

## 4.16. Social and Economic Elements

### 4.16.1. Introduction

This section is a new element of the environment that has been added as a result of comments received on the January 2006 EA (Jones & Stokes 2006). The County received 44 public comments regarding land use, socioeconomic and related issues (Appendix 3, categories 45.0, 45.1, 45.2, 45.4, 45.8, 45.9, and 50.0).

The proposed Urban Connector Alignment would be located in unincorporated Spokane County east of Francis Avenue in the City of Spokane and on the northern edge of the City of Spokane Valley. Spokane and the surrounding cities and unincorporated areas serve as the business, transportation, medical, industrial, and culture hub of the Inland Northwest. As the largest city between Seattle and Minneapolis, Spokane serves a thriving high-tech and healthcare sector and is an education and recreation/cultural center.

Spokane County is the fourth largest of Washington's 39 counties with an estimated 2006 population of 443,800. The estimated population in 2006 of unincorporated Spokane County is 123,411 (Washington State Office of Financial Management 2006). Most of the residents in unincorporated Spokane County live in areas adjacent to or surrounding the county's municipalities, in particular the cities of Spokane and Cheney.

### 4.16.2. What are the social and economic characteristics?

#### General Population Characteristics

The total population in the study area is 8,709. Section 4.7 of the January 2006 EA provided detailed information on the population, housing, and income for the area surrounding the proposed Urban Connector Alignment.

#### Community

The proposed Urban Connector Alignment is located north-northeast of the City of Spokane outside of the City of Spokane's Urban Growth Area boundary in an area known locally as the Orchard/Pleasant Prairie area (Davenport pers. comm.). The proposed Urban Connector Alignment would cross land developed in a rural low density land use pattern, which includes farming as a way of life. Much of the area retains an agricultural character, along with areas of forest and grass/forest areas that provide wildlife habitat.

Residential uses along the proposed corridor are for the most part scattered farm and single-family homes. There are no large-scale subdivisions located along the

proposed Urban Connector Alignment, although urban development is occurring approximately 3,000 feet south and west of the intersection of Bigelow Gulch and Argonne roads. More recent new home construction has occurred on large lots between Perrine and Evergreen roads at the east end of Bigelow Gulch Road.

### Demographic Characteristics

The study area included five block groups located adjacent to the Urban Connector Alignment; block groups are sub-units of a census tract. Demographic data for these block groups was examined and compared to countywide data for Spokane County. Please refer to Section 4.8, *Environmental Justice*, for more detailed information (organized by block groups) on race and ethnicity, linguistic isolation, and low income population in the study area.

#### *Race and Ethnicity*

In every racial/ethnic category (Hispanic, African American, Asian, and American Indian/Alaskan Native) the percentage of minority populations living within the study area was slightly lower than the minority percentage of residents within the entire county (Table 4.16-1).

**Table 4.16-1. Study Area Race and Ethnicity Data**

Block Groups	Total Population	Hispanic or Latino (any Race)	African American	Asian	American Indian and Alaska Native
Total Study Area	8,709	2.42%	0.47%	1.71%	1.58%
Spokane County, WA	417,939	2.77%	2.24%	2.63%	2.44%

Source: US Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF 1) 100-Percent Data, Tables P1, P9, and P11.

Note: The US Census Bureau defines Hispanic origin as an ethnicity and not a race. Consequently, a person of Hispanic origin may be of any race and, as such the US Census Bureau reports these characteristics separately.

Alone or in combination with one or more of the other races. The 2000 Census question on race included 15 separate response categories and three areas where respondents could write in more specific race group categories. People who responded to the question on race by indicating only one race are referred to as the race-alone population, or the group that reported only one race category. In the 2000 Census, nearly 98% of all respondents reported only one race.

The 2000 Census reported that there were 252 Spanish-speaking households and 137 households speaking an Asian language within the study area. Of those Spanish-speaking households, none are considered linguistically isolated, but 25% of the Asian-language-speaking households are considered linguistically isolated. A linguistically isolated household is one in which all household members 14 years old and over have at least some difficulty with English.

### Age

The age characteristics of the study area are comparable to those found countywide. In 2000, as shown in Table 4.16-2, census data indicated that 72.9% of the population within the study area is 18 years or older, about one percent lower than what is found countywide (74.3%).

**Table 4.16-2. Age Characteristics & Elderly Households**

Block Groups	Total Population	0-4 years	5-17 years	18-64 years	65 years and older	Elderly Households
Total Study Area	8,709	507 (5.8%)	1,855 (21.3%)	5,486 (63.0%)	861 (9.9%)	16.8%
Spokane County, WA	417,939	27,478 (6.6%)	80,022 (19.2%)	258,490 (61.9%)	51,949 (12.4%)	20.3%

Source: US Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF 1) 100-Percent Data, Table P12, P18.

