Crosstown Boulevard
Purpose and Need Statement

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Interstate (I)-40 plays a critical role not only as a transportation corridor within Oklahoma City and the state, but also as a primary freight corridor carrying goods east and west. It falls on the National Highway System (NHS) which consists of roadways important to the nation's economy, defense, and mobility. The NHS includes the Eisenhower Interstate System of highways, among others. On May 1, 2002, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issued a Record of Decision (ROD) for the *Interstate 40 - Crosstown Expressway from I-235 to Meridian Avenue Oklahoma City, Oklahoma FHWA-OK-EIS-01-(1)-F* project. The ROD documented FHWA's decision to select the preferred alternative, Alternative D, as described in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the I-40 Crosstown and its related improvements. The selected alternative involved reconstructing I-40 in Oklahoma City from the I-235/I-35 interchange westward approximately four miles on an alignment south of the existing structure. The selected alternative provided a ten-lane interstate facility including express lanes on new alignment approximately 2,200 feet south of the existing I-40 facility and a six-lane at-grade boulevard from east of the Union Pacific tracks at the I-235 interchange to west of Walker Avenue.

In addition, as part of the relocation of I-40, the ROD identified that the existing I-40 right-of-way would be converted to a six-lane at-grade boulevard from east of the Union Pacific tracks at the I-235 interchange to west of Walker Avenue. From Western to Agnew Avenues, the existing I-40 right-of-way would be converted to a divided boulevard. As identified in the FEIS, the utilization of the old I-40 right-of-way as a boulevard would provide improved access to Bricktown and the downtown area from eastbound and westbound traffic on the new I-40 Crosstown.

Because of the time elapsed since the ROD's approval in 2002, recent downtown development, and changing Oklahoma City priorities with respect to downtown transit, pedestrian, and cyclist options, the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) and FHWA decided to reevaluate the original six-lane boulevard concept as identified in the ROD.

This evaluation would examine alternatives to the original boulevard concept, identify their potential social, economic, and environmental impacts, and evaluate the concept for consistency with the most current planning priorities of Oklahoma City and current plus future traffic needs. The evaluation would take into account input from the public and various Oklahoma City and regional stakeholders. After initial public involvement undertaken by the Oklahoma City, FHWA determined that the reevaluation of the ROD would best be accomplished by preparation of a new Environmental Assessment (EA) addressing various reasonable alternatives for the proposed boulevard, including one that restored the original street grid to the greatest extent possible.

1.1 Project Background

In 1991, the Oklahoma City mayor developed a capital improvement program known as MAPS (Metropolitan Area Projects) to improve the quality of life in Oklahoma City through public investment. This evolved into the MAPS Committee in 1992 with a goal: "*to improve the economic well being of area residents by developing a successful plan for funding and constructing new and improved convention, tourism, sports, cultural, and educational facilities*." Voters approved the MAPS bond program. As a result of the April 19, 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, additional redevelopment occurred within the urban core of Oklahoma City.

