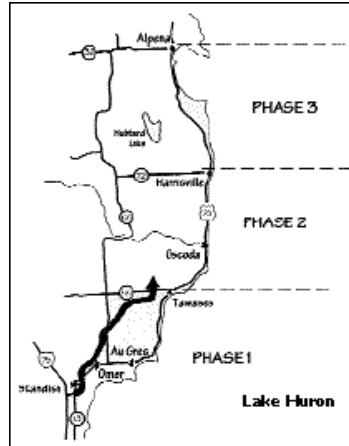


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U.S.-23 Extension

Proposal & Savings

- Deny funding for this proposed northeast Michigan freeway extension
Savings Estimate: \$800 million
(\$640 million federal;
\$160 million state and local)



Map Source: People for U.S. 23 Freeway

Background:

The planned 100-mile freeway extension would connect Alpena on the Lake Huron shoreline of northeast lower Michigan with the I-75 freeway near Standish. The extension would roughly parallel the existing U.S.-23 highway, which follows the coasts of Saginaw Bay and Lake Huron in a sparsely populated area of the state.

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) plans to construct the freeway in three phases, with a \$194 million price tag for the first 32-mile segment.

Recent Action:

A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was made public in September 1995. The release of the Final Environmental Impact Statement is expected in 1997. Funding for the project will depend upon an increase in the Michigan motor vehicles fuels tax.

Taxpayer Concerns:

- Traffic counts on the existing U.S.-23 highway do not justify the construction of a freeway extension.
- Only two alternatives were offered in the DEIS -- either build the freeway extension, or do nothing. Alternatives such as a 1988 MDOT plan to upgrade the existing highway were discarded without adequate consideration.
- The primary impetus for this project is to encourage economic growth in a relatively undeveloped area of Michigan. However, promises of economic benefits from the freeway extension are vague and unsubstantiated.

Local Community Concerns:

- Businesses along the existing highway that are dependent upon traffic volume would be devastated.
- Bypassed communities would be undermined, as investment and activity shifts to

new development at
freeway interchanges.

- Traditional land use patterns would be disrupted, and a significant amount of prime farmland consumed by freeway construction and related development.

The majority of public comments submitted to the Michigan Department of Transportation on the Draft

Environmental Impact Statement emphatically opposed construction of the freeway extension.

The Detroit Free Press editorialized on January 22, 1997, that "an extension of the U.S.-23 freeway -- should not be on the spending list."

Environmental Concerns:

- Environmental groups, as well as state and federal resource agencies, have concluded that the proposed freeway extension will have a significant effect on the unique natural environment of relatively undeveloped northeast Michigan.
- Phase I of construction would transect large undeveloped tracts of forested wetland in the Saginaw Bay watershed. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service observed that the initial phase of the U.S.-23 project would result in the "largest single wetlands loss within Michigan."
- Phases II and III of the project would severely compromise state and national forest land, protected wildlife habitat, coastal wetlands, and the Au Sable River Corridor.

The Detroit Free Press stated, "The proposed freeway route ... looks as if it were drawn by trucking firms to shave every possible minute off delivery times, regardless of how many Michigan fields, trees and swamps would disappear." \$

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