

November 3, 2025

To: [NEPA Comment Portal](#) and BLM state and local managers
Washington County Commissioners and St George City Council
UDOT Executive Director and Deputies

Subject: Comments from Tom Butine on the Northern Corridor Highway Right-of-Way Environmental Assessment (NCH ROW EA - NEPA Number DOI-BLM-UT-C030-2025-0041-EA)

In addition to the official comment portal (ID NorCor-1-500810273), I'm sending these comments to my local elected officials and UDOT leadership, in the perhaps naïve hope that they will be willing to read it, see another perspective in some depth, and consider working together on solutions.

Summary of Comments:

1. **The Law:** The primary governing law ([OPLMA](#)) has two pertinent sections. Section 1974 defines the Red Cliffs NCA and its purpose (to conserve its resources), and disallows any use inconsistent with that purpose (a highway has been proven to be inconsistent). Section 1977 directs Interior/BLM to develop a “comprehensive travel management plan” for BLM-managed lands in Washington County, and directs them to work with stakeholders to “identify 1 or more alternatives for a northern transportation route in the County”. This does not and could not direct the approval of a highway through the NCA, since that is prohibited by Section 1974.
2. **Alternatives Categories:** There are reasonable alternatives and whole categories of alternatives that have not been explored. A proper alternatives analysis process would do so.
3. **Issues with UDOT's Recent Letters:** UDOT's letter requesting reconsideration of the ROW contains several misrepresentations and misinterpretations. UDOT's Technical Memorandum contains little technical information or justification for expanded requirements, and indicates UDOT does not recognize key process issues or their role in them.
4. **Issues with the Process:** The alternatives analysis lacked proper sponsorship, stakeholder participation, scope, alternatives consideration and technical process. It is unrealistic to expect BLM sponsorship, and there were unrealistic constraints placed on the process by the applicants. Modeling baselines, projections and software were not validated. UDOT/Washington County have opposed an open and transparent process with stakeholders to explore the full range of alternatives. That opportunity still exists, and their constituents are ready and willing.
5. **Issues with Alternatives:** The categories of alternatives were inappropriately constrained and there was inadequate refinement of alternative concepts. As a specific example, UDOT inappropriately assumed the EIS' conceptual design of the Red Hills Parkway Expressway to be an inflexible design of a final solution, rather than a concept (perhaps extreme in both positive and negative impacts) of a connection of Red Hills Parkway to I-15, that could then be refined within recognized constraints. UDOT's issues could be addressed in that refinement process. Any NCH solution will likely address only a subset of the east-west traffic issues, but *any* improvement to the Red Hills Parkway connection to I-15 would help. It doesn't have to be an “expressway”.
6. **Issues with the Zone 6 Proposal**
The protections afforded to Zone 6, which was proposed by the County in exchange for the damage caused by the highway through the NCA, cannot be assured to be permanent, and that solution still leaves the issues of OPLMA Section 1974 compliance.

Personal Introduction and Qualifications:

I have been deeply involved in the NCH and related NEPA processes for the past 12 years, have technically analyzed the need and proposed alternatives, and have submitted alternative concepts, some of which were considered in previous NEPA processes. I am an engineer-scientist and program manager by profession, with a career as a Boeing systems engineer, engineering program manager, and Technical Fellow. I managed the systems architecture, integration and certification portions of \$30B airplane development programs. I have a deep background in complex systems engineering (collaborative goals/objectives/requirements definition, product design and integration, design analysis, product testing and certification), including computer modeling, and have organized and led many complex technical alternatives analyses. While road-based transportation systems are not my specialty, they are still “systems”, and engineering principles and processes still apply.

I moved to St George 15 years ago, primarily for the climate and the natural environment. I imagined volunteering with local governments to help solve problems, but discovered help from constituents was not welcomed, regardless of attempts to present fact-based analysis in a respectful and cooperative way. My experience on the Northern Corridor is a typical example, with local elected officials and government agencies unwilling to engage, ignoring input, and even using negative campaign tactics.

