

Questions and comments regarding the 5- lane proposal:

1. The proposed 200' easement is excessive.

Response: 1-1

WYDOT's current right-of-way is approximately 100 feet. The 5-lane Alternative would require 76 feet of pavement. Additional right-of-way needs would vary throughout the corridor.

2. The number of impacted properties, Etna- North (nine miles) - 140 – is excessive.

Response: 2-1

Some properties would be acquired. Approximately 14 acres of residential use would be converted to transportation use under the 5-Lane Alternative (see Table 3-10 of the EA). Actual property requirements would be determined at final project design, and impacts to landowners will be minimized to the extent possible during plan development. The 5-Lane Alternative would require the acquisition of approximately 42 acres of permanent Right-of-way (Table 3-10 of the EA). The acquisition of property interests will comply fully with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act for any person(s) whose real property interests will be impacted by the project. The Uniform Act is a federally mandated program that applies to all acquisitions of real property or displacements of persons resulting from federal or federally assisted programs or projects. It was created to provide for and ensure the fair and equitable treatment of all such persons.

3. Is the 2005 Memorandum the operative document driving this 5- lane proposal? Are there no studies or recommendations of a more recent vintage? There is particular interest in seeing statistics and study results since the 2007 great recession to the present. It is widely known that Lincoln County has been particularly slow in recovering from that crisis.

Response: 1-3

WYDOT has reviewed numerous recent studies as reference to the Environmental Assessment. These studies can be found in the reference section of the Environmental Assessment.

4. US Hwy 89 is, indeed, Star Valley's "main street". The proposed 5- lane will ruin the rural character of the valley and make a joke of the recently won Scenic Byway designation. On June 5, 2014 we were told the Scenic Byway designation "has no impact on design options."

Response: 1- 4

The 5-Lane Alternative would change views for residents, motorists, and snowmobilers to views of a wider roadway. However, changes to particular visual elements would be subordinate to the overall visual setting when viewed from alongside the highway, which would generally occupy the existing highway's same horizontal plane. Middle ground and background views would remain unchanged. No additional highway lighting would be constructed, and overhead power lines would remain in place. A Corridor Management Plan has not yet been completed for the recently designated byway. Scenic byway status is "recognition not regulation" and does not preclude the proposed roadway improvements, which will not affect its scenic byway status. There would be no change to the status of US 89 as a Wyoming scenic byway.

5. How will a 76' wide, 5 –lane highway serve to protect the "intrinsic quality" ("scenic, historic, recreational, cultural, archeological or natural qualities") of the "Scenic Byway, US Hwy 89"?

Response: 1-5: See response to 1-4

6. The Wildlife Habitat Management Areas will be negatively impacted at a time when our local herds are dwindling. How does WYDOT plan to mitigate impacts to ungulate migration routes, feed grounds, wetlands and raptor habitats? Elk and deer attempting to navigate 76' of super-highway will most assuredly result in more animal/ vehicle collisions.

Response: 1-6

WYDOT and WGFD worked together to identify design modifications that would avoid or minimize impacts to big game movement and to the Greys River feed ground. As a result of the collaborative negotiations between WYDOT and WGFD, the following measures will be incorporated into the build alternatives:

- A) Public education through various outreach methods, which may include general messages in the media, videos, brochures, posters, and bumper stickers Safety clear zone (described in the EA Chapter 2).
- B) Wildlife fencing on both sides of US 89 at the Greys River feed ground area.
- C) An "elk jump," which is a raised ramp that allows animals to escape fenced highway corridors, at the Greys River feed ground.

The number of vehicle/animal collisions would increase as traffic volumes increase, overtime. In addition, the Build Alternatives would include a wider pavement footprint for wildlife to cross. Studies have shown that most wildlife-vehicle collisions (89.7 percent) occur on rural two-lane roads and highways. In comparison, 52 percent of *all* crashes occur on two-lane roads. However, this does not necessarily mean that upgrading two-lane roads to more lanes would reduce such collisions long-term. One study found that upgrading a highway from two to four lanes initially resulted in a 500 percent increase in collisions with deer. Over time, this number steadily decreased, potentially due to wildlife being initially unfamiliar with the new character of the roadway and eventually adapting to it.

Traffic volume has a large effect on successful wildlife crossings, especially for slow moving species. However, lower traffic volumes do not necessarily equate with fewer collisions. Wildlife-vehicle collisions actually decrease when traffic volume increases to a high enough level that the volume is, in effect, a barrier (i.e., animals do not attempt to cross).

Construction and operation of the 5-Lane Alternative are not expected to impact aquatic resources within the Project Area because the streams that would be crossed do not support fish.

Highway projects generally have minimal impacts on migratory birds. Typically, habitat loss impacts associated with highway widening are not considered substantial enough to cause population declines of migratory birds. However, vehicle-bird collisions would increase as traffic volumes increase overtime. In addition, the wider highway would increase the number of vehicle-bird collisions.

