



U.S. Department  
of Transportation

**Federal Highway  
Administration**

**Ohio Division**

July 10, 2009

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Director Jolene M. Molitoris  
Ohio Department of Transportation  
1980 West Broad Street  
Columbus, OH 43223

In Reply Refer To:  
HEO-OH

Subject: I-70/I-71 South Innerbelt Project, FRA-70-8.93(PID 77369)

Dear Director Molitoris:

On June 15, 2009 ODOT requested FHWA issuance of a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the subject project. In an earlier letter dated April 21, 2009, ODOT requested FHWA approval of an Interstate Access Modification Study (IMS) for the subject project.

The project proposes major improvements to the I-70/I-71/SR 315 freeway system known as Columbus' South Innerbelt and involves changing the I-70 and I-71 lane assignments, adding additional through lanes on I-70 and I-71 and reconfiguring the I-70/I-71/SR 315 west interchange and the I-70/I-71 east interchange. The improvements will also consolidate access to the downtown area by moving ramps to the periphery of the I-70/I-71 overlap section and requiring motorists traveling to and from downtown Columbus to use one-way urban corridor streets.

Specifically, the proposed improvements will modify the current corridor by reducing the number of access points to I-70 and I-71 and widening segments of I-70 and I-71 to 5 travel lanes in each travel direction in downtown Columbus. Access to and from downtown Columbus will occur through the use of improved one-way City Streets which will act as frontage roads. The proposed design will also provide greater lane continuity for both I-70 & I-71 through a modified pair of system interchanges, whereby weaves are minimized but not entirely eliminated in the design. The proposed corridor improvements improve the operation and safety of the interstates, and include alignments which were optimized to have minimal right-of-way impact but still meet the purpose and need of the project. Our staff has coordinated with staff from ODOT's Office of Roadway Engineering Services on development, analysis, and completion of the IMS. Our previous comments have been adequately addressed. The proposed improvements for the I-70/I-71 project are currently estimated to require a \$1.69 Billion public investment (as verified by a FHWA Cost Estimate Review). Our office has coordinated the review and approval of the IMS with our Washington office and we hereby approve the proposed changes in access to the I-70/I-71 project, effective on July 8, 2009. This FHWA IMS approval is conditional upon ODOT addressing and



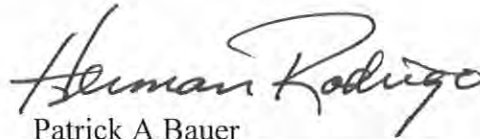
resolving the enclosed FHWA Technical Review Comments on the Conceptual Signing Plan which accompanied ODOT's IMS submittal to FHWA.

With submission of the final IMS document, FHWA was able to complete the environmental process for the subject project. FHWA approved the Environmental Assessment (EA)/ Draft Section 4(f) document on January 14, 2009 for public distribution and comment. The proposed project will require use of land from various Section 4(f) properties, including Section 4(f) Historic resources and Section 4(f) Park and Recreational Lands. Public and Agency comments on the document have been received and properly addressed and resolved.

The EA was independently evaluated by the FHWA and determined to adequately and accurately discuss the need, environmental issues, and impacts of the proposed project and appropriate mitigation measures. It provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required. Based on our review of the EA, subsequent comments on the EA and their responses and supporting technical studies, the FHWA has determined this proposed action to reconstruct the I-70/I-71 South Innerbelt will have no significant impact on the human or natural environment. Enclosed for your records and appropriate action is FHWA's FONSI determination signed on July 8, 2009.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Roger Ryder, Program Delivery Engineer – Team Leader, at (614)280-6849 or [Roger.Ryder@fhwa.dot.gov](mailto:Roger.Ryder@fhwa.dot.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Herman Rodriguez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Herman" and last name "Rodriguez" clearly distinguishable.

For:

Patrick A Bauer  
Acting Division Administrator

Enclosure(s)

ecc:

ODOT:

Tim McDonald

Tim Hill

Dirk Gross

James Young

Carmen Stemen

James Gates

Leonard Brown

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Dave Snyder

Jim Buckson

Tom Lefchik

Roger Ryder

File: FRA 77369

## **FHWA Technical Review Comments on the Conceptual Signing Plan for I-70/71:**

FHWA reviewed the signing plan from a qualitative standpoint and below are general areas of concern only (i.e., not every individual location) related to and to be applied to the entire project as a whole which will need to be addressed and resolved by ODOT during the design phase of the I-70/71 project:

### **1. Use of Option Lanes and Effect on Guide Signing**

The overuse of option lanes at major splits significantly complicates effective signing due to their proximity to and intermixing with service ramps. The manner in which the option lanes are proposed to be signed is with multiple down arrows pointing to a single lane. There is no provision in the MUTCD for this method of signing, which has been shown to be ineffective and confusing. This type of signing was also identified in the Complex Interchange Scan as being problematic. The correct and most effective manner in which to sign an option lane is with a diagrammatic type of sign, preferably the proposed method of one lane-use arrow above each lane. However, placing this type of signing adjacent to lanes that serve another exit also presents a confusing arrangement because the point of departure for the major split can be confused, depending on the location of the signs.

