ITD identify issues and concerns at public meetings in November 2004. Over 200 people helped identify potential alternatives at workshops in January 2005 and a meeting in April 2005. When ITD introduced 11 alternatives in January 2006, 695 people responded with comments.
- **One-on-one interviews** helped ITD identify community issues in more detail.
- **Breakfast meetings:** Monthly breakfast meetings were a forum for learning about the technical studies and providing input.
- **A mobile kiosk, regular newsletters, news releases and a project website** included project updates between public meetings.
- **Local agencies and resource agencies** gave input throughout the environmental process.



Construction phasing and funding

Chapter 8 explains how the new roadway would be funded and built. It includes a timeline for design and construction.

Environmental Commitments

Chapter 9 describes how ITD would minimize and mitigate for environmental impacts resulting from any of the alternatives; for example, seeding bare soils and limiting access. ITD would also follow local, state and federal requirements during construction.

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You are invited

The DEIS is available for public review and comment. A copy of the DEIS is available at www.us95thorncreek.com and at the following locations:

**Federal Highway Administration
Idaho Division**

3050 Lakeharbor Ln., Suite 126
Boise, ID 83703

**Idaho Transportation Department
Headquarters**

3311 W. State St.
Boise, ID 83703

Idaho State Library

325 W. State St.
Boise, ID 83702

Lewiston Library

428 Thain Rd.
Lewiston, ID 83501

**Idaho Transportation Department
District 2**

2600 Frontage Rd.
Lewiston, ID 84501-0837

Moscow Chamber of Commerce

411 S. Main St.
Moscow, ID 83843

Moscow City Hall

206 E. Third St.
Moscow, ID 83843

Moscow Public Library

110 S. Jefferson St.
Moscow, ID 83843

Genesee Public Library

140 E. Walnut St.
Genesee, ID 83832

Latah County Library

110 S. Jefferson St.
Moscow, ID 83843

Idaho State Library

Northern Field Office

1420 S. Blaine Ste. B
Moscow, ID 83843

Public Hearing

Those who attend the public hearing at the Best Western Plus University Inn on Jan. 23, 2013 from 2 to 8:30 p.m. will have the opportunity to:

- Provide written comments or give verbal testimony to a public hearing officer about the DEIS.
- Give comments during the open-microphone sessions held at 3 p.m. and 5:30 p.m.
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Fax: (208) 334-8563

Email: comments@itd.idaho.gov

All comments must be received by Feb. 23, 2013.

Next Steps

- All comments on the DEIS must be received by ITD on or before Feb. 23, 2013.
- ITD will begin to prepare the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and the Record of Decision (ROD) after Feb. 23, 2013.
- The FEIS will address public comments, make any corrections, provide new information and identify FHWA's and ITD's Selected Alternative.
- The ROD will announce the alternative and will provide the rationale for its selection. The ROD will also identify mitigation measures.

More Information

For more information about the U.S. 95, Thorncreek Road to Moscow Project:

Visit www.us95thorncreek.com

Call Ken Helm, ITD Project Manager, (208) 799-5090

Compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act

The Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) is committed to compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and all related regulations and directives. ITD assures that no person shall on the grounds of race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any ITD service, program, or activity. The department also assures that every effort will be made to prevent discrimination through the impacts of its programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations. In addition, the department will take reasonable steps to provide meaningful access to services for persons with Limited English Proficiency. Persons needing an interpreter or special accommodations are urged to contact the Public Involvement Coordinator at (208) 334-8119 or TDD/TDY (208) 334-4458.

Se les recomienda a las personas que necesiten un intérprete o arreglos especiales que llamen al coordinador de participación público al (208) 334-8119 ó TDD/TDY (208) 334-4458.

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The Idaho Transportation Department and the Federal Highway Administration look forward to reading your comments and seeing you at the public hearing.

With the completion of this project, U.S. 95 will be safer, generate increased mobility from northern to southern Idaho and contribute to the state's economic vitality.