

7.5 Environmental Impacts

The Florida Department of Transportation will prepare a full Project Development and Environment (PD&E) study at the conclusion of this SIMR. The PD&E study will document environmental impacts such as social, cultural, wetlands, physical etc. associated with the proposed modifications. An ETDM screening for the proposed improvements has been completed and relevant information is provided in the sections below.

Air Quality

The project is located in an area which is currently designated in attainment for all of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards under the criteria provided in the Clean Air Act. Therefore the Clean Air Act conformity requirements do not apply to the project.

Section 4(f) Potential

Section 4(f) refers to Department of Transportation Act of 1966 which stipulated that the Federal Highway Administration cannot approve the use of land from publicly owned parks, recreation areas, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, or public and private historic sites unless the following conditions apply: 1) There is no feasible and prudent alternative to the use of land or 2) The action includes all possible planning to minimize harm to the property resulting from use.

The EDTM screening noted the Twelve Mile Swamp Conservation Area, WMA and Florida Forever BOT project, Julington-Durbin Conservation Easement, and a City of Jacksonville park are located within 100 feet of the project.

While these features were noted in the EDTM screening, the proposed typical would not require any additional right-of-way except for future storm water treatment facilities and FDOT will make every effort to minimize impacts to any potential Section 4(f) locations.

Wetlands

The area within the project right of way was assessed for the presence of wetlands as part of the ETDM. Approximately 1,000 acres of wetlands exist within a 500-foot buffer of the project area. However, the proposed typical section would not require any additional right of way except for future stormwater facilities. The proposed concept minimizes impacts to wetlands to the extent practicable. A Wetland Evaluation Report (WER) will be prepared as part of the PD&E study to describe and evaluate the proposed wetland impacts and propose a mitigation plan. The ETDM screening assigned a Degree of Effect of "Moderate" with regards to wetland impacts.

Contamination Sites

The project area was screened for potential contamination sites as part of the ETDM. There are six businesses with onsite petroleum storage tanks within the 500-foot buffer distance; there are nine FDEP regulated and unregulated storage tanks within the 500-foot buffer distance. Only one storage tank falls within the 100-foot buffer. Additionally, there is one USEPA RCRA facility within the 500-foot buffer. The ETDM screening assigned a Degree of Effect of "Minimal" with regards to contamination sites due to the fact that there are minimal potential contamination sites identified within the buffer boundaries.

Threatened and Endangered Species

The ETDM screening found that the following species listed by FWC as Endangered, Threatened, or Species of Special Concern may occur along the project area: gopher tortoise, Eastern indigo snake, Florida pine snake, gopher frog, Florida sandhill crane, red-cockaded woodpecker, Southeastern American kestrel, wood stork, little blue heron, white ibis, tricolored heron, snowy egret, limpkin, Florida burrowing owl, Florida black bear, Sherman's fox squirrel, and Florida mouse. Since the project's proposed improvements will remain mostly within the existing right-of-way the potential impact on these species and their habitat has been assigned a Degree of Effect of "Minimal" in the ETDM screening.

7.6 Safety

The crash data evaluated in Section 3.3.2 showed that the crash rates along I-95 within the area of influence are lower than the statewide averages. The predominant crash type along I-95 in Duval County is rear end crashes accounting for 30% of the crashes and in St. John's County is fixed object crashes accounting for 26% of the crashes. On I-295, the predominant crash type is rear end crashes accounting for 40%-58% of the crashes on the three segments studied. Safety concerns exist within the study area due to the peak period congestion that exists, which can be a major factor in the rear end crash occurrences. From a safety perspective, the recommendations of this study should reduce crashes due to the improved traffic operations, under both Build alternatives.

7.7 Alternatives Comparison

The No-Build Alternative and the Build Alternatives were compared and a summary is provided in the sections below.

7.7.1 Planning and Environmental Comparison

This section provides a comparison of planning and environmental impacts associated with the No-Build and Build Alternatives. The need for improvements in the study area has been identified for some time to provide more roadway capacity, and improved travel time reliability through the study corridor. Both Build alternatives will provide better and potentially safer traffic operations than the No-Build alternative.

Both Build Alternatives are in conformance with the Long Range Transportation Plan. The No-Build alternative is not in conformance with any regional plans.

The No-Build Alternative will have no environmental impacts. The Build alternatives are part of the long-term improvement plans for the Jacksonville region. Special considerations were taken in developing and evaluating the Build alternatives to avoid and minimize the environmental impacts associated with this project to the greatest extent practicable. No fatal flaws or environmental impacts have been identified with the Build alternatives.

7.7.2 Operational Comparisons

As part of presenting the future year conditions traffic operations in Section 7.4, some operational comparisons were provided. This section provides additional comparison information among the No-Build and Build alternatives. The No-Build Alternative experienced excessive congestion in the study area for both the Interim Year 2030 and Design Year 2040 horizons. The Interim Build Alternative provides significantly improved traffic operations for the Opening Year 2020, Interim Year 2030 and Design Year 2040 compared