

**Comment: Existing US 20 should be improved and widened, or converted to an expressway, as an alternative for addressing traffic needs**

**Response: Improvements to US 20 on its existing alignment would not effectively address traffic and safety needs, while the Preferred Alternative does address these needs**

The purpose of the proposed action is to provide a transportation facility that properly addresses existing and projected system deficiencies and seeks to improve the safety and efficiency of the transportation system. This would include the high level of trips caused by increasing economic development and recreational activity within the area. The proposed improvements will integrate the needs of travel safety, increased development, system capacity, community access, and system continuity. These needs have been echoed by many of the communities in the study area.

To meet these needs the alternates evaluated were a No-Action Alternative and two Build Alternatives, an expressway and a freeway, both of which would be constructed as four-lane facilities. Under the No-Action Alternative, the proposed project would not be constructed or implemented. However, this would perpetuate a functionally obsolete facility. The No-Action Alternative would not reduce congestion, improve traffic safety, provide system continuity, improve community access or meet the demands of economic development and recreational growth in the region.

The existing US 20 roadway has been assessed and found to have widespread deficiencies in terms of horizontal alignment, vertical alignment, and cross section. Very high costs and complexities would be involved in addressing these deficiencies solely through US 20 upgrades. Local development impacts, environmental impacts, and traffic disruption would be three major concerns with such an upgrade, and the needs for the project would still not be effectively addressed.

Expressways have partial access control and employ the use of at-grade intersections. Freeways are divided highway facilities and use interchanges to fully control access. The Department has found that the Freeway Alternates would address traffic safety in the project corridor to a much higher degree than would the Expressway Alternates, due to the exclusion of at-grade intersections and the introduction of grade-separated interchanges. The Department's traffic crash data supports recent research indicating that grade-separated interchanges provide a much greater level of safety than at-grade and signalized intersections, such as would be constructed with the Expressway Alternates. Concerns regarding expressway safety would become more and more pertinent in the future as local development continues and opportunities for conflicts increase.

After years of coordination and participation, many local communities, including Freeport, Lena, Stockton, Hanover, and Galena, have supported the construction of a 4-lane freeway. Based on social, economic, environmental and engineering design studies, input from the general public and the recommendations of the Advisory Council, the Department has determined that the Long Hollow Freeway with the South Simmons Mound variation is the Preferred Alternative. This selection includes the proposed locations of interchanges.

The Department has found that compared to the other Build Alternates, the preferred alternative:

- best facilitates the travel and market access needs of the local communities;

- provides the best opportunity to facilitate contiguous growth and development for communities in the U.S. Route 20 corridor;
- supports the Stephenson County Comprehensive land-use plan, which recommends a four-lane freeway; and
- is one of the least costly alternates to build.