

I-375 IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

November 2020 Newsletter

PROJECT UPDATE

Over the last several months, the project team has been busy working with the Technical Team and stakeholders to select and refine a Preferred Alternative for the I-375 Improvement Project Environmental Assessment (EA). The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to prepare an EA when the impacts of a transportation project are uncertain. The document is developed to assist in determining the significance of the impact.

In February 2020, the Technical Team, comprised of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), the City of Detroit, and the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), met to select the Preferred Alternative. The Preferred Alternative was selected from the four Practical Alternatives presented to the Local Advisory Committee (LAC) and Government Advisory Committee (GAC) in September 2019. The four Practical Alternatives and the LAC/GAC meeting summary can be found on the project website, www.Michigan.gov/I375Study. The screening process focused on criteria developed around the project's Purpose and Need statement. Through this process, the Technical Team selected Practical Alternative 5B with Direct Lefts as the Preferred Alternative. Since then, the project team has continued to engage with stakeholders to refine the design.

The project team is now in the final phases of the EA and is preparing materials for a public hearing, tentatively scheduled for winter 2021. As part of the public hearing, the project team is in the process of creating a video to allow the public to visualize what it will be like to be both a driver and a pedestrian using the Preferred Alternative. The video will be available in advance of the public hearing on the project website.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE SCREENING

The Technical Team collaborated to screen the Practical Alternatives. The purpose of this process was to create a unified outcome with input from all members.

During the screening for the Preferred Alternative, two interchange designs (5A and 5B), and two boulevard designs (with Direct Lefts and Indirect Lefts) were evaluated. To evaluate the four Practical Alternatives, each criterion was assigned a measurement by which to score it, either with a pass/fail or a point scale. All Practical Alternatives were considered equal at the beginning of the screening process and the alternative that was found to best meet the Purpose and Need was selected as the Preferred Alternative.

Practical Alternative 5B with Direct Lefts was ultimately selected due to:

- Increased connectivity provided by the new interchange.
- Enhanced access with direct left turns.
- Nonmotorized connections to the Detroit Riverfront and east to west along Montcalm Street.
- Pedestrian and bicycle safety.
- Access to the Greektown Parking Garage.
- Economic development and placemaking opportunities.

WE ARE HERE



Preparation of the Environmental Assessment Report

WINTER 2020/2021



Public Comment Period



Public Hearing

SPRING 2021



Preparation of Final Environmental Documentation

2021-2027 AND BEYOND



Design



Construction and De-Designation

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE GEOMETRICS

The Preferred Alternative, shown in Figure 1, involves the removal of I-375, corresponding service drives, and the Gratiot Avenue Connector. In place of I-375, a six-lane boulevard would be built at current city street level from I-75 to Jefferson Avenue and transition to a four-lane boulevard from Jefferson Avenue to Atwater Street. The existing I-75/I-375 interchange would be rebuilt with a smaller footprint and enhanced connectivity.

Some highlights of the Preferred Alternative include:

- The I-75/I-375 interchange would be an urban-type interchange with right-hand on and off ramps that would provide access to the Eastern Market, Gratiot Avenue, the new boulevard, Brush Street, and Mack Avenue. This would eliminate the need to exit the freeway to stay on I-75.
- Braided ramps to and from Mack Avenue on I-75, meaning the ramps would pass over other ramps to and from the boulevard using bridges to separate the roadways and ramp traffic, eliminating weaving, or conflict points.
- Additional connectivity and access would be provided with a new bridge connecting Brush Park and Eastern Market, additional street connections in Eastern Market, and access to Brush Park from southbound I-75.
- A city street-level boulevard would begin south of the I-75/I-375 interchange and continue to the Detroit River, opening up additional connections to the Detroit Riverfront, Eastern Market, Brush Park, and a new local connector street from Eastern Market to Gratiot Avenue.
- Signalized intersections would be located along the boulevard at Jefferson Avenue, Larned Street, Lafayette Avenue, Monroe Street, Macomb Street, Clinton Street, Gratiot Avenue, and at the Blue Cross Blue Shield parking structure.
- Direct left-turns would be allowed along the boulevard, except at the intersection with Gratiot Avenue.
- Improved nonmotorized facilities, including a two-way cycle track connecting the Riverfront to the Montcalm Street extension to Gratiot Avenue. The two-way cycle track would then extend west to Brush Street and east to Gratiot Avenue where it connects with the Dequindre Cut Greenway bicycle path.
- Potential excess property that could be available for future redevelopment, shown in Figure 1.