I was the board president of Conserve Southwest Utah for several years. This organization is just a group of local citizens who want to help local governments balance development with environmental protections. It focuses on management of growth, water and public lands. When the Red Cliffs NCA was threatened by proposals for the northern transportation route, and local officials refused to engage in discussions about solutions, as a last resort, I led the formation of the Red Cliffs Conservation Coalition of local, regional and national non-profit organizations in order to equalize the field. These groups are composed of concerned citizens who wish to work with state and local governments to find mutually acceptable solutions for a northern transportation route in the County. When those efforts failed the highway through the NCA was approved in 2021, the Coalition filed a lawsuit, again as a last and only resort. The result was the reversal of the approval.

My experience in attempting to work with local governments on growth planning, water management and transportation planning is they do not want constituent participation, and are quick to label those constituents as the enemy.

I live in the NW corner of St George and frequently travel the area intended to be served by an improved northern transportation route. I drive and bike Red Hills Parkway several times per week. The Red Cliffs NCA, including Snow Canyon, is my backyard, and I hike and bike them weekly. I'm familiar with the NCA and NCH both analytically and personally.

I'm open to discussion and correction if facts or interpretation presented in this paper are in error.

Specific Issues

1. The Law: OPLMA

Section 1974 establishing the Red Cliffs NCA is clear in stating its purpose “to conserve, protect, and enhance” its resources, especially endangered species. Actions not directly supporting that purpose are explicitly denied. There are no exceptions. It cannot be argued that the requested highway supports the NCA’s purpose. The science is clear concerning the effects of a highway on fragmentation, predation, invasive species, and fire. It’s a conservation area, not a transportation area. UDOT’s ROW request must remain denied. Section 1974 also requires that a Resource Management Plan be developed, including a Travel Management Plan, which includes vehicular travel. This was completed in 2016, and it does not allow a new highway.

Section 1977 is confusing. It directs Interior/BLM to develop a “comprehensive travel management plan” for BLM-managed land in the County, by 2012. While such a plan has been completed for the NCA, as mentioned above, it has not been done for other BLM-managed lands in the County, as was directed. In creating that plan, it also directs Interior/BLM to work with stakeholders, including UDOT, local governments and the public, to “identify 1 or more alternatives for a northern transportation route in the County”. It does not explicitly say where these routes can be, yet leaves the Section 1974 provisions which effectively ban new highways in the NCA. Nor does it say which other BLM-managed lands outside the NCA would possibly make sense for a northern transportation route, although modifying an existing road in the NCA, like Red Hills Parkway, would presumably be allowed within limits. It doesn’t exclude lands not managed by BLM from consideration.

It could be argued that this requirement in Section 1977 for identifying northern transportation route alternatives was satisfied when Interior/BLM worked with local government agencies in approving the 2012 widening and upgrading of a pre-existing narrow, rough road through the NCA in into the “northern corridor highway” ([as declared by local officials](#)), named Red Hills Parkway. A better connection to I-15 could have been addressed at that time, and it’s a mystery why it wasn’t. It would have certainly been more practical and less costly to do it then.

Interior/BLM could have sponsored a full-blown alternatives analysis for a northern transportation route, considering the full range of alternatives categories, but it’s unclear if UDOT and Washington County would have participated since the NCA was excluded by law from consideration. UDOT/Washington County forced the issue with their request for a highway right-of-way (ROW) in the NCA. This was sort of a hostile act, or a disparate one, not compliant with the law (Section 1974), forcing Interior/BLM to react in a NEPA process, which is a poor process for this problem. UDOT/Washington County constrained the time, scope and resources of that process, driven by US presidential election timing and the executive branch politics at the time, with an Interior Secretary and administration willing to disregard the law. The result was an approved ROW in 2021. The lawsuit was quickly filed, and the approval was overturned (also with convenient timing). Since BLM is bound by the NEPA process, it must respond to a specific request. That request can either be denied or approved, but if it is denied, there is no option for categorical denial. That’s why the plaintiff’s settlement was limited to “rescinding” the approval and “remanding” the issue back to BLM to come up with a legal solution. A court decree, rather than a settlement, would have had the same effect. Now UDOT is asking for the overturn to be re-overturned (again, with convenient timing, with an assumed compliant Interior Secretary). The plaintiffs would have no problem going to court again, confident that a fair court will rule in their favor with another “rescind and remand” order.

