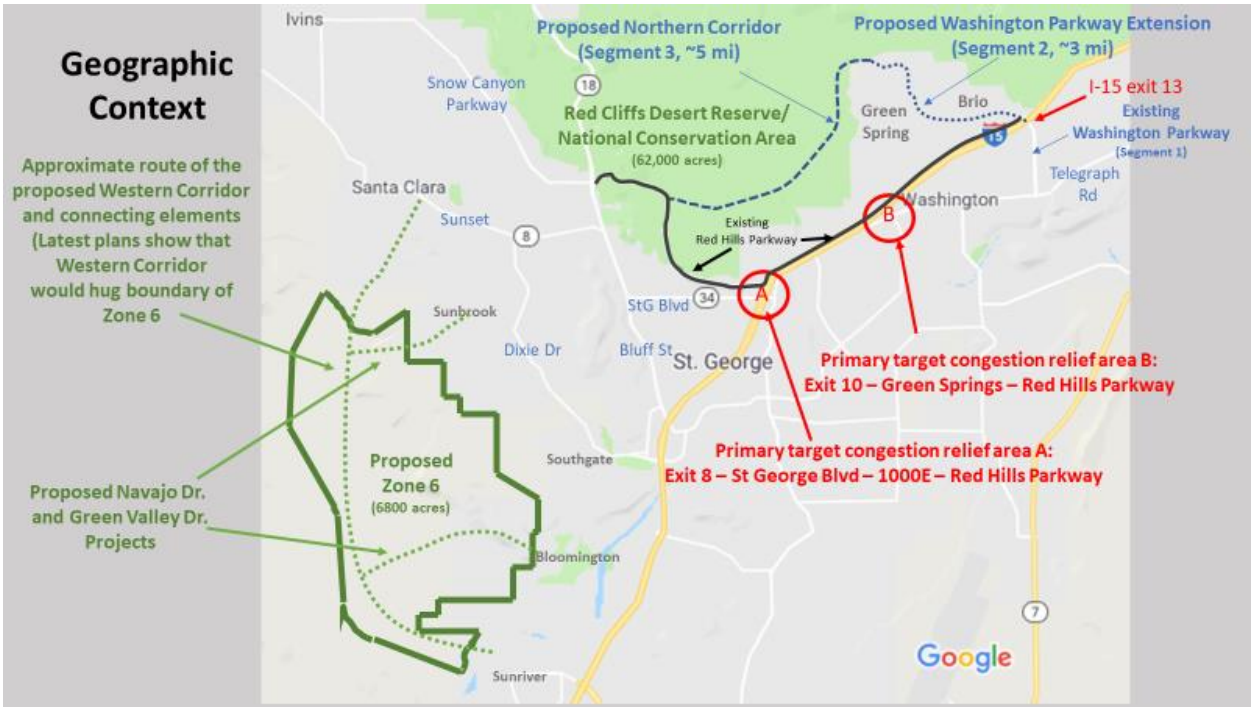
Traffic Congestion, Proposed Solutions and Alternatives

3.1 Context

The map below provides the geographic context for the primary projected traffic congestion areas, the Northern Corridor Highway proposed as a solution to the congestion, its proposed Zone 6 mitigation, with the highways planned in that proposed mitigation area.

The subsections that follow describe issues with the assumptions and constraints used in the traffic modeling resulting in the proposed Northern Corridor and community alternatives offered to better address the projected traffic congestion.



