



CHAPTER 1 - PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

1.1 What is the I-73 Project?

I-73 is a national highway project that will provide a transportation corridor from Michigan to South Carolina. The I-73 project will start at Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan and go through portions of Ohio, West Virginia, Virginia, and North Carolina before terminating near the Myrtle Beach area (Figure 1-1).

Currently, Michigan and Ohio have postponed this project due to a lack of funding, while West Virginia has completed parts of I-73, also known as the King Coal Highway and Coalfields Expressway. West Virginia is waiting on more funding prior to completing the entire I-73 corridor project. Virginia is completing a Final Environmental Impact Statement for its portion of I-73 and is planning to submit the document to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in 2006. North Carolina has also completed portions of I-73 by the re-designation of existing roads as an interstate facility. North Carolina Department of Transportation is

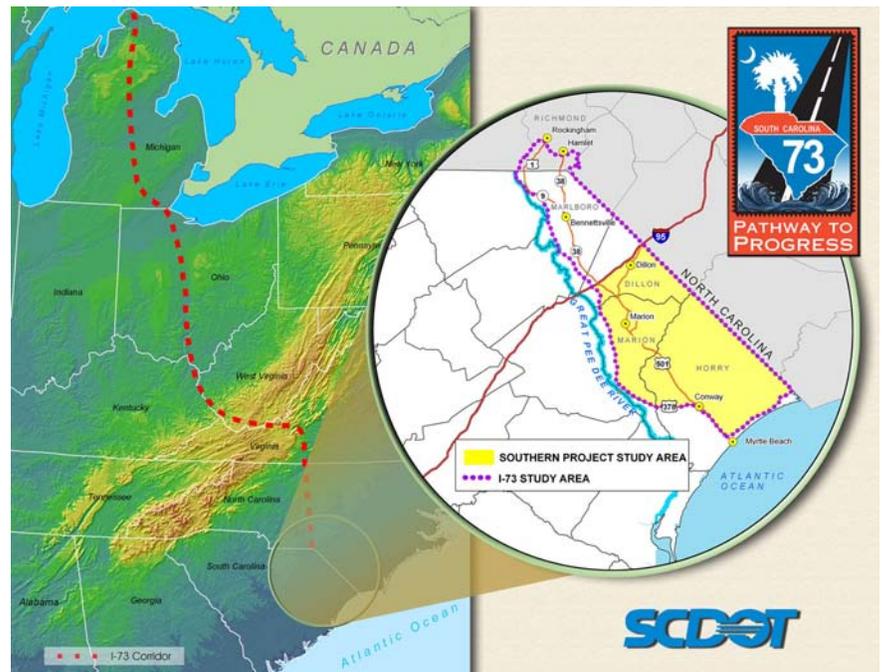


Figure 1-1. Interstate 73 Corridor

currently completing environmental analyses, planning phases, and right-of-way acquisitions. This Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) has been prepared to evaluate and document the potential benefits and impacts that would result from construction of I-73 in South Carolina. In addition to this EIS, there are 10 Technical Memoranda that provide supporting documentation and are hereby incorporated by reference into this EIS. These Technical Memoranda include the following:

- *Alternative Development Technical Memorandum;*
- *Community Impact Analysis Technical Memorandum;*
- *Cultural Resources Technical Memorandum;*
- *Hazardous Material Technical Memorandum;*
- *Hurricane Evacuation Analysis Technical Memorandum;*
- *Indirect and Cumulative Technical Memorandum;*
- *Noise Technical Memorandum;*



- *Public Involvement Technical Memorandum;*
- *Traffic Technical Memorandum; and,*
- *Natural Resources Technical Memorandum.*

1.1.1 Where is the project located?

The portion of the project to be analyzed in this EIS is located in the northeastern corner of South Carolina. The project study area, shown in Figure 1-2, extends southeast from I-95, and is bounded to the northeast by the North Carolina/South Carolina state line, to the southeast by U.S. Route 17, and to the southwest by the eastern edge of the Great Pee Dee River floodplain, U.S. Route 378, and U.S. Route 501. A separate EIS is being prepared to analyze the portion of Interstate 73 extending from I-95 to the vicinity of Hamlet, North Carolina.

1.1.2 What would the I-73 facility be like?

The proposed I-73 facility would be a high speed, divided, fully controlled access roadway that would require interchanges for access. Existing access to properties would be maintained by the use of frontage roads. Existing traffic patterns would be maintained by providing overpasses for east and west traffic flow.

Two typical sections were developed to accommodate the number of lanes needed for the future traffic volumes, as well as a multimodal corridor. Figure 1-3 (on page 1-4) represents the interim design, which is proposed to be constructed initially and would accommodate two lanes of traffic in each direction. In the future, when traffic volumes increase to a point that additional lanes are necessary in order to maintain an acceptable level of service, an additional lane in each direction could be added. This ultimate design would accommodate three lanes of traffic in each direction; refer to Figure 1-4 (on page 1-5). A 400-foot right-of-way would be acquired in the vicinity of frontage roads so that additional right-of-way would not be required when the ultimate design was needed. Where frontage roads are not required, a 300-foot right-of-way would be adequate.

