

# Northern Corridor / Washington Parkway Highway Fact Sheet

## Route Alignment

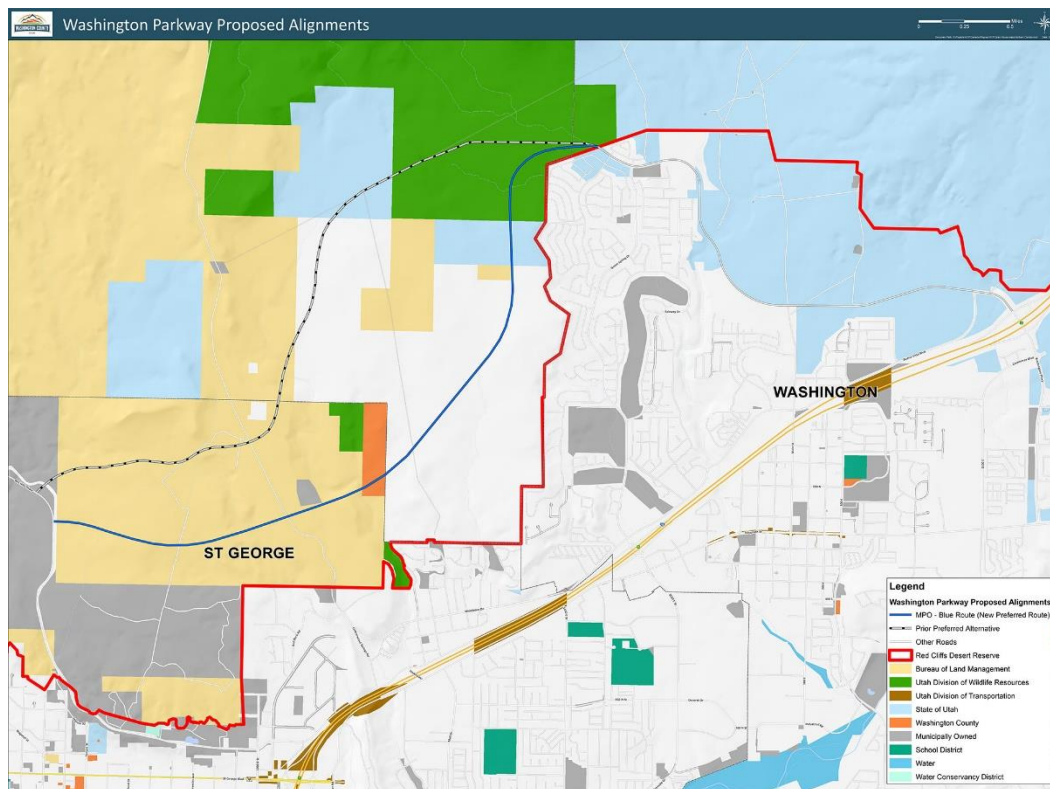
The current proposed highway alignment would link I-15 Exit 13 to Red Hills Parkway just west of the Pioneer Hills Trailhead.

**2.5 miles** would link I-15 Exit 13 to the top of Green Springs Dr., costing an estimated **\$6 million**<sup>1</sup>.

**4.2 miles** would fragment the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve and Red Cliffs National Conservation Area (RCNCA) from above Green Springs Dr. to Red Hills Parkway. Estimated total cost for the Northern Corridor I-15 Exit 13 to Red Hills Parkway (including increased capacity between SR-18 and Northern Corridor from 2035-2040) is **\$110 million** dollars.<sup>2</sup>

**300 foot** right-of-way

**153-acre** disturbance area



Washington County image. Blue line is current route alignment within the NCA/Reserve.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.stgeorgeutah.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Washington-City-2019-Tentative-Budget-Packet.pdf>, p. 66

<sup>2</sup> Dixie MPO 2015-2040 Regional Transportation Plan, pp. 18-19, 21.