The habitat loss associated with the 5-Lane Alternative would be confined to areas adjacent to the existing roadway that are not considered prime nesting habitat or stopover habitat for migratory birds.

7. There are many problems foreseen with the proposed elimination of individual mailboxes, replacing them with "cluster boxes." As multiple drivers "cluster" to their mailboxes, accidents are more likely to happen.

Response: 1- 7

Mailbox clusters proposed for this project would be located away from the US 89 roadway. The mailbox clusters would be located a sufficient distance from the highway to accommodate safe entry and exit.

8. There seems to be little sense to the plan to deliver five lanes of traffic into the two-lane towns of Thayne, Etna and Alpine, then into the two-lane Snake River Canyon or two-lane Hwy. 26 into Idaho. Folks have called this “absurd” and “planned bottlenecking.” It is thought that more accidents will result from all the merging from two lanes to one, then the re-acceleration from one lane to two. These two scenarios are fraught with passing, or “get ahead” opportunities. (These are not “three-lane” towns. The center lane is used for delivery parking and left turns, not travel.)

Response: 1-8

The 5-Lane Alternative would be wider than the existing highway at either end of the Study Area. The project would connect in Alpine and Etna at locations where US 89 currently becomes a two-lane highway with a center left turn lane. At Alpine, the speed limit drops to 45 mph just south of the curve west of Alpine, and drops further to 35 mph near Elk Run Drive, just west of the project end point. At Etna, the speed limit drops to 35 mph as the highway approaches the community. These decreases in speed limits where the lane configuration would change already provide “speed harmonization,” reducing the traffic “shockwave” and resulting in more uniform driver behavior, which indirectly benefits bottlenecks and chokepoints. A multi-lane design would allow traffic to sort and dissipate, potentially decreasing the bottleneck effect entering the towns of Etna and Alpine. Changing from a multi-lane section to three lanes on each end of the Study Area would provide a natural transition to the slower speed in the urban areas.

Further, the existing center turn lanes at Alpine and Etna allow left turning vehicles to move through traffic rather than block it, helping expedite traffic flow. This alternative would be designed to address potential future bottlenecks at these transition points, such as speed limit adjustments and lane merge signs posted in advance of these locations. In addition, five lanes would better distribute traffic as it enters the communities of Alpine and Etna.

9. In the interest of avoiding the inevitable bottlenecks in the 5-lane proposal, we fear that WYDOT has a plan to eventually construct “by-pass” roads around Thayne, Etna and Alpine. Bypasses would only serve to provide more intersections, more merging dangers, more of what the current proposal is designed to eliminate. By-passes would turn Star Valley’s “main street” into nothing more than a frontage road through the towns, greatly hurting local businesses.

Response: 1- 9

State Statute requires all proposed bypasses to be approved by majority vote. WYDOT has no plans for this alternative.

10. Folks are asking: Why doesn’t WYDOT present a plan similar to the Snake River Canyon road? In other words: occasional passing lanes, right turn lanes, acceleration lanes for high volume intersections, (access points), etc.

Response: 1- 10

Six alternatives, including the No Build Alternative and five build alternatives, were considered for their ability to address the purpose and need of this project.

A) Alternative 1: No Build Alternative. Maintain the existing two-lane roadway with spot safety improvements.

B) Alternative 2: Improved two-lane roadway with center passing lane added.

- C) **Alternative 3: Three-lane roadway with center turn lane.**
- D) **Alternative 4: Divided four-lane roadway.**
- E) **Alternative 5: Five-lane roadway with center turn lane.**
- F) **Alternative 6: Four-lane roadway with a center turn lane that alternates depending on need for additional passing opportunities.**

The highway through the Snake River Canyon does not have the high density of approaches and turning movements that are characteristic of the US 89 project corridor. Occasional passing lanes and turn lanes would not sufficiently address the projected capacity needs of this section of US 89.

11. Of the anticipated increase in traffic, people are asking if there plans to further widen the Snake River Canyon road?

Response: 1- 11

WYDOT does not have plans to widen the highway in Snake River Canyon. Due to the low access density, this segment does not need the additional lanes to carry projected traffic volumes.

12. There is much skepticism surrounding WYDOT's population projections. Does the department stand by its estimate that Lincoln County will have 28,000 residents by 2023? Lincoln County, specifically the Star Valley Hwy. 89 corridor which is being addressed here, would need huge, new industrial and commercial development to realize these numbers.

- A) 2012 actually saw a negative population growth in Star Valley and local economist's project, the valley's population to grow to only 14,000 by 2020. (2012 Star Valley population: 12,477)
- B) Government and government enterprises are the biggest employers in the county, and those are primarily concentrated in Kemmerer and Afton- not Thayne- north.

