ARKANSAS STATE HIGHWAY COMMISSION

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September 24, 2025

Mr. Jeff Dingman
City of Fort Smith
623 Garrison Avenue
Room 315
Fort Smith, AR 72901

Dear Mr. Dingman:

Reference is made to the Highway 64 Corridor Study and Arkansas State Highway Commission Minute Order 2025-059, which adopted the study for use as a planning guide for future improvements. For your information, a copy of the Minute Order is enclosed along with a copy of the study.

This study considered the need for and feasibility of roadway improvements in and surrounding downtown Fort Smith including the feasibility of constructing a new Arkansas River crossing. The study identified two alternatives for redistributing traffic on Highway 64 to enhance safety and economic competitiveness in downtown Fort Smith while maintaining truck mobility. While no funding has been identified for these improvement concepts, the Department will consider the findings of this study as future highway improvement programs are developed.

Thank you for your interest in Arkansas' transportation system. If any additional information is needed, please advise.

Sincerely,

Jared D. Wiley, P.E.
Director

Enclosures

c: Highway Commission
Chief – Administration
Chief Engineer – Operations
Chief Engineer – Preconstruction
Assistant Chief of Administration
Assistant Chief Engineer – Planning
Assistant Chief Engineer – Program Delivery
Communications
Environmental
Planning & Research
Program Management
Roadway Design
District 4

ARKANSAS STATE HIGHWAY COMMISSION

MINUTE ORDER

District: Four

County: Sebastian

Category: Miscellaneous

WHEREAS, Minute Order 2020-061 authorized a study to recommend needed improvements to the State Highway System in and surrounding downtown Fort Smith including the feasibility of constructing a new U.S. Highway 64 river crossing; and

WHEREAS, the Highway 64 Study (Fort Smith) has been prepared and has identified improvement alternatives within the study area.

NOW THEREFORE, this study is adopted for use as a planning guide for future improvements within the study area.

Approved:

Chairman

Vice-Chairman

Member

Member

Member

P&R

Submitted By:

Assistant Chief Engineer - Planning

Approved:

Director

Minute Order No. 2025-059

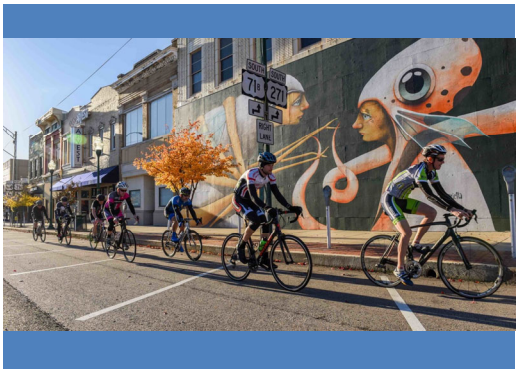
Date Passed AUG 20 2025

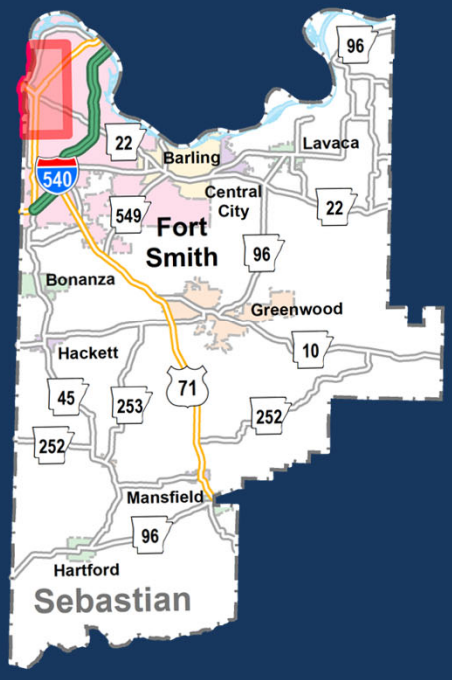
Form 19-456
Rev. 5/24/2023

JDW

HIGHWAY 64 STUDY (FORT SMITH)

SEBASTIAN COUNTY





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AUGUST 2025

ARDOT
ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

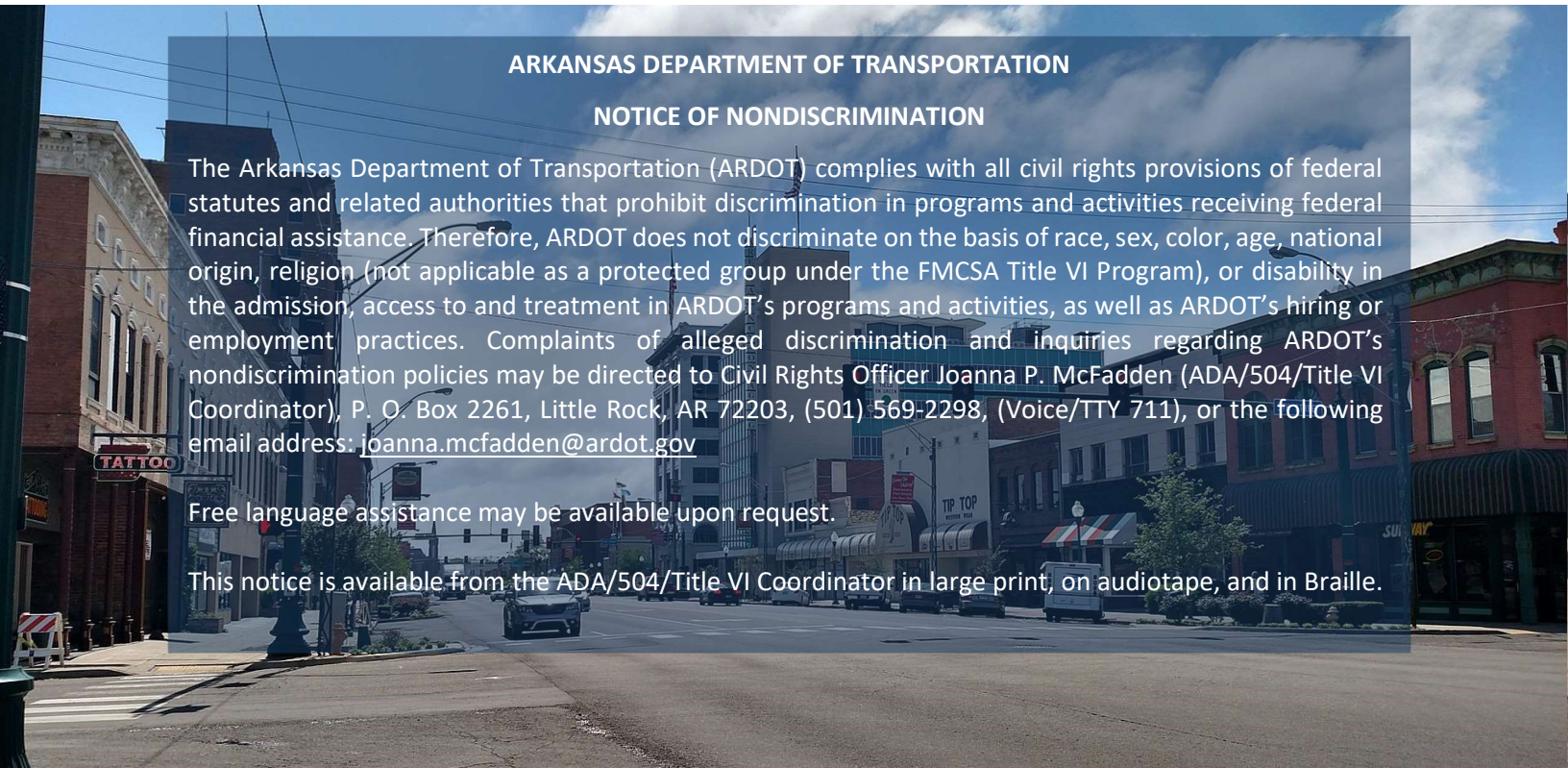
HIGHWAY 64 STUDY (FORT SMITH)