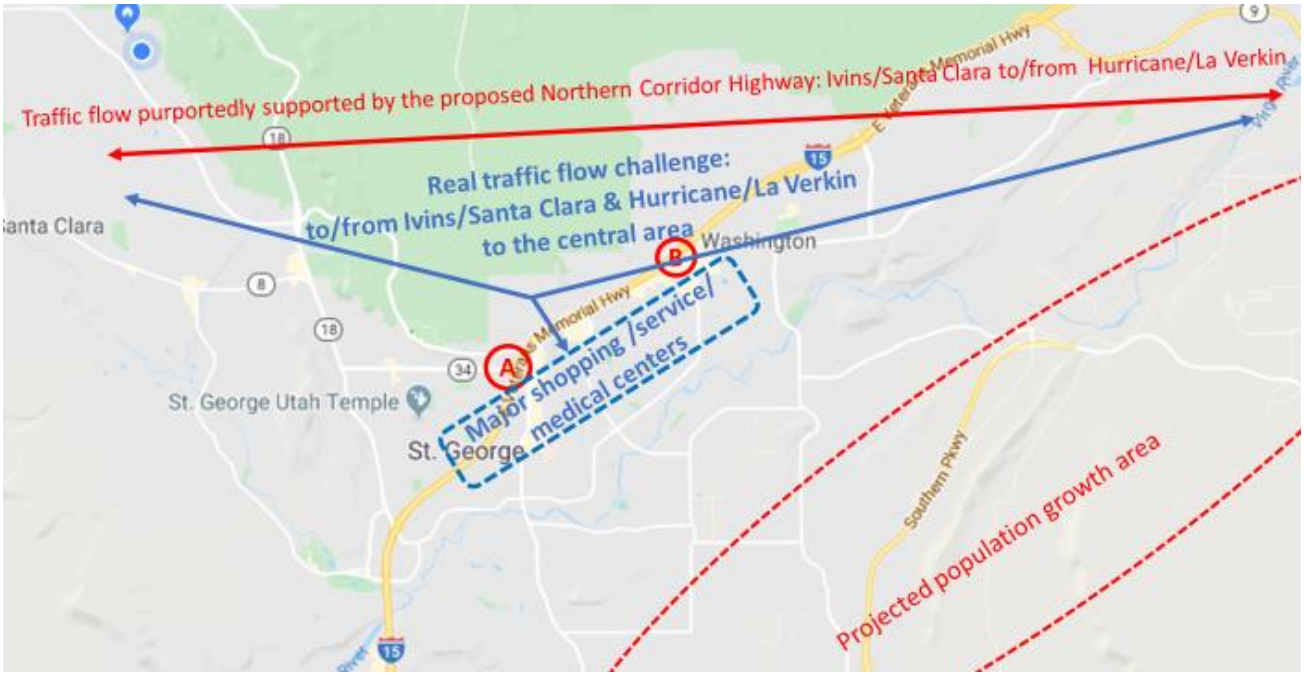
3.2 Traffic Modeling Assumptions and Constraints

Verification and validation of the assumptions and constraints used in the traffic modeling that is the basis for the purpose and need statement for the Northern Corridor is necessary, including

- *How were east-west traffic volumes estimated? Is it just a straight extrapolation of current flows?*
- *Were thru-flows distinguished from flows to the central shopping/services/medical areas, and if so, how?*
- *What/dates times were used to estimate maximum and average flows, and which were used to determine need?*
- *Were flow purposes specified and how do those purposes project into the future?*

The need statement for the Northern Corridor Highway is based on a traffic model which projects "failed" intersections by 2040 at certain times in the east-west traffic flow along the north side of St George: traffic flowing between Hurricane and La Verkin on the northeast side of the metropolitan area and Ivins and Santa Clara on the northwest side. The map below shows the traffic flow of concern and the two congestion areas that are projected to result.

The projected congestion challenges local understanding of the area and its growth and congestion issues. It is the southern side of the metro area that is projected to be the high growth area, with the northern side already fairly built-out and constrained by geography, federally-managed public lands including the Red Cliffs National Conservation Area, and Shivwits Band of Paiutes tribal lands. There is considerable open land far north of the existing metro area, along SR18, but this area would not be served by the proposed Northern Corridor Highway: they would either want to access the central metro area or bypass it altogether with a highway far north of the proposed highway. It challenges the imagination to project large increases in traffic volumes along the north side of the metro area. It is completely within reason to expect increased traffic from all outlying areas to the major shopping, service and medical centers in central St George and Washington, through the two intersections that are projected congestion areas. Bypassing them with a new highway would not ease the congestion of traffic whose destinations are in close proximity. The whole concept upon which the Northern Corridor is predicated is flawed. We need improved traffic flow to and through the congested intersections, not a way to bypass them.