Response: 1- 12

Most recent population projections used for the traffic analysis are provided in Chapters 1 and 3 of the Environmental Assessment. Overall, US 89 traffic volumes increased by approximately 16.4 percent (3,790 to 4,410) from 2004 to 2008. Traffic volumes increased in 2009 and 2010 to 4,770, followed by a recent decline to 3,600 In 2013. Depending on the year, trucks comprise approximately 6 to 7 percent of this volume. As shown in Table 1-5, increases and decreases that have occurred since 2004 indicate that 2013 traffic volumes (3,600) are now only slightly below those experienced in 2004 (3,790). A range of growth rates from 1 percent to 3 percent was analyzed to estimate future traffic volumes. As noted under Changing Economics and Demographics, above, average annual growth in Lincoln County from 2004 through 2013 was approximately 1.8 percent. WYDOT, conservatively estimates annual traffic to increase in the study area from 1 to 1.5 percent by 2034, this project's design year. Using 2013 traffic volumes as the base year, AADT is expected to approach 4,250 in 2024 and 4,925 in 2034, thereby degrading to a level of service D.

13. Regarding WYDOT's reported growth of building permits issued between 1994 and 2003, has WYDOT consulted any more recent statistics?

- A) We know that in 2012, only 37 new home permits were issued for all of Star Valley, continuing a steady, annual decline since the high of 318 in 2005.
 - 1) The towns of Thayne and Alpine reported zero permits in 2012.
 - 2) The towns of Star Valley Ranch and Afton reported two permits each in 2012. (Residential and commercial permits announcement in April, 2012)
- B) The rate of growth of new home permits issued is only 1.8%.
- C) There is no information as the actual fulfillment of these permits.

- D) Construction jobs have dropped from 2,500 in 2007 to less than 1,500 in 2011 as home- building has dropped drastically.
- E) The number of vacant lots that sold in 2012 did increase over 2011, but 2011 was a low year.

Response: 1-13

The number of building permits issued in the study area has steadily increased in recent years. A total of 37 were issued in 2013; this number nearly doubled to 67 in 2014. By summer of 2015, 53 building permits were issued, which already surpasses the total for 2013, as well as the 41 permits issued at this time of the year in 2014.

- 14. The projected growth of Star Valley and “new development in the area” seems to be based on plats approved as of 2005. In 2005, landowners may have had an “incentive to subdivide.” What about since then? Since the “housing crash”? What has been the trend of subdividing and new building lots platted since 2005?

Response: 1- 14

The EA includes growth changes for the study area through 2013. Data for 2013 shows that average annual growth generally returned to 2000 to 2009 levels, at 2.3 percent.

- 15. The Alpine Junction traffic light is being used as an example of WYDOT’s gross miscalculation of “new development in the area.” Many would like to see this sole Star Valley traffic light removed as being “useless” and “offensive.” It has been remarked, and demonstrated, that “platted building lots do not equal buildings.”

Response: 1- 15

Significant development was planned in the Alpine area at the time, and traffic impact studies conducted at that time showed the need for a traffic signal. A new study would be needed to study the signal again to determine if it is warranted with current traffic volumes. We are aware of vehicle detection issues at this intersection and are taking steps to remedy the issue.

- 16. Does WYDOT stand by its June, 2013 statement, in a public meeting that it “will build new foundations and move houses” for homeowners impacted by the 9-mile, Etna- north 5-lane proposal?

Response: 1- 16

The Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT) will comply with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act, which provides protections and assistance for people affected by federally funded projects. This law was enacted by Congress to ensure that people whose real property is acquired, or who move as a result of projects receiving federal funds, will be treated fairly and equitably and will receive assistance in moving from the property they occupy.

- 17. More Teton County workers would rather live in Teton County than Lincoln County. The plans to develop building lots for Teton County workers have not panned out in the volume anticipated.

Response: 1- 17

Lincoln County’s population growth rate in 2013 was the fourth highest in the state, just slightly behind Teton County, which ranked second.

18. We challenge the notion that 5 fatal crashes in 13 years justify 200' easements and a 76' wide road. Specifically, how would a super-highway have prevented each of these fatalities?

Response: 1- 18

The number of injuries in the study area doubled in 2013 compared to 2012, indicating a substantial increase and a need to address safety. In addition, crashes nearly tripled from 2012 to 2013.

The number of fatal crashes alone has not been considered justification for the proposed action. Other safety factors were considered in developing alternatives, including property damage and injury crashes additionally, the project is needed to:

- A) Improve highway safety.
- B) Increase highway capacity and improve mobility.
- C) Improve roadway conditions.

19. The statement that Hwy. 89 is operating at its "peak capacity" seems ludicrous to those who live here and use the road. The road is busier than usual during the 60- day tourist season, but residents accept that and deal with it, grateful for the visitors.

Response: 1- 19

The current Level of Service (LOS) for the study area is C, which is the minimal level for which this type of roadway should operate. However, LOS is expected to degrade to D overall by 2014, and to E during summer months.