TRAFFIC

Traffic for the Preferred Alternative was modeled and compared against the No-Build Alternative for the year 2040. The No-Build Alternative would occur if the proposed project was not constructed. This provides a baseline condition against which to compare the impacts of the Preferred Alternative. The Preferred Alternative accommodates fewer vehicles than the No-Build Alternative due to the change from a freeway to the proposed boulevard design.

During the morning rush hour, all freeway segments of the Preferred Alternative are expected to operate at acceptable levels, an improvement over the No-Build Alternative. The intersection of Jefferson Avenue and the boulevard is expected to experience some congestion, as well as two intersections along Lafayette Avenue at St. Antoine Street and Rivard Street. However, overall intersections are expected to operate acceptably in the Preferred Alternative.

During the evening rush hour, all freeway segments of the Preferred Alternative are expected to operate at acceptable levels, an improvement over the No-Build

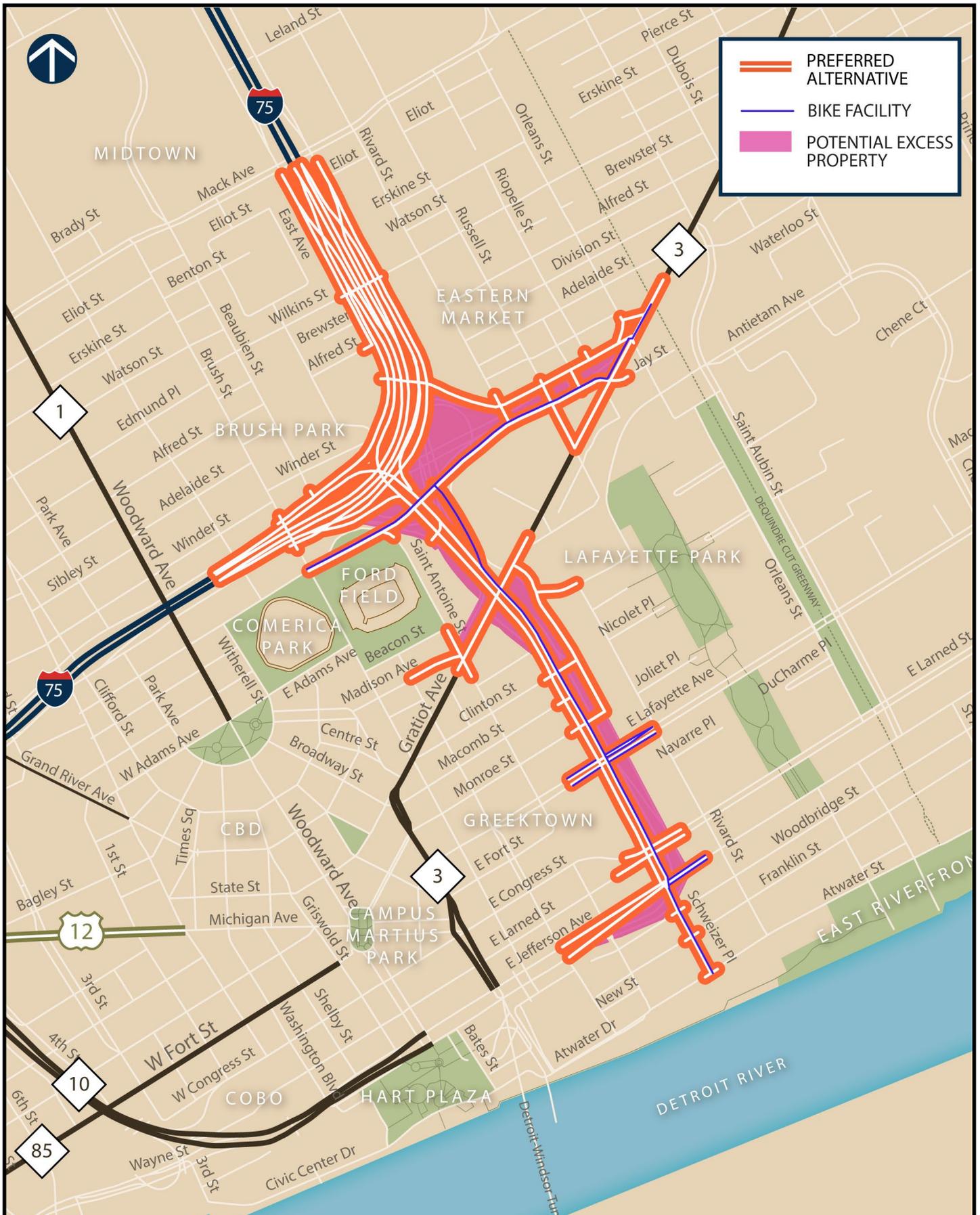
Alternative. The intersection of Jefferson Avenue at the boulevard is expected to experience some congestion, as well as the intersection of Jefferson Avenue and St. Antoine Street.

