CHAPTER 7

COMMENTS AND RESPONSES

Introduction to Response to Comments on the DEIS

This section of the FEIS provides a summary of the comments received on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Blue Water Bridge Plaza Study along with the Study Team's responses. In August 2007, MDOT and FHWA distributed the DEIS to agencies and organizations on the official distribution list of agencies that typically have an interest in environmental documents. Copies of the DEIS were also sent to agencies/organizations that had requested a copy of the document, and/or that could be affected by improvements to the Blue Water Bridge Plaza.

MDOT and FHWA held an advertised public hearing to receive comments on the DEIS on:

October 9, 2007
3:00 pm – 8:30 pm
McMorran Place
701 McMorran Blvd.
Port Huron, Michigan

At the public hearing Study Team members made two presentations describing the NEPA process, the proposed project, the DEIS and key issues and impacts. Members of the public attending the hearing were given three different options for providing their comments:

- **Oral Testimony:** This testimony was documented by a court reporter during the public hearing presentations and is included in the official Blue Water Bridge Plaza Study Public Hearing Transcript which is on file at the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT).

- **Oral Statements**: Attendees were offered the opportunity to make statements in private which were recorded by a court reporter at the public hearing. The statements are documented in the Official Public Hearing Transcript which is on file at MDOT.

- **Written Statements:** Attendees were invited to submit written comments on cards provided at the public hearing or in letter form. The written statements are included in the official Blue Water Bridge Plaza Study Public Hearing Transcript which is on file at the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT).

The 120-day comment period for agencies and individuals to respond to the DEIS officially closed on December 10, 2007. The comment period included a 60-day extension which was requested by the city of Port Huron.

The Study Team responded to comments received on the DEIS by following the general guidelines developed by FHWA for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The Study Team completed written responses for substantive comments pertaining to analysis conducted for and documented in the DEIS. Comments agreeing with DEIS information or statements, general opinions, statements of fact or preference were not formally responded to in details, but are included in this section. The Study Team summarized comments that had similar or overlapping issues to reduce the number and length of repetitive comments received. The summaries help distill the essential points raised in the comments, thus enabling agency reviewers and ultimately the public; to better understand the issues that were raised. Responses were not drafted for statements of preference. The Study Team did not draft detailed responses for comments expressing a specific preference for one alternative over another.

Comments focusing on issues which require detailed design plans (i.e. soil issues, construction sequencing etc. were not responded to at this stage. These types of comments will be addressed in coordination with local governments and agencies during the final design phase of the project. The full text of all comments received can be reviewed in **Section 7.1** of this FEIS.

Many of the comments came in the form of letters from various agencies. The following list will assist with locating individual agency comment letters:

Agency/Governmental Unit	Page Number
United States Environmental Protection Agency	7-3
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United States Department of Commerce, NOAA	7-4
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State of Michigan, Department of Environmental Quality	7-8
Southeast Michigan Council of Governments	7-10
United States Senators Carl Levin and Debbie Stabenow	7-16
United States House of Representatives, Candice Miller	7-16
State of Michigan, House of Representatives, Phil Pavlov	7-17
St. Clair County	7-18 thru 7-67
City of Port Huron	7-18 thru 7-67
Charter Township of Port Huron	7-18 thru 7-67
Charter Township of Fort Gratiot	7-18 thru 7-67
Southeastern Michigan Council of Governments	7-18 thru 7-67
Bridge Plaza Business and Community Coalition	7-18 thru 7-67

7.1 Response to Comments from Federal/ State Agencies and Officials

7.1.1 United States Environmental Protection Agency

1.) We have expressed disagreement with the following statement found in Section 3.9.4: "Technical shortcomings of emissions and dispersion models and uncertain science with respect to health effects prevent meaningful or reliable quantitative estimates of MSAT emissions at the project level." We continue to request that this statement be stricken from the EIS.

The Study Team understands EPA's concerns with the statement. The text comes directly from the FHWA's Interim Guidance on Air Toxics in NEPA Document, (February 3, 2006). FHWA requires that the statement be included in the document's discussion on MSATs. FHWA is concerned about the health impacts of MSATs and with the assistance of MDOT is partnering with the USEPA on the National Near Roadway MSAT Study (http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/airtoxicmsat/index.htm). One location for the study is in southeast Michigan. This study may eventually lead to the ability to develop meaningful analyses and reporting of the transportation impacts of MSATs.

2.) LEED is the nationally-accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high-performance green buildings intended to maximize operational efficiency while minimizing environmental impacts. We encourage the FHWA and MDOT to commit to creating a sustainable building implementation plan for the Blue Water Bridge Plaza.

GSA requires all leases to be LEED certified. GSA will work with FHWA and MDOT to ensure these requirements are met during the design and construction phases of the plaza project. Per State of Michigan Executive Directive No. 2007-22, all buildings constructed on the plaza and at the Welcome Center will meet LEED certification (minimum 26 points) for the GSA leased facilities. MDOT will strive to obtain Silver LEED certification.

7.1.2 United States General Services Administration

1.) Visual Character, quality, and land use are not included in the Summary of Impacts table for the four alternatives. The table should be revised to include all potentially significant impacts.

The Study Team does not believe that certain, more descriptive information such as land use and visual quality impacts can be reduced to a bullet point on a table. The summary of impacts matrix provides a listing of numeric data regarding impacts of the alternative in the Study Area. Qualitative impacts such as visual character, quality and land use impacts are best discussed in the ***DEIS*** *in* ***Chapter 3 The Environment: What's there Now and Project Effects.***

2.) The figures in Appendix E are generally good and show relevant information, however the legend box on Figures E.3 - E.14 and E.18 - E.19 should be revised and expanded

to show all the graphic symbols and colors (lines, dots, crosshatch patterns, colors and shadings, etc.) depicted on the figures themselves. Currently, the information depicted on these figures is incomplete or ambiguous. It is hard to read the labels through the darker colors (reds and blues) in particular.

Comment acknowledged. Figures that were advanced to the FEIS have been updated and the legend box has been expanded to show all graphic symbols and colors.

3.) Given the amount of apparent "public controversy" (i.e., political and community concerns) involving the project (based on the February 5 and 27, 2007, letters to Governor Granholm from the city of Port Huron and Senator Levin, respectively), following the NEPA process to the strict letter of the law is essential for public acceptance and buy-in to the final selected alternative whether City West, City East, or the Township.

The Study Team has followed the NEPA process throughout the entire study process and will continue to do so until the project is complete.

4.) The Project Mitigation Summary ("Green Sheet") at the end of Chapter 5 could be a very useful tool in addressing and allaying public concerns about unavoidable impacts (especially adverse or detrimental ones) resulting from the project. Every effort should be made to ensure that this summary is as complete and up-to-date as possible.

Comment acknowledged. The Study Team agrees on the importance of keeping the Project Mitigation Summary up to date.

7.1.3 United States Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

1.) If there are any planned activities which will disturb or destroy geodetic control monuments, NGS requires notification not less than 90 days in advance of such activities in order to plan for their relocation. NGS recommends that funding for this project includes the cost of any required relocation(s).

There are no planned activities which will disturb or destroy known geodetic control monuments for the Blue Water Bridge Plaza Study.

7.1.4 United States Department of the Interior

1.) The E.G. Williams House has been determined to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places as an excellent example of an early Queen Anne duplex residence, and because it was associated with E.G. Williams, a prominent local newspaper publisher. The property is also a Registered Michigan Historic Site. The evaluation considered two other action alternatives and the no-action alternative that would have avoided impacts to the

property; however, these were determined not to be prudent alternatives. The Preferred Alternative would result in an adverse effect determination with the Michigan State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). The SHPO has agreed in principle with the mitigation provided by FHWA and MDOT, but a memorandum of agreement (MOA) has yet to be executed.

The Department would concur with the FHWA that there appears to be no feasible or prudent alternative to the proposed project, if built as proposed, which would result in the loss of the eligible Section 4(f) property, the E.G. Williams House, or avoid the *de minimus* impacts to Port Huron Township Park NO.1. The Department would also concur that all measures to minimize harm to the property have been employed, under the condition that the mitigation proposed in the draft MOA is agreed to by the Michigan SHPO. A copy of the signed MOA should be attached to the final evaluation.

MDOT will perform the mitigation measures requested by SHPO in association with the relocation of the E.C. Williams House. ***Section 4.4.4*** *of this FEIS describes the mitigation measures to be carried out regarding the E.C. Williams House. An updated Memorandum of Agreement is included in this* ***FEIS Appendix B.*** *A final signed MOA will be included in the Record of Decisions (ROD) for this project.*

2.) "Wildlife species that would be affected are common in the surrounding area, tolerant of noise and visual disturbances, and would easily relocate to similar habitats." This statement would seem to indicate that habitat loss does not affect wildlife. Although suitable habitat may remain in the Study Area, it is likely occupied by many of the same common wildlife species that would be displaced from impacted areas. There is no information provided in the DEIS to show that these habitats presently are, or at the time of project construction are likely to be, so far below carrying capacity as to be able to absorb the displaced wildlife, assuming that individuals were able to locate and move to these other suitable habitats. This section should be corrected in the FEIS.

The Study Area is highly urbanized. Most of the habitat that would be affected by the project consists of the yards of homes and the edges of a couple of fields. It was not the intent to imply that habitat loss does not affect wildlife, but instead to indicate that the loss of habitat, such as the type of habitat in the Study Area, would not significantly affect the wildlife located within the Study Area. The statement has been revised to read: "… and may relocate to similar adjacent habitat."

3.) In addition, this section of the DEIS does not include any discussion of potential effects to migratory birds. The Preferred Alternative would impact 4.36 acres of wetlands. We expect these wetland areas to provide habitat for a variety of migratory birds. Further, peregrine falcons have nested under the Black River Bridge as recently as 2005. Under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, as amended, it is unlawful to take, capture, kill, or possess migratory birds, their nests, eggs, and young. We recommend this section in the FEIS address potential impacts to migratory birds.

On projects that involve work on structures over watercourses, MDOT reviews potential impacts to migratory birds that may make (or have made) nests underneath the bridges. During the design phase of the project, the Black River Bridge will be reviewed for past migratory bird nesting activity. If evidence of migratory bird nesting is discovered, coordination between MDOT (Environmental Section and Region Resource Specialist), MDEQ, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will occur. A "Special Provision" that describes procedures for dealing with migratory birds will be included within the project specifications. MDEQ permits required to conduct work on bridges over water may include specific dates when work on bridges will be prohibited for the protection of migratory birds. There is documentation of the peregrine falcon nesting on the Blue Water Bridge, however not on the Black River Bridge. This bird is typically a high altitude nester (cliffs, tall buildings, bridges).

4.) <u>Section 5.15, What Will Be Done To Ensure No Migratory Birds Will Be Impacted?</u> (page 5-15): This section addresses mitigation measures for work on bridges over watercourses and indicates that coordination between the MDOT, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and the FWS will occur. We recommend expanding this list to include other Agencies that may have review or permitting authority, for example the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Coast Guard.

The Study Team coordinated with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and U.S. Coast Guard during the development of the DEIS. Both agencies have permitting authority as it pertains to this project and we have added their agency names to ***Section 5.14 What will be done to Ensure No Migratory Birds will be Impacted?***

5.) We also recommend <u>Section 3.14.3 Will the Project Impact Any Plants, Wildlife, or Threatened and Endangered Species?</u> in the FEIS include a discussion of other mitigation measures, such as scheduling construction activities or removing potential habitat before the initiation of spring nesting or after the breeding season has ended to avoid take of migratory birds, eggs, young, and/or active nests. We recommend including these mitigation measures in the Project Mitigation Summary "Green Sheet."

A similar question was previously asked; please see the response in ***Section 7.1.4****. Mitigation measures have been included in* ***Section 5.14 What will be done to Ensure No Migratory Birds will be Impacted?*** *in this FEIS*

7.1.5 United States Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration

1.) If any replacement wetlands are to be located within 10,000' from a public use airport additional coordination with the FAA will be required to ensure that the proposed mitigation site does not adversely impact air safety.

The Study Team proposes building wetland mitigation sites on the northern part of the proposed new Michigan Welcome Center site. The nearest public airport is located six miles away. Consultation with FAA will take place should further wetland mitigation be proposed within the stated criteria.

7.1.6 Ontario Ministry of Transportation

1.) Customs processing capacity at the current plaza has had and continues to have a significant impact on the operations of Highway 402 within Canada. Passenger car and truck queues form on the westbound lanes of Highway 402 when the arrival rate of U.S. bound traffic exceeds the processing rate at the Blue Water Bridge Plaza in Port Huron. This has created a number of concerns for the traveling public and the community. We believe that the Preferred Alternative presented in the DEIS will significantly increase processing capacity at this crossing and result in traffic queues approaching the border being eliminated for all but the highest security conditions. We would encourage the Michigan Department of Transportation to proceed expeditiously with the implementation of the plaza improvements.

Comment acknowledged.

7.1.7 Blue Water Bridge Canada

1.) While U.S. bound traffic volumes were lower compared to the same period last year, delays in processing both commercial and passenger vehicles often exceeded two hours and at times were reported as three hours or more. The inadequacies of the present facility were a major factor in the inability for Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials to process these vehicles in a timely manner. In particular the lack of inspection booths and secondary processing facilities restrict the ability of CBP to open more lanes when required.

Comment acknowledged.

2.) BWBC is pleased to note that the "City West Alternative" is designed so that commercial trucks entering the United States will be processed on the right side of the plaza. BWBC was required to implement a temporary "merge" as a safety precaution at the base of its span in order to eliminate the dangerous weave movements required by U.S. truck and cars after the last modifications to the U.S. plaza. The new U.S. plaza design will allow BWBC to remove this restriction and allow for a more free flow of traffic.

Comment acknowledged.

7.1.8 State of Michigan, Department of Agriculture

1.) Our primary concern, as it relates to this project would be potential impacts the project could have on properties enrolled under Part 361 of the Natural Resources and environmental Protection Act (NREPA), Public Act 451 of 1994, as amended (formerly Public Act 116 of 1974, the Farmland and Open Space Preservation Act), and on established county and inter-county drains. As noted in earlier correspondence, staff does not anticipate impacts on these lands or infrastructure; nor do we anticipate other social, economic and/or

environmental impacts from the project alternatives, as they relate to agriculture and the various functions of the Department.

Comment acknowledged.

2.) We have some vested interest in seeing that the requirements for an adequate inspection facility are met, as requested by USDA Animal and Plant Inspection Service, Plant Protection and Quarantine (USDA-APHIS, PPQ). We encourage you to continue to work closely with USDA-APHIS in developing an inspection station to meet their needs.

Comment acknowledged. The possible relocation of the USDA APHIS animal inspection facility on Wadhams Road is not part of the plaza project nor does its relocation meet the purpose and need for the plaza expansion.

7.1.9 State of Michigan, Department of Community Health

1.) We have determined that there are no healthcare facilities within the Study Area. There are a few healthcare facilities within a half mile of the Study Area but based on our research, we believe that any of the alternatives for the proposed Blue Water Bridge Plaza Expansion should have no impact on these or any other healthcare facilities under our jurisdiction.

Comment acknowledged.

7.1.10 State of Michigan, Department of Environmental Quality

1.) Wetland impacts range from 4.4 acres for the City East and City West alternatives to 10.4 acres for the Township alternative. A permit for these impacts will be required from LWMD, under Part 303, Wetlands Protection, of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA 451, as amended (NREPA).

Comment acknowledged. All required permits for the project will be obtained.

2.) Page E-19 Wetlands-states that replacement ratios for forested impacts are 10:1, and the ratios for emergent, scrub/shrub and open water are 2:1 Under Part 303; the replacement ratios are 2:1 for forested wetlands and 1.5:1 for emergent scrub/shrub wetlands.

The correction has been made in the DEIS. Wetland replacement ratios for the Blue Water Bridge Study are 2:1 for forested wetlands and 1.5:1 for emergent scrubs/shrub wetland. For the Recommended Alternative, MDOT proposes to construct 7.1 acres of replacement wetlands.

3.) The bridge crossing at Black River and the culvert crossing of Stocks Creek will be replaced. A permit will be required from the LWMD under Part 301, Inland Lakes and Streams and Part 31, Water Resources Protection, of the NREPA.

Comment acknowledged. All required permits for the project will be obtained.

4.) Page 3.11-3 Stocks Creek states that the existing 200-foot-long triple six foot diameter culverts will be replaced with a 210-foot-long 12-foot by 8-foot elliptical concrete culvert. MDOT should consult with the LWMD and the Michigan Department of Natural Resource to ensure the proper sizing of this crossing to allow for adequate fish passage.

MDOT will consult with the Land and Water Management Division (LWMD) of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) during the design phase to ensure the proper sizing of the proposed 12′ x 8′ 210 foot-long elliptical culvert at Stock's Creek for fish passage. A hydraulic analysis was conducted for Stocks Creek which was used to help size the new structure. A permit is required for the new structure from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality to ensure compliance with fish and wildlife regulations. Specific structure elements will be determined in the design phase of the project.

5.) Page 3.11-6 City West Alternative states that an oil separator system would be used to provide pollutant removal (oil and solids) from the stormwater. This mitigation component should be added to the mitigation Green Sheet.

This item has been added to the Green Sheet.

6.) Page 3.12-1 Floodplains. It is recommended that paragraphs two and four be re-worded as follows:
Paragraph 2-The floodplain is divided into two parts, the floodway which carries most of the flow during a flood event, and the floodway fringe which is an area of very slow moving water or "slack water". The floodway is the high hazard area during times of flooding.

*These changes have been made in **Section 3.11** of this FEIS.*

7.) Paragraph 4-The State of Michigan's Floodplain Regulatory Authority, found in Part 31, Water Resources Protection, of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA 451, as amended (NREPA) requires that a permit be obtained prior to any alteration or occupation of the 1OO-year floodplain of a stream/drain with a drainage area of two square miles or more. The purpose of Part 31 is to assure that projects do not obstruct the flow of water and cause a harmful interference in the 1OO-year floodplain and that the floodway portion of the floodplain is not used for residential construction. Part 31 is enforced by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.

Comment acknowledged. All required permits for the project will be obtained.

8.) Page 3.13-6- Figures 3.13.1 and 3.13.2-The figures are confusing in that part of the wetlands are shown in yellow and part are in blue along Stocks Creek.

The error has been noted in Chapter 12 of this FEIS however the figure has not been updated as it has not been included in this FEIS.

7.1.11 Southeast Michigan Council of Governments

1.) In general, all of the proposed alternatives should result in reduced congestion and idling at the Blue Water Bridge and thus provide better air quality than would be experienced under a do-nothing scenario. However, more detailed information, directly comparing the different alternatives would provide a better understanding of the relative benefits and negative impacts of each alternative in relation to the others.

A qualitative PM2.5 hot-spot analysis has been prepared for this FEIS according to U.S. EPA and FHWA guidance. This is located in ***Section 3.3*** *of this FEIS.*

The comment specifically references air quality and requests more detailed information comparing the alternatives to better understand the relative benefits and impacts of each alternative in relation to each other. Each plaza alternative has essentially the same traffic projects and plaza elements with the same number of primary booths and similarly sized secondary inspection areas. The movement of vehicles through the plaza is essential the same for each alternative and traffic operations through the plaza would not change significantly from one alternative to another. Thus air quality impacts would be relatively the same as the congestion and idling reductions would be essentially the same for each alternative.

2.) The report states that "implementation of a construction emissions reduction plan may be considered" and lists a number of actions that may be included in this plan. The DEIS does not indicate if such a plan is to be implemented and when that decision will be made?

Section 5.4 *of the* ***DEIS*** *document identifies MDOT's best practices for minimizing air pollution and particulate matter during construction. Based on the air quality analyses completed for the proposed improvements, this project will not contribute to any violation of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) and is not expected to have a substantial effect on MSATs in the region. MDOT's 2003 Standard Construction Specification Sections 107.15(A) and 107.19 will apply to control fugitive dust during the construction and cleaning of haul roads. Additionally, MDOT will utilize Intelligent Traffic Systems, such as changeable message signs along the I-94/I-69 corridor to most effectively manage traffic operations and reduce long durations of idling where feasible during construction and operation of the new border plaza. For additional information, See* ***Section 5.23, How will Air Pollutions be Controlled During Construction?*** *of this FEIS.*

3.) The section on Off-Road Construction Equipment references Tier II standards for non-road equipment. However, stricter Tier III standards began taking effect in 2006 and will

be fully phased in by 2008. These are the standards that should be met for off-road construction equipment.

Tier III standards have been phased in and will be followed during construction. MDOT will comply with Tier III level guidelines and practices. ***Section 5.4*** *of the* ***DEIS*** *documents MDOT's best practices for minimizing air pollution and particulate matter during construction.*

4.) Current air quality status should focus on Southeast Michigan and St. Clair County rather than the entire state. It should talk about monitored levels of ozone and PM2.5 (annual and 24-hour) in St Clair County compared to other parts of the region and note recent trends in the data. There is concern over more idling concentrated in the plaza and roads heading to the plaza all of which currently occur in Canada. Reference should be made on the most recent emissions inventory data for these pollutants, not the data in the State's 2005 Annual Air Quality Report.

A carbon monoxide hot-spot analysis was performed for 2005, 2013 and 2030. The results are presented in ***Chapter 3.9.2*** *of the* ***DEIS****. The CO concentrations will decrease compared to existing conditions.*

A qualitative hot-spot analysis for PM2.5 has been prepared with the results presented in ***Section 3.3 Air Quality*** *of this FEIS. This analysis was prepared according to U.S. EPA and FHWA Guidance.*

5.) SEMCOG agrees that a PM2.5 hot-spot analysis should be performed on the Preferred Alternative, following the federal guidance that was issued by EPA and FHWA in March 2006.

A qualitative PM 2.5 hot-spot analysis for the Recommended Alternative has been completed and is included in ***Section 3.3*** *of this FEIS, following U.S. EPA and FHWA Guidance.*

6.) While validated models for predicting MSAT pollutant concentrations are not yet available, pollutant burdens can be quantified and compared between alternatives. We believe that a Tier III analysis, as described in FHWA's 2006 Interim Guidance on air toxic Analysis in NEPA Documents, is appropriate for his project due to the high level of truck traffic associated with the bridge plaza and the level of community concern regarding the project.

Tier III standards have been phased in and will be followed during construction. MDOT will comply with Tier III level guidelines and practices. ***Section 5.4*** *of the* ***DEIS*** *documents MDOT's best practices for minimizing air pollution and particulate matter during construction.*

7.) Based on the conclusion from the DEIS, the City West (Preferred) Alternative would improve the flow of traffic and would provide adequate capacity for current and future traffic on local roads, freeway segments, and mobility through the plaza resulting in less vehicle queues and backups on the freeway network.