20. Exactly how is Hwy. 89 "failing" in its "intended function?" Perhaps we are confused as to the highway's exact "intended function" if it is not to deliver people and goods to their designations.

Response: 1- 20

US 89 is functionally classified by WYDOT as a Rural Principal Arterial, which provides the safe and efficient movement of people and goods over long distances while allowing for limited access to adjacent lands. US 89 is also designated as part of the National Highway System (NHS), which consists of roadways important to the nation's economy, defense, and mobility. This system was developed by the U.S. Department of Transportation in cooperation with the states, local officials, and metropolitan planning organizations. In addition to the Interstate Highway System, the NHS includes other Principal Arterials (such as US 89) in rural and urban areas that provide access between an arterial and a major port, airport, public transportation facility, or other intermodal transportation facility. The 2012 Lincoln County Economic Development Plan recognizes US 89 as "the lifeblood corridor of the region and a critical link with areas beyond the county borders." As such, the highway's function as a Rural Principal Arterial is to provide for substantial statewide or interstate travel. A Rural Principal Arterial typically has high mobility and high access control, with a limited number of access points (such as intersections or driveways). In other words, this type of highway should have relatively smooth, uninterrupted flow with minimal entrances or exits. However, US 89 is also used by area residents for short, local trips within Star Valley's small towns, which affects mobility. The Study Area includes over 100 uncontrolled access points that affect traffic flow. This means that US 89 is not currently functioning as it was intended.

21. In 2005, Lincoln County to Teton County individual commuter vehicle count was 924. In 2011, this number was 990, an increase of only 66 personal vehicles in six years. This does not justify any highway expansion.

Response: 1- 21

There is no precise way to predict future economic and social events that can influence growth and traffic conditions, such as the 2008 economic recession that affected the entire country, as well as the Study Area. However, economic changes in the town of Jackson, 37 miles northeast of Alpine in Teton County, have strongly influenced changes in Star Valley and are expected to continue to do so. According to the 2012 Lincoln County Economic Development Plan, drops in home prices since the recession have fueled an influx of young families to Star Valley, which saw an increase of 575.9 percent over a 10-year period in the 25-34 age groups. Retirement-aged individuals moving to the region have also increased Star Valley's population recently. These changing demographics and commuting patterns are reflected in increased bus use in the area.

Ridership on Southern Teton Area Rapid Transit (START), which provides commuter service through Star Valley between Etna and Jackson, has increased considerably, from approximately 150,000 passengers per year in 1993 to an average of over 840,000 passengers per year from 2008 to 2012. In 2013, START carried 899,318 riders, the highest in START history. The 2012 Lincoln County Economic Development Plan also notes that "tourism has the potential to be a major economic benefit to the county, although the opportunities are under-realized at present." US 89 carry tourists to many of the state's most popular recreation destinations. Six of the top 10 visitation years to Yellowstone National Park include every year from 2007 through 2012, with 2012 the second highest. Visitation to Grand Teton National Park in 2012 was the 10th highest in the park's history, with 2013 only slightly lower. US 89 also provides access to Grand Targhee Ski Resort, Jackson Hole Mountain Ski Resort, and the Snow King Ski Area. On a grander scale, US 89 connects Mexico with Canada over nearly 2,000 miles, and was named by national Geographic in 2013 as the number one "Drive of a Lifetime" out of 500 "of the world's most spectacular trips." For these and other reasons, we believe a higher demand will be placed on US 89 in coming years.

22. The very popular START buses have alleviated much of the commuter traffic. In 2013, the Star Valley/ Teton County buses had 29,831 riders, up 350 from 2012. That's almost 30,000 individual cars that were NOT on the road last year.

Response: 1- 22

These changing demographics and commuting patterns are reflected in increased bus use in the area. Ridership on Southern Teton Area Rapid Transit (START), which provides commuter service through Star Valley between Etna and Jackson, has increased considerably, from approximately 150,000 passengers per year in 1993 to an average of over 840,000 passengers per year from 2008 to 2012. In 2013, START carried 899,318 riders, the highest in START history. The increase in ridership is, in part, reflective of the increase in population but the increase in ridership is not anticipated to entirely alleviate the need for roadway improvements.

23. Reports say the START commuter buses have reached their capacity. Star Valley residents would like to see additional START buses, and ask that Lincoln County begin working to supplement the START efforts. The START director says there are no plans to add another bus. Lincoln County needs to step up and participate in delivering its residents to their out-of-county jobs.

Response: 1- 23

Adding START buses, although not a component of this proposed action, is worthy of pursuing and should be with START program director/board. WYDOT will assist in this coordination when and where appropriate.

24. In Afton last month, we were told that the Thayne/ Etna- north project was delayed until 2016. Why does the STIP still show this project in the 2014 columns?

Response: 1- 24

The STIP is updated annually and the Thayne/Etna North project schedule will be revised as appropriate.

