Loop 375 Border Highway West

From Racetrack Drive to U.S. Highway 54
El Paso County, Texas
CSJ: 2552-04-027

Draft
State Environmental Impact Statement

Texas Department of Transportation
El Paso District

September 2012

Border Highway West Extension Project
From Racetrack Drive to U.S. Highway 54

CSJ: 2552-04-027

DRAFT STATE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

SUBMITTED PURSUANT TO 43 TEXAS ADMINISTRATIVE CODE CHAPTER 2

BY THE

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

9/26/12
Date of Approval

Texas Department of Transportation

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ABSTRACT

The Texas Department of Transportation, the lead agency, is preparing a State Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to determine the potential environmental, social, and economic impacts of the proposed **Loop 375 Border Highway West Extension Project** in El Paso, Texas. The project limits extend **from Racetrack Drive** near Doniphan Road and New Mexico 273, west of downtown, **to United States Highway (US) 54,** east of downtown El Paso, a distance of approximately nine miles, of which approximately seven miles would be tolled. The project is proposed as a four-lane, controlled-access toll project. Portions of the proposed project (from Park Street to Schuster Avenue) are included in the current El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization *Mission 2035* Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). The entire proposed project from Racetrack Drive to US 54 is included in the Comprehensive Mobility Plan, adopted by the region in 2008, and this entire limit will be included in the upcoming *Horizon Model 2040* MTP update.

The proposed project is the result of previous studies which have identified a need for an alternate route for I-10 to address **needed improvements to system capacity, reliability, and regional system linkage** for the El Paso, Texas metropolitan area. Other than I-10, there is no continuous high speed east-west highway through El Paso. The only other major highways that serve east-west traffic are US 85 (Paisano Drive) and Loop 375. However, US 85 has numerous signalized intersections and heavy pedestrian activity, and Loop 375 terminates at Santa Fe Street, south of downtown. Neither facility provides for high-speed movement through the El Paso region.

Four reasonable alternatives were evaluated to an equal level of detail, and each would require: the acquisition of new right-of-way; residential and commercial displacements; potential community impacts; access changes; and impacts to land use, floodplains, water quality, parklands, vegetation, hazardous materials, and traffic noise. No adverse impacts are anticpated to historic resources. Required surveys for archeological resources would be completed during the Final EIS stage. **Alternative 2 (Border A and Rail Yard B) has been chosen as the Preferred Alternative** and would be evaluated to a higher level of detail in the Final EIS following a public hearing. The final decision on the Preferred Alternative would occur when the Final EIS receives a Record of Decision. The estimated proposed construction cost is $500 million and would utilize 100% state funding. Construction is estimated to begin in 2015.

Comments on the Draft EIS are due by November 26, 2012 and should be sent to:

