RATHDRUM PRAIRIE
AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the impacts to historical sites in Alternatives M and N?

The Rathdrum Prairie Area Transportation Study is a planning project focused on identifying ways to Environmental and cultural resource sites, including historical locations, will be reviewed as part of the NEPA process. Cultural resource experts will identify and describe possible impacts and include their findings in the NEPA documents. This review process ensures important places and resources are considered early in planning and that measures are taken to prevent or reduce impacts.

For Alternatives M and N, several historic roads, railways, bridges, and other structures in the study area have been identified as resources to be considered. More detailed information about these locations is available in the Existing Conditions Report on the project website.

Can alternatives be combined to solve both north-south and east-west mobility issues?

Yes, combinations of alternatives will be explored in Level 3 screening to address multiple transportation challenges at the same time. Pairing options allows planners to maximize the benefits of each alternative such as improving safety, reducing congestion, and enhancing connectivity, all while creating more flexible and effective solutions for regional travel. For example, a north–south highway option could be paired with an east–west highway option to improve access across the area, rather than in a singular direction.

Will developers contribute to infrastructure costs?

Funding for projects will be determined during later planning and design phases. While ITD does not typically rely on developer contributions for state highways, local jurisdictions may consider developer participation for local streets, intersections, or supporting infrastructure that affects the local roadway network. Final funding decisions will be made in coordination with state and local agencies to ensure projects are built efficiently and sustainably.

Have upgraded interchange designs like SPUIs (single point urban interchange) and DDIs (diverging diamond interchange) been considered in the study?

The alternatives in the study identify potential interchange locations for access–controlled highways, but they do not specify the type of interchange design. SPUIs and DDIs are not included in the current alternatives. These design details are usually evaluated later during the design phase when engineers may consider advanced interchange designs if they improve traffic flow and safety.

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Will traffic signals be removed from U.S. 95 through town?

Under the expanded highway alternatives, the existing signals would remain. However, some intersections could be redesigned or upgraded during later engineering phases to improve traffic flow and safety.

Are traffic circles or roundabouts being considered at key intersections like SH-41 and Scarcello?

The intersection of SH-41 and Scarcello Road is outside of the limits of this PEL study, and therefore is not included as part of the Level 2 alternatives. The study and alternatives focus on adding lanes, improving intersections, or building access-controlled highways with interchanges. While roundabouts are not generally used on state highways, local roads connecting to these highways could consider roundabouts as part of their future improvements.

Will overpasses be built at major intersections on U.S. 95?

Overpasses are not included in Alternative B, the US-95 expanded highway option. While overpasses can improve safety and reduce congestion at high-traffic intersections, building them all along US-95 would require acquiring a significant amount of adjacent property. This makes constructing overpasses at major intersections impractical. Overpasses were considered as a concept during the Level 1 screening, but they were eliminated and are not part of the current study alternatives.

How will Government Way and Ramsey Road be used in future traffic planning?

Government Way and Ramsey Road will continue to serve as important routes for local and regional travel. Improvements may include upgrading intersections or adjusting traffic signal timing to handle increased traffic and coordinate with alternatives that move into more detailed design.

Will the Huetter alternatives include traffic signals at Prairie, Hayden and Lancaster?

Yes. The Huetter arterial alternative would include signalized intersections at Prairie, Hayden and Lancaster. However, the access-controlled highway alternative would use interchanges instead of signals at these locations, meaning drivers would use on- and off-ramps to access the intersecting roads while traffic on the main highway flowed continuously.

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Is there a plan for another crossing over the train tracks in Rathdrum?

Both Alternative M and Alternative N include a new Meyer Road bypass that would cross over the BNSF railroad tracks just north of SH-53. This grade-separated crossing would prevent delays caused by train traffic and improve safety by eliminating at-grade conflicts. It would also provide a direct connection to an interchange with the alternative east-west access-controlled highway, improving regional mobility.

Can scenic corridors and sunrise-sunset views be protected?

As part of the NEPA process, the study reviews important visual resources, such as open spaces, scenic corridors and aesthetic features. The process identifies key official viewpoints and evaluates how each alternative might affect them. If impacts are expected, the study will consider ways to reduce or avoid them, such as adjusting roadway alignments, adding landscaping or using design elements that blend with the surrounding environment.

What percentage of people will use buses instead of cars?