The City West (Preferred) Alternative adequately meets all of the requirements developed and identified in Table 2.3.1 Summary of Alternative Evaluation. The Preferred Alternative would address the potential congestion problem along the M-25 Corridor by improving the intersection capacity, adjusting traffic signal operations, adding turn lanes, and/or adding through lanes until low to moderate levels of congestion are achieved.

Comment acknowledged.

8.) The planned modification to the existing I-94/I-69 Bridge over the Black River widens it from four (4) lanes to nine (9) lanes through the Preferred Alternative. This improvement to capacity is expected to overcome the need for additional crossing over the Black River. However, there is question whether this capacity improvement does in fact address local community concerns. Further consultation is needed with community officials to address these concerns.

The proposed Black River Bridge would be expanded as described in the comment above. There are three dedicated lanes to Canada (eastbound) and three additional eastbound lanes for local traffic for a total of six eastbound lanes. These six lanes are needed to separate the local traffic from the international traffic, a key concern of local residents. There are three westbound lanes across the Black River, which is an adequate number of lanes for the 2030 forecast traffic volumes. These improvements to the Black River Bridge and I-94/I-69 will also provide the necessary infrastructure to support existing and future border pre-clearance programs such as FAST and NEXUS. MDOT believes this improvement fully satisfies the purpose and need for the Blue Water Bridge Plaza Study. Remaining local community concerns regarding the limited crossing of the Black River full outside the scope of this study.

9.) Local Road Traffic Impacts: The DEIS does an adequate analysis of the freeway system, but needs clarification on number of items particularly to local roads and community impact. The key issues identified are as follows:

A corridor traffic progression analysis should be performed and provided in the Final Environmental Impact Statement since the Preferred Alternative would add two new signalized intersections and a roundabout (see Table 2.2.4) along Pine Grove Avenue. A stronger effort is needed to time the signals along Pine Grove Avenue, which continues to be a problem. The impact of introducing signalized intersections and a roundabout within close proximity should be discussed.

MDOT completed a traffic signal optimization report in February 2006. MDOT implemented several signal retimings as a result of this report. MDOT commits to completing a similar study once the project has been constructed to determine if signal timing changes need to be made along M-25.

10.) The report should clearly indicate the individual streets that will be closed as a result of the Preferred Alternative, as this would be a major connectivity issue for neighborhood around the plaza, particularly along 10th Avenue. The potential increase in traffic along 10th

Avenue and the intersection of 10th Avenue and Hancock Street should also be considered in analysis.

The Recommended Alternative realigns Pine Grove Avenue to the west closing the existing road under the plaza. The realigned roadway will curve around the proposed plaza from 10th Ave. to Riverview St. The new plaza requires some right-of-way (ROW) to be purchased along; north Scott Avenue, Mansfield Street, Harker Street, Elmwood Street, Church Street, and south Hancock Street. The remaining ROW on these streets will have Pine Grove Avenue access via Hancock Street or 10th Avenue. There is no anticipated traffic volume change due to the new plaza on 10th Avenue or the intersection of 10th Avenue and Hancock Street.

11.) On page 2.2-32, the report needs to specify what type of intersection control is proposed for the intersection of Lapeer Connector with the collector road.

No intersection control is proposed for Westbound Collector road traffic and those turning south on to the Lapeer Connector. For traffic heading north on the Lapeer Connector and turning west onto the freeway, the intersection control is a stop sign. In the future, if traffic warrants, this intersection could be signalized.

12.) On page E-25 (Figure E.16), the symbols that correlated to the legend appear to change in size. If different sizes indicate difference in features or performance measures, please explain, otherwise correct graphic.

This figure has not been included in this FEIS. The error has been noted in Chapter 12 of this FEIS however the figure has not been updated as it has not been included in this FEIS.

13.) It has been determined the welcome center would not be constructed in the median of the I-94/I-69 freeway as originally discussed, because of safety concerns and parking requirements. The build alternatives propose a new welcome center on vacant land in Port Huron Township approximately one mile west of its current location that is better suited to meet MDOT's design standards. It has also been identified in the study that MDOT will hold a public meeting to develop design aesthetics and landscaping treatments for the new welcome center. The public meeting should also include design aesthetics and landscaping treatments in and around the plaza itself.

MDOT will fund the development of an Aesthetic Design Guide and use the Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) process to work with a local community advisory committee to develop and document architectural and aesthetic enhancements which will be incorporated into the design of the Michigan Welcome Center, the I-94/I-69 corridor, and plaza to the extent possible. These design items will be refined during the design phase of the project.

14.) The DEIS does not acknowledge receipt of the non-motorized trail plan developed by St. Clair County Parks and Recreation. The plan was developed in collaboration with County

Parks, Port Huron Township Supervisor, Port Huron City Engineer, and the Port Huron City Planner. The plan contains a city of Port Huron and Port Huron Township proposal for a non-motorized traffic bridge over the Black River connecting to Water Street on the west side and the Bridge to Bay Trail on the east side. The FEIS should reference the trails plan and indicate that the provision of a non-motorized crossing will move forward in the next stages of the project.

MDOT has received a non-motorized plan to connect sidewalks along Water Street to the St. Clair River non-motorized network. MDOT will fund the construction of a non-motorized path across the Black River. The trail plan is referred to in ***Section 5.25*** *of this FEIS.*

15.) The large plaza footprint has an impact on both the residents and businesses in the area. What are the implications on tax revenues (property tax base, income tax, and school tax) from the loss of residences, businesses, and school-age children? Further, what demands does the facility place on emergency first responders.

Section 3.4, Economics *of the* ***DEIS*** *presented the impacts on tax revenues due to the proposed plaza. The calculations have been updated for 2008 and are located in* ***Section 3.2*** *of this FEIS. Potential impacts to first responders were presented in* ***Section 3.2.12, Community and Neighborhood Impacts,*** *and in* ***Section 3.5, Public Safety and Security*** *of the* ***DEIS.***

16.) The five-year construction time-period will cause disruption to adjacent residents and businesses. What efforts will be undertaken to mitigate such disruption.

MDOT and the City recognize the importance of minimizing the traffic impacts to the local community as a result of this project. MDOT will coordinate with community stakeholders prior to the beginning of construction to assure impacts on residents and local services are minimized to the greatest extent possible. Specifically, MDOT will coordinate with Blue Water Area Transportation Commission and the St. Clair County Transportation Study Team, the St. Clair County Road Commission and the city of Port Huron, regarding Maintenance of Traffic concerns which affect their daily operations. ***Section 3.17*** *of this FEIS* ***Construction Impacts*** *and* ***Chapter 5.19*** *discuss mitigation measures to offset impacts associated with the proposed project.*

17.) MDOT had indicated that they will provide purchasing, relocation assistance and advisory services for anyone whose property is needed for the project. However, concerning properties not taken by the new plaza, the project will reduce neighborhood cohesion in the blocks surrounding the existing plaza. That area would be divided as a result of the plaza expansion causing several local businesses to be relocated. This division of the neighborhood could potentially present a challenge to the local low-income population to find sufficient alternatives to the departed businesses of comparable types.

It should be recognized that the existing elevated plaza already serves as a physical and psychological barrier between properties and neighborhoods on either side.

*As the **DEIS** described in **Section 3.2.9**, the larger scale of the Recommended (City West) Alternative will clearly increase the perceived and actual separation between properties on both sides of the plaza. The City West Alternative was selected in part because of the lesser perceived impact compared to the City East. In addition, it would provide improved north-south movement in Port Huron by offering two roadways (Pine Grove Avenue and 10th Avenues) instead of just one under the City East Alternative. Furthermore, the City West Alternative does not have the major north-south roadway in the area (Pine Grove Avenue) traveling under a substantial portion of the plaza, which is better from a security and visual barrier perspective.*

While there will be changes to local circulation with the closure of some streets, Pine Grove Avenue and 10th Avenues will be maintained for local circulation, and will perform better for traffic movement than they would without the project. However, the Study Team recognizes that construction of the enlarged plaza could affect walk distances for persons that use transit and/or do not have a car. Many of the existing restaurants, small stores, and gas stations that surround the existing plaza would be replaced and serve a market that is created by the plaza and the neighborhoods that surround it. These types of businesses may relocate in the vicinity of the new plaza and will continue to provide services to those using the plaza and neighboring residents.

MDOT will conduct community outreach during the final design process to ensure that community aesthetic and visual concerns are considered. Aesthetic and Visual impacts will be considered through the application of Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS), which will attempt to ensure that the scale and aesthetic treatment of new roadways such as realigned Pine Grove Avenue are community friendly and welcoming to pedestrians.

18.) The build alternative scenarios make reference that the run-off would be treated prior to entering the water body. However, more information on the detailed stormwater management techniques should be provided. The following information reflects the requirements often found in a stormwater ordinance and should be incorporated into the design of the project.

- **There will be no direct discharges of stormwater run-off to the receiving water.**
- **The run-off from the project will equal pre-settlement run-off rates.**
- **Native vegetation will be used in all plantings.**
- **Ensure the proper vegetation type and amount in the grassy buffer areas to ensure that erosion does not occur from overland flow.**
- **Invasive species will be removed from the site.**
- **Keep the natural drainage ways intact.**
- **Infiltration and Low Impact Development (LID) practices will be utilized, when feasible based on appropriate soils, locations and pollutant removals. This includes porous pavement in low traffic volume areas, bioswales along roads, and bioretention in parking lots.**
- **Public education signage for LID techniques should be incorporated into the site.**

*As stated in **Section 5.7** of the **DEIS**, MDOT utilizes Best Management Practices (BMPs) to manage stormwater run-off. "Best Management Practices are policies, practices, procedures or structures implemented to mitigate the adverse environmental effects on surface water quality resulting from development. "(Federal Register Vol. 65, No. 47) These BMPs include techniques and ideas similar to those listed in the comment above. MDOT will coordinate with the appropriate state and local agencies to develop final mitigation measures during the design and permit application phases.*

7.1.12 United States Senators Carl Levin and Debbie Stabenow

1.) We encourage you to work with city and county officials to address their concerns and to explore opportunities to address the potential economic impact of the project on the surrounding communities. We urge all the agencies involved in this project to continue to work closely with the community of Port Huron to address these serious questions and issues.

*In response to community concerns received from the release of the DEIS, the Study Team initiated a Project Enhancement and Mitigation (PEM) group comprised of representatives from the city of Port Huron, St. Clair County, Port Huron Township, federal and state elected officials, GSA, FHWA, and MDOT. This group met monthly from February through November 2008 to work through issues raised by the local community regarding the proposed plaza and corridor improvements. A summary of the group activities and outcomes can be found in **Appendix C** of this FEIS.*

7.1.13 United States House of Representatives, Candice Miller

1.) Of particular concern has been the inability of the affected communities to receive answers to their questions from MDOT. This project is going to have a major impact on the city of Port Huron and surrounding municipalities. Local government leaders as well as residents should be relevant participants in this process to ensure that the new facility makes as little negative impact as possible.

MDOT held 9 public meetings or workshops and approximately 40 meetings with local officials prior to the development and release of the DEIS. Hundreds of local residents, business owners and officials attended these meetings.

*In response to community concerns received from the release of the DEIS, the Study Team initiated a Project Enhancement and Mitigation (PEM) group comprised of representatives from the city of Port Huron, St. Clair County, Port Huron Township, federal and state elected officials, GSA, FHWA, and MDOT. This group met monthly from February through November 2008 to work through issues raised by the local community regarding the proposed plaza and corridor improvements. A summary of the group activities and outcomes can be found in **Appendix C** of this FEIS.*

2.) The current plaza is simply inadequate to meet CBP's needs in a post-9/11 world. But my specific concern is that the traffic projections which have been used to develop the

Preferred Alternative are overly optimistic about future needs. It seems that basing future traffic growth on the rapid growth of the 1980s and 1990s will inevitably result in a plaza footprint far in excess of what may actually be required. Given the slow down of the domestic auto industry, the prospect of fewer Canadian trash trucks crossing the bridge, and newer technology to speed processing times, I have serious questions about whether a plaza the size of the Preferred Alternative is necessary.

In response to community concerns received from the release of the DEIS, CBP re-evaluated the overall needs for the proposed plaza and worked with the Study Team to reduce the overall plaza space needed for CBP operation. As a result, the size of the proposed permanent plaza footprint has been reduced from the 65 acres in the DEIS to 56 acres in this FEIS. The size of the proposed plaza is not entirely dependent on future traffic, but instead is based on the facilities needed for CBP to complete their mission at the border. Additional explanation and justification for the plaza size can be found in ***Chapter 1*** *and more specifically in* ***Section 1.6*** *of this FEIS.*

7.1.14 State of Michigan, House of Representatives, Phil Pavlov

1.) I write today in support of their concerns related to Section 1 of the DEIS and supporting technical reports. As mentioned, our community acknowledges that there is a legitimate need to improve the existing bridge plaza infrastructure in order to reduce processing delays, enhance security, and accommodate new technologies. However, since the new plaza will be a permanent fixture in our community, it is imperative that our concerns are addressed.

As identified in this chapter of this FEIS, MDOT, FHWA, GSA, and CBP have worked diligently to address the comments of the community. In response to community concerns received from the release of the DEIS, the Study Team initiated a Project Enhancement and Mitigation (PEM) group comprised of representatives from the city of Port Huron, St. Clair County, Port Huron Township, federal and state elected officials, GSA, FHWA, and MDOT. This group met monthly from February thru November 2008 to work through issues raised by the local community regarding the proposed plaza and corridor improvements. A summary of the group activities and outcomes can be found in ***Appendix C*** *of this FEIS.*

7.2 Regional and Local Government Comments

The Regional and Local Government Comments section addresses comments from the following agencies:
St. Clair County
City of Port Huron
Charter Township of Port Huron
Charter Township of Fort Gratiot
Southeastern Michigan Council of Governments
Bridge Plaza Business and Community Coalition

Some of the respondents presented more than one issue or concern. The Study Team prepared comment summaries due to the volume of comments received during the public comment period and the number of comments raising similar or overlapping issues. Comments are categorized under the following major headings:

Aesthetics and Community Character
Air Quality
Alternatives Considered/Additional Alternatives
Black River Bridge
Community Impacts
Drainage and Floodplain Concerns
Economic
Energy Issues
Farmland
Format of the DEIS
General
Hazardous Materials
Health and Safety
Historical Properties
Improvements to Local Roads
Justification for Plaza
Land Use Issues
Mitigation Efforts
Noise
Other Environmental Concerns
Pedestrian and Non-motorized Access
Project Design
Project Funding
Public Involvement and Coordination
Public Transportation
Right-of-Way Acquisition and Relocation Issues
Security
Signals and Signing
Support and Economic Assistance to Community
Threatened and Endangered Species
Traffic
Michigan Welcome Center
Wetlands

7.2.1 Aesthetics and Community Character

1.) Many commenters expressed concern with regard to public input into the need for aesthetically pleasing landscaping, retaining walls, lighting and facilities. They recommended that the new facilities reflect the character and historical significance of the

city. They urged the design not resemble a "checkpoint" or warehouse, and asked that details for proposed aesthetic treatments be committed to as opposed to being described in generalities as to what "could" be proposed. Other recommendations were that noise barriers be more aesthetically pleasing than standard and reflect the "national and local economic significance of this corridor."

*MDOT will fund the development of an Aesthetic Design Guide (see **Section 5.4** of this FEIS) which will describe and illustrate design intent, specific aesthetic design features and enough design detail to demonstrate the aesthetic commitments to be carried forward during the final design and construction phases of the project. MDOT and GSA commit to work with the local Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) community advisory committee to develop a plaza design which reflects the regions heritage and identity. This process will be carried forward into the design and construction phases of the project.*

***Section 3.8** of the **DEIS** looked extensively at the visual impacts of the project. The Recommended Alternative (City West Alternative) would expand the existing plaza significantly and subsequently change the view surrounding the existing plaza location. This alternative will relocate Pine Grove Avenue to the west. The motoring public would no longer have the tunnel effect of the plaza over Pine Grove Avenue. Overall, the change in view for the Recommended Alternative would be most evident for those residents or businesses who are adjacent to the new plaza as the security perimeter of the new plaza would obstruct some of the view of the plaza and would likely be viewed as an improvement. MDOT will conduct community outreach during the final design process to ensure community concerns are considered to the greatest extent feasible. Aesthetic and visual impacts will be considered through the application of CSS, which will attempt to ensure that the scale and aesthetic treatment of new roadways such as realigned Pine Grove Avenue are community friendly and welcoming to pedestrians.*

7.2.2 Air Quality

1.) One commenter expressed concern with PM2.5 emissions (particulate matter of less than 2.5 microns) and its potentially serious health affects on lungs, citing as examples, "asthma, difficult/painful breathing, chronic bronchitis" and potential associations of PM2.5 diesel emissions with lung cancer.

*The Study Team conducted a qualitative hot-spot PM 2.5 analysis for the Recommended Alternative and included it in **Section 3.3** of this FEIS, following U.S. EPA and FHWA Guidance. **Section 5.4** of the **DEIS** documents MDOT's best practices for minimizing air pollution and particulate matter during construction.*

2.) A few commenters stated the DEIS contained inadequate disclosure of microscale air quality impacts. Specifically, commenters felt that there was not adequate carbon monoxide (CO) hot spot analysis completed at the Hancock Street/M-25 intersection and on the plaza itself. The commenters believe a hot spot analysis is needed for idling vehicles on the bridge plaza. The commenters believed that vehicle processing times that were withheld by CBP

for security purposes should be made available and utilized for CO and PM2.5 analysis as done for the Peace Bridge Plaza.

Prior to commencing with the air quality analysis an Air Quality Protocol was submitted to the FHWA and U.S. EPA for approval. This protocol was followed during the preparation of the air quality analysis. The CO microscale analysis was performed in an area immediately adjacent to daily traffic queues where the general public will have access. A traffic delay analysis has been completed and is included in ***Section 2.3.5*** *if this FEIS which provides information similar to the Peace Bridge Study.*

The Peace Bridge analysis was consistent with the construction of a new bridge and added capacity as proposed with the Peace Bridge project. In the case of the Blue Water Bridge, the existing bridges over the St. Clair River have adequate capacity for future traffic through the design year (2030), and thus no new border capacity improvements are proposed other than the future growth of traffic.

Regarding vehicle processing times, CBP officials have stated numerous times that the agency will take care to make information in National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) analysis and documents available to the public in conformance with its responsibilities under the Council on Environmental Quality regulations at 40 CFR 1506.6(f). In accordance with CEQ regulations, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will not disclose classified, sensitive security information, or other information that DHS otherwise would not disclose pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) (5 U.S.C. 552).

3.) A couple commenters believed additional or Tier III air quality analysis is necessary, including addressing mobile source air toxics for which validated predictive models do not yet exist.

A similar question was asked previously; please see the response in ***Section 7.1.11*** *comment 6.*

4.) A number of commenters requested additional studies be conducted including hot spot air quality within the project footprint for future years, and the development of a specialized methodology for modeling PM2.5. Information not in the DEIS was also requested including where baseline studies for air quality were conducted and in addition, St. Clair County monitored levels and trends for ozone and PM 2.5. SEMCOG felt that a PM2.5 hot-spot analysis should be conducted for the Preferred Alternative.

A Carbon monoxide hot-spot analysis was performed for 2005, 2013 and 2030. The results are presented in ***Chapter 3.9.2*** *of the* ***DEIS****. The CO concentrations will decrease compared to existing conditions.*

A qualitative hot-spot analysis for PM2.5 has been prepared with the results presented in ***Section 3.3 Air Quality*** *of this FEIS. This analysis was prepared according to U.S. EPA and FHWA Guidance.*

The forecast decreases in emissions are due to the reduction in idling vehicles for the Build Alternatives compared to the No-Build Alternative along with overall improvements in emissions standards for the trucks and cars that will use the new plaza between 2013 and 2030.

5.) Numerous commenters expressed concern over future air quality impacts, compliance with local, state and federal standards, and the steps MDOT will take in mitigating the effects and how and when they would be implemented. A few asked for confirmation if a construction emissions control plan would be prepared and asked how its implementation would be assured.

MDOT will work with contractors on an operational agreement to control air pollution during construction. A construction emissions plan may include actions such as: retrofitting off-road construction equipment; limiting the age of off-road vehicles used in construction projects; minimizing engine operations; restricting construction activities around certain more-sensitive receptors, like Southwestern High School (when it is in session); using diesel particulate traps and oxidation catalysts; and, using existing power sources or clean fuel generators, rather than temporary power generators. The Contractor will institute fugitive dust control plans as per MDOT Standard Construction Specifications under Section 107.15A and 107.19.

MDOT will work with SEMCOG, MDEQ, the private sector and the community to create an action plan that includes short-term and long-term objectives aimed at reducing fugitive dust, diesel truck idling, fuel consumption, or diesel emissions to limit PM2.5 emissions in the area within one mile of the plaza. The action plan will identify priorities for the future federal aid eligible transportation project through program such as, Congestion, Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) and the Midwest Clean Diesel Initiative. These activities will be implemented during design and construction phases, and sustained through the maintenance and operation of the facilities. Activities could also include outreach efforts to inform commercial operations and residents on air pollution control strategies. The actual projects will be generated from the community and its partners who will develop project proposals to implement these strategies.

6.) Commenters questioned air quality emergency protocols and locations to place complaints or get additional information.

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Air Quality Division has developed a system to notify the public of potential air quality health issues. More information can be found in the MDEQ's Annual Air Quality Report and on the MDEQ website (http://www.michigan.gov/deq).

Concerns regarding the Blue Water Bridge Project can be made 24 hours a day by submitting them to the project website (www.michigan.gov/bluewaterbridgeproject). Concerns and complaints can also be submitted by calling the toll-free project hotline (888-955-3515) from 8 a.m. to 5p.m. weekdays and after hours on voice mail. Comments can also be submitted at the Port Huron Transportation Service Center located at 2127 11th Avenue, Port Huron, Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. The project website will continue to be maintained through the life of the project and for some time after the project is

completed. Responses to comments can be further clarified through calling the hotline and speaking directly with a member of the Study Team. A project communication protocol will be created during the construction phase.

7.) One commenter noted the new stricter off-road construction equipment Tier 3 in should be met instead of the Tier 2 standards in the DEIS.

Tier III standards have been phased in and will be followed during construction. MDOT will comply with Tier III level guidelines and practices. ***Section 5.4*** *of the* ***DEIS*** *documents MDOT's best practices for minimizing air pollution and particulate matter during construction.*

7.2.3 Alternatives Considered/Additional Alternatives

1.) One commenter believed that the DEIS "does not evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives, and does not provide adequate mitigation."

