

Executive Summary

This document is a Revised Environmental Assessment to the January 2006 Bigelow Gulch Road/Forker Road Urban Connector Project Environmental Assessment prepared for the proposed corridor improvement project to be constructed along the existing Bigelow Gulch Road and Forker Road for much of its distance.

Why was the Environmental Assessment Revised?

On January 27, 2006, the Spokane County Public Works Department, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) issued a National Environmental Policy Act Environmental Assessment (EA) and Section 4(f) Evaluation for proposed Bigelow Gulch/Forker Road project. Public review of the EA included an extended comment period, public open houses, and a public hearing held March 22, 2006.

Following public review of the January 2006 EA, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) concluded that a revised EA should be prepared to address public comments and to expand analysis of impacts of several elements of the environment.

What does the Revised Environmental Assessment Cover?

This revised EA includes a project description, including changes to the proposal that have occurred since the January 2006 EA; an expanded discussion of project alternatives, including the engineering analysis used to select the proposed project; an expanded analysis of the elements of the environment; and a restatement of the Section 4(f) Evaluation. Socioeconomics, a new section, has been added to the

analysis. Appendices present the distribution list, mitigation commitments, public comments and responses, a discussion of farmlands, and an addendum to the cultural resources report previously provided as an appendix to the January 2006 EA.

This revised EA and the January 2006 EA are available at the Spokane County Public Works' website at:

<http://www.spokanecounty.org/engineer/bigelowgulchforkerconnector.asp>.

Project Benefits

The Bigelow Gulch Road/Forker Road is a history of high collision rates, substandard roadway conditions, and a declining vehicle capacity. The proposed project would result in a number of benefits including:

- Improved safety for vehicles, pedestrian, and bicycle users in the corridor;
- Reduced number of head-on vehicle collisions;
- Improved travel times and reduced congestion during peak hours;
- Improved freight mobility;
- Reduced pollutant loading from the roadway as a result of stormwater treatment and detention;
- Improved air quality from reduced numbers of idling vehicles at intersections; and
- Increased capacity to temporarily handle the future traffic from the first phase of the North Spokane Corridor.

Where is the Bigelow Gulch Urban Connector located?

The Bigelow Gulch Urban Connector Project is located in Spokane County, Washington. The project would extend from the eastern edge of the City of Spokane, through unincorporated Spokane County, and continue east to the northern boundary of the City of Spokane Valley in the Sullivan Road and Wellesley Avenue vicinity.

What is the Bigelow Gulch Urban Connector Project?

The Bigelow Gulch Urban Connector project (Figure ES-1) includes the following basic elements:

- From Havana Street to the intersection of Forker Road and Progress Road (approximately 7.4 miles) the new roadway would be a rural-type, four-lane

roadway with alternating gravel median and two-way left-turn pockets and paved shoulders;

- From the Forker Road/Progress Road intersection to Wellesley Avenue (approximately 0.8 mile), the new roadway would be an urban-type four-lane roadway with two-way turn pockets, bicycle lanes, swales, and sidewalks;
- A 0.14-mile portion of the right-of-way from west of Jensen Road to just west of Argonne Road would be reduced in width from 120 to 80 feet and shifted slightly south to avoid the historic Karl Paulson Farmstead on Bigelow Gulch Road; and
- An undercrossing from Forker Road would merge with the East Bigelow Gulch Road eastbound traffic about 500 feet east of the proposed East Bigelow Gulch Road/N Forker Road intersection.

Other improvements will include new traffic signals and stormwater detention and water quality treatment facilities. A detailed description of the proposed project is presented in Chapter 2.