Elderly households have at least one member 65 years or older.

Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

In addition, households with elderly members in the study area made up 16.8% of the households, a little lower than the 20.3% found countywide.

### Disabilities

According to the 2000 Census, 136,962 people with a long-lasting physical, mental, or emotional condition, or disability, live in Spokane County. Persons with disabilities represented 35% percent of the 390,461 county residents who were aged 5 years and older in the civilian non-institutionalized population. The proportion of people with disabilities within the study area is comparable to the countywide percentage (Table 4.16-3).

**Table 4.16-3. Persons with Disabilities**

Block Groups	Total Population 5 years and over	Population 5 years and over with Disabilities	Percent of Total Population
Total Study Area	8,202	7,691	36.2%
Spokane County, WA	390,461	136,962	35.1%

Source: U.S. Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF 3) - Sample Data, Table P41.

Disability - A long-lasting physical, mental, or emotional condition. This condition can make it difficult for a person to do activities such as walking, climbing stairs, dressing, bathing, learning, or remembering. This condition can also impede a person from being able to go outside the home alone or to work at a job or business.

The number of persons with disabilities residing in the study area was based on responses from the census short form. Respondents were asked if they had any of the following long-term conditions:

- blindness, deafness, or a severe vision or hearing impairment (sensory disability)
- or

- a condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting, or carrying (physical disability).

In addition, respondents were asked if they had a physical, mental, or emotional condition that made it difficult to perform certain activities, including:

- learning, remembering or concentrating (mental disability),
- dressing, bathing or getting around inside the home (self-care disability),
- going outside the home alone to shop or visit a doctor's office (go-outside-the-home disability), and
- working at a job or business (employment disability).

Respondents could report more than one type of disability and the disabilities could cause limitations to one or more activities. Not all limitations, however, can be assumed to affect the mobility of persons.

## Orchard Prairie

The proposed Urban Connector Alignment would cross through the farming community of Orchard Prairie, first settled in 1879. Two central landmarks in this community are the Orchard Prairie Elementary School and Central Grange No. 831. The Orchard Prairie School was built in 1894 and has continued to the present day to educate the children of this community. Grades 1 through 7 are held at the Orchard Prairie Elementary School in combined classrooms. The community takes great pride in the strong community spirit and sense of place provided by the Orchard Prairie School (Highberg 1978). The Central Grange was built in 1910 as the Orchard Prairie Congregational Church and later purchased by the Central Grange. The building is located at 7001 East Bigelow Gulch Road on the north side of the existing Bigelow Road (see Appendix E of the January 2006 EA for a more detailed description of the Central Grange).

## Public Services

Few public facilities and services are found along the Urban Connector Alignment. The project lies mostly within Spokane County Fire District No. 9. Approximately 1 mile of the proposed Urban Connector Alignment is located in Fire District No. 1. District No. 9's Fire Station No. 94 is located adjacent to the project, just southwest of the intersection of Bigelow Gulch and Jensen roads. Construction of a new fire station at that location is nearing completion.

Other public services located along or near the Urban Connector Alignment include five churches and the Spokane Humane Society, which act as local gathering places and develop community cohesion:

- Spokane Christian Center – 8909 E. Bigelow Gulch Road

- Light of Gospel Church – 5716 Progress Road N.
- East Valley Baptist Church – 14516 Wellesley Avenue East
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints- 15520 Wellesley Avenue East
- Community Church of the Bible – 4510 Sullivan Road N.
- Spokane Humane Society – along N. Havana Road near the west terminus of the project corridor

Notable public services not located within the study area, but important to residents include hospitals and libraries. The nearest hospital to the Urban Connector Alignment is located along the I-90 corridor in Spokane Valley. Argonne Library at 4322 N. Argonne Road is the nearest library located approximately two miles south of the project corridor.

## Commercial Uses

There are scattered commercial or industrial uses along the project corridor. A landscape nursery is located on the southwest corner of the intersection of Bigelow Gulch and Argonne roads. Industrial uses are located west of the project limits at the Havana Street terminus in an area known locally as the Hillyard industrial area, which includes uses such as the Losbaugh automobile recycling yard, O’Neil’s Custom Engines, and Food Service of America. Industrial and commercial uses also occur to the south and east of the eastern terminus at Wellesley Avenue in the City of Spokane Valley.