The proposed Northern Corridor Highway route depicted in the map below shows the serpentine routing of traffic around the two projected congestion points, obviously giving no improved access for the major shopping, service and medical centers from the suburban population centers.

As any experienced modeler will agree, the output of a model is highly dependent upon the assumptions and constraints placed upon it. It is common industry practice to document the assumptions and constraints used in any mathematical modeling exercise. These are generally not very numerous or complex. Conserve Southwest Utah has requested from Washington County informally and formally (via FOIA and GRAMA) the documented will that has been hidden from public review. A review of the assumptions and constraints used in generating the Statement of Need should be in order. The county has said that an independent technical review of the model would be performed before any action is committed, yet there has been no such review. A formal technical peer review of the model should be required to verify the Statement of Need.

3.3 Growth and Traffic Planning

In a reaction to the proposed 2006 Washington County Lands Bill sponsored by the county and Utah's congressional delegation that would have forced the construction of the Northern Corridor Highway, the citizens of the county lodged a protest that resulted in not only the 2009 Omnibus Public Lands Bill that established additional protections against the highway, but also a growth and traffic planning concept named Vision Dixie. Concepts in this vision included protecting public lands, concentrating growth to avoid sprawl, and addressing transportation planning integrally with growth planning. Vision Dixie demonstrated a disconnect between the citizens and their elected representatives concerning growth and traffic planning and protection of our public lands. The disconnect has become further demonstrated by the lack of implementation planning by our county and municipal governments. Growth has sprawled, transportation corridors have not been managed, and traffic congestion is resulting. This is a self-inflicted wound. The scope of the EIS should include alternatives that support the Smart Growth principles committed in Vision Dixie.

3.4 The logic of the Northern Corridor

As discussed in the previous paragraphs, the logic of the Northern Corridor Highway is questionable. Its superficial reason is obviously to reduce projected traffic congestion, but that relief can easily be argued to be theoretical rather than practical. It is also clear that the even the superficial and theoretical reasons could have been avoided if growth and traffic planning had been undertaken in support of the Vision Dixie Smart Growth principles developed by the citizens of the county over 20 years ago. There are, however, reasons for the proposed Northern Corridor Highway that transcend the superficial and theoretical traffic congestion challenges:

Utah and Washington County has long sought state and local control of federally-managed public lands. They have tried, and continue to try, sweeping measures that would grant them control, but they also employ methods that support their ends that are by nature "death by a thousand cuts": small steps that establish precedent in achieving their goals. This is an example of a "cut" – a few miles of highway forced through protected habitat that have been set aside with their agreement, taking control of protected lands and forcing their will upon them. If it can happen once, it can happen many times.

When the HCP and NCA were formed, there were private inholdings included in the area. Washington County agreed to support the purchase of these inholdings in order to secure the long-term protections of the HCP and NCA. However, they also forced in the agreements that these inholdings be valued at such a high amount that purchase would be very expensive and difficult. They have coincidentally defined the rather circuitous route of the proposed Northern Corridor Highway Right-of-Way to pass adjacent to a large inholding, and they have recently purchased the inholdings in the Right-of-Way. This opens the possibility of and pressure for future development within the HCP/NCA. They say they this would never happen since the support the purpose of the HCP/NCA, but this was the same assurances they gave when the HCP and NCA were established, yet now this highway is being proposed.

