

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Final Environmental Impact Statement and  
Section 4(f) Evaluation  
for the Proposed US-23 Freeway Extension Project  
Phase I

Arenac and Iosco Counties, Michigan

February 1999

Prepared by the  
Michigan Department of Transportation  
In Cooperation with the  
Federal Highway Administration

## **STATUS**

The Michigan Department of Transportation has completed its final review of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the proposed US-23 freeway extension in Arenac and Iosco Counties, Michigan. The document has been submitted to the Federal Highway Administration for its review and action. The recommended alternative in the FEIS is to construct a limited access freeway from the M-13 interchange south of Standish to M-55 west of Tawas City. The FEIS evaluates the recommended alternative and the do nothing alternative. The need for transportation improvements along US-23 has been a recurring issue for more than 35 years. US-23 transportation improvements are needed due to an increase in regional mobility requirements, a decrease in the level of service along the existing route, and an increasing number of access conflicts. Various studies have been prepared to identify the specific improvement needs of US-23, which include relief from traffic congestion, increased accessibility to the Lake Huron shoreline, and the enhancement of travel safety and efficiency.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVES**

A previous study in 1992 raised concerns about the high number of residential displacements needed for improvements along existing US-23. At the same time, the Wurtsmith AFB was closing and the northeast region experienced additional economic distress, which resulted in discussions of a regional freeway to help create the type of transportation access and service needed to support existing and new businesses and industries.

The recommendations made in the previous environmental and planning studies were used in the development of alternatives and alignments that were evaluated in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), which was approved in September 1995.

The FEIS discusses the selection of the Inland Freeway Corridor, and recommends an alignment for that route. The US-23 freeway extension best meets the stated objectives for the purpose of and the need for improvements to resolve transportation issues in northeast Michigan, and is consistent with the long range plan for a statewide system of expressways. A freeway is the

safest and most efficient means to provide regional transportation service, and will be a key element to support opportunities for economic development in the region. Existing and future traffic projections indicate increasing congestion along US-23 along with high directional flows, inadequate lane capacity, and the mix of slow-moving recreational vehicles, farm equipment, and pedestrians.

## **ISSUES**

Several issues emerged during the development of alignment alternatives. Controversy has centered around the proposed northern terminus, establishing access to project area cities and townships, impacts on environmental resources, and concerns regarding residential and/or commercial displacements. Public and agency comments on the DEIS and from the public hearing, and responses to each comment, are provided in the FEIS. Permit requirements and details of proposed mitigation are also included. In response to many of the concerns raised, changes were made to the freeway plan. These changes include adjustments to the alignment along certain segments, reducing the median width, deleting the proposed interchange west of Omer, and postponing the proposed Environmental Education Center/Rest Area until a future phase of the freeway extension. These adjustments reduce wetland impacts, residential relocations, stream relocation, wildlife and habitat impacts, and costs.

## **RECOMMENDED ALTERNATIVE**

The recommended alternative (Alignment 1C/2D/3A/4B within the Inland Freeway Corridor) is shown on the attached map (Figure 3-4), and described as follows:

*Segment 1:* Alignment 1C was recommended from south of Standish to north of Omer. The alignment begins at the US-23/M-13 interchange and proceeds east toward the Sagatoo Road/City Limits Road intersection. The alignment shifts northwest near Pine River Road, and then crosses US-23 east of the VFW Hall. It continues north toward the Husak Road/Wyatt Road intersection, where it turns northeast toward the Rifle River crossing and east/northeast toward Main Street Road in Omer.

*Segment 2:* Alignment 2D was recommended from North of Main Street Road to the East Branch of the Au Gres River. The alignment proceeds east/northeast from Main Street toward Ostrander Road where it turns north and parallels Lehman Road. Near Maple Ridge Road the alignment turns northeast, crossing M-65 and the county line. An interchange is located on M-65 near Mason Road. The alignment then proceeds north and parallels the west side of Towerline Road. It then turns northeast south of Turtle Road and passes through the Au Sable State Forest, continuing north to cross Whittemore Road, and then northeast across the East Branch of the Au Gres River.