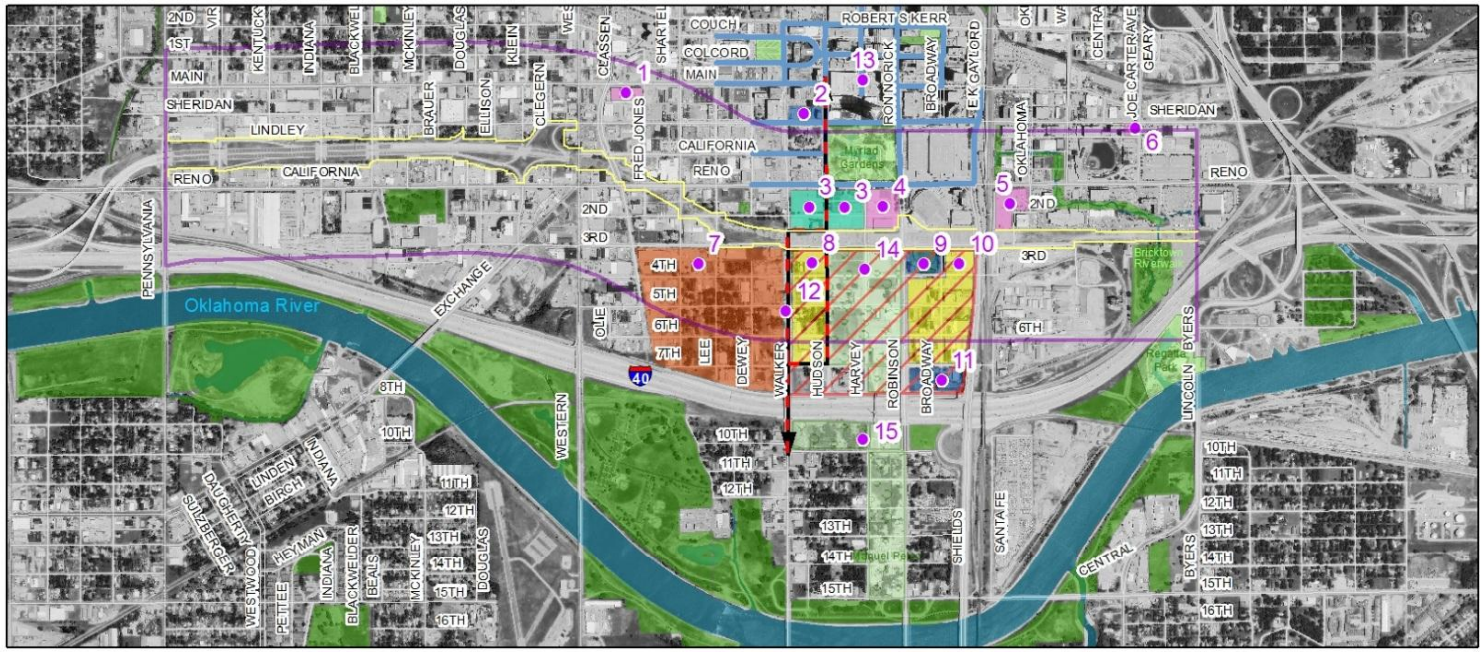
Recent downtown development trends in Oklahoma City have focused on transit, pedestrian and bicycle travel modes. The following paragraphs from the OKC Plan 2000-2020 best summarizes the recent historical context of downtown Oklahoma City (Oklahoma City, 2000):

> *"Oklahoma City's downtown, like downtowns throughout the nation, experienced a decline in economic vitality in the period following World War II. A number of factors contributed to this decline—plentiful land available for development at the City's periphery, flat terrain with an absence of natural geographical boundaries, school desegregation, increased reliance on the automobile, an improved middle class standard of living, and competition from adjoining cities.*
>
> *In an effort to redress the decline of downtown Oklahoma City, over a thousand buildings were torn down between the 1960s and the 1980s to create a platform for renewal. This renaissance effort had been only partially realized when the oil bust of the early 1980s hit, sending downtown into an economic tailspin. In order to reverse the trend of decline, voters, in 1993, approved a series of bold new construction and refurbishment projects, collectively referred to as MAPS (Metropolitan Area Projects). The 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building interrupted the momentum for renewal, but with the completion of the first MAPS projects and the finalization of bombing repairs and reconstruction, investment interest in downtown is resurging."*

The success of MAPS resulted in voter approval of MAPS for Kids, and currently MAPS 3. Several of the projects in MAPS 3 lie in the vicinity of the old I-40 right-of-way and will require reliable vehicular access (Oklahoma City, 2013). As part of MAPS 3, the Core to Shore area provides an estimated 750 acres that will undergo redevelopment. These improvements will contribute to leveraging investment opportunities for residential, office, and retail establishments. The Core to Shore Plan (2008) envisions the Crosstown Boulevard as a "world-class, pedestrian-friendly boulevard."

A large portion of the Core to Shore planning area is located within the study area. In addition, Figure 1 provides a list of other projects that are currently under development or planned within and near the study area of the Crosstown Boulevard project. Transportation solutions developed within the study area would be expected to provide necessary access and related improvements that would accommodate this development.

Figure 1. Study Area Map



Map #	Project Name or Future Planned Development	Map #	Project Name or Future Planned Development
Commercial, Industrial, and Residential			
1	Fred Jones Hotel	7	Medium-density residential use with ground level restaurants at key intersections
2	OG&E corporate headquarters		
3	Convention Center	8	High-density residential use
4	Hotel	9	Higher-density office use
5	Bricktown parking garage and hotel	10	Medium-density loft residential use
6	Bricktown hotel	11	Office use
Transportation		**Park**	
12	Streetcar	14	Upper Park
13	Project180 streetscape improvements	15	Lower Park

1.2 Project Location

As identified in the ROD, the proposed boulevard occurs within the old I-40 right-of-way from east of the Union Pacific tracks at the I-235 interchange to west of Walker Avenue (Figure 1). The study area which extends from Pennsylvania Avenue to Lincoln Boulevard/Byers Avenue covers approximate 463 acres[1] within and near the central business district. Over 70 percent of the area is comprised of commercial/mixed and industrial uses.