SEBASTIAN COUNTY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prepared by the Planning & Research Division
Arkansas Department of Transportation
In Cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration

This report was funded in part by the Federal Highway Administration,
U.S. Department of Transportation. The views and opinions of the authors expressed
herein do not necessarily state or reflect those of the U.S. Department of Transportation.



ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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INTRODUCTION

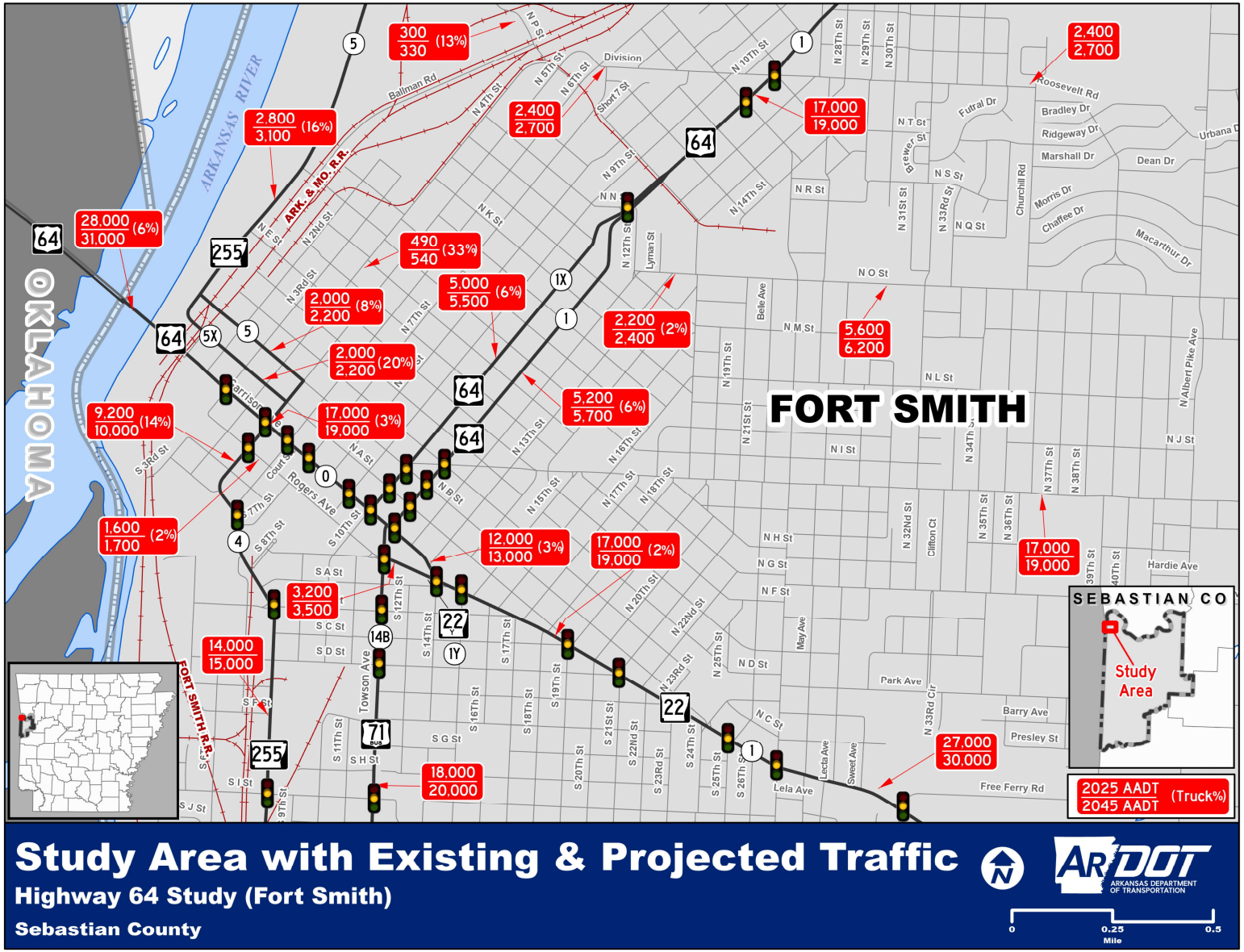
Local officials and other stakeholders have expressed concerns about traffic flow, particularly the truck traffic, in and around downtown Fort Smith. To address this, the City of Fort Smith and Frontier Metropolitan Planning Organization conducted the Fort Smith Downtown Traffic and Truck Study (2020) to evaluate alternatives for managing truck traffic and promoting a more pedestrian-friendly downtown. Following this study, the Arkansas State Highway Commission authorized a new study by Minute Order 2020-061 in 2020 to recommend highway improvements, including a possible new Highway 64 Arkansas River crossing. **Figure 1** illustrates the study area.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Fort Smith was established as a United States Military western frontier post over 200 years ago and became incorporated in 1842. Due to its proximity to the Arkansas River, the city has a long history as a strategic location for defense and commerce. Today, many warehousing and industrial facilities that have been part of the regional economic hub for decades are still in operation in downtown Fort Smith. With revitalization efforts by the city and business community, historic downtown Fort Smith is experiencing a transformation into the center for arts and entertainment of the River Valley region.