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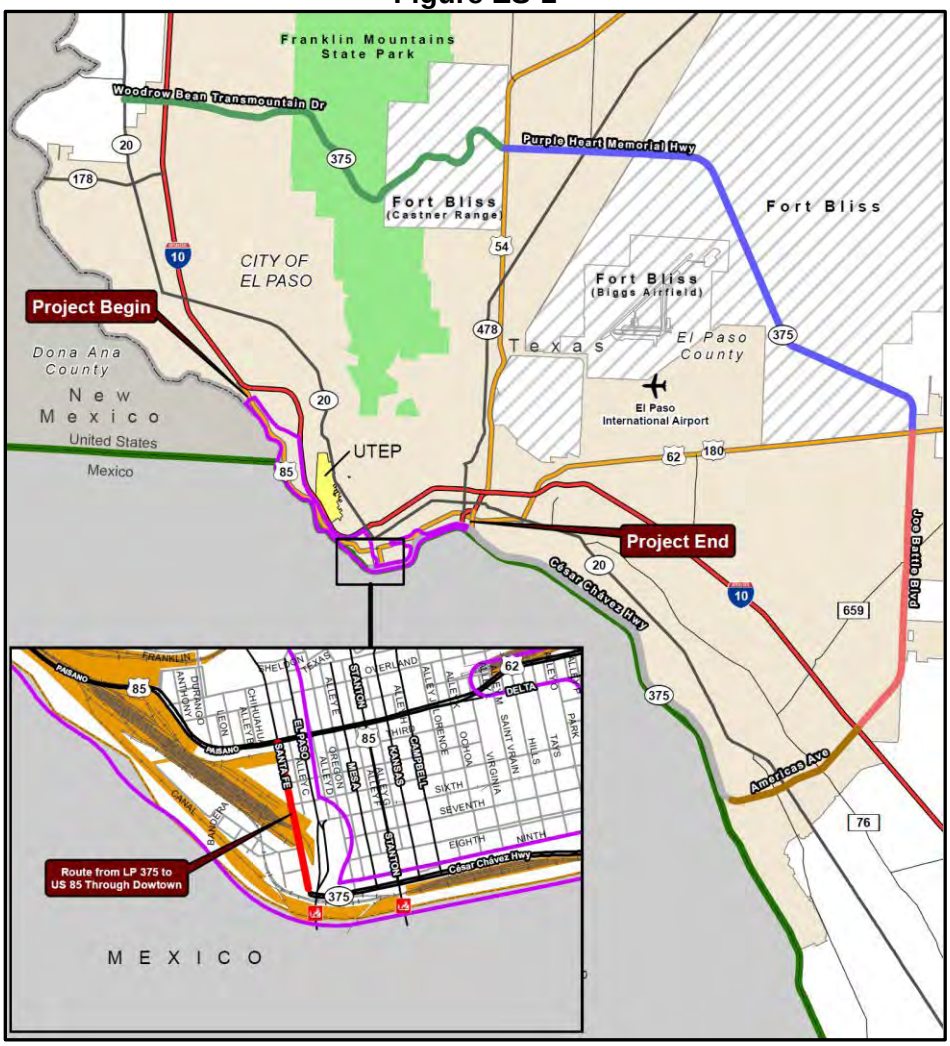
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ES.1 SUMMARY OF THE ACTION

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), the lead agency, has prepared a State Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to determine the potential environmental, social, and economic impacts of the Loop 375 Border Highway West Extension Project, a proposed four-lane controlled-access toll facility in El Paso, Texas. The project limits extend from Racetrack Drive near Doniphan Road and New Mexico (NM) 273 on the west side of downtown El Paso, to United States Highway (US) 54 east of downtown, a total project length of approximately nine miles, of which approximately seven miles would be tolled. Portions of the proposed project (from Park Street to Schuster Avenue) are included in the current El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization *Mission 2035* Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). The entire proposed project from Racetrack Drive to US 54 is included in the Comprehensive Mobility Plan adopted by the region in 2008 and the entire project will be included in the upcoming *Horizon Model 2040* MTP update. The estimated cost for each reasonable alternative would be similar at approximately $500 million. Construction is anticipated to begin in 2015.

Figure ES-1



The proposed project is the result of previous studies, which have identified a need for an alternate route for I-10 to address needed improvements to system capacity and reliability as well as regional system linkage for the El Paso, Texas metropolitan area. Other than I-10, there is no continuous high speed east-west highway through El Paso. The only other major highways that serve east-west traffic are US 85 (Paisano Drive) and Loop 375. However, US 85 has numerous signalized intersections and heavy pedestrian activity, and Loop 375 terminates at Santa Fe Street south of downtown. Neither facility provides for high speed movement through the El Paso region.

ES.2 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE ACTION

A historical need for addressing east-west mobility deficiencies through El Paso has been identified in regional long range planning efforts since 1961. **Appendix M** contains a list of previous studies that support the need and toll feasibility for the proposed project.

The purpose of the proposed project is to provide an alternate route to I-10 to accommodate a need for projected growth in regional east-west traffic and to improve east-west regional reliability and continuity.

ES.3 SUMMARY OF ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

No-Build Alternative

Under the No-Build Alternative, the proposed project would not be constructed. The No-Build Alternative would not address the needed improvements to system capacity and reliability as well as regional system linkage; therefore, traffic congestion and demand would continue to increase.

