

Access to Smith Mt. Lake. I-73 could also provide better access to the recreation-related attraction of Smith Mountain Lake, south of Roanoke. That can enhance opportunities for recreation-related development in that area and also enhance the attractiveness of the Roanoke area as a place to live and work. However, that depends on decisions to be made regarding alignment for I-73 south of Roanoke. It is important to note that none of the alignment options south of Roanoke are necessarily precluded by decisions regarding whether I-73 would be routed through or around Roanoke.

Choices Among the “Build” Scenarios. The potential positive and negative economic impacts of the three basic alignments for I-73 are discussed below, and are also summarized in Table 3-1 at the end of this chapter.,

❖ 3.2 The Central Corridor Alignment

Competitive Opportunities for Central Roanoke. The Central Corridor Alignment for I-73 would route the new interstate down the present path of I-581, through the center of Roanoke. The principal benefits of this option to the city include a potential for strengthening the role of the Central Business District in the region by retaining its position at the core of the central traffic corridor. The city’s restaurants, shopping centers, and hotels in the vicinity of the airport as well as downtown stand to benefit from additional tourist spending. Six to ten new interchanges are planned (varying with options for the southern part of this Central Alignment, discussed later).

This option would not increase the supply of “greenfield” (open space) development sites for industry and commerce outside of the City. It thus could help encourage redevelopment of city sites near I-73 with higher density commercial uses. That could be both an economic opportunity for strengthening developer interest in the City, as well as reducing the potential for environmental encroachment on rural areas in Roanoke and Botetourt counties. It could also be a risk. If the City fails to redevelop its own sites for industry, then businesses may perceive a reduced set of “open space” choices for large new industrial or warehousing facilities. That could ultimately reduce investment in the broader region’s economic base.

Displacements. There are clear costs to the City and its business community entailed in the Central Alignment. This option would add an additional lane in each direction on I-581 and US-220 and potentially necessitate some new frontage or access roads along parts of the route. Displacement of businesses would be inevitable, although VDOT and its engineering consultants have not yet finalized the design and list of properties that would have to be purchased or taken. Displacements would also occur where major interchanges would be rebuilt – the consolidation of Orange and Williamson interchanges and the consolidation of Franklin and Wonju interchanges. On the other hand, the new design would also open up opportunities for more development elsewhere in the city, as explained below.