Highway 64 connects with Interstate 40 in Oklahoma west of Fort Smith and enters Arkansas via the sole bridge crossing the Arkansas River on the western side of the metropolitan area. Through downtown Fort Smith, Highway 64 (Garrison Avenue) is a four-lane principal arterial road with on-street parking available. Heading north out of downtown, Highway 64 is dual signed with Highway 71B as a one-way couplet along 10th and 11th Streets. It continues northward before crossing the Arkansas River into Van Buren with access to Interstate 540.

Figure 1. Study Area with Existing and Projected Traffic



As the city's commercial hub, Highway 64 experiences significant traffic as illustrated in the previous figure, with trucks from within and outside the downtown area utilizing the same routes for both local and regional shipping and delivery. The presence of this truck traffic has been perceived as a constraint on downtown Fort Smith's revitalization efforts.

Other arterials passing through downtown Fort Smith are Highway 22 (Rogers Avenue), Highway 71B (Towson Avenue), and Highway 255. In conjunction with Highway 64, these arterials currently serve as the network for trucks to travel in and around downtown.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The 2025–2028 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) includes the following improvement jobs in the vicinity of downtown Fort Smith:

- **Job 040723** – Pavement, drainage, and pedestrian mobility and safety improvements will be made along Highway 71B (Towson Avenue) from south of Highway 64 to Highway 271. The City will assume ownership of this section of Highway 71B upon completion.
- **Jobs A40030** and **A40038** – Pavement improvements are currently under construction along sections of Highways 22, 64, 253, and 271.

Multiple local and regional efforts to revitalize downtown Fort Smith and improve pedestrian and bicycle facilities in the area are ongoing. The Future Fort Smith Comprehensive Plan (2014) includes considerations for integrating safe pedestrian and bicycle travel and re-routing truck traffic. The Propelling Downtown Forward (2017) masterplan addresses the need for continuing stakeholder collaboration and managing truck traffic. In 2021, the city adopted the Form-Based Codes to guide land development

that focuses on the physical form and design of buildings, streets, and public spaces to help promote a high quality of life for residents and visitors. The Safe Fort Smith Action Plan (2024) outlines the City's safety goals for reducing crashes, including those involving vulnerable pedestrians and bicyclists. These efforts acknowledge potential conflicts between trucking activities, community development, and limited options available for managing truck traffic on the State Highway System.

Additionally, the Frontier Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) Together: Frontier 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (2022) and Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (2016) include improvement projects in and around downtown Fort Smith. Collectively, these plans, along with the Fort Smith Downtown Traffic and Truck Study (2020), outline a vision for improving the safety, quality of life, and economic competitiveness of downtown Fort Smith while maintaining freight mobility.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The Arkansas Long Range Intermodal Transportation Plan (LRITP) defines six goal areas that support the Department's mission. These goal areas help inform the purpose and need for improvements to Highway 64 (Garrison Avenue) and other roadways in downtown Fort Smith. As detailed in several of the current transportation and community development plans described above, the principles of enhanced safety, mobility, and economic vitality have been jointly developed by local officials, other stakeholders, and the public. These principles are also considered below in the context of the six LRITP goal areas.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Safety performance for roadway segments throughout the study area was reviewed using the most recent crash data available (2019–2023). As shown in **Figure 2**, Highway 64 has several areas with high crash frequency, in particular the segment between 3rd Street and 7th Street and the segment between 10th Street and 12th Street. While the presence of trucks was perceived as a barrier to the downtown revitalization effort, only 4 percent of the crashes involved trucks on Highway 64 (Garrison Avenue). Two fatal or serious injury crashes involving trucks were on the one-way couplet of Highway 64 (10th Street). Additionally, the City of Fort Smith has identified Highway 64 (Garrison Avenue) as a high priority for safety improvements.

An additional review was performed focusing specifically on pedestrians and bicyclists. **Figure 3** illustrates the locations of 19 pedestrian-involved crashes and 14 bicycle-involved crashes in the downtown area during the 2019–2023 period. The figure also displays the varying levels of downtown pedestrian activity. The highest concentration of pedestrian activity occurred on Highway 64 (Garrison Avenue) between 5th Street and 10th Street and on Rogers Avenue between Court Street and 9th Street. While similar levels of pedestrian activity occur on those segments of Highway 64 (Garrison Avenue) and Rogers Avenue, no pedestrian- or bicycle-involved crashes were reported on Rogers Avenue, and no pedestrian or bicycle crashes involving trucks were recorded during this period.

Figure 2. Total and KA Crash Data (2019–2023)

