

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

The Southern Kentucky Corridor (I-66) Planning Study is a planning study of a proposed interstate corridor between Somerset and London in Southern Kentucky. This study report documents the existing transportation, socioeconomic and environmental conditions along the study corridors; analyzes future traffic demand; and evaluates corridor alternatives based on traffic and socioeconomic data, environmental issues and engineering and construction costs. The study corridors are one-half-mile to one-mile bands within which ultimate roadway alignment options will be considered in future studies under the process set forth by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). For analysis purposes, this study examines corridor alternatives that are generally 2,000 feet in width.

A. PROJECT BACKGROUND

The 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) identified high priority corridors on the National Highway System. The East–West Transamerica Corridor (I-66) was one of these high priority corridors, generally located between and parallel to I-70 and I-40 with an eastern terminus in Virginia and a western terminus in southern California, as shown in **Exhibit 1.1**. Based on Federal transportation legislation, the portion of the corridor through Kentucky is represented as a 50-mile wide band width centered on the cities of Pikeville, Jenkins, Hazard, London, Somerset, Columbia, Bowling Green, Hopkinsville, Benton and Paducah, as shown in **Exhibit 1.2**.

The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) also established funding for the Somerset to London segment of the I-66 corridor as a high priority corridor. Existing routes within the project area are increasingly less safe to travel with growing traffic volumes and projected decreases in existing levels of service. Truck traffic in the area also adds to safety concerns, since many of the two-lane routes have substandard geometrics, such as narrow lane and shoulder widths and insufficient passing zones.

Part of the high priority corridor initiative involves the improvement of depressed or impoverished regions by increasing access and mobilization. The southeastern region of Kentucky has been traditionally known for its below-average income rates. **Exhibit 1.3** shows poverty rates as a percentage of population for each county in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. As shown, the identified corridor for the proposed I-66 route crosses portions of Kentucky with some of the highest poverty rates. An average poverty rate was calculated for the counties (and portions of partial counties) included within the identified I-66 corridor. The average rate, 23.3%, is more than five percent higher than the statewide average rate of 17.9%. For counties in Kentucky through which an existing interstate passes, the poverty rate falls to 14.7%, lower than the statewide average.

B. PREVIOUS STUDIES

As a result of the ISTEA legislation, consultants Wilbur Smith Associates (WSA) and Howard, Needles, Tammen and Bergendoff (HNTB) were selected in 1992 to conduct a national East-West Transamerica Corridor Feasibility Study. In this study, indicators of feasibility for the corridor included:

- Engineering feasibility (constructability and cost);
- Economic feasibility (efficiency, productivity and development);
- Financial feasibility (costs, revenues and funding);

- Implications (environmental, energy, safety and demographic);
- Need (passenger and freight utilization); and
- Institutional feasibility (legal, legislative and public policy).

A Steering Committee consisting of representatives of eleven states and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) provided technical direction to the study while the Missouri Highway and Transportation Department served as administrative agent. This study, titled the “Transamerica Transportation Corridor Feasibility Study,” was completed in 1994. While this study concluded that the entire coast-to-coast corridor did not meet the economic feasibility criteria established for the study, it did conclude that further analysis could find some segments of the corridor feasible from a state or regional perspective.

In 1997, the Kentucky Transportation Center (KTC) completed a study for the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC), concluding that the Southern Kentucky Corridor (I-66) through Kentucky was indeed feasible. Titled the “Southern Kentucky Corridor (I-66) Economic Justification and Financial Feasibility Final Report,” this study identified the Somerset to London segment of the I-66 corridor as a priority segment. Results indicated that such a corridor could provide economic development benefits, quality of life benefits, and additional employment opportunities for the corridor area counties. The study included public participation through an advisory committee, public meetings, and newsletters sent to all parties who expressed an interest in the project.