The nearest primary retail services (grocery stores, pharmacies, banks, gas stations, etc.) are located near the western and eastern termini of the project corridor within the city limits of Spokane and Spokane Valley respectively. These retail services are also available outside of the study area south of the project corridor along N. Argonne Road and I-90.

## Schools

Several educational facilities can be found along or in the immediate vicinity of the project corridor:

- Orchard Prairie Elementary School is a public elementary school located is on North Orchard Prairie Road, approximately 0.4 mile from the closest point on the proposed Urban Connector Alignment.
- Spokane Christian Academy is a private school located near the midpoint of the project, northwest of the intersection of Bigelow Gulch and Argonne roads. It provides day care and private education for kindergarten through 8th grade.
- Trentwood Elementary School is a public elementary school located on East Wellesley Avenue at the east end of the project corridor.

- East Valley Middle School and East Valley High School are public secondary schools located at the east end of the project corridor, approximately one-half mile from the closest point to the Urban Connector Alignment.

Demographic data for these five schools was found on the National Center for Education Statistics website and was previously presented in Table 4.8-1.

The project corridor crosses through three school districts: Orchard Prairie No.23, West Valley No. 363, and East Valley No.361.

- The Orchard Prairie school district consists of one elementary school, Orchard Prairie (K–7), with an enrollment in 2005 of 74 students.
- The West Valley School district had a total enrollment of 3,082 in 2005 and is composed of one early childhood education center, four elementary schools, two middle schools, a high school, and two nontraditional high schools. No schools in the West Valley School district are found along the project corridor.
- The East Valley School District had a total enrollment of 4,382 in 2005 and is comprised of six elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. East Valley Middle School is located at the eastern end of the project corridor had an enrollment of 544 in 2005. Across Sullivan Road from the middle school is East Valley High School, which had an enrollment of 1,431 in 2005 (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction 2006).

### 4.16.3. What regulations apply to social and economic elements?

#### Community Character and Cohesion

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, established that the federal government use all practicable means to ensure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings [42 U.S. Code 4331(b)(2)]. The Federal Highway Administration in its implementation of the NEPA [23 U.S. Code 109(h)] directs that final decisions regarding projects shall be made in the best overall public interest. This requires taking into account adverse environmental impacts, such as destruction or disruption of human-made resources, community cohesion, and the availability of public facilities and services.

Other applicable statutes and regulations include Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Presidential Executive Order 13166 – Limited English Proficiency, Presidential Executive Order 12898 – Environmental Justice, the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act as amended, the Civil Rights Restoration Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Age Discrimination Act. These statutes and regulations have to do with effects on people and provide guidance to

prevent discrimination based on age, race, or ethnicity and reduce disproportion effects to disadvantaged populations.

The WSDOT *Environmental Procedures Manual* (WSDOT 2006a) defines community cohesion as “the ability of people to communicate and interact with each other in ways that lead to a sense of community, as reflected in the neighborhood’s ability to function and be recognized as a singular unit.”

The project area includes five local churches, four schools, one fire station, and a Grange Hall that help define the community’s sense of place. Other public facilities, as well as commercial services, are located one to two miles outside of the project area. As previously noted in Section 4.16.2, the Orchard Prairie community exhibits a strong sense of place and community involvement.

#### 4.16.4. How were potential effects evaluated?

The analysis of impacts involved the compilation and review of the County and City of Spokane Valley Comprehensive Plan policies for consistency with proposed alignment and conformance with the existing long-range plans of each jurisdiction, review of aerial photographs and discussions with Spokane County planning staff.

Of importance in the impact analysis were the considerations of any significant population or employment changes, any neighborhood division or separation from services, changes in community cohesion, or changes in housing and service; or substantial impacts on businesses and service providers in an area, either directly or indirectly.

Cumulative impacts were also analyzed and are presented in Section 4.17 of this Revised EA. It was assumed that all aspects of the proposed action would be performed in accordance with all applicable existing laws, regulations, and permit conditions. Analysis of potential impacts was based on project activities described in Chapter 2, *Project Description*.

#### 4.16.5. What impacts would the Urban Connector Alignment have on social and economic elements?

No Action

##### How would construction affect social and economic elements?

There would be no construction-related impacts.

##### How would operation affect social and economic elements?

No Action would not meet the proposed action’s purpose and need, part of which is tied to improvement of movement of goods and freight between the light industrial

and commercial development at both ends of the Urban Connector Alignment. There would be continuing loss of lives and injuries from a very high level of accidents.