The alternatives analysis undertaken in the EIS was flawed. Its whole process, including stakeholder participation, was inadequate. There was no back-and-forth communication between stakeholders. And it was bound for failure by the constraints placed on it by UDOT and Washington County. The County has made it clear to BLM over many years that it wants a highway through the NCA, and BLM has made it clear many times that it could not grant one due to Section 1974. What was BLM to do: convene the stakeholders in a comprehensive alternatives analysis that the County would not support, and that was well outside its expertise and purview?

There is no provision in Section 1974 that says “However, if local governments fail to adequately plan transportation routes outside of an NCA, making them more expensive than routes inside an NCA, then it’s ok to build a major high-speed highway through an NCA.” Of “If local governments can find an Interior Secretary who will disregard the law, then it’s ok.” Or “If local governments can bully the opposition into not objecting, then it’s ok.”

Washington County has wanted this new highway through Red Cliffs for decades, and has been refused many times, for the reasons stated in the law. The County has had 30 years to plan alternative routes. It does not need BLM to help them do so. It seems that the County’s own arrogance or close-mindedness has resulted in the current situation. The County is not above the law, and this sensitive protected land is not owned by the County, to treat as it pleases. Red Cliffs is not any old piece of multiple-use public land, it is a National Conservation Area, akin to a national park.

We’re left with a very clear Section 1974 that denies a new highway in the NCA, and a very confusing Section 1977 that directs alternatives for a northern transportation route “somewhere in the County”. Maybe it’s time for us, the elected officials and their constituents in Washington County, to solve our own problems, rather than trying to get the federal government to solve them for us.

2. Categories of Alternatives

The categories of alternatives for a “northern transportation route” have not been clearly defined and explored. By defining them, and then identifying specific alternatives within those categories, the full scope of possibilities could then be explored, as any proper alternatives analysis would. Here’s a start for a list of categories:

- a. A route for a new highway through the NCA within the framework of existing law.
This is the only path UDOT and Washington County have been pursuing, even though approving a highway requires ignoring/breaking the law. It doesn’t matter if there is a promise to protect other lands not in the NCA (like Zone 6). It’s illegal.
- b. A route for a new highway through the NCA enabled by changing the law to specifically allow an exception
This path has been tried several times by UDOT/Washington County but has failed, so far. It seems that the land’s owners (all US citizens, as represented in the federal government) do not agree, over concerns about precedent and need.
- c. An effective route for a new highway enabled by changing the existing law to adjust the NCA boundary
This has not been discussed (to my knowledge), but it poses challenges. A land trade and other concessions would probably be involved.
- d. One or more major upgrades to existing east-west thoroughfares

Improving the connection of Red Hills Parkway and I-15 is an option in this category. The Red Hills Parkway Expressway is one conceptual option for it, but there are many others with less cost and impacts that have not been considered (to my knowledge). For unknown reasons, UDOT/Washington County are focused on this Expressway alternative being the only possible alternative in the category. The downtown couplet is another option, although challenging. Maybe there are additional options. We don't know, since it hasn't been opened for consideration by the public and by neutral experts.

- e. Upgrades to several problem intersections and to the overall traffic management system on major thoroughfares in the County

This has not been seriously considered (to my knowledge). Alternatives in this category, including minor updates to the Red Hills Parkway connection to I-15, adjustments to other problem intersections, and "smart traffic management", could address many of the traffic issues in the County. Traffic flow on major thoroughfares is currently inefficient, and it appears that there are no wide-scope active management systems in place.

- f. Integrated land use (growth) and infrastructure (e.g., transportation, water) planning across the metro area to avoid future issues

This has not been considered. Instead, Washington County has dis-integrated land use planning across cities, with transportation planning chasing bottlenecks after the fact. (Water management is becoming more integrated, but only after years of contention and wasted effort and money.) This category may be the only practical way to address future issues.

There may be additional categories to explore, but nobody knows since the County refuses discussion.

