

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
FINDING OF NO PRACTICABLE ALTERNATIVE  
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT MID-BAY BRIDGE  
CONNECTOR, EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE**

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Pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1508) and U.S. Air Force Environmental Impact Analysis Process as effectuated by 32 CFR Part 989, the Mid-Bay Bridge Authority (MBBA) with support from the Air Force, has conducted an Environmental Assessment (EA) to identify and assess probable environmental consequences for the construction and operation of an approximately 10-mile-long, four-lane divided limited access toll facility primarily through Eglin Air Force Base (AFB). This project will occur in three phases over an approximately 10-15 year period. The EA is incorporated by reference into this finding.

**Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action** (EA Section 1.4, page 1-10 to 1-11):

The purpose for the Mid-Bay Bridge Connector is to provide an alternative corridor which will improve capacity, provide for partial linkage to Interstate 10 (I-10), enhance safety, and establish an alternative evacuation route in the event of emergencies. The need for the Mid-Bay Bridge Connector has previously been defined in other project studies completed by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) and the MBBA, with extensive coordination with Eglin AFB, to include the evaluation of alternative corridors. The need for this alternative corridor has been recognized for many years, and the current routes are congested even without emergency situations. Needs identified in the EA include, but are not limited to, adding traffic capacity in the area, eliminating aggravated traffic conditions along White Point Road and College Boulevard, and decrease response time for Eglin AFB personnel during mission activities and potential security threats.

**The Proposed Action and Alternative Actions** (EA Sections 2.2 - 2.4, page 2-1 to 2-10):

For this EA, four build alternatives (identified as Alternatives A through D) as well as three alternatives that would not involve construction (namely, Transportation Demand Management [TDM], Transportation Systems Management [TSM], and the No Action alternative) were reviewed against the defined Purpose and Need and the potential impacts were compared to each other. The primary differences between these alternatives were the alignment options on the southern, middle and northern portions of the study area. On the southern end, routes were considered along existing White Point Road or new alignments that bypassed the communities of Bluewater Bay and Seminole to the east on Eglin AFB property. North of Rocky Creek, new alignments were considered through undeveloped private property or to the east on Eglin AFB property. As the corridor curved to the west, routes were considered along existing College Boulevard or new alignments that bypassed the Northwest Florida State College (formerly Okaloosa-Walton College) and the Eglin golf course to the north on Eglin property.

Alternatives B and D were eliminated from detailed evaluation because they did not meet purpose and need, and would have caused substantial commercial and residential impacts. The TSM and TDM alternatives were eliminated from further analysis as individual alternatives because the minor improvements offered would not fully satisfy the Mid-Bay Bridge Connector need. However, components of TSM and TDM would be utilized through the Proposed Action. The No Action Alternative was studied as a baseline for evaluation of impacts of Alternatives A and C (which were carried forward for detailed analysis); with no action, congestion would continue to worsen, with more roadways reaching unacceptable levels during peak traffic, and the crash rate would be expected to increase. Alternative A was chosen as the Proposed Action over Alternative C because it would minimize impact to wetlands areas, cause fewer traffic noise impacts, and result in less impact to residential/commercial properties along College Boulevard.

**Description of Proposed Action (Alternative A)** (EA Section 2.5.1, page 2-11 to 2-16):

The Mid-Bay Bridge Connector involves construction of an alternative bypass route around the eastern and northern sides of the communities of Niceville, Seminole and Bluewater Bay in Okaloosa County, Florida. The new 10-mile route consists of a four-lane divided facility with urban (curb and gutter) and rural cross sections and proposed structures over Rocky Creek and several smaller streams that drain to Choctawhatchee Bay. The Mid-Bay Bridge Connector will include a mainline toll plaza (either north or south of Rocky Creek) and intersections/interchanges at strategic locations throughout the corridor. The project will occur over a 10-15 year period and will be divided into three phases. Phase 1 will begin at the Mid-Bay Bridge Toll Booth Plaza to Range Road. Phase 2 runs from Range Road to SR 285, and phase 3 continues from SR 285 to SR 85. (EA Section 1.2, page 1-4, and Figure 1.2-2, page 1-5).

In order to avoid impacts to Pippin Lake and surrounding wetlands, a four-lane divided urban typical section (106' minimum right-of-way) (ROW) is proposed for the southern 1.0-mile of the Connector from the existing Mid-Bay Bridge toll plaza to north of Lakeshore Drive. (Figure 2.5-1, page 2-12) The roadway includes 12' travel lanes, 4' wide bicycle lanes, a 22' wide raised grass median, curb & gutter, and an underground drainage system. The roadway will have a design speed of 45 mph. From north of Lakeshore Drive to SR 85, a four-lane divided rural typical section (202' minimum ROW) is proposed. The roadway includes 12' travel lanes, 5' paved shoulders, a 50' wide depressed grass median, and parallel ditches. The roadway will have a design speed of 60 mph from north of Lakeshore Drive to north of SR 20; and a design speed of 70 mph for the remainder of the Mid-Bay Bridge Connector northward and westward to SR 85.