25. Does the \$40 million listed in the June 3, 2014 STIP for the Thayne/ Etna- North (pages 4 & 6) project include buying easements? (If not, what are the projected costs to be added to the project?)

Response: 1- 25

The estimated cost shown in the STIP reflects the construction and construction engineering costs. The cost of buying right-of-way will be based on the appraised value of the property and any needed mitigation for damages. The total cost of right-of-way acquisition for the project will not be known until the design is finalized.

26. How much of the \$40 million is being allocated to the relocation of infrastructure owned by others, including Lower Valley Energy, Silverstar, water districts, etc?

Response: 1- 26

None of the cost reflected in the STIP is allocated to the relocation of infrastructure owned by others, such as utility companies. If the utility is within the existing right-of-way and is licensed, the cost of needed relocation is their responsibility. If the utility is outside of the Right-of-way, WYDOT will pay to move it if necessary. These actual costs to the project will not be known until the final impacts of the project are determined.

27. Does the \$40 million listed in the June 3, 2014 STIP for the Thayne/ Etna-North projects include the costs of the environmental assessments?

Response: 1- 27

Environmental assessments are performed during the preliminary engineering phase of the project. The cost of this work is not included in the estimated cost of the project shown in the STIP.

28. Does the \$40 million listed in the June 3, 2014 STIP for the Thayne/ Etna-North projects include the needs requested by the Game & Fish Department?

- A) Wildlife friendly fencing
- B) Wildlife exit ramps (three)
- C) A new elk jump and gate
- D) The purchase of undeveloped property as mitigation for acres lost to 200' easement
- E) Removal and replacement of the Quonset hut
- F) Public Parking improvements

- G) Retaining walls adjacent to the Alpine Wetlands to minimize discharge of construction materials and petroleum-based products from accessing the wetland
- H) Construction of an Information and Education building
- I) Removal and replacement of 4 Osprey nest poles
- J) Construction of wildlife migration underpass
- K) A plan to relocate the nests of the Swainson hawks and red-tail hawks from the large trees designated for removal

Response: 1- 28

The cost shown in the STIP reflects the construction and construction engineering costs for all features built through the project corridor. This cost is an estimate based on the best information available and includes the items listed as described in the EA.

29. To what extent do WYDOT and Lincoln County anticipate using the power of eminent domain to acquire rights-of-way?

Response: 1- 29

The Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT) will comply with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act, which provides protections and assistance for people affected by federally funded projects. This law was enacted by Congress to ensure that people whose real property is acquired, or who move as a result of projects receiving federal funds, will be treated fairly and equitably and will receive assistance in moving from the property they occupy.

30. Can the "U.S. Highway, principal arterial" designation for Hwy. 89 be changed? Would WYDOT work with Lincoln County and Star Valley to explore this?

Response: 1- 30

The designation of this highway as a Rural Principal Arterial is secondary to its designation as a NHS highway. This designation is for the whole route, as the US has determined that this roadway is important to the nation's economy, defense, and mobility. The portion through Lincoln County and Star Valley alone cannot be changed.

31. WYDOT is concerned about its ability to maintain US 89. How on earth will 200' easement and 76' of pavement be maintained? (mowing, plowing, painting, etc.) What is the maintenance plan?

Response: 1- 31

WYDOT will maintain the new road section in much the same manner as the existing with regard to mowing and right-of-way maintenance. There will be additional maintenance burden for the increased pavement surface. Future preservation treatments will likely be accomplished through contracts with contractors to perform the work. The additional maintenance burden impact directly to WYDOT will be for snow removal in the winter. WYDOT has upgraded its maintenance equipment, including more powerful snow plows. In addition, WYDOT has hired a new foreman with experience keeping state highways open 24/7.

32. Is it true that the local WYDOT shop has been told that no new manpower or equipment will be forthcoming to maintain 200' of easement and 76' of pavement? Surely there is a plan to increase

personnel and equipment to handle the maintenance demands of the 5- lane proposals. What is the plan?

Response: 1- 32: See Response 1-31

33. Increased lane miles will result in increased costs. Who will pay for these increases? County? State? The federal government that is a mind- boggling \$17 trillion in debt, borrowing almost half of what it spends?

Response: 1- 33

Costs will be covered by WYDOT and FHWA funds.

34. Does WYDOT expect Lincoln County to build the needed “connectivity” to Hwy. 89?

Response: 1- 34

Where existing county roads are impacted, WYDOT will reestablish the intersection for connectivity.

35. It is noted that although automobile traffic has increased slightly on Hwy. 89, truck traffic has not increased proportionately. This is probably due to the fact there is no new industries or commercial enterprises to speak of in Star Valley.

Response: 1- 35: Comment noted.