For example, I-70 WB Sta. 811 shows 5 signs on one span with a total of 8 down arrows pointing to 6 lanes. The two decision points--one a major system split, the other a service ramp--are separated by about 800 feet with an option lane that flares out gradually and subtly over this distance, also an issue of concern identified in the CI Scan. This location has two issues of concern that are causing the signing to be unclear and exceed the maximum recommended amount of information in a single display: (1) the proximity of the two decision points and (2) the use of the option lane for the major split to a 3-lane connection to I-71 NB. If the decision points were to remain in the same relative locations, the signing could be cleared up and messages positively conveyed by eliminating the option lane and providing only dedicated lanes--two for I-70 WB and two for I-71 NB, where the I-670 traffic could then be segregated beyond the influence of the split. We do not see the option lane as being necessary to reduce lane changes or address weave concerns because all entrances are from the right side. The option lane also does nothing to serve I-70 traffic, as traffic entering from the right would have to enter that lane to remain on that route whether it is an option lane or a dedicated lane. Providing Advance Guide signs in a 2-mile sequence should address any concerns of late lane changes from the 2 left lanes of I-70 WB to access I-71 NB.

If the third lane is needed at the split to I-71 based on traffic volumes, then we suggest considering splitting the I-70 and I-71 traffic farther east, outside the influence of an adjacent service interchange to create either a C-D road serving I-71 and Downtown traffic, or a parallel direct connection to I-71 NB where the Downtown exit would still depart from I-70, but beyond the influence of the major split. Separation between the I-71 split and the Downtown ramp would enable sign spreading, reducing the informational load at each location to a manageable level. It would also allow for the effective use of a diagrammatic arrow-per-lane sign to depict the option lane and preclude confusion with direction to the service ramp instead of the system ramp.

## 2. Sign Spreading and Informational Load of Sign Displays

There is ample opportunity within this project to employ sign spreading to reduce the informational load imposed on motorists at any one location. Sign spreading is a concept whereby major overhead signs are placed at separate locations along the freeway such that the Exit Direction sign is the only sign placed at the decision point and not co-located with an Advance Guide sign for the following exit. Applying sign spreading to a major split would involve placing only those signs pertinent to the decision at the bifurcation--i.e., the Exit Direction and Pull-through signs. In many cases in the project, major split signing for system interchanges is intermixed with service ramp Advance Guide signing at the bifurcation, unduly increasing the informational load at an already complex decision point due, in part, to the presence of an option lane. If a service ramp is accessed within one of the system ramps, then the signing for the service ramp should be accomplished by means of a Supplemental Guide sign elsewhere in the sequence. If the service ramp has high enough frequency of unfamiliar users that a full advance signing sequence is necessary, then the location of the ramp within the system interchange should be reconsidered in order to more effectively provide the signing that does not conflict or overlap with that of the system connections.

## 3. Location of Exit Direction Signs

Exit Direction signs seem to be consistently located incorrectly, not coincident with the approximate theoretical nose. Instead many of the signs are located well into the painted gore. Locating the Exit Direction sign beyond the theoretical nose reduces its effectiveness, particularly at locations with longer gores, because they are placed such that late maneuvers across the gore can be induced due to limited visibility of the signs on an approach caused by such features as horizontal alignment, retaining walls, or bridge abutments. Consistent placement of the Exit Direction signs will help address expectancy issues.

## 4. Use of Down Arrows on Advance Guide Signs Over Non-Dedicated Lanes

At several locations, down arrows are used to assign destinations or route direction to specific lanes on the Advance Guide signs. However, as one travels along through the signing sequence, the lane assignment changes due to intervening ramps, forcing traffic to change lanes between the first sign and the decision point. This condition is particularly evident along the connection from I-70 WB to I-670. The first signs assign I-670 WB and EB separately to each of the two available lanes. Beyond the point where the 2-lane ramp joins the 6-lane I-71 NB weave, the signing then informs the motorist that the lane previously designated for I-670 EB is actually a lane drop to a service ramp, forcing a lane change to the left while traffic also merges from the right. While the intent might be to balance traffic along the ramp, then re-balance it based on a cross-sectional change, we believe it would be more effective and less confusing to simply sign the 2-lane ramp generally to I-670 and not specifically assign each direction to specific lanes that do not ultimately serve the signed destination. The effect would be that unnecessary lane changes by those bound for I-670 EB would not occur if those vehicles were already in the left lane of the ramp connection. A progressive changing of lanes through a corridor by shifting the sign location by one lane at a time is counterintuitive to the motorist and only serves to confuse them because the specificity at each sign location implies that they have already selected the correct lane, which is actually not the case. Signing more generally to the route and not each direction in this case would prepare the motorist to keep seeking out the desired direction of travel at the appropriate location.