## Need

Rapid population growth in Washington County over the past twenty years has increased overall congestion, including around Exits 8 and 10 on I-15. Current planning expectations are that Washington County's population may grow to 355,000 by the year 2045. The proposed Northern Corridor highway through the Red Cliffs National Conservation Area is based on the premise that large numbers of residents will need to travel between eastern portions of Washington County (Washington City, Hurricane, Laverkin) and western portions (Santa Clara, Shivwits, Ivins) on a daily basis in the future.<sup>3</sup>



BLM image. Red Cliffs NCA.

Traffic heading to the many commercial areas in between and around Exit 8 and Exit 10 (Target, Shoppes at Zion, Red Rock Commons, Red Cliffs Mall, Cotton Mill, Washington Walmart) would not be relieved by this highway, resulting in continued congestion around the two exits.

## Traffic

This new highway would accommodate between 20,000 and 45,000 additional vehicles<sup>4</sup> per day while reducing traffic demand on portions of I-15, St. George Boulevard, Bluff Street, and Red Cliffs Drive by about 10 percent.<sup>5</sup> What is unclear is how the Bluff Street/Red Cliffs Parkway interchange and Snow Canyon Parkway, with its associated intersections, will accommodate the additional traffic. Additionally, there is a legitimate safety concern about greatly increasing traffic on Red Hills Parkway, a road subject to frequent vehicle collisions.

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<sup>3</sup> Washington Parkway Corridor Alternatives Cost/Benefit Analysis, April 25, 2010, p. 12

<sup>4</sup> Washington Parkway Corridor Alternatives Cost/Benefit Analysis, April 25, 2010

<sup>5</sup> Washington Parkway Study: Integration of East-West Transportation Needs with Conservation Objectives for Desert Tortoise in Washington County Utah

## Impacts

One result of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 was to specifically set aside the Red Cliffs National Conservation Area as protected habitat for endangered species and to preserve its scenic beauty and recreational opportunities. In exchange, much land in the county was opened to development to provide for current and future growth. This proposed transportation corridor would bisect the Reserve and fragment its ecological protections, going against the provisions in the original agreement.

## Critical Habitat

The highway would pave 153 acres of critical habitat for the threatened Mojave Desert Tortoise. Approximately **50** tortoises were found in a 2018 pre-survey of the highway right-of-way and buffer.

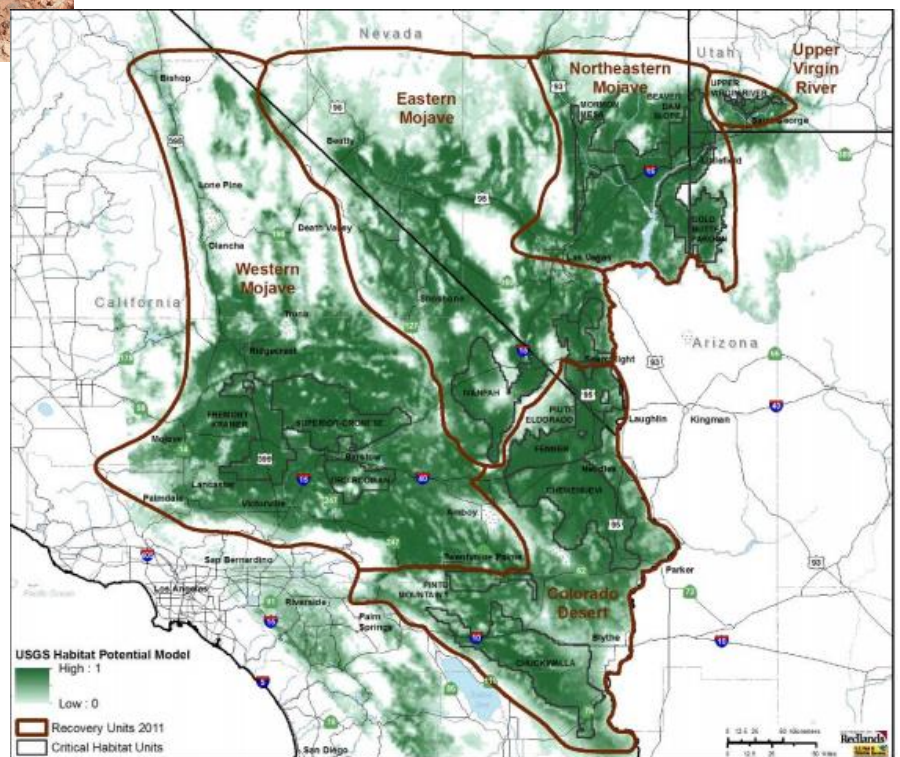
The highway would fragment tortoise range in the highest-density tortoise zone in the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve (Zone 3), which is part of the highest-density tortoise recovery unit, the Upper Virgin River Recovery Unit.