36. Of the 2005 Memorandum studies regarding crashes, we note the following:

- A) Fatal crashes are “10% higher than the state average.” Going from 32’ of road to 76’ of road is overkill for such small numbers (2.71 fatalities per 100 million vehicle mile on Hwy. 89 vs. 2.45 statewide, 1992- 2001).
- B) Does WYDOT stand by its statement, in a public meeting, “Let the deaths be on you head” if the public persists in objecting to the 5- lane proposal?
- C) The majority of crashes are with “fixed and non- fixed” objects. How will five 12’ driving lands and two 8’ shoulders fix this? What “fixed” and “non- fixed” objects are to be removed? Will utility lines be buried and the poles eliminated? At whose expense? Other expansion projects show that houses and buildings are closer to the road, subjecting them to impacts.
- D) “Driver inexperience,” “unsafe speeds” and “no- violations” accounted for 56.4% of crashes. Which of these crashes would have been prevented by a 76’ wide roadway?
- E) Only 26.9% of crashes involved road conditions which were “icy, snowy or slushy.” 53.8% of crashes were in “dry road conditions.”
- F) “Atmospheric conditions” at the time of crashes: 67.6% were in “clear/ cloudy” conditions. How will 76’ remedy this? Only 23.9% of crashes were in “rain, snow, fog, wind, ground blizzard, sleet, hail, and freezing rain” conditions. (The numbers demonstrate the skill of the Star Valley residents as they drive Hwy. 89 in winter. People ask: what percentage of crashes involved non- residents?)
- G) Of “motor vehicle collisions” (head- on, rear- ender, etc.) 52% of crashes were listed as “none reported.” “Left turn” and “right turn” collisions combined were only 14.9%. Yet, WYDOT asserts the need for a 76’ wide road based on collisions regarding left and right turns on to and off of Hwy. 89.
- H) Residents would like to know the specifics of the crashes and how WYDOT thinks the 5- lane proposal would have prevented them.

l) Building a super- highway to prevent crashes seems counter-intuitive.

Response: 1- 36

As mentioned in Chapter 1, 206 crashes occurred on US 89 between 2004 and 2013 within the Study Area, which is an average of 21 crashes per year. Of these 206 crashes, 22 (11 percent) involved alcohol and 60 (29 percent) were vehicle-animal collisions. Crashes in the Study Area showed a generally decreasing trend from 2005 to 2012; however, crashes nearly tripled from 2012 to 2013 (see Table 3-6 and 3-7 and Figure 3-4, 3-5, and 3-6). From 2004 through 2013, 101 people were injured or killed (see Table 3-7). (The number of persons injured is higher than the number of injury crashes because more than one person could be injured in a crash.) The number of injuries showed an overall declining trend until 2013, which doubled over the previous year. The 5-Lane Alternative would increase traffic capacity and improve safety between Etna and Alpine. Within the past 10 years, WYDOT converted approximately 33 miles of principal arterial roads throughout the state from 2 lanes to 5 lanes. The majority of miles (14) were between Cody and Powell; the remainder were between Lander and Hudson son, Riverton and Shoshoni, and Wright and Gillette. These conversions resulted in an average 46 percent decrease in fatal/injury crashes and 13 percent decrease in non-injury crashes overall. Although these roadways do not share identical conditions to US 89 (e.g., terrain, traffic volumes, etc.), WYDOT anticipates a decrease in crashes from applying the same type of conversion to this project.

FHWA conducted a study on the conversion of two-lane, undivided roadways to two-way left-turn lanes (i.e., similar to the 5-Lane Alternative) on two-lane roads. The study found that reductions of at least 29 percent, 19 percent, and 36 percent can be conservatively expected in total, injury, and rear-end crashes, respectively, at rural installations. The study also found that locations with a high frequency of rear-end collisions, especially those involving a vehicle turning into driveways along a two-lane road, would experience a greater safety benefit from installing a five-lane design. In addition, the wider 8-foot shoulders would provide more room for disabled vehicles to move out of the traffic flow, and would provide additional safety for cyclists. Wider shoulders and roadway template also provide a larger “escape zone” for errant vehicles. Risky passing maneuvers would also be minimized as drivers feel less pressure to increase speeds to pass slower vehicles.

37. It is noted that the “speed study” was performed during 10:00 am and 2:30 pm in 2003. Is there a more recent study? Or, a study that includes the rush hours?

Response: 1- 37

WYDOT prepared a Spot Speed Study (Etna to Alpine Lincoln County) June 2014. Free flow speeds were taken with radar and a minimum 100-vehicle sample were collected for 3 locations for both directions of travel. This study did not include rush hour periods. The data from the 2003 study correlates to data collected in 2014; i.e., speeds were very similar.

38. Daily Hwy. 89 commuters report stringent adherence to the posted speed limits due to the superb vigilance of law enforcement during rush hours.

Response: 1- 38: Comment noted.