##### 5. Successive Ramp Terminal Distances and Non-Overlapping Physical Noses

The extension of the sign support span over over such a wide pavement area (travel lanes plus the entering ramp and gore area) makes it difficult for the overhead sign panels to be visually grounded and associated with their respective lanes, despite the use of lane markings and channelizing lines. In addition, with the complexity of the decision points and options presented on the signs, incorrect maneuvers might induce crossing of the gore areas that overlap, but are not physically separated because the physical noses do not overlap. These conditions are particularly evident on I-70 WB between Sta. 705 and 715, both on the mainline and on the outer roadway. This condition is also present in the weaving section on I-71 NB where three ramps join to form a 6-lane cross section that is immediately followed by a 4- and 3-lane split less than one-half mile away, also with an option lane. It is suggested traffic from the three ramps be physically segregated so that the destinations signed for each of those ramps are the only destinations accessible, and not the destinations for which an option was previously provided (e.g., I-70 WB to I-71 NB remains separated until north of the I-670 split from I-71 NB; I-70 WB to I-670 ramp remains separated from I-71 NB through traffic and only allows I-71 NB traffic to merge into I-670, but not I-670 traffic to merge to I-71 NB, as that option was provided previously).



**FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION**  
**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**  
**For**  
**I-70/71 SOUTH INNERBELT**  
**INTERSTATE ROUTES 70 AND 71, PID #77369 (FRA-70-8.93)**  
**COLUMBUS, OHIO**

Issued Pursuant to 42 U.S.C. 4332 (2)(c), 23 U.S.C. 138, 49 U.S.C. 303 and 23 U.S.C. 128(a)

(This action complies with Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands; the Farmland Protection Act of 1981; and the National Historic Preservation Act)

Proposed Project

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) plans to reconstruct the I-70/I-71/SR 315 freeway system known as Columbus' South Innerbelt. The purpose of the project is to reduce congestion and improve safety on I-71 and the I-70/I-71 overlap. Detailed studies identified traffic volumes exceeding the highway's intended capacity, numerous geometric deficiencies related to a 40-year old design, and a lack of route continuity for overlapping interstate highways which resulted in congestion and compromised highway safety for through travelers, freight haulers, transit operators, local motorists and commuters. The southern project terminus is on I-71 in the vicinity of Greenlawn Ave. The northern terminus is on I-71 at the I-670 interchange. Due to improvements to the I-70/I-71 interchange, the project limits also extend along I-70 east to just east of Kelton Ave. and west to Sullivant Ave. and along SR 315 from the I-70/I-71 interchange to Broad St. The project is located in Franklin County, Ohio, within the municipality of Columbus.

Proposed improvements involve changing the I-70 and I-71 lane assignments, adding additional through lanes on I-70 and I-71 and reconfiguring the I-70/I-71/SR 315 west interchange and the I-70/I-71 east interchange. The improvements will also consolidate access to the downtown area by moving ramps to the periphery of the I-70/I-71 overlap section and requiring motorists traveling to and from downtown Columbus to use one-way urban corridor streets. Motorists will access downtown Columbus via one-way urban corridor streets that run parallel to the north side of the I-70/I-71 overlap and along both sides of I-71. These streets collect traffic from the freeway to distribute it throughout the downtown. The Mound Street corridor will be used for westbound traffic along the I-70/I-71 overlap and the Fulton Street corridor for eastbound traffic. Along I-71 traffic will utilize Lester Drive and Willow Alley for southbound traffic while northbound traffic will use a new urban corridor street parallel to Parsons Avenue. The Interstate improvements will provide for three (3) through lanes in each direction for I-70, two (2) through lanes in each direction for I-71 and the elimination of the weaving between interstate routes in the overlap section by keeping the I-70 lanes to the inside and bringing the I-71 lanes along the outside. The project length is approximately 8.7 miles. The project also includes consolidation of ramps and movements including:

- I-70/71 eastbound ramp to Front St. and the I-70/71 eastbound ramp to Fourth and Livingston Sts. served by ramps from I-70 eastbound, I-71 northbound and SR 315 southbound to eastbound Fulton St.
- I-70 eastbound ramp to 18<sup>th</sup> St. served by I-70/71 eastbound ramp to Parsons Ave.