## Proposed Action

### How would construction and operation affect social and economic elements?

#### *Community Cohesion*

The effects of transportation projects on community cohesion may include splitting communities, isolating or separating portions of a neighborhood, changing property values, or separating residents from community facilities or services. Potential effects on community cohesion were identified by reviewing the air quality, environmental justice, land use and displacements, noise, transportation, and visual sections of this Revised EA.

Because Bigelow Gulch and Forker roads are existing roadways through low-density development, no new communities would be divided or isolated, nor residents separated from community facilities or services, nor would any community service boundaries, such as school districts or fire districts, be severed or bisected.

Through comment letters received and public testimony taken at several public meetings about the Urban Corridor Alignment, members of the community raised concerns about project-related social and economic effects to their rural community. Many of these comments raised specific concerns about degradation of the Orchard Prairie community's quality of life. The specific community concerns cited are included in Appendix 3 of this revised EA. These comments ranged from concerns about increased traffic in the rural environment, the negative impacts of widening or relocating the roadway closer to existing residences, the potential for this roadway improvement to lead to future zoning changes that would increase development leading to increased school enrollment.

Impacts from the proposed Urban Connector Alignment are expected to be limited to individual or small clusters of homes and outbuildings located along the alignment. In some instances, the location of the proposed alignment would differ from the existing location of Bigelow Gulch Road but it would continue to pass through a primarily rural area of the county. No overall community changes are expected as a result of the Urban Connector Alignment.

The proposed Urban Connector Alignment could impact some existing uses located along the corridor. Impacts would be generally limited to those properties immediately abutting the existing and proposed alignments. Overall, the project would benefit local residents as well as residents and businesses in the larger Spokane area. The wider roadway and 8-foot-wide shoulders on each side would

allow slow-moving farm equipment to more easily and safely move along or across the roadway. Other benefits would include a reduction in accidents from improved roadway alignment and sight-distances that would benefit both pedestrians and drivers accessing and crossing Bigelow Gulch and Forker Roads (see Section 4.9, *Transportation*, for discussion of safety).

The proposed roadway improvement would include construction of approximately 4,000 linear feet of new roadway within new right-of-way in the Weile Avenue area (Figure 2-1). Construction of the new roadway at that location would mean that approximately 5,000 feet of the current Bigelow Gulch roadway would be bypassed by the new alignment, which would result in a reduction in traffic along the northern loop of Bigelow Gulch Road in the vicinity of Orchard Prairie Road and the Central Grange. Residents using this area of the community would have greater ease traveling either by motor vehicle, bicycle, or as pedestrians due to the reduced traffic volumes along this section of Bigelow Gulch Road.

The new alignment would result in the physical separation of some residences from one another between East Wilding Avenue and East Weile Avenue, and between North Eastern and Thierman roads. This physical separation between households would alter roadway configurations in the area, requiring changes in pattern of travel of residents along that portion of the alignment, and in increased effort and travel time between households on either side of the new alignment. These changes would not block or restrict access to any properties, community facilities, or services. The linkage between the neighborhood and community facilities would be altered but not impaired.

For residents located east of the eastern intersection of East Weile Avenue to Forker Road, the proposed Urban Connector Alignment would be the widening of an existing roadway that is currently an element of the community. The proposed alignment would increase the number of travel lanes from two to four lanes plus center median. The widening of the roadway would allow residents greater ease and improved safety in access to and egress from their residences by motor vehicle or bicycle and a need for greater caution in crossing the roadway by foot or bicycle. The speed limit on the roadway would remain the same; however, sightlines and distance would improve to the benefit of pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists crossing the roadway.

### *Housing*

Construction of the proposed Urban Connector Alignment would result in a combination of partial and total property acquisition for road right-of-way, including the relocation (displacements) of nine homes and five outbuildings in this rural area. The impact of these relocations is presented in Section 4.7, *Land Use and Displacement*, of this Revised EA. While these relocations would affect the residents on individual parcels and farms, there would be minimal effect on the overall

community structure. Existing residences with access to Bigelow Gulch would have their current access points relocated, realigned, and/or improved to comply with design standards and to improve safety.

Spokane County has purchased six of the nine homes, with the remaining three yet to be purchased. According to Spokane County, two of the parcels with homes would be required for the proposed roadway or associated facilities such as stormwater swales, channels, and detention ponds. These properties would be removed from the future tax roll. The two properties would result in the loss of approximately \$1,900 per year of taxes, or the equivalent of 0.0007% of the County's assessed valuation. The third property would also be acquired, and the house removed to accommodate the proposed action. At a later date the remaining buildable portion of the parcel would be resold, with the property added back onto the tax roll at some future date (Hemmings pers. comm.). This would result in a short-term loss of tax revenue of minimal impact.