Traffic modeling suggests more than 20 percent of peak period demand on I-375 will reroute to other corridors and disperse among alternate routes on the existing street grid with the capacity for additional vehicles. The corridors that will see additional traffic that previously used the I-375 freeway are:

- M-10 from I-75 to Jefferson Avenue
- Brush Street from I-75 to Jefferson Avenue
- Mack Avenue from I-375 to St. Aubin Street
- Randolph Street from Gratiot Avenue to Jefferson Avenue
- Beaubien Street from Gratiot Avenue to Jefferson Avenue
- Congress Street from M-10 to Beaubien Street

These corridors were analyzed further to verify that they have the capacity to support additional traffic.

FIGURE 1. PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE



STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

To date, there have been 70 one-on-one stakeholder meetings, seven LAC/GAC meetings, and two public meetings. The project team has also been working closely with stakeholders large and small along the corridor.

A focus of recent engagement has been in refining the Madison Avenue/Gratiot Avenue/St. Antoine Street intersection. The project team analyzed 12 configurations for the intersection. The current design balances many factors, including vehicular traffic, pedestrians, and special events. The Theatre District has expressed concerns with eliminating outbound access from Madison Avenue and changing traffic patterns. The project team is continuing work with the Theatre

District to analyze how this intersection will perform during various special events. Operations will be further analyzed during the project's design phase.

VISUALIZATION

The project team is in the process of developing a visualization of the project in preparation for the public hearing. The visualization will be a video that will drive viewers through various paths in the corridor, providing stakeholders the opportunity to explore the corridor firsthand. The video will be available on the project website, www.Michigan.gov/I375Study, in advance of the public hearing. Figure 2 shows an image of the visualization in development.

FIGURE 2. SCREENSHOT OF THE VISUALIZATION



NEXT STEPS

The EA is expected to be released this winter for public comment. The public review period will be open for 45 days to gather public and agency comments. A public hearing will be held during that time. The public hearing is a formal process in which the public can appear before MDOT to have their comments documented for inclusion in the EA. Due to public health concerns, virtual outreach opportunities will supplement the in-person hearing. Virtual outreach would offer the opportunity to engage and provide comment for the record. At both the in-person hearing and virtual outreach options the public will have the opportunity to review materials and provide comments publicly or in a written statement.

If FHWA determines that the proposed action does not result in significant impacts, then FHWA will issue a Finding of No Significant Impacts (FONSI), concluding the NEPA process and allowing MDOT to move into final design for the project and obtain the proper federal, state and local permits and approvals. Preliminary design is expected to occur following the issuance of

a FONSI, with additional stakeholder engagement on aesthetics and maintenance of traffic strategies.

The project requires the permanent de-designation of I-375, which is the removal of this section of highway from the Interstate System of Highways. Additionally, it would designate the boulevard as a non-freeway National Highway System route.

Following the issuance of a FONSI the project will move into the design phase, which will include an analysis of special event traffic. Currently, the project is planned to start in spring 2027. MDOT will continue to evaluate opportunities to perform the project earlier. The project team will continue to work closely with stakeholders throughout design and construction.

We look forward to continuing to engage with you throughout this process. Your input thus far has informed the development of the Preferred Alternative. To provide feedback or connect with the project team directly, contact us using the details below.

CONTACT US

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VISIT OUR WEBSITE

www.Michigan.gov/I375Study