The Upper Virgin River Recovery Unit currently has the highest density of any recovery unit at 19.6 tortoises/km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>6</sup> It will be difficult to meet the range-wide goal of species recovery if a 4-lane highway fragments this important critical habitat.

Risks associated with the highway include direct mortality, construction activities, habitat loss and fragmentation, spread of exotic/invasive weeds, small reserve, disturbance, increased risk of fire, increased predation and subsidies, disease, increased access to remote areas and increased threat of poaching and harassment.

The highway would also interrupt migration routes of mule deer and increase the chance of vehicle collision, potentially impacting hunters who draw tags in Reserve.



<sup>6</sup> Regional Desert Tortoise Monitoring in the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve 2017

## Trails

The highway would bisect the T-bone and Cottontail Trails, and impact user experience on the Pioneer Hills, Middleton Powerline, Icehouse and Mustang Pass Trails.



Red Cliffs Desert Reserve image. T-Bone Trail.

## Economy

There are no studies analyzing the economic impact to Washington County of visitors to the Red Cliffs NCA. However, let's assume that a modest 10% of the 4.5 million visitors to Zion in 2017 spent a couple extra vacation days in St. George to explore local recreation opportunities in the Red Cliffs NCA including sightseeing, hiking, mountain biking, and rock climbing. If this is the case, it's safe to say that 450,000 people spent money on hotels, meals, services, and supplies. Preserving the integrity of the Red Cliffs NCA is important to the economic wellbeing of southwest Utah.

The famous "red rock" views that entice tourists to the St. George area also lure new part-time and permanent residents. Realtors use pictures of the Red Cliffs NCA to generate buzz. The proximity of homes to this incredible resource drives up property values.

## Quality of Life

The scenic vistas, open space and exceptional opportunities for recreation provided by the Red Cliffs NCA greatly enhance quality of life in southwest Utah. To paraphrase John Muir, the Red Cliffs NCA is our beauty and bread, place to play in and pray in, source of strength and healing for body and mind.

## Conserve Southwest Utah's Proposal

An independent, open review of the transportation model to verify its assumptions and basis, the problem statement, and why the Northern Corridor is the only viable alternative.

An independent, open analysis of other alternatives, for example:

1. Red Hills Parkway Flyovers
2. More porous I-15 (underpass/overpass at 400 East, 2450 East, others)
3. One-way timed traffic loops
4. Efficient interchanges
5. Emphasis on multi-modal transportation including walking, biking, carpooling and public transit
6. Re-route truck traffic around St. George on Southern Parkway
7. Incorporation of future transportation trends

### Community Input for a New Northern Corridor Analysis

A cost-benefit study done eight years ago<sup>7</sup> compared various road alignments through the NCA to the cost of doing nothing to alleviate congestion. This "sensitivity analysis"<sup>8</sup> was not an analysis of alternatives. A true comparison of alternative transportation alignments would follow an approach used by UDOT and the Wasatch Front Regional Council when regional transportation plans are updated.<sup>9</sup> We believe this approach should be required before a commitment of this magnitude that will affect these important public lands is made.



### Vision Dixie Smart Growth Principles

Land-use planning and zoning practices have a major impact on transportation. Implementing Vision Dixie principles like "Direct Growth Inward" and "Build Balanced Transportation" could shape the way we travel between work, school, home and shopping. In well-planned communities, walking, biking or public transit can replace the need for single car trips that produce congestion.