- I-70 westbound ramp to Fourth St. served by I-70 westbound ramp to Mound St. and Parsons Ave.
- Ramp from Third St. to I-70 eastbound served by the ramp from Fulton St. at Grant Ave. to I-70 eastbound.
- Ramp from Third St. to I-70/I-71 westbound and the ramp from Second St. to I-70/I-71 westbound served by the ramp from Mound St. at Second St. to I-70 westbound, I-71 southbound and SR 315 northbound.
- I-71 northbound ramp to Broad St. served by ramps from I-70 eastbound and I-70 westbound to Parsons Ave.
- I-71 southbound ramp to Spring St. and the I-71 southbound ramp to Broad St. served by the I-71 southbound ramp to southbound Willow Alley and Lester Dr.
- Ramp from Cole and 18<sup>th</sup> St. to I-71 northbound served by the reconstructed ramp from Main St. and Parsons Ave. to I-71 northbound (left turn to be provided).
- Ramp from westbound Broad St. to I-71 northbound and I-670 westbound served by ramps from northbound urban corridor street at Spring St. to I-71 northbound and I-670 westbound.
- Ramp from Long St. to I-71 northbound served by the ramp from northbound urban corridor street at Spring St. to I-71 northbound.
- Ramp from Broad St. to I-71 southbound served by the ramp from Main St. to I-71 southbound.
- I-670 eastbound ramp to Broad St. served by the ramp from I-670 eastbound to Cleveland Ave.
- New ramp from Fulton St. at Grant Ave. to I-71 northbound.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has determined this proposal to reconstruct Interstates I-70/I-71/SR 315 will have no significant impact on the human or natural environment. This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is based on the Environmental Assessment (EA) approved by FHWA on January 14, 2009 and supporting technical studies, along with subsequent comments and responses on the EA and from the public hearing. The EA has been independently evaluated by the FHWA and determined to adequately and accurately discuss the need, environmental issues, and impacts of the proposed project and appropriate mitigation measures. It provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

#### Alternatives Considered

The consideration of conceptual alternative solutions that would improve the operation and safety of this corridor began early in the Project Development Process. Based upon initial ideas identified by ODOT's project team, the project's advisory committee, and the community, six preliminary concepts were developed:

- Concept 1 - Upgrade State Route 104
- Concept 2 - Upgrade SR 104 and add a connector from I-70
- Concept 3 - Reroute trips to SR 315 and I-670
- Concept 4 - Improve operation and safety of the I-70/71 South Innerbelt



- Concept 5 - Provide Truck Only Lanes
- Concept 6 - Improve traffic and transit operations

Concept 4, improving the operation and safety of the I-70/I-71 South Innerbelt, was determined to best address the project's Purpose and Need and was advanced for more detailed development. Furthermore, it was determined that some aspects of Concept 6 could be combined with Concept 4 and, therefore, would also be advanced. Specifically, encouraging Transportation Demand Management, Transportation System Management, and development of Intelligent Transportation Service were combined with Concept 4.

Working in conjunction with the project's advisory committee and the community, several variations of Concept 4 were developed. These possible build alternatives, along with a No-Build Alternative, were:

- One-way Urban Corridor Streets Using Mound Street and Fulton Street
- One-way Urban Corridor Streets Using Fulton Street and Livingston Avenue
- Urbanized Freeway
- Two-way Urban Corridor Street
- Two-way Urban Corridor Boulevard (Grand Boulevard)

The *Conceptual Alternatives Study*, April 5, 2006, concluded that the One-way Urban Corridor Streets using either Mound Street and Fulton Street or Fulton Street and Livingston Avenue would best address the project's Purpose and Need. These alternatives would eliminate almost all of the existing capacity, safety and geometric deficiencies and would integrate well with the City's downtown street network. These alternatives were also considered the best of any build alternative for constructability as they can maintain local access to and from the freeway along the proposed urban corridor street network. The *Assessment of Feasible Alternatives*, October 7, 2007, explained that in addition to the No-Build Alternative, two build alternatives were under consideration. With either alternative, motorists traveling into/out of downtown would use urban corridor streets (modified city streets) running parallel to the freeway to connect with the downtown street network. The modification of the overlapping I-70 and I-71 freeways included in both build alternatives under consideration would provide for:

- Three through lanes in each direction for I-70,
- Two through lanes in each direction for I-71,
- The elimination of the weaving between interstate routes in the overlap section by keeping the I-70 lanes to the inside and bringing the I-71 lanes along the outside.

Generally, both build alternatives fit within existing I-70, I-71, and SR 315 rights-of-way or the footprint of existing downtown streets. In a few areas, where extensive construction would be required, the existing streets could be widened toward the freeways using space currently occupied by substandard interchange ramps. Both alternatives under consideration included design enhancements intended to improve the look and feel of the freeway system and nearby city streets. These enhancements included wider bridges, wider pedestrian facilities, street trees, landscaping, decorative retaining walls, fencing, and community appropriate lighting. Both alternatives under consideration also included reinforced retaining walls to accommodate, in some areas, the possible future construction of "caps" over the freeway.

The two build and the No-Build alternatives included:

- *The Mound-Fulton Alternative* – Would consolidate access to the downtown and move ramps to locations at the periphery of the I-70/I-71 overlap section. With this alternative, motorists would access downtown Columbus via one-way urban corridor streets running parallel to the north side of the I-70/I-71 overlap and along both sides of I-71. These streets would collect traffic from the freeway to distribute it throughout the downtown. This alternative would use the Mound Street corridor for westbound traffic along the I-70/I-71 overlap and the Fulton Street corridor for eastbound traffic. Along I-71, this alternative would use Lester Drive and Willow Alley for southbound traffic while northbound traffic will use a new urban corridor street parallel to Parsons Avenue.
- *The Fulton-Livingston Alternative* would also consolidate access to the downtown and move ramps to locations at the periphery of the I-70/I-71 overlap section. This alternative however, would use Fulton Street for westbound traffic along the I-70/I-71 overlap and the Mound Street corridor for eastbound traffic. This alternative differed from the Mound-Fulton Alternative only along the I-70/I-71 overlap section.
- *The No-Build Alternative* assumed that the existing highway conditions (location and number of through lanes, location and number of ramp lanes, ramp lengths) would remain the same through the design year of 2035. Moreover, with the No-Build Alternative there would be no expenditure of federal or state funds for highway improvements in the I-70/71 project area, except for routine maintenance. Therefore, users of the I-70/71 South Innerbelt system would face increasing congestion, longer delays, and additional safety related problems because the system would not be able to accommodate design year traffic volumes.

