Hoback Junction

finding of no significant impact

WYDOT Project Numbers:
N104006 | N104065 | N104078

Prepared for:
Federal Highway Administration and
Wyoming Department of Transportation

December 2007

Hoback Junction

FHWA–WY-FONSI-2007-03

Finding of No Significant Impact

on the

Environmental Assessment

for

FHWA-WY-EA-2007-03
Hoback Junction, Wyoming
Teton County
Wyoming Project 0N104006, N104065, N104078

Submitted Pursuant to:
42 USC 4332(2)(c)

by the

U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration

and the

State of Wyoming
Department of Transportation

Finding of No Significant Impact

for

FHWA-WY-FONSI-2007-03
Hoback Junction, Wyoming Teton County
Wyoming Project No. 0N104006, N104065, N104078

THE FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION HAS DETERMINED THAT THIS PROPOSED PROJECT WILL HAVE NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT. THIS FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT IS BASED ON THE HOBACK JUNCTION ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT WHICH HAS BEEN INDEPENDENTLY EVALUATED BY THE FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION (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 IS NOT REQUIRED. THE FHWA TAKES FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ACCURACY, SCOPE AND CONTENT OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT.

Date December 19 2007

For Federal Highway Administration
Division Administrator

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BMP	Best Management Practices
BTNF	Bridger-Teton National Forest
dBA	Decibel
DEIS	Draft Environmental Impact Statement
EA	Environmental Assessment
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact
ID	Interdisciplinary
MP	Milepost
MSE	Mechanically Stabilized Earth
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
SWMP	Stormwater Management Plan
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USFS	U.S. Forest Service
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
WGFD	Wyoming Game and Fish Department
WYDOT	Wyoming Department of Transportation

Table of Contents

Appendix

List of Figures

Chapter 1.0 Project Description

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT) proposes improvements to a 0.6-mile section of U.S. Highway 26/89, between milepost (MP) 141.4 and 140.7, including the U.S. 26/89, U.S. 189/191, and U.S. 26/89/189/191 intersection and the Snake River Bridge immediately southwest of the Hoback Junction community (see **Figure 1-1**). The three highway sections that meet at Hoback Junction are critical travel links within the region. Commuters from Pinedale and Bondurant (via U.S. Highway 189/191) and Alpine (via U.S. Highway 26/89) use these segments of roadway to commute to and from Jackson. The highway is also heavily used by commercial vehicles and tourism traffic.

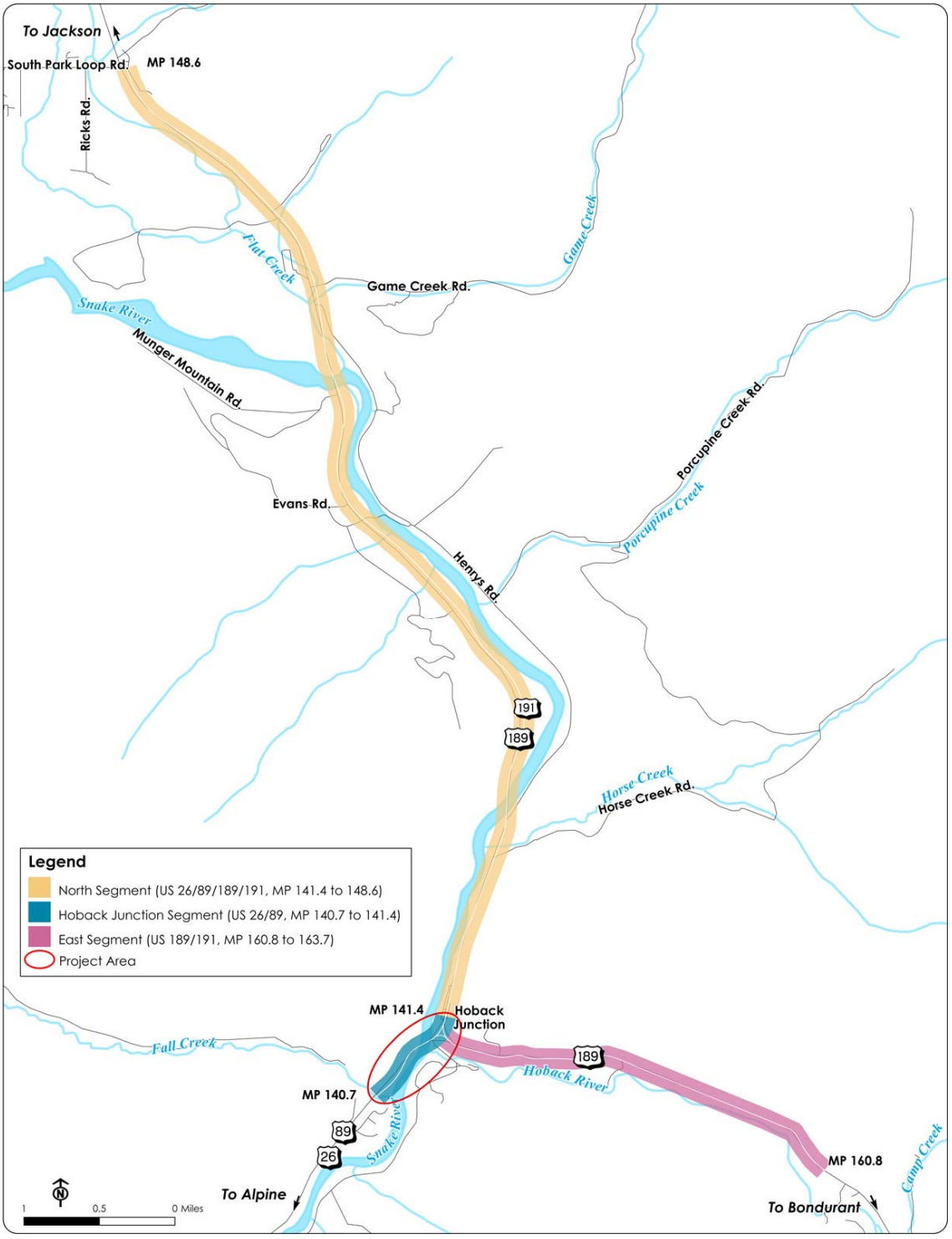
WYDOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) initiated a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) in 2000 that included study of portions of the three highway segments that meet at Hoback Junction: U.S. Highway 26/89/189/191 from MP 148.6 south to the Junction, U.S. Highway 26/89 from MP 140.7, and U.S. Highway 189/191 to MP 160.8. In 2007, based on their independent utility and distinctive attributes, WYDOT and FHWA decided to separate these three segments into three distinct National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) studies, leading to the initiation of the Hoback Junction Environmental Assessment (EA)

In September 2007, the Hoback Junction EA was completed and signed. The EA and this Finding of No Significant Impacts (FONSI) were prepared in compliance with NEPA and with other applicable environmental laws, Executive Orders, and related requirements. As required by NEPA, an environmental analysis was conducted and all potential impacts associated with the proposed action were documented and mitigation measures identified. No significant impacts were identified during the course of this study.

1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the Hoback Junction project is to resolve existing bridge and roadway deficiencies, while safely and efficiently accommodating current and future traffic volumes and improving system linkage. The primary needs to be met by this project are:

Figure 1-1
Study Area

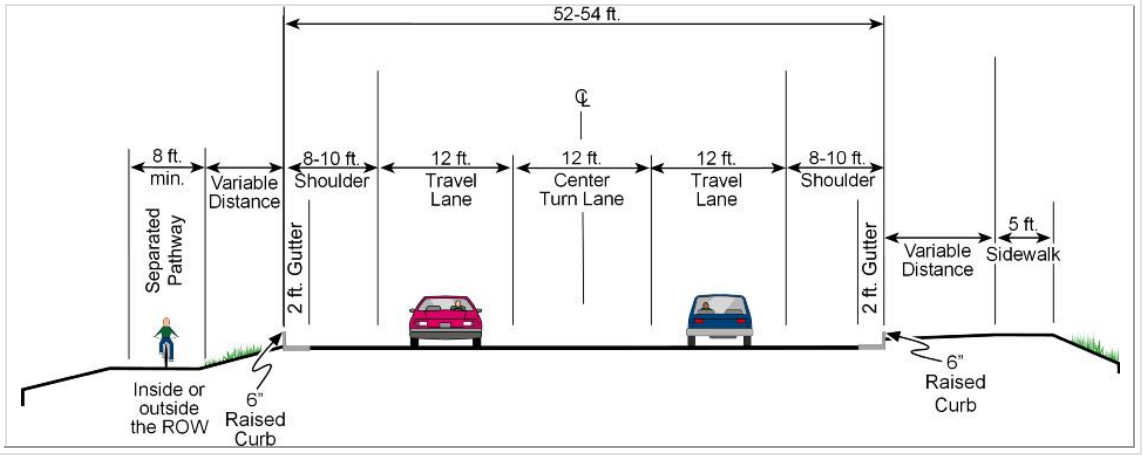


- ***To correct roadway and bridge deficiencies:*** The existing bridge and roadways that pass through Hoback Junction have a number of deficiencies that affect their ability to safely carry a growing number of vehicles.
- ***To accommodate travel demand:*** A variety of vehicle types travel through Hoback Junction for multiple trip purposes. Increases in traffic volumes, combined with intersection deficiencies discussed above, will worsen travel conditions at the Hoback Junction intersection.
- ***To improve traffic safety:*** Analysis of nine years of crash data (1995 to 2004) for the study area indicates that the conditions described above combine to create safety concerns. For the period 2001 to 2005, the study area had an average crash rate of 3.04, which is more than double the 2004 statewide average of 1.28 for similar facilities. As traffic volumes continue to increase, the number of crashes is also likely to increase if no roadway improvements are made.
- ***To reduce geologic hazard potential:*** An active landslide exists at the west end of the bridge over the Snake River. The slope movement at this location has contributed to the structural deficiency of the bridge by causing stress on the approach span. This landslide was quite active in the mid-1980s after a series of very wet years. Since the late-1980s the movement has slowed, but slope inclinometers installed in 1999 indicate that the landslide continues to move.

1.3 PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The 3-Lane Urban Alternative provides the most favorable response to the overall purpose and need for the project. The typical cross-section for this alternative has two 12-foot travel lanes and a 12-foot turn lane. The center lane would operate as a turning lane for access to residences and businesses in the Hoback Junction area. Also provided are 8- to 10-foot shoulders, curb and gutter, and a 5-foot sidewalk on the east side and pathway on the west side (see **Figure 1-2**). The 3-Lane cross-section would apply to the bridge and points north, however the bridge would not include a pathway. South of the Snake River bridge, the typical cross-section would have two 12-foot travel lanes and 8-foot shoulders, but no curb and gutter.

Figure 1-2
3-Lane Urban Alternative Typical Section



The Preferred Alternative includes the following design options:

- ***Snake River Bridge Options:*** Five bridge location options were evaluated and screened in the EA. The Bridge Location Design Option was carried forward as part of the Preferred Alternative because it would have minimal impacts to the natural environment, would minimize encroachments to the landslide area at the southwest corner of the existing bridge, and would minimize impacts during construction because the new bridge could be built while using the existing bridge as a detour. This option represents a combination of two other options (Adjacent to Existing Bridge and Parallel South) and involves constructing a new bridge next to and on the south side of the existing bridge.

- ***Access and Circulation Options:*** Four access and circulation options were evaluated and screened in the EA. The Do Minimum Option would maintain all existing accesses and not add enhancements. The Combine Approaches and Encourage Internal Circulation would eliminate two approaches, but maintain two-way access on all remaining approaches and encourage internal circulation by not formally delineating frontage roads. Both of these options would retain internal circulation. For this reason they were both carried forward for further consideration.

- ***Hoback Junction Intersection Options:*** Two design options to reconfigure the existing three-way intersection were considered, a "T" intersection and a

roundabout. Both of these options would meet the project's purpose and need and were carried forward for further consideration.

1.4 Summary of Impacts and Mitigation Measures

No significant impacts to the environment were identified during the course of this study. Analysis of social, economic, and environmental issues revealed that a limited number of resources will be impacted by the Preferred Alternative. Impacts that will require the implementation of mitigation measures include the following:

- ***Property Acquisition:*** The Preferred Alternative would require the acquisition of 1.2 acres of additional right-of-way and displace one business (Hoback River Resort). Right-of-way acquisition would comply with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisitions Policies Act of 1970, as amended. Owners of property to be acquired will be compensated at fair market value for their property. Relocation assistance payments are designed to compensate displaced persons for costs that are the result of acquisition of the property upon which they reside.

- ***Water Resources:*** Replacement of the Snake River Bridge has the potential to modify the river channel through adjustments of the river bank, installation of riprap to prevent erosion, and changes in bridge pier shape and/or placement. Bridge construction may result in short-term increases of sediment levels into the river during the construction phase. WYDOT has attempted to avoid and minimize impacts to water resources during the project design. WYDOT will continue to seek opportunities to avoid and minimize impacts to water resources and will incorporate BMPs to mitigate unavoidable adverse effects to water resources.

- ***Water Quality:*** The Preferred Alternative would increase the amount of impervious surface from 2.9 acres to 5.9 acres, resulting in increased stormwater runoff containing highway pollutants. The widened roadway would result in increased use and volume of sand, gravel, and deicing salts during the winter months. WYDOT will require preparation and implementation of a Storm Water Management Plan (SWMP). This plan will describe and list the BMPs necessary to improve storm water quality.

- ***Wetlands:*** Total wetland impacts would be an estimated 0.32 acre with a total of 3.20 wetland functional units lost. A permit from the USACE will be required for all wetland and waters of the U.S. impacts. Wetland mitigation

will be required and the mitigation would be designed such that the total functional units lost as a result of the construction project would be replaced at a minimum ratio of 1:1.

- ***Wildlife:*** Wildlife has the potential to be affected by loss of habitat, disturbance, displacement or mortality, and potential movement barriers. The USFWS believes the proposed project will not adversely affect the bald eagle based on the distance from the project and demonstrated tolerance to disturbance. During the final design phase, WYDOT will investigate the feasibility of providing wildlife passage adjacent to both abutments under the reconstructed Snake River Bridge. WYDOT will also employ BMPs to mitigate impacts to wildlife and fisheries.

- ***Vegetation:*** The Preferred Alternative would disturb approximately 2.5 acres of Mountain Big Sagebrush. Due to ground disturbance there is potential for noxious and invasive species to establish. Based on the limited ground disturbance associated with the Preferred Alternative and application of mitigation measures during construction, potential establishment would be minimal.