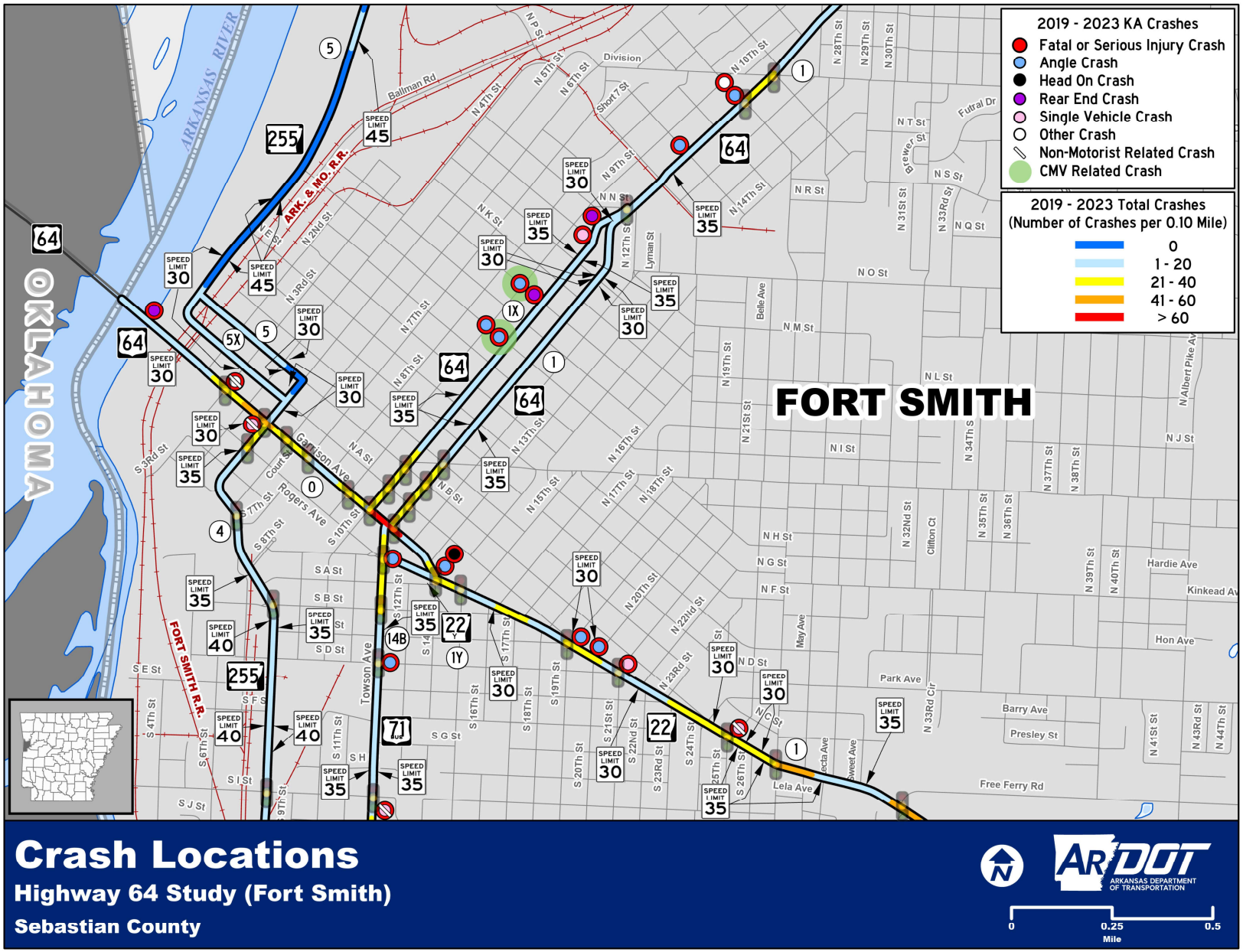
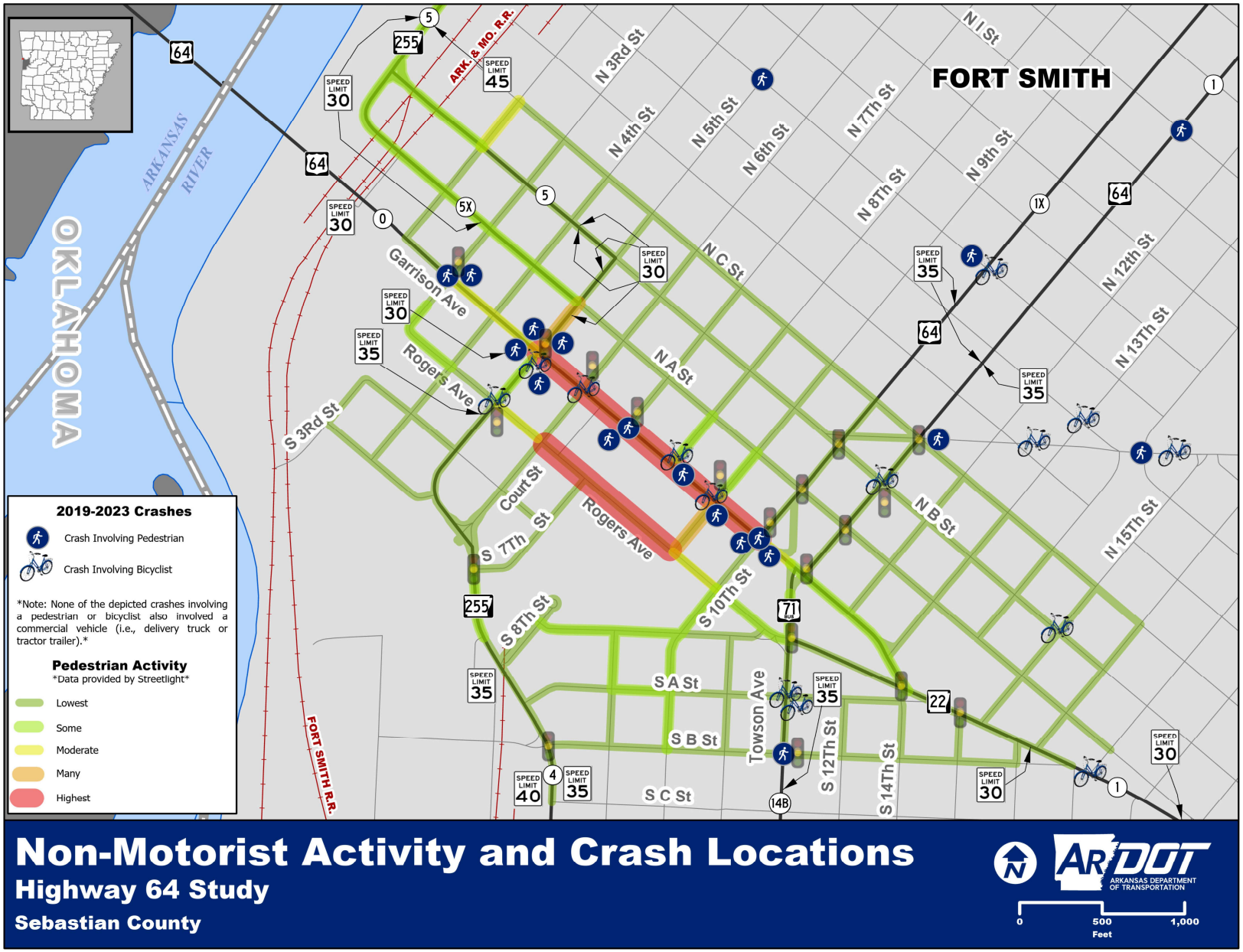


