

APPENDIX D.

CASE STUDIES OF EXPERIENCE ELSEWHERE

❖ D.1 Overview

Analysis. One basis for assessing potential impacts of city center vs. outer belt options for I-73 through Roanoke is to consider the experience of other, similarly-sized cities that have been bypassed by interstate highway improvements. Accordingly, the consulting team conducted case studies of the effects of new interstate highways bypassing downtowns in four other cities – two in Virginia and two in the Midwest. These findings are also generally consistent with hundreds of studies of highway bypasses in smaller communities in Kansas, Wisconsin, Iowa, Texas, North Carolina, and Washington State.

Summary of Findings. The wide range of highway bypass studies carried out around the country provides a generally consistent story. They indicate new highways bypassing the central business district of a community are seldom either devastating or the savior of the area. The locational shift in traffic can cause some existing businesses to close up or relocate, but it can also create some new business opportunities. Net economic impacts on the broader community are usually relatively small (positive or negative). Downtown business districts having a strong identity as a destination for visitors or for local shoppers are the ones most likely to be strengthened due to the reduction in traffic delays through their centers. However, there is also a broad perception that adequate signage to the bypassed business center is an important need (and concern) for ensuring its continued success.

Across the case studies, some positive and negative factors are common. The positive benefits of bypassing downtown areas commonly include the removal of heavy truck traffic from central areas and the opening up of additional industrial sites along the new route, thus attracting new investment from outside of the region. The negative impacts include increases in sprawled, low density commercial and residential development entailing high environmental and infrastructure costs.

Other findings are as follows:

- Bypasses do not necessarily result in a reduction in total traffic volume in the downtown area. Often, the removal of most truck movements and other pass-through highway traffic encourages more local traffic, which had previously avoided the downtown area due to heavy traffic. The result is often little or no