The NEPA process initiated by UDOT/Washington County is appropriate only for category (a). The Red Cliffs Conservation Coalition is confident that there is no route a reasonable court will agree is legal, but of course nothing is for sure. NEPA allows for requested routes to be considered, but cannot categorically reject any/all routes; each proposal must be considered. This made the "rescind and remand" settlement the only path open to the Red Cliffs Conservation Coalition. If UDOT submits a different alternative, it would trigger another NEPA process, which would also be rejected under the current law. Any highway route in the NCA raises the concern of a national precedent (how could it not?) and even more concern about pressure for development along the highway in Washington County.

Considering alternatives outside of the NCA, and outside BLM managed lands in general, in a NEPA process, such as category (d), would be a poor way to proceed. It is bound by a specific process and has been shown to not foster real engagement. In the case before us now, it's very unclear how the alternatives outside the NCA were conceived. I submitted a few concepts during the initial scoping process. A couple of them (the Couplet and the Expressway), perhaps coincidentally, were developed without review into slightly more detailed conceptual designs, but they tended to the more extreme and less imaginative implementations, with more impacts. This is understandable considering the constraints of this NEPA process. The process could only show that alternative concepts outside of BLM's control existed, rather than to recommend a specific solution.

I contend that UDOT and Washington County erred in initiating the NEPA process to perform an alternatives analysis for a northern transportation route. This process is marginally effective only for routes inside the NCA. A proper process would engage the stakeholders, including

Washington County constituents and NGOs, and define the alternative categories and then pursue alternatives in a transparent and open/cooperative manner. Jumping to a solution category in a closed/opaque process was a very predictable way to waste time and money and to cause division in the community. The County and UDOT are still pushing this process and stoking this division, wasting more time and money, not seeking a shared solution. It doesn't lend itself to finding good solutions.

3. Issues with UDOT's Recent Letters

3.1 Request for Reconsideration

Reference: letter dated 6/5/2025, no identifier, from UDOT Executive Director Carlos Braceras to BLM Acting Utah Director Matt Preston

The referenced letter seems to be born of an understandable frustration with the process. I suspect all parties are frustrated. But UDOT started it, by initiating NEPA without holding an open consideration of all solution categories before boxing Interior/BLM into a corner. It's late for them to be complaining about the outcome. Some specific examples of issues with this paper:

- 3.1.1 In page 1 paragraph 2, UDOT complains that the 2024 ROD endorsed an alternative (the Red Hills Parkway Expressway) that is not viable. There are many conceptual design options for connecting Red Hills Parkway to I-15; the alternatives analysis chose an expensive and complex one to consider. So, consider options! I agree that BLM cannot direct an alternative outside of its control. It would have been sufficient to just deny a route through the NCA.
- 3.1.2 In that same paragraph, UDOT refers to Congressional intent as documented in OPLMA. Intent can only be determined by what is written, and nowhere in that act does it authorize a highway through the NCA. Quite the opposite. By a simple reading, there is no inferred approval of a highway in the NCA, or even consideration of one. It's ludicrous to suggest UDOT knows more about Congressional intent than what is actually written in the law.
- 3.1.3 In page 2 paragraph 1, UDOT references the "parochial interests" of certain NGOs. If they are parochial, UDOT's interests are equally parochial. UDOT and the NGOs have different values and priorities, and apparently different readings of the law. No need for derogatory labels.
- 3.1.4 In page 2 paragraph 3, UDOT states a desire for a more even-handed and transparent process. We all desire such a process. But UDOT has not enabled or supported one. UDOT started this process by initiating NEPA without first setting a context, establishing sponsorship and stakeholders, and considering a broad set of solutions. Let the public, who will be most affected by the transportation solution, engage in the process directly.
- 3.1.5 In page 3 paragraph 1, UDOT misquotes OPLMA, listing the stakeholders in the transportation alternatives, but conveniently omitting "the public", which is clearly listed in OPLMA as a stakeholder. The citizens of Washington County are the most important stakeholders. They have to live with the outcome. UDOT is over-emphasizing their own ability and that of elected officials to understand and participate in the definition of technical alternatives, and omitting the ability of the public, who will be most impacted, to do so.
- 3.1.6 In page 3 paragraph 1, UDOT incorrectly references OPLMA's requirements. OPLMA does not require a northern transportation route to be identified, as UDOT states it does. It requires Interior, in consultation with stakeholders, to "identify **1 or more alternatives** for a northern transportation route in the County" (section 1977, (b)(2)(A)). This is a key and consistent misinterpretation by UDOT and Washington County, incorrectly implying that BLM must not only identify the alternatives but approve a ROW through the NCA. It

