



IMPACTS

What are the Environmental Impacts?

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As discussed in the [Project History](#), improvements to the I-44/US-75 interchange have been studied and documented in the 1999 Major Investment Study, the 2002 Environmental Assessment, and the 2017 Preliminary Engineering Study. As the project is funded in part by federal funds through the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the project is required to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and several other federal environmental laws and executive orders.

Following the 2017 Preliminary Engineering Study and the selection of the preferred alternative for the interchange, ODOT completed detailed environmental studies of the project area. These studies included:

- Delineation of streams and wetlands
- Identification of floodplain impacts
- Assessment of threatened and endangered species and their habitat
- Identification of archeological and historic resource (cultural resources)
- Assessment of potential hazardous waste sites
- Evaluation of impacts to parks
- Study of traffic noise impacts

- Environmental Justice study

ODOT completed coordination and consultation with agencies including the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office as well as the public. ODOT presented the findings of the studies and agency and public involvement in a Reevaluation of the 2002 EA. The Reevaluation included measures to avoid and/or minimize impacts and included commitments to perform more detailed studies as the various Work Packages are advanced. The Reevaluation was approved by FHWA on June 9, 2020.

As the design of Work Packages 2-5 has developed, ODOT has completed updates to environmental studies where necessary. A summary of these findings is presented below. These updates will be documented in an additional Reevaluation of the EA, which will be finalized once public input is received from this virtual open house.

Streams and Wetlands: The project will involve work in the Arkansas River, Mooser Creek, Cherry Creek, and tributaries to Mooser Creek and Cherry Creek, which exhibit the characteristics of jurisdictional waterways (and potentially jurisdictional wetlands) regulated by the US Army Corps of Engineers. The proposed construction activities will be evaluated to ensure that the appropriate Clean Water Act Section 404 permit application is made.

Floodplains: A portion of the Mooser Creek floodplain extends into the project area. ODOT is studying the need to provide potential compensatory flood storage areas. Coordination with the City of Tulsa is ongoing.

Threatened and Endangered Species: Studies indicate potential habitat in the project area for the piping plover, Northern long-eared bat, and American burying beetle. Potential habitat for the bald eagle and other migratory birds was also identified. ODOT will perform additional survey prior to construction to identify any active eagle or other bird nests. Measures to minimize impacts on the piping plover, Northern long-eared bat, and American burying beetle will be added to the project plans.

Cultural Resources: The cultural resources survey resulted in identification of three previously unrecorded historic-era archeological sites and 38 buildings or building complexes.

None of these sites or buildings was found to be historically significant and none were found eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

In addition to the above documented cultural resources, the northernmost portion of the project area along US-75 extends into the mapped boundary of the NRHP-eligible Red Fork Neighborhood Historic District. The district is bounded on the east by the US-75 corridor but does not include the US-75 roadway. The project will avoid any impacts to the Red Fork Historic District.

Hazardous Waste Sites: Several sites with Recognized Environmental Conditions (RECs), or known sources of contamination, were identified in the project area. These sites include locations of existing or former underground storage tanks that have documented reports of releases. Should additional monitoring or remediation be required at any of these sites, ODOT will complete that work prior to construction.

Park Impacts: ODOT has coordinated with the City of Tulsa and determined the project will not impact any lands designated as park property.

Environmental Justice: The project is situated within the Tulsa City limits. The City of Tulsa as a metropolitan area is more racially diverse than the State of Oklahoma as a whole. There is a higher percentage of Hispanic, African American and Asian population in the City. Of note, however, is the fact that the Native American population is 55% less in Tulsa compared to the State. Census data show a relatively large proportion of the study area and local community populations comprising persons who identify with two or more races. The Hispanic and African American populations in portions of the project area are higher than the percentage in the State of Oklahoma as a whole but are proportionally lower than that of the City of Tulsa. The area south of I-44 has an African American population of 26.6 percent. This is greater than three times that of the State and almost double the percentage of the City of Tulsa African American population.

Under EO 12898 on Environmental Justice, groups defined as "Low-income" populations include those people whose household income falls below the annual statistical poverty thresholds used by the Census Bureau, which are based on the poverty guidelines developed by the Department of Health and Human Services. Estimates compiled as part of the 2013-2017

American Community Survey indicate relatively high poverty rates in the Census Tracts composing the project area. The project area has higher poverty rates and lower median household income than the State or City as a whole.

Particularly notable, the poverty rate for the area south of I-44 is nearly 20 percentage points higher than for the City. There are three low-income housing communities in this area.

The proposed improvements will be on existing alignment and would not create a new barrier that would divide neighborhoods or communities, although it will enlarge the footprint of I-44 and US-75 as an existing barrier. The proposed construction will improve community cohesion with the reduction of the US-75 barrier currently dividing neighborhoods at W. 51st Street. The newly constructed portion of W. 51st Street across US-75 will serve as a local east/west connection between the two neighborhoods and allow for greater access to businesses and services across the previous barrier. The new pedestrian bridge over the TSU Railroad will connect these neighborhoods to each other and the River Parks Trail System and Zarrow Regional Library. The proposed improvements will not create, separate, or isolate any distinct communities, neighborhoods, ethnic groups, or other specific groups.

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