**Summary of Environmental Consequences**

The potential impacts of the Proposed Action are summarized below. Supplemental EAs will be completed on phase 2 and 3 and will be forwarded to the Air Force for coordination and subsequent signature.

**Air Quality** (EA Section 4.1.1, pages 4-1 to 4-3): Short-term impacts will occur during construction, primarily particulate matter from grading activities and operation of equipment.

Compared to no action, there will be a general improvement of air quality in the area since more efficient transportation flow would result. No mitigation for operational effects is necessary.

**Geological Resources** (EA Section 4.1.2, page 4-4): The Proposed Action would have no adverse impact on the geological resources of the area. Due to the shallowness of the anticipated excavations, underlying geologic layers would not be impacted.

**Water Resources/Wetlands** (EA Section 4.1.3-5, pages 4-4 to 4-7 and 4-11 to 4-13): While the proposed action will not impact groundwater, impacts to surface water, floodplains and wetlands are unavoidable. MBBA will be required to install stormwater management ponds to collect surface water runoff from the proposed action. Approximately 39.8 acres of floodplains and 42.77 acres of wetlands will be affected. To mitigate these impacts MBBA will be responsible for applying and securing a Section 404 Individual Permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and an environmental resource permit from the Northwest Florida Water Management District/ Florida Department of Environmental Protection (NFWMD/FDEP). These permits would identify all mitigations MBBA would be required to follow and construction cannot begin until the permitting process is complete. Possible measures for reducing wetland impacts include avoidance, replacement, and/or enhancement of other existing wetlands.

**Biological Resources** (EA Section 4.1.4, pages 4-7 to 4-10) and (EA Appendix B): The Proposed Action will likely affect several rare, threatened, or endangered species. Because there are listed species likely to be affected by the Mid-Bay Bridge Connector, Eglin Natural Resource Section has made the determination to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. As a result of a biological assessment (BA) submitted on May 2008, the USFWS has issued a biological opinion (BO) that states whether or not the federal action is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of listed species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat.

The BA and BO are included in Appendix B of the EA for reference.

The USFWS, through their BO issued September 2008, has determined that the proposed Mid-Bay Bridge Connector Road is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the Okaloosa darter and because no critical habitat has been designated for this species; none will be affected. The BO does state that the Okaloosa darter populations shall be monitored pre-construction and for a minimum of five years post-construction to assess the scope of project impacts. In addition, a comprehensive water quality monitoring plan shall be developed and implemented to target road-related chemical pollutants that may be detrimental to the darter.

Other federally listed species occurring within the Proposed Action area include the Eastern indigo snake, flatwoods salamander, red-cockaded woodpecker and bald eagle. Provided that all proposed avoidance and minimization measures are followed, the USFWS concurs with Eglin's determination that road construction activities are not likely to adversely affect the flatwoods salamander (*Ambystoma bishopi*) and Eastern indigo snake (*Drymarchon corais couperi*), and have no effect on the red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*). Compliance with National

Bald Eagle Management Guidelines is recommended if any bald eagles are encountered. Avoidance and minimization measures can be found in the BO and BA.

**Noise** (EA Section 4.1.6, pages 4-14 to 4-16) and (EA Appendix C): The Proposed Action corridor includes 105 individual noise sensitive receptors. Eleven receptors are predicted to be 1 dBA from the Federal Highway Administration threshold level of 67 dBA. The abasement level used by the FDOT is 66 dBA. The MBBA met with the affected residents and have agreed to construct a vegetative buffer between the residents and the Proposed Action, serving as both a noise abatement measure as well as a visual barrier.

**Cultural Resources** (EA Section 4.1.7, pages 4-16 to 4-17) and (EA Appendix E): To ensure compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act's Section 106, Eglin AFB inventoried cultural resources. This included Eglin AFB land Units X-885 and X-886 surveyed specifically for the MBBA project. A total of 20 archeological sites were identified. Pending on-going consultation with the Florida State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) 4 of these total sites are eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NR) and 7 are possibly eligible for inclusion in the NR. These NR-eligible or potentially eligible sites generally are manifested as evidence of prehistoric and/or historic periods of occupation. Of these, one site (8OK428) may represent a Civil War-era homestead associated with Creek Indians, and another (8OK2630) may have Late Paleoindian/Early Archaic period affiliation, i.e. materials potentially 8,000 years old. Completion of Section 106 process for the MBBA project requires assessment and resolution of adverse effects. Completing these remaining steps will be addressed by means of a Section 106 project-specific Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). Execution of the MOA is anticipated to be accomplished before phase 2 and phase 3 of this project. The MOA will closely relate to three construction phases of the MBBA project's Alternative A: Phase 1, Mid-Bay Bridge to Range Road; Phase 2, Range Road to SR 285; and Phase 3, SR 285 to SR 85. There are no cultural resources concerns on phase 1, engineering design efforts, for phases 2 and 3, will seek to avoid impacts to NR-eligible sites. If avoidance is not possible, archeological "data recovery" excavation will be the preferred mitigation. Development of the MOA requires substantial consultation with the SHPO, and the four federally recognized tribes Eglin AFB consults for Section 106 matters such as the MBBA project. These tribes are the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida, the Muskogee (Creek) Nation of Oklahoma, the Poarch Band of Creek Indians of Alabama, and the Seminole Tribe of Florida. Development of the MOA also requires notification to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Pertinent documentation of Eglin AFB's Section 106 consultation with these parties is provided in Appendix E.