Traffic data indicates that I-10 and other roadways within the study area are approaching capacity. With the addition of the projected traffic growth in the area, I-10 will not be able to adequately handle future growth and traffic demands. Therefore, a need exists for the proposed extension of Loop 375 to serve as an alternate to I-10. Crash data also indicate that improvements are needed for incident management.

Universe, Preliminary, and Reasonable Alternatives

The alternatives analysis was completed in coordination with cooperating and participating agencies (See **Appendix B** for a complete list) and the public through three series of scoping meetings (see **Appendix C** for summaries of these meetings).

The universe of alternatives was developed, and evaluated a full range of multi-modal alternatives including: the No-Build Alternative; Transportation Systems Management; localized improvements; addition of I-10 express lanes; improving/connecting local arterials; tunnels; mass transit; and bike/pedestrian routes within a constrained border corridor route. A limited set of preliminary alternatives consisting of non-tolled and tolled, elevated and depressed options within the constrained border corridor was presented at the first series of public scoping meetings (October 2007). The universe of alternatives was also presented at this meeting.

In 2010, the project team evaluated 15 preliminary alternatives based on an expanded study area that utilized portions of the former American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO) facility and CEMEX properties, which were not previously available for consideration. The preliminary alternatives evaluated various options including: No-Build, at-grade (boulevard,

super-street, etc.), elevated, depressed, and tunnels. The alternatives also included options for interchanges at major cross-streets and the ability to maintain access to existing facilities. Each alternative was evaluated using a set of environmental, traffic, and engineering criteria followed by public and agency input.

In 2011, the project changed to state funding. This change in funding resulted in a reduced study area from the 2010 area, which was approximately 16 miles, to a reduced area of approximately eight miles, from Racetrack Drive to Park Street near downtown El Paso.

The project team modified the previously identified 15 preliminary alternatives to the modified study area and developed four shorter, more concise, recommended reasonable alternatives (two within Segment 13 and two within Segment 14) and a No-Build Alternative. The naming convention was also modified at that time for easier public and agency comment. The recommended reasonable alternatives utilized a “Border A or B” and “Rail Yard A or B” nomenclature to evaluate four possible segments. These segments were then combined as Reasonable Alternatives 1 through 4 for a full evaluation of four build alternatives and a No-Build Alternative.

Following the second public scoping meeting in December 2011, the project length was extended approximately one mile (for the current total project length of approximately nine miles) to US 54. The design change addresses access to downtown and the addition of an interchange at Coles Street.

A third public scoping meeting was held in June 2012 to present the change in limits and access changes at the western terminus with NM 273 and Doniphan Road, as well as access changes on the eastern terminus and the area south of downtown. Currently, access is planned to remain at NM 273. New access includes the addition of a connection to Doniphan Drive and improved east-west access to downtown through the addition of an interchange at Coles Street.

