

Lafayette *Metropolitan Expressway*

Technical Memorandum 4

ENVIRONMENTAL RECONNAISSANCE

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**Lafayette
Metropolitan
Expressway
Commission**

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INTRODUCTION

The Lafayette Metropolitan Expressway (LME) Toll Feasibility Study is being coordinated by the Lafayette Metropolitan Expressway Commission (LMEC), which is responsible for the pursuit of alternative and innovative funding sources, including but not limited to tolls, to supplement public revenue sources for the construction, maintenance, and operation of a safe and efficient limited access highway system exclusively within Lafayette Parish.

This Environmental Reconnaissance Technical Memorandum addresses the existing human and natural environmental conditions that could potentially be affected by each of three alternatives for the proposed corridor. It is intended to provide a broad summary and description of the natural, cultural, community resources, land uses and environmental factors that exist.

LME PROJECT PURPOSE AND NEED

The goals of the study are to determine the feasibility and identify potential financing plans, determine any environmental constraints, gauge public acceptance of the project and develop a project implementation plan and implementation strategies to cover subsequent phases, including Phase B, which would include any environmental study and documentation required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

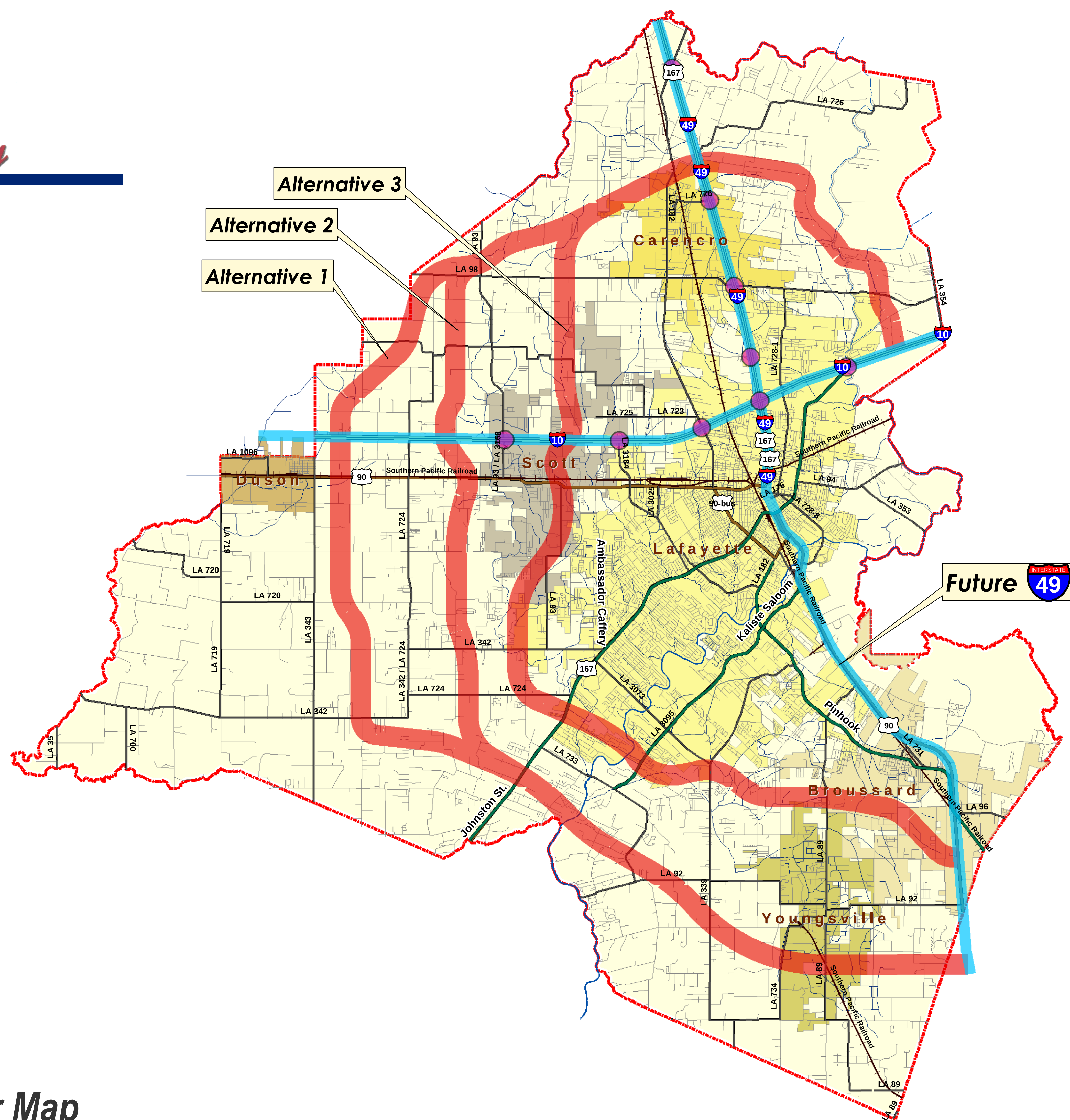
This project would demonstrate purpose and need as identified below:

- Improve Lafayette's transportation system as existing facilities are congested and needed improvements are unfunded;
- Improve the regional and national system by supplementing Interstate 10 and Interstate 49 connectivity through the metro area;
- Prepare for future growth and traffic demand;
- Promote economic development with jobs, tourism, education, recreation, retail and medical services, and
- Improve hurricane evacuation system.