The Blue Water Bridge Plaza Study DEIS provides a full examination of impacts of three build alternatives and the No-Build Alternative, and provides full disclosure of impacts. MDOT and FHWA worked with government agencies, stakeholder, and the public to develop, refine, and evaluate potential alternatives for improvements to the United States Plaza at the Blue Water Bridge. The alternative development process included several steps. Nineteen illustrative alternative concepts were developed and evaluated. Concepts were eliminated because they did not adequately address the purpose of and need for improvements.

Additional mitigation items have been included in this FEIS and are discussed in ***Chapter 5*** *of this FEIS.*

2.) One commenter recommended "development of a water ferry system to move people up and down the Black and St. Clair Rivers."

This strategy does not meet purpose and need for the Blue Water Bridge Study as defined in ***Section 1.0*** *in this FEIS. No enhancement of this nature is proposed as part of the plaza expansion project.*

7.2.4 Black River Bridge

1.) A number of commenters believe the Black River Bridge improvements should be evaluated independently of the plaza project and/or expressed concern with potential delay in improvements to the Black River Bridge.

The replacement of the Black River Bridge is a priority for MDOT. In order for projects to have separate environmental clearances, the projects must have "independent utility," meaning the projects must stand alone regardless of the outcome of the other project. The Black River Bridge size is dependant on the construction of a new plaza. The elevation of the new plaza also is tied to the Black River Bridge. Thus, the plaza and Black River Bridge must be included in one environmental study.

2.) A few commenters noted "that there was a Federal Register notice published on November 7, 2006 which indicated that the Black River Bridge portion of the project would be evaluated in a separate NEPA document. However, we are unaware of a subsequent notice being published to join the two projects back into the same NEPA document. If there was not a subsequent notice informing members of the public that the two projects have been joined back together, we are concerned that MDOT did not follow customary procedures in this regard and may in fact have failed to follow regulatory requirements. "

FHWA and MDOT followed procedures and regulatory requirements regarding the combining of the Blue Water Bridge Project and the I-94/I-69 Corridor Study. On May 1, 2007 a Notice of Intent was published in the Federal Register that informed the public that in early 2007 after additional consultation with stakeholders, it was determined that the two separate studies should be merged into one and the I-94/I-69 improvements would be a part of the Plaza Environmental Impact Statement.

3.) A few commenters expressed concern in regards to accessibility across the Black River Bridge prior to, during and following construction as well as recreational access to the Black River.

The Black River Bridge will remain open throughout construction. As part of MDOT's maintenance of traffic planning all efforts will be taken to minimize traffic delays. MDOT's Work Zone Mobility Policy will be followed to minimize congestion within work zones. MDOT will work closely with the city of Port Huron and St. Clair County Road Commission to reach consensus on the final staging plan and maintenance of traffic provisions prior to the beginning of construction.

4.) One commenter inquired whether construction "will impede boat traffic on the Black River" and whether vertical clearances for boats passing under the bridge would be maintained or increased.

The Black River is a navigable waterway, which allows small boats to travel upstream beyond the Black River Bridge. The under clearance for the proposed bridge is either improved or remains the same as existing. In no instance is under clearance less than the existing bridge clearance. Boat traffic will not be impeded during the majority of construction. The one exception to this will be during beam placement, which will require no boat traffic passing underneath the cranes for 15-minute intervals. A communication plan will be developed during the construction phases of the project.

5.) Many commenters supported a non-motorized crossing over the Black River.

MDOT commits to constructing a 14-foot non-motorized crossing on the south side of the Black River Bridge. North/south connections will also be provided across the Water Street Bridge. In conjunction with the city of Port Huron's plans for providing non-motorized routes, this project also adds shared use of 10-foot sidewalks along the realigned Pine Grove Avenue. See ***Section 5.25*** *of this FEIS for more information.*

7.2.5 Community Impacts

1.) A number of commenters concluded that the project would create a barrier (either perceived or real) between the north and south end of the community. Mitigation steps towards mitigating city division were also requested.

*A similar question was previously asked; please see the response in **Section 7.1.11, comment 17**.*

2.) A few commenters asked about measures to ensure that enhancements to their life experience persist for the life of the improvement, and expressed concerns about the effect of the project on the quality of life.

*Although "enhancing resident and visitor experiences to the greater Port Huron area" is not a specific purpose of the project, each alternative will provide a more efficient border crossing experience for both visitors and residents who use the border crossing, with expected shorter lines and crossing times (see delay analysis in **Section 2.3.4** in this FEIS). For local residents, there will be safety improvements from reduced back-ups of border crossing traffic that interfere with local traffic on the freeway. These improvements will remain for the life of the improvements with the development of project enhancement and mitigation specifics. These results are discussed in **Appendix C** of this FEIS and represent a substantial investment in the future success of Port Huron.*

3.) Several commenters were concerned about the impacts to those neighborhoods not directly impacted by the proposed project. They were concerned these neighborhoods will suffer "cumulative impacts" including loss of value, as they become the new "front row" to the plaza. Others voiced concern with the prolonged timeframe of uncertainty of potential acquisitions.

*The discussion in **Section 3.2.9** of the **DEIS** acknowledges that a few homes near the edge of the plaza from past expansions have experienced conversion to office use or are vacant. The Recommended Alternative may cause changes in the property values and property taxes for homes and businesses that remain in the vicinity of the plaza. Some parcels may increase in value due to improved access while other parcels may lose value due to noise or visual impacts. A property, which may have lower value as a residential property, may also have a much greater value as a potential business site. It is difficult to differentiate between the effects of the project and changes in values due to property improvements or changes in the local market. As a result, MDOT does not attempt to assess the potential changes in value for individual properties that do not need to be purchased for the project. MDOT does not compensate property owners for potential losses in property values due to their proximity to the project, nor is MDOT compensated for potential additional value created by the project.*

*Cumulative impacts are impacts on the environment resulting from the incremental impact of the project when added to other past, present, and reasonable foreseeable future projects. The impacts referred to in the comment are not cumulative impacts but instead are direct impacts of the plaza project. The DEIS does discuss these impacts in the **Land Use Section 3.1** (potential for future conversion of homes to*

*business uses), the **Community and Neighborhood Impacts Section 3.2,** and the **Economics Section 3.4**. As indicated in **Section 3.4** of the **DEIS**, MDOT does not engage in speculative assessment of the impacts of a transportation project on specific property values.*

*MDOT has put forward a number of mitigation measures, outlined in **Chapter 5.0** of this FEIS, to address land use, community, economic and visual impacts and formed a special Project Enhancement Mitigation team to address mitigation.*

4.) Two commenters voiced concerns with the availability of alternative businesses and services within a reasonable distance of the affected residents.

There are no grocery markets, drug stores, doctor's offices or other such routinely-visited essential services being relocated as a part of this project. Many of the existing restaurants, small stores, and gas stations that surround the existing plaza and would be replaced serve a market that is created by the plaza and the neighborhoods that surround it. These types of businesses may relocate in the vicinity of the new plaza. If they do relocate in the vicinity of the expanded plaza they could continue to provide services to those using the plaza and neighboring residents. There are alternate like businesses on major routes accessible by transit customers near to the project area.

5.) One commenter asked how the alternatives would impact the provision of and access to social services in the surrounding neighborhoods, the city of Port Huron, and the neighboring townships.

*As described in **Section 3.2.10** of the **DEIS**, none of the alternatives would have a substantial effect on community services. The Free Methodist Church at the corner of 10th and Pine Grove Avenue is the only community type institution that would be displaced by the Recommended Alternative. MDOT will work with Blue Water Area Transit providers prior to the beginning of construction to ensure that there are no major impediments to transit accessibility for any transit-dependent populations. Pedestrian access to social services may experience minor impacts from re-routing.*

There are no emergency service providers within or immediately adjacent to the Study Area. Prior to the beginning of construction, MDOT will work with local emergency service providers to ensure access. As part of MDOT's maintenance of traffic planning all efforts will be taken to minimize impacts to critical north-south routes and emergency service access, to the greatest extent possible.

6.) A number of commenters expressed concern regarding the impacts to the demographic character and social interaction within the surrounding neighborhoods. A door-to-door survey was also suggested.

*A similar question was previously asked; please see the response in **Section 7.1.11, comment 17**. A door-to-door survey will not be completed for this project.*

7.) A few commenters inquired as to the availability of health and human service providers within the Study Area and how the relocation of families may impact services delivered at these centers.

*As described in detail in **Section 3.2.10** of the **DEIS**, the Recommended Alternative (City West) and the City East Alternative would both displace the First Free Methodist Church at the corner of Elmwood Street and 10th Street. MDOT will work with the church to find an adequate replacement property. No community health or human services facilities are being displaced. There are no health care facilities, emergency service providers, or community centers located in the Study Area.*

8.) Two commenters voiced concerns regarding the impacts on businesses within the project footprint and the loss of services they provide the community. There was also a question with regard to business access to Fort Gratiot Township associated with the Township Alternative.

The Recommended Alternative would require 30 businesses to be displaced. These businesses include gas stations, restaurants and offices that serve the local community as well as border crossing traffic. With the plaza expansion in Port Huron, many of these businesses may want to relocate to vacant areas near the plaza. This may create new pressures to convert homes in the nearby neighborhoods to business sites. There will likely be a period of time, after the businesses are displaced when local residents will have to travel farther to get to local businesses. Residents in the neighborhoods surrounding the plaza who walked to the nearby restaurants or filled up their vehicles at the nearby gas stations will likely have to travel a few extra blocks to get the same services.

***Section 3.4.6** of the **DEIS** notes that approximately 75 percent of the relocated businesses own their site while the others lease their location. The relocated businesses may choose to move to a different community or remain close to their current location. In accordance with federal law, MDOT can not direct relocated homeowners or businesses on where to relocate. Some changes in existing business patterns for residents and business owners in the vicinity of the plaza are inevitable with this number of business relocations.*

*Relocated businesses will be compensated as discussed in **Section 5.3** of this FEIS and the Conceptual Relocation Plan in **Appendix A.***

9.) Two commenters were concerned with the benefit of the project to the Port Huron area, asking, will the "project add to resident and visitors experiences" to the area? Elaboration was requested on the benefits the improvements would provide to the city, state, U.S. and Canada.

The proposed project offers many benefits for residents, visitors, the State of Michigan and United States. Everyone will benefit from the improved security that a new border crossing will provide. Currently, CBP cannot complete their mission at the border due to limited space for required inspection procedures. The improvements also anticipate reduced traffic delays. Local residents and visitors will benefit

significantly from improvements made to the I-69/I-94 corridor which will separate local traffic from Canadian bound traffic. The delay analysis summary can be found in ***Section 2.3****. of this FEIS. Improvements will also be made to the local road system surrounding the plaza, the Water Street interchange, and the Lapeer Connector. A new welcome center will provide visitors with a greatly improved facility with better accessibility and local information for visitors to the area. As a project enhancement MDOT has agreed to work with the Greater Port Huron Chamber of Commerce to create a local visitor center along Pine Grove Avenue. Based on the estimated construction cost the Study Team estimates that over 4,000 jobs will be created over a five year construction period. Lastly, MDOT is committed to creating a visually attractive project that meets the local character of Port Huron and will be developing an Aesthetic Design Guide as a result of Project Enhancement and Mitigation group meetings. This design guide will ensure that local preferences are incorporated into the final design and construction and a common theme is used throughout the project.* ***Section 5.0*** *of this FEIS discusses in detail the mitigation that has been committed to as a result of this project.*

10.) Many commenters believed the following items should be included in the DEIS.

- **Provide a list of specific businesses that have relocated from the Detroit Metropolitan Region to Port Huron in the past 3 years.**
- **Provide data and recent trends in home sales for Port Huron from 2002-2007.**
- **What have the sales trends been and how have prices changed in the past five years?**
- **How many foreclosures are there in the city of Port Huron? How many foreclosures are there in the Study Area?**

The type of information requested is typically produced by regional planning agencies or retail organizations in the context of a much larger comprehensive planning initiative. Specific to the alternatives under study, the requested information would not add value to the assessment of the impacts associated with the project or to the associated mitigation efforts being proposed.

7.2.6 Drainage and Floodplain Concerns

1.) Two commenters concluded that "there is no analysis/information presented regarding potential floodplain impacts downstream from the crossing" and "relevant regulations require that potential projects such as this result in no harmful interference with floodwater elevations/conveyance. The DEIS does not provide enough details to confirm whether or not this threshold has been met."

The existing and proposed bridges over the Black River have been analyzed with the results showing that the proposed water surface elevation immediately upstream will be 0.01 feet lower than for existing 100-year flood conditions. Immediately downstream of the bridges the existing and proposed water surface elevations are the same. Therefore upstream flooding conditions will be improved by the new Black River Bridge while not increasing downstream flood levels. This has been noted within this FEIS ***Section 3.11.***

2.) One commenter questioned how impacts to the floodplain(s) would be mitigated and how the mitigation would be monitored for success, determined to be successful, and mitigated if not successful.

*As discussed in **Section 3.11** of the **DEIS**, fill material will be placed within the 100-year floodplain west of the Black River Bridge along both sides of I-94/I-69. Compensatory storage will be provided by lengthening the bridge over the Black River to ensure that the new bridge would not impact 100-year floodplain elevations. No adverse impacts are anticipated to floodplains as a result of the Recommended Alternative. To ensure that all environmental and hydraulic impacts associated with the floodplain crossings of the Recommended Alternative are minimized, further evaluation of crossing options will be conducted during the design phase. See **Section 5.0** of this FEIS for a more detailed discussion of mitigation.*

3.) Several commenters were concerned with the flow rates and quality of the stormwater discharge into the city of Port Huron's existing system. Commenters were also interested in how stormwater quality would be monitored.

Detailed stormwater detention plans will be developed during the design phase. MDOT commits to coordinate with the city of Port Huron to either utilize a portion of their stormwater sewer system or develop a separate system to manage all stormwater run-off associated with the expanded plaza.

4.) Several commenters were concerned with how the stormwater run-off would be detained and treated within the Study Area?

MDOT currently plans to treat and detain plaza and MDOT roadway run-off within MDOT ROW prior to out letting into the Black River. Best Management Practices consistent with MDOT's Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control Manual will be used throughout the project during construction and after construction to ensure that sediment and other pollutants are removed. Currently there is no treatment of storm run-off from the plaza so the post-construction facilities will improve existing water quality.

In accordance with state and federal laws, stormwater detention basins will be constructed to control the rate of flow of stormwater so that there is no increase in the rate of flow of stormwater into water bodies or sewer systems. Currently the plaza drains into the Black River by two outlets and does not affect the city's storm system. The larger plaza footprint will require additional storm discharge to be accommodated by the plaza's system; however this will be accomplished by similar outlets as existing. MDOT will coordinate with the city of Port Huron and St. Clair County during the design phase to identify and design the appropriate stormwater detention facilities.

5.) Several commenters questioned, "What impact will changes in land use and construction have on the quantity and quality of stormwater that ends up in …. County and natural drains?" They also inquired as to "What Best Management Practices will be implemented to prevent degradation of stormwater quality?"

From a drainage perspective, changes in land use that increase the amount of paved area have the largest effect. Although the new plaza is in a mostly urban area, the new plaza and welcome center do increase the amount of paved area. As a result, the amount of stormwater run-off would increase. Best Management Practices consistent with MDOT's Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control Manual will be used throughout the project during both construction and after construction to ensure that sediment and other pollutants are removed. These will be specified during the final design phase consistent with the final design. As currently planned the total amount of paved area for the new plaza site would increase but the new site also has a higher percentage of unpaved, impervious area within it compared to the existing. Currently there is no treatment of storm run-off from the plaza so the post-construction facilities will improve the quality of run-off.

Early hydrologic analysis shows that the flow rates will increase for the local project drainage areas due to the increase in impervious area and this increased flow rate will increase the peak watershed flow rate for Stocks Creek, the only affected county drainage facility. The local increase will largely pass through the Black River structure prior to the peak watershed flow rate. While stormwater run-off volumes will increase, releases to natural water courses will be mitigated by the use of detention facilities. Releases will be dispersed over time so as to avoid raising the backwater elevation of the Black River.

6.) Two commenters questioned whether coordination with the St. Clair County Drain Commission and County Stormwater Coordinator has begun. They also asked if the Drain Commissioner's Procedures and Design Criteria for Stormwater Discharge and Development plans had been reviewed, and how cumulative effects to drains and watercourses would be mitigated.

Meetings have been held with county officials including the County Stormwater coordinator. MDOT will coordinate with the city of Port Huron and St. Clair County regarding the design of stormwater detention basins.

7.) Three commenters were concerned whether the proposed developments were consistent with existing county and city's existing stormwater, land use and infrastructure plans. They also asked what steps would be taken to ensure the county Stormwater Permit and City/County Stormwater Pollutions Prevention Initiatives are followed.

MDOT currently plans to treat and detain plaza and MDOT roadway run-off within MDOT ROW prior to out letting into the Black River. MDOT only proposes to use the City's stormwater system for drainage from improvements to local roads adjoining or intersecting the project.

Currently the storm run-off from the plaza is drained by separate MDOT controlled 42" and 48" storm sewers located southeast of the Black River and I-94\I-69, not by the city's storm sewer system. Similar drainage outlets are anticipated with the location and size to be determined in design. The amount of storm run-off entering the city's system will be reduced by expanding the plaza footprint and rerouting the corresponding run-off to new MDOT controlled outfalls.

MDOT will work coordinate with the city of Port Huron and St. Clair County regarding the design of stormwater detention basins.

8.) One commenter is concerned with delay in completing the city's Combined Sewer Overflow project by the December 21, 2016 mandate due to uncertainty of the plaza expansion.

MDOT will continue to coordinate with the city of Port Huron during the design phase regarding the plaza expansion and its effect, if any, on the Combined Sewer Overflow project.

9.) One commenter noted that MDOT is required to receive permission from the city of Port Huron to release new stormwater into the city's storm sewer system.

Any proposed storm sewer connection associated with local road improvements will be coordinated with the city of Port Huron during design. Connections to the city's storm sewer system are not anticipated for the plaza facilities or I-94/I-69 improvements.

10.) One commenter stated that the County, City and local Townships have participated in the development of the Northeastern Watersheds Management Plan and asked how the proposed project will meet the goals and objectives of the Management Plan in compliance with National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Phase II stormwater regulations.

MDOT will continue to work with local officials throughout the design process to ensure the project will be in compliance with local, regional and state regulations. Best Management Practices consistent with MDOT's Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control Manual will be used throughout the project during both construction and after construction to ensure that sediment and other pollutants are removed. There is no current treatment of storm run-off from the plaza so the post-construction facilities will improve existing water quality.

Potential hazardous material spills on the plaza are currently handled by an approximate 30,000 gallon tank under the plaza that storm run-off can be routed to in the event of a hazardous material spill during a rain event. A similar system will be developed in the final design for hazardous material retention. Detention facilities will be utilized to mitigate any increase in stormwater discharge.

11.) One commenter asked if there be sump pumps operated for potential high ground water levels and what would be the effects on adjacent properties.

During the design phase of the project geotechnical subsurface testing will be conducted in and around the area of the proposed plaza. If high groundwater levels are found, MDOT will use best management practices to design an appropriate plan to address the condition and work closely with local agencies to assess potential affects to adjacent properties, if any.

12.) Two commenters were concerned with proposed mitigation of the impacts and how wetland mitigation would affect water quality within the area.

MDOT plans to mitigate for the loss of wetlands from the project by constructing new wetlands north of the proposed new welcome center. One of the functions of wetlands and the corresponding results of wetland mitigation is to improve water quality through filtration and other means. Soil erosion and control methods appropriate to the final design of new wetlands will be used to protect water quality during the construction and establishment of the new wetlands. ***Chapter 5.10*** *summarizes mitigation proposed for wetland impacts.*

7.2.7 Economic

1.) A few commenters requested more information in regards to job creation for minority and low-income groups, due to the project.

Job creation associated with this project will benefit the entire Port Huron community including minority and low income households. There is opportunity for construction, transportation, logistics and warehousing jobs resulting from the investment in the expanded plaza. In fact, the Port Huron area already has several facilities associated with customs brokers and trucking firms that operate on the plaza. The state will fund the development of an economic development plan for the city of Port Huron and area surrounding the plaza. The purpose of this plan is to build upon existing strategic advantages, international trade opportunities, and the community's extensive transportation assets that can contribute to a stronger more vibrant economy for the future.

2.) Commenters asked what steps will MDOT take to ensure there will be no jobs lost as a result of each alternative under consideration.

All Practical Alternatives will have an impact on local employment as discussed in ***Section 3.4.5*** *of the* ***DEIS****. The only alternative that would not affect employment is the No-Build Alternative, which would not meet the purpose and need for the project and thereby compromise efforts to protect homeland security. MDOT cannot ensure that there would be no jobs lost as a result of the project, as some businesses that require relocation may opt to relocate out of the Study Area or simply close. In accordance with federal law, MDOT can not direct relocated homeowners or businesses on where to relocate. MDOT has been working with the community through a Project Enhancement and Mitigation (PEM) group. These discussions have included how to address project economic issues. Also see, comment 1, in Section 7.2.7 (above).*

3.) Commenters asked if there are there assurances that local contractors or workers will benefit from construction jobs. Will the project comply with Davis Bacon and prevailing wage (depressed area) standards?

MDOT and FHWA will seek the best possible value from their investments when tendering construction projects and like any other project, there is no guarantee that local firms would be selected and local

materials will be used. Local economic benefits from construction would depend on the availability of local materials and workers and the ability of local contractors to competitively complete the job. The project will comply with the Davis Bacon Act and associated prevailing wage requirements.

4.) One commenter was concerned about the impact of construction on the local market and it's affects on jobs and spending, both during and post construction.

*As described in **Section 3.4** of the **DEIS**, the investment of construction dollars for the project will result in the creation of new construction and plaza related jobs. When an investment is made in the construction of a new facility, the companies and individuals receiving payment for building the project will in turn spend the money they receive on other goods and services. Companies and individuals receiving benefits in terms of reduced travel time and accident costs would also invest portions of these savings in the local and state economies. Based on the estimated construction cost for the City West Alternative of $232 million, the Study Team estimates that 4,220 jobs will be created over a five-year construction period. Most of these jobs will be short-term construction related positions. Local job benefits from construction of the Recommended Alternative would depend in part on the availability of local materials and workers. MDOT seeks the best possible value from its investments when tendering construction projects and, like any other project, there is no guarantee local firms would be selected or local materials used.*

5.) A few commenters requested more information on potential project-specific job impacts including updated data and job loss mitigation actions. One commenter asked what steps MDOT will take ensuring that jobs in other areas of the city of Port Huron and St. Clair County will not be adversely affected as a result of the loss or relocation of jobs in the Study Area. Will there be a multiplier effect for job loss in the city and the county? If so, what will that multiplier effect be and how was it determined?