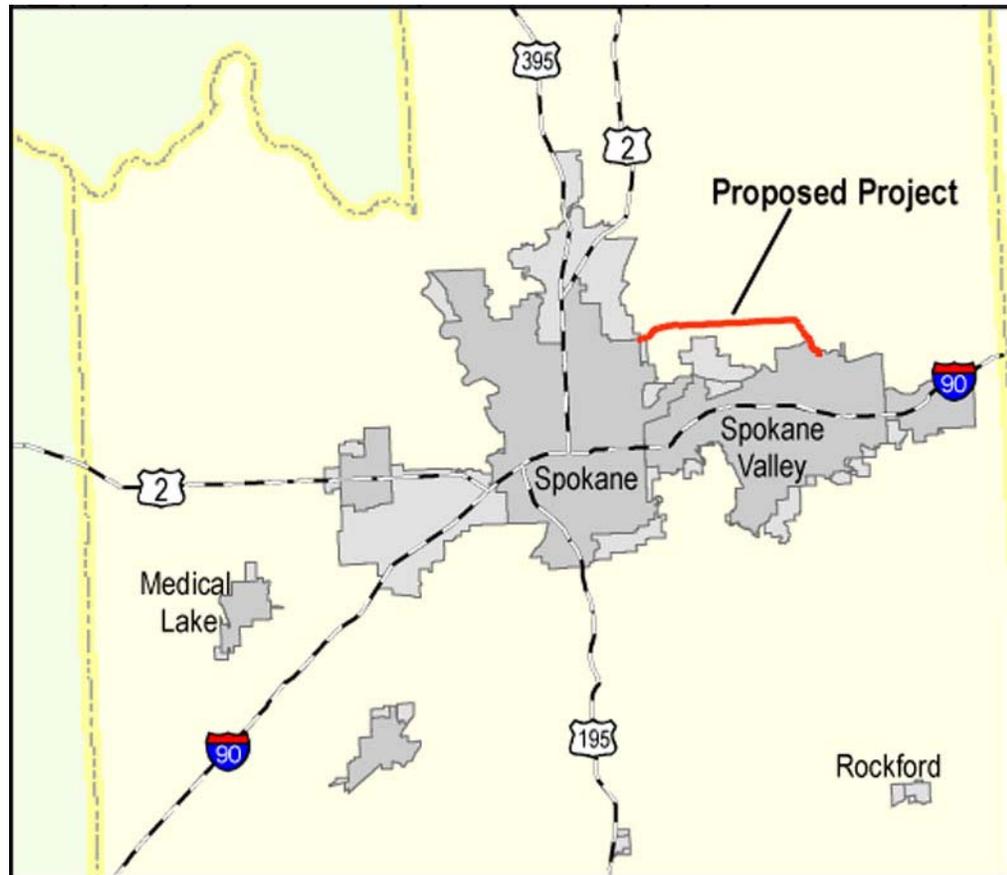
Why is this project being built?

The Bigelow Gulch Urban Connector project is intended to increase capacity, improve the transportation system linkage, improve roadway safety, and to accommodate existing and future freight linkages between areas north of Spokane (City and County) to the industrial/retail areas east of Spokane and Interstate (I)-90.

When will construction begin and how long will it take?

Construction would occur in six phases beginning in 2008 and extend through 2012. Three of the phases from Havana Street to Argonne Road would be completed in 2009, with the remaining three projects (from Argonne Road to Wellesley Avenue) completed during the 2010 to 2012 timeframe.

Figure ES-1. Location of Bigelow Gulch Urban Connector Project



What effects will the project have on the environment?

Based on the analysis conducted for this project, the level of impact of the proposed action would vary among environmental resources. Construction would disturb soils; modify topography and local drainage patterns; and impact wetlands, streams, and wildlife habitat. The roadway would modify existing localized patterns of travel and movement of residents, increase traffic noise for some adjacent residences, displace some housing units, and affect several acres of sports fields at the East Valley Middle School. Elements of the environment are analyzed in Chapter 4. Mitigation measures would be implemented to reduce impacts. The EA document section number for each element is in bold text following each summary discussion below. Where appropriate, mitigation measures are included in the summaries.

How will the project affect the natural and physical environment?

Geology and Soils: Construction of the proposed roadway would require earthwork. Effects on geology and soils in the project area will be managed through the implementation of a Temporary Erosion and Sediment Control plan, including construction best management practices for slope construction and protection.

Section 4.1

Groundwater: Groundwater and water supply wells could be affected by construction of the Urban Connector. Operation of the proposed project would result in an increase in impervious surface, runoff, and pollutants. Pre- and post-construction monitoring would occur for all water supply wells located within 1,000 feet of the alignment where recommended by the geotechnical engineer or as requested by applicable property owners. An alternative water supply would be provided for wells impacted by the project. The quantity and quality of runoff would be managed through the implementation of a stormwater management program that complies with the requirements of the *Spokane County Guidelines for Stormwater Management* (Spokane County et al. 2005). **Section 4.2**

Floodplains: Construction of the proposed Urban Connector would require construction in a small portion of floodplains located at both ends of the proposed alignment. Through use of a combination of stormwater detention and conveyance, the project would meet the requirements of the Spokane County Code (SCC).