- does not. There are ways to settle this impasse. BLM is not in a position to define these alternatives. UDOT/Washington County refuse to engage all stakeholders in coming up with acceptable alternatives. This is a mess of UDOT/Washington County's own making.
- 3.1.7 In page 3 paragraph 2, UDOT states that the planning for this highway was driven by the current demand and forecasted population growth. UDOT doesn't mention or evidently consider the factors that drive current or past demand. Are the causes of point-to-point demand in the past the same that drive future demand? UDOT doesn't seem to recognize that the county has a dis-integrated land use and transportation planning process across the metro area. This dis-integrated process enables cities to manage their growth without considering the impacts on neighboring cities, with transportation planning forced to react after the fact. Growth in Washington City, Hurricane, Leeds and Toquerville in the NE, and Ivins and Santa Clara in the NW, cause problems in St George. Current demand, and projections into the future, are based on this poor planning process. Even without considering this underlying cause, UDOT and Washington County has anticipated a northern transportation route for over 30 years ago, long before most growth occurred, and yet they assumed that there would be no problem, since all of this public land was available for the highway, even after the land was specifically protected in 1996 and again in 2009. A better connection between I-15 and Red Hills Parkway (which was celebrated by local officials in 2006 as the [Northern Corridor Highway](#)) could have been provisioned outside the NCA many years ago. Now these options have been made more difficult due to the sprawling growth right up to the NCA's boundary and around key intersections. These sorts of problems will continue as long as the metro area continues this uncoordinated growth. UDOT/Washing County's desire for this highway through the NCA is driven by poor local planning, and it will continue to cause problems in the future, with more pressure on protected public lands. The NCA cannot be sacrificed due to this poor planning.
- 3.1.8 In page 4 paragraph 1, UDOT states that Zone 6 would be protected by restrictions on development. This is untrue. The protections are not guaranteed, since those lands would not be part of the NCA or permanently protected in any way. (Apparently, as evidenced by this current mess, even being in an NCA does not protect them.) There is very little to protect Zone 6 from future development. There are already plans to fragment it with roads connecting neighborhoods on the east with the Western Corridor on the west.
- 3.1.9 In page 5 paragraph 1, UDOT states issues with BLM "endorsing "the Red Hills Parkway Expressway. I agree with many of these issues, however, this alternative should have been considered as a possibility, not as an absolute solution or final design. It could be refined; impacts and costs could be greatly reduced. BLM's "endorsement" of it is not declarative. OPLMA Section 1977 gave BLM the job of performing an alternatives analysis, but no agency (including UDOT and Washington County) did the pre-requisite sponsorship work of organizing the stakeholders and planning the process. It is a process that is much bigger than NEPA, since Section 1977 included the "in the County" phrase, and excluded the NCA per Section 1974, for the scope of alternatives. Even if UDOT/Washington County would have stepped up, it is my experience that they would have worked diligently to constrain the alternatives and public participation to pursue their own "parochial interests" of a solution inside protected public lands. Their timeframe (driven by the 2020 elections) was also completely unrealistic for a proper alternatives analysis. UDOT and Washington County need to look in the mirror before assigning blame for the outcome. BLM can only say which alternatives are not viable on NCA land, and it did that. I disagree completely with UDOT's closing statement in this paragraph, that no northern transportation route can ever be built, unless, that is, UDOT

- has preemptively concluded such a route must go through the NCA. Let's perform a real engineering alternatives analysis, open and transparent. UDOT has tunnel vision.
- 3.1.10 In page 5 paragraph 2, again, why did UDOT not convene an open technical forum to define viable conceptual alternatives?
 - 3.1.11 In page 5 paragraph 2, UDOT refers to "3,300 pristine acres" in Zone 6. This is a minor point, but clearly UDOT has never visited Zone 6. It is far from pristine. It's a shock that tortoises can live there.
 - 3.1.12 In page 5 paragraph 2, I contend that there are conceptual design options for connecting Red Hills Parkway to I-15 that have much less impact than the alternative stated in the EIS. Why not explore them? Local elected officials appear ignorant of these options. I hope they aren't happy to stay that way.
 - 3.1.13 It's easy to declare either or both RODs to be "politically motivated". Both sides used the political situation at the time to issue decisions – the plaintiffs out of necessity, and UDOT/Washington County out of strategy. But that doesn't mean that the underlying environmental impact analyses are politically tainted. OPLMA does not allow actions in the NCA that do not further the purposes of the NCA, and clearly the highway does not do that. It does not direct a highway to be approved. There has been a very poor and very opaque alternatives analysis. Let's open it up and see what we can find.

