

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION STATE ROUTE 124/MOUNMENT DRIVE EASEMENT

I. Introduction/Proposed Action

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Walla Walla District (Corps), proposes to issue a perpetual easement to the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) for a planned vehicle overpass on SR 124 and road realignment at the intersection of SR 124 and Monument Drive.

II. Background Information

SR 124 is a two lane east/west rural arterial road located in Walla Walla County. The road serves as an access route (and shortcut) between the Tri-Cities and eastern Washington. Due to the increase in traffic volume, WSDOT has determined that a portion of SR 124 between the intersection of Monument Drive and SR 124 and the Union Pacific Railroad tracks poses a safety hazard to motorists.

Specifically, there are two issues which need to be addressed. The first one is the Union Pacific Railroad crossing of SR 124 near Monument Drive. The tracks are at grade and the only safety feature presently operating at the site is a set of overhead lights. There are no barriers to stop vehicles from proceeding over the tracks as trains approach the road. The second issue is the intersection of SR 124 and Monument Drive. The current alignment has the intersection located in close proximity to the railroad crossing (about 250 feet) which limits sight distance and increases the potential for collisions as vehicles enter onto SR 124 from Monument Drive

III. Statement of Purpose and Need

The Corps proposes to issue a perpetual easement to WSDOT for use of a portion of Corps managed federal land in the construction of a vehicle overpass on SR 124 and accompanying realignment of a portion of Monument Drive. The purpose of the proposed action is to address safety issues/concerns – i.e. prevent train/vehicle collisions and provide a better sight view at the intersection of SR 124 and Monument Drive. The action is needed because the railroad tracks are at grade, provide no barriers to stop vehicles from driving over the tracks as trains approach the road, and the current intersection of SR 124 and Monument Drive is located in close proximity to the railroad.

IV. Project Alternatives

The following alternatives were identified and considered for this project.

Alternative 1 (No Action (No Change) Alternative): Under the no action alternative, the Corps would not issue an easement to WSDOT and the SR124 vehicle overpass and Monument Drive realignment would not be constructed. Current driving conditions would remain the same. Although the “no action” alternative does not meet the project purpose and need, under Council on Environmental Quality guidelines, it serves as the project baseline for environmental conditions and therefore is carried forward for analysis.

Alternative 2 (Proposed Alternative): Under this alternative, the Corps would issue a perpetual easement to WSDOT for the construction of a vehicle overpass spanning the Union Pacific’s railroad tracks. WSDOT would also realign a section of Monument Drive by moving its intersection with SR 124 further to the west thereby increasing the sight distance to over 700 feet which meets WSDOT standards for sight distance at intersections.

Preferred Alternative: Alternative 2 was selected as the preferred alternative as it met the identified project purpose and need.

V. Environmental Effects: The following environmental resources were identified as being relevant to the project – biological, water quality, cultural resources, traffic, visual quality, hazardous and toxic materials, environmental justice, noise, climate change, and air quality. Environmental analysis and effects of the preferred and “no action” alternatives are detailed in the project Environmental Assessment (EA). The EA analysis concluded there would be no significant impacts to the environment resulting from implementation of the preferred alternative.

WSDOT made a biological “No Effect” determination for the proposed undertaking. A Corps staff biologist reviewed WSDOT’s biological documents/determination and concurred with them. The Corps biologist also stated there would be no effect to Endangered Species Act-listed species or to other wildlife (EA, Appendix A).

WSDOT undertook both a cultural resources literature search and field survey for the proposed alternative. Neither effort identified any cultural properties within the project area (EA, Appendix B). Preparation of an inadvertent discovery plan was recommended in the unlikely event that historic properties or human remains are discovered during construction. WSDOT, on behalf of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, submitted a “No Historic Properties Affected” determination to the Washington State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) for concurrence. (FHWA funds would be used for the project and therefore, FHWA

is the lead federal agency for the proposed undertaking.) The SHPO concurred with WSDOT's determination. WSDOT also consulted with the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation regarding the proposed undertaking (Appendix B). No tribal comments were received.

The Corps reviewed WSDOT's project cultural resources survey report, concurred with the findings and made a "No Historic Properties Affected" determination (EA, Appendix B).

VI. Coordination

The project has been coordinated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Environmental Protection Agency, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, WSDOT, FHWA, Washington Department of Ecology, National Marine Fisheries Service, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, and Walla Walla County.

The project EA was released for a 15-day public comment period. Notice of the proposed project along with the draft FONSI and EA was made available on the Corps' website for viewing.

VII. Conclusion/Finding

I have taken into consideration the technical aspects of the project, best scientific information available, public comments, and the information contained in the EA. Based on this information, I have determined that the preferred alternative would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, and an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

Timothy R. Vail
Lieutenant Colonel, Corps of Engineers
District Commander

Date