
1. Overview

This report is one of several that, over a 22-month period, examines alternatives for improving transportation in a corridor that is generally defined as being one-mile on either side of M-15 between I-75 and I-69 in Oakland and Genesee Counties, Michigan (Figure 1-1). The goal is to gain approval of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to advance the project from this environmental analysis phase to the design phase. Technical analyses define and analyze the impacts of “build” alternatives versus not implementing any improvements in the corridor (i.e., doing nothing). Alternatives formulation and analysis is guided by interaction with the public, other stakeholders, and agencies that have a regulatory role in project development (for example, those dealing with wetlands, endangered species, and cultural resources).

This chapter provides an overview of the project: its history, purpose, and schedule. It is followed by chapters that discuss: 1) the range of alternatives to be considered; 2) the process used to perform the evaluation of these options in moving toward the best course of action; 3) the results of that evaluation; and, 4) the consultant’s findings. All of this information will be reviewed with the public prior to advancing to the next phase of work.

1.1 History

M-15 is a north-south arterial extending 70 miles (110 kilometers) from U.S. 24 in Oakland County to M-25 in Bay County. The current analysis is confined to the 20-mile (32-kilometer) section between I-75 and I-69. South of I-75 is the Village of Clarkston in Oakland County. North of the junction with I-69 is the City of Davison in Genesee County. These two communities fall outside the study area. Ortonville in Oakland County and Goodrich in Genesee County are directly served by M-15. The core or “downtown” sections of each of these communities is, for the most part, “off line”, meaning that M-15 does not bisect these districts, but skirts them. The project is almost equally divided between Genesee and Oakland counties.

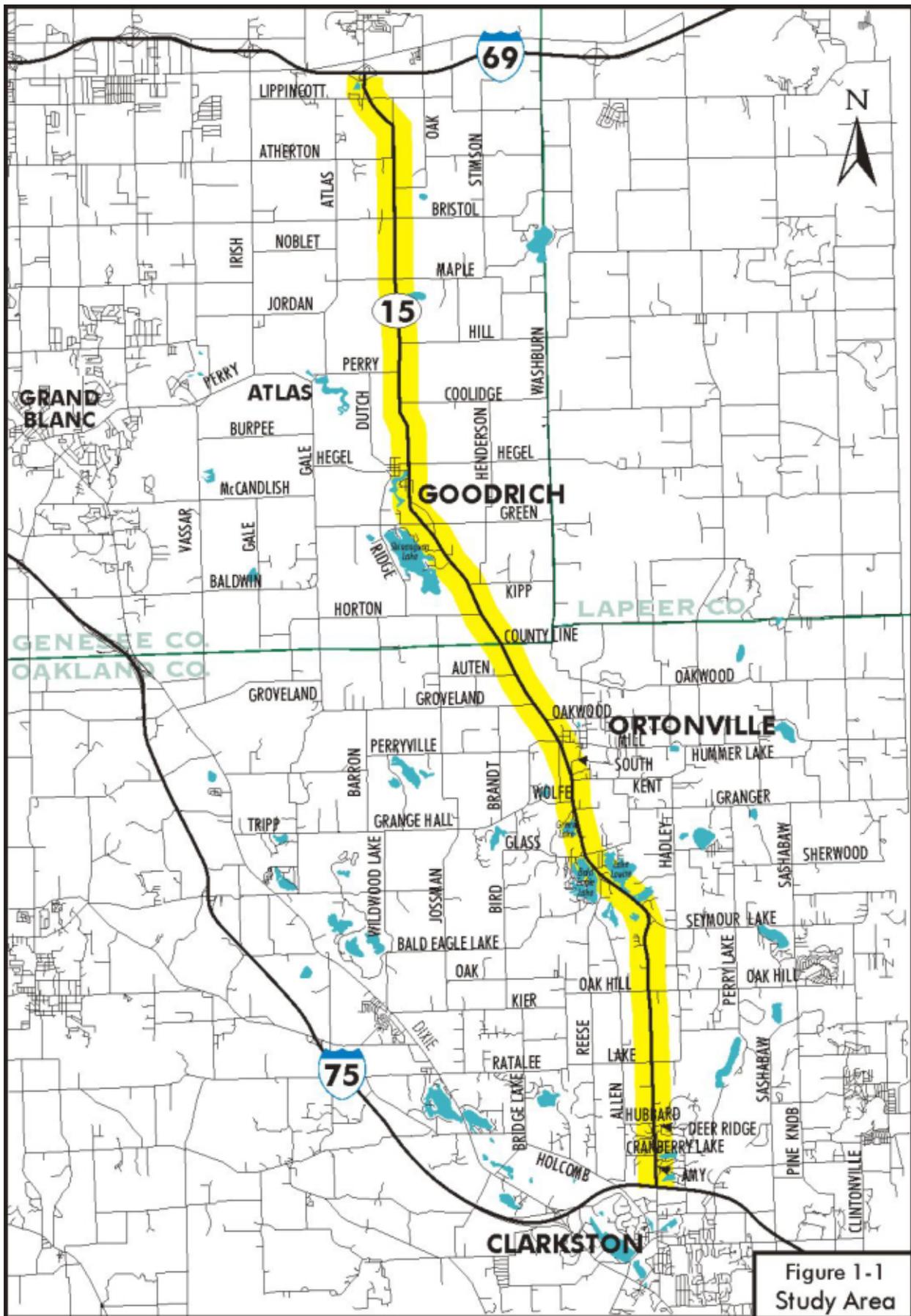


Figure 1-1
Study Area

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The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) developed a “Preliminary Project Statement” in 1995 that addressed congestion in the corridor. That study found that in the previous decade, traffic volumes on M-15 in Oakland County had increased at up to seven percent per year. Population projections indicated that such growth would continue in the area placing continuing pressure on M-15. Safety analyses performed at that time concluded that the crash experience reflected a roadway with capacity and turning movement deficiencies. Traffic volume growth in the Genesee County portion of the corridor was found to be more moderate, but new housing projects were underway, with the expectation of more to come. The findings of the Preliminary Project Statement are summarized below.

- Existing and forecast travel indicated a need for construction of a five-lane section in Oakland County, consistent with the results of the 1991 Northern Oakland County Corridor Study (by The Corradino Group). MDOT’s Preliminary Project Statement suggested that a boulevard be considered as an alternative to the five-lane typical section.

- Money should be dedicated to two studies: (1) a feasibility study (to include an environmental study and a determination of general alignment, cross section, and right-of-way needs); and, (2) a corridor management study to work with local communities to preserve needed right-of-way and implement other strategies that would allow development to occur in a manner consistent with future roadway improvements.

- Local roadway development on the part of Oakland County and the affected townships should be encouraged to provide alternative north-south routes for local circulation. Most of those routes that offer parallel service to M-15 are gravel roads.

Since the time of MDOT’s Preliminary Project Statement, traffic demand has continued to grow. And, the growth in Genesee County has increased to the point that projected travel demand now demonstrates a need for four travel lanes on M-15 in that county, as well as Oakland County (Figure 1-2), if the traffic cannot be diverted to other arteries. In response, MDOT has moved forward to undertake this project while continuing to stress the need for local communities to address non-M-15 improvements to foster a balance of state/local initiatives.