A number of benefits can often be directly attributed to a new interstate route. According to the KTC’s Feasibility Study, benefits include:

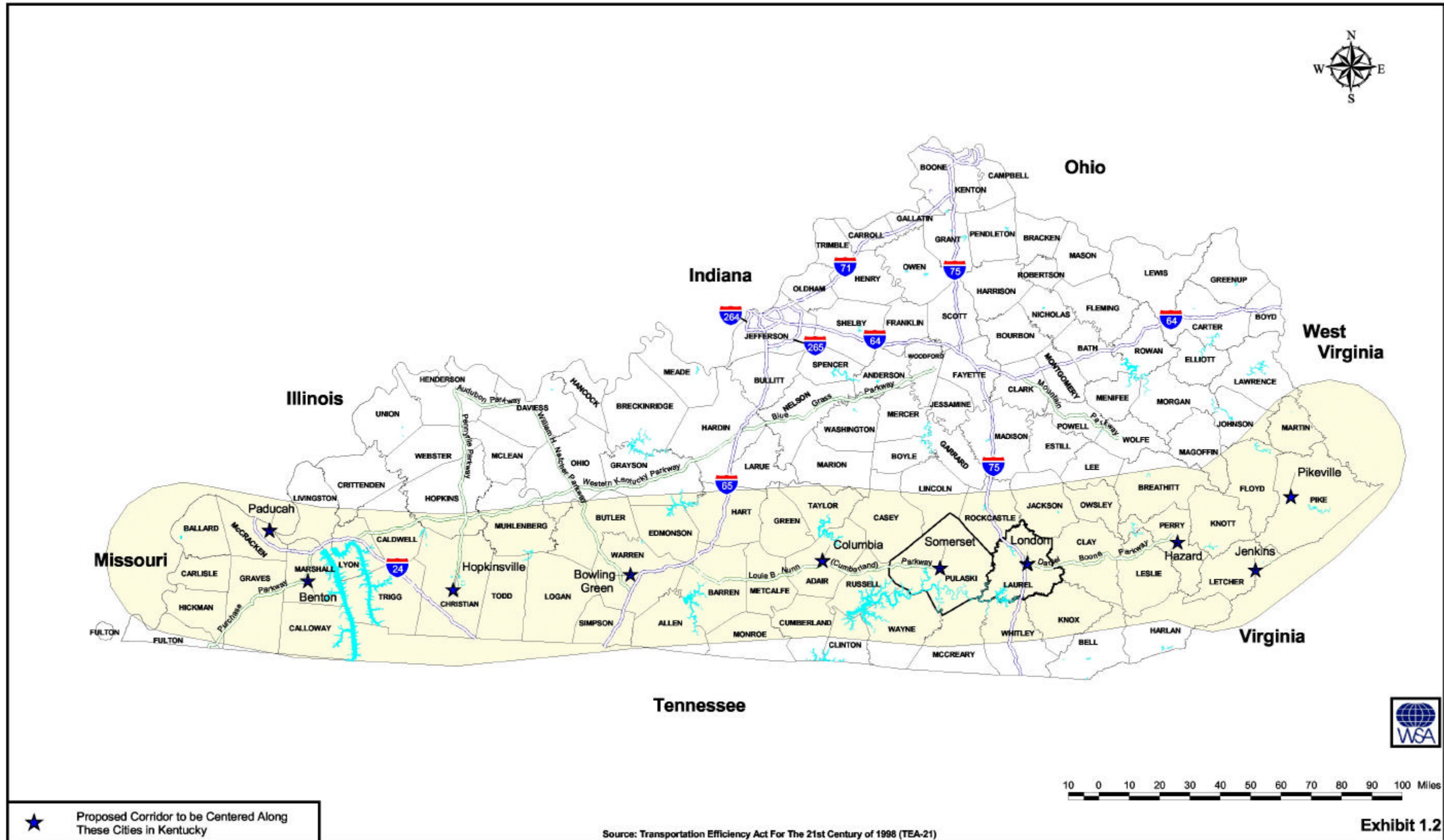
- Increased regional transportation system efficiency;
- Improved personal and urban mobility;
- Reduction in travel-times and vehicle operation costs;
- Reductions in accident rates, severity and costs;
- Improved employment opportunities;
- Reductions in freight costs;
- Increased manufacturing efficiency;
- Increased economic development opportunities;
- Improved access to health care facilities; and
- Improved air quality with consistent speed.

C. PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to identify areas of concern, benefits of such a project, public input, and an environmental footprint from known documentation; to evaluate corridor alternatives; and to provide recommendations based upon the aforementioned and more specific evaluation criteria for future project development activities for the I-66 corridor project between Somerset and London. This study is intended to develop recommendations at a corridor level, based on existing topography (i.e., contours, streams, subdivisions, cemeteries, highway crossings, etc.), environmental features, traffic needs, socioeconomics, estimated costs, and engineering judgment.



Corridor 3-The Transamerica Corridor (Interstate 66)



★ Proposed Corridor to be Centered Along These Cities in Kentucky

Source: Transportation Efficiency Act For The 21st Century of 1998 (TEA-21)

Exhibit 1.2

Proposed I-66 Corridor Through Kentucky (50 Mile Corridor Width)

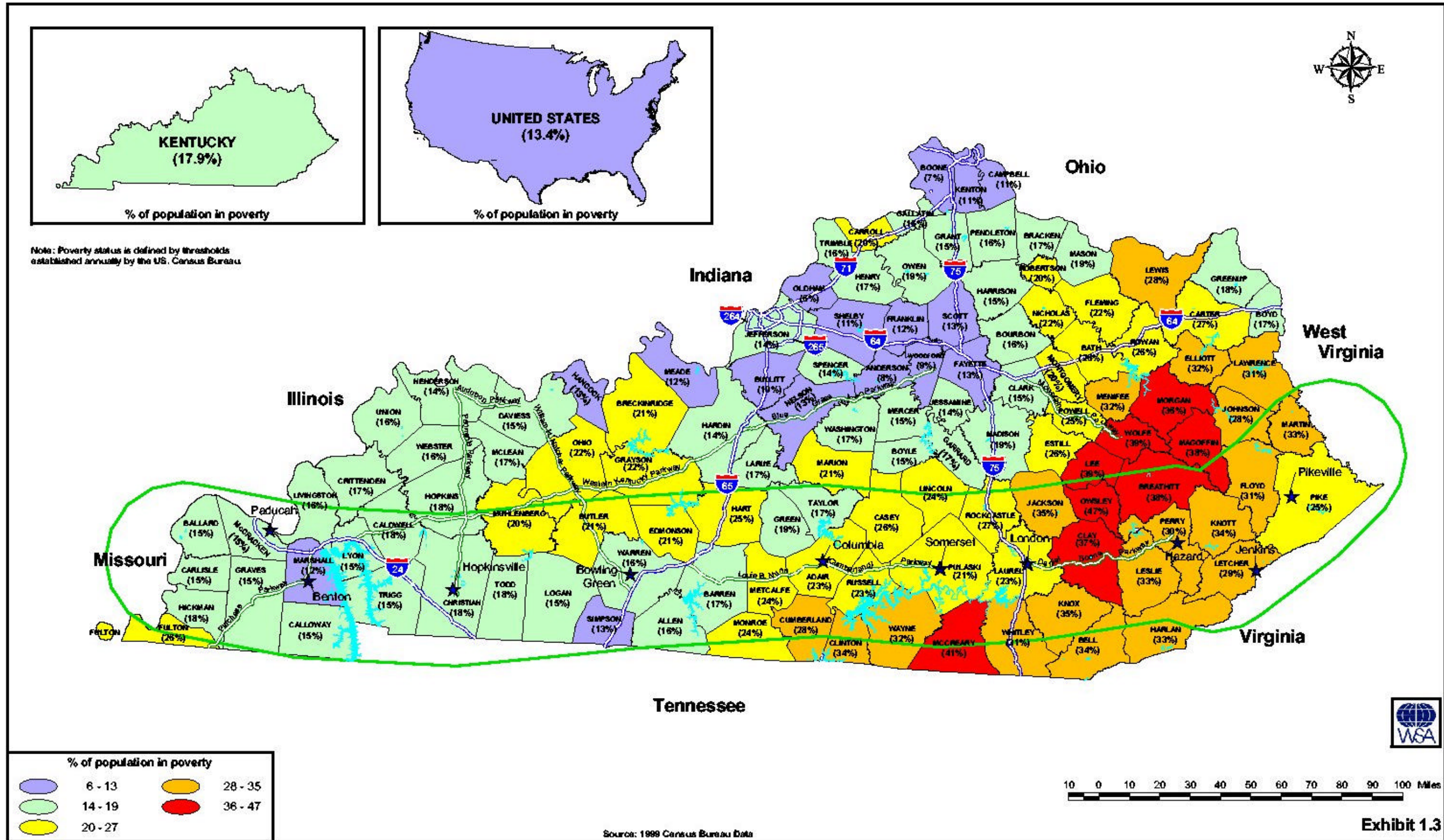


Exhibit 1.3
1995 Estimates of Persons in Poverty

The identified goal of this project is to provide an interstate transportation corridor extending from the Louie B. Nunn (Cumberland) Parkway, west of Somerset, to the Daniel Boone Parkway, east of London. The proposed facility from Somerset to London is expected to:

- Improve accessibility and traffic flow to the cities of Somerset, Corbin and London;
- Maximize connectivity to other major roads in the region;
- Improve accessibility to tourism and recreational facilities in the immediate vicinity of the corridor and the region;
- Improve highway access to enhance economic development potential for counties throughout southeast Kentucky;
- Improve access and mobility in depressed or impoverished regions;
- Accommodate increasing traffic and truck volumes by diverting traffic to an interstate facility;
- Improve travel safety by providing a safer travel route; and
- Fulfill enacted TEA-21 legislation.