*MDOT cannot require displaced business to relocate in a specific location; however businesses are encouraged to remain in the area. Permanent job losses would only occur if relocated businesses chose to move out of the area or close down. No analysis was completed to determine a job loss multiplier effect. Indirect and cumulative impacts were discussed in **Section 3.7** of **DEIS**.*

As mitigation for the project the State of Michigan will fund the development of an economic development plan for St. Clair County to assist with the potential development of new businesses in the Port Huron area.

The purpose of the plan is to facilitate the development of an Economic Development Strategic Plan for the city of Port Huron and St. Clair County through the assistance of the Michigan Department of Transportation. This strategic plan would build upon existing strategic advantages, international trade opportunities, and the community's extensive transportation assets that can contribute to a stronger more vibrant economy for the future. With an Economic Development Strategic Plan in place St. Clair County and Port Huron will be better positioned to build on the competitiveness of this region creating a stronger and more prosperous economy by working to achieve common goals and action strategies. With

a plan in place, it is possible to interest various agencies in funding key project elements in an overall economic revitalization effort for the community, particularly with the a well documented community profile and trends and condition report and certainly recognizing that there are impacts to the city from the expansion of the bridge plaza, and this expansion will ultimately benefit the entire nation.

6.) Numerous Commenters voiced concerns and requested additional information in regards to the project's potential adverse impacts on the local economy including businesses on M-25 in Fort Gratiot Township and downtown Port Huron. There were requests for additional information on local economic data and current trends; the economic effects of the alternatives, economic analysis methods, and how the alternatives would benefit surrounding communities.

There are three basic impacts that a project of this type would have on the overall Port Huron area marketplace locations referred to in the comments. 1) Business or residential relocations as existing businesses or customers change locations, 2) Changes in access to businesses, and 3) The introduction of new traffic into the area that would increase the customer base for businesses. These issues are discussed in ***Section 3.4*** *of the* ***DEIS*** *and* ***Section 3.2*** *of this FEIS. The section covering "Existing Business and Economic Activity" in* ***Section 3.4.4*** *of the* ***DEIS*** *was at a level of detail that is comparable or higher to most EIS documents and meets the requirements of technical guidelines for environmental documents. The type of information requested is typically produced by regional planning agencies or retail organizations in the context of a much larger comprehensive planning initiative. Specific to the alternatives under study, the requested information would not add value to the assessment of the impacts associated with the project or to the associated mitigation efforts being proposed.*

For the City West and City East Alternatives, substantial impacts to the retail marketplace are highly localized in the vicinity of the project in terms of business and residential relocations and changes in access. These are discussed in ***Section 3.4*** *of the* ***DEIS****. From a regional standpoint the business and residential relocations and changes in road access are not substantial enough to have notable impacts on other areas of Port Huron or Fort Gratiot Township. This is not a project which creates a new interchange or closes an interchange, or changes access and traffic patterns in a way that would substantially affect business patterns outside of the immediate vicinity of the project. As a result, there would be limited value in the type of market study data requested in the comments.*

7.) A few commenters inquired about project costs the city of Port Huron would incur. Two commenters recommended a crossing toll increase benefiting the City; another

MDOT is still in the process of finalizing the proposed funding mix for the plaza expansion. Thus, at this time it is difficult to predict what amount of Act 51 local participation will be required for proposed plaza/corridor improvements within the city of Port Huron. MDOT is aware of the city's concerns and commits to minimizing the Act 51 impacts to the city to the greatest extent possible.

MDOT does not support the creation of an ad hoc program to simply provide payment in lieu of taxes to a community hosting a transportation facility. If MDOT provided payments in Port Huron, similar

payments would be expected in every community throughout the state which hosted a State Trunkline. MDOT believes the mitigation and enhancement measures developed for this project sufficiently address all of the direct and indirect impacts of this project.

The authorizing toll legislation requires that tolls be dedicated to the maintenance and operations of the bridge, plaza and connecting roadways. Individuals and businesses paying these tolls expect that generated revenue be managed by the state of Michigan to assure efficient operations and the infrastructure maintained in good operating condition. Any diversion of these funds for non-transportation uses would be in violation of the best interests of the entire State of Michigan

8.) A number of commenters voiced concerns over the tax effects on the community, and requested current and future county, personal, business and consumer tax revenue amounts be given with respect to distance from the project. Taxable value methodology and results were also questioned.

The Study Team has added a discussion of sales tax revenue to the economics section of this FEIS. Forecasting the sales tax effects over 20 plus years resulting from a project, isolated from population changes and local, state, national and global economic change would by necessity, be very subjective. Local communities seldom prepare forecasts of the type from which a detailed, quantitative analysis could be based. From a state-wide, county-wide or city-wide perspective, there is little to indicate the project would result in a substantial long-term change in sales tax revenue. The change in revenue expected would likely be less than the margin of error of any type of numeric analysis. As such, a detailed, quantitative analysis would not provide added value.

MDOT's standard procedure is to look at tax base impacts from a jurisdictional perspective rather than distances from the project as it would not provide a useful basis for comparison. It is more accurate to look at tax base impacts from the perspective of a percentage impact of tax base rather than current dollar amounts of revenue, as local jurisdictions can adjust the amount of revenue up or down based on millage changes or other tax rates. The true project impact is on the base that is taxable, not the revenue amount that may change from year to year due to a variety of factors.

The property tax base impacts are estimates based on current available data. Estimates of property tax base loss were based on St. Clair County provided tax data for affected parcels including all of those shaded on the alternative exhibits provided in the DEIS and FEIS. For each alternative, the affected parcels assessed and personal property values were placed in a table and the sum of the total taxable value to be acquired was calculated. These property lists and data were discussed with local officials; listing of current assessed values of individual properties within the DEIS is not needed to discuss the alternatives.

*As indicated in **Section 3.4** of the **DEIS**, MDOT does not engage in speculative assessment of the impacts of a transportation project on specific property values: "It is very difficult to isolate the effect of a transportation improvement on the value of particular parcels of land. A property, which may have lower value as a residential property, may also have a much greater value as a potential business site. It is also difficult to differentiate between the effects of the project and changes in values due to property*

improvements or changes in the local market. As a result, MDOT does not attempt to assess the changes in value for individual properties that do not need to be purchased for the project. MDOT does not directly compensate property owners for potential losses in property values due to their proximity to the project nor does MDOT charge property owners for any potential additional value created by the project.

9.) Several commenters were concerned with the tax loss that will be faced by the City due to loss of property tax on homes, and income and school taxes from those relocating out of the area. The city of Port Huron calculated that "the city's tax base would experience decreases in the 2% range" as opposed to the 1.4% local property tax impacts referenced in the DEIS. There were concerns with losses in water and sewer revenues and additional demands on emergency responders, and losses of school tax revenues. An estimate of pre and post-construction sales tax revenues was requested for Port Huron and Fort Gratiot, and some local agencies requested payment in lieu of taxes for tax revenue losses and anticipated additional emergency response needs.

The Study Team coordinated with city of Port Huron including the City's Assessor's office in preparing the estimates of property tax base loss by the city of Port Huron. The tax base losses have been updated due to the slight reduction in plaza size along with growth in property values and now represent 1.6 percent loss to the city of Port Huron property tax base and 0.4 percent to the Port Huron Township property tax base as shown in ***Table 3.2.1*** *in this FEIS. This is not total impacts to the City tax base. Other impacts are acknowledged although not specifically quantified in the document. The Study Team appreciates the input of the city of Port Huron in quantifying estimates of income tax loss and other potential losses and has added detail to this FEIS reflecting these impacts. It is important to recognize that all of these losses are worst case scenarios that assume the following:*

- *Any business property impacted at all by right-of-way will be acquired.*
- *All businesses and residents would choose not to relocate in the City and once relocated would not upgrade existing vacant or underutilized sites within the City.*
- *The additional fees paid for utilities by MDOT and other agencies for the new plaza would not offset utility losses.*

There will be substantial opportunity to reduce and mitigate these impacts as the project proceeds into design. Agreements may be worked out with property owners where only a small part of the property is needed, allowing some businesses and homes to remain. This may substantially reduce both the property tax and income tax impacts of the plaza and losses in revenue sharing.

MDOT currently pays the city of Port Huron for both utilities and emergency service provision for the plaza and anticipates paying a greater amount (to be negotiated) as part of the new, expanded plaza. These are not issues that require compensation by other means.

MDOT does not support the creation of an ad hoc program to simply provide payment in lieu of taxes to a community hosting a transportation facility. If MDOT provided payments in Port Huron, similar payments would be expected in every community throughout the state which hosted a State trunkline.

MDOT believes the mitigation and enhancement measures developed for this project sufficiently address all of the direct and indirect impacts of this project.

The authorizing toll legislation requires that tolls be dedicated to the maintenance and operations of the bridge, plaza and connecting roadways. Individuals and businesses paying these tolls expect that generated revenue be managed by the state of Michigan to assure efficient operations and the infrastructure maintained in good operating condition. Any diversion of these funds for non-transportation or Blue Water Bridge operational uses would be in violation of the best interests of the entire State of Michigan.

10.) One commenter expressed concerns about the figures stated for the number of Canadians and Michigan residents crossing the bridge for work and asked what methodology was used to obtain this data.

The 2000 U.S. Census data was used to obtain information regarding the number or cross-border workers. However, this data only provided U.S. residents who work in Canada. The Study Team also contacted known employers of cross-border workers in the Port Huron area (i.e. hospitals) to obtain this data.

7.2.8 Energy Issues

1.) Two commenters asked what kind of energy would be used at the completed plaza and what measures would be taken to maximize energy efficiency.

MDOT and the U.S. General Services Administration, will be responsible for much of the design of buildings on the new plaza as GSA will be leasing the space for the federal agencies. GSA requires all leases to be LEED Certified. Under the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007, plaza facilities must be constructed to meet or exceed specific energy use reduction targets. GSA will work with FHWA and MDOT to ensure these requirements are met during construction.

2.) A commenter expressed concern in regards to solar power interference and if nearby properties will be shaded as a result of the proposal?

All of the proposed plaza improvements for the Recommended Alternative are separated from existing development by roadway, so shadow effects of the proposed improvements are minimized. Security walls surrounding the plaza are also set back from the adjoining roadway. There will be some evening sunset shadow on the side yard or driveway sides of residences located on the east side of 10th Avenue between Elmwood and Church Streets. This occurs as a result of the east end of the plaza being elevated to enable 10th Avenue to remain open.

7.2.9 Farmland

1.) One commenter questioned how much prime and important farmland would be permanently rendered unavailable for agricultural activities as a result of this project?

*As discussed in **Section 3.17**. of the **DEIS**, no prime or unique farmland exists in the project area. There will be no impacts to prime and unique farmland from the project.*

7.2.10 Format of the DEIS

1.) One commenter was concerned with the format and appearance of the document.

The general format of this document attempted to make the DEIS reader friendly for the public. The white space (with the noted pictures or text) in the margins was used to better communicate key concepts to the reader. This format meets both the spirit and intention of NEPA in communicating and disclosing the environmental effect of the project.

7.2.11 General

1.) One Commenter voiced concern over the project justification of safety and security, and felt economy and shipping and distribution was the actual intention. The commenter also added the city council was present, listening and concerned.

Comment Acknowledged.

2.) A few commenters concluded that "A supplemental DEIS is needed to address the shortcomings of the present DEIS and to assure that there is full disclosure/adequate opportunity for public comment at this stage in the process. It is not acceptable for our concerns to be addressed only in the Final Environmental Impact Statement".

The comments received from stakeholders are addressed in this FEIS. This is standard procedure for environmental documents and is the purpose of having both a DEIS (Draft) and FEIS (Final) as part of the process. Further comments on this FEIS mitigation are then addressed in a Record of Decision (ROD). FHWA has determined there is no need for a revised or supplemental DEIS.

3.) The supervisor of the Charter Township of Fort Gratiot referenced the "DLZ report as a part of" the township's concerns. This report was prepared by a consultant retained to assess the DEIS and it asked a great number of questions on many subjects as reflected throughout this comments sections, including but not limited to traffic. The Marysville City Council expressed general comments regarding the process and the number of concerns regarding the project. The city council asked "that all issues be resolved before that construction occurs".

Questions raised in the referenced document prepared by DLZ were distributed and were used by local stakeholders in many correspondences. These questions are responded to throughout this section by subject matter.

4.) A couple commenters asked if the project will increase recreational opportunities, including public access to lakes and rivers, and additional parks as relates to the regional objectives of the Northeastern Watersheds Management Plan and protecting water resources from degradation. One concern was additional education initiatives for the public.

MDOT believes that proposed corridor improvements will improve local access to the Black River by reducing congestion along I-69/I-94. In addition, a non-motorized path will be added to the new Black River Bridge which will provide pedestrian connectivity across the Black River and to Township Park No. 1 located along Water Street. An improved border crossing will also improve access to lakes, rivers, and state/provincial park related recreation opportunities on either side of the border.

No access is planned to the mitigated wetlands from the Michigan Welcome Center. This is in order to give the mitigated wetlands the highest opportunity to develop into and function as high quality wetlands. No additional public access is proposed, therefore no walkways or signage is proposed.

5.) A commenter asked what plans are in place for the snow removal from the corridor and plaza.

Snow removal along the I-69/I-94 corridor will be plowed using standard snow plowing procedures as it is today. Snow on the plaza is stockpiled and then trucked offsite to various MDOT own vacant lots. This reflects existing snow removal practices.

6.) Bay Mills Indian Community has proposed a casino development near the Blue Water Bridge plaza. We are concerned that the DEIS may not take into account this development, especially with regard to new local road infrastructure surrounding the plaza.

The traffic analysis conducted as part of the Blue Water Bridge DEIS can only account for development adequately committed to be shown in the Regional Long Range Transportation Plan and Model. The Study Team has designed the plaza alternatives and the local road network to accommodate uncertainties in future growth such as a new casino. The proposed roadway network has greater capacity than existing, especially the relocated Pine Grove Avenue which is expanded to 3-lanes in each direction from the existing roadway cross-section which has only 2-lanes in each direction. Should a casino be developed in Port Huron, it would likely result in higher traffic flows during evenings and weekends. The higher evening and weekend traffic associated with casinos would not have as much effect on the typical morning and afternoon peak hour traffic flows from workers traveling between home and work.

7.2.12 Hazardous Materials

1.) Three commenters were concerned as to how environmental spills will be contained and public drinking water protected from such spills.

Currently there is an approximate 30,000 gallon tank under the existing plaza that run-off can be routed to in case a hazardous material spill occurs. A similar system will be developed for the new plaza in the final design for hazardous material retention.

2.) A few commenters questioned how local response agencies will alert the public to spills or the release of airborne hazardous substances and if fire suppression and other containment facilities would be utilized to avoid the entry of contaminants into air, sewer, and river systems.

The protection of the population from threats related to hazardous materials is an important function of the border inspection plaza. The proposed new plaza will have numerous facilities to help detect and contain hazardous materials including storage tank facilities mentioned in the previous question. The notification measures which are currently in place for Federal Agencies and MDOT personnel to alert local emergency responders and officials will continue to be used in the event of spills or the release of hazardous substances. Any threat to surrounding neighborhoods will continue to be handled by local responders. Interagency safety and security meetings occur regularly and will be ongoing to ensure continued communication and cooperation regarding potential threats and emergency response and containment.

7.2.13 Health and Safety

1.) Several commenters expressed concern regarding ground water wells and recharge areas and the impacts to the quality of groundwater in the Study Area during and after construction.

*As discussed in **Section 3.11** of the **DEIS**, the Study Area does not contain any Sole Source Aquifers of Critical Aquifer Protection Areas as defined by the EPA under the authority of the Safe Drinking Water Act. No impact to groundwater resources are anticipated as a result of the Recommended Alternative.*

2.) Three commenters were concerned with the facility plans for livestock inspection and quarantine and for the disposal of animal waste.

No offloading inspection of livestock is proposed on the new plaza. There will be an elevated platform from which inspectors can view livestock on trucks, but offloading or quarantine of animals will continue to take place at the existing Wadhams Road facility.

3.) Several commenters expressed concern regarding routes for emergency response vehicles and law enforcement. "Sufficient ingress/egress must be provided in the

construction zone for emergency routes for law enforcement, fire and EMS." One commenter asked, "Once completed, what are the expected routes for these agencies both within and through the project footprint? How will these changes impact response times, both during construction, and upon completion of the project?" There was particular concern with regard the potential EMS traffic delay on the new Pine Grove Avenue to areas north of the plaza.

As a part of MDOT's maintenance of traffic planning efforts all efforts will be taken to minimize impacts to critical north-south routes and emergency service access, to the greatest extent possible. MDOT will follow ASHTO maintenance of traffic standards to ensure that emergency routes for law enforcement, fire and other emergency services will be easily accessible. Maintenance of traffic is discussed in more detail in ***Chapter 3.17 Construction Impact****s of this FEIS.*

MDOT will coordinate with emergency service providers prior to the beginning of construction and at the beginning of new phases of construction. Communication will be maintained throughout construction. Adjustments to emergency response plans will be developed based on project activity. The effects of response times were presented in ***Table 3.5.2*** *in* ***Section 3.5*** *of the* ***DEIS****. The Recommended Alternative would have little effect on the response times for fire and police, depending on the service provider.*

4.) Three commenters inquired if financial assistance would be available for a trauma center, and if new specialized response equipment would be necessary, and if so if funding assistance would be available.

No funds are proposed to construct a Trauma Center. It is not anticipated that emergency services will need to increase as a result of the new plaza. The Recommended Alternative will improve safety and security around the plaza and within the Study Area by improving local roadways and traffic flow on the plaza. None of the alternatives will require the relocation of any hospitals, fire, police or other emergency service facilities. The Recommended Alternative would have little or no effect on emergency service response times to and from the plaza. Emergency service along I-94/I-69 would be improved with better separation of local and plaza traffic.

5.) Three commenters asked if a clinical quarantine/isolation facility would be available on the plaza for persons suspected of being infected with communicable diseases. One expressed that such a facility should be equipped for emergency triage.

In the event of a person suspected of being infected with a communicable disease arriving on the plaza, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the County Health Department would be contacted, and if necessary a medical person would then be sent to make a determination on the need for and location of an isolation location. Dependent upon the individual's stability at the time of contact, Emergency Medical Services (911) may be called. A clinical quarantine/isolation facility is not proposed for the new plaza.

6.) A few commenters questioned whether communication and intelligence sharing between Plaza agencies and local law enforcement agencies was adequate to provide safety and security to the plaza and welcome center. "What plans are in place and what accommodations will be made to foster interagency safety and security cooperation?" One asked if there would be a 24/7, manned phone number for local law enforcement to contact during construction.

MDOT will coordinate with local officials regarding the continued use of an 800 MHz communication system and accessibility/use of future intelligent transportation systems (ITS) technology being implemented along the corridor and the plaza. Interagency communication and intelligence meetings occur regularly with federal, local, state, county, and international law enforcement agencies and will be ongoing to ensure continued communication and cooperation in this area.

7.2.14 Historical Properties

1.) Several commenters expressed concerns regarding potentially historical or culturally significant structures or sites that may be within the proposed project footprint. They inquired as to how these sites would be preserved.

*As noted in detail in **Section 4.4** of the **DEIS**, the E.C. Williams House is the only impacted building determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The Recommended Alternative will require the full acquisition of the property and relocation of the E.C. Williams House. Therefore, MDOT has proposed relocating the house from its historic location as a way to preserve the structure. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has concurred with this proposal as the best course of action. As additional mitigation measure additional research will be performed to document the house's history.*

The Study Team conducted an archaeological records check and field reconnaissance for the Study Area to assist with the identification of potential archaeological sites. In addition, deep testing was conducted on both sides of the Black River to test for cultural deposits that may be buried in the ground beyond the limits of normal testing. No evidence of prehistoric occupation or potential historic artifacts was found. The Study Team coordinated with the State Historic Preservation Office throughout the archaeological assessment.

7.2.15 Improvement to Local Roads

1.) A few commenters expressed concerns that current plans for future community development and the local transportation network were not "sufficient to address the future traffic increases."

*As discussed in **Chapter 2** of this FEIS, the Study Team completed a detailed analysis of traffic levels, traffic forecasts, and transportation needs on the local network surrounding the existing and future plaza. The purpose and need for this project is not address the local road capacity issues See **Section 1.0** for additional information on the purpose and need.*

2.) A group of commenters believed that the expansion of Wadhams Road should be in place prior to the construction of the new Wadhams Bridge and that the Keewahdin Road (M-136) Temporary Business Loop should be improved and made permanent prior to the Plaza/Corridor construction. Two commenters requested for "MDOT to officially recognize the M-25 alternate route and work with the local road agency to contribute the resources necessary for long-term maintenance of this alternate route." The synchronization of signals and expansion and safety improvements on M-25, north of the plaza were also requested.

The proposed Wadhams Road expansion and The Keewahdin Road Temporary Business Loop are not part of this project and are not a directly or indirectly impacted by this study. MDOT has coordinated efforts with the St. Clair County Road Commission to ensure the construction of the Wadhams Road Bridge is completed prior to undertaking construction of the I-94/I-69 corridor and Blue Water Bridge Plaza. It is MDOT and the Road Commission's goal to not have more than one river crossing closed at any time. MDOT plans to formally designate a bypass that would connect Wadhams Road with Keewahdin and M-25.

MDOT completed a traffic signal optimization report in February 2006. MDOT implemented several signal retimings as a result of that report. MDOT commits to completing a similar study once the project has been constructed to determine if necessary signal timing changes need to be made along M-25.

3.) Two commenters were concerned with the development and implementation of an access management plan along M-25.

An access management plan has already been developed for the M-25 corridor. MDOT will coordinate with the city during the design phase to assure any new access along relocated Pine Grove Avenue is consistent with the plan. MDOT is also committed to working with local partners to strengthen the provisions of this plan, if needed.

4.) A number of commenters expressed concerns regarding the proposed roundabout, along Pine Grove Avenue.

The roundabout shown in the DEIS along Pine Grove Avenue is no longer proposed. A boulevard type roadway is now proposed for Pine Grove Avenue which will allow for a Michigan left turn for vehicles to heading to the plaza from southbound Pine Grove Avenue.

7.2.16 Justification for Plaza

1.) A few commenters concluded that the DEIS does not provide "vital details" and justification for a new bridge plaza, specifically with regard to the need to "enhance border security.

*Additional details and justification have been added to **Chapter 1 Why are improvements needed?** of this FEIS. Specifically, **Section 1.6** has been added to provide further information.*

2.) While supporting the need to "enhance security and accommodate new security-related technologies" several commenters concluded that the DEIS did not provide enough information about how the projected traffic volumes related to the proposed plaza size. In particular, their concern was based upon comparison to traffic volumes for the proposed Peace Bridge Plaza.