#### Selected Alternative

Based upon the ability to meet purpose and need, operational performance, public comments, and impacts to the natural and human environments, FHWA and ODOT are in agreement that the Mound-Fulton Alternative is the Preferred Alternative for FRA-70-8.93, the I-70/71 South Innerbelt project.

Construction of the Selected Alternative will have the following impacts:

- Residential relocations of 14 dwelling units in Franklinton and the Miranova tennis court. Commercial relocations of 9 properties. Government relocations include 1 US Army building and 1 City of Columbus parking garage. No substantial concerns are associated with relocations.
- River impacts consist of approximately 1,030 linear feet of the Scioto River impacted by bridge construction over the river.
- A loss of approximately 0.25 acres of ORAM Category I wetlands which consist of small areas where wetland vegetation extends beyond the limits of constructed ditches. A loss of 4-5 acres of upland forested areas (riparian species), primarily on the east side of the Scioto River.
- Noise impacts are predicted on adjacent sensitive receivers. Noise mitigation is recommended at several locations. The specific locations for noise mitigation have not been fully defined, however, based upon the preliminary traffic noise analysis conducted in 2006,

noise mitigation will be further investigated in the following communities and neighborhoods:

- Franklinton – residential area, churches, and Dodge Park along I-70, I-71, and SR 315
- River South – residential condominium towers and Franklin County Juvenile Detention Center along I-70/71, Mound, and Fulton
- Brewery District – residential developments and Scioto Audubon Metro Park along I-70/71
- German Village – residential areas, churches, Africentric School along I-70/71
- Discovery District – residential areas, universities, schools, and churches along I-70/71, I-71, I-670, Mound, Fulton, Lester, and Willow
- Old Oaks and Near Southside – residential areas and hospital along I-70 and Mooberry
- Near East – residential areas, schools, churches along I-70 and Cole
- Old Town East -- residential areas along I-71 and Parsons
- King-Lincoln -- residential areas and churches along I-71 and new urban corridor street

In these areas the use of noise walls will be further investigated. If noise impacts are identified and noise walls are found to be technically feasible, ODOT will develop and implement a traffic noise mitigation specific Public Involvement Program to ensure that any noise walls (or other noise mitigation treatment) are desired by and acceptable to the affected community and the City of Columbus. During this Public Involvement Program, residents of the affected community will be given the opportunity to decline construction of the noise walls or assist with the selection of a neighborhood appropriate material, color, and texture for the noise walls. The investigation of noise insulation for schools, churches or other public or nonprofit institutional buildings will require an analysis of the existing buildings to determine if HVAC improvements, replacement windows, sound insulating curtains, and/or other architectural modifications can be used to reduce interior traffic noise levels.

- The construction noise from bridge demolition, earth moving, and pile driving are related to freeway reconstruction and not urban corridor street reconstruction. All developed land uses and activities adjacent to the project will be affected to varying degrees by noise generated from power operated equipment utilized in highway construction. Such equipment may include, however is not limited to, front loaders, backhoes, bulldozers, trucks, tractors, scrapers, graders, pavers, roller compactors, slip form equipment, concrete mixers, cranes, compressors, generators, pumps, jack hammers, pneumatic tools, saws, vibrators, and pile drivers. While this equipment will operate intermittently, it will produce loud noise (70 - 98 dBA) at a distance of approximately 50 feet. Numerous noise sensitive sites (schools, churches, dense residential development, historic sites and districts) are located adjacent to the project and the construction noise levels could substantially exceed the existing noise levels. A detailed construction noise assessment will be conducted for the Preferred Alternative which will identify where construction noise levels are likely to be a concern and if there are any construction noise mitigation measures that are practicable to be implemented. At a minimum, construction equipment will be operated in compliance with all applicable City of Columbus ordinances and regulations pertaining to construction noise. Also, ODOT will consider scheduling some construction activities during daytime hours to help minimize construction noise impacts during normal sleep hours.