Right now, only a small share of people in Kootenai County use public transit as a primary source of transportation, and there are no major expansion plans for bus service. For a smaller metro area, it is reasonable to assume that about 2 percent of people might choose buses instead of personal vehicles. This estimate is based on existing travel patterns and transit data rather than a formal calculation for this study.

Because the transit system is limited and does not have dedicated funding for large growth, a significant shift from cars to buses is not expected. The travel model used for this study includes current bus routes and service levels but does not assume major increases in future transit use.

Sources:

- Federal Transit Administration: The National Transit Database (NTD) | FTA
- American Public Transportation Association (APTA): Transit Statistics – American Public Transportation Association
- US Census Bureau: Commuting (Journey to Work)

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What are the next steps for implementing future transit options like light rail or express bus lanes?

Large transit projects, such as light rail or express bus lanes, require their own planning process, separate from this study. They need a clear demand for service, environmental reviews, space for tracks or dedicated bus lanes, and long-term funding. Light rail systems are especially expensive and usually only exist in large metro areas with high population density and established transit networks.

At this time, there are no plans or dedicated funding for light rail or major transit expansions in Kootenai County. Any future transit project would need to be led by local and regional transit agencies and supported by state and federal partners.

This study does not prevent future transit options, but it also does not include new rail lines or express bus lanes because they are not feasible with current ridership levels, funding, or available infrastructure.

How does projected growth affect the alternatives?

Projected growth is built directly into the regional traffic model maintained by the Kootenai Metropolitan Planning Organization, or KMPO. The model does not predict growth on its own. Rather, it uses the official land-use plans adopted by cities and the county as its foundation.

Here's how it works:

Local governments decide where development can occur.
City and county zoning and comprehensive plans determine how much housing or commercial development is allowed in each area.

Those plans are converted into assumptions about future households and jobs.
Planners translate zoning capacity into numbers the model can use. For example, if a neighborhood is zoned for residential use, the model estimates how many homes could be built and applies an average household size based on Census data. Commercial and industrial areas are assigned expected job numbers.

These households and jobs drive the future travel estimates.
The model uses this information to estimate how many trips people will make, when they make them, and where they travel. This forms the baseline for projected road demand and traffic patterns.

Frequently Asked Questions

Testing alternatives and scenarios.
The model is then run for different "what-if" scenarios, including the project alternatives being considered. For example, if an alternative adds a new highway lane or changes an intersection, that design is entered into the model to see how traffic would respond. This allows planners to compare alternatives and identify which options improve safety, reduce congestion, or provide the most benefit under projected growth conditions.

Model updates as plans change.
If cities or the county revise zoning, add new development areas, or change long-term plans, KMPO updates the model accordingly. The model reflects local decision making, it doesn't create them.

Given this process, the alternatives in the study are being designed to handle the 2045 projected traffic volumes based on the growth allowed in current city and county plans.

It's also important to note that the region has experienced unusually rapid growth in recent years. Traffic models can't predict unexpected surges; they rely on adopted land-use plans. Their value is in providing a consistent, regional baseline and helping planners test how different roadway improvements perform before anything is built so that agencies like ITD can ensure their investments in transportation improvements provide the maximum benefit.

Will the final alternatives address traffic needs for the next 50 years?

The study looks ahead and plans for projected growth out to 2045, which is about 20 years into the future. This matches the KMPO model and includes growth and land use plans from the cities and Kootenai County. The alternatives are being designed to meet traffic forecasts for that year. Many alternatives can handle that demand and have extra capacity for more.

What's Next?

ITD will continue developing and evaluating alternatives that advance to Level 3 screening analysis using the following steps:

- Explore combinations of Level 2 alternatives and consider design adjustments to alignments and cross sections.
- Assess benefits, impacts, costs and right of way needs in greater detail for each alternative.
- Spring 2026: Conclude the alternatives screening, prepare recommendations and hold one more public meeting to share Level 3 alternatives and gather feedback to help identify which alternatives should be recommended for development.
- Summer 2026: Prepare the final report and documentation for agency review. Begin moving the recommended alternatives into the NEPA process, pending funding and other unforeseen factors.

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How to stay informed:

Project Webpage: https://itdprojects.idaho.gov/pages/rathdrum-prairie-pel
E-mail: info@rathdrumprairiepel.com

Persons needing an interpreter or special accommodations are urged to contact 208-334-8884 or TTY/TDD users dial 711 to use the Idaho Relay System.