39. In the 2005 Memorandum, “passing segments” were listed as an option. Why, now, are “passing lanes impossible”? (June 5, 2014 meeting in Afton)

Response: 1- 39

An alternative with non-continuous passing lanes was considered for analysis in the EA (Alternative 2). Alternative 2 would not provide the capacity improvements to accommodate 2034 traffic volumes, would result in LOS D by the design year (2034), would not appreciably reduce the percent time spent following slower vehicles, and would not reduce the rear-end or sideswipe vehicle-to-vehicle crash types that typically result from following or passing a slower vehicle and/or turning vehicle. In addition, passing lanes require tapers at each end, which would not safely accommodate the potential increase in accesses associated with the large number of undeveloped lots currently platted. Therefore, this alternative does not meet the project purpose and need and was eliminated.

40. We have heard that some Wyoming state troopers are opposed to the 5- lane proposal. Is this true? Have our troopers and sheriff's deputies been polled on the proposal?

Response: 1- 40

Comment noted. We have not polled troopers and/or sheriff's deputies on this proposed action.

41. The danger of "unregulated access points" (both Thayne- north and Etna- north) has been put forward as one of the primary reasons the 200' easement and 76' of pavement is needed. People would like WYDOT to qualify these access points as follows:

- A) How many of these access points are to seasonal hay/ grain fields?
- B) How many are used regularly and how often in the course of a year?
- C) How many are not used at all anymore?
- D) How many are to single- family dwellings?
- E) How many are to "developed" subdivisions?
- F) How many are to "undeveloped- but- platted" subdivisions?
- G) How many are to "developed" and "undeveloped" defined? One home? Five homes? 55 of the lots? 80% of the lots?

Response: 1- 41

Within the project corridor, there are 40 residential access points, 31 commercial access points, 13 major access points, and 39 field access points, for a total of 123 within 9.25 miles.

42. WYDOT states that "effective access management" reduces travel time by "40- 60%." It is thought that this is very overstated.

Response: 1- 42

The 40-60 percent reduction in travel times is taken from page 2-27, Table 2-10 of National Highway Institute course 13378 Access Management, Location and Design, April 2000. Travel time reductions would not be as high as 40-60 percent in a rural setting. However, lack of effective access management and the proliferation of accesses is a major factor leading to the deterioration of highway safety and efficiency. Problems with lack of access control in Wyoming are becoming apparent due to increases in traffic volumes.

43. The federal highway trust fund will be out of money next month and there is already talk in Washington, D.C. of increasing the federal fuel tax. Several Wyoming state legislators are planning to draft bills to reduce the state fuel tax should the federal government act to increase its tax. How will this affect WYDOT's plans?

Response: 1- 43

A reduction in funding levels can have the effect of delaying a planned project. This depends on the level of funding lost and the other needs of the state highway system.

44. On July 7, 2014, The Hill newspaper announced that the federal highway trust fund will begin cutting payments to states next month. How will this affect the plans for "Thayne/Etna- north? When funds are cut, priorities must be established-where does this project sit on WYDOT's priority list? Surely Thayne/ Etna- north does not raise to the level of urgency as, say Hwy. 22, Teton Pass.

Response: 1- 44

See the response for 1-43. Many factors play into the prioritization of projects and can affect how long a project can be delayed should funding become an issue. Prioritization usually will be based on pavement, safety, and bridge needs, but can also be influenced by limitations attached with different funding types.

45. From the 2005 Memorandum: "A divided multilane highway with a depressed median may be desired." By whom? Are we headed toward "Interstate 89"? With exit ramps to the houses along the way?

Response: 1- 45

Please see response to Comment 1-36. WYDOT has no intention of building an interstate configuration on this project.

46. Has Lincoln County begun to require the recommended 75' set back from the Hwy. 89 centerline? Have the county and WYDOT begun to "purchase or acquire the required right- of- way for future corridor development needs"? If so, where, and what are the details?

Response: 1- 46

Lincoln County instituted a 50-foot setback in 2005. WYDOT has initiated discussions with many landowners concerning the proposed improvements and how this may affect their property. WYDOT has not begun to acquire the needed property at this time.

47. According to the 2005 Memorandum, a 355 increase in traffic is projected by 2027. How does this justify a 1005 increase in highway capacity?

Response: 1- 47

Please see response to Comment 1-36.

48. There was a good point made at one of the public meetings about the increased danger of farm equipment accessing and egressing Hwy. 89 under the 76' proposal. Locals know how to "make a lane" to facilitate passing farm equipment on the highway and to accommodate our ranchers and farmers as they go about their important business.

Response: 1- 48

Comment noted. However, visitors (including tourists) to the valley do not necessarily possess this ability to "make a lane" to facilitate passing farm equipment on the highway and to accommodate our ranchers and farms as they go about their important business." Accommodating farm and ranch equipment safely is an important consideration in determining the needed width. This route experiences many different types of traffic (i.e., commuters, tourists, locals, and farm implements), which results in a substantial variation in speed on the highway. Given the width of some of the farm equipment, a wider section is desirable to accommodate a safe passing opportunity.