**Hazardous Materials and Waste** (EA Section 4.2, pages 4-18 to 4-19): Construction of the new facility will involve the use of hazardous materials, and generation of hazardous and solid wastes, but the impacts will not be significant. Potential uses of hazardous materials during operation of the facility include paint for striping the road and cleaning compounds. The use of hazardous materials for maintenance operations would have an insignificant impact on the environment, and would not adversely affect the health and safety of workers or the public. No active hazardous waste generator sites/locations are known to be present in the proposed Mid-Bay Bridge Connector corridor. The Proposed Action will be located in an area of Eglin that is considered probable for unexploded ordnance (UXO) occurrences. UXO hazards will be

identified and cleared prior to the commencement of construction activities associated with the Mid-Bay Bridge Connector project.

***Socioeconomic*** (EA Section 4.3.1, pages 4-19 to 4-20): Implementing the Proposed Action will not adversely impact social or economic resources, including population, income, and employment in the project area, and will provide a temporary beneficial impact to the local economy.

***Environmental Justice*** (EA Section 4.3.2, page 4-20): There will not be disproportionate impacts to any nearby low-income or minority populations; therefore, no environmental justice impacts will occur.

***Land Use and Aesthetics*** (EA Section 4.3.3, page 4-21): No significant impacts to land use will occur. The Proposed Action will provide an overall land use benefit to Eglin by creating a definitive (fenced) southern border and a potential buffered area between Eglin and the surrounding communities. Eglin's mission will not be adversely affected.

***Transportation*** (EA Section 4.3.4, pages 4-22 to 4-23): Short-term traffic impacts during construction will be adverse, but not significant. The completed Proposed Action will provide a significant benefit to the area by alleviating the current congestion along the already heavily used transportation network.

***Utilities*** (EA Section 4.3.5, pages 4-23 to 4-24): Short-term interruptions of utility service will likely occur during construction. Any impacts to the wastewater spray-fields located just east of SR 285 and north of College Boulevard will be mitigated prior to or concurrently with roadway construction.

***Cumulative Impacts*** (EA Sections 4.6 & 4.7, pages 4-25 to 4-29): No significant cumulative impacts are projected to occur based on the Proposed Action and other reasonably foreseeable projects in the project area. The Proposed Action would improve the transportation efficiency and capacity in the area, and benefit the transportation network of other local project. Cumulative impacts may be identified when the Supplemental EAs are completed on phase 2 and 3. Future actions in the area include the construction of a parallel two-lane sister span to the existing Mid-Bay Bridge, the widening of SR 20 just east of White Point Road to the Walton County line, and a new corridor through Eglin AFB from SR 87 in Santa Rosa County to US 331 in Walton County.

***Plans, Permits, and Management Actions*** (EA Section 5.0, pages 5-1 to 5-5): The MBBA has committed to obtaining and complying with the plan, permits, and management actions associated with the Proposed Action.

***Public Notice and Agency Coordination*** (EA Section 6.0, pages 6-1 to 6-2) and (EA Appendices A and G, page A-1 to A-25 and G-1): A public notice of the Draft EA was published in the *Northwest Florida Daily News* on 26 September 2008 for a 30-day comment period. Concurrently, the Draft EA was submitted to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida State Clearinghouse for 60-day agency review. The public comment period

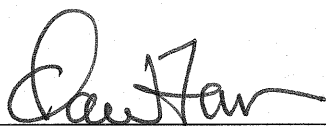
closed on 25 October 2008. No public comments were received. Agency comments were received on 20 November 2008 and incorporated into the EA.

**Finding of No Practicable Alternative**

Taking the above information into consideration, pursuant to Executive Order 11988, *Floodplain Management*, Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands and the authority delegated by Secretary of the Air Force Order 791.1, I find there is no practicable alternative to conducting the Proposed Action within the floodplain and wetlands. The Air Force further finds all practicable measures have been taken to minimize harm to wetlands and floodplains, and proposed measures to minimize are documented in the EA. Because there is no practicable alternative to impacting wetlands, federal regulations require compensatory mitigation. Mitigation for wetland losses are proposed to occur at a suitable location off Eglin AFB property. This finding fulfills both the requirements of the referenced Executive Order and 32 CFR Part 989.14 requirements for a Finding of No Practicable Alternative.

**Finding of No Significant Impact**

In accordance with the Council of Environmental Quality regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, and Environmental Impact Analysis Process, 32 CFR 989, an assessment of the identified environmental effects has been prepared for the Mid-Bay Bridge Connector. The Air Force concludes that the Proposed Action will have no significant impact on the quality of the human environment; thus, an Environmental Impact Statement is not warranted.



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