- ***Visual:*** Visual impacts would result from wider bridge mass, increased shading under the bridge, and retaining walls, affecting the traveling public, local residents, and recreational activities. WYDOT will revegetate using native trees, shrubs, and grasses. Cut and fill slopes will be constructed to provide naturally appearing foreground views. The length and use of retaining walls will be minimized, and retaining walls will be designed such that they blend into the environment. WYDOT will consider incorporation of measures and recommendations contained in the Jackson/Teton County Comprehensive Plan and the Wyoming Centennial Scenic Byway Plan and will coordinate the aesthetic treatment of the walls with the design advisory group during the final design phase.

- ***Construction:*** Construction activities could impair travel mobility, increase traffic congestion, and temporarily restrict access to residences and businesses. Construction activities could also increase dust, noise, runoff, and result in visual intrusions to motorists and residents. Construction would present the potential for exposure to, or accidental spill of, hazardous materials. Contractors will be required to adhere to measures outlined in WYDOT's Standard Specifications for Road and Bridge Construction, 2003, to control air pollution and protect water quality during construction. Construction will conform to all local ordinances. A traffic management plan

will be developed and coordination with local residents and emergency service providers will occur to minimize delays and ensure access to properties.

Environmental impacts and mitigation measures associated with the Preferred Alternative are fully discussed in Chapter 3.0 of the Hoback Junction EA dated September 17, 2007.

Chapter 2.0 EA Comments and Responses

FHWA and WYDOT held a public hearing on the EA on October 9th, 2007 and received comments over a 30-day comment period. This chapter provides comments received and responses to substantive comments. For copies of the comments received, as well as the public notice and other information, please refer to the *Hoback Junction EA: Public Review Period and Public Hearing Transcript* (WYDOT, 2007).

Comments Received on Comment Forms at the Public Hearing/Open House

Comment #1: Rod Lewis
I own approximately 5.5 acres of undeveloped commercial property between the rivers east shore and the state highway right-of-way. I am very concerned about the lack of access to that property behind and adjacent to the highway right-of-way by the fire house. There is a real need to freely access these commercial lots via a through way back onto the highway. A 4th access to the circle needs to be strongly considered to make this possible. I am in the river business and have been for 37 years. We have the only access to and from the Snake River in the area. We need easy access to the boat ramp behind the firehouse.

> **Response:** Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. WYDOT will maintain access to adjacent properties. Exact access locations will be determined during final design.

Comment #2: Jason Majors
I own the property located at 1595 J-W Drive, Jackson, WY 83001. This project is going to have a significant impact on my property value and increase the noise pollution to my property. I would strongly request that the state adopt the Roundabout Intersection Option. This will force vehicles to slow down, which will increase safety and reduce noise pollution.

Please do not give motor vehicle traffic to speed through the junction by adopting the "T" Intersection approach, which will ruin the character of the area.

> **Response:** Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. Improvements in safety and mobility at Hoback Junction should benefit adjacent land owners.
>
> Per federal regulations, a noise analysis was conducted for the Hoback Junction study area (Section 3.10.3 of the EA). This analysis indicated that changes in

future noise levels from existing conditions are predicted to be virtually imperceptible (see Chapter 3 of this FONSI). Under the Preferred Alternative, two receivers would experience noise levels above the Noise Abatement Criteria in 2026. Mitigation measures evaluated for these receivers were determined to be cost prohibitive.

Comment #3: Michael Kinley

1. The roundabout is a great idea - keeps traffic moving but also slows it to a safer speed and it helps overall on gas consumption because of not having to stop go, stop go and then accelerate into traffic again.

2. Keep the Snake River Bridge as far North as possible by building in phases.

3. The Pinedale stop from the East is also a concern so we definitely need a roundabout.

Response: Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. WYDOT will consider your comment regarding bridge location during the design stage.

Comment #4: Heather Mathews

I commend the idea of a roundabout. This seems like a wonderful option for the junction - safe, attractive, and navigable for tourists. It also seems like the best way to slow traffic down around the junction.

Thank you for considering landscaping - it would be nice to see good landscaping. And for considering sidewalks/pathways to make the junction more pedestrian/bicycle friendly.

If the alternative of a "T" at intersection is further considered - my concern would be that those driving north from Alpine who want to turn into the Point Store will cause problems - maybe a right-turn lane would be considered there - and also for those needing to turn right into businesses when driving south. The middle turn lane will be invaluable - thank you!

Response: Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. WYDOT will study turning movements during the final design stage.

Comment #5: Heather Mathews
My main concern is the safety of pedestrians & bicyclists. I live near Camp Creek & I prefer to bike to work in the summer, but b/c of the extremely narrow shoulders I drive to Henry's Road & bike to town from there. Because it is so hard to cross the highway I hope that a comprehensive look will be taken with regard to alternative transportation such as bicyclists - If a bike path is on the west side of the highway I would hope it would continue to the southern end of the bike path at Game Creek, or have an underpass for bikers to access a) Henry's Road or b) widened shoulders safe for bikers to take them to the south end of the existing bike path. I would also hope in this case that there would be wider shoulders on the west side of the road from Game Creek to the pathways at the Junction. If pathways are put on the east side of the highway I hope that those, too, will connect safely to other pathways or wide shoulders.

> **Response:** Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. The Preferred Alternative includes accommodations for bicyclists and pedestrians through Hoback Junction and improves safety by reducing areas of potential conflict between bicyclists/pedestrians and vehicles entering and exiting the highway. Final pathway and sidewalk location and configuration will be determined during the final design phase.
>
> The Preferred Alternative would improve connectivity within the Hoback Junction Area. Pathway options north of Hoback Junction and pathway network continuity will be fully evaluated in a separate NEPA study that would extend from Hoback Junction to South Park Loop Road. Transportation improvements proposed for this study, which WYDOT plans to initiate immediately, would include a separate pathway to connect with the existing Von Gontard Trail near Game Creek Road. WYDOT will continue to work with Teton County, Friends of Pathways, and the public to address the needs of bicyclists and pedestrians in this area.

Comment #6: B.J. Kinley
I am in favor of the existing bridge alternative even though traffic will be slowed during demo & rebuilding of that bridge. The existing route should be adhered to as much as possible.

The roundabout is the only solution. The T stop is far too dangerous. Specifically with so much morning Alpine traffic drivers would likely be pulling out of the T-stop when it is not safe.

> **Response:** Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project.

Comment #7: Allen D. Saunders
Bridge Alternatives: My home is on the Hoback River, south and immediately above the Hoback Bridge. My views will be impeded and noise levels of traffic will be increased if the second option for the bridge (completely new bridge) is chosen. Option #1 to build part of the bridge to the south of the existing bridge and then replace the northerly section of bridge would considerably lessen these impacts to our home and the others west on River Drive. Those homes, in fact, would be seriously impacted by a new wider bridge located further to the south (includes those along the Snake River). Two stage project, if it is needed, is worth the wait.

Intersection: A rotary intersection would be preferred by travelers from the Pinedale direction at peak commuting times and would probably be a safer solution. Pinedale traffic could be impatient and pull into traffic both directions at wrong times.

> **Response:** Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. Impacts associated with the two bridge options are very similar, with negligible differences in visual, right-of-way, and noise impacts. (For more information on changes in noise levels, see Chapter 3 of this FONSI). Due to these similarities, these options were combined into one option for further study, referred to as the Bridge Location Design Option. WYDOT will consider your comment regarding the effects of widening to the south in the bridge design.
>
> The EA discusses visual impacts of the proposed bridge and measures to mitigate for those impacts. During the design phase, WYDOT will provide further opportunities for public input on aesthetics, bridge design, and maintenance of traffic during construction. These and other considerations must be balanced as the bridge design evolves.

Comment #8: Don Coleman
Severe damage to the environmental aesthetic will be done if the parallel south bridge plan is applied. The Hoback Resort should be avoided, not purchased & not despoiled.

The parallel north approach is doable with no environmental impact at all & will not require a foreshortening of the Rogers Point subdivision access road & the tree destruction planned with parallel south approach.

The Northern Parallel approach would also save the few tall trees south of the river. These aesthetic considerations are of real value to our community.

The do minimum internal circulation alternating seem best for facilitation of the many varied uses to which it is currently put including the fire house access from the north.

Attn. Mark Faulk - Geologist - Please call me regarding Landslide risk details? Thanks

Response: Thank you for your comments regarding the bridge alternatives. Visual impacts for both bridge options are very similar (see Response to Comment # 7 above). As part of the alternative screening process, bridge alternatives located north of the existing bridge were eliminated because they would encroach on the existing landslide (see EA Section 2.3). Avoiding the landslide area necessitates widening to the south which, unfortunately, likely would displace the Hoback Resort.

The design phase process will include public involvement and formation of a design advisory group to coordinate the aesthetic treatment of the bridge and retaining walls. Your comments on the bridge options design will be considered during that process.

Comment #9: James A. Rose
My objections to this project would be to the roundabout. I am a resident of Rogers Point and I see people stopped in the road all the time to read their maps. How would a roundabout handle this? I have been on 2 roundabouts in my life (both in I.F.) and have not had good experiences. I think a good percentage of our visitors have probably not had experience with them and it would be a nightmare.

Response: Thank you for your comments. The same shoulder width would be provided with the roundabout and the "T" intersection options.
A roundabout should not promote or increase the use of shoulders for unintended purposes such as map reading.

If a roundabout design is selected, WYDOT would work to increase driver awareness of how roundabouts function. Whatever option is chosen – the "T" or roundabout intersection – the speeds will be kept low and the intersection would be designed to operate safely and efficiently.

Because roundabouts have been installed in many applications throughout the United States, some research on their safety benefits is available. FHWA's *Roundabouts: An Informational Guide* includes research indicating that in locations where roundabouts were installed to replace either stop-controlled or signal-controlled intersections, accident occurrences were reduced by about 37 percent

on the whole and injury accidents were reduced by 51 percent. Also, the same data reveals that in single-lane applications, like that proposed for Hoback Junction, accidents were reduced more dramatically - 51 percent on the whole and 73 percent for injury accidents.

Comment #10: Steve Bock
My main concern as far as traffic thru the junction is speed. Therefore I am in favor of the roundabout which I have been told will slow traffic down to 25 mph. Also, I am happy to see no development in the highway right-o- way where the construction trailer for the canyon reconstruction project was located.

Response: Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project.

Comment #11: Todd Fitzgerald
As a property owner adjacent to the highway right-of-way, on the hill overlooking the project area. I have a number of concerns regarding this project. In reviewing the Environmental Assessment it lacked detailed information regarding the plans to put my concerns at ease. My concerns are listed as follows:

1. Any work at the toe of the slope below my property that may lead to the destabilization of erosion of that slope.

2. The right-of-way access to our well located along our property boundary adjacent to the highway right-of-way. Any equipment or material storage that could impact the groundwater area that gives our well.

3. Hours of operation for vehicles and construction throughout projects.

4. The proposed roundabout is preferable over the T intersection, but although it is designed to accommodate traffic, seems to be designed to small.

5. Access to old Yellowstone Road.

Response: Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project.

Comment #1: Should any slope work occur near your property, WYDOT would take the necessary measures to stabilize the slope.

Comment #2: WYDOT does not know the location of your well, but will work with property owners during the design and construction phases to avoid and minimize construction-related impacts.

Comment #3: Details regarding hours of operation for vehicles and construction will be determined during the design phase and will conform to all local ordinances. WYDOT will implement measures to minimize impacts to traffic circulation during construction (see Section 3.22 of the EA).

Comment #4: A roundabout (if selected) will be designed to accommodate large semi-trucks and oversized loads.

Comment #5: WYDOT will maintain current access to old Yellowstone Road**.** Exact access locations will be determined during the final design phase.

Comments Mailed to WYDOT

Comment #12: Julius and Erika Muschweck
The Jackson Hole News & Guide on September 26, 2007, writes about the road planning for Hoback Junction. The article states that "an alternative roundabout is being considered".

We strongly support the building of roundabouts. So many traffic lights could be eliminated if roundabouts became prevalent. We have driven in Germany and especially in France, where traffic flows constantly when roundabouts are available.

We applaud the State of Wyoming and WYDOT for hopefully taking this progressive step to plan and build a roundabout at Hoback Junction.

Response: Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project.

Comment #13: Bill Chaney
This pertains to the request for comments regarding the proposed road work in Hoback Canyon. A roundabout will only be successful when the radius is large enough to accommodate long vehicles without requiring significant slow down or travel across curb lines.

In the Hoback Canyon, there are a number of construction vehicles hauling gravel, etc. in double attached trailers and long RV's hauling an attached vehicle which should be considered under this option.

The simple fact has been overlooked in various parts of the country resulting in unwarranted traffic congestion. The solution for the Interstate system has been long exit ramps and overpasses which does not seem practical in this instance.

Response: Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. Design of the roundabout will accommodate construction vehicles and recreational vehicles.

Comment #14: Paul Barbour
Enclosed (see attached drawing to original letter) is a drawing of my suggestion for the road project at the Hoback Junction in Teton County. My plan reconfigures the intersection by allowing the majority of the traffic, which is to and from Jackson and Alpine, a non-stop passage at relatively high speeds. By routing north bound traffic from Alpine to pass through an underpass, this plan avoids the time consuming and dangerous stop sign which is presently in use.

Since the traffic from Bondurant to Alpine is expected to continue to be light for the foreseeable future, I did not include an overpass in my drawings for that direction. I suggest a stop sign instead to save design and construction costs. However, it would make sense to me that provisions for a future overpass be part made of the original plans if and when a plan like mine is used.

I realize that a proposed roundabout at the intersection is a less expensive alternative but I feel that my plan would be a better solution in the long run. With rapid expansion of the Alpine and the other communities in Star Valley, the traffic from these areas would soon prove too heavy for a roundabout to handle. My experiences with the roundabouts in Idaho Falls as well as many roundabouts in Great Britain have shown me that they work when they are used for low speed situations. Hoback Junction needs a safe, smooth and relatively fast intersection.

I suspect that your team has more than likely already come up with a design similar or the same as mine. I just wanted you to know that a lot of locals here aren't crazy about roundabout and prefer a plan like mine.

Response: Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. Typically, WYDOT would not construct a grade-separated interchange when other less costly alternatives that function well can be used. Grade separations are costly to construct and maintain.

Comment #15: Keith and Deanna Harger
We are residents of Hoback Junction proper, in the Rodgers's Point Subdivision. Following are our comments regarding the design alternatives for the Hoback Junction area:

GENERAL COMMENTS:

1. As residents of Hoback Junction and as the people who will be most profoundly affected by the outcome of the project - whether adversely OR positively - we feel it is important to point out what we see as fundamental differences between our goals and those of WYDOT. Simply put, our goals are to preserve and enhance the safety and integrity of the actual community through which the highways travel. WYDOT, on the other hand, is clearly more concerned with moving external traffic THROUGH the community in the most efficient way possible. Though the two goals need not necessarily be in conflict, it is with an eye toward their apparent differences that the following comments are made.