- At this time, ODOT has not issued a written policy or technical guidance on the assessment of construction related vibration. A screening methodology was developed for these concerns based upon the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Technical Advisory TAV-02-01-R9601. A concern was identified if a given activity was likely to occur within 25 feet of any resource or within 100 feet of a historic building such as the St. Paul AME church or the Africentric School. Pavement breaking, bridge demolition, and pile driving within these distances were considered major concerns. Retaining wall construction, mainline excavation, and paving were considered secondary concerns. A more detailed study will determine if the vibration from project construction will damage buildings and/or annoy people living nearby and identify reasonable mitigation options that could be used to reduce construction-related vibration where damage or annoyance is anticipated.
- The project is included in the most current air-quality conforming Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) prepared by the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC). Franklin County is in non-attainment for both particulate matter (PM 2.5) and ground-level ozone. Ozone related air quality issues are addressed by the inclusion of the project in MORPC's TIP. In a letter dated April 2, 2009, the FHWA Ohio Division documents that it reviewed the I-70/71 South Innerbelt Qualitative PM 2.5 Hot-spot Analysis document and consulted with Ohio EPA and USEPA, Region 5 to determine the project analysis addresses the requirements as described in the March 10, 2006 Final Rule. The project will not cause or contribute to a new violation of the 24 hour or annual PM 2.5 standards. The project meets the conformity hot-spot requirements as stated in 40 CFR 93. In a letter dated March 30, 2009 Ohio EPA reviewed the *Qualitative Mobile Source Air Toxin (MSAT) Analysis Report for FRA-70-8.93 (77369)* and concluded that the build alternatives and the no-build alternative do not have significant differences in the MSAT effects of the design year 2035. The report discussed the difficulty in predicting project specific health impacts through vehicle emissions and provided information in accordance with CEQ regulations 40 CFR 1502.22(b) regarding unavailable or incomplete information.
- ODOT will conduct a Phase II Environmental Site Assessment on fifteen (15) parcels recommended for further investigation and impacted by the Preferred Alternative. None of these sites were identified as Superfund sites or sites unusual for an urban area. These properties will require authorization from Ohio EPA under a Rule 13 permit prior to any excavation or drilling activities. All required permitting commitments will be complied with throughout Construction activities.
- The project will have impacts to several recreation areas and parks. The impacts and Section 4(f) status are summarized below.

Park or Recreation Property	Impact	Mitigation	Section 4(f) Status
Dodge Park	2.0 acres walking trail, baseball field with overlapping soccer/football field	The baseball field with overlapping soccer/football field and the walking trail will be reconfigured or reconstructed near their original location within	De minimis

		Dodge Park in consultation with the Columbus Department of Recreation and Parks	
Lower Scioto Bikeway	Acquisition of an aerial easement for about 2.4 acres of land from the parcel occupied by the existing Lower Scioto Bikeway. An additional 650 feet of the Lower Scioto Bikeway will be covered by new bridges (about 300 feet is beneath the existing bridges)	Installation of bikeway lighting and signing in the affected area along with a temporary detour during project construction in consultation with the Franklin County MetroParks and the Columbus Department of Recreation and Parks	De minimis
Scioto Audubon Metro Park	Approximately 3.0 acres intended for future open space in the 71.0 acre park site	The reduction in area designated as green space on the Scioto Audubon Metro Park Master Plan can be mitigated with the installation of appropriate landscaping along the park's northern edge in consultation with the Franklin County MetroParks and the Columbus Department of Recreation and Parks	De minimis
Africentric School Athletic Fields	Approximately 2.4 acres of new permanent right-of-way from the 13.0 acre parcel containing the recreational land which is available for use by the general public	A conceptual site plan for the redevelopment of the school property has been prepared showing the running track/football complex, not 4(f), and the green space, at the adjacent soccer and baseball fields, which is 4(f), reconstructed on site to provide for the continued use of these facilities by the school and the general public. A seventh alternative would involve relocation of the Africentric School Sports Complex to a site elsewhere in the City of Columbus and the mitigation for the green space (utilized by the community at the soccer and baseball fields) at other sites owned by Columbus City Schools in the same general neighborhood, so long as the mitigation sites are open to the	Individual Evaluation



		public and provide an equivalent use to community residents. The mitigation for the loss of available green space could be creation of new green space or the enhancement of an existing site or sites in the neighborhood.	
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- The Section 106 and Section 4(f) status for all historic properties within the Area of Potential Effect are summarized in the table below.

<b>Property/NRHP Status</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Effect under Section 106</b>	<b>Section 4(f) Status</b>
Brewery District/ District	Construction activity related to the construction of a new eastbound urban corridor street bridge over I-70/71 near Second Street and will not remove any contributing or non-contributing structures located within the district boundaries	No adverse effect	De minimis
German Village/ District	Construction activity related solely to the reconstruction of the Third and Fourth Street intersections with Livingston Avenue	No adverse effect	De minimis
Near East Side/ District	Acquisition and demolition of contributing and non-contributing buildings located between Parsons Avenue and I-71 associated with the E. T. Paul Tire Company and the Carabar	Adverse Effect – Loss of ET Paul and Carabar buildings	Individual Evaluation
East Town Street/ District	Construction activity limited to reconstruction of Lester Drive	No adverse effect	De minimis
Jefferson Avenue/ District	Construction activity will not remove or alter any contributing or non-contributing structures located within the established district boundaries. Minor right-of-way may be required from within the historic boundary to include aesthetics and/or pedestrian enhancements. Through consultation with representatives of the Jefferson Center for Learning and the Arts and St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church, ODOT will provide mitigation for the loss of parking through	No adverse effect	De minimis