Additionally, this study is intended to be used for the evaluation of projects with respect to their merit for inclusion in future Cabinet programs. The conclusions of this study are representative of the most accurate analysis possible based on current available information and the time allotted for evaluation. Later additional studies may reveal other needs or solutions, which are not readily apparent at this time.

D. PROJECT STUDY AREA

The project study area is located in south-central Kentucky and includes Pulaski and Laurel counties and the population centers of Somerset and London. Alternative corridors evaluated in this study are west-east corridors, providing connections between the Louie B. Nunn (Cumberland) and Daniel Boone Parkways. Some of the key existing routes within the corridor include Interstate 75, Louie B. Nunn (Cumberland) Parkway, Daniel Boone Parkway, US 27, US 25, KY 80, and KY 192.

The approximate limits of the study area boundary are as follows: two miles west of Fishing Creek on the Louie B. Nunn (Cumberland) Parkway near Somerset on the west; KY 80 on the north; near Brock on the Daniel Boone Parkway on the east; and a line between Burnside and Corbin on the south. All of the study corridors begin at the Louie B. Nunn (Cumberland) Parkway, west of Somerset, and end at the Daniel Boone Parkway, east of London. A location and vicinity map of the project area is shown in **Exhibit 1.4**.

E. REPORT CONTENTS

The remaining chapters of this report include Chapter 2 – Study Area Conditions, Chapter 3 – Proposed Corridors, Chapter 4 – Analysis of Alternatives, Chapter 5 – Public and Agency Involvement, and Chapter 6 – Recommendations/Conclusions. Further data, information and documentation on analyses and input to the study are identified in the appendices. These include Appendix A – Public Airport Facilities, Appendix B – Planned and Programmed Improvements, Appendix C – Critical Accident Rates, Appendix D – Federal and State Threatened and Endangered Species in Pulaski and Laurel Counties, Appendix E – Kentucky Geologic Survey

Report, Appendix F – Typical Section/Proposed Design Criteria and Appendix G – Public and Agency Involvement Materials.