INTERSECTION VERSUS ROUNDABOUT OPTION:

2. We are delighted to see the roundabout finally be discussed as a formal alternative. In our opinion, it is the best possible option for reconciling the goals and needs of the Hoback Junction Community with those of WYDOT. By allowing traffic to continue moving through the intersection in an orderly but controlled manner, it creates a real opportunity to control speeds through the Junction, while eliminating the possibility of large vehicle queues from "backing up."

3. Under no circumstances should there be an alignment that allows merging traffic from 26/89 the right-of-way over through-traffic traveling on 189/191. Besides being confusing from a way-finding standpoint, it would only add to the already dangerous reality of the intersection as it is experienced by local residents. The fact that vehicles traveling between Alpine and Jackson currently must stop in at least ONE direction has been the one saving grace that has kept [most of] us alive and out of accidents up until now.

   Without the geometrics of a roundabout or similar device, a stop sign is the only effective means of controlling speed through the intersection. Though WYDOT representatives repeatedly contend otherwise, SPEED LIMIT SIGNS WILL DO NOTHING TO CONTROL SPEED! One needs to look no further than the small towns of Star Valley, such as Etna, Freedom, or Smoot, to recognize this as fact.

   Furthermore, the addition of lanes and widening of the highway will only

increase the need for REAL speed control devices. It is common, indisputable knowledge that wider roads simply encourage motorists to drive faster. Faster speeds mean less time to react to events such as, for instance, someone in front of you slowing to turn left onto the Hoback Junction South Road while you're in the left lane in the process of passing another, slower, southbound vehicle.

SPECIFIC DESIGN OF ROUNDABOUT:

4. While it is a great start, the roundabout design still needs to have a much larger radius. Vehicles should be forced to slow down drastically before entering the roundabout - enough so that they are essentially making a gentle 90 degree right hand turn to enter. Obviously, for this to achieve the necessary effect of SLOWING traffic, the entries to and from adjacent highways must be distributed properly along the circumference of the roundabout. Otherwise, the net effect could be FASTER speeds through the intersection. In other words, someone coming from Alpine and heading to Bondurant must be required to: a) make a right hand turn into the roundabout; b) navigate a portion of the roundabout in a counterclockwise, left-hand turn direction and; c) THEN make another right hand turn onto 189 South.

ALIGNMENT OF BRIDGE

5. The north end of the bridge should be pushed as far west as possible, through any means available. The net goal should be the preservation of the mature trees at that location, plus insuring that the Hoback River Resort is left intact as a viable business. Both the trees and the Resort are enormous amenities to the community of Hoback Junction and the Valley as a whole. Their loss would be an inexcusable tragedy.

   If necessary, retaining walls should be constructed adjacent to the northeast abutment.

   The new bridge should clearly be constructed immediately adjacent to the existing one in a sequenced approach that allows construction to proceed one lane at a time, with the current bridge operating in tandem with the new bridge for a period of time. Thanks for your consideration.

   Response: Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project.

   Comment #1: WYDOT has the responsibility to plan and design for both regional and local traffic—balancing different transportation needs and types of travel while considering the safety and integrity of the community affected.

Comment #2: Thank you for your comment.

Comment #3: WYDOT conducted traffic counts to determine which route should have the right-of-way if the "T" intersection is built. Under a roundabout design, this will not be an issue. Whatever option is chosen—the "T" or roundabout intersection—the speeds will be kept low and the intersection will be designed to operate safely and efficiently. The Preferred Alternative would include installation of curb and gutter north of the bridge and through Hoback Junction. This design feature will work to slow traffic. Also, intersection design would use traffic signing, geometrics, lighting, warning devices, rumble strips, and other measures to slow vehicles entering the junction where necessary.

Comment #4: A roundabout (if selected) would be designed to allow maximum speeds of 20 to 25 mph and would be able to accommodate large semi-trucks and oversized loads.

Comment #5: Thank you for your comments regarding the bridge alignment. Avoiding the landslide area to the north necessitates widening to the south, which, unfortunately, likely would displace the Hoback Resort. The final design would avoid and minimize property impacts to the extent practicable, possibly through use of retaining walls. In determining the bridge design, WYDOT will consider your preference regarding construction staging and bridge location.

Comment #16: Tim Young, Executive Director of Friends Pathways
Thank you for providing the opportunity for public comment on the Hoback Junction Environmental Assessment dated September 2007. Please accept the following comments from Friends of Pathways.

Friends of Pathways is a private non-profit and community advocacy organization serving bicycling, walking, and trails transportation and recreation needs. Friends of Pathways works to enhance and connect the communities in and around Jackson Hole by promoting safe and convenient non-motorized transportation and recreation facilities and programs. Friends of Pathways (FOP) was founded in 1994, and today has grown to over 1,100 members.

Concerns with EA vs. EIS - Purpose and Need:
As noted in the new EA, the original Hoback Junction EIS was started in 2000, and FOP has participated in that process continuously and submitted comments starting in 2000. One area of particular concern we have commented on is the safety of the 1.2-mile section of highway north of Hoback Junction up to Horse Creek.

One problem this new limited-area Hoback Junction EA creates is that it does not address the 1.2-mile section between Hoback Junction and Horse Creek. That area has a history of bike accidents, and has been identified as a severe safety problem and barrier for bicycling due to the lack of any shoulder. That section of U.S. 26-191 north of Hoback Junction, which was included in the original EIS, but is no longer in the new EA, should be prioritized and moved forward as soon as possible. It is perhaps the most dangerous location for bicyclists in Teton County.

The breakup of the EIS into three separate NEPA processes is unfortunate. Significant time, energy and resources have been invested in the 7 -year long EIS process, and it is disheartening to see the larger EIS project reduced to .6 miles EA in Hoback Junction only. Some evaluation should be conducted into how WYDOT and FHWA complies (or fails to comply) with the spirit and legal requirements of NEPA, why this project went wrong, and how the planning and public review process might be revised to better respect the public's ability to follow and effectively comment on transportation projects. An honest and open review of NEPA compliance by WYDOT and the Federal Highway Administration WY Division office would help future decision makers and the public, and could help create a more constructive and trusting relationship between transportation agencies and the public. Friends of Pathways would like to participate in this type dialog if this suggestion is accepted and followed up on.

Hoback Junction Village:

Friends of Pathways generally supports the proposed 3-lane urban road section proposed in Hoback Junction. One specific improvement we suggest is changing the proposed 5' sidewalk on one side into a 10' wide pathway for pedestrian and bike use, so the design would have a 10' pathway on both sides. The Hoback Junction main commercial area has a substantial 200' wide right-of-way along the commercial downtown, which should provide adequate room for the preferred alternative three lane urban section and the addition of a 10' wide pathway for shared pedestrian and bicycle use on both sides. The width of the preferred alternative road shown is 52¬56' wide (Figure 2-3 says 52-54'). That still leaves ample room for internal circulation and a pathway on both sides.

Friends of Pathways supports the "Combine Approaches and Encourage Internal Circulation" option over the "Do Minimum". Care must be taken in the final design to address the conflicts between the internal circulation and the new pathways. It may be desirable to locate the 10" wide pathway on the outside of the ROW to minimize conflicts with motor vehicles and informal parking.

Accommodation should be planned now for the eventual continuation of a pathway from Hoback Junction village north to connect to the Jackson Hole Pathways System. That future pathway would logically continue north on the west side of the U.S. 26/191. There is no pathway proposed by Teton County south of Hoback Junction, and the pathway system will terminate at the Junction. South of Hoback Junction, bicycles will use the road shoulders, which are 8' in the Snake River Canyon and are very functional for bicycle use. Hoback Canyon shoulders are variable and impacted by rumble strips that do not meet current WYDOT standards.

Friends of Pathways has consistently commented that pathway standards in Teton County are 10' wide, not the "8' minimum" shown on the EA typical sections. I recently attended the public meeting at the WYDOT Jackson Office and discussed this again with the design team. The typical sections in the EA decision must be revised to show a 10' typical width for shared use pathways. This is supported by the 1999 AASHTO Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities, a guide that has been available since prior to the start of this planning process. The AASHTO Bicycle Guide states on Page 35:

> "The paved width and the operating width required for a shared use path are primary design considerations. Figure 1 7 depicts a shared use path on a separated right of way. Under most conditions, a recommended paved width for a two-directional shared use path is 3.0 m (10 feet). In rare instances, a reduced width of 2.4m (8 feet) can be adequate. This reduced width should be used only where the following conditions prevail: (1) bicycle traffic is expected to be low, even on peak days or during peak hours, (2) pedestrian use of the facility is not expected to be more than occasional, (3) there will be good horizontal and vertical alignment providing safe and frequent passing opportunities, and (4) during normal maintenance activities the path will not be subjected to maintenance vehicle loading conditions that would cause pavement edge damage. Under certain conditions it may be necessary or desirable to increase the width of a shared use path to 3.6 m (12 feet), or even 4.2 m (14 feet), due to substantial use by bicycles, joggers, skaters and pedestrians, use by large maintenance vehicles, and/or steep grades."

Intersection Design:

The alternative with a roundabout is an excellent choice for the intersection of U.S. 191 and U.S. 26. FOP supports this alternative. A single lane roundabout will handle the traffic safely and be adequate for future traffic projections over the life of this project. Roundabouts are proven to be a safer option and carry more traffic than Stop Sign controlled intersections that might otherwise be considered.

Care must be taken in the design of the roundabout so that the design speeds are no more than 20 mph. The EA states "less than 30 mph", which is too high of speed for safe traffic flow and pedestrian crossings, and is therefore not desirable. The design must accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists with safe logical crossings of the splinter island

with adequate refuge space in the median island, and provision for bicycles that choose to take the travel lane through the roundabout. Large vehicles with greater turning radius should be accommodated with a truck apron on the inside shoulder of the roundabout. This helps minimize the roundabout radius and keep speeds below 20 MPH.

Snake River Bridge:

The bridge over the Snake River is clearly in need of replacement. The EA states the existing roadway width of the bridge is 28 feet with 2 lanes; the EA states the proposed new bridge would accommodate three 12-foot lanes, two 8-foot shoulders, and a 5-foot sidewalk, a width of 57' total.

A key recommendation Friends of Pathways makes is provision of a sidewalk on both sides of the new bridge for pedestrians. The incredible beauty of the Snake River at this confluence with the Hoback River is a special place that deserves providing for the ability for visitors and Hoback residents to view the river safely from the bridge. In this case, the view is equally compelling on both the upstream and downstream side; it can be predicted with certainty that pedestrians will walk on both sides of the bridge to view the river. This predictable use should be safely accommodated with sidewalks on both sides of the bridge.

The view of the river should also not be blocked with a chain link fence, such as has been installed over the Snake River Bridge at Alpine. A 48" pedestrian railing is adequate and would best preserve the scenic views from the bridge.

There appears to be an opportunity to reduce the width of the auto lanes, and remove the middle turn lane. Obviously, no turns are possible on the bridge. Side road access on the east side should be dealt with without a highly expensive bridge center turning lane that provides no turn movements. Two 12' lanes, two 8' shoulders, and two 6' sidewalks, one each side a minimum 6' width, should be provided. This can be done in 52' as compared to 57' width in the proposed design with 3-12' lanes. This would result in a substantial savings perhaps into the millions of dollars, and a design that would carry the traffic and more safely accommodate pedestrians.

Transportation Impacts:

Disagreement with EA section 3.8.4 Bicyclist and Pedestrian Facilities

Friends of Pathways does not agree with this section as presented. It states:

> "According to the Jackson/Teton County Comprehensive Plan, walking and bicycling usage in Teton County is comparatively low for a mountain community. Counts taken in July 1996 (peak season) indicate that walking and

> bicycling make up 9 percent and 6 percent of the mode share, respectively, reflecting the limited facilities available. The Teton County Travel Study, 2001 noted that bicycling is most commonly used for trips of a distance less than 2.5 miles, and walking is used mostly for trips of less than 1.0 mile. Study participants did not make any bicycle trips over 15 miles. Because the Hoback Junction area is located approximately 12 miles from the Town of Jackson, there has not been a great demand to provide a large amount of bicycling amenities that connect the two areas."

The 2001 Travel Study is the more current resource, and it showed that bike trips were up to 10% and pedestrian trips more or less stable. That is a 67% increase in bike trips over 1996, is significant use for a mountain community, and shows progress towards the Transportation Goals, as described in the excerpts below. It is also known that bicycle and pedestrian use in mixed-use villages was significantly higher, and experts agree, when barriers to bicycle/pedestrian safety are removed, use soars. This is proven on WY -390, where after construction of the pathway, Friends of Pathways counts in July and August 2007 show use up to 1,500 bike/ped trips per day compared to 5O day prior to the pathway installation.

It can be predicted with confidence that if the pathway is connected safely to the Town of Jackson, bicycle use in Hoback and to the north will greatly increase. For example, Middle School students rode from Hoback to the Middle School for the 2007 Bike to School Week this year, showing the potential for longer trips. These bike trips can also be combined with transit, which expands the potential for increased alternative transportation trips

The Teton County Comprehensive Plan Chapter 8 provides good basis for planning pathways in the Hoback Junction Area. It states:

> **B. PLAN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**
> 2. **Alternative Modes and Programs**. Another important theme of this chapter is the fact that the "alternative modes" - walking, bicycling and public transit - are underrepresented in the community today and should receive emphasis in the future.
> 3. **Roads and Streets**. ...An important aspect of this chapter is the identification of, and recommendations for, additions and expansions to roadways that include consideration of alternative modes."
> **Goal No.1: To systematically plan for future mobility that meets the needs of residents and tourists within the context of community character.**
> **Objectives:**
> I.A. Ensure all modes are evaluated when roadway corridors are planned and designed, and incorporated when possible.

Goal No.2: To decrease the rate of anticipated vehicular traffic growth in the community.
Objectives:
2.A. Decrease automobile reliance by shifting resident travel mode shares as follows

(percent of daily resident person trips in July:)
1996 Actual 2020 Objective Percent Change
Drive alone 55% 42% -13%
Rideshare 29% 30% + 1 %
Walk 9% 13% +4%
Bicycle 6% 10% +4%
Transit <1 % 5% +5%
Goal No.3: To improve the safety and efficiency of the transportation system in Jackson and Teton County.
Objectives:
3.A. Maintain or reduce existing accident levels, and reduce accident severity by 10 percent.
3.B. Reduce pedestrian and non-motorized vehicle accidents by 10 percent while increasing the amount of pedestrian and non-motorized vehicle travel.
3. C. Provide a safe, convenient, appealing, and reliable transit system.

The above quoted Goals and Objectives of the Teton County Comprehensive Plan Chapter 8 should be acknowledged and referenced in the EA Decision documents. The other document that is helpful to add reference to in the EA is the new Teton County Jackson Pathways Master Plan, June 2007. That Plan states that a pathway connecting to Hoback Junction is a top priority to be completed within 5 years.