The new plaza has been designed to accommodate forecasted traffic volumes and enhanced security at the border. The traffic forecast plays a part in the plaza configuration and size, but is only one part of what determines the plaza size.

There were multiple reviews of plaza layouts by CBP, MDOT, GSA and other plaza users, following the release of the DEIS. The plaza size had been reduced from earlier versions and is now considered to be at a minimum size necessary, not to accommodate traffic flows, but rather to accommodate the security needs of CBP while enabling more efficient and safe traffic flows. This will result in overall reduced congestion and user wait times on the plaza. Additional information related to the plaza size is included in ***Chapter 1.2*** *and* ***2.3*** *in this FEIS.*

3.) Several commenters believed that "the DEIS does not provide adequate justification to support the 65 acre physical layout/size of the Preferred Alternative." They were also concerned that "the plaza may not be laid out in the most efficient possible manner."

There were multiple reviews of plaza layouts by CBP, MDOT, GSA, and other plaza users following the release of the DEIS. The plaza size has been reduced from 65 acres to 56 acres and is now considered to be at a minimum size necessary. A detailed discussion of these plaza changes can be found in ***Chapter 1.5*** *and* ***Chapter 2.2 in this FEIS****. The layout of the plaza has been determined with significant input from CBP and GSA and represents the best possible layout for the purpose of complying with the National Environmental Policy Act and is not intended to be the final design layout for the plaza.*

There are many not so obvious requirements that affect the layout of the plaza and its corresponding size. These are discussed in the two comments above.
The proposed size of the plaza has been through numerous reviews by CBP, GSA, FHWA, and MDOT and represents a size that has been meets the requirements of CBP for completing their mission at the border while minimizing impacts to the local community.

7.2.17 Land Use Issues

1.) Several commenters questioned if the proposed plan was consistent with local land-use and zoning plans and asked for coordination with local agencies. Some felt inconsistencies with local plans warranted efforts to reduce the new plaza "footprint to approximately 40 acres like the proposed new Peace Bridge Plaza."

As noted in ***Section 3.1.3*** *of the* ***DEIS****, none of the proposed alternatives, including the Recommended Alternative are accounted for within existing land use plans or ordinances. The city will need to re-*

*evaluate the appropriate zoning and its plans for future land use based on the changes brought about by the enlarged plaza and roadway improvements. As outlined in **Appendix C** of this FEIS, MDOT has committed to fund any necessary update to the Master Plan and zoning ordinance resulting from the plaza expansion.*

As discussed for the previous question CBP has reexamined the plaza needs and determined the proposed plaza size could be reduced from 65 acres to 56 acres.

2.) One commenter inquired if there were any public lands within the project's footprint and how any impacts to the public lands would be mitigated.

*There are three publically-owned pieces of land within the Study Area as described in detail in **Chapter 4** of the **DEIS** and illustrated in Figure E.21 of the appendices. Of these, the only property of these directly affected by the project is Port Huron Township Park No. 1, which would be affected by reconstruction of the I-94/I-69 mainline and the new Black River Bridge. As noted in **Chapter 4** of the **DEIS**, this would be a de minimis impact (meaning that this minor impact would have no adverse effect on the function of that park resource). A narrow strip of park property (approximately 0.3 acres) bordering on the north side of the Water Street interstate off-ramp would be needed for new highway right-of-way. Temporary right-of-way needed would be approximately 0.1 acre at the entrance to the park for driveway grading and connecting to the new Water Street roadway. A potential 1.2 acres may be needed for a stormwater detention easement near the Black River.*

*The Charter Township of Port Huron's letter in **Appendix D** of the **DEIS** dated April 10, 2007 has concurred with MDOT that the impacts would be very minor and not create a temporary or permanent adverse change to the park. The township's Parks and Recreation commission has indicated that they would be interested in mitigation that would include returning excess property to the park and landscaping the potential drainage easement so that it is an aesthetically pleasing natural area.*

3.) A group of commenters asked that following construction, "excess land" be given to the city for redevelopment.

Excess land (if any) will be inventoried and sold at fair market value after construction has been completed, per normal MDOT policy. MDOT is legally required to sell excess land at fair market value.

4.) Three commenters were concerned with the incorporation of the development into existing community plans, ordinances and zoning and the expected expense for each community.

A similar comment question was previously asked; please see the response in Section 7.2.17, comment 1.

7.2.18 Mitigation Efforts

1.) Several commenters believe an "unprecedented mitigation effort" is necessary to address the social and economic impacts that will be caused by the Preferred Alternative. They believe MDOT should consider "creative and unique" mitigation efforts including those that make use of non-traditional funding sources. NEPA regulations regarding mitigation were referenced, including 40 CFR 8 1500.1(b), 40 CFR 1500.2(f); 40 CFR 1508.20 and 23 CFR 771.105(d).

In response to community concerns received from the release of the DEIS, the Study Team initiated a Project Enhancement and Mitigation (PEM) group comprised of representatives from the city of Port Huron, St. Clair County, Port Huron Township, federal and state elected officials, GSA, FHWA, and MDOT. This group met monthly from February thru November 2008 to work through issues raised by the local community regarding the proposed plaza and corridor improvements. A summary of the group activities and outcomes can be found in ***Appendix C*** *of this FEIS. MDOT and FHWA are very cognizant of the NEPA guidelines and implementing regulations and follow them closely along with other applicable state and federal laws including Act 51.*

The project is not truly unprecedented in magnitude within Michigan as was commented. There have in fact been numerous urban highway projects and airport expansions that have resulted in a higher number of community impacts and relocations. However, as the comment accurately points out, the plaza project will benefit millions of citizens while its negative impacts will mostly result within the city of Port Huron and St. Clair County. The project will also improve access to downtown Port Huron and only slightly modify access to commercial centers north of Port Huron.

The Study Team appreciates the city of Port Huron's and other stakeholder's interest in creative mitigation and the research they have done. The Study Team acknowledges that there are strong opportunities to be creative in mitigation efforts for the project. For additional information, see PEM in ***Appendix C*** *and the Green Sheet in* ***Chapter 5.***

2.) One commenter concluded that the Mitigation chapter of the DEIS was too general and "did not offer specific mitigation actions for specific impacts."

Project specific mitigation has been developed as a part of this FEIS process for the Recommended Alternative. Additional mitigation details are included within this FEIS mitigation "green sheet," found in ***Section 5.0*** *of this FEIS. Many of the design specifics such as aesthetic treatments detailed lighting standards, etc. are dependent on the engineering and architectural detail of the facilities design. These will be detailed with further public input in the subsequent design phase.*

MDOT will fund the development of an Aesthetic Design Guide which will describe and illustrate design intent, specific aesthetic design features and enough design detail to demonstrate the aesthetic commitments to be carried forward during the final design and construction phases of the project. MDOT and GSA commit to work with the local Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) community advisory

committee to develop a plaza design which reflects the regions heritage and identity. This process will be carried forward into the design and construction phases of the project.

Mitigation and enhancement activities contained within the Final EIS and Record of Decision is a binding commitment that MDOT must follow during the implementation phases of this project.

7.2.19 Noise

1.) One commenter asked how construction noise would be minimized during construction.

Section 5.6 *of the* ***DEIS*** *documents MDOT's best practices for minimizing noise impacts during construction. Construction activities will be limited to dawn to dusk, unless the city/township requests changes to this policy to allow construction to proceed more quickly.*

2.) Three commenters were concerned about the additional noise of idling and accelerating trucks at the expanded plaza and whether this was incorporated into the noise analysis.

Trucks are not permitted to idle on the plaza when not in line at the primary inspection booths. Once in the secondary plaza area, trucks are required to turn their engines off due to security concerns. Backups on the plaza are anticipated to be reduced substantially with the new plaza, and as a result, the idle of trucks waiting to enter the primary booths will be reduced. The speed limit on the plaza and the bridge over the St. Clair River is quite low and acceleration is kept to a minimum due to the slower speeds.

3.) Two Commenters believed that Riverside and Hancock Street and 10th Avenue should be included as noise receptors in the noise analysis.

These residences were included in the noise analysis and were represented by Receivers 151, 63, 67, 129, 155, 156, 157, 158 96, 97 106, 107, 172 and 174 as shown on ***Figures E.24*** *and* ***E.25****, pages* ***E-33*** *through* ***E-36*** *in* ***Appendix E*** *of the* ***DEIS****.*

4.) Two commenters questioned the prediction of lower noise levels at noise receptor locations 73, 75, 106, 107, 172 and 174 which will experience greater traffic volumes.

The Recommended Alternative will increase noise levels at all six of these noise receptor locations 1 to 5 dBA as shown in ***Appendix E, Pages E-35*** *and* ***E-36*** *of the* ***DEIS****.*

5.) What are the future predicted noise levels at noise receptor location 152 and will this land use be compatible with future noise levels?

Whether the future land is acquired by MDOT as part of the project or not, future noise levels at this location will be very similar to the projected levels for Receivers 150 and 151 as shown on ***Figures E.24***

*and **E.25**, **Pages E-33** through **E-36** in **Appendix E** of the **DEIS**. A portion of the land would be exposed to noise levels above the NAC and other areas would be below the NAC.*

6.) One commenter was concerned whether baseline measures for noise have been established in the Study Area and if these measures fall within the acceptable ranges of the City and Township ordinances.

*Baseline existing noise levels throughout the corridor are presented in **Pages E-34** through **E-36** of the **DEIS, Appendix E.***

7.) One commenter was concerned with local land uses and how MDOT will involve those entities affected by noise issues in context solutions development.

In the Recommended Alternative commercial and residential properties that abut the plaza will in most cases experience an increase of a few decibels. Any future public meetings will be advertised to the public locally and posted on MDOT's website; local government officials are also asked to participate on behalf of all residents.

8.) One commenter questioned "what steps will be taken during construction to minimize the impacts of noise on surrounding land uses, residents, and businesses?"

Construction noise will be minimized by measures such as requiring that construction equipment have mufflers, that portable compressors meet federal noise-level standards for that equipment, and that all portable equipment be placed away from or shielded from sensitive noise receptors if at all possible.

Construction activities will be limited to dawn to dusk and all noise ordinances will be followed unless the City/Township requests changes to this policy to allow construction to proceed more quickly. MDOT will work with the city of Port Huron and with Port Huron Township if a permit is required to work outside of construction hours. In areas where construction vibration is anticipated, basement surveys will be conducted before construction begins to document any damage caused by highway construction. Identification of properties to be offered basement surveys will be determined during the design phase.

9.) General commenters inquired as to site specific noise impacts. One asked if post construction noise would be monitored and action taken if exceeding standards?

*MDOT does not recommend the installation of noise barriers for the Recommended Alternative. Although the DEIS stated a noise wall would be constructed, after further analysis, the noise wall does not meet warrants based on state noise policy. If final design results in substantial changes in roadway design from modeled conditions, noise abatement measures will be reviewed. During the design phase the feasibility and reasonableness of the noise barriers are reviewed in greater detail. **Section 3.4** of this **FEIS** discusses the updated noise analysis and results.*

10.) One commenter inquired, "When practical, where and how will berms and natural sound barriers (trees) be applied to mitigate noise pollution?"

Berms and trees will not be utilized around the plaza as there is not enough ROW to create effective sound barriers. Trees adjacent to plaza security walls/fences are not permitted. Berms are being proposed around the welcome center to help buffer the adjacent properties. Trees as inquired about by the commenter provide no noticeable reduction in noise levels; however, landscaping will be considered as a part of the context solutions for design.

7.2.20 Other Environmental Concerns

1.) Two commenters were concerned with the potential hazards caused by increased impervious surfaces on wildlife habitat.

Most of the Study Area is highly urbanized and developed. Most of the habitat that would be affected by an increase in impervious (paved) surfaces consists of yards of homes and the edges of fields. The proposed Welcome center site occupies a former farm field already designated for residential development. The proposed project affects habitat areas that have low native plan diversity.

No designated or unique habitat areas would be affected by the project. The project would involve a loss of 4.36 acres of wetland habitat as discussed in ***Chapter 3.12*** *of this* ***FEIS****. The project will also affect stream related habitat at the crossings of the Black River and Stock's Creek as discussed in* ***Chapter 3.10*** *of this FEIS. Impacts to wetland and stream habitats will be minimized through the design phase and mitigated by construction of replacement wetlands and use of best management practices to address stream impacts.* ***Chapter 5*** *of this FEIS summarizes the mitigation measures proposed for the project. No significant impacts to wildlife habitat are expected from the project.*

2.) Three commenters inquired if Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards will be incorporated into the construction of the proposed facilities.

A similar question was previously asked; please see the response in Section 7.1, comment 2.

3.) Has any part of the site been classified as an "environmentally sensitive" area'?

No part of the Study Area has been classified as an environmentally sensitive area.

4.) One commenter asked what portions of the project were in a designated DEQ/NOAA/EPA Coastal Zone and asked what steps will be taken to mitigate the impact of pier work in the river or coastal zone impacts.

The Coastal Zone within the project area is associated with the St. Clair River and the Black River. The portion of the project located within the Coastal Zone is the area between Water Street and the east side of the Black River. The Coastal Zone adjacent to the St. Clair River extends to 10th Avenue and thus is not

within the project limits. As stated in the DEIS, the replacement of the Black River Bridge will occur within the limits of the Coastal Zone. The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) indicated that the project is consistent with the Michigan Coastal Management Program.

5.) One commenter inquired how invasive plants species will be deterred and if native plants will be incorporated into the landscaping of the project.

Monitoring for invasive plants is performed at the same time the mitigation area is monitored for success. During each site visit sampling quadrants are used to determine the percent cover of each species within the quadrant. Sampling quadrants are placed randomly and intended to give a fair and random representation of the mitigation site. If the percent cover of invasive plants exceed permitted percent cover values then they are required to be treated or the mitigation area is not considered to be meeting requirements. As part of the wetland mitigation permit process, MDOT will be required to monitor the new wetland site for up to five years to ensure success.

6.) A few commenters expressed concerns regarding the DEIS recommendation for further study of the Recognized Environmental Conditions. They concluded that the DEIS should "be conclusive in its findings." There were also questions as to whether buried heating oil tanks may remain in the area and how they would be handled if identified.

MDOT performs more detailed environmental analysis as deemed appropriated during the real estate appraisal or acquisition processes. The intent of the Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) performed as a part of the NEPA process is only to identify potential environmental conditions that may be of significance to warrant a more detailed analysis prior to alternative selection. A detailed study is only required during the NEPA process if the preliminary Phase I ESA identifies potentially contaminated sites that are of enough concern that they could have clean-up costs that would change the selection of an alternative. The Study Team identified no such serious sites of concern for this project. MDOT will follow all applicable state and federal laws for the remediation of contaminated materials/soils.

7.) One commenter inquired "In what ways would each alternative under consideration encourage or facilitate economic effects that could result in other activities that could significantly affect the environment?

The comment refers to the potential indirect environmental impacts of the project. Indirect impacts of the project are discussed in ***Section 3.7*** *of the* ***DEIS*** *and* ***Section 3.2*** *of this FEIS.*

8.) A few commenters expressed concern that security lighting and general lighting from the expanded plaza will "spillover into surrounding properties." How will this "light pollution" be minimized?

MDOT, CBP and GSA will develop detailed lighting plans for the plaza and corridor lighting elements during the design phase. All efforts will be taken to minimize light pollution on adjacent neighborhoods

and businesses. For the Recommended Alternative, the plaza lighting will utilize directional or cut-off luminaries on the plaza perimeter designed to minimize light spillage beyond the security wall surrounding the plaza.

7.2.21 Pedestrian and Non-Motorized Access

1.) Two commenters were concerned about the impact to "minority and low-income residents in the Study Area who rely on walking to school, work, or for recreation."

*As discussed in greater detail in **Section 3.3.4** of the **DEIS**, the blocks containing residences affected by the Recommended Alternative and the City East Alternative generally have lower percentages of minority or low-income population than the city as a whole. Nonetheless, under the Recommended Alternative, there may be individual impacts to persons that rely on walking to school, work, or for recreation.*

One of the benefits of the Recommended Alternative (City West) compared to the City East Alternative for such persons is that the local street system would have two north-south roadways for pedestrian and motorized circulation (Pine Grove Avenue and 10th Avenue) as opposed to just one. However, Pine Grove Avenue would be realigned, which could result in longer walk distances for certain trips. One of the objectives of the design of the reconfigured roadways will be to provide landscaping and amenities that provide a safer and more pedestrian-friendly environment.

Based on comments received on the DEIS, a non-motorized path will be added to the south side of the Black River Bridge to provide pedestrian access across the Black River. This pathway will connect to the new sidewalks along relocated Pine Grove Avenue and to new sidewalks along Water Street.

*An Environmental Justice analysis was performed using a set of guidelines provided by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and in consultation with MDOT officials responsible for Environmental Justice issues. Potential Environmental Justice effects are defined as the unavoidable negative effects of the project that would be mostly experienced by minority and low-income populations or are higher than the negative effects that would be suffered by non-minority and/or non-low-income populations. The analysis has determined that there are no disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental impacts on minorities and/or low-income populations by the No-Build or the Recommended Alternative. For further explanation, see **Section 3.6** of this FEIS .*

2.) A couple of commenters expressed concerns regarding the need for accessibility for pedestrians and bicyclists within the project area and whether bicycle access would be accounted for at the potential roundabout on Pine Grove Avenue. Commenters also believed it is necessary to have a non-motorized route over the Black River.

In conjunction with the city of Port Huron's plans for providing non-motorized routes, this project adds shared use of 10 foot sidewalks along the realigned Pine Grove Avenue.

A non-motorized path is proposed crossing over the Black River Bridge and has been added to the south side of the proposed structure.

The roundabout shown for Pine Grove Avenue as part of the DEIS has been removed. Pine Grove Avenue in this location will be built as a boulevard section with a wide median to provide traffic with a left turn to access the new plaza entrance ramp.

3.) One commenter inquired what design issues would be considered for the visually impaired pedestrian at the proposed Pine Grove Avenue roundabout.

As discussed for the comment above, the roundabout shown for Pine Grove Avenue as part of the DEIS has been removed.

4.) One commenter expressed concern regarding maintaining "pedestrian and other non-motorized access through the construction site during the construction period," asking how routes would be determined and designated.

All reconstructed and new city streets will have full pedestrian amenities provided. MDOT will consider pedestrian access throughout the Study Area during the construction process and arrangements will be made to ensure safe pedestrian travel.

5.) Two commenters believed it is necessary to have a non-motorized route over the Black River.

A non-motorized path is proposed crossing over the Black River Bridge and has been added to the south side of the proposed structure.

7.2.22 Project Design

1.) One commenter asked "when and how will MDOT discuss the current design capacity?"

*The existing and proposed plaza capacity is discussed in **Chapter 1.6** of this FEIS, discussing the delay at the primary inspection booths.*

*Roadway design criteria are addressed in **Section 2.2** and **3.4** of the **DEIS**. The Study Team identified key engineering and facilities design criteria based on reasonable engineering standards and information on facilities and security provided by CBP and GSA All plaza design elements adhere to CBP's Port of Entry Design Guide. Design criteria contain fundamental roadway and bridge design elements adhering to MDOT design guidelines.*

2.) One commenter was concerned with the plaza and roadway design and enhancing local access to the area from the plaza and I-94/I-69.

The Recommended Alternative will enhance traffic flow in an efficient and safe manor. In the eastbound direction to Canada local movements will be separated from Canada bound freeway traffic at the Water Street interchange providing 6-lanes eastbound compared to the existing 2-lanes. In addition there will be 8-toll booths compared to the existing 5-toll booths. In the westbound direction into the U.S there will be 20 Primary Inspection Lanes compared to the existing 13 PILS. The Relocated Pine Grove Avenue will provide direct access to and from the plaza for all movements. This access at Pine Grove Avenue, along with a more efficient border crossing, will improve the ability of travelers to visit the local area.

7.2.23 Project Funding

1.) A few commenters wanted assurances that the city of Port Huron will not be required to pay any portion of the costs of the project.

Due to state law, this is not a commitment that MDOT can make in the DEIS or FEIS. MDOT commits to working with the city of Port Huron regarding any Act 51 cost responsibilities they would have for the project. The State Trunkline System is one of the jurisdictional road systems authorized by Act 51. Designated by the State Transportation Commission, the State Trunkline System consists of roads, streets, and highways found both inside and outside the limits of incorporated cities and villages. It assigns to the Michigan Department of Transportation the direction, supervision, control, and cost of maintenance, construction, and improvements to State Trunkline highways. Incorporated cities of over 25,000 people are required to make a financial contribution, according to population, for improvements to State Trunkline highways within their jurisdiction, and for connections between city streets and the State Trunkline system. Under Act 51, the city of Port Huron would be required to provide 8.75% of the state required match for any trunkline improvements. See ***Section 5.29*** *in this FEIS for more information.*

2.) One commenter asked what was the source of the $150 million of "private" funding for the project designated in the Regional Transportation Plan, and expressed concern that there was no budget for maintenance of traffic costs.

Funding for the project will come from a mix of funding sources including federal aid earmarks, and bonding against future plaza related revenue sources. Revenue sources from plaza operations include future toll revenue and lease payments made by the General Services Administration and the Duty Free operations. Revenue from plaza operations has been coded as private. In this case that means that not all the funding is coming from state and federal transportation sources.

The cost estimates include approximately $11 million for maintenance of traffic activities during construction.

7.2.24 Public Involvement and Coordination

1.) Two commenters believed the public was not involved or adequately represented in the early stages of the alternatives development process. They were concerned that members of the public were not part of the Advisory Committee.

The early alternative development process (Illustrative Alternatives) consisted of two phases. In the first phase, a wide variety of concepts and ideas for the plaza improvements were explored. Some of these concepts were fully developed into alternative plans. Others were discarded once it became apparent they would not meet the purpose and need for the project. There were three public meetings during the early alternative development phase of the project and a total of 6 public meetings and three public workshops held prior to the release of the DEIS. See ***Chapter 6*** *of this FEIS for additional details on public coordination.*

The Advisory Committee provided expertise and input regarding pertinent issues related to the Blue Water Bridge Plaza Study. The Advisory Committee consisted of a core group of stakeholders representing plaza inspection agencies, local and state officials, Canadian officials, private firms, local agencies and key representatives from the local community. The general public was represented through their elected local officials and various local agencies who participated in the advisory committee. MDOT ensured that the concerns of residents were represented in the Advisory Committee by inviting local official and local agencies to be active members of the Advisory Committee. The general public had opportunities to become involved through public meetings and public hearings. For a summary of public involvement opportunities, ***see Chapter 6****, of this FEIS.*

2.) Two commenters inquired whether there would be a central office or person assigned to the receiving of and responding to concerns filed by residents and visitors during construction, when they would be available, and whether there would be someone available to appeal a decision made on a complaint.