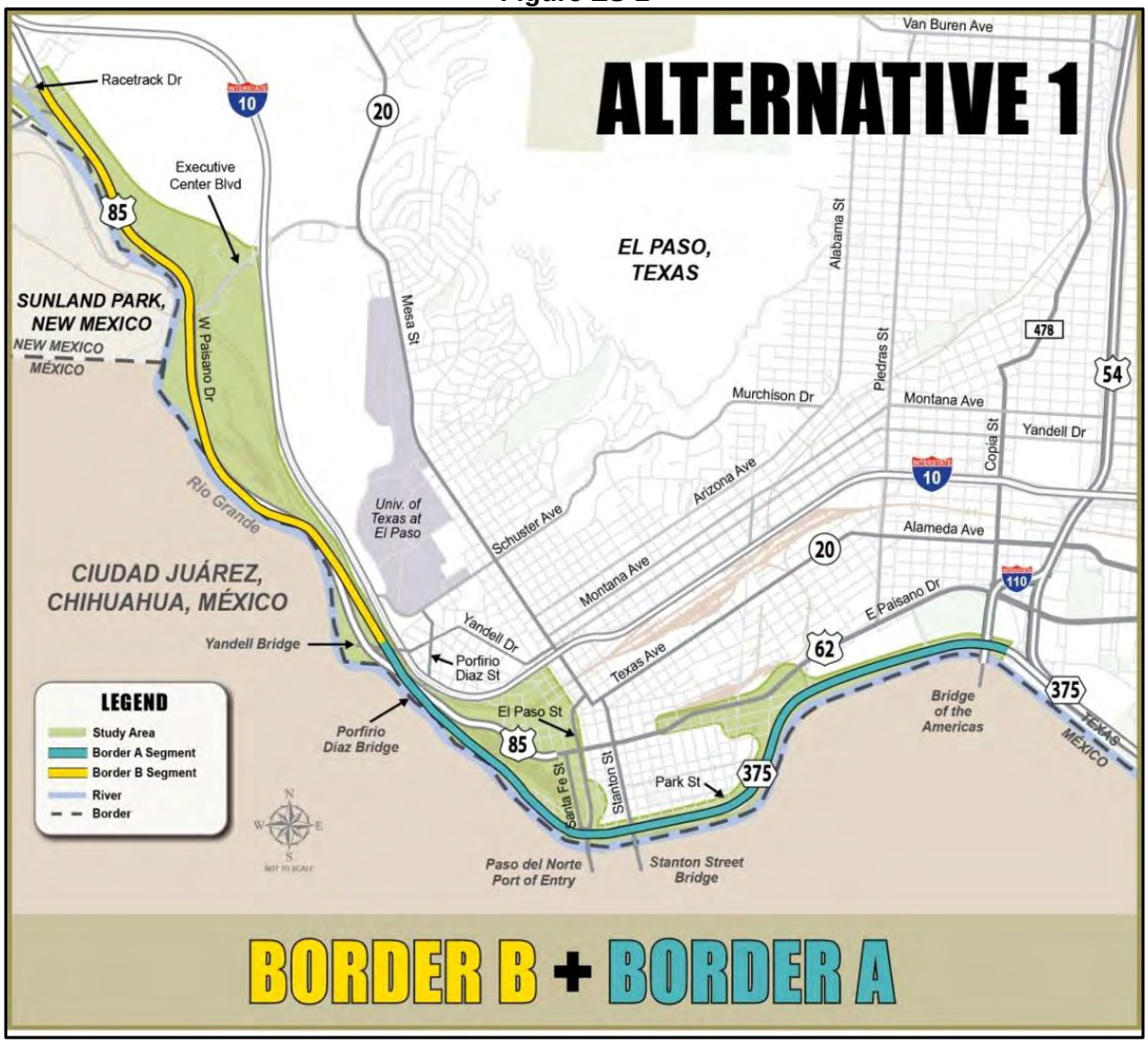
Preferred Alternative

An Alternatives Workshop was held in August 2012 to compare the reasonable alternatives and determine a Preferred Alternative based on results of technical analyses and public scoping meeting #3 results. Alternative 2 was selected as the Preferred Alternative to be carried forward to the public hearing and further analysis in the Final EIS. See figures of each of the Reasonable Alternatives 1-4 below.

Reasonable Alternative 1

Reasonable Alternative 1 is a combination of Recommended Reasonable Alternatives Border A and Border B (See **Figure ES-2**). The non-tolled length of Reasonable Alternative 1 is approximately 1.9 miles. The tolled length of Reasonable Alternative 1 is 7.1 miles.