	enabling the purchase of an available parking lot adjacent to the historic district (project MOA).		
Ohio Asylum for the Blind/ Listed site	Will require some roadway and sidewalk construction within the designated boundaries of the Ohio Asylum for the Blind. Will not remove or alter any contributing or non-contributing structures located within the established site boundary. Construction activity related to the reconstruction of the existing I-71/Main Street Interchange, Parsons Avenue, and the Parsons/Main Street intersection.	No adverse effect	De minimis
Bellows Avenue School/ Eligible site	Will require the acquisition and demolition of the Bellows Avenue School to accommodate the improved ramps necessary to make this complex west I-70/I-71/SR 315 Interchange function safely and efficiently.	Adverse Effect – Loss of school building	Individual Evaluation

With this Finding of No Significant Impact, FHWA is: (1) making independent findings of applicability for the Section 4(f) de minimis determinations listed in the above tables, and (2) making independent findings that there is no feasible and prudent alternative to the use of land from the 1) Near East Side Historic District, 2) Bellows Avenue School, and 3) Africentric School Athletic Fields and the proposed action includes all possible planning to minimize harm to each of these properties resulting from such use. Furthermore, the Final Section 4(f) Evaluation (dated June 2009), which was prepared for the proposal, provides analyses and documentation to support a decision that the Mound-Fulton Alternative is the alternative that causes the least harm on Section 4(f) resources.

Construction of the Selected Alternative will require the implementation of a variety of environmental commitments (see page 84 of the EA for additional information).

- All necessary Section 404 (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) and Section 401 (Ohio Environmental Protection Agency) water quality permits will be acquired prior to construction activity. The ODOT-OES Permit Determination will be the mechanism to determine the proper level and type of waterway permits required for the project. Stream and/or wetland impact mitigation will be in accordance with the most current US Army Corps of Engineers and Ohio EPA rules in place at the time the permits are obtained.
- During design of the Scioto River bridges ODOT will consider a spill/runoff containment system to prevent or minimize the likelihood of contaminants entering the river.
- ODOT will re-vegetate any disturbed portions of the Scioto River bank with all native species.

- ODOT will ensure water sedimentation impacts are kept to a minimum through the use of Best Management Practices for soil erosion and sedimentation control. All soil erosion and sediment control measures shall be in place prior to any excavation, grading or filling operations and installation of proposed structures or utilities. They shall remain in place until construction is completed and the area is stabilized as accepted by the engineer.
- ODOT will coordinate with the US Army Corps of Engineers to ensure that the final design of the bridges over the Scioto River and the I-70/I-71/SR 315 interchange ramps do not impact the Scioto River flood control system. A floodplain permit for work within the FEMA designated 100-year floodplain of the Scioto River will be obtained by ODOT from the City of Columbus floodplain administrator prior to project construction.
- During detailed design of the highway system, ODOT will develop and implement a traffic noise mitigation specific Public Involvement Program to ensure that any recommend traffic noise mitigation is desired by and acceptable to the affected community and the City of Columbus.
- The required consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act was completed. Franklin County is within the range of five federally listed species, including the Indiana bat, Scioto madtom (fish), northern riffleshell mussel, clubshell mussel, and rayed bean mussel. Since the project is located in an urbanized area, no impacts are anticipated to the Indiana bat. However, if trees exhibiting suitable Indiana bat habitat must be cut, ODOT will coordinate with USFWS to determine if surveys are warranted and any potential Indiana bat roost trees will only be cut between September 30 and April 1 of the year. Due to the highly urbanized nature of the project area and the characteristics of the Scioto River, no impacts to any of the other federally listed aquatic species are anticipated. A survey of mussels in the Scioto River near the I-70/I-71 bridges completed in October 2005 detected one Ohio Species of Concern (flat floater) present. Based on the survey there may be approximately 280 individuals of this species within 500 feet of the existing I-70/I-71 bridges. As any in-stream construction could eliminate specimens of this species, if in-stream construction cannot be avoided, a mitigation (relocation) plan will be developed in coordination with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.
- With regard to historic resources covered by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, when adverse effects are determined in conjunction with OSPHO, ODOT will utilize the treatments intended to minimize harm to historic sites and districts contained in the Memorandum of Agreement (Agreement Number: 14242) which was executed August 1, 2007 and the First Amendment to the Memorandum of Agreement (Agreement Number: 14913) which was executed July 18, 2008.
- With regard to parks and recreational lands protected by Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act, ODOT will ensure that the mitigation measures, included in the concurrence letters signed by the Director of the Columbus Department of Recreation and Parks, the Executive Director of Franklin County MetroParks and the Senior Executive of Capital Improvements for the Columbus City Schools, are implemented.
- During detailed design of the highway system near Dodge Park and Scioto Audubon MetroPark, ODOT will review the concurrence letters signed by the Director of the

Columbus Department of Recreation and Parks and the Executive Director of Franklin County MetroParks to ensure that the identified impacts and mitigation remain valid.