3.2 Issues with UDOT's Red Hills Parkway Expressway Evaluation Technical

Reference: Memorandum, dated 8-6-2025, no identifier, no authors cited

UDOT issued this memo to explain its position with the alternative "endorsed" by Interior/BLM in the January 2025 ROD. Many issues/unknowns stated in this paper are valid if it is assumed that the conceptual design of the Red Hills Parkway Expressway is cast in stone, and that there are no less impactful options for connecting Red Hills Parkway to I-15. While it is a challenging engineering problem, it should not be assumed that there are no less impactful and less expensive connection concepts. It should not be assumed that UDOT would own the connecting roadways, and that the related onerous design requirements must be levied.

UDOT makes the valid point that the public should be involved in the details, but they should also be involved in the design concept for the connection itself, and, even more importantly, in the consideration of the wider scope traffic issues that the dis-integrated growth planning has caused, and will continue to cause, in Washington County. Repeating an earlier point, it was UDOT and Washington County that forced this issue, defining the problem too narrowly by requesting a ROW in the NCA for the highway, and then constraining the time and resources to fit within the presidential election cycle. Where was UDOT's desire for public engagement then?

UDOT is incorrectly focused on the narrow point of implementation challenges of a rushed design concept for the Red Hills Parkway connection to I-15. Take the blinders off.

4. Issues with the Alternatives Analysis Process

4.1 Sponsorship and definition of the process

UDOT and Washington County should and could have been the sponsors of a "Northern Transportation Route Alternatives Analysis", to include all stakeholders, agree upon goals, objectives and requirements, the analysis process and tools, and to more openly and fully consider the full range of alternatives categories (see Issue 2 above). BLM sponsorship and the NEPA process are not appropriate for the full scope of the problem, and should have been engaged only when serious alternatives touched BLM-managed lands.

As sponsors, UDOT and Washington County would have defined ownership and engaged stakeholders and independent professional/technical leadership, who would then have defined a process. This did not occur. The process should include topics such as

- a. Definition of the teams and roles for each step in the process, including technical reviews and issue resolution.
- b. Definition and weighting of goals, objectives and requirements that the alternatives must meet and be graded.
- c. Definition of the categories of alternatives to be considered, a concept description for specific alternatives within each category, the prioritization of the alternatives to be further defined, and a description of what should be included in the definition/preliminary design of each alternative and their variations/options
- d. The qualification and quantification of direct and indirect impacts
- e. Derivation and verification of baseline data and projections
- f. Selection validation of tools, including modeling software

4.2 Issues with the UDOT/County Preferred Alternative

In addition to the fact that a new highway through the NCA is forbidden by law, and its approval is bound to trigger another lawsuit, the County's preference would send a large amount of traffic through a residential community (Green Springs), and dump that traffic onto the existing Red Hills Parkway, adding a traffic signal to further slow traffic, and cause additional traffic at intersections of Red Hills Parkway and Bluff, and Sunset and Bluff. Many alternatives will cause impacts at related intersections, and those impacts should be addressed in each alternative's analysis. Avoiding this analysis makes any conclusions invalid since the whole "system" is not considered. Heavy weight should be given to the disruption of residential neighborhoods. Is there anywhere in the state or even in the country where a new highway is proposed to bisect and impact a residential neighborhood like this?

It appears to be a requirement or objective to drive more traffic through the Exit 13 intersections. Supporting businesses on Trust Lands should not be a factor, yet it seems to be a major one to Washington County. It is only a factor because of the state's ownership of Zone 6 lands, and the complication of mitigating damage to the NCA that is illegal on its face. This is a complication that depends on decisions about categories of alternatives to be considered.