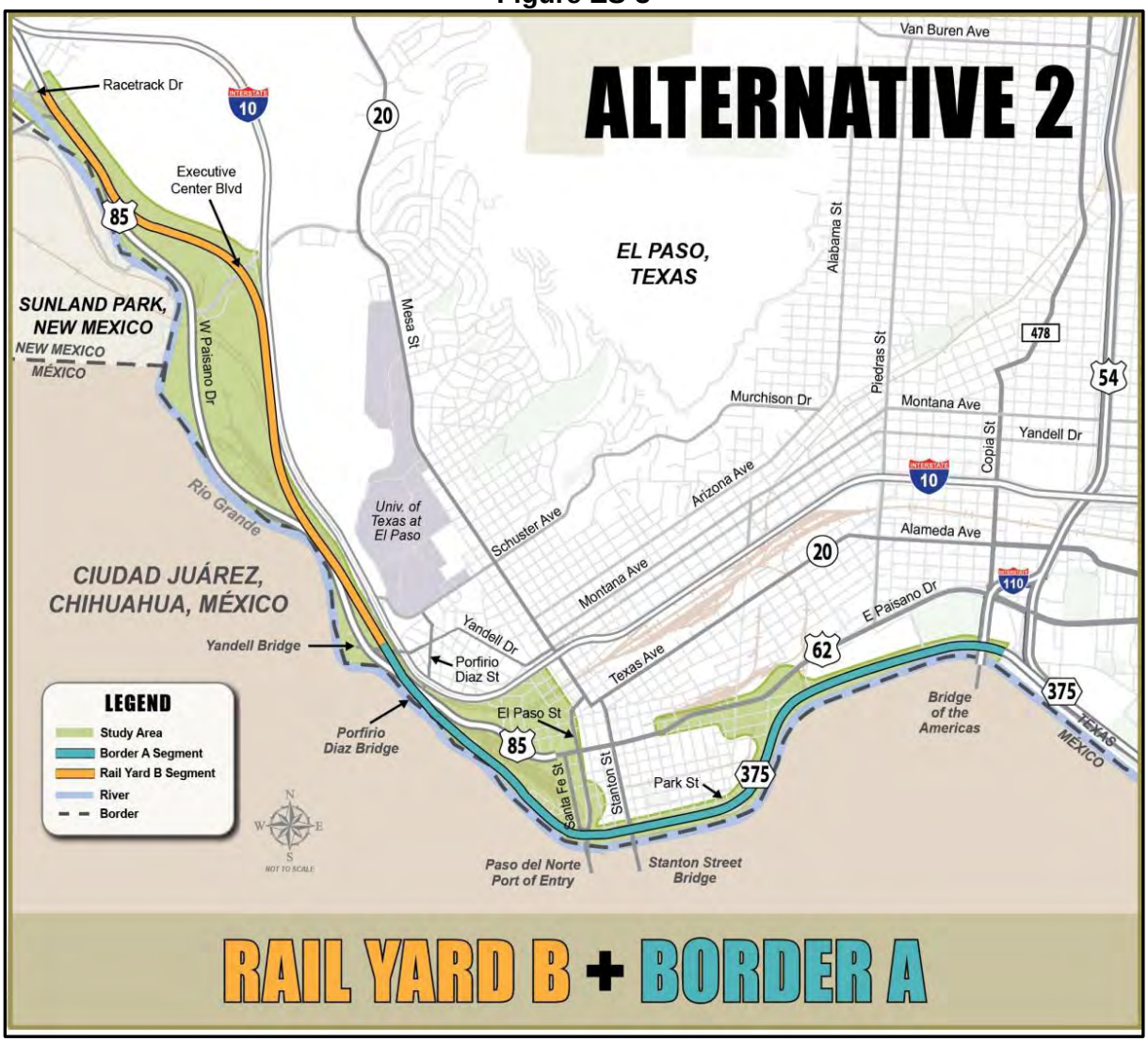
Figure ES-2



Reasonable Alternative 2, the Preferred Alternative

Reasonable Alternative 2 is a combination of Recommended Reasonable Alternatives Rail Yard B and Border A (See **Figure ES-3**). The non-tolled length of Reasonable Alternative 2 is approximately 1.9 miles. The tolled length of Reasonable Alternative 2 is 7.1 miles.