3.5 Community Alternatives

20.5.1 Alternatives to be Considered

The county included only two alternatives in its consideration of the Northern Corridor Highway:

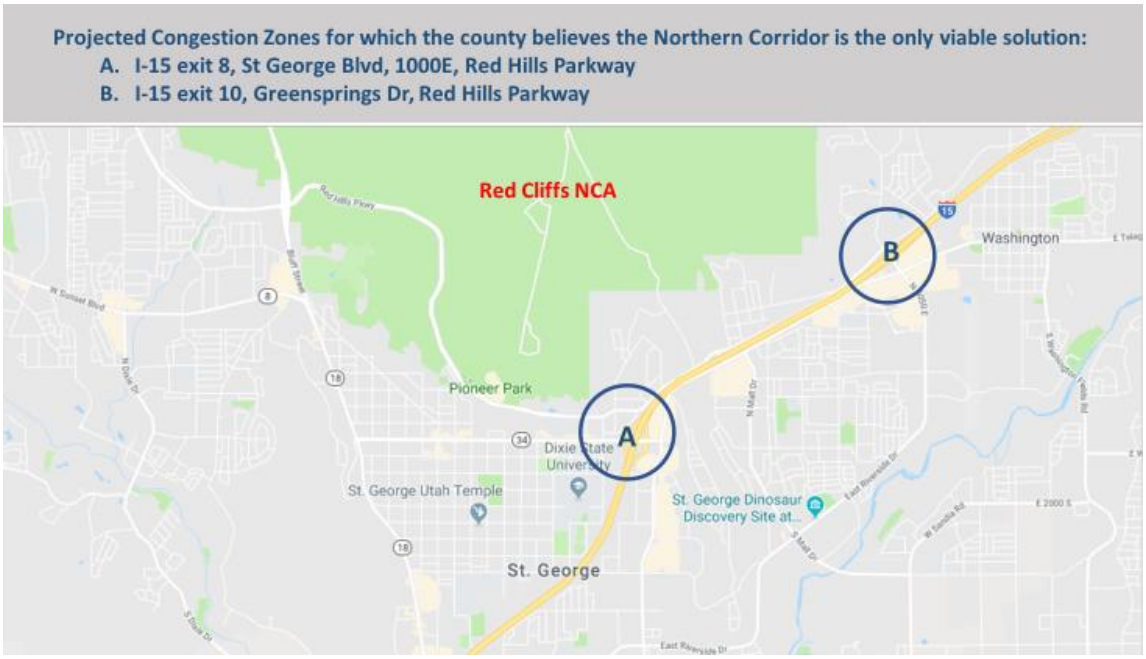
1. *All of the proposed projects identified in the Regional Transportation Plan*
2. *None of them*

This does not represent an appropriate range of alternatives. The EIS should determine the impact of additional alternatives:

1. *All of the proposed projects minus the Northern Corridor*
2. *All of the proposed projects minus the Northern Corridor plus the set of Community Alternatives*

20.5.2 The Community Alternatives

There are two primary alternatives to the Northern Corridor Highway that would reduce the projected traffic congestion. There are two primary projected zones as depicted in the map below.



As described in the previous section, the county suggests that these two zones are congested by traffic attempting to move east-west along the northern side of the metropolitan area. Some of that cause may be true, but the most logical cause is traffic attempting to get from the northeast and northwest sides of the metropolitan area to the central shopping, services and medical centers. A more logical solution would be to allow increased ease of access to those centers and to/from them onto I-15. The following alternatives address those logical solutions.

Alternative 1: Red Hills Parkway – I-15 Viaduct/Flyover Connection
This alternative would connect Red Hills Parkway north-bound directly to I-15 north-bound, and I-15 south-bound directly to Red Hills Parkway south-bound. There are two options:

