



# Executive Summary

## ES.1 Introduction

The Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT), in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), are proposing an improvement of the existing US 31 Corridor as a freeway from US 30 in Plymouth to the southern junction of US 31 and US 20 in South Bend, Indiana.

The INDOT 2000-2025 Long Range Transportation Plan proposes the “US 31 Freeway Upgrade from Indianapolis to South Bend.” In particular, the Plan identifies the need to improve US 31 in St. Joseph and Marshall counties, and the associated statewide Travel Demand Model (TDM) shows unacceptable congestion along portions of US 31 for the years 1998 and 2025 in these counties. In addition to being a part of the INDOT 2000-2025 Long Range Transportation Plan, the need for improving existing US 31 has also been identified in the regional transportation plan. The transportation plan of the Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG), identifies the need to improve existing US 31 south of US 20 to a new “limited access road with interchanges at several locations that would continue to US 30 in Marshall County.”

On March 26, 2002, FHWA published a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the *Federal Register* advertising to the public that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) would be prepared for the proposed improvement of the existing US 31 corridor from US 30 to US 20. FHWA and INDOT approved the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and it was made available for review and comment on February 27, 2004, with the No-Build Alternative and Freeway Alternatives Cs, Es and G-C still under consideration. The formal comment period began on March 5, 2004, with the *Federal Register* notice of the availability of the DEIS. The public comment period extended 52 days (regulations require a minimum 45-day comment period) and concluded on April 26, 2004. A Public Hearing to discuss the findings of the DEIS was held on March 18, 2004. Several public comments and resource agency comments following the Public Hearing suggested the investigation of the combination of Alternatives Es and G-C north of Roosevelt Road. In response to these requests, a “hybrid” alternative, Alternative G-E, was developed that consisted of a combination of the southern portion of Alternative G-C and the northern portion of Alternative Es. This expanded the range of reasonable alternatives in the decision-making process to include the No-Build Alternative and Freeway Alternatives Cs, Es, G-C and G-E.

On September 23, 2004, INDOT announced its recommendation that Alternative G-Es (a modified version Alternative G-E) had been identified as the Preferred Alternative for the proposed improvements to US 31 and would be advanced to the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). This FEIS is the result of a multi-year effort involving an extensive public involvement process; on-going coordination with local officials, state officials and federal agencies; and detailed environmental, socio-economic, historic and archaeological analysis.

It should be noted that in addition to this EIS for US 31 from US 30 to US 20, in Marshall and St. Joseph counties, there are two other segments along the US 31 Corridor between Indianapolis and South Bend that are currently being studied. Environmental Impact Statements are currently underway for US 31 improvement projects from I-465 to SR 38 in Hamilton County (US 31 Improvement Project) and also from approximately two miles south of SR 26 to approximately one mile north of US 35 in the City of Kokomo in Howard County (US 31 Kokomo Corridor Project).