

Go North Alliance Newsletter. February 2024: The Official Evaluation Process Has Begun

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), in coordination with the West Virginia Department of Highways (WVDOH), recently published a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the Federal Register. This step kicked off the official environmental review for the Parsons to Davis section of Corridor H by informing the public of the intent to prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) concerning this section of highway. Per the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the process of **preparing the SEIS must include an analysis of alternative routes, in this case the ROPA (Revised Original Preferred Alternative) and a Blackwater Avoidance Alternative (Northern Route).**

The NOI Supplementary Documentation - which can be found by scrolling to the bottom of this link: <https://transportation.wv.gov/highways/engineering/comment/Pages/Parsons-to-Davis.aspx> - describes the alternate routes that are being considered and the process for how the preferred route will be chosen. The alternatives will be screened in three steps. If an alternative fails to achieve a majority of the elements in any of those steps, it will be eliminated from further evaluation. Importantly, the elements are defined by WVDOH.

For instance, the first step elements that will be compared include, among other things: Improve east-west transportation through northeastern West Virginia; Promote economic development in the region; Preserve or improve the quality of life in the region; Reduce truck traffic through the City of Thomas; Improve emergency response times and access to emergency facilities; and Provide safe and efficient travel to and from Tucker County High School.

However, many of the elements that directly impact those of us who live permanently, own second homes, or vacation in Tucker County are not included in the analysis until Step 2. That means one of the alternatives could be eliminated before critical impacts are analyzed. Notably, these include environmental impacts, impacts on recreational trails and parks, detrimental effects to air quality and ambient noise levels, and effects on scenic vistas and viewsheds.

NOW, MORE THAN EVER, IS THE TIME TO MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD. As part of the NEPA process, WVDOH is required to solicit and consider public comments in their evaluation and preparation of the SEIS. Comments can pertain to any aspect of this section of Corridor H. The most effective comments are likely to be those that directly address the impacts of one route vs. the other, and whether WVDOH is evaluating the correct elements during each step. For example, if you feel that environmental impacts should be evaluated in Step 1 and not Step 2, it is reasonable to include that request in your comments.

There are **two important items you can act on during this comment period:**

1. WVDOH has scheduled a Public Informational Workshop for the Parsons to Davis Project on Tuesday, February 27, 2024 from 4 to 7 p.m. at Tucker County High School. More information can be found at <https://transportation.wv.gov/highways/engineering/comment/Pages/Parsons-to-Davis.aspx>
2. The **deadline for public comments is March 27, 2024.** Comments can be made in person at the public workshop on February 27, submitted online, or via US Mail. The link above includes the email and mailing addresses if you choose to submit your comments through one of these methods

In the next step of the environmental review process, WVDOH will produce a Draft SEIS (DSEIS). The anticipated date for availability of this draft is May 2024. This is a very short amount of time for WVDOH to review and evaluate all public comments received and make a decision following the close of the public comment period on March 27, 2024. The Go North Corridor H Alliance is requesting an extension to the public comment period.