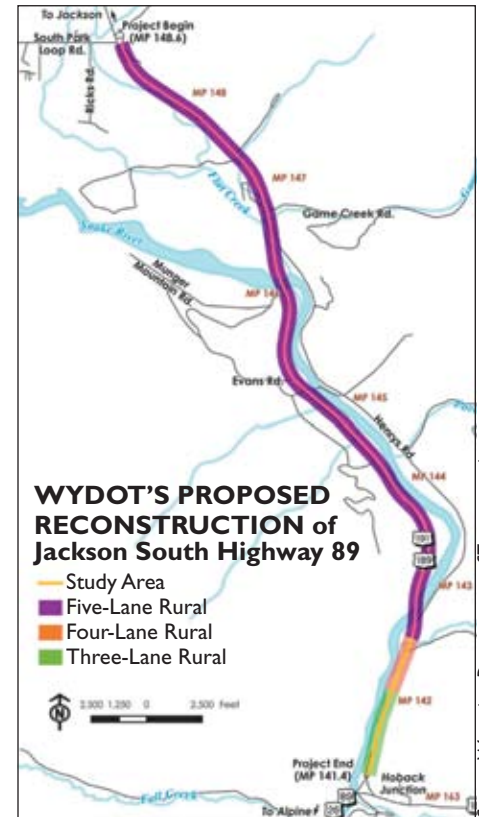
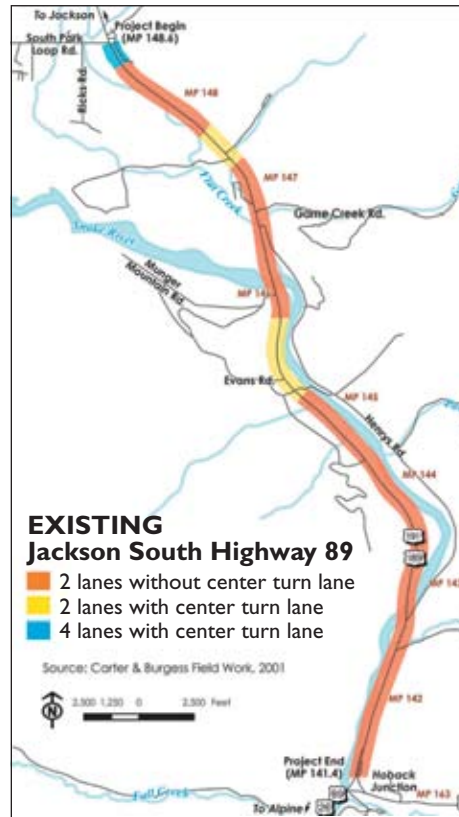


Did you know that the Wyoming Department of Transportation wants to make the highway south of Jackson five lanes nearly all the way to Hoback Junction?

In mid-September, WYDOT issued a final environmental impact statement (FEIS) recommending that 6.1 miles of the 7.2-mile stretch of highway from southern South Park Loop Road to Hoback Junction should be rebuilt to five lanes.

Why is this jump from two to five lanes a bad idea? We've outlined several key reasons below. Please consider adding your voice to those of other community members who believe that a three-lane highway – with right-turn pullouts where needed and over- or underpasses for wildlife – is what's appropriate, not a so-called "rural" five-lane highway.

See the back of this sheet for instructions on submitting your comments, which are due by Nov. 17. *Even if our comments might not be enough to scale back this reconstruction project, they may help get better wildlife crossings included in the final design.* Your comments might also help influence coming expansions planned for Highways 22 and 390.



The Wyoming Department of Transportation wants to expand 6.1 miles of the 7.2-mile section of Jackson South Highway 26/89/189/191 to five lanes. The Jackson South FEIS is available online at www.dot.state.wy.us/wydot/engineering_technical_programs/environmental_services/jackson_south.

1. Will a five-lane highway really be safer than three lanes?

WYDOT officials say that expanding the highway from two to five lanes will make it safer for motorists. **We agree that the road needs safety improvements, but five lanes could well be less safe than three.** That's because so many accidents along this stretch are caused by wildlife trying to cross the road and drivers trying to avoid them.

According to the FEIS – *WYDOT's own study* – between 1995 and 2004 there were 202 crashes in the 7-mile section. **Ninety-three of them – almost half – involved animals.** On Page 4-41, the study states that "big game species, such as deer, elk and moose often congregate during winter along lower-elevation habitats adjacent to the roadway." The FEIS continues, "**Because wider road widths, increased traffic volumes, higher traffic speeds,**

and increasing species populations are generally believed to increase the potential for wildlife-vehicle collisions, the long-term risk of wildlife-vehicle collisions is expected to increase in areas where safe highway crossing is not available."