2.0 PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of boulevard project being evaluated with the EA is to complete the I-40 Relocation project in a manner that is broadly consistent with the 2002 ROD and complete a number of environmental commitments. A major purpose of the proposed action is to help alleviate traffic on the new I-40 mainline access points, and local roads by restoring connectivity between I-40 and downtown that was lost when I-40 was relocated. Prior to the relocation of the I-40 Crosstown, traffic into downtown Oklahoma City had access to downtown via ramps (primary access points to downtown) at Pennsylvania Avenue (an off-ramp in the eastbound direction and an on-ramp in the westbound direction), Virginia Avenue (an on-ramp in the eastbound direction and an off-ramp in the westbound direction), Western Avenue (off- and on-ramps in both the eastbound and westbound directions), Classen Boulevard (an off-ramp in the westbound direction only), Walker Avenue (an off-ramp in the eastbound direction only), Hudson Avenue (an on-ramp in the westbound direction only), Harvey Avenue (an off-ramp in the eastbound direction only), and Robinson Avenue (both off- and on-ramps in the westbound direction and an on-ramp in the eastbound direction). As a result of these eight access points, bi-directional traffic was distributed rather evenly across the central business district.

As the new I-40 Crosstown was opened in 2012, local traffic entering the downtown street network was limited to Pennsylvania Avenue (off- and on-ramps in both the eastbound and westbound directions), Western Avenue (off- and on-ramps in both the eastbound and westbound directions), Robinson Avenue (an off-ramp in the westbound direction), Shields Boulevard (both off- and on-ramps in the eastbound direction and an on-ramp in the westbound direction), and the east boulevard connection to I-235/I-35.

To improve interstate access to Oklahoma City and separate through and local traffic movements on I-40, additional access points into downtown need to be provided, as identified in the ROD. Since approval of the ROD, Oklahoma City and various large private entities have completed or developing further commercial, recreational, and entertainment destinations that are expected result in even more demand for fast and efficient access to the downtown business district from the I-40 mainline.

[1] 2010 Land Use, Association of Central Oklahoma Governments, Transportation Planning Department

3.0 NEED ELEMENTS

3.1 Alleviate traffic backing up on the new I-40 Crosstown ramps

The new I-40 Crosstown is a 10-lane interstate stretching four and a half miles from May Avenue to the I-235/I-35 interchange. During planning and design of the new I-40 Crosstown, a proposed boulevard in the abandoned I-40 right-of-way was inclusive of the mainline alternative (Alternative D). According to the I-40 Major Investment and Environmental Impact Statement Traffic Analysis Methodology Report (Parsons Brinckerhoff, 1999):

> "*Alternative D, as considered for this study, includes a boulevard constructed in the abandoned I-40 ROW from east of the Union Pacific tracks to Western. The existing I 40 between Western and Agnew would be converted to a divided boulevard. Two way access to the proposed boulevard would be provided at both the I 235 interchange and the Agnew interchange."*

As a result of the functional dependence of the new I-40 Crosstown and the Crosstown Boulevard, defined as Alternative D in the FEIS and ROD, no traffic specific analyses were completed for the boulevard. Access points into downtown provided by the Crosstown Boulevard were an assumption in the traffic analysis for the new I-40 Crosstown mainline. The new I-40 Crosstown can carry up to 173,000 vehicles per day and provides full access interchanges at Shields Boulevard and at Western Avenue in Oklahoma City (Figure 1).

In July 2014, a Traffic Operational Analysis of the Boulevard was completed by Traffic Engineering Consultants. Based on this analysis, by 2030 the average annual daily traffic (AADT) at the western and eastern portions of the boulevard would be 31,000 and 32,000 vehicles per day, respectively. Without improvements within the old I-40 right-of-way, current I-40 travelers wishing to access to Oklahoma City's local street network must use either Shields Boulevard or Western Avenue. As identified in the FEIS and ROD, additional access points are needed to offer the greatest capacity into downtown and provide the best distribution of local traffic to and from the I-40 interstate system (Parsons Brinckerhoff 1999).

3.2 Restore lost vehicular access to downtown Oklahoma City

Numerous new and re-development projects have resulted from MAPS and Oklahoma City planning initiatives. These include, among others, the Chesapeake Arena, Myriad Gardens and other Oklahoma City parks, the Devon Tower office building, the Bricktown entertainment district, Amtrak station, and local government buildings.

As currently envisioned by MAPS 3, the new convention center is planned for the area near the Myriad Botanical Gardens north of the abandoned I-40 right-of-way (Figure 1). The entire facility would be approximately 470,000 square feet and include 235,000 square feet of exhibition halls, meeting rooms and ballrooms.