"8.2 Capital Project 5- Year Priority List
10. South 89 Pathway
Concept: Construct a shared-use path from Game Creek to Hoback Junction. Funding: This project may be included the WYDOT highway reconstruction.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment on this transportation project in Hoback Junction. Please contact me at 307-733-4534 if you have questions on these comments, or would like additional information. Please check your stakeholder contacts and include me as the official contact for Friends of Pathways. I would also like to request a seat on the Interdisciplinary Team as a representative of pedestrians and bicyclists if such a team is used on this project, as was successfully used on the Snake River Canyon project.

Response: Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. Concerns with EA vs. EIS –Purpose and Need Comments: As discussed in Section 1.2 of the EA, the project was split into three separate NEPA studies

based on the three project segments' independent utility and distinctive attributes. FHWA determined that each of the three highway segments has logical termini and independent utility and may therefore proceed as separate NEPA documents. This decision was vetted with the Interdisciplinary (ID) Team and did not raise concerns.

As discussed in Section 1.2 of the EA, WYDOT and FHWA have fully complied with NEPA and related requirements in preparing the EA and the FONSI.

Currently, WYDOT is preparing the Jackson South Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Pathway improvements and network continuity from Hoback Junction north to milepost 148.6 (the project's northern terminus) are included in build alternatives being studied in the EIS. The Jackson South EIS incorporates the analysis conducted and input received over the last ten years.

Hoback Junction Village Comments: Final pathway and sidewalk location and configuration will be determined during final design. WYDOT would provide adequate spacing. WYDOT currently uses the 1999 AASHTO Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities. WYDOT agrees with a 10-foot width for a shared use pathway and will construct this width when feasible; however, an 8-foot minimum width may need to be used in certain areas having right-of-way or other constraints.

WYDOT has noted your preference regarding the circulation option.

As mentioned above, build alternatives being studied as part of the Jackson South EIS will include a separated pathway that would connect to the Von Gontard Trail.

Intersection Design Comments: Accommodations for pedestrians and bicyclists will be incorporated into the intersection design. A roundabout (if selected) would be designed to allow maximum speeds of 20 to 25 mph and would be able to accommodate large semi-trucks and oversized loads. WYDOT will use signage and other measures to forewarn of the Hoback Junction and create a safe environmental for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Snake River Bridge Comments: The need for a sidewalk on both sides of the bridge will be determined during the final design process. WYDOT will provide opportunities for public input as part of that process. A sidewalk on both sides will increase the footprint of the bridge and add to the structure cost.

Installation of a chain link fence is not required but sometimes provided for safety reasons. The need for a fence will be determined during the design stage. The width between the curbs on the bridge will match the top width of the roadway. Although left turns cannot be made on the structure itself, a third lane on the bridge is needed to provide a safe transition to the third lane needed for vehicles turning left into Rodgers Point and into the fire station, and to provide additional room for left-turning vehicles that may queue back onto the bridge. Future maintenance and traffic are other considerations when determining the bridge width. The 52' width mentioned in your comment is sufficient for the clear roadway width, but not for the overall bridge width needed for pedestrian and safety railing.

Transportation Impacts Comments: The goals and objectives of area plans, including the *Teton County Travel Study 2001*; the *Jackson/Teton County Comprehensive Pathways in Jackson Hole: A Conceptual Plan*, 1992; *Hoback Junction EIS Bicycle/Pedestrian Plan*, Draft, 2003; and *Recreation Project Plan, South Park River Access*, September 2004, were considered and referenced in the Hoback Junction EA. The EA also acknowledges that area residents who responded to 1996 and 2001 travel surveys placed a high priority on improving sidewalks and walkway systems (section 3.8.4 of the EA). In consideration of the above area plans and public input, the Preferred Alternative includes accommodations for bicyclists and pedestrians through Hoback Junction, including a pathway and sidewalk. WYDOT plans to immediately initiate the Jackson South EIS, which will also include pathway improvements and network continuity from Hoback Junction north to milepost 148.6 (the Jackson South EIS projects terminus).

The goals and objectives described in Chapter 8 of the *Jackson/Teton County Comprehensive Plan* (2002) were considered in the identification and evaluation of alternatives. This is clarified in Chapter 3 of this FONSI. WYDOT notes your disagreements with statements in the EA regarding bicycle and pedestrian travel. Chapter 3 amends several of the statements. Additional bike trip data from the Teton County Travel Study 2001 was also added to Chapter 3 of this FONSI. Splitting the Hoback Junction EIS into three separate NEPA studies should allow the Hoback Junction EA and the Jackson South EIS to be completed sooner and better meet the goal stated in the *Teton County Jackson Pathways Master Plan* (June 2007) of completing a pathway connection to Hoback Junction within five years.

Stakeholder Contact Comment: WYDOT contact information will be updated. During the design stage, WYDOT will meet with various stakeholders to obtain

input for the project. It is envisioned that representatives from the recreation community will be a part of that discussion.

Comment #17: Louise Lasley of Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance
The Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance (Conservation Alliance) would like to present our comments on the Hoback Junction Environmental Assessment. The Conservation Alliance represents 1500 members in 50 states and 7 foreign countries, is dedicated to responsible land stewardship in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and works to ensure that human activities are in harmony with area's irreplaceable wildlife, scenic and other natural resources. Our community is composed of many members who utilize the roads through Hoback Junction for commuting or to access recreational opportunities. To that end, we respectfully submit the following comments for your consideration.

The Conservation Alliance would like to encourage the Wyoming Department of Transportation to pursue the following options for completion of the Hoback Junction reconstruction:

3 Lane Urban Alternative:
The width of the road and the accommodations for local use are in character for the area and will facilitate residential, commercial and traffic needs. The consideration of more lanes would negatively impact the neighborhood quality that exists.

Bridge Location:
We prefer the parallel south alternative, which minimizes disruption during construction, has minimal environmental effects and limited impact on residents. Although there will be direct impact, possible structure removal, with this option, we feel that the benefits for the overall impacts should be considered.

Access and Circulation Options:
We prefer the "combine approaches and encourage circulation" option to provide for safety concerns and control of access for the commercial and residential structures. This appears to be less confusing and less dangerous for pedestrians and drivers.

Amenities:
The Conservation Alliance applauds all attempts to maintain or support a well-landscaped and attractive design for Hoback Junction. This will enhance driver awareness of the residential aspects if the area and will promote a greater sense of community for its residents.
We thank you for the opportunity to comment on this Environmental Assessment.

Response: Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project.

Comment #18: John Emmerich of Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD)
The staff of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department has reviewed the Environmental Assessment for Hoback Junction in Teton County. We offer the following comments for your consideration.

Our primary concerns focus on the maintenance of wildlife populations and habitat in the immediate junction area. The areas immediately north, south, and east of the junction are important big game migration corridors and crucial winter range complexes. We believe the best alternatives to minimize impacts to wildlife populations would include the following:

- Attempt to slow the speed of motorists as they approach and depart the junction. Big game is in close proximity to the highway during winter and spring moths because of snow conditions, and access to forage and water. Big game movements to these resources frequently necessitate that they cross the highway or use it as a travel corridor. Wildlife on or near the highway can create safety hazards for motorists. A reduction in the speed limit in the junction area would minimize wildlife/vehicle collisions and increase motorist safety.

- Minimize the height of any retaining wall that would be constructed to stabilize the active landslide area adjacent to the Snake River Bridge on the south side of the river. This area is crucial winter range for mule deer and elk, and it is vital that big game access to the Snake River and adjacent winter ranges is not restricted.

- Mitigate the loss of crucial fish and wildlife habitats.

- Construction and location of fencing to minimize vehicle-wildlife collisions. We recommend a standard pole top highway right-of-way fence. This fence design currently exists along some portions of Highway 189/191 south of Jackson, and is effective in not restricting big game movements to seasonal ranges.

- Design the bridge and underpass beneath the roadway that will promote wildlife movement to seasonal and daily habitats.

- Maintain all big game movement and migration corridors to seasonal habitats.

- Adhere to existing Forest Service seasonal range closures on crucial big game winter habitats during construction (November 15—April 30).
- Protect and maintain bald eagle and raptor nest sites, and trumpeter swan habitat.
- Develop a pathway system that does not promote human access to crucial wildlife habitats.

Pathways

The preferred alternative is the 3-Lane Urban with several design options (EA, 2-14). On page 2-3, it is stated that a pathway would be located on the west side of the road, and Figure 2-3 states that the separated pathway would be inside or outside the ROW. We encourage the pathway be located close to the road. How the pathway is constructed in this section of the project will likely influence location and design farther to the north. As stated in previous comments, pathways should not be placed immediately adjacent to riparian areas of the Snake and Hoback Rivers, or in crucial wildlife habitats.

Wetlands

Wetland mitigation will be required for the 0.32 acre of shrub swamp that will be impacted by this phase of the project (EA 3-24, 44). Mitigation required is for total functional units lost (3.20) be replaced at a minimal ratio of 1:1. We suggest that mitigation for these wetlands be combined with mitigation for the next phase of the project also, and that WYDOT work closely with WGFD staff to design functional and worthwhile mitigation projects, possibly in the WGFD South Park WMA to provide high public benefit. We are concerned that a recent wetland mitigation project south of Bondurant for highway reconstruction along that portion of the highway seems to have provided minimal wetland value.

We also have requested that amphibian surveys be conducted prior to construction in wetlands that will be impacted by the Hoback Road Project (June 9, 2006). Will such surveys be completed?

Nongame Species

Table 3-16 states that Trumpeter Swan are "unlikely in the study area." This is true for summer but in winter swans are found along the Snake River and in the project area. Swans also migrate up and down the river in spring (March—April) and fall (November). Mortality from collisions is a major cause of mortality in swans; any lines or wires stretched across the river during construction need to be well marked.

Mortalities of swans or raptors at the project site should be reported immediately to the local WGFD office.

Table 3-17 listing raptor species has some inaccuracies. Red-tailed hawk, golden eagle, American kestrel, and great-horned owl are known to nest in or near the project area, rather than just "potential breeding residents."

On page 3-67, in the list of impacts to wildlife and fisheries, "Habitat Fragmentation" should be included in the list and developed in the following text. This is a more inclusive term than "movement barriers" and has broader ecological implications. If wildlife species are not able to access habitat critical for certain functions of their life cycle, they could be eliminated from the area. Especially critical in the overall Hoback Road project is creating barriers that prevent wildlife from accessing the river corridor.

Bald Eagle

Although the bald eagle nest at Hoback is located ½ mile form the project site and unlikely to be directly affected by construction, it is likely that adult eagles will be displaced from some foraging habitat close to bridge construction site. WYDOT should coordinate with Bridger-Teton National Forest and WGFD biologists to make sure that recreational users of forest land and river corridor do not create additional stresses to this nest site during construction phase. A livestock trail located under the nest on the west side of the river should be posted as closed to all human use during the construction period. Also in terms of timing, it would be best if construction could start in mid to late summer rather than in early spring during the early nesting period when eagles are most prone to disturbance. Bald eagles forage along the Snake and Hoback Rivers.

Bald Eagle Mortality

Bald and golden eagles have been killed by vehicles in the Snake River Canyon and along the Hoback Highway; thus the possibility of a rock [road]-kill eagle is not rare as stated on page 3-71. Quick removal of road kill away from the edge of the highway can prevent this from happening.

Wildlife

In Section 3.17.7.2 (EA, page 3-77), it is stated that during the final design phase WYDOT will investigate the possibility for providing wildlife passage adjacent to both abutments under the reconstructed Snake River Bridge. WYDOT should work closely with WGFD biologists in making this determination and designing wildlife passage.

Appendix A. Wildlife Species Potentially Occurring in the Greater Study Area

This has some inaccuracies. Uinta Ground Squirrel is listed as uncommon, but is very common in the sage habitats adjacent to the river corridor and an important foraging species for nesting bald eagles in early spring. Bald Eagle should be listed as common. "Greater Study Area" needs to be defined; it is not clear if this refers to the entire Hoback Road Project study area or something greater than this. We suggest that it should include the entire Road Project area.

Aquatic concerns were outlined in a letter dated June 9, 2006. We have no additional comments at this time.

We would like the opportunity to work closely with the cooperators on this project during all phases of the project implementation. Personnel in the Jackson Regional Office are prepared to assist in this effort. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Response: Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project.

Speed at intersection: A roundabout (if selected) would be designed to allow maximum speeds of 20 to 25 mph. The "T" intersection (if selected) would have a stop into the junction on the Pinedale side. To slow vehicles entering the junction, WYDOT will use signage (including speed limit signs) to forewarn of the junction. Flashing lights, rumble strips, and other measures to slow vehicles entering the junction will also be used if needed. There is a dynamic message sign at the north end of Hoback Junction that is used to advise motorists of travel conditions such as wildlife crossings.

Retaining wall: Retaining wall would not be used to stabilize the landslide area, but is needed to minimize river and property impacts. During the design stage, WYDOT will seek to minimize the height and length of retaining wall used.

Crucial fish and wildlife habitats: Sections 3.17.6 and 3.17.7 of the EA discuss the measures WYDOT will take to avoid, minimize, and mitigation for these impacts.

Fencing: WYDOT will consider the need for wildlife fencing during the design stage.

Wildlife movement: During the final bridge design phase, WYDOT will investigate the feasibility for providing wildlife passage adjacent to both bridge abutments under the reconstructed Snake River bridge. WYDOT will work closely with WGFD biologists in designing wildlife passage. WYDOT will seek to

maintain all big game movement and migration corridors to seasonal habitats, and comply with applicable Forest Service requirements.

Existing Forest Service seasonal range closures will be observed during construction.

No raptor nest sites will be affected by the project, and trumpeter swan habitat in the project area is limited to the Snake River. There will be no major alterations to the Snake River in the project area.

Pathways: The proposed path would be located parallel to the existing roadway, and no impacts to riparian areas or big game ranges would occur. Final pathway and sidewalk location and configuration will be determined during the final design phase. Design of the Hoback Junction pathway would accommodate the pathway proposed in the Jackson South EIS, which WYDOT will be initiating soon.

Wetlands: Construction for the Hoback Junction and Jackson South projects is scheduled to occur at different times. Therefore, the wetland impacts and associated Section 404 permitting associated with these projects also would occur at differing times. Therefore, it may prove difficult to coordinate the mitigation efforts between these projects. That said, WYDOT will closely consider all mitigation options during permitting, especially mitigation opportunities on the South Park WMA.

Typically, WYDOT does not conduct amphibian surveys for minor wetland impacts, but the need for such surveys will be determined during the permitting stage.

Nongame Species: The information regarding potential trumpeter swan occurrence along the Snake River in the winter and in migration seasons is noted and Chapter 3 provides a clarification. Winter construction may take place on the bridge in order to complete the project in a timely manner. Any wires or lines needed for construction that are stretched across the river will be well marked to improve visibility to avian species in order to avoid collisions with the wires.