*Segment 3:* Alignment 3A is recommended from the East Branch of the Au Gres River to McCardle Road. It proceeds east from Greenwood parallel to the north side of Townline Road. Near Chambers Road the alignment turns northeast to McCardle Road.

*Segment 4:* Alignment 4B is recommended east from McCardle Road north to the project's terminus at M-55. The M-55 interchange location for this alignment is located east of Kobs Road. Widening M-55 to five lanes will be necessary between the proposed interchange and Tawas City.

Four interchanges are recommended -- at M-13, existing US-23, M-65, and M-55. The right-of-way width for the recommended alignment transitions from 356 feet at the US-23/M-13 interchange to 291.9 feet at Sterling Road. The transition is accomplished by reducing the median from 182 feet to 72.2 feet. From Sterling Road north, the right-of-way and median width were reduced to minimize impacts on natural resources and to reduce the costs associated with right-of-way acquisition.

### **ALTERNATIVES ELIMINATED**

The FEIS includes discussion of the impacts of the no-build alternative as a basis of comparison with the recommended alternative. The no-build alternative would not meet the project's defined purpose and need, and would result in a decreased level of service, additional noise impacts, and a potential for an increase in accidents along US-23. Likewise, it would not increase accessibility or enhance recreation, tourism, or economic resources.

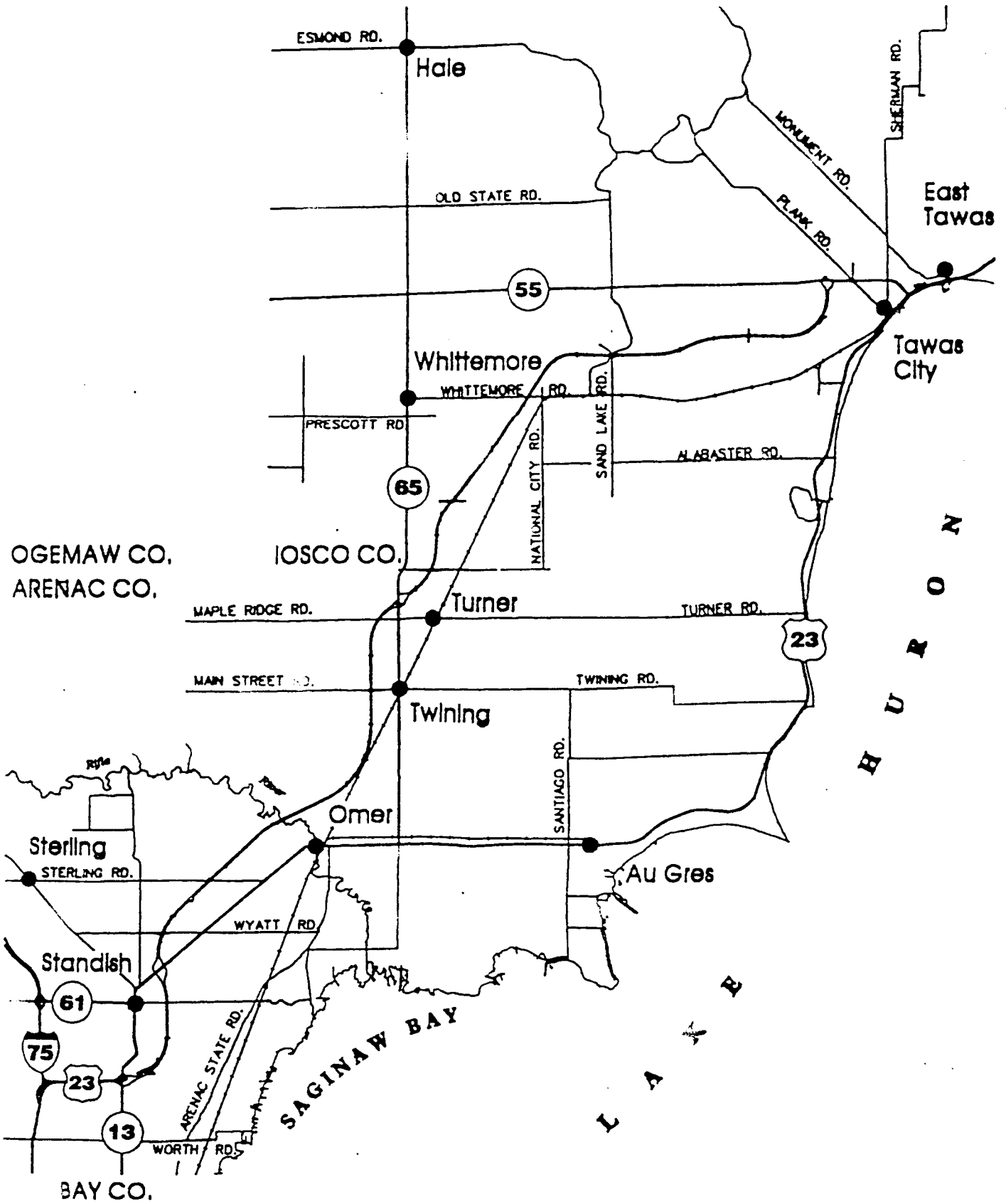
Five freeway alignments evaluated in the DEIS (1B, 1D, 2C, 2E, 3C) were eliminated from further consideration due to public and agency comments and further evaluation of potential impacts. Factors considered in the decision to eliminate alignments include compatibility with the project's purpose and need, and impacts on land use, wetlands, and farmlands.