Figure 3. Non-Motorist Activity and Crash Locations



MOBILITY AND SYSTEM RELIABILITY

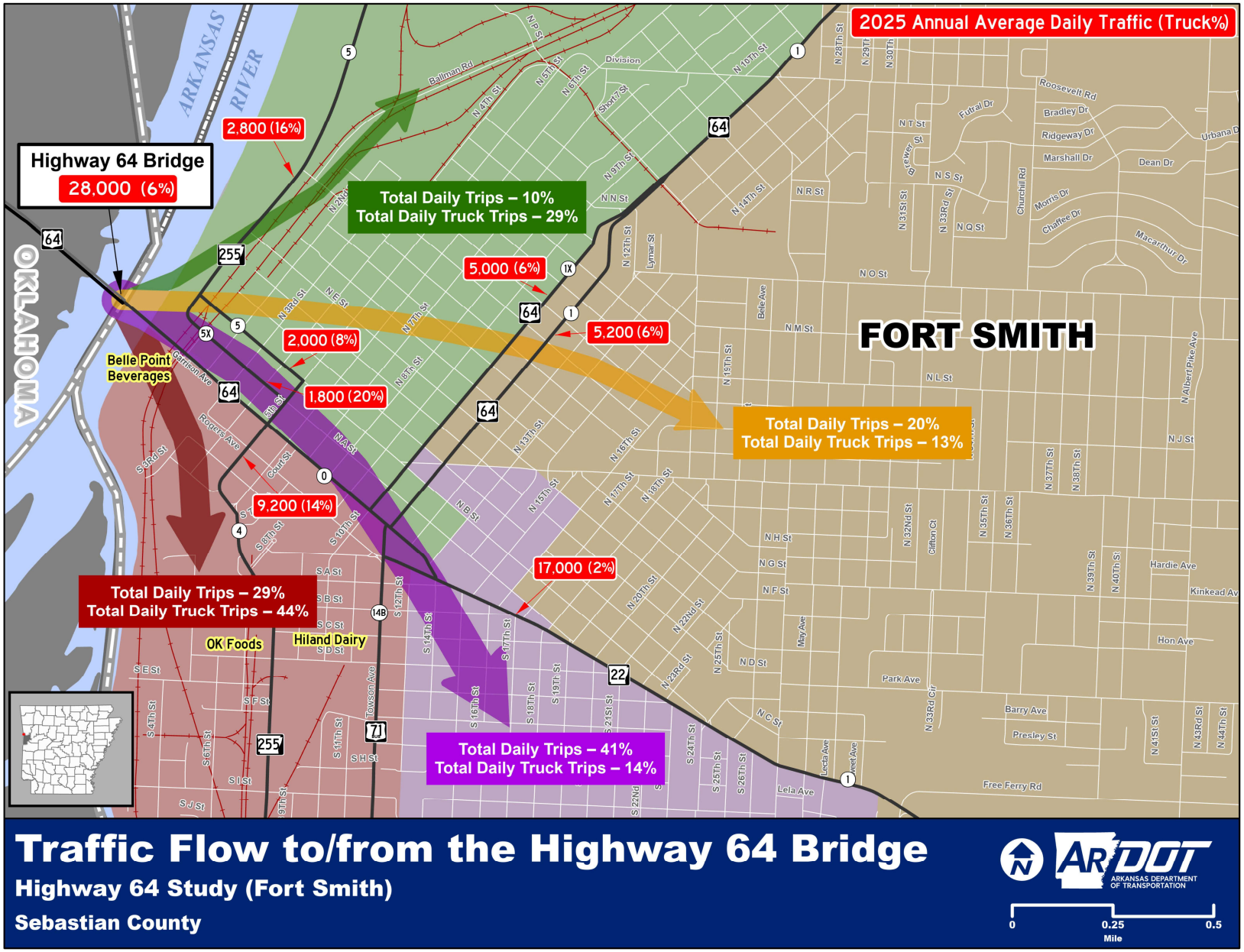
While Highway 64 (Garrison Avenue), Highway 22 (Rogers Avenue), Highway 71 (Towson Avenue), and Highway 255 carry high volumes of traffic, an analysis of these highways indicates that traffic operations are generally satisfactory with minor delays. This analysis verified the findings from the Fort Smith Downtown Traffic and Truck Study.

As illustrated in **Figure 4**, most traffic from the Highway 64 bridge has a destination to the south and east of the downtown area. This study did not identify any significant reliability or connectivity issues within the area. However, public feedback indicated concerns about perceived traffic and truck traffic contributing to downtown congestion and an unsafe environment for pedestrians and cyclists. Additionally, trucks traveling on Highway 64 (Garrison Avenue) and its intersecting routes are required to make challenging 90-degree turns to navigate through downtown.

Freight Connections

Multiple routes that bisect downtown Fort Smith are used by trucks. Several truck traffic generators are located downtown. However, most of the truck traffic flowing through downtown is generated from outside the study area, as highlighted by **Figure 4**. While local signage prohibits trucks on certain streets, it has been noted that truck drivers unfamiliar with the area routinely deviate from the designated route.

Figure 4. Traffic Flow to/from Highway 64 Bridge



MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Fort Smith and the surrounding area are served by multiple transportation modes, including public transit, an expanding regional airport, railroads, and several riverports. However, bicycle and pedestrian facilities are the primary multimodal components relevant to this study.

The Fort Smith Bikeway System provides an integrated network for travel to destinations such as parks, schools, and public transit stops. Although bicycle facilities along Highway 64 (Garrison Avenue) are not currently in place downtown, shared lane markings and a paved multi-use trail are present in the downtown area, and additional facilities are planned. As previously noted, several serious crashes in the study area involved pedestrians.

The region's active transportation plans include the provision of new pedestrian facilities in and near downtown Fort Smith. Future sidewalk and side-path projects will continue to improve community connectivity and make it easier and safer to access schools, parks, and commercial areas.

ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

Downtown Fort Smith is home to small businesses in the retail, hospitality, and entertainment and culture sectors. Downtown is also a significant tourist destination. As previously referenced, current local and regional plans emphasize the need to support and improve active transportation modes, which are considered integral to downtown Fort Smith's economic vitality.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Historic properties in the downtown area pose the most significant environmental constraint in the study area. These include two historic districts, numerous historic structures, and the Fort Smith National Historic Site and National Cemetery. These locations would need to be considered during the development of any transportation improvement projects.

INFRASTRUCTURE CONDITION

Pavement condition ratings in the study area range from poor to good. As previously mentioned, multiple STIP projects and other local and regional infrastructure improvements have been planned or are currently ongoing. The Highway 64 (Garrison Avenue) Bridge is in fair condition and recently underwent deck rehabilitation.

PURPOSE AND NEED SUMMARY

Local officials, downtown stakeholders, and the general public perceive truck traffic as contributing to congestion, unsafe pedestrian and bicycling conditions, and impeding downtown revitalization efforts. Although downtown Fort Smith is not currently experiencing significant vehicular mobility problems, trucks do encounter difficulties making 90-degree turns when traversing through the downtown area. Several roadways in and around downtown Fort Smith experience higher crash frequencies, and multiple crashes involving pedestrians and bicyclists have occurred, particularly along Highway 64.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS

Several alternatives were developed to address the needs of the study area. A No-Action Alternative is included to provide a baseline for the improvement alternatives.