The information regarding raptor species nesting near the project is noted and clarified in Chapter 3. There are no known nests within 0.5 mile of the study area that could be subject to disturbance.

The potential for the Preferred Alternative to increase habitat fragmentation from existing conditions is believed to be very small. Disturbance from the proposed project mostly would occur within the right-of-way, in a developed area. The habitat that would be affected has been altered and not considered highly suitable habitat for wildlife.

The Greater Study Area is simply a generic term used to encompass the study area, the original EIS study area, and a buffer around the highways where wildlife was likely to occur.

Bald Eagle: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has determined that the Preferred Alternative would not adversely affect the bald eagle based on the distance of the nesting pair, which is located more than 0.5 mile from the study area (see Section 3.17.5.2 of the EA). WYDOT will consider comments regarding construction near the nest as part of the Jackson South EIS. Foraging habitat for bald eagles is abundant along the Snake River corridor and temporary disturbance around some foraging habitat near the bridge, while possible, is not likely to cause noticeable impacts to bald eagles in the area.

Bald Eagle Mortality: No eagle fatalities have been reported by the Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation in their road kill monitoring study, nor were any eagles reported for a study of road kills in Yellowstone National Park. While it is certainly a possibility, vehicle-eagle collisions are rare. WYDOT maintenance crews routinely remove road kill wildlife and will continue this program during and after completion of the project.

Appendix A: Thank you for the clarifications to the EA regarding the status of various species. Chapter 3 of this FONSI contains these clarifications.

Comment #19: Andrew Schwartz, Teton County Board of County Commissioners
The Teton County Board of Commissioners would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff of the Wyoming Department of Transportation for their work on the Hoback Junction Environmental Assessment (EA). The EA includes meaningful consideration of the concerns of Teton County residents, including safety, environmental protection, community impacts, and provision of non-motorized facilities. It is the opinion of the Board that the document strikes the appropriate balance between these sometimes competing objectives.

Specifically, the Board supports the 3-Lane Urban Alternative with the following design elements:

- *Parallel South* location for the new Snake River Bridge.

- *Combine intersection and encourage internal circulation* within the commercial core of Hoback.

- *Roundabout* intersection design to replace existing 3-way intersection.

For the reasons discussed in the EA, the 3-lane cross-section, with the design elements enumerated above, would best service the community, motorists, non-motorists, and the environment.

The Board asks that WYDOT consider locating a START commuter bus stop and park-and-ride within the highway right-of-way to the south of the Hoback Market. This would ensure that changes in ownership or use of the market property would not disrupt service. Additionally, the proposed trail should be located within the highway right-of-way so as not to unnecessary impact private property along the corridor.

> **Response:** Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. A commuter bus stop can be considered during the final design stage based on transit commuter needs at that time. The proposed pathway would be located within existing right-of-way where practicable. Final pathway and sidewalk location and configuration will be determined during final design.

Comment #20: Chandler J. Peter of Corps of Engineers, Omaha District
This is in reference to your correspondence received October 1, 2007 concerning the release of an Environmental Assessment (EA) associated with work proposed on 0.6 mile of U.S. Highway 26/89 at Hoback Junction Teton County, Wyoming. Thank you for the notification.

Your letter indicates the work proposed for Highway 26/89 is being separated from other actions associated with upgrades to U.S. Highway 189/191. All activities were initially proposed to be addressed under a single Environmental Impact Statement, wherein the Corps has been serving as a cooperating agency. The Corps has no concerns with separations of actions.

A review of the EA for the Highway 26/89 indicates that some form of authorization is required under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. The EA indicates that 0.32 acres of wetlands adjacent to the Snake River will be impacted with the preferred alternative. If this action is carried forward, it is likely that the action would be covered by

Nationwide Permit 14. If temporary discharges are also needed in the Snake River for construction and/or demolition, those actions made be authorized by provisions of Nationwide Permit 33. Additional coordination between the Wyoming Department of Transportation and this office will be needed to determine the appropriate type of authorization.

Thank you for the notification and opportunity to review the EA.

> **Response:** Thank you for your comments. Clarifications based on your comments regarding the nationwide permits are included in Chapter 3 of this FONSI. WYDOT will continue to coordinate with the USACE throughout the bridge alternative selection and design process.

Public Comments Received Through E-mail

Comment #21: Kathy Erickson
Thank you for the opportunity to express my views about the proposed new lane and bridge changes. I travel that road from Star Valley every working day and I'm truly grateful for the wonderful improvements that have been made for our safety on the highway. There are hundreds of cars that travel that road from Star Valley everyday and I would like to see the "T" Intersection built instead of the "Roundabout". With the heavy flow of traffic coming in from the southwest to the stop sign, and the lesser traffic from Hoback, it would seem sensible to do a "T" and have the traffic from the Hoback stop, allowing the steady flow to come in from the southwest. I have a concern for the traveler's safety with the Roundabout.

I've watched people try to navigate the roundabouts in other areas and they seem to have a hard time with it, and I've seen some near accidents occur. I can't imagine a semi-truck or other large piece of equipment being able to navigate around that safely without taking out other vehicles, especially when the weather is nasty. Another concern would be for the ability of crews to remove snow from the roads, especially during the morning and evening commutes. Thank you for your time.

> **Response:** Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. A roundabout (if selected) would be designed to allow maximum speeds of 20 to 25 mph and would be able to accommodate large semi-trucks and oversized loads. See response to Comment #9 regarding roundabout operation safety. The "T" intersection (if selected) would maintain continuous traffic flow between Alpine and Jackson and include a stop sign for westbound traffic using Highway 189 from Bondurant. To slow vehicles entering the junction, WYDOT will use

signage (including speed limit signs) to forewarn of the junction. Flashing lights, rumble strips, and other measures will also be used if needed. Traffic counts will determine which route has the right-of-way if the "T" intersection is built; under a roundabout design this will not be an issue. Whatever option is chosen – the "T" or roundabout intersection – the speeds will be kept low and the junction will be designed to operate safely and efficiently. Also, the roundabout design would allow for effective snow removal.

Comment #22: Dee Struble
I greatly appreciate your efforts of trying to alleviate the congestion at the junction and the replacement of the bridge will be beneficial to all concerned. I drive from SV five days per week and have done so for the past 5 years. I cannot picture the majority of commuters, tourists, truckers and those coming from Pinedale being able to negotiate a roundabout. Most of them cannot figure out the stop signs, let a lone utilize turn signals or follow the speed limits at the junction. You might as well put in a tow and repair shop by the fire station if a roundabout is utilized. Contrary to comments, this is not Europe and people are not use to negotiating roundabouts.

Would it would be more feasible to put in a 4 way stop light (to include those departing Hoback Market) or at least a 3-way light? I know in the past there have been major issues regarding the lighting of such intersections especially a roundabout, have those issues been considered in this project?

If a t-intersection is utilized I am unsure if allowing those coming from the Snake River Canyon the right-of-way is a good idea. Please consider all options equally. Thank you for allowing my input and I appreciate your taking the time to read this. Good luck at the meeting.

Response: Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. See response to Comment #9 regarding roundabout operation safety. If a roundabout is selected, WYDOT would work to increase public awareness on roundabouts and their workings. The roundabout would be designed to allow maximum speeds of 20 to 25 mph and would be able to accommodate large semi-trucks and oversized loads. The "T" intersection (if selected) would have a stop into the junction on the Pinedale side. To slow vehicles entering the junction, WYDOT will use signage (including speed limit signs) to forewarn of the junction. Flashing lights, rumble strips, and other measures will also be used if needed. Whatever option is chosen – the "T" or roundabout intersection – the speeds will be kept low and the junction will be designed to operate safely and

efficiently. The issues expressed in your comment will be considered during the final design phase.

Comment #23: Luke Lynch
I am writing to comment on the EA for the Hoback Junction/ Snake River bridge redesign. As a frequent traveler through Hoback Junction, I would like to address a few particular issues that I hope are incorporated into the redesign:

1. Pedestrian/ Bicycle Friendly: There appears to be ample room to provide a 10 foot wide pathway through Hoback Junction and north to Horse Creek Station, likely the most dangerous stretch of highway for cyclists in northwest Wyoming. This stretch of highway is currently very dangerous for motorized and non-motorized travelers.

2. Speed: Speed through the Hoback Junction intersection should be limited to 20 m.p.h. to prevent collisions, and to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists who frequent the area.

3. Roundabout: A single lane roundabout would provide the best traffic control situation and would adequately handle traffic and all traffic projected for the intersection on into the future. This would provide a safer alternative to a stop sign and would provide for better traffic flow.

4. New Bridge Design: There is no need for a turn lane on the bridge.
How about two 12' lanes, two shoulders, and two sidewalks, one each side a minimum 6' width. This would provide a pedestrian friendly alternative and allow people to view the Snake River.

Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or for clarification.

Response: Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. WYDOT currently uses the 1999 AASHTO Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities. WYDOT agrees with a 10-foot width for a shared use pathway and will construct this width when feasible; however, an 8-foot minimum width may need to be used in certain areas with right-of-way or other constraints.

Please see response to Comment #5 regarding future extension on the pathway to points north.

A roundabout (if selected) would be designed to allow maximum speeds of 20 to 25 mph and would be able to accommodate large semi-trucks and oversized loads. The "T" intersection (if selected) would have a stop into the junction on the Pinedale side. To slow vehicles entering the junction, WYDOT will use signage (including speed limit signs) to forewarn of the junction. Flashing lights, rumble strips, and other measures will also be used if needed.

The width between the curbs on the bridge will match the top width of the roadway. Although left turns cannot be made on the structure itself, a third lane on the bridge is needed to provide a safe transition to the third lane needed for vehicles turning left into Rodgers Point and into the fire station, and to provide additional room for left-turning vehicles that may queue back onto the bridge. Future maintenance and traffic are other considerations when determining the bridge width. The need for a sidewalk on both sides will be determined during the final design phase.

Comment #24: Steve Poole
Please consider this email an official comment for the proposed highway reconstruction at Hoback junction 89/26/191. Please utilize the roundabout to slow traffic to at least 20 MPH. Put pedestrian walkways on both sides of the bridge. Design and or construct a pathway along the highway corridor for this project area. Thank you.

Response: Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. See response to Comment #9 regarding roundabout operation safety. A roundabout (if selected) would be designed to allow maximum speeds of 20 to 25 mph and would be able to accommodate large semi-trucks and oversized loads. To slow vehicles entering the junction, WYDOT will use signage (including speed limit signs) to forewarn of the junction. Flashing lights, rumble strips, and other measures will also be used if needed. The preliminary design includes a pathway through Hoback Junction to the new Snake River bridge. The need for a sidewalk on both sides of the bridge will be determined during the final design process. WYDOT will provide opportunities for public input as part of this process. A sidewalk on both sides of the bridge will increase the footprint of the bridge and add to the structure cost. Final pathway and sidewalk location and configuration will be determined during the final design phase.

Comment #25: Calvin Williams
I would like to go on record as being totally and completely against the proposed roundabout at Hoback Junction. I and many others that I have spoken to, DO NOT like

them, and will avoid them at all costs. Thing built, it WILL get someone killed. Not to mention, that it would have to have a diameter of 500 feet to allow a semi-truck to be able to make it through. For example, ask anyone living in Idaho Falls what they think of Hitt Road. Ask Wal-Mart how much their same-store sales have dropped at that location. People would rather go all the way across town to the other store.

I agree that the existing structure over the Hoback River need to be replaced, but it would make more sense to re-align the intersection into the proposed "T," with traffic from Highway 26 having the right-of-way over traffic from Highway 191. With the existing terrain, it would not take much dirt work to get elevations that would increase the sightline for traffic coming from the Pinedale direction.

Thank You

I would also like to add, that the people that are responsible for the maintenance and upkeep on the roads, would not be able to, with anything round.

> **Response:** Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. See response to Comment #9 regarding roundabout operation safety. WYDOT will closely consider driver safety in selecting an intersection option for the junction. Traffic counts indicate that a "T" intersection (if selected) would need to have a stop into the junction on the Pinedale side. If a roundabout is selected, WYDOT would work to increase public awareness on roundabouts and their workings. A roundabout would be designed to allow for regular and effective maintenance.

Comment #26: Debbie S. LaJeunesse
After living at Hoback Junction for 15 years, I have some definite thoughts on the junction and proposed changes. I favor the Roundabout Option, if it can be made large enough for all the trucks to navigate. I've seen lots of these in Europe and know that they do work.

I feel that having any stop signs, in any direction, creates unnecessary noise, especially from all the trucks (especially those that jake down the hill, stop and then again the noise when they start off). Having a roundabout would probably lessen the amount of stopping at that location and create a quieter neighborhood. Another benefit would be all the people, who are unfamiliar with roundabouts - they would be very cautious and go slow so as to figure out what and where they are supposed to be, which would slow everyone down (hopefully).

I also think the 3-lane with center turn lane is the way to go. Why aren't there ever any little tunnels under the highway around here, to allow the animals to use the tunnel to get to the other side of the road?

There is my two cents.

Thanks for the opportunity,

> **Response:** Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. A roundabout (if selected) would be designed to accommodate large semi-trucks and oversized loads. During the final bridge design phase, WYDOT will investigate the feasibility for providing wildlife passage adjacent to both bridge abutments under the reconstructed Snake River bridge.

Comment #27: Randy Roberts and Ellen Fales
I'm writing this to you from San Diego and I just was able to plug back in. I hope it is not too late for these comments regarding Hoback Junction.

I am a cyclist in the region for over 30 years. I am urging you in your planning process to include a number of safety features for non-motorized travel in your reconstruction.

A separated pathway on both sides of the highway would keep conflicts down. This needs to be extended to Horse Creek as called for long ago. This gauntlet of a highway is now the most dangerous section of road for cyclist and pedestrians in our county.

WYDOT should be complemented on their Snake River Canyon project. It is now one of the most popular rides in our county. But, this area does not connect to South Park. You have many cyclists trying to cheat death by riding to Hoback Junction. Your idea for a roundabout is exciting as this is a perfect place for one.

Please consider these comments as a way to provide for safe non-motorized travel. Our local organization Friend's of Pathways (which I am president of) is excited to offer any assistance in making this project safe and efficient for everyone.

> **Response:** Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. Pathway options from Hoback Junction to South Park are included in alternatives that will be evaluated in a separate NEPA study for Jackson South, which WYDOT plans to initiate immediately. WYDOT will continue to work with Teton County, Friends of Pathways, and the public to address the needs of bicyclists and pedestrians for Jackson South.

