

this option, the effect would be to worsen traffic congestion expected to occur on I-581. That would have negative effects on access to downtown Roanoke.

On balance then, the East Alignment presents the greatest potential threats to the commercial dominance of the city by opening up new sites in the region's highest growth corridor. These sites could attract commercial investment, trade, and tax dollars from existing businesses in the city.

❖ 3.5 Conclusions

From the viewpoint of the City of Roanoke, there is no optimal choice for alignment of I-73. Each of the alternative alignments entails some tradeoffs amongst positive and negative impacts, and involves some risks. Our observations regarding the positive and negative impacts and risks associated with each alignment alternative are summarized in Table 2-1 on the next two pages.

The "No Build" scenario assumes that I-73 is not built, but that currently planned highway maintenance, rehabilitation and improvements are done. That alternative has significant disadvantages for the City. Without any widening of I-581, construction of reliever (bypass) routes or development of other transportation alternatives by the City, traffic congestion will substantially worsen along that corridor. VDOT traffic models forecast a significant worsening of traffic conditions along I-581, with very severe congestion by the year 2020. Such congestion would degrade access to the downtown area, making the area much less attractive for visitors, local shoppers and for business locations. The "No Build" scenario will also keep Roanoke's interstate access focused on a northeast-southwest direction, with travel times northwest (to Ohio and Michigan) over 100 minutes longer and travel times southeast (to North Carolina) nearly 60 minutes longer than would occur under any of the I-73 alternatives. That will further constrain the area's ability to grow as a major regional distribution center. (Refer to Appendix C for traffic details.)

The Central Alignment has the greatest potential benefits to the City but also significant potential risks. Benefits to the City are created by limiting the supply of competitive suburban development sites and by increasing the potential visitor traffic for highway-serving businesses within the City. This option, if properly designed, could increase demand for central city sites near interchanges, increasing their value. Higher values could stimulate higher density, higher value development, adding jobs and tax base. The risk of losing commercial development and tax base to suburban sites would also be minimized. To realize such advantages, the City must take proactive steps to improve local access streets, redevelop existing industrial and commercial buildings and sites, relocate some businesses, and provide assistance and incentives for development at available locations. If those steps are not taken, then the City risks limiting prospects for regional economic development and it could also experience economic damage to the central corridor from land takings. If this alignment is pursued, then the City needs to proactively plan to work with VDOT to