

Assessing the Impact of Interstate and Freeway Withdrawals



Client

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

Facts

Period

2022

Project Country

United States

In response to a request from Congress, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) sought to measure the impacts of Interstate withdrawals on transportation performance, Interstate System users, and surrounding communities.

This project, led by EBP and ICF International, documented the circumstances and impacts of freeway withdrawals (Interstate and non-Interstate). The study assesses impacts for each of five congressionally directed criteria (safety, mobility, the movement of goods and services, national defense, and the environment) and for additional criteria identified in the research (land and economic development, equity and livable communities, and resiliency and sustainability). In addition to the impact study of 15 projects, two detailed project analyses highlight the decision-making process and evaluation criteria involved in freeway removal.

The study finds that while freeway withdrawals are rare, they are driven by community-specific goals to better position an area for community and economic development, improve the environment and safety, and with historical and equity considerations in mind. Some withdrawal projects and proposals seek to redress historical injustices from freeway construction through low-income and minority communities.

Withdrawal projects are subject to extensive planning and analysis of trade-offs among alternatives, including criteria that favor vehicular through-mobility as well as criteria that reflect economic and community development goals. The study finds that where vehicular demand can be met with a non-freeway facility, a true withdrawal (removing a freeway) may be feasible and yield the desired community benefits (e.g., growth and development in the corridor, improved livability, greater mobility for non-vehicular and local travel) while creating no or minimal disbenefits (e.g., delay) for vehicular through-traffic.

Where freeway infrastructure is still required to meet vehicular demand, other similar “withdrawal-like” solutions to address the negative side-effects of urban highways such as tunnelling, “capping” with land bridges, or relocation may be more appropriate. Both types of projects seek to better align infrastructure with community goals and transportation needs. These projects can have both positive and negative impacts across the evaluated criteria, depending on project features and the level and nature of traffic patterns in the corridor. Decision-makers weigh outcomes across multiple objectives to determine a preferred course of action.

Contact Persons



Naomi Stein
naomi.stein@ebp-us.com