Attached is Table 1-1, which is a summary of impacts for the recommended alignment. Also attached are Figure 3-3, showing the alignments discussed in the DEIS, and Figure 3-4, which shows the recommended alignment.

### **NEXT STEPS**

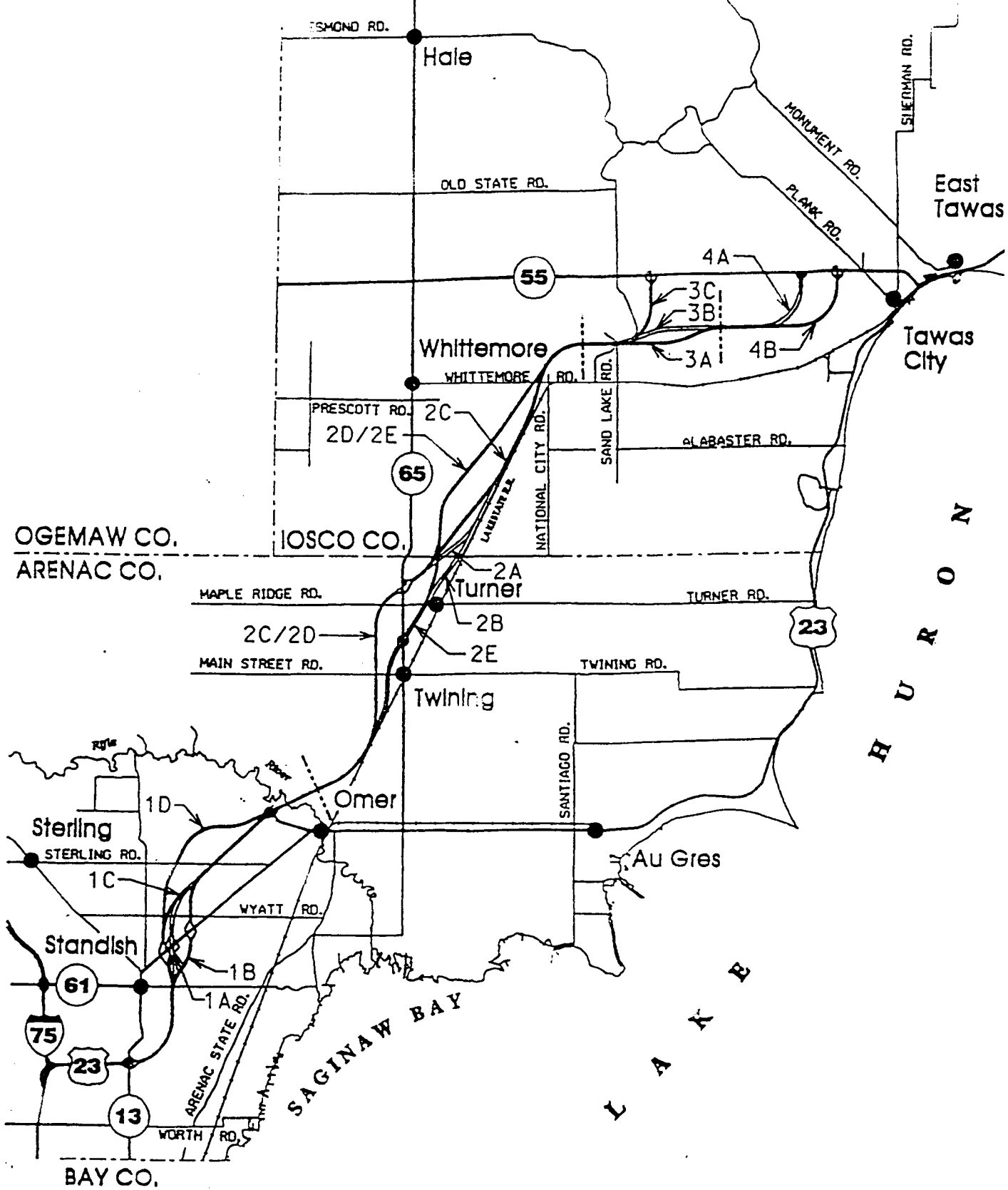
With the details of the freeway plan essentially complete, the FEIS is now undergoing final review by the Federal Highway Administration. Release of the full report for public and agency comment will occur after the document has been approved for printing and public distribution by the Federal Highway Administration. Notification of the availability of the FEIS for review and comment will be made through local media. This summary is provided at this time to suffice until the FEIS is available to the public.