4.3 Issues with the Modeling

4.3.1 At a macro level

The modeling data summarized in the EIS indicates the alternatives offer point relief to *some* troubled intersections, but leaves many troubled intersections untouched. The analysis focuses on "peak hours", projected in 2050, both of which may be invalid considerations. It shows only a small variation, point-to-point from exit 13 to Sunset, for many of the alternatives.

The future traffic demand (year 2050) was apparently derived from a measurement of traffic at a point in the past (2017?), the county population at that time, and the projected future population. There is no evidence that the causes of past demand were determined, or that causes of future demand were derived. It's unknown to what degree past traffic demand was caused by activities that will be persistent into the future. Washington County's current and past economy is skewed toward construction, but that cannot (and better not) continue indefinitely. To what degree is traffic driven by construction? To what degree is traffic driven by location of services in the past and where those services are located in the future? A model that projects a future state without understanding the causes is unreliable and even invalid. This condition should be explained before putting much credence into the modeling results. Model validity doesn't appear to have

been tested. The whole need for a northern transportation route is being driven by this apparently weak point. It's unwise to drive such impactful and expensive decisions based on modeling that has had such limited public and peer validation.

This is similar to the need declared by the County for the Lake Powell Pipeline, when projected future water demand was based solely on current demand, current population and projected future population, without regard for conditions that could change. A huge decision was being based on invalid conditions, conditions that have been proven to be changeable.

Once a new highway is built, it cannot be unbuilt. We better get it right, and there is very little hint that we have it right.

4.3.2 Issues with Troubled Intersections ([FEIS Appendix J, Table 4](#))

The traffic modeling of the alternatives' effects on major problematic intersections in effected traffic areas require explanation as the peak hour intersection performance is largely the same no matter which alternative is chosen, including the "no action" alternative. Here are some examples:

- Red Hills Parkway-Bluff is not much of a problem no matter which alternative is chosen, according to the modeling results, which is hard to believe considering a lot more traffic will be forced through that intersection.
- Sunset-Bluff is a mess no matter what, according to the model. The alternatives just push the problem down to it. What solution will have to be implemented there? A full grade-separated intersection? What is that impact?
- StG Blvd-Bluff is bad with any of the NCA alternatives, more with some than others. What accounts for the difference? And why would that intersection be any worse? Theoretically, any NE-NW traffic flow would not even negatively impact that intersection since it is south of the traffic flow.
- StG Blvd-Main intersection is understandably not impacted much, and is equally impacted by all alternatives. At last, an impact prediction that is understandable.
- StG Blvd-1000E is messy now, and will get messier with most alternatives, yet the variation doesn't seem to make much sense. Why would there be any variation between the inside-NCA alternatives? They should all lessen the impact, seemingly equally. Why would the Red Hills Parkway Expressway not significantly reduce traffic there, since the intersection is completely bypassed?
- Exit 8 N and S ramps should be about equally impacted, except for the Expressway alternative, yet the model shows unexplained variation.
- StG Blvd-River looks pretty bad with any alternative, and this study does not address it.
- Red Hills Pkwy-200E is relatively good in all alternatives, yet it seems it would get worse with increased traffic on Red Hills Pkwy, causing more delay.
- Red Hills Pkwy-1000E is a problem now, and seems to be inexplicably variably impacted by the alternatives. It seems that all of the inside-NCA alternatives would improve it, since they all move traffic away from that intersection, yet the model doesn't show that.
- Green Springs-Telegraph is bad in all scenarios, and seems unrelated.
- How can the exit 13 ramps not be affected by any of the alternatives through the NCA? They would all force a lot more traffic through the ramps. And how would the non-NCA alternatives have the same effect?

Basically, without some explanation and discussion, the modeling results are confusing, leading to questions about the veracity of the modeling overall. Discussions about this have been refused by UDOT and the County.

