

local access streets, redevelop existing industrial and commercial buildings and sites, 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 mitigate potentially negative localized impacts along the highway corridor and encourage redevelopment for higher density commercial uses elsewhere along the central corridor.

The West Bypass Alignment provides the least potential opportunity for economic gains, but also the least economic risk to the City. Because of the mountain terrain and environmental considerations, the West Bypass would have only one new interchange (US-221) west of Roanoke. Thus, it would not open up an abundance of land with highway access for development. In that sense, it would not substantially threaten or enhance either the City's industrial and commercial base. Its benefits for regional economic growth would come primarily from the shortened travel time from Roanoke to markets in Michigan, Ohio and North Carolina. Economic development in the city could also benefit somewhat from this alignment if the US-221 connection to Roanoke was upgraded to four lanes, but that is not currently part of this I-73 option. The West Bypass would keep most of the I-73 through traffic west of the City, so there would be relatively minor impacts on traffic flow on I-581 compared to the "no build" scenario.

The East Bypass Alignment presents the greatest potential risk to the City's commercial base by opening up new sites with three interchanges proposed in Botetourt and in Bedford Counties -- which are already the region's fastest-growth areas. While this alignment could help regional growth, these sites would be likely to attract commercial investment, trade, and tax dollars away from existing businesses in the City. Development of the City's RCIT area could be enhanced, and economic risks to the City minimized, if US-460 is upgraded as a spur into the City from I-73. However, that is not currently part of this alignment option. Since, the East Bypass provides the greatest "dog-leg" alignment of I-73, some vehicles traveling along I-73 between points north and south of the City would be expected to use I-581/US-220 as a shortcut. With no expansion to the I-581 / US-220 capacity planned with this alignment, traffic movement along some parts of that central corridor would experience slightly increased congestion levels (compared to the "no build" scenario).

Perspectives from Experiences Elsewhere. Case studies were conducted of similar size cities with existing highways through the center of the city which experienced new bypass highways. While each situation is unique and none are identical to the Roanoke situation, some findings do appear to hold across all cases: New highways which bypass the central business district can weaken the central area's economy, but typically do not devastate them. Central areas which have already adjusted to a visitor and service-based economy are likely to experience little or no loss of business. The locational shift in traffic can cause some existing businesses to close up or relocate, but it can also create some new business opportunities within the city. And highway-related new development, whether in the central city or outlying areas, does not automatically occur -- it requires not only highway interchanges, but also utility services, local access roads and land use regulations that permit it. Both positive and negative economic impacts on the broader community were usually smaller than originally anticipated.