February, 1999



**US-23 FREEWAY EXTENSION  
PHASE I**

**PROJECT REGION AND  
RECOMMENDED ALIGNMENT**

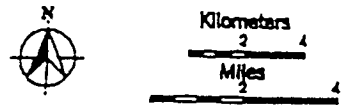


Michigan Department of Transportation

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**US-23 FREEWAY EXTENSION**

PHASE I



**FIGURE 3-3**  
**PRACTICAL ALIGNMENTS**

**TABLE 1-1  
SUMMARY OF IMPACTS**

	ALIGNMENT*								RECOM- MENDED ALIGNMENT TOTALS
	1B	1C*	1D	2C	2D*	2E	3A* 4B*	3C	
LENGTH (Miles)	9.7	9.9	10.5	14.8	14.9	14.6	7.8	3.2	32.6
RESIDENTIAL DISPLACEMENTS	22	31	32	20	18	18	15	23	64
COMMERCIAL/INDUSTRIAL DISPLACEMENTS	2	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	2
TOTAL DISPLACEMENTS	24	33	35	20	18	10	15	23	68
WETLANDS (Acres)	152	136	190	260	192	217	134	88	462
FARMLAND (Acres)	184	195	150	188	145	265	60	30	400
PA 116 FARMLAND (Parcels)	7	5	4	3	2	12	1	1	9
ROADWAY BRIDGES	7	6	6	8	7	8	3	2	16
RAILROAD BRIDGES	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3
STREAM CROSSINGS	5	5	6	8	10	10	4	4	19
NOISE IMPACTS (Buildings)	28	38	39	43 (Binder) 44 (Kobs)	44	38(Binder) 40 (Kobs)	33	60	115
POTENTIAL HISTORIC STRUCTURES	0	0	3	2	0	2	1	5	1
POTENTIAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES	11	5	14	1	6	7	2	4	13
STATE THREATENED SPECIES	0	1	0	2	1	1	1	0	3
HAZARDOUS WASTE SITES	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL COSTS, includes Const., ROW, Relocations, & Mitigation (\$ Millions)	68.4	66.9	69.7	86.1	81.5	80.9	45.9	33.5	194.3

\*Recommended Alignment (1C, 2D, 3A, 4B) impacts differ from those presented in the Draft EIS due to avoidance and minimization effort.

**Notes:**

- There are no projected adverse air quality or federal threatened or endangered species impacts for any alignment.