Mitigation and enhancement activities contained within this FEIS and Record of Decision is a binding commitment MDOT must follow during the implementation phases of this project. The local office responsible for construction oversight, schedule questions, and project complaints will likely be the Port Huron Transportation Service Center. A final decision on who the primary contacts will consist of will be made after the design phase. The Port Huron Transportation Service Center is open 5 days a week during regular business hours.

3.) One commenter stated, "We need our federal and state legislators to publicly voice their opinions on these projects, including draft, design, and submit public comments."

Federal and State legislators have been coordinated with during this project and provided a copy of the DEIS. Federal and state legislators were encouraged to comment on the DEIS.

7.2.25 Public Transportation

1.) Several commenters voiced concern about the need for continued access to public transportation, the maintenance of routes with minimal service disruption, and access for low-income users of transit to like facilities of those relocated. There was also a question of

financial and programmatic assistance to ensure transit access upon completion of the project.

MDOT commits to early coordination with transit providers during the design process and into the construction process to ensure continuous service. As noted in ***Section 3.12.14*** *of the* ***DEIS****, there may be minor alterations to existing public transit services, especially during the construction process. After construction is completed, local road improvements on Pine Grove Avenue may improve transit operations as the roadway is expected to experience less congestion. At the same time, transit routes and stops may change slightly as the roadway is realigned; this may result in shorter or longer walk distances for some transit patrons. If there are gaps in the transit agency's ability to serve alternative destinations, there may need to be reconsideration of transit service routing. Current routes for buses, dial-a-ride vans, shuttles and trolley services may need minor modifications. MDOT will continue to coordinate with the Blue Water Area Transit during the design and construction phases to ensure that transit services in the Study Area continue to adequately serve the public, particularly those persons who are transit-dependent.*

7.2.26 Right of Way Acquisition and Relocations

1.) One commenter was concerned with lack of information regarding the impacts of "probable business relocations" within current residential lands. The commenter believed that these land use implications should have been addressed in <u>Section 3.1, Land Use and Zoning.</u>

The analyses of relocations was not repeated in the ***DEIS Section 3.1****, Land Use and Zoning, in the interest of keeping the EIS document from becoming larger (and less reader-friendly) than it currently is. This discussion was included in* ***Section 3.2.9, How will the Alternatives Affect neighborhood?*** *in the* ***DEIS.*** *The format of the document was approved by FHWA and is consistent with other EIS documentation produced throughout the United States.*

2.) Numerous commenters requested more specific information in regard to business relocation economic impacts. Specifically, where businesses would relocate, if the customer base and market exposure would be the same, and how the existing market would be affected. One commenter felt businesses needed to be assessed more specifically to their differing relocation needs.

MDOT is available to assist businesses and residents find appropriate housing or commercial sites as close to their original location as is possible, but if residents or businesses wish to move, MDOT cannot compel them to remain in the same area. MDOT follows state and federal guidelines, which allow owner flexibility in the relocation process. MDOT makes the good faith offer, based on fair market value to both owners and tenants, who are then free to choose their replacement location,. Relocation advisory services are extended to both parties.

Under the City West Alternative, the relocated Pine Grove Avenue provides new frontage access to existing vacant or underutilized business locations north and south of the plaza. This may be an

attractive location for new or relocated businesses, providing economic redevelopment opportunities around the plaza.

The businesses relocated may choose to move to a different community or remain close to their current location if possible. Some changes in existing business patterns for residents and business owners in the vicinity of the plaza are inevitable with the business relocations. Some of the potential relocations are due to the need to acquire parts of the land of a business but not the whole property. In these cases MDOT may be able to work out an agreement so that the business can remain in its existing location if the property owner is interested. Relocated and new businesses will likely develop on available sites in the vicinity of the new plaza in order to serve the local market and cross-border traffic served by existing businesses.

The City West Alternative was designed to provide optimal access to businesses north of Hancock Street and maintain the most efficient flow of traffic. North of plaza, relocated Pine Grove Avenue was redesigned as a one-way pair with northbound Pine Grove Avenue traffic shifted east and connected to existing Pine Grove Avenue near Riverview Street. This provides easy access to the businesses north of Hancock Street for all M-25 connector and Pine Grove Avenue traffic. Presently only Pine Grove Avenue traffic has direct access to the businesses north of Hancock with M-25 connector traffic by-passing to the west and tying into Pine Grove Avenue further north. The commercial blocks north of Hancock Street could potentially serve as future locations for businesses serving border crossing traffic displaced by the Recommended City West Alternative.

Relocations indicated in the DEIS and FEIS are due to direct property acquisition and not any kind of indirect changes in shopping patterns or other behavior. The EIS assesses relocations that will result in a site that will be used for a transportation use.

3.) A number of commenters were concerned about how many homes and businesses were being relocated, where to, and when the process would begin. There were also questions regarding what properties MDOT had already acquired.

Property Acquisition will begin following receipt of the Record of Decision. The timing of these relocations would be dependent upon the determination of right of way needs during final design.

MDOT has acquired some properties as hardship acquisitions in response to property owner requests for assistance. The Study Team included recent hardship right-of-way acquisitions in the evaluation of impacts including the number of relocations, job relocations, economic impacts and tax base impacts. In the cases where MDOT made hardship or protective acquisitions a number of years ago, prior to the development of alternatives for the Blue Water Bridge Plaza Study in 2002, such as the vacant London's Dairy Property, impacts were not included.

4.) One commenter was concerned with how public and private utilities within the right-of-way (ROW) will be relocated.

The city of Port Huron will have dedicated access to their municipal utilities. A utility corridor will be created around the plaza within MDOT owned ROW. Detailed utility relocation plans will be developed during the design phase.
The specifics of utility relocations are a final-design issue that will be considered in more detail, after the NEPA process has been completed. MDOT recognizes the need for unfettered utility access and will coordinate with them and all the utility providers, during final design to ensure continuous access is maintained during and after construction.

5.) There were a few comments regarding the effects of relocations on neighborhoods.

*See **Section 3.6** of the **DEIS,** and **Section 3.7** of this FEIS for more information on relocations.*

7.2.27 Security

1.) A few commenters stated that the "DEIS does not provide anywhere near adequate detail/analysis regarding existing and future vehicle delays/queues at the plaza." They cite in comparison the more extensive analysis provided in the Peace Bridge DEIS.

*The primary need for a new plaza at the Blue Water Bridge has been inspection and security enhancements and safety concerns with the existing plaza. Although delay data was not included within the DEIS, each plaza alterative was developed to accommodate traffic volumes within CBP's and MDOT's acceptable level of delay. To meet the concerns of stakeholders including the local community, basic information on vehicle delays is now included in **Chapter 2** of this FEIS for the Existing, No-Build and City West plaza configurations.*

2.) Numerous commenters expressed concern regarding the number of inspection booths and the level of CBP staffing at the booths. Request was made for more detail on delay associated with CBP staffing levels and what would be done to address this. It was questioned if the alternatives could vary with improved staffing.

The primary need for a new plaza at the Blue Water Bridge is inspection and security enhancements and safety concerns with the existing plaza.
CBP management of the ports of entry determines the level of staffing based on location specific criteria. CBP maintains adequate staffing to fully staff all 13 existing primary lane booths during peak traffic hours. With an increase in the number of primary booths, CBP will reassess the staffing allocation at the future plaza port to ensure that all booths will be fully staffed during peak hours.

For national security and law enforcement reasons, CBP does not publicly disclose the number of CBP officers located at U.S. ports of entry (POEs).

3.) Several commenters questioned why "reverse inspection" was eliminated as an alternative suggesting that this option should be further analyzed.

The Study Team considered the possibility of moving some or all plaza inspection facilities to the Canadian side of the bridge. The major barrier to moving United States facilities to the Canadian side of the crossing is sovereignty related issues over jurisdiction, which can only be worked out through international diplomatic channels and are beyond the scope of this study. This alternative was dropped from further consideration

Reverse inspection also will not solve the issue of an undersized plaza on the U.S. side as the Canadian plaza currently occupies 98 acres.

7.2.28 Signals and Signing

1.) Two commenters were concerned with how residents and visitors would be kept informed of construction activities, delays, detours and other disruptions during construction, asking for details on signage, resources and outreach when signage would be installed.

MDOT will attempt to minimize disruption of traffic in the construction area to the greatest extent possible. Although control of all construction related inconveniences is not possible, motorists and pedestrian safety will be ensured by signing all construction areas.

Detailed detour plans will be developed prior to the beginning of construction with local officials. Informing the public of current and upcoming construction/traffic related concerns will be an important part of the construction process. A motorist information plan will be developed to provide information on open routes, detours, locations of construction, and best routes to access key facilities to visitors, motorists, residents and business owners through the use of signs, a project website and a toll-free project hotline.

7.2.29 Support and Economic Assistance to Community

1.) Several commenters believed that MDOT needs to make a firm, long-term commitment of staff and budget to provide economic development assistance to the local communities affected by the project including helping to identify and secure state and federal grants. They requested assurances that MDOT will meet and work with affected communities. Participation of FHWA and CBP was also requested. It was asked that MDOT consider utilizing an economic development consultant to work with MDOT and the city of Port Huron.

MDOT commits to developing an economic development strategic plan. MDOT also commits to fund up to $1 million for economic development services to fund the implementation of the aforementioned plan. An agreement will be developed with an appropriate local agency that will be responsible for using these funds to implement key strategies that are developed as part of the economic development plan. The estimated cost of this project enhancement is $1,000,000.

An economic development strategic plan would build upon existing strategic advantages, international trade opportunities, and the community's extensive transportation assets that can contribute to a stronger more vibrant economy for the future. The economy of Port Huron and St. Clair County is changing; globalization and new technologies continue to accelerate the rate of that change. With an economic development strategic plan in place, St. Clair County and Port Huron will be better positioned to build on the competitiveness of this region creating a stronger and more prosperous economy by working to achieve common goals and action strategies.

This economic development strategy will consider the economic conditions of the region, capture the essential elements of any earlier economic development plans for the community, and identify strategies and specific actions of importance to the region's economy. The goals are to improve the economic prosperity of the region and define a plan that builds on the region's strengths that make this area an exceptional place to live and work. The plan will also identify areas of concern that should be considered while moving forward as well as goals and actions the community should collectively pursue.

MDOT will continue to coordinate with the local community and bring other state and federal agencies and resources to the community. See ***Section 5.2*** *of this FEIS for more information on the economic development strategic plan.*

2.) One commenter asked if funding could be provided to the local tourism bureau for marketing incentives for businesses supported by border crossings,

MDOT has committed to coordinate with the Greater Port Huron Chamber of Commerce, to fund a portion of the construction costs for a local visitor center addition as part of relocated chamber offices along Pine Grove Avenue. It is envisioned this facility would provide local information and support cross-border marketing opportunities. See ***Chapter 5*** *of this FEIS for additional mitigation information.*

3.) One commenter asked if a permanent source of funding will be provided to local communities that will be hosting and providing services or losing tax revenues.

MDOT currently pays the city of Port Huron for both utilities and emergency service provision for the plaza and anticipates paying a greater amount of $300,000 as part of the new, expanded plaza. A permanent source of funding is being proposed for emergency services on the plaza provided by the city of Port Huron and Port Huron Township.

Revenues from tolls collected at the Blue Water Bridge are restricted to transportation and maintenance purposes only per MDOT's toll authority agreement. Some Blue Water Bridge funding will be used initially to implement eligible mitigation/enhancement measures and strategies. However, a permanent source of funding will not come from toll revenue.

7.2.30 Threatened and Endangered Species

1.) Several commenters expressed concern regarding threatened and endangered species in the Study Area, how they were identified as well as how they will be impacted and protected.

The Study Team identified plants, wildlife and threatened and endangered species with the potential to be found in the Study Area through record searches and field investigations. Information was obtained from the following sources to provide initial direction and focus for field assessments: The United States Department of Agriculture Soil Survey for St. Clair County, St. Clair County Plat Book, St. Clair County Element List courtesy of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and United States Fish and Wildlife Service federal list of threatened and endangered species and National Wetland Inventory maps. A request was made to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Michigan Natural Features Inventory for records and information on state threatened or endangered species, and species of concern previously identified within the Study Area or surrounding areas (see ***Agency Early Coordination Letters in Appendix D.1****).*

These resources assisted qualified biologists in providing additional focus to specific habitats during the field reviews of the Study Area. Specific target species and target habitat were identified based on information received from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the Michigan Natural Features Inventory.

No threatened and endangered species of plants or wildlife were found in the Study Area. Spotted Turtle (State endangered species) habitat was found near Stocks Creek. Special care will be given to this area. ***Section 5.12-5.14*** *of the* ***DEIS*** *describes what measures will be taken to protect existing vegetation, maintaining wildlife, and mitigation of threatened and endangered species.*

2.) Two commenters inquired how will migratory birds will be impacted and protected within the Study Area.

On projects that involve work on structures over watercourses, MDOT reviews potential impacts to migratory birds that may make (or have made) nests underneath the bridges. During the design phase of the project, the Black River Bridge will be reviewed for past migratory bird nesting activity. If evidence of migratory bird nesting is discovered, coordination between MDOT (Environmental Section and Region Resource Specialist), MDEQ, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will occur. A "Special Provision" that describes procedures for dealing with migratory birds will be included within the project specifications. MDEQ permits required to conduct work on bridges over watercourses.

7.2.31 Traffic

1.) A few commenters were concerned with the possible loss of north/south travel capacity during construction. The commenters expressed concern that during construction the local street network will experience an increase in traffic resulting in long delays and

gridlock. They believe this congestion will have a negative impact on local businesses and be inconvenient for the traveling public. There was also concern that the local street network had not been adequately analyzed for construction and maintenance of traffic, associated emergency response access, or potential use of way finding signs. Commenters also believe the DEIS did not provide nearly enough detail regarding the proposed traffic control/maintenance of traffic plan and its costs.

The selection of the City West Alternative provides the ability to maintain critical north/south travel route during construction. Traffic and pedestrian access along 10th Avenue and Pine Grove Avenue will be maintained during construction to the greatest degree possible. As part of MDOT's maintenance of traffic planning efforts all efforts will be taken to minimize traffic delays, to the greatest extent possible. Final plans for maintaining traffic flow during construction will be prepared by MDOT prior to the beginning of construction in close coordination with the city of Port Huron, St. Clair County Road Commission and CBP. The cost estimates include approximately $11 million for maintenance of traffic during construction. MDOT will also coordinate with the city of Port Huron emergency service providers and transit providers, prior to construction to ensure that they are aware of construction staging and that there is no limitation in their ability to respond to emergencies or provide critical community service. See ***Section 3.17****, in* ***this FEIS****, for additional construction impact information.*

2.) One commenter inquired as to "what steps will be taken to ensure constant access to neighborhoods and business areas" during construction, asking for a description of any anticipated disruptions and construction timeline and calendar.

As part of MDOT's maintenance of traffic planning all efforts will be taken to minimize access disruptions to local businesses, to the greatest extent possible. MDOT will make every effort to reach an agreement with the City and County Road Commission engineering staffs on planning goals and implementation strategies for project construction staging prior to the beginning of construction. At the onset of the construction phase, a detailed construction schedule will be developed. Impacted businesses and residential neighborhoods will be coordinated with at that time. See ***Section 3.17****, in* ***this FEIS****, for additional construction impact information.*

3.) One commenter inquired "Are there streets and pedestrian systems within the footprint and surrounding area that may be considered or rendered isolated by the user during the construction and after the completion of the project?"

There are no streets or sidewalk that would be isolated by the project in the manner described. Any closure of access would be considered a total acquisition for the purposes of this project. All reconstructed and new city streets will have full pedestrian amenities provided. MDOT will consider pedestrian access throughout the Study Area during the construction process and arrangements will be made to ensure safe pedestrian travel.

4.) One commenter questioned conclusions in the DEIS stating congestion will increase under the Do Nothing scenario as well as the causes of projected congestion.

*The traffic analysis performed for the DEIS used established methodology approved by MDOT and FHWA. No-Build congestion at key intersections is discussed in **Chapter 2** of the **DEIS** and is based on future traffic volumes and existing roadway geometrics. It assumes no improvements will be made to the current roadway system. The analysis is also consistent with assumptions included in SEMCOG's Regional Travel Demand Model.*

*For the plaza, a delay analysis was conducted for inclusion in this FEIS and the results are summarized in **Section 2.3** of this FEIS. The average delay currently at the border ranges from 20-24 minutes. Under the No-Build scenario, the average delay goes up to 30-35 minutes. The average delay for the Recommended Alternative is 3-4 minutes.*

5.) One commenter questioned, "In the "Cost of Congestion Analysis" section on page 3.4-12, the DEIS simply refers to a 2003 study by Taylor, Robideaux, and Jackson. This section mentions this report, but gives no actual data or findings until much later in Section 3.4. What steps did MDOT take to ensure that the findings of this 2003 study are still relevant today?"

The "Cost of Congestion Analysis" referred to on page 3.4-12 was a methodology developed in 2003. The actual parameters entered into the analysis were based on current traffic projections and more recent estimates for costs of delays to motorists. The $4.3 billion figure derived for the Blue Water Bridge Plaza Study is not a 2003 figure but is based on a methodology developed in 2003, which is still applicable today, due to similar delays and traffic volumes, continued uncertainty in the cross border delivery process, similar wages for drivers waiting in queues, and the ongoing reduction in the number of daily trips drivers can make across the border (due to congestion).

6.) One commenter asked what other alternatives MDOT examined to effectively manage existing congestion and mitigate projected congestion. Were organizational system or technology solutions considered and how were those alternatives determined to be insufficient?

Technology solutions were examined as means both to expedite vehicle processing and as a means to assist with traffic flow. Many of these are being incorporated on the existing plaza as short term improvements and will be used as a part of the solution for the new plaza as well. One such example is the expanded use of non-invasive inspection technologies to expedite truck cargo inspections. Other such initiatives include the use of primary inspection booths capable of accommodating both passenger and cargo vehicles to enable more adaptability to change traffic conditions. Variable message signing, operational improvements through building placement and improvements to traffic circulation both on and off the plaza will also improve traffic flows.

The inability of the existing plaza to accommodate improvements needed to increase traffic flow, such as elimination of the "weave," on the Blue Water Bridge or improved inspection facilities necessitates the need for a new facility. The City West Alternative has been reduced to the smallest size possible while

still improving circulation, providing needed facilities, and supporting more comprehensive inspection policies.

7.) Two commenters were concerned about easy access on and off the Blue Water Bridge. One commenter cited examples of staff actively directing traffic on the Canadian plaza and suggested having a staff person on the U.S. plaza to direct traffic.

Access on and off the new plaza will be improved over the existing plaza due to the new roadways and signing which will provide motorists with better operations and directions. During peak traffic times, MDOT staff does direct traffic on the plaza to assist motorists and trucks with maneuvering and traffic conflicts.

8.) We recommend that relief/alternate roads be in place prior to construction of the Bridge Plaza Corridor. All attempts should be made to minimize construction overlaps that would impede the smooth flow of traffic into surrounding communities of Fort Gratiot, Port Huron Township and the city of Port Huron.

Disruption of traffic due to construction will be minimized to the greatest extent possible. Traffic on I-94/I-69 will be maintained using freeway crossovers and temporary pavement, part-width construction techniques, and the use of detour routes. Detours will involve temporarily closing down certain roadways for construction while providing an alternate route of transportation. MDOT has also coordinated efforts with the St. Clair County Road Commission to ensure the construction of the Wadhams Road bridge is completed prior to undertaking construction of the I-94/I-69 corridor and Blue Water Bridge Plaza. It is MDOT and the Road Commission's goal to not have more than one river crossing closed at any time. Drivers will then have the option to use the Wadhams Road to Keewahdin Road route to bypass construction entirely, although this route will not be signed as an official detour route. See ***Section 3.17****, in* ***this FEIS****, for additional construction impact information.*

9.) Several commenters were concerned that the DEIS does not "provide a definitive, clear, and well-reasoned justification for selection of the traffic growth rate." They were concerned that the growth rate may be overstated due to other factors such as lack of major infrastructure improvements and a potential second international crossing in Detroit which they believe could draw traffic away from the Port Huron area.

Growth trends were developed based on the historic trends as this is the only substantial data available. Other factors such as economic growth, employment rate, and exchange rate do have a factor in the volume of traffic crossing the border; however their impact and potential future change can't be precisely quantified. The existing border crossing experiences delay on a regular basis and has several deficiencies that render it incapable of accommodating new inspection facilities or further safety and efficiency improvements. These are addressed in the purpose and need of the Blue Water Bridge Plaza Study DEIS. These factors require a new plaza accommodating the needs of CBP for security and processing, and traffic growth. An important factor to note in the size of an inspection plaza is the amount of commercial

traffic. Historically there has been a consistent growth in truck traffic at the Blue Water Bridge plaza up to 2001 with a slower growth rate since. Historical standards would indicate that a similar rate of truck traffic growth can be anticipated in the future. Both high and low forecasts were prepared to account for variation in growth rate. Decreasing the traffic forecasts does not eliminate the need for substantially improving maneuvering room for large vehicles, expanding inspection facilities to account for new processes and security measures, realigning the plaza with trucks on the right, and improving traffic flow. These design factors account for the majority of the plaza footprint.
Any number of uncontrollable factors can result in both short and long term increases or decreases in traffic growth, particularly at a border plaza. Some of these include:

- *National economies*
- *Foreign trade policies*
- *Currency valuations*
- *Evolving transportation technologies*
- *Improved efficiencies or breakdowns in alternative transportation modes or routes*
- *Changes in industrial facility location or output*
- *Changes in trade and security standards, fuel costs, changes in manufacturing policies such as utilization of "just in time" delivery vs. on site warehousing*
- *Population growth and migration*
- *Immigration and visa policies*
- *Periodic labor shortages occurring in the transportation industry.*

Most of the cited variables have had some influence on traffic growth at the Blue Water Bridge at some points in the past, and they are reflected in historical traffic counts. Changes in any one of these factors alone is not likely to have a dramatic effect on the overall traffic growth at the Blue Water Bridge Plaza. However, as with all traffic forecasting, the cumulative effect of such unpredictable policies and developments can account for both short and long term variations from estimates of traffic growth. Unpredictable variables such as those listed will continue to affect traffic into the future, and as a result historical trends continue to be the most reliable standard by which to account for traffic growth at this location.