Comment #28: Teri Quigley
I'm tickled that DOT is actually asking for public comment before simply doing what they think will work. I have commuted the SR Canyon for 10 years and have become increasingly frustrated at the Hoback stop sign. I know a roundabout will work, they've been working for ages in England and Europe, and you have a natural one already started with the 3 intersecting roads. There are two roundabouts in Idaho Falls which uses 2 approach lanes, one for the immediate right turners, one for the go straight or around left. Your challenge will be educating the public 'how' to behave and navigate safely around..... count my vote as YES!

> **Response:** Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. If a roundabout is selected, WYDOT would work to increase public awareness on roundabouts and their workings.

Comment #29: Stacey Smith
Hello, on the Hoback Junction highway rebuild, I would prefer to see an intersection with Alpine traffic given the right of way. I think with the amount of big truck traffic coming through the canyon a roundabout could be problematic. Thank you

> **Response:** See response to Comment #9 regarding roundabout operation safety. A roundabout (if selected) would be designed to allow maximum speeds of 20 to 25 mph and would be able to accommodate large semi-trucks and oversized loads. The "T" intersection (if selected) would have a stop into the junction on the Pinedale side, with Alpine traffic given the right-of-way. Whatever option is chosen—the "T" intersection or roundabout—the speeds will be kept low and the junction will be designed to operate safely and efficiently.

Comment #30: Stephen and Cynthia Munger
We are opposed to a "Roundabout Intersection" at Hoback Junction for the following reasons:

1. This type of intersection is not common in the West and should not be on a major highway. We don't need tourists who are already uncertain of which way to go when they come to the intersection, even more confused by an intersection style they are not familiar with and have never driven before.

2. This type of intersection does not allow for wide loads. The southern access to Jackson is the only real access for wide loads. A one lane roundabout does not

allow for moving a house, bridge or even a mobile home. This type of intersection would be more difficult for the large volume of semi-trucks and RVs to navigate.

3. The traffic volume that is predicted in the Environmental Assessment with a 85% increase should not be subjected to an intersection that is dependent on yielding at entrance.

Why is it that the Alpine Junction is slated for a signal and yet the Hoback is not? We believe that instead of side roads and a "Roundabout" a "T" intersection with turn lanes and a three-lane "Urban Alternative" through the Hoback Area is best.

Response: Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. See response to Comment #9 regarding roundabout operation safety. If a roundabout is selected, WYDOT would work to increase public awareness of roundabouts and their workings. The roundabout would be designed to accommodate large semi-trucks and oversized loads. The "T" intersection (if selected) would have a stop into the junction on the Pinedale side. WYDOT would install a traffic signal at Hoback Junction once traffic volumes warrant a signal.

Comment #31: Anna Bush
I am writing to let you know that I think that putting a roundabout at Hoback Junction is a bad idea. I have lived in Jackson for 40 yrs. and when I go to Idaho Falls there are roundabout's there and they confuse me because the driver's do not obey the yield sign's. I have come close many time's to being in an accident because someone would not take the time to slow down and yield. I cannot imagine the nightmare it would be at Hoback Junction with people driving at highway speed's. Please consider an intersection giving Alpine the right of way. Thank you

Response: Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. See response to Comment #9 regarding roundabout operation safety. If a roundabout is selected, WYDOT would work to increase public awareness of roundabouts and their workings. A roundabout would be designed to allow maximum speeds of 20 to 25 mph. The "T" intersection (if selected) would have a stop into the junction on the Pinedale side. To slow vehicles entering the junction, WYDOT will use signage (including speed limit signs) to forewarn of the junction. Flashing lights, rumble strips, and other measures will also be used if needed. Whatever option is chosen—the "T" or roundabout intersection—the

speeds will be kept low and the junction will be designed to operate safely and efficiently.

Comment #32: Ronald Williams
I am writing to express my unwavering opposition to a roundabout at Hoback Junction, or anywhere else in Wyoming for that matter. One need look no further than the Loveland Colorado area to see what an absolute disaster they are. The overwhelming majority of Wyoming TAXPAYERS, who will be stuck paying for something they despise, should be given some consideration. I lived in Europe for 3 years, where roundabouts are common, and I know from personal experience what an absolute disaster they are.

Response: Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. See response to Comment #9 regarding roundabout operation safety. If a roundabout is selected, WYDOT would work to increase public awareness of roundabouts and their workings. Whatever option is chosen—the "T" or roundabout intersection—the speeds will be kept low and the junction will be designed to operate safely and efficiently.

Comment #33: Chris and Teresa Morasco
To whom it may concern,
As a daily commuter from the town of Alpine for the past 12 years My wife and I are in favor of the additional width of the new roads for bike lanes. We also believe that a "roundabout" would not be advisable at the intersection as it would slow the commuter traffic coming from Lincoln County to an unacceptable traffic jam as the travel population continues to increase, which would inevitably back up onto the Snake River Bridge even more than it does today. The prospects of removing heavy snowfall from such a traffic structure has also proven to be problematic in other areas with similar snowfall. We also think that the northbound traffic coming from Sublette County should also be required to stop at the junction as it is now well known that the majority of traffic is coming from the south on hwy 89/26. Furthermore, we believe the concerns that the local community has with "speeding issues" can be addressed with an appropriate speed limit for the junction with travelers being given ample warning of the decrease in speed on hwy 89/26, as well as the decreasing speed limit and impending stop sign on hwy 191/287 prior to arriving at the junction. Thank you for considering our input on this matter

Response: Thank you for taking time to comment on this project. Given projected traffic volumes, WYDOT does not anticipate a roundabout (if selected)

resulting in traffic queues on the bridge. The "T" intersection (if selected) would have a stop into the junction on the Pinedale side. To slow vehicles entering the junction, WYDOT will use signage (including speed limit signs) to forewarn of the junction. Flashing lights, rumble strips, and other measures will also be used if needed. Traffic counts will determine which route has the right-of-way if the "T" intersection is built; under a roundabout design this will not be an issue. Whatever option is chosen—the "T" or roundabout intersection—the speeds will be kept low and the junction will be designed to operate safely and efficiently. Also, the roundabout design would allow for effective snow removal.

Comment #34: Stephen Haydon
Here are some comments on the EA:

1. Water Quality - I believe the new bridge should be designed to minimize the pollution being dumped into the Snake River. All I saw in the EA is that it would be diluted so it is not a problem which I believe is the wrong approach.

2. Noxious weeds - Need to monitor the site for a few years after construction and spray weeds as they occur.

3. Lack of information on the proposed bridge. All I can see from the document is that the new bridge is twice as wide as the existing. This sounds huge to me - I think the design should try to mitigate the impact of the size of the bridge on the community of Hoback and on river users below in any techniques currently available.

   Response: Thank you for taking time to comment on this project.
   Water Quality Comment: WYDOT has attempted to avoid and minimize water quality impacts as part of its preliminary bridge design. If the Preferred Alternative is selected, WYDOT would continue to seek opportunities to avoid and minimize impacts to water resources during final design. For example, contractors will be required to adhere to measures outlined in WYDOT's *Standard Specifications for Road and Bridge Construction*, 2003, to protect water quality during construction. Best Management Practices would be implemented to control sediment and prevent erosion. Refer to Section 3.12.3 of the EA for more information regarding mitigation for water quality impacts.

   Noxious Weeds Comment: WYDOT is currently working with Teton County on an initiative to control weeds along the entire Hoback corridor *prior* to construction. A revegetation plan would be developed through coordination with the U.S. Forest Service, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, and the U.S.

Army Corps of Engineers. The revegetation plan should include success monitoring specifications and noxious weed control methods (see Section 3.17.7.1 of the EA for more information).

Bridge Comment: The existing bridge width is 28 feet with two lanes; the new bridge would be approximately 57 feet wide, accommodating three 12-foot lanes, two 8-foot shoulders, and a 5-foot sidewalk. The increased bridge width is necessary to meet current design standards, provide for a safe transition to the third lane needed for vehicles turning left into Rodgers Point and the fire station, provide room for left-turning vehicles that may queue onto the bridge, , and provide for bicyclists and pedestrians. The new bridge would be approximately the same height as the existing bridge. Section 3.21 of the EA discusses measures to minimize visual impacts of the new bridge. WYDOT would study and discuss bridge aesthetics with the public during the final design phase.

Comment #35: Sue Prevost
As a frequent cyclist of this particular area of Jackson, I would like to voice my support of the pathway project from Hoback Junction to Game Creek.

This area is in desperate need of a safe pathway. The existing shoulder is dangerous & nonexistent in some areas. I have personally experienced a few 'close calls' on the Snake River Bridge. Please consider the many cyclists that commute this roadway on a daily basis.

Thank you for your consideration.

Response: Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project Pathway options north of Hoback Junction and pathway network continuity will be fully evaluated in a separate NEPA study for Jackson South, which WYDOT plans to initiate immediately. WYDOT will continue to work with Teton County, Friends of Pathways, and the public to address the needs of bicyclists and pedestrians for Jackson South.

Comment #36: Jill Moberg
The Hoback Junction area has a substantial 200' wide right-of-way; please consider the addition of a 10' wide pathway for shared pedestrian and bicycle use on both sides of the roadway. The preferred alternative shows a path on one side and sidewalk on the other.

This new reduced-area Hoback Junction EA unfortunately does not address the 1.2 mile section between Hoback Junction and Horse Creek, long identified as a severe safety problem area for bicycling due to the lack of any shoulder; it is perhaps the most dangerous location for bicycles in Teton County. That U.S. 26-191 road section should be prioritized and moved forward as soon as possible.

The alternative with a roundabout is an excellent choice for the intersection of U.S. 191 and U.S. 26. Care must be taken in the design of the roundabout so that the design speeds are no more than 20 mph. The EA states "less than 30 mph", which is too high of speed for safe traffic flow and pedestrian crossings.

The bridge over the Snake River is clearly in need of replacement.
Provision of a sidewalk on both sides of the new bridge for pedestrians is critical.
There appears to be an opportunity to reduce the width of the bridge by removing the middle turn lane, as no turns are possible on the bridge. Two 12' lanes, two 8' shoulders, and two 6' sidewalks, one each side a minimum 6' width, should be provided.

Response: Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. Final pathway and sidewalk location and configuration will be determined during final design. The Preferred Alternative would improve bicyclist and pedestrian opportunities within the Hoback Junction Area. Pathway options north of Hoback Junction and pathway network continuity will be fully evaluated in a separate NEPA study for Jackson South, which WYDOT plans to initiate immediately. WYDOT will continue to work with Teton County, Friends of Pathways, and the public to address the needs of bicyclists and pedestrians for Jackson South.

A roundabout (if selected) would be designed to allow maximum speeds of 20 to 25 mph. The "T" intersection (if selected) would have a stop into the junction on the Pinedale side. To slow vehicles entering the junction, WYDOT will use signage (including speed limit signs) to forewarn of the junction. Flashing lights, rumble strips, and other measures will also be used if needed.

Your comment regarding the need for a sidewalk on both sides of the bridge will be considered during the final design process. Although left turns cannot be made on the structure itself, a third lane on the bridge is needed to provide a safe transition to the third lane needed for vehicles turning left into Rodgers Point and into the fire station, and to provide additional room for left-turning vehicles

that may queue back onto the bridge. . Future maintenance and traffic are other considerations when determining the bridge width.

Comment #37: Kjell Elisson
I attended the informational presentation your office sponsored at the WYDOT building on the 9th of October. As a representative from Jackson Hole Fire/EMS, we have these comments:

We prefer the round-about design. We believe it is not only safer but it leaves us room to expand our fire station to help meet the needs of our ever changing community.

The other option of having a stop sign, while it appears easier, we believe it is unsafe. There is no safety barrier in the instance that a motorist misses, or fails to notice the stop sign. There is a higher potential for a MVC (motor vehicle collision) that could not only hamper the response to the station, but also has a high potential for actually crashing into our station.

We would also like to discuss the placement of Fire Department signs and also the possibility of an emergency call flashing light. This would assist our fire apparatus entering the road from the station and also assist our volunteer personal responding to the station.

Whichever design is decided, we also recommend that rumble strips be placed at the appropriate locations.

Thank you for your hard work on this project and please feel free to contact me with any clarification I may be able to provide.

Response: Thank you for taking time to comment on this project. WYDOT will address signing and lighting needs during the final design. Blinking lights and signals will be considered for the fire station. WYDOT will address rumble strips under their statewide rumble strip projects.

Public Comments Received by Phone

Comment #38: Carol Kruljac
Carol Kruljac called regarding the junction design of Hoback junction. She believes that either proposal is a benefit to her and her business. She owns a business at Hoback Jct.

and in Rock Springs. She understands the nature of speeding traffic. She wants a safe junction.

> **Response:** Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. Whatever option is chosen—the "T" or roundabout intersection—the speeds will be kept low and the junction will be designed to operate safely and efficiently. See response to Comment #9 regarding roundabout operation safety.

Comment #39: Dan Winder
Dan Winder called to mention that he did not like the roundabout.

> **Response:** Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. See response to Comment #9 regarding roundabout operation safety. Your comment will be considered as the project moves forward.

Verbal Comments Given to Court Recorder at the Public Hearing and Open House November 2, 2006

Comment #40: Stan Chatham
My name is Stan Chatham. My company is the Snake River Park. We're the KOA down at the Hoback Junction, actually a mile north of the Junction. And we've been there for 30 years. And my comments about the phase that we're talking about right now are the roundabout sounds like a very good idea. It's a great start. I have seen it work in other areas where the original attitude was "this will not work. This will build more congestion." And fortunately within six months the people were saying, "boy, this is a good deal. We are so smart to have done this." So I can see where it can work.

The only question is the layout. The continuous smooth flow of traffic. And so the design of it, I'm sure your people will be able to come up with a real good design that will help that scenario.

I have questions about the need for a bike path on one side of the highway and sidewalks on the other side of the highway. I think that is probably overkill because of the amount of pedestrian traffic at the Junction.

Yes, we have problems getting people across the road, but people walking up and down the highway -- quite frankly now people are scared to because they're afraid they're going to get hit because the road is so narrow.

But we aren't talking about a commercial corridor of two or three miles. We're talking about a commercial corridor there at the Junction of possibly, what, 300 yards on each side of the highway and so that might be something we need to discuss.

I am very concerned about the next phase coming north. That I think -- I want to make sure I say this right. We all know that we need to do something about the Junction, the bridge, the congestion, yes. But I think the next phase going north is critical what we do in that phase in the first one mile going north. Because of all of the small businesses up there -- I can speak for Snake River Park big time.

They even begin to discuss the idea of having five lanes, it's a disaster waiting – waiting to happen because of the type of traffic that comes in and out of Snake River Park.

The closest example I can give you would be the type of traffic that comes in and out of Evans Construction up on Hog Island. There's a big difference between a pickup pulling out of Evans Construction and merging into traffic then an 18-wheeler pulling cement -- a cement truck or pulling gravel. And I got the same scenario with Snake River Park with our big rigs coming in and out, i.e., the 36, 40-foot trailers being pulled by a pickup.