Figure ES-3



Reasonable Alternative 3

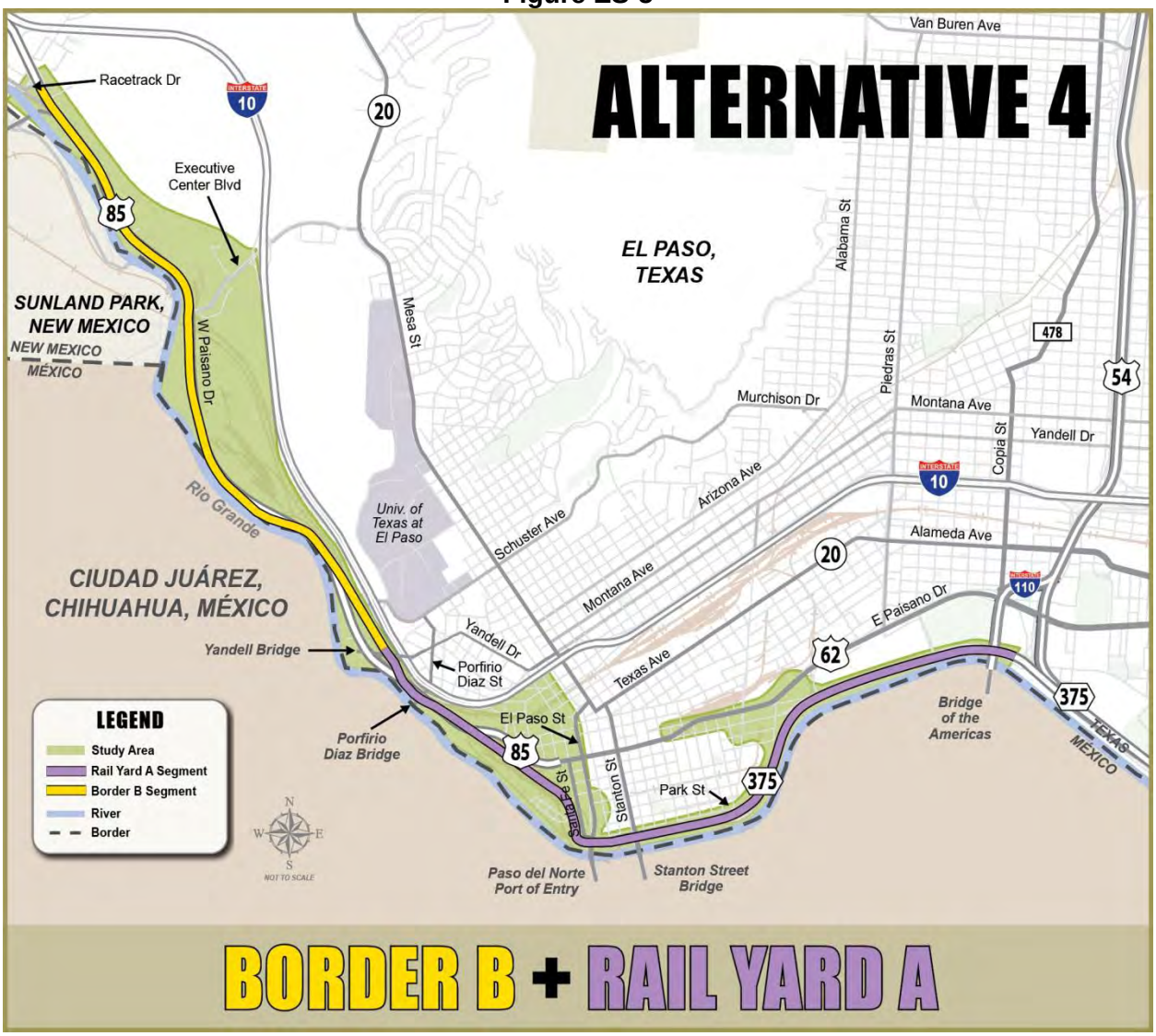
Reasonable Alternative 3 is a combination of Recommended Reasonable Alternatives Rail Yard B and Rail Yard A (See **Figure ES-4**). The non-tolled length of Reasonable Alternative 3 is approximately 1.8 miles. The tolled length of Reasonable Alternative 3 is 7.2 miles.

Figure ES-4

Reasonable Alternative 4

Reasonable Alternative 4 is a combination of Recommended Reasonable Alternatives Border B and Rail Yard A (See **Figure ES-5**). The non-tolled length of Reasonable Alternative 4 is approximately 1.8 miles. The tolled length of Reasonable Alternative 4 is 7.2 miles.

Figure ES-5



See **Section 2.5.1** for a discussion of the pros and cons of each alternative and a comparison of the potential impacts for each of the reasonable alternatives.

DRAFT STATE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

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