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<sup>7</sup><https://dixiempo.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/washington-parkway-extension-cost-benefit-study-may-16-20.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> [https://dixiempo.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/nwp\\_final\\_report.pdf](https://dixiempo.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/nwp_final_report.pdf). "The Cost/Benefit Study also completed a sensitivity analysis that compares future traffic demand on six different conceptual corridors (Figure 7). This sensitivity analysis showed that the strongest demand was for a transportation corridor that connects the existing Washington Parkway interchange on I-15 (exit 13) to Bluff Street via Red Hills Parkway, as well as a segment of new alignment."

<sup>9</sup> <http://wfr.org/vision-plans/regional-transportation-plan/progress-2019-2050-regional-transportation-plan/develop-scenarios/>

Individual cities must implement Vision Dixie principles to avoid the continued trend of transportation planning chasing development. Development and transportation planning should be integrated, allowing each to influence the other.

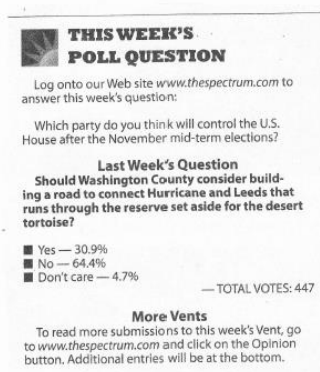
### Multi-modal Transportation

Avoiding single-person vehicle trips will be crucial for relieving traffic congestion across the County. Walking, biking, carpooling, and public/mass transit are all great options that cities and county are working hard to provide for their residents. Let's start making the switch when possible!

### Public Opinion

A 2010 poll in Washington County's Spectrum Newspaper<sup>10</sup> showed lack of support for a road through the Red Cliffs NCA / Reserve. There were 447 respondents, and 64.4% opposed the road.

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A 2015 poll<sup>11</sup> conducted by Washington County's local paper the Southern Utah Independent to determine popular support for or against the "county's preferred" Northern Corridor route across prime NCA habitat showed that 63% of those participating in the poll do not support the road.

In April 2018, the Southern Utah Independent conducted a new poll<sup>12</sup> regarding the Northern Corridor to gauge public opinion. As of May 1, 2018, the poll was 76% (124) to 23% (38) opposed to the road.

### Legality

The highway violates Washington County's current Habitat Conservation Plan established under the Endangered Species Act, the 2009 Omnibus Public Lands Management Act and the congressionally-established Red Cliffs National Conservation Area, and the Red Cliffs National Conservation Area Plan.

<sup>10</sup> Saturday 09.04.10 Page A6 The Spectrum & Daily News

<sup>11</sup> <http://suindependent.com/poll-northern-corridor/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://suindependent.com/poll-northern-corridor-washington-parkway-constructed/>

Overturning bedrock conservation laws would set a dangerous precedent for other counties trying to work around Habitat Conservation Plans.

Legislation to force the corridor died in the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress. Washington County is now applying for a right-of-way grant for the corridor on federal lands which initiates NEPA, or the National Environmental Policy Act process. In NEPA, an objective and detailed review of environmental impacts will take place, and a range of alternatives to the corridor will be analyzed.

**NEPA**

County-hired environmental consultants are currently amending the Washington County Habitat Conservation Plan to explicitly allow the construction of a Northern Corridor as part of HCP renewal. They will also apply to the BLM for a right-of-way grant for the Northern Corridor which could result in a Resource Management Plan amendment (under jurisdiction of the BLM). A Notice of Intent will be issued in summer 2019, initiating NEPA. Important documents will be available for review by the public. There will be multiple comment periods.



**You**

Public engagement and support of NGO's (non-governmental organizations like Conserve Southwest Utah) in the NEPA process is crucial. The Bureau of Land Management and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service have an affirmative legal duty to fairly consider alternatives proposed in NEPA. Comments from the public and interested stakeholders are considered.