I don't care what anyone says, it takes a long time to get those people up to speed and every time I hear the scenario of a five-lane expressway in front of Snake River Park or anything on that stretch until you get up on Hog Island -- once you cross the bridge up on Hog Island, they turn loose. But once they cross that bridge, that last mile and a half before you get to the Junction you need to slow that traffic down.

The signage that we have there now is totally inadequate. It's amazing that we don't have more incidents there each summer and I would love to get more input about your future plans on this next phase. But the first phase with the Junction with the bridge and the roundabout I think it's a wonderful start.

I think you all come a long way. It's a lot more realistic today than it was five or six years ago when we first started talking about this. I feel that in a perfect world it would all work out well. Well, it's not a perfect world. We have to deal with reality on this. And we do need to slow this traffic down. I hope you'll keep me posted. If I can do anything, input, please give me a holler. Thank you for your time.

This is Stan Chatham with an additional comment. Right now the bridge that crosses the Snake that we know needs to be replaced, you have a 25 mile an hour speed limit on

it. You need to do a better job on your signage, telling these people that they're going from a 40 to a 25. Right now there's just no warning, especially if you're coming north.

You says -- you're doing 55, and it says slow down and then all of a sudden you're doing 25. There is no -- it's not adequate signing. I think that we need to do some work on the signage because I know that the highway patrol is writing tickets there, and you got locals and everyone going up and down and the traffic -- the tourists, I mean, they get caught and they get ticketed because of a lack of signage, granted some people are going to take the speed limit and say, well, that doesn't apply to me. Those people need to get the tickets.

But the honest mistakes are honest mistakes, and I think that a lot of that would go away if they had better signage about that speed limit going across that bridge. Thank you.

My name is Stan Chatham, additional comments. The first one is the wildlife crossing the road. And we all know that that's a major issue in the Junction and I hope that the studies that are being done will include talking to the people who live there and pick up the elk, the deer, the moose off the road that are hit.

It is a very big problem. That whole stretch down through there because of the game coming out of Horse Creek, the game are coming across the river from Munger Mountain. It's a major game crossing there. And we're hoping that there's going to be some serious discussions and research done on this.

My other comment is about the jake brake issue coming into the Junction coming in from Pinedale and coming up from the Alpine. It is certainly a noise issue that definitely should be considered in the Environmental Impact Statement. It doesn't take a genius to realize how much noise these brakes make, especially at night. And the quality of people's livelihoods have been affected every day down there by the noise of these jake brakes. And, unfortunately, talking to the people from WYDOT today, they really say there's nothing they can do about it. It has to -- it's a municipal issue and they can't even put up signs. That to me is passing the buck and this is something that really needs to be addressed if you're going to do this right the first time. But to pass -- to say, well, it's not anything we can do about that, I find that totally unacceptable. Especially that attitude at this stage of the game. I would hope that they would explore every option possible. After all, people do live at this Junction. And it's not right for them to be woken up on a nightly basis with these jake brakes or any time of the day. Thank you very much.

My name is Stan Chatham, again, and the document that I am looking at right now, the Environmental Assessment, I don't see anything or haven't seen anything that it talks about the jake brakes. And that's something that needs to be seriously addressed. I see a little diagram of heavy trucks, but I don't see any corresponding material that talks about the jake brakes, and that is a definite problem down there. And I would love to get some information on this as would the people down there. Thank you.

Response: Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. A roundabout (if selected) would be designed to allow maximum speeds of 20 to 25 mph. To slow vehicles entering the junction, WYDOT will use signage (including speed limit signs) to forewarn of the junction. Flashing lights, rumble strips, and other measures will also be used if needed. Speed limit sign locations will be determined during the final design process, as well as final pathway and sidewalk location and configuration. As planned, a pathway *and* sidewalk would only be provided through the junction to the north side of the bridge.

Concerning your comments about the highway north of Hoback Junction – WYDOT intends to initiate the Jackson South Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) immediately. The EIS will be based on analysis conducted over the last ten years and all previous public and agency comments received to date will be taken into consideration.

The Hoback Junction EA discusses effects of the project on wildlife. Wildlife disturbance or displacement, barriers to wildlife movement, and potential mortality impacts to wildlife are not expected to be greater with the roadway and intersection improvements than the existing conditions. The completed road construction project would effectively slow traffic through the area, and may reduce the potential for road kills and few, if any, road kills are expected to occur on the Snake River Bridge. During the final design phase, WYDOT will investigate the feasibility for providing wildlife passage under the reconstructed Snake River bridge.

WYDOT does not regulate the use of jake brakes. We recommend you contact your Teton County elected representative or county staff regarding this issue.

Comment #41: Rod Lewis

My name is Rod Lewis and I own about five and a half acres of commercial property at Hoback Junction and I'm very concerned about access to the commercial property. And as I look at this circle here on page 2-14 of the Hoback Junction Environmental Assessment, I'd sure like to see another access into this circle that would go right

toward where the existing firehouse is because there are about 9 or 10 commercial lots back here with nothing on them and we need access into them on one end and access back out to the highway on the other.

One the engineer's pointed out, there's no reason why the access going toward Pinedale, an access just like that couldn't be flipped over and create a fourth entryway into this circle that would access the north side where the firehouse is now to access the commercial property behind the state highway right-of-way. And another comment, I think I'm in favor of the circle because it would slow down traffic, which the other wouldn't. And right now cars speeding through Hoback Junction makes it just part of a race way instead of a community.

So I think the idea -- anything that would slow down traffic and give a presence of, hey, we're in a community and let's slow down and let's be careful, I think would be an advantage to the whole community. I guess that's my concern.

I guess there's one other thing I'm concerned with. I've been in the river running business here in for 37 years on the Snake River, and all that property that I have, that commercial property, is based -- right now the focus is on river running --River running, rafting, boating, fishing, and any kind of boating. We have the only -- if you look at the diagram on the Environmental Assessment thing on the same page, if you look behind the firehouse down on the sand bar, there's a boat ramp giving access to the river. And because it's highly used commercially, we definitely need an easy access to the commercial property and to the road accessing the river so boats can get to and from the river.

It's been my livelihood for 37 years and it's why I bought the property, and I'd hate to see difficult to do than it already is. Thank you.

> **Response:** Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. WYDOT will maintain access to adjacent properties. Exact access locations will be determined during final design. Only the three existing highway legs would have access into the roundabout, to ensure that the roundabout functions efficiently and safely.
>
> WYDOT appreciates your comments regarding additional river access; however, this has not been identified as a project purpose or need.

Public Comments Received by Fax

Comment #42: Janet Palermo
Although Hoback Junction is not legally considered a town, I would say there is more of a town I know. We are so proud of our junction that we all have either a Hoback nation or Hog Island sticker on our car. With this in mind, we need not only to look at this road improvement as a correction of a bridge deficiency and increase traffic flow, but also to accommodate the needs of a junction growing into a town.

As a Hoback homeowner, the concerns I have going into this new project are as follows:

1. Increase safety
2. Decrease speeding (presently 40 MPH, actual speeds more like 55 MPH)
3. Decrease noise pollution (Jake brakes and trucks braking hard, and acceleration noise to get to 55 MPH)
4. Increase wildlife protection
5. Easy access to Hoback Fire Department

Personally I am not sold on either option I was presented, but I lien more towards the circle than the "T" intersection (AKA Alpine 500). The "T" intersection doesn't answer the needs of:

1. Safety and
2. Slowing the speeds of traffic

Although the circle does answer the first two needs, safety and slowing traffic it brings other questions to the table. The circle also doesn't answer my other needs, as decrease noise pollution, increase wildlife protection and access to the Fire Department.

Questions that pop in my mind about the Roundabout would be:

1. How do you intend to slow the traffic coming into the circle
    a. Signage?
    b. Rumble strips? (do rumble strips work in the winter when there is snow?)
    c. Slower speeds before actual circle?
    d. Blinking lights?

If your going to have people slow from 55 MPH going through the circle, that is a lot of deceleration for a semi truck, or someone late to work at 7:30AM.

2. How do you intend to decrease noise pollution?
    a. I know the rules of Jake brakes, but if we could manage to override the present rules and present it to this improvement as not only a noise pollution decrease but as an environmental issue, we would have some very happy Hoback residents.
    b. As I have said the present MPH is 40, if we slow the speeds to 15, then it turns to 55 after the circle, say going to Pinedale, and the driver needs to "floor it" in order to increase of their MPH, that acceleration noise for trucks or RV's is quiet considerable. Have we considered slowing speeds miles before and after the Junction to decrease noise pollution?

3. What actions are being made to protect wildlife?
    a. We all aware of the wildlife corridor in Hoback junction, your diagrams on October 9th showed us that, but what actions, such ad wildlife fencing, are being proposed to protect these innocent animals. I see a dead animal on the road at least once a week it seems. At the meeting I didn't see any solutions I was hoping we could address this.

4. Access to the Hoback Fire Department
    a. As a volunteer Fire Fighter for over 8 years, a major concern that I have would be access and safety for the volunteer Fire Fighters and our equipment. With the proposed Roundabout there was little detail about the Fire Dept. access road. Concerns to me are:
        i. Easy access from the fire station to the highway. Are you going put in a blinking light that we can activate? Are you putting up signs that inform folks that there is a firehouse? Although I have a siren and blinking lights on our fire trucks, it sometimes is just not enough for us to be able to get out on to the highway. The faster we can get to a scene, the more lives and property we can save. Isn't that worth blinking light or blinking sign?
        ii. How do we limit the amount of traffic using the Fire access Road? Many times we are in the front of our fire house, either training, or working our engines, what is going to limit someone from blazing through there and interfering with our duties, or perhaps running one of us down? Are you going to put in rumble strips? If so, that will decrease our response time as well. Is the road going to be a straight-away or curved? There was very little information about this major, life safety concern.

Safety, Speeds, Wildlife, Noise and Fire Dept. access are my concerns and I hope you take in account these issues and I have brought to the table a few things that you may or may not have asked yourselves. I wanted to thank you for the October public hearing, I have been waiting for this for sometime, I am glad that WYDOT is concerned with the public's opinion and our concerns are being looked at. I know that it's a few years till the digging begins, and there are lots of issues still at hand. I ask that everyone involved to understand that even though Hoback is only a junction on paper that it is our town and not just a thruway for the Alpine area residents to blaze through on their daily commute.

Response: Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. See response to Comment #9 regarding roundabout operation safety. A roundabout (if selected) would be designed to allow maximum speeds of 20 to 25 mph and would be able to accommodate large semi-trucks and oversized loads. To slow vehicles entering the junction, WYDOT will use signage (including speed limit signs) to forewarn of the junction. Flashing lights, rumble strips, and other measures will also be used if needed. Blinking lights and signing will be considered for the fire station.

Slowing the vehicles entering the junction should reduce noise levels compared to vehicles traveling at higher speeds through the area. WYDOT does not regulate use of jake brakes, but recommends you contact Teton County in that regard. Standard WYDOT design practice involves slowing traffic before the intersection based on design guidelines.

Per federal regulations, a noise analysis was conducted for the Hoback Junction study area (Section 3.10.3 of the EA). This analysis indicated that changes in future noise levels from existing conditions are predicted to be minor (see Chapter 3 of this FONSI). A noise impact is considered to be substantial if the project would result in a noise increase of 15 dB(A) or greater above existing noise levels. Under the Preferred Alternative, two receivers would experience noise levels above the Noise Abatement Criteria in 2026. Mitigation measures evaluated for these receivers were determined to be cost prohibitive.

The Hoback Junction EA discusses potential project impacts to wildlife. Wildlife disturbance/displacement, barriers to wildlife movement, and potential mortality impacts to wildlife are not expected to be greater with the roadway and intersection improvements than the existing conditions. The completed road construction project would effectively slow traffic through the area, and may reduce the potential for road kills, and few, if any, road kills are expected to

occur on the Snake River Bridge. During the final design phase, WYDOT will investigate the feasibility for providing wildlife passage under the reconstructed Snake River bridge.

Regarding access to the fire station, WYDOT would maintain access to the fire station. Your comment regarding rumble strips slowing emergency service delivery is noted, and will be considered along with other safety considerations when deciding upon the use of rumble strips. Your comment regarding traffic on the fire access road will be considered in final design in deciding upon internal circulation options.

Comments from BTNF Round Table Discussion

Comment #43: Provided by Darin Martens, BTNF

1. Consider the Shidner property [Hoback Cabins] for river access/launch.
2. A Scenic Byway Portal site for sign desired at the Junction, per the Byway Plan, probably northbound before bridge may be best.
3. What is the bridge sidewalk width, for pathway connectivity?
4. Where will the Shidner cabins go? BT may be interested in these for employee housing.
5. Visuals: corten steel guardrail and bridge, and architecturally significant bridge is preferred, appropriate color for the MSE wall.
6. How will the toe of the landslide be fixed by the bridge?-
7. Terry is looking at Bald Eagle nest sites in both upstream Snake & Hoback drainages. [concurs 10/23/2007, no nest within .5 mile of project).
8. Would like a Forest entry sign in the Snake River Canyon. [there is one by Dog Creek now, I'll get clarification].
9. Would prefer the same bridge footprint - no piers in the river.
10. Wildlife passage under the bridge is desired.
11. Towards Wild & Scenic Recreation Designation - build a river launch/landing, parking and a restroom.
12. It looks like a larger curve radius for the round-a-bouts may be needed?

13. Perhaps the Hoback Fire Station could be located in the center of the round-a-bout?

14. Additional wildlife crossing dynamic messaging signs would be nice, probably at Jct., northbound before bridge, southbound out of Jct.

Response: Thank you for taking time to provide comments on this project. WYDOT will consider future river access, river launches, parking areas, etc. as enhancement projects, separate from this project.

The Hoback Junction portion of this project is part of the Wyoming Centennial Scenic Byway. Posting a portal sign advising this at an appropriate location will be considered in the sign plan.

As proposed, the sidewalk on the bridge would be five feet wide. Final sidewalk locations and configurations for the bridge, as well as aesthetic bridge treatments, will be determined during the final bridge design process.

During final bridge design, WYDOT would develop some type of mechanical stabilization for the landslide. This likely would consist of tie back anchors around the existing bridge abutment and behind the new bridge abutment. Also, if the road is shifted to south, the fill material required for the new abutment and retaining walls will act as a toe berm, further stabilizing the landslide.

WYDOT currently has no plans for the Shidner property cabins, but will conduct a market value appraisal of the property. This information and negotiations with the landowner will determine if WYDOT obtains part or all of this property. WYDOT would be happy to discuss this issue further upon making this determination.

During the final design phase, WYDOT will investigate the feasibility of providing wildlife passage adjacent to both abutments under the reconstructed Snake River Bridge.