1.1.3 Why was the project initiated?

The I-73 Corridor was identified as a High Priority Corridor by the U.S. Congress in the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991. Congress designated high priority corridors as those that would provide the most efficient way of integrating regions, linking major population centers of the country, providing opportunities for increased economic growth, and serving the travel and commerce needs of the nation. The corridors that Congress designated were to be included in the National Highway System. Congress wanted the FHWA, along with the states, to develop long-range plans and feasibility studies for these corridors, and focus federal funds towards these areas for road construction. The proposed project is the South Carolina segment of the I-73/I-74 High Priority Corridor and is currently listed as number five on the National Highway Systems High Priority Corridors list.¹

¹ 23 U.S.C. §1105(c) (1991, as amended through P.L. 109-59).

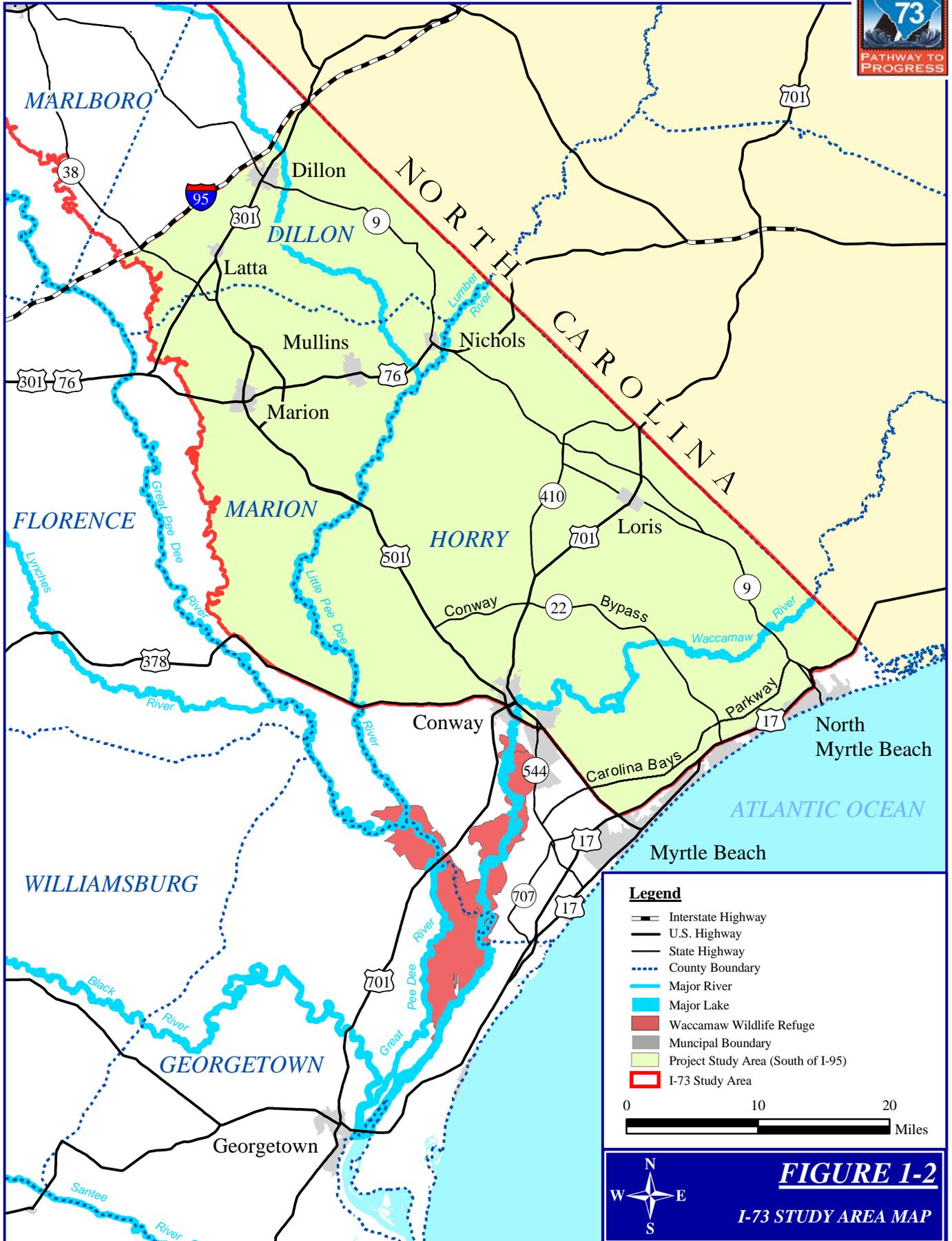
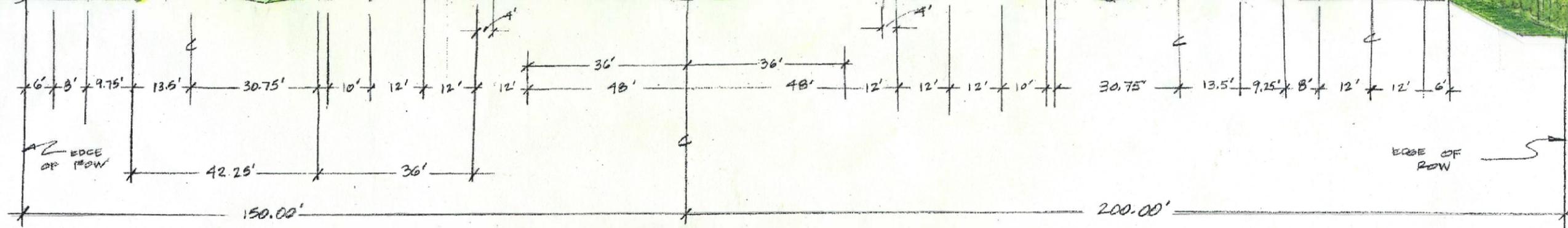
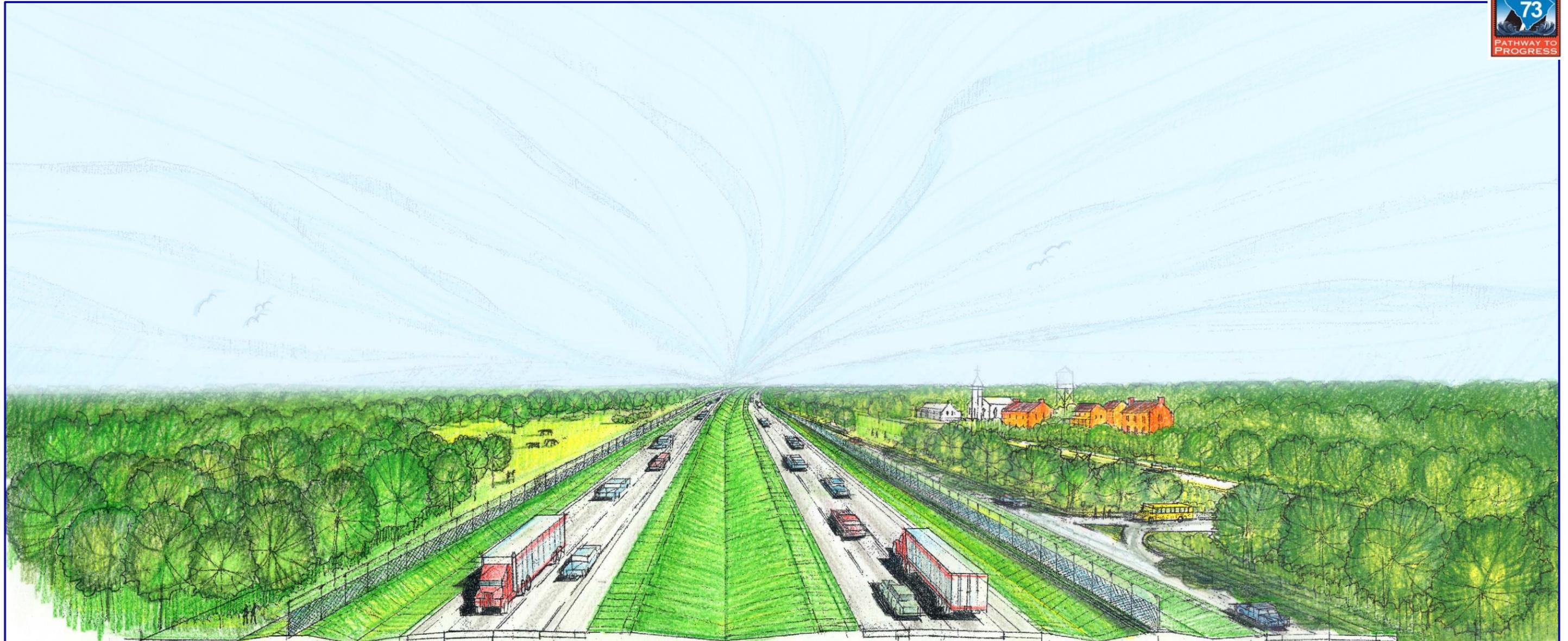


FIGURE 1-2
I-73 STUDY AREA MAP



I-73 INTERIM - NO FRONTAGE RD. AT LEFT / SPACE FOR RAILROAD BOTH SIDES

FIGURE 1-3
 INTERIM TYPICAL SECTION
 FRONTAGE ROAD ON ONE SIDE
 SPACE FOR RAILROADS ON BOTH SIDES