In other words, six miles of five-lane highway will increase hazards for both wildlife and motorists moving through the valley because wider roads will result in more vehicles hitting wildlife. Hundreds of elk alone use critical winter range east of the highway and the South Park Feedground west of it.

And although the study does note the possibility of including structures to help mitigate this problem, it's unlikely that the ones currently being considered will be enough to counter the danger from a wider road and higher speeds.

2. Is WYDOT's justification for expanding the highway to five lanes based on accurate growth projections?

WYDOT's environmental study concludes that projected future numbers of highway users make the five-lane expansion necessary. The study says that traffic volume on Jackson South increased 179 percent between 1985 and 2006, and projects a 37 percent increase in volume during the next 20 years. On Page 3-16, it states, "From 1990 to 2000, Teton County grew approximately 63 percent and Jackson grew approximately 93 percent. These trends are expected to continue in the future."

However, most of the data that WYDOT used for its projections – including information from our community's 16-year-old Comprehensive Plan – is grossly outdated, especially considering the ongoing economic recession.

Also, the study doesn't take into account the fact that our community is currently in the middle of revising the Comprehensive Plan, under which Jackson Hole's growth potential may end up being reduced.

Source: Wyoming Department of Transportation

3. Are \$70 million and five lanes of pavement worth shaving just 15 seconds off a 7-mile drive?

The Jackson South Highway expansion project is estimated to cost about \$70 million, which Wyoming can't afford by itself. So it will require federal funding, and the federal government in return requires that the highway operate at a "Level of Service C" or better throughout the 20-year expected lifespan of the rebuilt road.

"Level of Service" is the rating of a road's capacity to handle traffic volumes at specific speeds; the rank declines as delays and dangers increase. WYDOT ran models of various scenarios for the reconstruction to assess what level of service on the 7.2-mile section would result during its peak two hours of use.

WYDOT officials determined that the expansion from two to five lanes was justified, but their analysis is flawed because it was based on a study of just the segment from Hoback Junction to South Park, not the length of the corridor from Hoback to the Town of Jackson, which is the "logical terminus" or end destination for most travelers.

WYDOT rejected a less-expansive proposal submitted by Teton County because it came in with a "D" rating. (It would have had a higher rating if the entire corridor had been included in the study.) It missed making "C" only because the travel time was estimated to take 15 seconds longer than that required for the better rating.

4. What about what our community wants?

WYDOT states that any alternative than the one it proposes would not meet the main aim of the transportation section of our current Comprehensive Plan: To provide for the mobility of residents and visitors within the context of community goals.

The Alliance contends that WYDOT is *not* considering the context of our unique community's goals.

What are those goals? Community surveys done in connec-

tion with our current Comprehensive Plan revision all showed the strongest support for protecting wildlife, its habitat and the corridors it needs to move through, and for managing growth responsibly.

It's difficult to see how replacing more than six miles of a two-lane highway with five lanes of pavement will protect wildlife or qualify as responsible growth.

However, as noted under #2 above, growth projections and the decisions based on them need to stem from current, accurate data – WYDOT's are not. Any projections of anticipated growth need to take into account the regional and local effects of the severe world-wide economic downturn, which isn't likely to end anytime soon.

Further, as noted under #2 above, growth projections and the decisions based on them need to stem from current, accurate data – WYDOT's are not. Any projections of anticipated growth need to take into account the regional and local effects of the severe world-wide economic downturn, which isn't likely to end anytime soon.

How you can comment on the proposed expansion of Jackson South Highway 89:

On Sept. 30, in response to requests from the Alliance and others, WYDOT officials announced that they had decided to add a 30-day extension to the original comment deadline of Oct. 18.

This makes the official public review period for the Jackson South Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) a 60-day period, which began Sept. 17 and ends Nov. 17, 2010. Please provide written comments postmarked no later than Nov. 17 to:

Tim Stark, Environmental Services Engineer,
Wyoming Department of Transportation,
5300 Bishop Blvd., Cheyenne, WY 82009-3340

Phone: (307) 777-4379, Fax: (307) 777-4193, or email comments to: jacksonsouthfeiscomments@dot.state.wy.us.

The FEIS can be viewed during the 60-day review period on WYDOT's website (http://www.dot.state.wy.us/wydot/engineering_technical_programs/environmental_services/jackson_south), and at the following locations during normal business hours: Jackson Town Hall at 150 E. Pearl, Teton County Library at 125 Virginian Lane, Teton County offices at 320 S. King St., WYDOT offices at 1040 Evans Rd., and Hoback Market at 10880 South Highway 89. If you wish to receive a copy of the FEIS, please contact Tim Stark at the address and phone number above.

Questions?

Please contact Louise Lasley, Alliance public lands director, at Louise@jhalliance.org or (307) 733-9417.