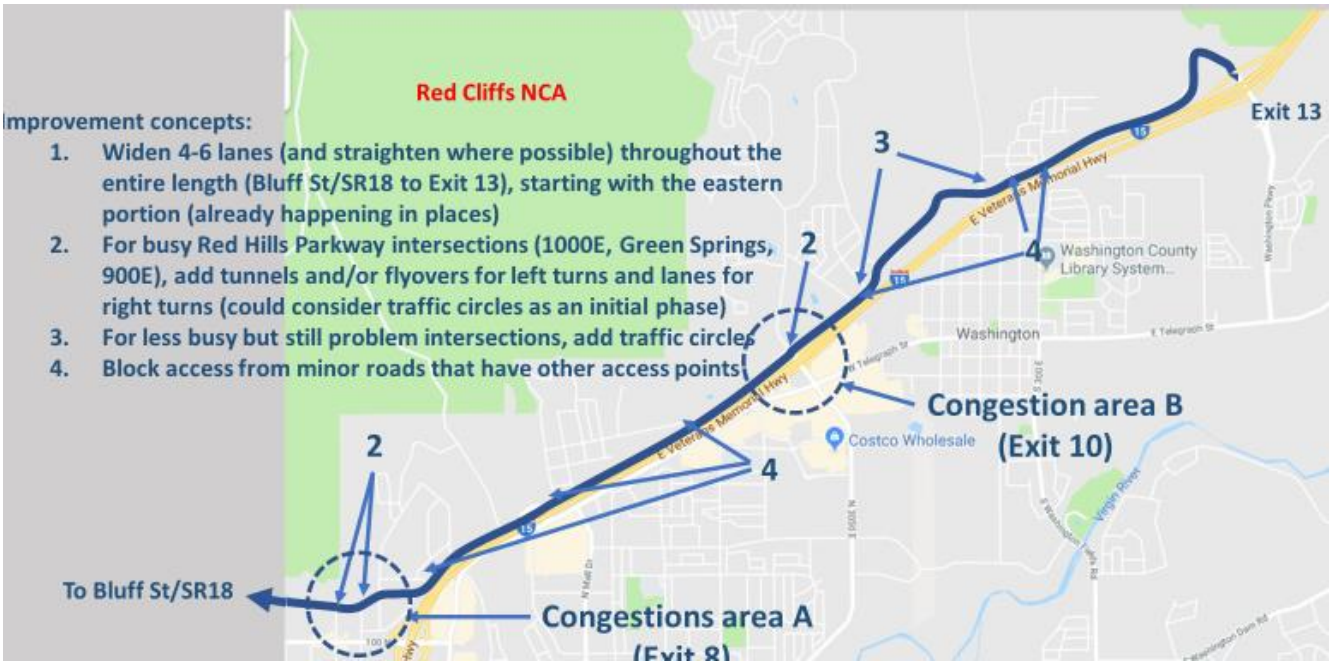
> Option 1: a classic flyover viaduct, shooting over/adjacent to businesses south of Red Hills Parkway between N100E and I-15. This would disturb or cause relocation of a small number of businesses.

Option 2: a viaduct over the existing Red Hills Parkway and a shorter flyover causing little or no business disturbance or relocation.

Alternative 2: Improvements to Red Hills Parkway between I-15 exits 8 and 13

Widening and straightening the road throughout its length, adding traffic circles at busy intersections and eventually improving throughput with flyovers/tunnels to ease left and right turns.

Red Hills Parkway (known as Buena Vista on the northern end) essentially parallels the proposed Northern Corridor Highway. Maximization of its throughput would minimize or eliminate the need for the Northern Corridor. Such an action has been made more difficult by the lack of planning for traffic caused by sprawling development, but limiting side-road access and maximizing the utility of major intersections would allow this road to perform the duty of the Northern Corridor.



Alternative 3: More Porous I-15 to Move Traffic North-South Around Congestion Areas

Much of the congestion around Areas A and B is due to traffic being forced through them in order to transit north and south across I-15, causing unnecessary chock points at the congested intersections. By allowing one or more optional avenues for north-south traffic, congestion would be relieved.