A roundabout (if selected) would be designed to allow maximum speeds of 20 to 25 mph and would be able to accommodate large semi-trucks and oversized loads**.** Relocating the Hoback Fire Station into the center of the roundabout would present traffic circulation and emergency response issues and add considerably to the project cost.

There is a dynamic message sign at the north end of Hoback Junction that is used to advise motorists travel conditions such as wildlife crossings.

Chapter 3.0 Clarification to the EA

This section provides additional information and clarification to the Hoback Junction EA based on comments received. Section numbers in this chapter refer to EA section numbers.

Section 3.8.4, Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities: Goals and objectives described in Chapter 8 of the *Jackson/Teton County Comprehensive Plan* (2002) were considered in the identification and evaluation of alternatives. The plan places importance on shifting automobile dependence toward other modes, such as walking, bicycling, and public transit. Goals and objectives in the plan include:

- **Alternative Modes and Programs**. An important theme of Chapter 8 is the fact that the "alternative modes" - walking, bicycling and public transit - are underrepresented in the community today and should receive emphasis in the future.
- **Roads and Streets**: An important aspect of Chapter 8 is the identification of, and recommendations for, additions and expansions to roadways that include consideration of alternative modes.
- **Systematically plan for future mobility that meets the needs of residents and tourists within the context of community character.** Ensure all modes are evaluated when roadway corridors are planned and designed, and incorporated when possible.
- **Decrease the rate of anticipated vehicular traffic growth in the community.** Decrease automobile reliance by shifting resident travel mode shares as follows:

	1996 Actual	2020 Objective	Percent Change
Drive alone	55%	42%	-13%
Rideshare	29%	30%	+1%
Walk	9%	13%	+4%
Bicycle	6%	10%	+4%
Transit	<1%	5%	+5%

- **Improve the safety and efficiency of the transportation system in Jackson and Teton County.** Maintain or reduce existing accident levels, and reduce accident severity by 10 percent. Reduce pedestrian and non-motorized vehicle accidents by 10 percent while increasing the amount of pedestrian and non-motorized vehicle travel. Provide a safe, convenient, appealing, and reliable transit system.

The goals and objectives described in the *Pathways Master Plan* (June 2007) were also considered in the identification and evaluation of alternatives. A shared-use path (called the South 89 Pathway) from Game Creek to Hoback Junction is included in the plan's

capital project five-year priority list. Connectivity to the planned South 89 Pathway will be considered in the final design of bicycle and pedestrian facilities in Hoback Junction. **Section 3.8.4** states: "According to the Jackson/Teton County Comprehensive Plan, walking and bicycling usage in Teton County is comparatively low for a mountain community". The 2001 Travel Study is a more current resource than the 1996 study upon which this statement was based. This study indicates that bike trips were up to 10% and pedestrian trips more or less stable. This reflects a 67% increase in bike trips over 1996, which is considerable use for a mountain community and shows progress towards the county's transportation goals.

Section 3.10.3, Noise Impacts: States that "future noise levels are predicted to increase an average 3.6 to 4.0 decibels over existing noise levels, primarily due to the effect of almost doubled future traffic volumes." Traffic increases in Hoback Junction would be more moderate. Accordingly, a closer look at the noise monitoring results in Table 3-11 indicates that projected noise increases are more moderate than those stated in the EA. Changes in future noise levels, for both No-Action and Preferred Alternatives, are predicted to be minor.

Section 3.17.2.2, USFS Sensitive Species, Table 3-16, Sensitive Species for the Bridger-Teton National Forest, Trumpeter Swan: In the winter, swans are found along the Snake River and in the project area. Swans also migrate up and down the river in spring (March—April) and fall (November). Mortality from collisions is a major cause of mortality in swans; any lines or wires stretched across the river during construction will be well marked. Mortalities of swans or raptors at the project site will be reported immediately to the local Wyoming Game & Fish office.

Section 3.17.3.1, Non-Game Wildlife Species, Table 3-17, Raptor Species Potentially Occurring in the Study Area: Red-tailed hawk, golden eagle, American kestrel, and great-horned owl are known to nest near the project area, rather than just "potential breeding residents." No known nests are located within 0.5 mile of the study area that could be subject to disturbance.

Section 3.24, Permits Required: Per the USACE, it is likely construction of the Preferred Alternative would be covered by Nationwide Permit 14. If temporary discharges are also needed in the Snake River for construction and/or demolition, those actions made be authorized by provisions of Nationwide Permit 33. WYDOT will continue to coordinate with the USACE throughout the bridge alternative selection and design process.

Appendix A, Wildlife Species Potentially Occurring in the Greater Study Area lists Uinta Ground Squirrel as uncommon. Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) note that it is very common in the sage habitats adjacent to the river corridor and an important foraging species for nesting bald eagles in early spring. WGFD also notes that Appendix A should list Bald Eagle as common.

Chapter 4.0 Selection of Preferred Alternative

Based on the Hoback Junction EA, public hearing transcript, and agency and public comments received, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), in coordination with the Wyoming Department of Transportation, selects the Preferred Alternative described in Section 1.3 of this Finding of No Significant Impact and Section 2.3.4 of the Environmental Assessment (EA). Furthermore, FHWA selects the roundabout design option described in Section 2.3.5 of the EA. The decision regarding access and circulation options (see Section 2.3.4 of the EA) will be deferred to the design stage.

APPENDIX A:
AGENCY CORRESPONDENCE

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
CORPS OF ENGINEERS, OMAHA DISTRICT
WYOMING REGULATORY OFFICE
2232 DELL RANGE BOULEVARD, SUITE 210
CHEYENNE WY 82009-4942

October 22, 2007

Mr. Lee Potter
Federal Highway Administration
Wyoming Division
2617 Lincolnway, Suite D
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82001-5671

Dear Mr. Potter:

This is in reference to your correspondence received October 1, 2007 concerning the release of an Environmental Assessment (EA) associated with the work proposed on 0.6 miles of US Highway 26/89 at Hoback Junction in Teton County, Wyoming. Thank you for the notification.

Your letter indicates the work proposed for Highway 26/89 is being separated from other actions associated with upgrades to US Highway 189/191. All activities were initially proposed to be addressed under a single Environmental Impact Statement, wherein the Corps has been serving as a cooperating agency. The Corps has no concerns with the separation of actions.

A review of the EA for the Highway 26/89 indicates that some form of authorization is required under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. The EA indicates that 0.32 acres of wetlands adjacent to the Snake River will be impacted with the preferred alternative. If this action is carried forward, it is likely that the action would be covered by Nationwide Permit 14. If temporary discharges are also needed in the Snake River for construction and/or demolition, those actions made be authorized by the provisions of Nationwide Permit 33. Additional coordination between the Wyoming Department of Transportation and this office will be needed to determine the appropriate type of authorization.

Thank you for the notification and opportunity to review the EA. If you have any questions concerning this matter, please contact me at (307) 772-2300. We have assigned File No. **20040230** to this action.

Sincerely,

Chandler J. Peter
Project Manager
Wyoming Regulatory Office

✓ Mr. Jeff Weinstein
Wyoming Department of Transportation
5300 Bishop Boulevard
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82009

WYOMING GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

5400 Bishop Blvd. Cheyenne, WY 82006

Phone: (307) 777-4600 Fax: (307) 777-4610

Web site: http://gf.state.wy.us

October 26, 2007

WER 9826
Department of Transportation
Environmental Assessment
Hoback Junction
Teton County

Tim Stark
Environmental Services Engineer
Department of Transportation
5300 Bishop Boulevard
Cheyenne, WY 82009-3340

Dear Mr. Stark:

The staff of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department has reviewed the Environmental Assessment for Hoback Junction in Teton County. We offer the following comments for your consideration.

Our primary concerns focus on the maintenance of wildlife populations and habitat in the immediate junction area. The areas immediately north, south, and east of the junction are important big game migration corridors and crucial winter range complexes. We believe the best alternatives to minimize impacts to wildlife populations would include the following:

- Attempt to slow the speed of motorists as they approach and depart the junction. Big game is in close proximity to the highway during winter and spring months because of snow conditions, and access to forage and water. Big game movements to these resources frequently necessitate that they cross the highway or use it as a travel corridor. Wildlife on or near the highway can create safety hazards for motorists. A reduction in the speed limit in the junction area would minimize wildlife/vehicle collisions and increase motorist safety.

- Minimize the height of any retaining wall that would be constructed to stabilize the active landslide area adjacent to the Snake River Bridge on the south side of the river. This area is crucial winter range for mule deer and elk, and it is vital that big game access to the Snake River and adjacent winter ranges is not restricted.

- Mitigate the loss of crucial fish and wildlife habitats.

- Construction and location of fencing to minimize vehicle-wildlife collisions. We recommend a standard pole top highway right-of-way fence. This fence design currently exists along some portions of Highway 189/191 south of Jackson, and is effective in not restricting big game movements to seasonal ranges.

- Design the bridge and underpass beneath the roadway that will promote wildlife movement to seasonal and daily habitats.

- Maintain all big game movement and migration corridors to seasonal habitats.

- Adhere to existing Forest Service seasonal range closures on crucial big game winter habitats during construction (November 15 – April 30).

- Protect and maintain bald eagle and raptor nest sites, and trumpeter swan habitat.

- Develop a pathway system that does not promote human access to crucial wildlife habitats.

Pathways

The preferred alternative is the 3-Lane Urban with several design options (EA, 2-14). On page 2-3, it is stated that a pathway would be located on the west side of the road, and Figure 2-3 states that the separated pathway would be inside or outside the ROW. We encourage the pathway be located close to the road. How the pathway is constructed in this section of the project will likely influence location and design farther to the north. As stated in previous comments, pathways should not be placed immediately adjacent to riparian areas of the Snake and Hoback Rivers, or in crucial wildlife habitats.

Wetlands

Wetland mitigation will be required for the 0.32 acre of shrub swamp that will be impacted by this phase of the project (EA 3-43, 44). Mitigation required is for total functional units lost (3.20) be replaced at a minimum ratio of 1:1. We suggest that mitigation for these wetlands be combined with mitigation for the next phase of the project also, and that WYDOT work closely with WGFD staff to design functional and worthwhile mitigation projects, possibly in the WGFD South Park WMA to provide high public benefit. We are concerned that a recent wetland mitigation project south of Bondurant for highway reconstruction along that portion of the highway seems to have provided minimal wetland value.

We also have requested that amphibian surveys be conducted prior to construction in wetlands that will be impacted by the Hoback Road Project (June 9, 2006). Will such surveys be completed?

Nongame Species

Table 3-16 states that Trumpeter Swan are "unlikely in study area". This is true for summer but in winter swans are found along the Snake River and in the project area. Swans also migrate up and down the river in spring (March-April) and fall (November). Mortality from collisions is a major cause of mortality in swans; any lines or wires stretched across the river during construction need to be well marked. Mortalities of swans or raptors at the project site should be reported immediately to the local WGFD office.

Table 3-17 listing raptor species has some inaccuracies. Red-tailed hawk, golden eagle, American kestrel, and great-horned owl are known to nest in or near the project area, rather than just "potential breeding residents".

On page 3-67, in the list of impacts to wildlife and fisheries, "Habitat Fragmentation" should be included in the list and developed in the following text. This is a more inclusive term than "movement barriers" and has broader ecological implications. If wildlife species are not able to access habitat critical for certain functions of their life cycle, they could be eliminated from the area. Especially critical in the overall Hoback Road project is creating barriers that prevent wildlife from accessing the river corridor.

Bald Eagle

Although the bald eagle nest at Hoback is located ½ mile from the project site and unlikely to be directly affected by construction, it is likely that adult eagles will be displaced from some foraging habitat close to the bridge construction site. WYDOT should coordinate with the Bridger-Teton National Forest and WGFD biologists to make sure that recreational users of forest land and river corridor do not create additional stresses to this nest site during construction phase. A livestock trail located under the nest on the west side of the river should be posted as closed to all human use during the construction period. Also in terms of timing, it would be best if construction could start in mid to late summer rather than in early spring during the early nesting period when eagles are most prone to disturbance. Bald eagles forage along the Snake and Hoback Rivers.

Bald Eagle Mortality

Bald and golden eagles have been killed by vehicles in the Snake River Canyon and along the Hoback Highway; thus the possibility of a road-kill eagle is not rare as stated on page 3-71. Quick removal of road kill away from the edge of the highway can prevent this from happening.

Wildlife

In Section 3.17.7.2 (EA, page 3-77), it is stated that during the final design phase WYDOT will investigate the possibility for providing wildlife passage adjacent to both abutments under the reconstructed Snake River Bridge. WYDOT should work closely with WGFD biologists in making this determination and designing wildlife passages.

Appendix A. Wildlife Species Potentially Occurring in the Greater Study Area.

This list has some inaccuracies. Uinta Ground Squirrel is listed as uncommon, but is very common in the sage habitats adjacent to the river corridor and an important foraging species for nesting bald eagles in early spring. Bald Eagle should be listed as common. "Greater Study Area" needs to be defined; it is not clear if this refers to the entire Hoback Road Project study area or something greater than this. We suggest that it should include the entire Road Project area.

Aquatic concerns were outlined in a letter dated June 9, 2006. We have no additional concerns at this time.

We would like the opportunity to work closely with the cooperators on this project during all phases of project implementation. Personnel in the Jackson Regional Office are prepared to assist in this effort.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

JOHN EMMERICH
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

JE:VS:gfb

cc: USFWS

TETON COUNTY WYOMING

www.tetonwyo.org

October 31, 2007

Mr. Timothy Stark
Wyoming Department of Transportation
Environmental Services
P.O. Box 1708
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82003-1708

RE: Comment on Hoback Junction Environmental Assessment

Dear Mr. Stark:

The Teton County Board of Commissioners would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff of the Wyoming Department of Transportation for their work on the Hoback Junction Environmental Assessment (EA). The EA includes meaningful consideration of the concerns of Teton County residents, including safety, environmental protection, community impacts, and provision of non-motorized facilities. It is the opinion of the Board that the document strikes the appropriate balance between these sometimes competing objectives.

Specifically, the Board supports the 3-lane urban alternative with the following design elements:

- *Parallel South* location for the new Snake River bridge.
- *Combine intersections and encourage internal circulation* within the commercial core of Hoback.
- *Roundabout* intersection design to replace the existing 3-way intersection.

For the reasons discussed in the EA, the 3-lane cross-section, with the design elements enumerated above, would best serve the community, motorists, non-motorists, and the environment.

The Board asks that WYDOT consider locating a START commuter bus stop and park-and-ride within the highway right-of-way to the south of the Hoback Market. This would ensure that changes in ownership or use of the market property would not disrupt service. Additionally, the proposed trail should be located within the highway right-of-way so as not to unnecessarily impact private property along the corridor.

Sincerely,

Andrew Schwartz, Chair

c: Paula Stevens, Assistant Planning Director

Post Office Box 3594
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

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Email:
commissioners@tetonwyo.org