4.3.3 Issues with the Definition of the Red Hills Parkway Expressway

I suggested in the original scoping comments a Red Hills Parkway alternative that merely connected it to I-15 more efficiently using a flyover connection, bypassing 1000E and StG Blvd, using a slight elongation of existing exit 8, basically creating an exit/entrance 8A on the same ramps. Instead of modeling that suggestion, a much more expensive and elaborate concept was modeled, which pushed the impacts to existing structures and the overall costs much higher. Discussions on the design options for this alternative were refused, and the analysis continued with the much more expensive option. There should be a public discussion of the options for implementing this alternative that would reduce its costs. There are many options the flyover ramps' connection points, from beginning on 1000E, after smoothing the corners onto it from the Parkway, to spots east or west along the Parkway. As far as I know, these options were not considered. There has been no public disclosure or discussion about what was considered and how. These options could greatly affect property impacts and acceptability of the I-15 connection. Understandably, BLM's EIS time constraints, forced by UDOT/Washington County, limited discussions and exploration. However, UDOT/Washington County have had plenty of time, before and since, to open discussions.

4.3.4 Traffic Flowtimes ([FEIS Appendix J, Table 5](#))

The route variations used to project flowtime don't seem meaningful, since it seems that the flowtime between Exit 13 and the Sunset-Bluff intersection is the only meaningful metric. Each alternative dictates the route, so the key metric is travel-time between the two endpoints for each alternative. This metric should be the key, if the goal is to improve east-west flow while not harming, flows inside the end points.

The flowtimes show the Red Hills Parkway Expressway to be the shortest, but just slightly superior to the UDOT preferred route. However, the Expressway has cost and impact issues. With the UDOT preferred route, there are the legal and environmental impact issues, and complications with mitigation and Zone 6. Since the more practical variations of the Expressway solution (focused more on the connection to I-15 and less on the "expressway" elements) was not studied, the flowtime of these variations are unknown, but it seems that they are worth studying before any extreme actions are taken.

5. Issues with Zone 6

The Red Cliffs Desert Reserve is a designation of protected land managed by the County that includes the Red Cliffs NCA, state and local lands, and private land, created to mitigate habitat and species damage/loss on private and public land in the county, as required by federal law. There are currently 5 geographic zones defined in the Reserve. Washington County proposed adding a 6th zone to mitigate damage that would be caused in Zone 3, where it proposed alternative routes for the "northern transportation route". Zone 3 itself exists to mitigate damage elsewhere in the county, so this would be mitigating the mitigation. When the Reserve was created in 1996, the county pledged to protect it. The protection lasts as long as there is an agreement in place to protect it (Habitat Conservation Plan - HCP). Without an HCP, any new development in the County could not be undertaken without going through an environmental review and mitigation process, which would effectively end new development in the county. So, this HCP is very important to the economic development of the County. Zone 6 would contain a collection of federal (BLM), state (trust lands) and private lands, and adding it to the HCP would add some protection. However, the HCP is a voluntary agreement, and it could be ended or

modified at any time. The NCA provides additional legal protections (as this battle over the highway demonstrates), but the Zone 6 lands, even the federal lands within it, are not proposed by the County to be part of the NCA. So, the degree and duration of protection is in question. Zone 6 appears to be a mess, physically, but it has a lot of endangered species in it. It is heavily used by bikers and climbers.

And there is still the issue of the law. Section 1974 effectively disallows highway in an NCA, for which Zone 6 was proposed as mitigation.

Conclusion

The Interior Department and BLM should recognize the faults, limitations and constraints in the process for understanding future traffic and in the alternative solutions open for consideration. UDOT and Washington County should not engage Interior/BLM or the NEPA process until they accept the role of sponsors of the solution and have demonstrated that they have appropriately explored the full range of alternatives categories. Even then, Interior/BLM is constrained by current law (OPLMA Section 1974) even when accommodating alternatives analysis process (Section 1977).

UDOT and Washington County are focused on presenting alternatives outside the NCA narrowly and amplifying their negative impacts, and on insisting upon an alternative disallowed by law.

The approval of a northern transportation route will continue to be hampered by division and legal issues until the sponsors of a solution step forward and undertake a proper open process to reach consensus with stakeholders. Their constituents are ready to participate. These recurring NEPA exercises, tugs of war and lawsuits are a giant waste of time and energy, driven by Washington County's insistence on getting their way (a highway through protected land) no matter if it's a poor solution with undefined goals, objectives and requirements for a poorly defined problem.