Additionally, Bricktown Entertainment District is estimated to be the top visitor attraction in downtown Oklahoma City, with approximately 6 million annual visitors. Chesapeake Energy Arena and Myriad Botanical Gardens both estimated over 1 million visitors each in 2012. The Chesapeake Energy Center is also the home of the Oklahoma Thunder of the National Basketball Association. In 2013, the Thunder's 41 home games attracted approximately 746,000 people. The Cox Convention Center and Choctaw Ballpark were also both in the top 15 visitor attractions in 2012 (Oklahoma City MAPS 3 Market Analysis, 2013).

The Downtown Public Park project includes a 40 acre upper section (north of the new I-40 Crosstown) and a 30 acre lower section (south of the new I-40 Crosstown) connected by the Skydance Pedestrian Bridge (Figure 1). Amenities are currently being developed for the park, but would support MAP 3's goals of improving the residents' quality of life. The Downtown Public Park would be developed in three phases: 1) the upper section with basic amenities such as landscaping along the new boulevard and access to the new pedestrian bridge, 2) the upper section will then be augmented to include a cafe, lake and other amenities, and 3) the lower section will be completed in the final phase and amenities have not been identified to date.

Since the new I-40 Crosstown opened to traffic in 2012, access into downtown from I-40 are provide only at Shields Boulevard and Western Avenue. An additional access point occurs at Pennsylvania Avenue/Villa Avenue/South Agnew Avenue, which is further away from the downtown core to the west. Utilizing the old I-40 right-of-way would increase access from the new I-40 Crosstown into downtown by providing a local route that directly provides access to community resources, neighborhoods, the downtown core, tourist venues, and sporting and convention facilities, and businesses.

Major employers in downtown Oklahoma City include Devon Energy, City of Oklahoma, Sonic Corp., SSM Healthcare, University of Oklahoma Health Science Center, OGE Energy, and AT&T. Of the seven major employers, only one, Sonic Corporation, is within the study area (Table 1). Devon Energy, City of Oklahoma, OGE Energy, and AT&T are located within the central business district just north of the study area.

Table 1. Downtown Oklahoma City Major Employers

Major Employers	Number of Employees (2013)
Devon Energy	3,100
City of Oklahoma	4,500
Sonic Corporation	2,000
SSM Healthcare of Oklahoma, Inc.	2,900
University of Oklahoma Health Science Center	4,200
OGE Energy	3,450
AT&T	3,000

Source: Greater Oklahoma City Economic Development, Updated October 2013

3.3 Provide Pedestrian and Bicyclist Accessibility

Since FHWA issued the ROD, several local plans identify the proposed boulevard as part of land use and redevelopment efforts in Oklahoma City. These plans include the *Downtown Strategic Initiative* (Oklahoma City, 2013a), the *2005 – 2030 Oklahoma Statewide Intermodal Transportation Plan* (ODOT 2005), the *Core to Shore Plan* (Oklahoma City, 2008), and the in-progress comprehensive plan, *planOKC* (Oklahoma City Planning Department, 2013). As part of the EA evaluation, transportation solutions consider for the boulevard should be consistent with the current planning initiatives, which are described briefly below.

The *Downtown Strategic Initiative* identifies efforts to redevelop the downtown core and surrounding neighborhoods (Oklahoma City, 2013a). It considers how transportation connects areas in downtown. Plans show the future boulevard linking a corridor of existing parks and the future Downtown Public Park, Myriad Botanical Gardens, Bricktown River Walk Park, and Regatta Park. The ODOT *2005 – 2030 Oklahoma Statewide Intermodal Transportation Plan* recommends improvements to transportation projects to assist with intermodal transportation in the area.

The *Core to Shore Plan* (Oklahoma City, 2008) focuses on redevelopment opportunities resulting from relocating the I40 Crosstown. Phase I of the plan includes new local access provided on the old I-40 right-of-way. Based upon the plan, the new access should complement the downtown land use and redevelopment plans. The plan also indicated that transportation alternatives on the old I-40 right-of-way should be comfortable for pedestrians, meet "complete street" type of policies that will be indentified in the new comprehensive plan (planOKC), provide land use connections between downtown and the river, and support mixed-use development. As a result, the plan's overall purpose is to create a compelling re-development vision for the Core to Shore district and provide a framework that guides public and private sector action toward implementation. This would be accomplished by providing transportation improvements that meet the following objectives:

- Developing a downtown boulevard, along the old I-40 alignment between Oklahoma and Walker Avenues.
- Connecting the downtown core with the Oklahoma River shore utilizing multiple modes of urban transit, including pedestrian and bicycle transportation, buses, and future fixed guideway transit.

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