Spokane County would work with the current owners and occupants regarding the relocations. The occupants would be entitled to receive relocation benefits following the formal purchase offer to the property owner. Monetary benefits would also be available for moving and reestablishment expenses up to specific limits.

### *Public Services*

Construction of the new Fire Station No. 94 located at the intersection of Bigelow Gulch and Jensen roads is nearing completion. The new station is located farther from Bigelow Gulch Road, with new access to Jensen Road and direct access to Bigelow Gulch Road eliminated. The old fire station would be demolished when construction is complete. Spokane County would provide cost sharing with the fire district associated with the proposed Urban Connector Alignment project.

The proposed action would require property at the Light of Gospel Church on Progress Road. The proposed roadway would be located immediately east of existing church parking, while a proposed detention pond would be located adjacent to the north church entrance, and the south entrance to the church parking lot would be modified by widening of Progress Road and the access road from Forker Road. These uses would not displace or restrict access to the church.

No effects are expected to occur to other public services from construction or operation of the proposed action.

### *Commercial*

Construction of the project would not relocate any businesses but would require modified access to businesses at the west end of the project near Havana Street. Traffic delays may occur to commercial vehicles using along the corridor during construction, which may lead businesses transporting goods and services via Bigelow

Gulch Road and Forbes Road to seek alternative travel routes. Businesses would remain open and access would be provided through the duration of the project, though temporary short-term delays may be expected.

### *Schools*

Under the proposed action, the Urban Connector Alignment would be located 0.4 mile from the Orchard Prairie School that is approximately 1,200 feet farther than the school is from the existing Bigelow Gulch Road.

With the exception of modified access at Old Bigelow Gulch, Forker, and Progress roads, access to Bigelow Road by school buses would remain unchanged. Based on consultation with the School Districts, no change in school bus service is anticipated at this time (Greene pers. comm.).

Under the proposed action, the Urban Connector Alignment would result in a more restricted movement of students between the East Valley Middle School sports fields and the East Valley High School. Fencing would be installed between the schools. Access would be provided by a crosswalk at the intersection of Sullivan Road and Wellesley Avenue and either an overpass or pedestrian tunnel under the roadway. Please see Chapter 5, *Section 4(f) Evaluation*, for further discussion.

Construction of the proposed Urban Connector Alignment would result in a shift of traffic from Progress Road to Sullivan Road, which would be beneficial to the East Valley Middle School. Under current conditions, a majority of the traffic in the Bigelow Gulch Road/Forker Road corridor uses Progress Road, passing in front of the East Valley Middle School.

### **What are the indirect effects on social and economic elements?**

Indirect effects are those caused by the proposed action that are later in time or farther removed in distance, but still reasonably foreseeable.

The proposed Urban Connector Alignment would include additional travel lanes and safety measures that would benefit drivers traveling to and from residences within the study area, as well as drivers and freight traffic traveling between the cities of Spokane Valley and Spokane.

As mentioned in Section 4.7, *Land Use and Displacement*, construction of the proposed action could lead to the request for zoning and land use changes on land adjacent to or in close proximity to the proposed Urban Connector Alignment. There may be a desire by property owners and developers to allow more intensive development in the area around the roadway. The outcome of such requested changes would be determined through the County process for evaluating and either approving or denying the changes. Spokane County is currently completing amendments to the comprehensive plan that could include proposed changes to the land use designation and/or UGA boundary.

## What measures are proposed to minimize effects to social and economic elements?

### *Design*

- Spokane County will work with the community during the final engineering design phase to address site-specific aspects of the Urban Connector Alignment, such as access points, retention or installation of landscaping, or construction of an earth-berm to create a visual barrier where the roadway is being relocated closer to an existing residence.
- Spokane County will work with East Valley School District regarding recreation and access mitigation defined in Chapter 5, *Section 4(f) Evaluation*.

### *Construction*

- Spokane County will inform the public, school districts, churches, fire districts, law enforcement, emergency service providers, and transit agencies of changes in traffic flow or lane closures ahead of time through a public information process (see Section 4.9, *Transportation*, mitigation measures);
- Spokane County will provide a contact person whom the public may contact to submit complaints, problems and suggestions related to construction; and
- Spokane County will maintain access to businesses and homes during construction. Please see Sections 4.9, *Transportation*, 4.10, *Air Quality*, and 4.11, *Noise*, for additional mitigation measures regarding mitigation measures for traffic control, dust, and construction-related noise.

Analysis of the effects of the proposed action on social and economic elements in the project vicinity indicates that none would rise to a level of significance. The final design aspects and construction measures listed in this section were considered in reaching this conclusion.