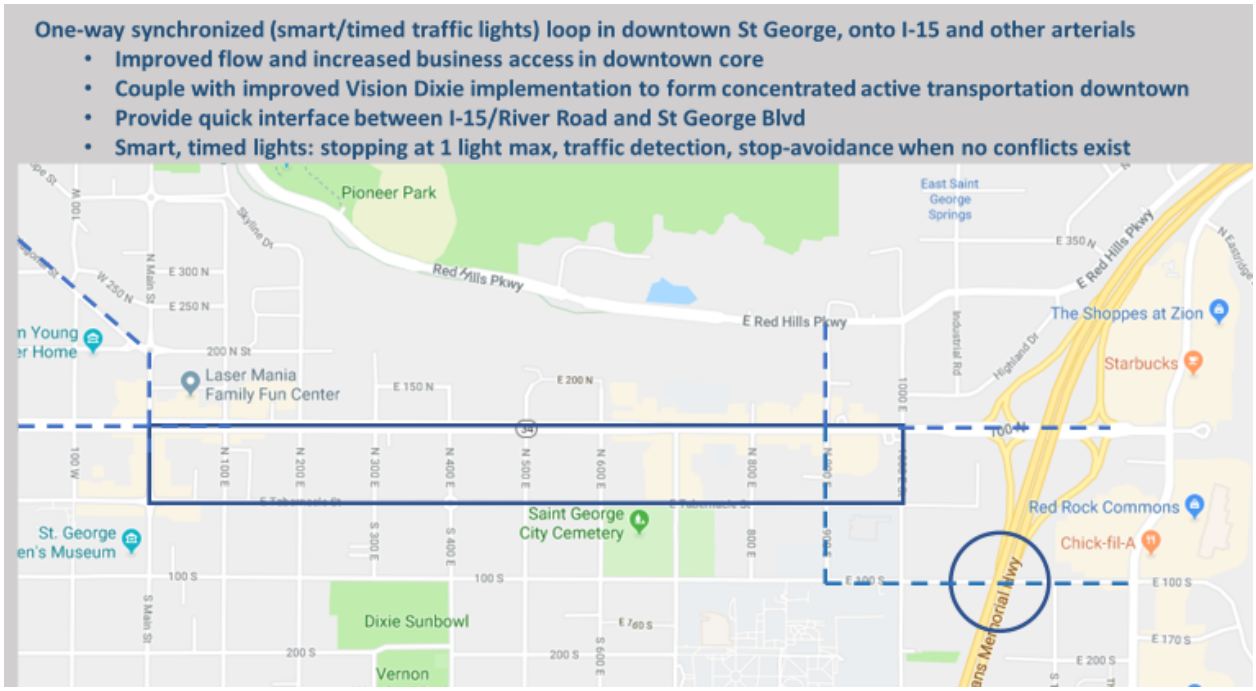
4.1 Indirect Improvements

There are several improvements that would have indirect positive impacts on the congestion areas:

1. Implement Vision Dixie
   The county and local municipalities should create, review with the public, verify satisfaction of principles, and execute a Vision Dixie Implementation Plan. Such a plan would define a "program" for the implementation, describing the strategy and concepts for the implementation, and identifying the projects and their sequencing and budgets for implementation; and then define and execute the specific projects (tasks, schedules, responsibilities, budgets). This could be done for each government or in an integrated,

unified way covering the entire county. Such a plan and execution would prevent the growth issues that are exacerbating traffic problems throughout the county.

2. Downtown St George Loop
   Vision Dixie principles indicate that growth should be up rather than out, and that a core shopping/business are should be developed in a manner that enable traffic flow and alternative active modes of transportation (e.g., walking, bicycling). Such a core would be facilitated by a "efficient" traffic loop in the downtown area (e.g., timed traffic signals and "free" turning (e.g., flashing yellow left turns rather than left turns only allowed on green arrow lights)), with efficient entrance/exit points to/from adjacent arterials and shopping/service/medical centers. See the map below for the concept.



3. Moving people instead of cars
   Enable workable transit options within and across the metro area such as
   - Circulator Trollies for major shopping and employment centers
   - East-West transit routes between Ivins/Santa Clara and Hurricane/Laverkin
   - Tourist routes between lodging and major attractions (e.g., Zion NP, Snow Canyon SP, Red Cliffs NCA)
   - Integrated mass transit planning to consider long-term options such as light rail
   - Consider long-term improved transit flows with dedicated lanes.

4. Long-term Thru-Traffic St George Bypass
   There is considerable I-15 traffic moving from Salt Lake City and points north and east to Las Vegas and points south and west. This traffic adds to the overall congestion in the metropolitan area and to air, noise, invasive species pollution.