Section 4.3

Wetlands: The proposed Urban Connector will affect several small areas of wetlands, requiring fill of 0.71 acre of wetland. Mitigation to achieve “No Net Loss” will be provided to compensate for wetland fill based on the requirements of SCC Chapter 11.20. **Section 4.4**

Streams: Construction of the proposed project would require the installation of culverts under road crossings and the reconstruction of stream segments as open stream channels. Impacts would primarily occur in Bigelow Gulch Creek at the western end of the project, and in Forker Creek at the eastern end of the project and would include impact to stream buffers (per Section 11.20.060 of SCC), modification to hydrologic processes of streams, and an increase of 56.9 acres of impervious surface in four subbasins. Mitigation would include the implementation of a stormwater management system per Spokane County guidelines for stormwater management (Spokane County et al. 2005) to control runoff quantity and quality in the subbasins. The stream channels supporting fish would be reconstructed following *Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Aquatic Habitat Guidelines* (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife 2004). **Section 4.5**

Vegetation and Wildlife: The proposed project would remove 37.8 acres of forest and grass/scattered trees and shrubs, 71.6 acres of non-forested, largely agricultural fields and areas modified by development (e.g., yards, driveways, etc.), and 0.71 acre of wetland. This habitat would be converted to impervious surface and associated built features, or seeded and/or planted with shrubs (approximately 53.5 acres).

Approximately 7.8 acres of old roadway would be decommissioned and existing pavement and unsuitable subgrade material removed. The areas would be regraded and planted to shrubs, trees, and grass for wildlife habitat. Approximately 6.6 acres of existing ponderosa pine forest at the west end of the proposed alignment would be designated as open space and wildlife habitat. **Section 4.6**

Land Use: The project is compatible with planning policies for the area. The project would require acquisition of several properties along the roadway corridors.

Compensation would be made for property acquisition, and relocation assistance would be provided. Property acquisition would comply with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 as amended and other applicable federal and state regulations. **Section 4.7**

Environmental Justice: The proposed project would not result in any disproportionate, high, and adverse impacts to minority or low-income populations, and the project has met the requirements of Executive Order 12898 and its supporting law Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. **Section 4.8**

Transportation: Construction of the proposed project would result in temporary increase in traffic congestion during roadway construction but improved traffic flow, decreased congestion, and improved traffic safety during project operation. The proposed action would meet the peak-hour Level-of-Service standards for intersections and roadway segments. Improvements would be made at the intersection of Sullivan Road and Euclid as mitigation. **Section 4.9**

Air Quality: The project will conform to the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for the Spokane area. **Section 4.10**

Noise: Construction of Urban Connector will increase traffic noise for adjacent residences. A total of 20 homes would be subjected to traffic noise exceeding WSDOT noise abatement criteria (where outdoor noise level exceeds 66 A-weighted decibels (dBA) or where there is a noise level increase of 10 dBA or more) in 2025. It has been determined that noise barriers do not meet WSDOT's criteria for reasonableness and feasibility. However, Spokane County will work with property owners regarding potential screening of homes where future noise levels are expected to exceed WSDOT criteria. **Section 4.11**

Visual Quality: Construction of the Urban Connector would result in loss of natural vegetative visual screening along portions of the alignment and a change in views for residents where new roadway would be built. **Section 4.12**

Parks and Recreation: The proposed action would not impact parks. Impacts on recreation would occur at the East Valley Middle School sports fields and would be mitigated through the addition of replacement fields north of the existing fields (see Chapter 5, *Section 4(f) Evaluation*). **Section 4.13**

Cultural and Historic Resources: The project will not affect archaeological or cultural resources; however, it is possible that construction activity may uncover previously unrecorded cultural resources. If unrecorded resources are discovered, Spokane County would implement plans and procedures to address unanticipated discovery of cultural resources. **Section 4.14**

Hazardous Materials: Five previously recorded HAZMAT properties were identified within the project area, none of which represents an environmental concern to the proposed project. Additionally, structures to be demolished as part of the proposed action would need to be inspected and any hazardous materials (e.g., asbestos, lead-based paint, underground fuel tanks) removed prior to construction. **Section 4.15**

Social and Economic Elements: Impacts on community cohesion would vary with location along the proposed alignment. Some residents in the Orchard Prairie community would experience reduced traffic volumes, and others would experience a new or wider roadway. The proposed roadway would allow for greater ease in moving farm equipment. Traffic delays would occur during construction, and these delays may cause businesses transporting goods or providing services via Bigelow Gulch Road and Forker Road to seek alternative truck routes. **Section 4.16**

Cumulative Effects: With the exception of noise, the cumulative effects analysis focused on all elements of the natural and built environment evaluated in this Revised EA in addition to the North Spokane Corridor and the I-90 (Sullivan Road to the Idaho State line) widening, two “reasonably foreseeable” scheduled projects. When analyzed in combination, the projects would result in impacts to natural resources and land use in the area. These changes would be moderated through the implementation of best management practices required by regulation and mitigation measures prescribed for the projects. **Section 4.17**

Section 4(f) Evaluation: The Urban Connector Alignment would use 3.42 acres of recreation property (sports fields) and open space at the East Valley Middle School, but would not use historic properties. Measures to minimize use of the recreational fields would include providing additional land for recreation, a pedestrian tunnel or bridge between the middle and high schools, and other improvements. **Chapter 5**