NO-ACTION ALTERNATIVE

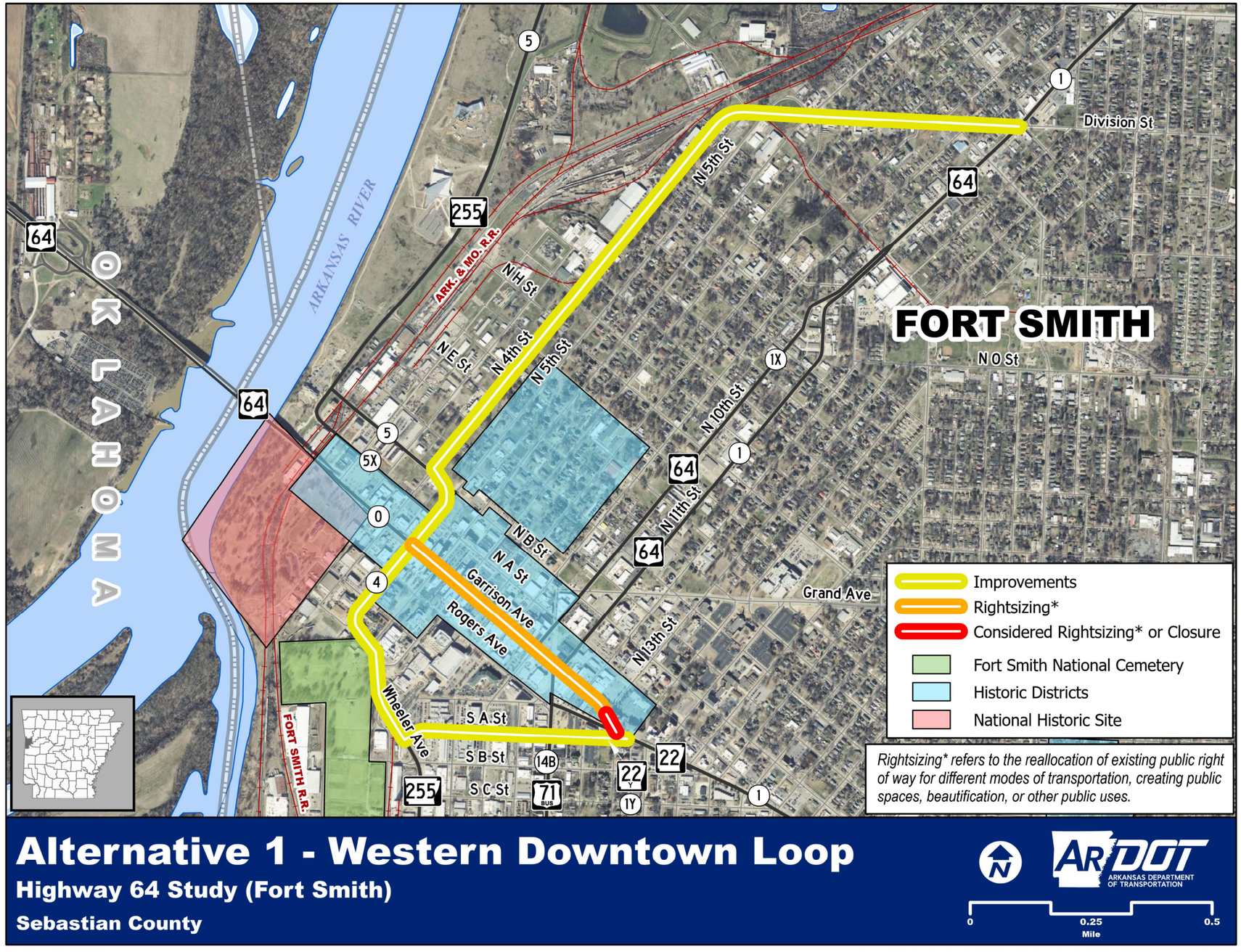
Under the No-Action Alternative, no improvements would be made to existing roadways. Safety problems could worsen in future years as Fort Smith and surrounding areas continue to grow, while the truck traffic patterns through downtown Fort Smith will remain. The No-Action Alternative would have no associated costs other than routine maintenance.

ALTERNATIVE 1 – WESTERN DOWNTOWN LOOP

Shown in **Figure 5**, this alternative would use perimeter routes to redirect regional traffic, including truck traffic.

A downtown loop would be established by improving South A Street, 5th Street, 4th Street, and Division Avenue to accommodate higher traffic volumes and truck traffic. Reducing truck traffic on Highway 64 (Garrison Avenue) would improve pedestrian conditions downtown and provide an opportunity for rightsizing. Rightsizing refers to reallocating existing public right of way for different modes of transportation and creating opportunities for developing public spaces, beautification projects, and other downtown Fort Smith revitalization plans. The total estimated cost of this alternative is $120 million, including $70 million for construction.

Figure 5. Alternative 1: Western Downtown Loop



Overall, reducing or re-distributing truck traffic in and around downtown Fort Smith would be expected to enhance the safety performance of the downtown area by reducing conflict points between trucks, other vehicles, and pedestrians and bicyclists. Reducing the number of vehicular lanes on Highway 64 would encourage traffic to distribute across multiple streets, while closing a portion of Highway 64 would further reduce through traffic.

Historic properties would constrain improvements to 5th Street. Improvements to North 4th Street and South A Street could have an adverse impact on existing residents and businesses. Although trucks currently use North 4th Street, increasing traffic on local roads could adversely affect some property owners. Recently, the Sebastian County Sheriff's Office installed a gate on South A Street to restrict through traffic near their facility. Other parallel routes, such as South B Street or Canal Street, may be considered as alternate routes.

ALTERNATIVE 2 – DOWNTOWN STREET MODIFICATIONS

As shown in **Figure 6**, Alternative 2 would distribute regional traffic and truck traffic across multiple downtown streets. Rogers Avenue, 5th Street, and the one-way couplet of A and B Streets would be modified to accommodate higher traffic volumes and truck traffic. Like Alternative 1, this alternative would improve pedestrian conditions downtown and provide an opportunity to rightsize Highway 64 (Garrison Avenue). The total estimated cost for this alternative is $70 million, including $40 million for construction.

This Alternative would likely have fewer impacts on developed properties than Alternative 1. However, historic properties could present constraints. Rerouting some traffic to the North A Steet and B Street one-way couplet and Highway 22 (Rogers Avenue) could be beneficial by increasing visibility for businesses along those roadways. Conversely, rerouted truck traffic could also be perceived negatively by those same businesses. **Tables 1** and **2** provide a comparison of the two alternatives.