- With regard to the green space at the soccer and baseball fields at the Africentric School, which are recreational lands protected by Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act, ODOT will ensure they will be provided for as part of six potential on-site mitigation options to offset the loss of green space and the running track/football complex. A seventh alternative involves relocation of the Africentric School Sports Complex to a site elsewhere in the City of Columbus and the mitigation for the loss of available green space (utilized by the community at the soccer and baseball fields) at other sites owned by Columbus City Schools in the same general neighborhood, so long as the mitigation sites are open to the public and provide an equivalent use to community residents. The mitigation for the loss of available green space could be creation of new green space or the enhancement of an existing site or sites in the neighborhood.
- All real estate transactions and relocations will be carried out under the laws of the State of Ohio and the Federal Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act. ODOT will ensure that those displaced by the project will receive fair-market value for the property necessary for the project. ODOT will ensure that those displaced by the project are aware of the Relocation Assistance Program (RAP) which provides advisory assistance and monetary benefits in accordance with Chapter 163 of the Ohio Revised Code and US Public Law 91-646, "Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970," which was amended in 1987. Residents being relocated will be provided relocation benefits and will have the opportunity to relocate to equivalent, decent, safe, and sanitary or better housing than their present situation.
- Reconstruction of the I-70/I-71/SR 315 interchange will require permanent acquisition of approximately 1.5 acres of land owned by the City of Columbus and occupied by Dodge Park; temporary acquisition of about 0.5 acres of the same parcel which will revert to the City upon completion of construction; and permanent acquisition of approximately 3.35 acres (5 separate parcels) of land currently owned by Byers Realty LLC and occupied by a truck rental business. ODOT will clear, grade and replant the remnant parcels currently owned by Byers Realty LLC so they are consistent with the adjacent parkland and will transfer ownership of these remnant parcels to the City of Columbus, if requested.
- In accordance with Executive Order 11990, the Selected Alternative has been developed to avoid and minimize impacts to wetlands. Minimal wetland impacts are anticipated.
- During construction, traffic will be maintained on existing roadways using a combination of construction phasing and detours on existing routes. The City of Columbus emergency services, school systems, Franklin County, other public service providers, and local businesses will be notified by ODOT prior to construction on freeway mainlines, ramps, and bridges. ODOT will ensure that all detour routes and provisions for local access are clearly posted in advance of project construction.



### Public Involvement and Comments

During development of the proposed project, there have been numerous opportunities for the public to provide input into the decision-making process. Coordination with Federal, State, and local agencies was also conducted. Since the project's inception in 2002, ODOT has held over 250 stakeholder meetings, consulting party meetings, public meetings, briefings, a formal public hearing, and meetings with individual groups, organizations, and elected officials. Per Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which states "No person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance," all efforts were made to be inclusive of all respective groups during the Planning, Project Development and Public Involvement processes.

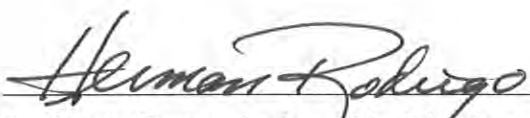
The EA was approved for public availability on January 14, 2009. The Notice of Public Hearing was advertised on January 27, 2009 and February 8, 2009 in the *Columbus Dispatch*. The Public Hearing was also advertised on January 29, 2009 and February 5, 2009 in *Fronteras*, a Spanish language newspaper in Columbus, Ohio. The open house public hearing was held on February 10, 2009, at the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning (MORPC) facility in Columbus, Ohio. Comments on the EA were due by February 24, 2009. Comments received have been documented and addressed in the *Public Hearing Summary*.

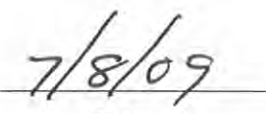
### Finding of No Significant Impact

No new information or issues have been raised by the agencies or the public on the Environmental Assessment to affect the recommended decision. Based on the above analysis of the EA, supporting technical studies, the public involvement process, and our oversight involvement in the project's development, it is our determination (in accordance with Federal Regulation 23 CFR 771.121(a)) that implementation of the Selected Alternative will have no significant impact on the human and natural environments.

### Statute of Limitations Notice

A Federal Agency may publish a notice in the Federal Register, pursuant to 23 USC § 139(l)(1), indicating that one or more Federal agencies have taken final action on permits, licenses, or approvals for a transportation project. If such notice is published, claims seeking judicial review of those Federal agency actions will be barred unless such claims are filed within 180 days after the date of publication of the notice, or within such shorter time period as is specified in the Federal laws pursuant to which judicial review of the Federal agency action is allowed. If no notice is published, then the periods of time that otherwise are provided by the Federal laws governing such claims will apply.

  
for Patrick A. Bauer, Acting Ohio Division Administrator

  
Date