

Alternatives Studied to Bypass Bishop for EDS-441(43)

When the Department of Transportation begins concept studies for roadway improvements, existing roadways are the first corridor analyzed for project feasibility, if possible. For the project EDS-441(43) in Oconee County, the existing US 441 corridor was analyzed along the project limits from the Apalachee River through Bishop to the existing 4 lane portion of US 441 southwest of Watkinsville. During the concept studies, DOT staff historians discovered that a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places existed along US 441 within the Bishop City limits. Project EDS-441(43) is scheduled to be built with 80% federal funding and constructing these roadway improvements on the existing US 441 corridor in Bishop would require the purchase of additional right of way and impact the Bishop Historic District. Federal law will not allow federal funds to be used to construct a project that would impact any publicly owned park or recreation area, wildlife or waterfowl refuge, or any historic site of national, state, or local significance, unless it can be shown that there are no prudent and feasible alternatives to avoid impacting the above listed resources. Therefore, to qualify for federal funding, OEL initiated concept studies for avoidance alternatives in the immediate vicinity of Bishop. Currently, five avoidance alternatives have been studied:

The Original Bypass Alignment (shown in purple on the attached map) - this alignment was designed to avoid eligible historic resources discovered during concept studies performed along the exiting US 441 corridor. This alignment proposes a shorter route than the existing US 441 along the southeast edge of the Bishop City limits. The design attempts to minimize property owner displacements along with minimizing impacts to streams and wetlands. Studies along this alignment indicate that a significant number of archeological and historic resources would be impacted. Therefore this alignment is not considered a prudent and feasible alternative.

The West Bypass Alignments “A”, “B”, & “C” (shown in blue, yellow, & orange respectively on the attached map) – While these three alignments are longer in length than any of the other alignments studied, they initially offered the potential of having fewer impacts on streams and wetlands, fewer property owner displacements than the alignment through Bishop, and lower cost due to not having to grade separate at two rail crossings. Concept studies performed for these three alternatives indicate an additional eligible historic resource on the west side of Bishop would be impacted. Therefore these three alignments are not considered prudent and feasible alternatives. Nearby residential development and the area’s stream geometry would prevent minor shifts to provide feasibility to these three alignments. Any other west side alignments would be considerably longer in length, significantly more expensive than other alternatives, and not considered to have enough potential feasibility to initiate concept studies.

The Current Bypass Alignment (shown in burgundy/dark red on the attached map) - This current alignment is proposed in response to the findings of the significant number of eligible historic and archeological resources that would be impacted by the original bypass alignment, along with the need to avoid a significant longitudinal encroachment along Greenbrier Creek. Concept studies performed for this alternative indicate that no eligible historic or archeological resource would be impacted. Additionally, this alignment offers fewer displacements than would occur along the existing US 441 corridor, and stream and wetland impacts have been minimized in this area. This alignment is considered a prudent and feasible alternative, and therefore potentially eligible for federal funding. This is the Departments’ preferred alignment.