The Blue Water Bridge Traffic Report discusses factors that have had an impact on crossborder traffic historically and that have the potential to impact traffic volumes in the future. These points take into account that there is no one accurate way to exactly predict what will influence future traffic volumes and by how much. Even very sophisticated traffic models with firm inputs are by necessity based on some degree of speculation and can produce a range of results. The traffic forecast methodology is clarified in ***Chapter 2*** *of this FEIS.*

The overestimation falls within the acceptable percentage difference according to 'The Model Validation and Reasonableness Checking Manual, 1997'. Despite overestimating traffic volumes, delay has continued to increase at the BWB plaza. Factors such as 9/11 increased the inspection performed by CBP.

As discussed in the report, population growth is an elemental factor in determining traffic growth; however it is not the only factor. The Study Team believes that population growth and border crossing traffic growth would only replicate each other in a scenario where the economy and trade grow only as much as the population does. Under such a scenario, it would be reasonable to assume that 20-year passenger vehicle traffic growth would equal approximately 19% which would be the weighted average of the regional population growths discussed in the Traffic Memorandum. This could be considered the absolute lowest likely forecast absent the occurrence of a major incident causing a long-term shut down of the border. The Study Team's passenger vehicle traffic forecasts are in-line with this assumption. However, economic growth routinely outpaces population growth by a factor of 2 to 3 times the basic population growth based on traffic trends. Trade growth between the United States and Canada has been even higher on average than GDP growth since 1990 and has averaged more than 4% per year between 2000 and 2005 neighboring states transporting goods across the Blue Water Bridge. For these reasons it is reasonable to assume, as historic trends suggest, that commercial vehicle forecasts will exceed population growth forecasts

10.) One commenter requested that the DEIS address the impacts to Garfield Elementary School which is located less than one mile from the 10Th Ave. and Garfield St. intersection.

School officials, staff, parents and students would likely be concerned about the potential disruption of the project during construction due to noise and detours interrupting

Construction noise will be minimized by measures such as requiring that construction equipment have mufflers, that portable compressors meet federal noise-level standards for that equipment, and that all portable equipment be placed away from or shielded from sensitive noise receptors if at all possible.

Construction activities will follow noise ordinances. Detailed detour plans will be developed during the design phase of construction with local officials input. Informing the public of current and upcoming construction/traffic related concerns will be an important part of the construction process. A Motorist Information Plan will provide information on open routes, detours, locations of construction, and best routes to access key facilities, to visitors, motorists and area residents and business owners. Signs, a project website, and a toll-free project hotline will all be used to inform the public.

At the onset of the construction phase, a detailed construction schedule will be developed. Impacted businesses and residential neighborhoods will be coordinated with at that time. MDOT will work with the school and city to address potential construction impacts to the school throughout the project.

11.) We believe that the DEIS does not provide nearly enough detail regarding the proposed traffic control/maintenance of traffic plan, its costs, and the negative impacts which will result during construction.

More detail has been provided regarding the maintenance of traffic plan in ***Section 2.3.6*** *of this FEIS. Goals have been established as a result of the PEM meetings with the city, county and other local officials. MDOT and the City recognize the importance of minimizing the traffic impacts to the local community*

as a result of the project, to the greatest extent possible. MDOT will make every effort to reach agreement with the City and County Road Commission engineering staffs on final planning goals and implementation strategies for the project construction staging, prior to the beginning of construction. Construction impacts are discussed in ***Section 3.17*** *of this FEIS.*

12.) Three commenters inquired as to what measures MDOT will take to "decrease the severity and occurrences of crashes along the corridor and on the Plaza."

Improvements to local roads, I-94/I-69 and the plaza are designed to meet MDOT safety standards which are designed to minimize the frequency and severity of traffic accidents. The proposed new inspection plaza and improvements along I-94/I-69 will improve long-term safety in the corridor by addressing a number of issues including:

- *Separating local traffic from traffic going to Canada along I-94/I-69 before the Black River Bridge. This will reduce the likelihood of conflicts between local and Canada bound traffic.*
- *Including wider shoulders on the new Black River Bridge to allow for easier emergency management and places for stalled vehicles.*
- *Fixing the mid-bridge weave on the Blue Water Bridge so that cars and trucks no longer have to cross over each other when exiting Canada for the United States. In the U.S., car inspection booths will now be on the left and truck inspection booths on the right.*
- *Continuing to provide electronic message signs which monitor and provide warnings on traffic conditions and any backups.*

13.) Two commenters expressed concern regarding future level of service at several locations within the Plaza and Corridor.

The I-94/I-69 corridor and local roads have been designed to accommodate the projected 2030 traffic volumes using micro-simulation design software to ensure that the proposed improvements will provide adequate function through the design year. Congestion on local roads is expected to be similar to or lower than it is today. Congestion of I-94/I-69 should be lower than exists today.

14.) Three commenters inquired as to how MDOT will ensure suitable allowances (either funding or actual improvements) are made to local jurisdictions to ensure the transportation network including transit operates at an optimal level during construction.

MDOT will coordinate with community stakeholders prior to beginning construction of this project to assure impacts on local services are minimized to the greatest extent possible. Specifically, MDOT will coordinate with the Blue Water Area Transportation Commission and the St. Clair County Transportation Study regarding concerns which affect their daily operations. See ***Section 3.17****, in* ***this FEIS****, for additional construction impact information.*

For more information regarding mitigation and enhancement commitments made to the local jurisdictions, see ***Chapter 5 Mitigation and Project Enhancement*** *of this FEIS.*

15.) One commenter requested "actual numbers and projections that prove there will be a relief in traffic congestion for environmental justice populations."

*The traffic analysis was summarized in **Chapter 2** of the **DEIS**. The traffic analysis indicates there will be a relief in traffic for all members of the population including Environmental Justice populations, the detailed traffic analysis can be found in the Blue Water Bridge Traffic Memorandum and is available upon request to MDOT.*

7.2.32 Michigan Welcome Center

1.) Many commenters were concerned with the proposed placement of the welcome center as it is only accessible by those travelling west. They suggested the welcome center be placed in the median to serve both east and west travelers and to allow greater access to Port Huron businesses, restaurants and points of interest.

Placing the welcome center in the median was evaluated extensively, however it was ruled out for the following reasons:

Limited Right-of-Way (ROW): The proposed expanded Michigan Welcome Center would require approximately 45 acres to fully construct. Only 6 acres is available within the median to construct a Michigan Welcome Center. With the limited median ROW, adequate space can not be provided for the necessary welcome center buildings, parking and other facilities.

Safety: A welcome center constructed in the median would require two left hand merge ramps along both directions of I-94/I-69. Left hand merges are contrary to driver expectations, as slow moving traffic is mixed with faster moving traffic traveling on the interstate. Based on where the Michigan Welcome Center would need to be located within the median (on a sweeping curve), the mix of vehicles (trucks vs. cars), spacing of adjacent interchanges (see below) and speed along the corridor, FHWA approval of left-hand merges at this location is unlikely.

Conflicts with adjacent interchanges: The location of the proposed new Michigan Welcome Center is very close to both the I-94/I-69 and Lapeer Connector interchanges. Placing left hand exit and entrance ramps in both directions along I-94/I-69 would create an undesirable traffic weave situation that is similar to the current Black River Bridge weaving issue. MDOT could not construct the full access Lapeer connector interchange and provide enough space between the interchange and median welcome center ramps. MDOT believes a full access Lapeer Connector interchange would provide greater benefit to the community than a welcome center in the median.

*As detailed in **Section 5.0** of this FEIS, MDOT commits to funding a local visitor center in collaboration with the Greater Port Huron Chamber of Commerce. This facility will be used to disseminate local tourism information and promote the tourism and economic development opportunities which exist within the Port Huron community.*

7.2.33 Wetlands

1.) Several commenters expressed concerns with the type of mitigation that will be implemented for impacted wetlands, asking what the impacts would be; if higher quality wetland might be protected in lieu of creating new wetlands; if new wetlands would remain in the watershed; and how new wetlands will be monitored and maintained free of invasive species. Commenters also asked how host communities could be involved by developing marginal wetlands as mitigation or reviewing mitigation plans.

The proposed improvements will impact 4.36 acres of wetlands. MDOT proposes constructing 7.10 acres of wetland mitigation on the proposed welcome center parcel. All proposed wetland mitigation for the wetlands impacted by this project would occur at the welcome center parcel, which is near the location of the impacted wetlands and in the same watershed as Recommended by the USACOE. MDOT will monitor the wetland mitigation area for five years.

The Study Team will also explore options to reduce wetland impacts during final design by closer matching existing roadway grades and using steeper slopes.

Monitoring the wetland mitigation site is necessary to determine if the wetland meets the MDEQ's performance standards. Monitoring of the wetland will include items such as water level measurements, vegetation sampling, and measurements of different habitat types, documentation of any wildlife activity, photographic records, and documentation of any problem areas. Annual reports will be submitted to the MDEQ.

2.) A commenter asked if walkways, signage, or other education initiatives will be incorporated into the construction of any mitigated wetlands so that the public will be encouraged to learn about the importance of wetlands.

No access is planned to the mitigated wetlands from the Michigan Welcome Center. This is in order to give the mitigated wetlands the highest opportunity to develop into and function as high quality wetlands. No additional public access is proposed, therefore no walkways or signage is proposed.

7.3 Community Comments

The Community Comments section addresses comments from local government agencies, business groups, private businesses, residents and other concerned individuals including:

City of Marysville
Greater Port Huron Chamber of Commerce
Fort Gratiot Business Association
The Smith Funeral Home

St. Clair River Binational Public Advisory Council
Village of Point Edward
Ontario Chamber of Commerce
Ontario Trucking

As in **Section 7.2** of this FEIS comment summaries were prepared due to the large number of comments received and the number of comments raising similar or overlapping issues. Comments and responses have been grouped by topic.

7.3.1 Aesthetics and Community Character

1.) Many commenters expressed concern with regard to public input and the need for aesthetically pleasing landscaping, retaining walls, lighting and facilities. They recommended that the new facilities reflect the character and historical significance of the city. They urged the design not resemble a "checkpoint" or warehouse, and asked that details for proposed aesthetic treatments be committed to as opposed to being described in generalities as to what "could" be proposed.

*See response in **Section 7.2.1**, comment 1.*

7.3.2 Air

1.) Many commenters voiced concern over the air quality impacts specifically from diesel trucks and/ or questioned the adequacy of the number of outbound inspection booths to move vehicles through in less than ten minutes.

MDOT will work with SEMCOG, MDEQ, the private sector and the community to create an action plan that includes short-term and long-term objectives aimed at reducing fugitive dust, diesel truck idling, fuel consumption, or diesel emissions to limit PM2.5 emissions in the area within one mile of the plaza. The action plan will identify priorities for the future federal aid eligible transportation project through program such as, Congestion, Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) and the Midwest Clean Diesel Initiative. These activities will be implemented during design and construction phases, and sustained through the maintenance and operation of the facilities. Activities could also include outreach efforts to inform commercial operations and residents on air pollution control strategies. The actual projects will be generated from the community and its partners who will develop project proposals to implement these strategies.

7.3.3 Alternatives Considered/Additional Alternatives

1.) One commenter advised against the "No-Build" alternative citing the need for improvements to support growing traffic volumes and enhanced security.

Comment acknowledged.

2.) One commenter expressed concern about the validity of the DEIS, believing that the study was biased toward the build options from the beginning rather than the no-build option.

The study property followed the NEPA process. A wide range of alternatives were considered over the course of the study, including the No-Build Alternative. The study has determined that the current plaza can no longer accommodate current or anticipated CBP security operations and prevents CBP from fully completing their mission at the border. The reasons for why improvements are needed are detailed in ***Chapter 1*** *of this* ***FEIS****. For the No-Build Alternative to be selected, the study would need to clearly demonstrate that the issues identified in the purpose and need could be accommodated on the current site. As discussed in* ***Chapters 1 and 2*** *of this FEIS, this was clearly not the case.*

3.) Several commenters suggested that a truck tunnel be built, or the old CN tunnel refurbished to accommodate truck traffic, reducing congestion on the bridge. Using the Grand Trunk CN property by Griswold was also suggested.

A tunnel is not considered to be a viable alternative for addressing the purpose and need for the project which is to expand the existing plaza in order to provide CBP more space in which to operate and conduct inspections. The twin bridges provide ample capacity for cross border traffic and the construction of a new tunnel or using the existing rail tunnel would require substantial impacts to connect to the freeway system and construct a new plaza. The current bridge congestion is due to constraints on the existing U.S. plaza.

4.) One commenter suggested transporting goods by rail as opposed to truck to reduce highway congestion and the need for expansion of the Port Huron Plaza.

Rail transportation across the country is also reaching capacity and experiencing congestion issues along major freight rail lines. The goods transported on rail are often different that those goods transported by truck. The commodities crossing in Port Huron are often related to the automotive industry which uses "just-in-time" deliveries to keep operating and storage costs low. Although some goods could be transported on rail if there was capacity, many goods are trucking dependent. Transporting more goods by rail would not eliminate the need for improvements on the plaza that address security, inspection and operational needs.

5.) A number of comments from local agencies, citizens, and Blue Water Bridge Canada were in support of the Preferred Alternative, stating that the Preferred Alternative would improve traffic flow, provide adequate capacity for future traffic resulting in fewer backups on the freeway and would benefit the area by bringing in new business.

Comments acknowledged.

7.3.4 Black River Bridge

1.) A number of commenters believe the Black River Bridge improvements should be evaluated independently of the plaza project and/or expressed concern with potential delay in improvements to the Black River Bridge.

*Similar questions were asked by local government officials. Please see response in **Section 7.2.4**, comment 1.*

2.) One commenter wanted to know why the proposed Black River Bridge eastbound lanes are 300% wider and the westbound only 50% and believed the bridge should have four lanes westbound.

There are three dedicated lanes to Canada (eastbound) and three additional eastbound lanes for local traffic for a total of six eastbound lanes. These six lanes are needed to separate the local traffic from the international traffic. There are three westbound lanes across the Black River, which is adequate for the 2030 forecasting traffic volumes.

7.3.5 Community Impacts

1.) A number of commenters concluded that the project would create a barrier (either perceived or real) between the north and south end of the community. Mitigation steps towards mitigating city division were also requested.

*Similar questions were asked by local government officials. Please see responses in **Section 7.2.5**, comment 1.*

2.) A few commenters voiced concern over measures to ensure that enhancements to life experience persist for the life of the improvement and the effects of the project on the quality of life.

*Similar questions were asked by local government officials. Please see responses in **Section 7.2.5**, comment 2.*

3.) Several commenters were concerned about the impacts to those neighborhoods not directly impacted by the proposed project. They were concerned these neighborhoods will suffer "cumulative impacts" including loss of value, as they become the new "front row" to the plaza. Others voiced concern with the prolonged timeframe of uncertainty of potential acquisitions.

*Similar questions were asked by local government officials. Please see responses in **Section 7.2.5,** comment 3.*

7.3.6 Economic

1.) One commenter was concerned with MDOT's proposal to mitigate potential economic damage to the city of Port Huron.

In response to community concerns received from the release of the DEIS, the Study Team initiated a Project Enhancement and Mitigation (PEM) group comprised of representatives from the city of Port Huron, St. Clair County, Port Huron Township, federal and state elected officials, GSA, FHWA, and MDOT. This group met monthly from February thru September 2008 to work through issues raised by the local community regarding the proposed plaza and corridor improvements. A summary of the group activities and outcomes can be found in ***Section 5.2*** *of this FEIS.*

As part of the mitigation of economic impacts, the State of Michigan will fund the development of an economic development plan for St. Clair County to assist with the potential development of new businesses in the Port Huron area.

The purpose of the plan is to facilitate the development of an Economic Development Strategic Plan for the city of Port Huron and St. Clair County through the assistance of the Michigan Department of Transportation. This strategic plan would build upon existing strategic advantages, international trade opportunities, and the community's extensive transportation assets that can contribute to a stronger more vibrant economy for the future. With an Economic Development Strategic Plan in place St. Clair County and Port Huron will be better positioned to build on the competitiveness of this region creating a stronger and more prosperous economy by working to achieve common goals and action strategies.

2.) A few commenters inquired about project costs the city of Port Huron would incur. Two commenters recommended a crossing toll increase benefiting the City; another suggested the city be exempt from any costs incurred for the project.

Similar questions were asked by local government officials. Please see responses in ***Section 7.2.5****, comment 7.*

3.) One commenter voiced concerns over the tax affects on the community.

Similar questions were asked by local government officials. Please see responses in ***Section 7.2.7*** *comment 8.*

7.3.7 General

1.) One commenter suggested that "a world-class international facility that houses various border, security, tourism and commerce agencies should be considered."

MDOT and its partner agencies agree on the benefits of having "world-class" facilities at the Blue Water Bridge. Although there could be benefits to co-location of all these functions, it is imperative that secure

border inspection operations are separated from any commercial uses on the plaza. Any office space for tourism and commerce agencies would need to be downstream and securely separated from inspection facilities, accessible only by travelers who have been cleared for entry into the United States. Options were explored for locating these facilities on the plaza but their inclusion would have led to an enlarged plaza footprint and greater impacts, specifically west of the plaza. As a result, tourism and commerce agency locations will be located off of the plaza, with directional signage indicating their location.

GSA has over the past few years, been incorporating Design Excellence into their Leasing Program. As MDOT and GSA partner on the selection of an Architect/Engineer for this project, MDOT and GSA will make every effort to incorporate the Design Excellence Program into this project.

Below is a brief summary of GSA's Design Excellence Program:

"In meeting the challenges associated with the stewardship of our buildings, GSA's performance standard is Design Excellence – buildings that express the vision, leadership, and commitment of the government to serving the public and the values of the nation. More, specifically, Design Excellence in the Public Building Service means:

- *Providing best value to our customer agencies and the American taxpayer.*
- *Developing safe, productive, and attractive workplaces.*
- *Operating efficiently and effectively-keeping projects on time and on budget.*
- *Ensuring that projects respond positively to national urban and environmental policies.*
- *Selecting America's best designers and artists to create facilities that ultimately become respected landmarks.*

The Public Building Service approach is holistic, incorporating expertise in many areas- architecture, urban design, landscape architecture, interior design, art, engineering, construction, security, sustainability, and workplace design. Design Excellence is about using this expertise to deliver projects that are exceptional-models others seek to emulate. In this effort, Design Excellence is neither veneer nor luxury. It is an integral feature of the GSA culture and how the Public Buildings Service addresses its work."

2.) A few commenters were concerned with the amount of time the process has taken thus far and would like to see it move forward.

The Study Team understands the importance of improving facilities in a timely manner. The length of the planning and NEPA process is a reflection of the need to address a wide-variety of complex local, national and international issues in planning and evaluating plaza improvements.

3.) A few commenters did not support the plaza expansion within the city of Port Huron. They suggested another option be investigated.

***Section 2.1 Alternatives Development**, in the **DEIS** explains the alternative development process of the project and why other alternatives were not carried forward.*

4.) Two commenters were concerned with the passport requirements to cross the border and suggested an ID card to make it easier.

These issues are beyond the scope of this project.

5.) One commenter asked, "what were the dates and cost of the most recent Blue Water Bridge and Plaza construction projects over the past 15 years? Include landscaping and concrete barrier and other security measures."

The current plaza was constructed in the early 1990's. The second bridge over the St. Clair River was built in 1997 at a cost of approximately $41.3 million (for the Michigan half).

6.) A few commenters disagreed with the size of the proposed expansion and supported the No-Build alternative, proposing instead upgrades or minor expansion of the current facility.

*The plaza size has been reduced from 65 acres in the DEIS, to 56 acres See **Section 2.3.5** of this FEIS for a more-detailed discussion on plaza size justification. Selecting the No-Build Alternative would not address the severe deficiencies and substantial issues wit the current plaza and I-94/I-69 corridor discussed in **Chapter 1** of this FEIS.*

7.) A number of people expressed a preference for the Township Alternative west of the existing plaza.

Comment Acknowledged.

8.) One commenter suggested rezoning the area to commercial/industrial and that local people should be used for construction.

Zoning is a local government land use decision; however it must be recognized that even with rezoning, at some point there remains a transition between commercial/industrial and existing residential land uses. MDOT and FHWA will seek the best possible value from their investments when tendering construction projects and like any other project, there is no guarantee that local firms would be selected and local materials would be used.

9.) One commenter wanted to know who the contractors would be for the new plaza and if engineering plans had already been made.

Design engineering plans will commence following publication of this FEIS and Record of Decision. A construction contractor will be selected through MDOT advertised competitive contracting procedures.

10.) One commenter suggested, "Independently performed basement surveys should be honored for those residences/businesses that are not identified by MDOT to be prone to construction-related vibration damage."

In areas where construction vibration is anticipated, basement surveys will be conducted before construction begins to document any damage caused by highway construction. Identification of properties to be offered basement surveys will be determined by MDOT during the design phase. Contingent upon property owner approval, MDOT, in consultation with the selected construction contractor, will make assessments as to which structures will have a basement survey completed. MDOT's contractor will be responsible for the costs associated with the required basement surveys. These surveys will be completed at the on set of the construction phase. This commitment has been added to the Mitigation Green Sheet found in ***Chapter 5*** *of this FEIS.*

7.3.8 Hazardous Materials

1.) Three commenters were concerned as to how environmental spills will be contained and public drinking water protected from such spills.

Similar questions were asked by local government officials. Please see response to comment 1 in ***Section 7.2.12.***

2.) One commenter questioned, "Why did the report not include known hazardous materials transportation routes as potential environmental conditions" and what would the impacts of these routes be to the project area?

A recognized environmental condition means the presence or likely presence of any hazardous substances or petroleum products on a property under conditions that indicate an existing release, a past release, or a material threat of a release of any hazardous substances or petroleum products into structures on the property or into the ground, groundwater or surface water of the property.
Recognized environmental conditions do not include de minimis conditions that generally do not present a material risk of harm to public health or the environment, and that generally would not be subject of an enforcement action if brought to the attention of appropriate government agencies. Conditions determined to be de minimis are not recognized environmental conditions. A de minimis contribution means that the environmental conditions would essentially be the same whether or not the proposed project is implemented.

A hazardous material route is not considered a recognized environmental condition as the route and risk would be the same regardless if the project moves forward or not and the movement of hazardous materials along a route does not constitute an enforceable action.

3.) A few commenters questioned how local response agencies will alert the public to spills or the release of airborne hazardous substances and if fire suppression and other

containment facilities would be utilized to avoid the entry of contaminants into air, sewer, and river systems.

Similar questions were asked by local government officials. Please see response to comment 2 in ***Section 7.2.12.***

7.3.9 Health and Safety

1.) One commenter was concerned about the potential health impacts and risks of a fire or other incidents at the Plaza.

The existing plaza and proposed plaza have a hazardous materials containment area for potential vehicle incidents. Currently there is an approximate 30,000 gallon tank under the existing plaza that run-off can be routed to in case a hazardous material spill occurs. A similar system will be developed for the new plaza in the final design for hazardous material retention. The State of Michigan contracts for fire and emergency response services from the city of Port Huron in case of a fire or other types of incidents.