49. We know that the currently operative MAP- 21 federal legislation calls for the accommodation of bicyclists and pedestrians. We support shoulder improvements for these purposes'. Star Valley residents avoid Hwy. 89 during the LOTOJA bicycle race, except to park at the accesses to cheer on the racers. A 5-lane proposal to accommodate this once- a- year event is not justified. As for encouraging bicycling- we have long stretches of the year where cycling is simply not possible.

Response: 1- 49

The proposed build alternatives would provide 8-foot shoulders that would accommodate bicyclists. The 5-lane alternative (or any other alternative evaluated) was not developed to solely accommodate bicyclists. The proposed alternatives were developed to improve highway safety, increase highway capacity and improve mobility and improve roadway conditions.

50. If WYDOT's environmental assessment found some endangered or threatened species in the path of the proposed right of way, plans- much less construction- would come to a screeching halt. How is it that the concerns for "environmental impact" do not extend to citizens, their homes, and their businesses? To paraphrase Boris Pasternak, WE are the environment too!

Response: 1- 50

First, humans, although obviously an important and valued species, are not an endangered species and their populations are not threatened to extinction. Second, WYDOT compensates by law those property owners who would be impacted by the project. The Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT) will comply with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act, which provides protections and assistance for people affected by federally funded projects. This law was enacted by Congress to ensure that people whose real property is acquired, or who move as a result of projects receiving federal funds, will be treated fairly and equitably and will receive assistance in moving from the property they occupy. In addition, the NEPA process is structured to gather and consider public comment in the development and selection of preferred alternatives, and also in the development of those alternatives as a project is designed.

51. Folks are alarmed that WYDOT Director Cox is concerned about "implications for federal funding... if we modify... to allow a design that is less than the 5- lane improvement." Conclusions are being drawn that the Star Valley projects are being driven by the federal government, which is borrowing \$.40 of every \$1 it spends, and nothing residents say or do will bring WYDOT off its 5- lane stand to consider reasonable alternatives.

- A) Why WYDOT's refusal to back off of the 5- lane proposal?
- B) What federal, borrowed, funds- have already been applied for?
- C) What federal (borrowed) funds have already been granted/ permitted/ received for the 5- lane solution to the exclusion of any other alternative?
- D) Are these funds from the soon- to- expire MAP- 21 federal legislation?
- E) What federal (borrowed) funds or other financial commitments will disappear if the 5- lane project is modified or abandoned?
- F) What money has WYDOT applied for and what money has been committed by the feds and what are the TERMS of the federal funds/ grants? Specifically, the terms of MAP- 21 compliance?
- G) Have any federal funds been promised based on the 2005 Memorandum- is that why there has been no more recent paperwork?
- H) If there is a later study, why was I not delivered to local officials?

Response: 1- 51

The Federal Highway Administration has rules in place to insure that once a state transportation agency begins spending money on a project they timely advance that project to completion. If a state does not make substantial progress within a 10 year period, they are required to repay the FHWA the funds expended on the incomplete project. FHWA then returns the funds to the state to be reallocated for other transportation expenditures. This "10 year rule" does not preclude the selection of alternatives advanced for consideration. A no build alternative can be selected without repayment, and any build alternative can be selected and as long as it is timely advanced to construction with no repayment required.

Conclusion

True, there are some Star Valley residents who favor the 5- lane proposal. We can only speculate as to the motives driving their support. What is not speculative- what is known to certainty- is that they are in the minority. The overwhelming majority of Star Valley residents are opposed to the super- highway.

New arrivals to our Valley, as well as demographers across the country, agree that people are choosing lifestyle as a priority when deciding where to relocate. Our new residents, especially, say the primary reason for their choosing Star Valley as their home is the beautiful, rural nature of the Valley. The proposed super- highway will not in any way enhance this Valley.

People think WYDOT is planning to spend a lot of money, federal money borrowed from other countries that we don't have on a project we don't want. This is the height of fiscal irresponsibility.

We urge WYDOT to step back, take a breath, and re- think the 5-lane proposal. Re- think, even, the 4 lane proposal. Please consider the intrinsic nature of Star Valley on which our Scenic Byway designation was based. Let's revisit the subject of five or four lanes in a few years. As it stands, this proposed super- highway is fiscally foolish, environmentally reckless and culturally undesirable.

People who travel the state of Wyoming know that there are other highway projects much more worthy of the money earmarked for this valley. While there are counties screaming for badly needed major road and highway improvements, Star Valley is not. Please take your \$40 to them, with love from us.

All we ask for is a little shoulder work, some signs added, some signs changed, relocated or removed, a turning lane here, a passing lane there, and some funky accesses reworked.

1-Conclusion

Please see the Public and Agency Scoping Report, particularly Appendix H: Public Scoping Comments and Responses, for public and agency comments, including those in support of the project. This report is included with the EA as Appendix B.