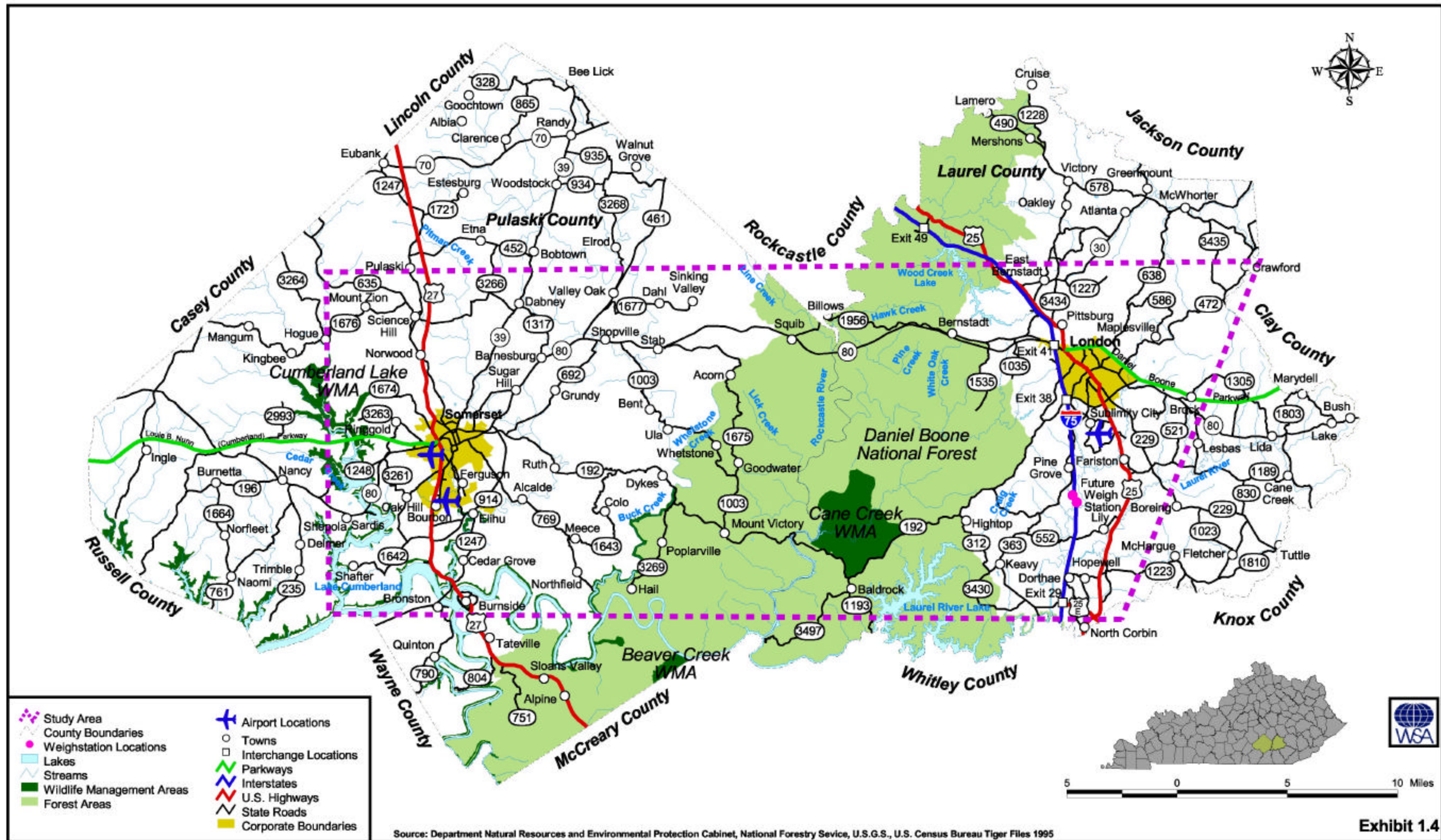


Exhibit 1.4
Proposed I-66 Corridor Project Location