2.) One commenter questioned how and where solid waste generated during the construction process be disposed of?

During the construction process the St. Clair County's Solid Waste Management Plan will be followed and solid waste will be disposed of as the plan outlines. In addition, MDOT follows a standard set of procedures for disposing surplus or unsuitable materials. When surplus or unsuitable material is to be disposed of outside of the right-of-way, the contractor shall obtain and file with MDOT written permission from the owner of the property on which the material is to be placed. In addition, no surplus or unsuitable material is to be permanently disposed of in any public or private wetland area, watercourse, or floodplain. No temporary disposal of material will occur in any public or private wetland area, watercourse, or floodplain without prior approval (and permit) by the appropriate resource agencies and the Federal Highway Administration.

3.) One commenter concluded that the DEIS does not adequately address how additional emergency services will be financed or what financial impact the greater demand for emergency services and public works may have on the city of Port Huron.

MDOT currently provides annual payments of $200,000 to the city of Port Huron for emergency response services. MDOT will increase this payment to $300,000 annually to continue to provide these services for the expanded plaza area. See ***Chapter 5****, of this FEIS for addition mitigation information.*

4.) Several commenters expressed concern regarding routes for emergency response vehicles and law enforcement. One commenter asked, what are the expected routes for these agencies both within and through the project footprint? How will these changes impact response times, upon completion of the project? There was particular concern with regard the potential EMS traffic delay on the new Pine Grove Avenue to areas north of the plaza.

The Recommended Alternative would have little or no effect on emergency service response times to and from the plaza. The new plaza would have specific entrances and exits for emergency responders according to a plan to be developed with local agencies. There are two major north-south roadways through this area, 10th Avenue (four lanes) and Pine Grove Avenue (five lanes). This alternative would relocate Pine Grove Avenue to the west from its intersection with 10th Avenue and tie into the M-25 connector. This will eliminate the portion of Pine Grove Avenue that runs under the plaza. Emergency service responders will be able to access the neighborhoods and businesses north and south of the plaza via 10th Avenue and Pine Grove Avenue. Emergency service along I-94/I-69 would be improved with better separation of local and plaza traffic.

5.) One commenter expressed concern "about possible increases in the time it will take to get to the hospitals during the construction phase." Another Commenter stated "Sufficient ingress/egress must be provided in the construction zone for emergency routes for law enforcement, fire and EMS."

As a part of MDOT's maintenance of traffic planning efforts all efforts will be taken to minimize impacts to critical north-south routes and emergency service access, to the greatest extent possible. MDOT will follow ASHTO maintenance of traffic standards to ensure that emergency routes for law enforcement, fire, ambulances and other emergency services will be easily accessible. Maintenance of traffic is fully discussed in this FEIS, ***Section 3.17 Construction Impacts****.*

MDOT will coordinate with emergency service providers prior to the beginning of construction and at the beginning of new phases of construction. Communication will be maintained throughout construction. Adjustments to emergency response plans will be developed based on project activity.

7.3.10 Historical Properties

1.) Several commenters expressed concerns regarding potentially historical or culturally significant structures or sites that may be within the proposed project footprint. They inquired as to how these sites would be preserved.

Similar questions were asked by local government officials. Please see response in ***Section 7.2.14,*** *comment 1.*

7.3.11 Noise

1.) Three commenters were concerned about the additional noise of idling and accelerating trucks at the expanded plaza and whether this was incorporated into the noise analysis.

This comment has been addressed in ***Section 7.2.19*** *of the Comments and Response section of this FEIS.*

2.) Several commenters inquired as to site specific noise impacts. One asked if post construction noise would be monitored and action taken if exceeding standards?

*This comment has been addressed in **Section 7.2.19** of the Comments and Response section of this FEIS.*

7.3.12 Pedestrian and Non-Motorized Access

1.) One commenter was concerned with the roundabout design not taking into consideration crossings by pedestrians and bicyclists and suggested stoplights instead.

The proposed roundabout shown in the DEIS for Pine Grove Avenue has been removed. The roundabouts at Water Street are still proposed. A pedestrian crossing location is currently proposed south of the southern roundabout which will allow bicyclists and pedestrians the ability to cross Water Street.

2.) Two commenters were concerned with a pedestrian crossing to Sarnia.

Pedestrian crossings of the Blue Water Bridge are not allowed by the United States or Canada.

7.3.13 Project Design

1.) Two commenters disliked the idea of a roundabout, expressing concerns about accidents or confusion at other locations they've used.

Current studies show that roundabouts have fewer conflict points in comparison to conventional intersections. The potential for hazardous conflicts, such as right angle and left turn head on crashes is eliminated with roundabout use. Although driver confusion is a concern with roundabouts, proper signing and design will reduce this likelihood.

7.3.14 Project Funding

1.) A few commenters inquired as to who the force behind the project was and who was funding it. Is it Federal, State or local government?

*The project is a joint effort proposed by several federal agencies and MDOT. The Blue Water Bridge and Plaza are owned by the State of Michigan (MDOT) and is leased to U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) through the General Services Administration (GSA). As the owners of the plaza, MDOT is the lead state agency for the project and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is the lead federal agency. As discussed in **Chapter 1** of this FEIS one of the principal needs for the project is the substandard size of the plaza which prevents CBP from carry out their mission to the fullest extent that is expected of them from the Department of Homeland Security. These agencies have determined the Blue Water Bridge Plaza to be a priority project for their respective agencies and are working together cooperatively to complete this important project.*

Funding for the design, ROW, and construction phases of the project will likely utilize funds from the following sources:

- *Federal Aid SAFETEA LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users) Earmarks*
- *Federal Aid (Corridor and Border Improvement Program)*
- *Bonds backed by revenue from an updated GSA lease, an updated Duty Free lease, and BWB Toll Revenue.*

Any proposed toll increases on the U.S. side of the Blue Water Bridge will be completed in accordance with the existing toll agreement. See ***Section 2.8*** *of this FEIS for a more-detailed discussion.*

Funding for the project will come from a mix of federal and state funds along with tolls and leases payments ***from the plaza agencies and the duty free store. For additional information, see the Executive*** *Summary in this FEIS.*

2.) A few commenters voiced concerns over the amount of money already spent and that which will be spent on the project and expressed the concern that U.S. tax dollars were being utilized to pay for improvements benefitting big business and international interests.

Comment Acknowledged.

7.3.15 Public Involvement and Coordination

1.) One commenter believed that MDOT's project newsletter did not adequately address his concerns with noise, air quality, possible chemical leaks, access, depreciation, relocations and like matters. The individual also felt the project didn't account for resident lifestyles and economic status.

The purpose of the project newsletters is to inform the public of an upcoming public meeting opportunity and to summarize key issues surrounding the project. The DEIS contains the specifics related to project impacts. It was not the intent of the newsletter to provide detailed specifics of the project. Discussion of the issues raised by the commenter are found in various sections of the DEIS and were discussed at the Public Meeting, Community Workshop and Public Hearing.

2.) One commenter casts doubt on MDOT's desire to involve the public.

The Study Team held nine public information meetings or workshops to provide study information and receive comments from the general public, hundreds of local residents, business owners, and officials attend these meetings. MDOT notified people by issuing press releases in the local newspaper, conducting interviews with local media, and mailing informational brochures to over 400 households located in the vicinity of the plaza. Brochures for each meeting were also distributed to key city, township, and county offices and to churches in the Study Area. All of the meetings were held at transit

and disabled accessible facilities in Port Huron, Michigan. The meetings were held in a large hall using an open forum format. Members of the public could visit stations and discuss different aspects of the proposed project (study process, traffic, environmental constraints, etc.) with project team members. All attendees were encouraged to fill out comment forms.

MDOT also formed a study Advisory Committee at the beginning of the project. The Advisory Committee provided expertise and input regarding pertinent issues related to the Blue Water Bridge Plaza Study. The Advisory Committee consisted of a core group of stakeholders representing plaza inspection agencies, local and state officials, Canadian officials, private firms, local agencies and key representatives from the local community. The general public was represented through their elected local officials and various local agencies that participated in the advisory committee. MDOT ensures that the concerns of residents were represented in the Advisory Committee by inviting local official and local agencies to be active members of the Advisory Committee.

Access to information on the Blue Water Bridge Plaza Study can be made 24 hours a day by visiting the project website (www.michigan.gov/bluewaterbridgeproject). Comments can also be submitted via the website. Comments and questions can also be submitting by calling the toll-free project hotline (888-955-3515) from 8 a.m. to 5p.m. weekdays and after hours on voice mail. Comments can also be submitted at the Port Huron Transportation Service Center located at 2127 11th Avenue, Port Huron. Comments and questions will be addressed by members of the Study Team. The Study Team is available to discuss questions and concerns Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. The project website will continue to be maintained through the life of the project and for some time after the project is completed. Responses to comments can be further clarified through calling the hotline and speaking directly with a member of the study team. For more details on public and agency coordination, see ***Chapter 6****, of this FEIS.*

3.) One commenter was disappointed to arrive late to the public hearing due to the incorrect posting of the start time on the MDOT website.

Comment acknowledged.

7.3.16 Right of Way Acquisition and Relocations

1.) One commenter urged MDOT to "reconsider its decision to cancel its fast track policy of property acquisition" and allow the city to continue to collect property taxes for the difference in time between standard and fast track acquisition.

Although the early acquisition program was canceled, MDOT was able to advance some "hardship" acquisitions for property owners specifically requesting acquisition and demonstrating hardship conditions. MDOT is committed to assisting qualified hardship cases and will advance them as funds become available.

2.) Numerous commenters requested more detail regarding potential relocation sites for both homes and businesses and the availability of lower-income residences. Analysis of

impacts for the replacement residential, business and non-profit organization property locations was also requested.

MDOT is required to follow all state and federal property acquisition statutes which assure property owners rights are upheld in the highest professional means possible. MDOT makes a good faith offer based on fair market value to both owners and tenants, who are then free to choose their replacement location. Relocation advisory services are likewise extended to both parties. All benefits will be explained to both owners and tenants, who are then responsible to make a final decision on their relocation.

MDOT policies and practices require adequate residential and commercial property be available to impacted property owners on every project. Typically, owners are not required to relocate until they have obtained a suitable replacement location.

The Study Team conducted an enhanced analysis of potential replacement housing within the city of Port Huron and other communities within the vicinity of the project. This analysis which is also contained in the Conceptual Stage Relocation Plan identified suitable replacement housing available for the population displaced by the project. This analysis identified the number of homes available for sale in specific neighborhoods and communities and potential differences in housing stock between available homes and those being acquired. This analysis is located in ***Chapter 3, Section 3.6.1: What is the Current Real Estate market in St. Clair?*** *of the* ***DEIS.***

Businesses affected by projects can typically be broken down into two types of properties: "destination" properties and "non-destination properties." Destination properties are the kind of businesses that typically will receive patronage from customers who are less dependent upon the exact location of the business. A doctor's office, for example, is a "destination" business that would be visited by patients regardless of its immediate location (assuming it is still within the same general vicinity and reasonably accessible to the patients). In contrast, as a non-destination business, a fast-food restaurant or gas station might be more of an impulse visit for motorists, and the location of such a business would be more critical to ensure that customers are able to access the property. Such issues are being addressed with property owners individually by MDOT real estate personnel.

3.) One commenter was concerned with keeping businesses within the city of Port Huron and whether a business district would be created

MDOT is available to assist relocated businesses and residents find appropriate housing or commercial sites as close to their original location as is possible, but if residents or businesses wish to move, MDOT cannot compel them to remain in the same area. MDOT follows state and federal guidelines, which allow owner flexibility in the relocation process. MDOT makes the good faith offer based on fair market value to both owners and tenants, who are then free to choose their replacement location. Relocation advisory services are extended to both parties.

Under the Recommended Alternative, the relocated Pine Grove Avenue provides new frontage access to existing vacant or underutilized business locations north and south of the plaza. This may be an

attractive location for new or relocated businesses, providing economic redevelopment opportunities around the plaza.

As part of the mitigation of economic impacts, the State of Michigan will fund the development of an economic development plan for St. Clair County to assist with the potential development of new businesses in the Port Huron area.
The purpose of the plan is to facilitate the development of an Economic Development Strategic Plan for the city of Port Huron and St. Clair County through the assistance of the Michigan Department of Transportation. This strategic plan would build upon existing strategic advantages, international trade opportunities, and the community's extensive transportation assets that can contribute to a stronger more vibrant economy for the future. With an Economic Development Strategic Plan in place St. Clair County and Port Huron will be better positioned to build on the competitiveness of this region creating a stronger and more prosperous economy by working to achieve common goals and action strategies.

The creation of a designated business district and any joint marketing efforts for a business district would be directed by the city of Port Huron and local business owners.

7.3.17 Security

1.) One commenter inquired as to the percentage of trucks that undergo X-ray inspection and how this affects the time needed for secondary inspections.

Many trucks are required to undergo NII in the secondary inspection area which does require additional time. CBP does not reveal exact percentages for security reasons. During peak times this process can result in congestion in the secondary area on the current plaza. The new plaza will provide adequate space for the trucks to be scanned and for CBP to complete their mission. Up to four NII machines are required on the new plaza

2.) Two commenters voiced concerns regarding the number of truck/car inspections that will be handled per day at the new expanded plaza and one inquired as to the percentage of vehicles using NEXUS and FAST programs and plans to expand them.

Approximately 5,700 cars and 2,000 trucks cross the bridge daily into the United States (August 2008). All vehicles coming into the U.S. go through primary inspection and screening. The current enrollment level for NEXUS 17% and FAST is 17 % (August, 2008). Both programs are expected to be expanded in the future to provide better efficient for vehicles crossing at the border. The proposed plaza and improvements along I-94/I-69 will efficiently accommodate this expansion of the FAST/NEXUS programs.

3.) Two commenters had voiced general concerns regarding border security and asked, "Has any terror related incident, of any kind been impeded or uncovered resulting from the U.S. Customs process at the Blue Water Bridge, pre or post 911?.

This information is not available to the Study Team due to security reasons. However, CBP has indicated that unlawful people and contraband are routinely discovered at the Blue Water Bridge.

4.) A few commenters questioned why having the plaza at ground level was safer than the current elevated plaza. One would like to see the plaza restricted to cars and vacation vehicles.

Pine Grove Avenue running under the main plaza is a security concern due to its location and volume of vehicles. CBP has indicated the new plaza cannot have a major road running beneath it. Removing truck traffic from the Blue Water Bridge is not possible as it would require a new bridge over the St. Clair River and would not be practical from either an economic or goods movement perspective. Facilitating the movement of commercial goods is an important part of the Blue Water Bridge border crossing.

5.) A few commenters believed that a new plaza would not provide any additional security and believed it would be a waste of money, because of other less secure means available to cross the border. One supported the corridor and local access improvements but not the plaza improvements.

Comment Acknowledged

6.) Numerous commenters expressed concern regarding the number of inspection booths and the level of CBP staffing at the booths. Others requested that NEXUS and FAST lanes be kept open longer.

Similar questions were asked by local government officials. Please see response in ***Section 7.2.29,*** *comment 2.*

7.) Several commenters questioned why "reverse inspection" was eliminated as an alternative suggesting that this option should be further analyzed.

Similar questions were asked by local government officials. Please see response in ***Section 7.2.29,*** *comment 3.*

8.) One commenter suggested pre-screening of vehicles to facilitate faster inspection.

CBP has already implemented an advance program to pre-screen trucks that require that require paperwork to be transmitted to CBP by carriers hours before the truck arrives at the border. Formal pre-screening activities would essentially require reverse inspection involving the movement of U.S. inspection facilities to Canada and vice-versa. This option was eliminated due to national sovereign issues that are beyond the scope of this study.

9.) One commenter suggested the use of truck scanning technology.

One fixed and one mobile non-intrusive inspection NII/scanning facility has been installed at the existing plaza. The Recommended Alternative includes a minimum of two permanent truck-scanning facilities and two mobile facilities positioned in a manner to facilitate more efficient inspection, processing and queuing of vehicle.

7.3.18 Signals and Signing

1.) A number of commenters recommended better signage be provided along the corridor, on the plaza and along Pine Grove Avenue.

During the design phase a signing plan will be developed which will address signing issues along the I-94/I-69 corridor and Pine Grove Avenue corridor as well as on the proposed plaza. MDOT will work with local officials throughout the design and construction to provide improved signing around the plaza area.

7.3.19 Traffic

1.) One commenter concluded that both during and after project construction, accessibility to their business at 1525 Hancock Street between Pine Grove Avenue and 10th Avenue will be limited or negated. The evaluation process for traffic rerouting was also questioned and information was requested on the time periods for each construction stage.

All of the concerns over the plaza staging plans along Hancock and 10th Ave. are addressed with the revised staging plan described in ***Section 5.18*** *of this FEIS. The plan proposes to build relocated Pine Grove Avenue first followed by the plaza, with minor impacts to traffic along 10th Ave. and Hancock Street. Access will be maintained to all businesses not relocated, both during and post construction. Business owners will also be coordinated with during the construction phase to provide updated information and schedule.*

2.) A commenter requested that MDOT commit in writing to not divert any bridge-bound traffic off I-94 onto local streets. It was requested that the plaza allow on and off traffic from Pine Grove Avenue, and a concern was expressed that traffic delay on the M-25 connector during construction would result in further cut-through traffic in adjoining neighborhoods.

As described in ***Section 5.18*** *of this FEIS, MDOT's maintenance of traffic planning efforts will seek to minimize access disruptions to local businesses. MDOT will work closely with the city of Port Huron and the St. Clair County Road Commission to finalize these plans prior to the beginning of construction. Detours if needed will be the signaled to minimize relocation of traffic to local neighborhood streets during construction. The new plaza will have full on and off access to Pine Grove Avenue.*

3.) A couple of commenter suggested booths should be 2 to 3 deep to process cars/trucks two to three at a time per lane. It was also asked why not "build up?' and staff all inspection booths at all times.

Customs and Border Protection (CBP) management at the ports of entry determine the level of staffing based on location specific criteria. The booths at the Blue Water Bridge Plaza are fully staffed during peak times.

The port of entry has 13 primary lane booths which are fully staffed during peak traffic hours. For national security and law enforcement reasons, CBP does not publicly disclose the number of CBP officers located at U.S. Ports of Entry (POEs). CBP has adequate staffing to fully staff all 13 primary lane booths during peak hours. Staffing could not be increased to "speed things up," as noted; the POE is fully staffed during peak traffic hours. The Study Team has explored a large number of layout options including staggered booths to develop a layout that meets security requirements while processing border crossers as efficiently as possible.

4.) A number of persons commented on the existing truck/auto traffic weave and wanted assurance it would be eliminated suggested eliminating the current traffic weave.

The proposed improvements will eliminate two critical weaves. First is the weave conflict on I-94/I-69 between Canada bound traffic and local traffic at the Black River Bridge. The Canadian bound traffic will be directed to the center three lanes while the local traffic is on the right. The lanes will be separated by a concrete barrier. The car/truck weave that takes place on the Blue Water Bridge over the St. Clair River when entering the United States will also be eliminated. The new configuration of the plaza will put trucks in the right lanes and cars will be on the left.

5.) A few commenters suggested separate lanes and inspection facilities for trucks and cars. One suggested directing trucks across one bridge and cars on the other, and inspecting the trucks separately in the township.

Due to the freeway configuration on both sides of the border and traffic weave issues, traffic cannot be separated by car and truck by bridge. See ***Section 2.1, Alternatives Considered and Dismissed****, in the* ***DEIS****.*

6.) A number of commenters voiced concerns over the amount of truck traffic at the Blue Water Bridge. The commenters suggested reducing truck traffic, by reducing the number of Canadian trash trucks or directing truck traffic to a different point of entry would eliminate the need for an expanded plaza. One commenter requested data on processing times, CBP staffing and other data that the commenter thought might affect plaza size and need.

Truckers make decisions regarding the use of border crossing locations based upon many factors, not the least of which is proximity to their destination and travel time. The nearest alternate commercial border crossing is located in Detroit. This location also resides within a developed commercial area, processes

even more commercial freight than does the Blue Water Bridge Plaza. The Michigan Department of Transportation is also studying the addition of another land port crossing of the Detroit River. This is illustrative of the growing importance of international commerce to the state and nation, as well as local industry and employment.

The Canadian trash trucks crossing at the Blue Water Bridge account for only 3% of the commercial traffic crossing the bridge. While there continues to be political debate on the value and impact of this use, the vehicles themselves are small in size by comparison to a commercial tractor trailer and their elimination would have little effect on the plaza operations and no effect on the plaza size or need.

As previously stated, CBP operational data are not public information for security reasons. Staffing size has little effect on plaza size and need, other than the need for more parking and building area proportionate to any increases in staffing. Modifications to traffic volumes would also have little effect on plaza size as the need is most affected by improved security measures, operational safety improvements, and improvements to vehicle maneuvering, sight clearance, and CBP response time to increase the overall operational efficiency and security.

7.) A few commenters questioned if streets would be closed under the bridge.

The Recommended Alternative will not require the closing of any streets under the bridge. However, MDOT is planning to close State Street, realign Gratiot Street and cul-de-sac Forest Street as part of a separate project not related to the plaza expansion project.

8.) One commenter was concerned about the possible closing of Pine Grove Avenue or its relocation and its possible adverse affect on downtown business.

While the Recommended Alternative relocates Pine Grove Avenue to the west it actually provides more direct access from I-94/I-69 to downtown Port Huron than exists today, and much improved access for inbound traffic from the plaza to downtown as was requested by the City.

As a part of MDOT's maintenance of traffic planning efforts all efforts will be taken to minimize access disruptions to local businesses. MDOT will work closely with the city of Port Huron and the St. Clair Road Commission to finalize these plans prior to the beginning of construction.

9.) A number of commenters expressed concerns regarding the proposed roundabout, along Pine Grove Avenue.

Similar questions were asked by local government officials. Please see response in ***Section 7.2.14,*** *comment 4.*

7.3.20 Michigan Welcome Center

1.) Many commenters were concerned with the proposed placement of the welcome center as it is only accessible by those travelling west. They suggested the welcome center be placed in the median to serve both east and west travelers and to allow greater access to Port Huron businesses, restaurants and points of interest.

Similar questions were asked by local government officials. Please see responses in ***Section 7.2.3****.*

2) One commenter suggested a one or two way drive from the welcome center north to west Water Street.

A connection from the new Michigan Welcome Center north to West Water Street was considered. However, this would be considered a break in access to the freeway system and is not allowed by the Federal Highway Administration unless stringent criteria are met. In addition, creating the drive to the north would create new environmental and social impacts to the residents living along West Water Street.