



# I-15/US-20 Connector Frequently Asked Questions

In reviewing comments received in response to the August 2020 online meeting, the project team noticed a series of common questions in relation to the project and process. The Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) developed these FAQs to answer those questions and share information with the project stakeholders.

## Q1. How many homes/businesses are impacted by each alternative?

- A. The project team has not determined the exact number of homes/businesses impacted by each alternative, because the precise locations will be refined through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. The NEPA process involves analyzing how each alternative could affect the human and natural environment.
- » For Alternative E3, there is likely less flexibility in moving the alignment because of existing infrastructure. Those homes and businesses shown as impacted in the concept graphics are not anticipated to change.
  - » For Alternative H2, the location currently shown is approximate and will be refined during the NEPA process. Those homes and businesses shown as impacted in the concept graphics may change.

## Q2. Why are impacts to homes/businesses listed as a challenge on Alternative E3 but not on Alternative H2?

- A. Alternative E3, as shown currently, would require the acquisition and removal of several physical properties. These are considered direct effects. Alternative H2, as currently shown, requires the acquisition or removal of fewer properties.

It is important to understand the difference between direct and indirect effects of a project as part of the NEPA process.

In NEPA, direct effects are those that are caused by the action (alternative/project) and occur at the same time and place. This could include property acquisition required to build an alternative such as the purchase of a home or building.

Indirect effects are defined as those that are caused by the action and are later in time or farther removed in distance, but are still reasonably foreseeable. This could include changes in land use patterns, or effects on air or water quality, and natural ecosystems.

## Q3. Will I be financially compensated for the loss of my home value?

- A. If the preferred alternative requires the acquisition of your home or part of your property, ITD will follow the Uniform Relocation Act and ITD's right-of-way process, which includes appraisal of the property and negotiation with the property owner. For more information, please refer to this brochure on the process:

[https://itd.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Acquisition-5\\_06.pdf](https://itd.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Acquisition-5_06.pdf)

## Q4. Why is Alternative H2 being considered when there are federally-protected bald eagles and other wildlife in the area?

- A. The project is just formally entering the NEPA phase of the project, which will examine environmental impacts in greater detail. Bald eagles are protected by the Eagle Act, the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, as well as other state and municipal protections. The project team will consult with the Idaho office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services to determine how Alternative H2 might impact eagles and other wildlife.

## Q5. If Alternative H2 is chosen, will noise reduction walls be part of the design?

- A. The NEPA analysis will include a noise study. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and ITD have guidelines for conducting noise analyses and determining whether noise abatement measures such as noise walls are needed to protect the public's health, welfare, and livability.

## Q6. How will you build a roadway over a landfill for Alternative H2? Isn't it unstable and won't digging it up release toxins into the environment?

- A. An assessment of the landfill material and the materials below the surface will be conducted as part of the NEPA process. If the material is unsuitable for supporting a roadway, alternatives will be evaluated, including rerouting the roadway around the landfill or removing the unsuitable material and replacing it with good material for building. According to records, the landfill

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is thought to only include inert materials like construction waste. However, through the NEPA process, the potential for hazardous materials within the landfill will be identified and, if necessary, hazardous materials will be removed if Alternative H2 moves forward for construction in its current location.

## Q7. Why isn't ITD considering the impacts of Alternative H2 to agricultural land?

- A. ITD is considering the impacts of Alternative H2 to agricultural land. That will be a component of the NEPA process and considered in selecting a preferred alternative.

## Q8. There is a lot of blowing dirt in the area where Alternative H2 is shown. Isn't this a big problem when considering a roadway in the area?

- A. Blowing dirt can be a problem if it obscures drivers' vision. There are several existing roads in the area that Alternative H2 would cross and drivers do not seem to be negatively affected by blowing dirt. However, the project team will keep this issue in mind as analysis continues.

## Q9. What is the cost of each alternative and why isn't that being disclosed?

- A. The complete cost of each alternative has not been determined. Cost/benefit at a very high-level was considered in alternative screening. For example, construction costs are generally higher for large bridge structures but the exact cost for a new river crossing has not been calculated.

Alternatives E3 and H2 are still at the concept level – meaning at this point they are lines on paper. They will be refined through NEPA analysis and the design processes. Still, cost is not typically considered a major deciding factor in the NEPA process and selection of the preferred alternative.

## Q10. Why is there an intersection at 5th West? Will 5th West be widened?

- A. An interchange at 5th West is included with Alternative H2 to provide local access to the realigned US-20. 5th West will not be widened with this project.

## Q11. What kind of impact will Alternative H2 have on Idaho Falls' downtown? It appears it will take business away from the downtown area.

- A. The impact of Alternative H2 on downtown Idaho Falls is not known at this time. Some new development is expected to occur along this alternative alignment if it is selected, but access to downtown will not be removed and may even be improved. Economic impacts will be studied further in the NEPA process.

## Q12. How will each of the alternatives impact growth and plans at the Idaho National Laboratory (INL)? Why isn't this a significant consideration?

- A. ITD has been coordinating with the INL throughout the planning and environmental linkages (PEL) study process. A key INL staff member participates in the Community Working Group meetings for the project. The project team is aware of expansion plans and will continue to coordinate with INL leadership throughout the NEPA process.

## Q13. How is the preferred alternative determined?

- A. Many factors go into the determination. Generally, the preferred alternative is the one that provides the best balance between meeting the project needs and minimizing impacts to the human and natural environment. Identification of the preferred alternative will be made based on the engineering and environmental analyses. While public involvement and input is one consideration, identification of the preferred alternative is not a vote.

## Q14. Can anything be done to speed up the process?

- A. The NEPA process is governed by federal law and requires consideration and disclosure of potential impacts through a process that includes public involvement and agency coordination. These activities take time. Several requirements of the Environmental Review process recently changed and we will be expediting the process where possible.