Figure 6. Alternative 2: Downtown Street Modifications

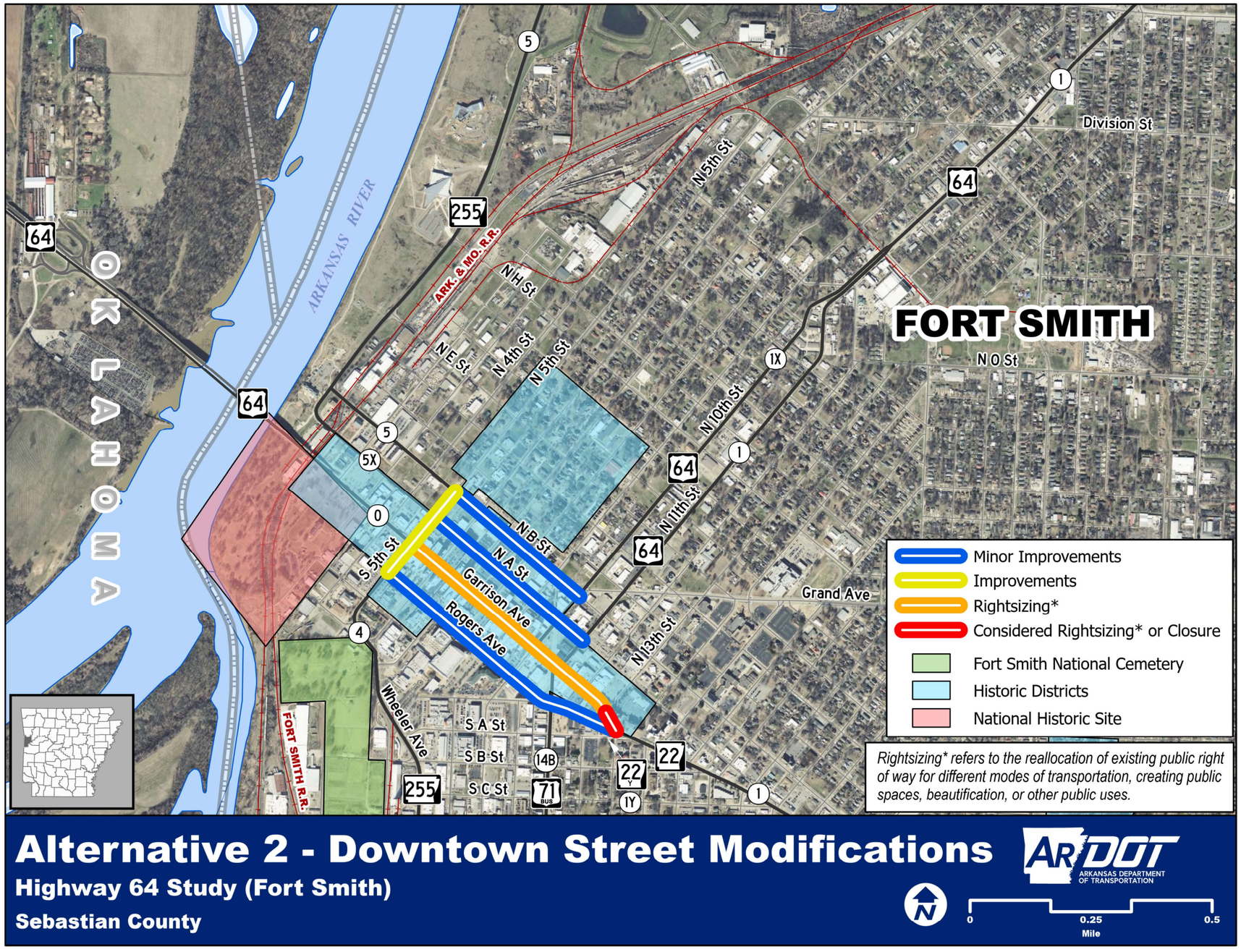


Table 1. Planning-Level Cost Estimates (in 2025 dollars)[1]

	Construction Cost (millions)	Total Cost[1] (millions)
Alternative 1	$70	$120
Alternative 2	$40	$70

[1]Total cost include preliminary engineering, right-of-way acquisition, utility relocation, and construction engineering. Additional assessment will be required to evaluate costs related to property modification.

Table 2. Comparison of Alternatives

Alternative	Advantages	Disadvantages
Alternative 1: Western Downtown Loop	• Reduces traffic on Hwy. 64 (Garrison Ave.) and enhances safety. • Improves pedestrian conditions and provides opportunities for rightsizing. • North 4th St. already used by trucks to access industrial development.	• 5th St. improvements constrained by historic properties. • Increasing traffic volumes on North 4th St. and South A St. would impact existing residential, government, commercial, and industrial properties. • Increasing traffic on local roads may adversely impact some property owners.
Alternative 2: Downtown Street Modifications	• Reduces regional traffic on Hwy. 64 (Garrison Ave.) and enhances safety. • Improves pedestrian conditions and provides opportunities for rightsizing. • Fewer property impacts than Western Downtown Loop. • Gives businesses on North A & B Streets and Rogers Ave. greater visibility.	• 5th St. improvements constrained by historic properties. • Increasing traffic volumes on North A & B Streets and Rogers Ave. may adversely impact some property owners.

NEW ARKANSAS RIVER BRIDGE ALTERNATIVES

In addition to the downtown improvement alternatives, three alternatives for a new Arkansas River bridge between Fort Smith and Oklahoma were considered to divert traffic from Highway 64. These alternatives were categorized within North, Downtown, and South Zones as shown in **Figure 7** and described below.

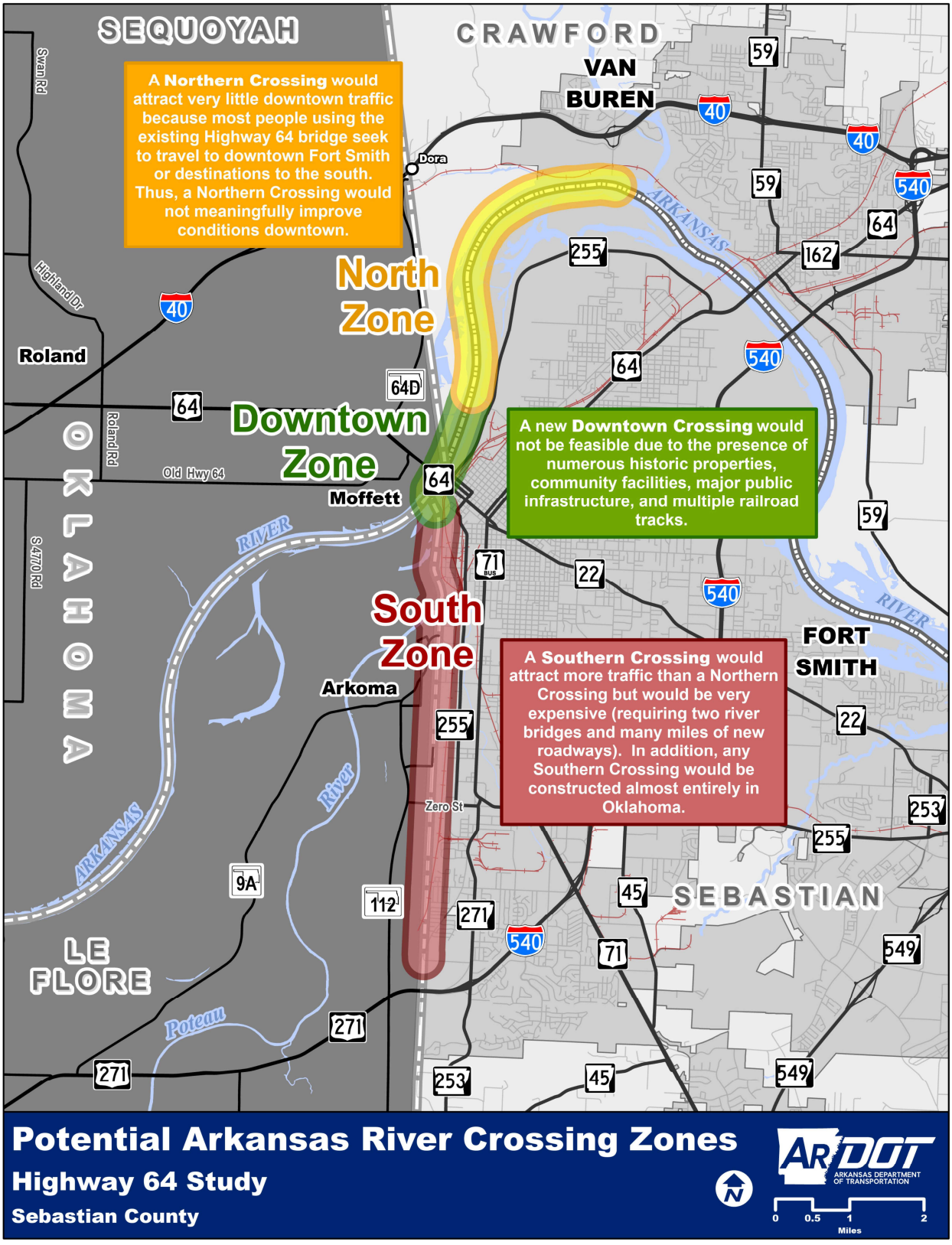
North Zone

Within this zone, potential crossings were reviewed including the following locations:

- Beginning at the Interstate 40 and Highway 64 interchange in Dora and continuing in a southeast direction, crossing the Arkansas River before connecting with Highway 255 (Riverfront Drive).
- Extending Kelley Highway westward on new location to the P Street intersection with Highway 255 (Riverfront Drive). The extension would continue westward, crossing the Arkansas River before intersecting Highway 64D in Oklahoma.

As previously shown in **Figure 4**, an analysis of origin-destination data revealed that most of the vehicles using the existing Highway 64 bridge are destined for the downtown area or points to the south. Therefore, constructing a bridge north of downtown would not attract sufficient traffic to meaningfully improve conditions on Highway 64 (Garrison Avenue) or downtown. Total planning-level cost estimates for crossing in the North Zone range from $300 million to $500 million.

Figure 7. Potential Arkansas River Crossing Zones



Downtown Zone

Downtown Crossing – An additional bridge downtown was determined to be infeasible due to the presence of numerous historic properties, community facilities, major public infrastructure, and railroad lines.

South Zone

Within this zone, potential crossings were reviewed including the following locations:

- A connection between Zero Street, Fort Smith and Roland, Oklahoma.
- A connection between Moffett, Oklahoma and Arkoma, Oklahoma.

Total planning-level cost estimates for crossings in the South Zone range from $400 million to $900 million. These alternatives would require two bridges (one crossing the Poteau River and one crossing the Arkansas River) and many miles of new connecting roadways crossing a large flood plain. In addition to extremely high costs associated with bridge and new location construction, the South Zone alternatives would be either entirely or almost entirely within Oklahoma. Consequently, these alternatives were determined to be infeasible.

To summarize, all the proposed bridge alternatives are expected to have significant feasibility challenges, including conflicts with existing buildings and infrastructure, the need for multistate collaboration, limited effectiveness for reducing downtown traffic, and high costs.

CONCLUSIONS

Two alternatives for redistributing traffic on Highway 64 (Garrison Avenue) through downtown Fort Smith were developed. Both alternatives would address the purpose of and need for improvements – enhancing safety and economic competitiveness of downtown Fort Smith while maintaining truck mobility – though both alternatives would have challenges.

While construction of a new Arkansas River bridge would improve mobility and connectivity of the highway system, a new major river crossing would be very costly and face many environmental and coordination challenges.

No funding has been identified for any improvements identified as part of this study. Additionally, traffic re-distribution would require significant changes to city streets, which must be initiated by the local jurisdiction. Further analysis is needed to refine the scope in order to minimize adverse effects.

APPENDIX A

MINUTE ORDER 2020-061

ARKANSAS STATE HIGHWAY COMMISSION

MINUTE ORDER

District: Four

Page 1 of 1 Page

County: Sebastian

Category: Miscellaneous

WHEREAS, U.S. Highway 64 through downtown Fort Smith is a primary route connecting western Arkansas to Oklahoma and points west; and

WHEREAS, traffic volumes and truck traffic have presented traffic operation challenges along the U.S. Highway 64 corridor in the City; and

WHEREAS, this corridor plays an integral role in supporting the City's economic competitiveness and quality of life; and

WHEREAS, local officials have adopted the Fort Smith Downtown Traffic and Truck Study which has identified potential improvements for further consideration.

NOW THEREFORE, the Director is authorized to conduct a study to recommend needed improvements to the State Highway System in and surrounding downtown Fort Smith including the feasibility of constructing a new U.S. Highway 64 river crossing.

Approved:

Chairman

Vice-Chairman

Member

Member

Member

TP&P

Submitted By:

Assistant Chief Engineer – Planning

Approved:

Director

Minute Order No. 20 20 0 61

Date Passed JUL 22 2020

Form 19-456
Rev. 1/13/2016
Y:\MPP\Minute Orders\2020\MO Authorize Fort Smith Downtown Travel Study 2020-07.docx

HIGHWAY 64 STUDY (FORT SMITH)

SEBASTIAN COUNTY