CORRIDOR ALTERNATIVES

The LME feasibility study has identified several possible corridors throughout Lafayette Parish that were narrowed into three corridors for this preliminary study. This technical memorandum summarizes both the human and natural environmental constraints for each corridor that may require further study in Phase B. For the purpose of this study, the corridors have been named Alternative 1, Alternative 2 and Alternative 3. All three alternatives follow the same corridor from I-10 just west of the eastern boundary of Lafayette Parish to the north across I-49 at Rue Des Etoiles to about the intersection of Mardi Gras Street and Dillon Street. From there the corridor splits into three possible alternative corridors that move south across I-10 and then cross Johnston Street/US 167. The three corridors then form two different corridors that move east, terminating at US 90 or the future I-49. *Figure 4-1* illustrates the three study corridor alternatives.

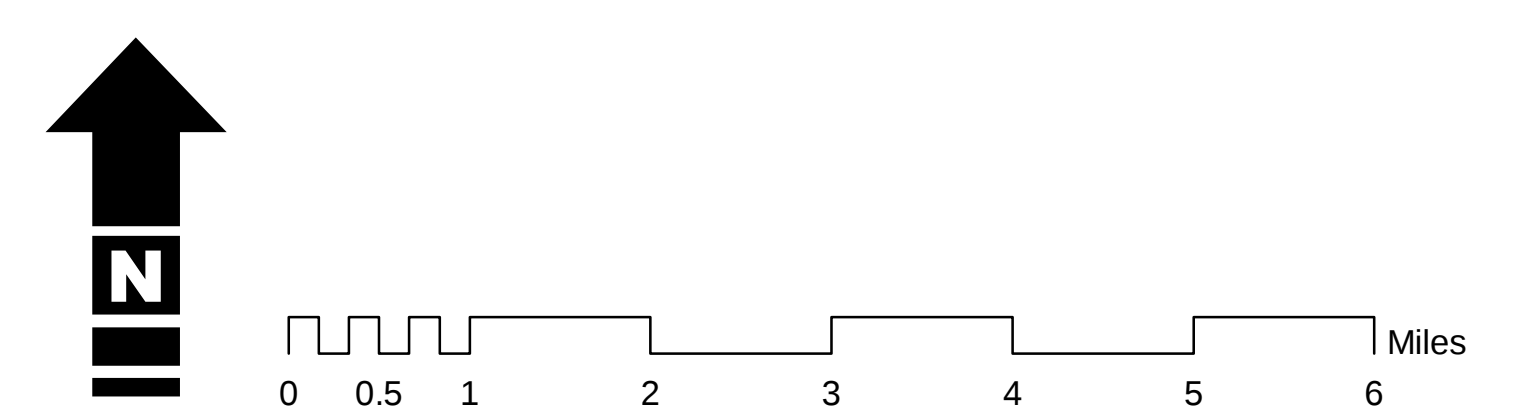
Lafayette Metropolitan Expressway



Legend

- Proposed Expressway Alternatives
- Existing Interchanges

Figure 4-1
Study Corridor Map



HUMAN AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW

The three proposed alternatives are located mostly in the middle to western portions of the parish. Most of these areas of Lafayette Parish contain agricultural, rural, or low-density residential land uses. The proposed alternatives lie within the Terrace Upland physiographic region of the parish which comprises the area west of the escarpment of the Mississippi River Alluvial Plain. Elevations in this region range from 60 feet in the northern part of the parish to 25 feet along the southern edge. This relatively flat region contains soils that are somewhat poorly drained but are suitable for such commercial crops as soybean and rice.

The landscape of this area of the parish consists of a series of naturally treeless areas broken only by forested riparian systems along bayous and streams. However, these indigenous forested areas were once more abundant than they are today because of clearing that has taken place over the last 200 years to facilitate agriculture and other types of development. The major forested areas remaining are on the outer edges of the parish, with small pockets of native vegetation found in scattered locations. Because of the small amount of remaining wooded and forested habitat, there are relatively low populations of wildlife found in the parish. The largest populations of birds and other animals that are found are those associated with open land habitats such as doves and cottontail rabbits. The scattered amounts of forested areas that do remain provide habitat for both flora and fauna not found elsewhere in the parish – including deer, swamp rabbits, and wood ducks.

Although the natural landscape within the parish and the study area has seen changes since early European settlement, it is still a picturesque landscape that is rich in both history and natural habitat. The vast acreage of agriculture land that exists today in and around the corridor study area supports a variety of commercial crops including sorghum, wheat, rice, soybeans, sugarcane and hay-alfalfa.

Although it is not certain when the first European settlers first inhabited the Lafayette area, some historic evidence indicates that a few trappers, traders and ranchers were present in the region before the beginning of Spanish occupation in 1766. The most significant cultural impact on the region occurred in the 18th century when a large number of Acadians in French Canada were expelled by the ruling British in 1755. A significant number of these Acadian exiles migrated to the bayous of southwestern Louisiana, including the Lafayette area, where they could live according to their own beliefs and customs. The French Revolution of 1789 also had an impact on the Lafayette area as many French Loyalists fled to Louisiana to settle.

Today, Lafayette represents the heart of Acadiana, an area of south Louisiana populated by persons of this Acadian or “Cajun” descent. The “Cajun” notoriety of the area helps generate more than \$200 million in tourism annually for the parish. The residents of Lafayette Parish are strongly bound by their Acadian heritage and ties to the past.

THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

EXISTING LAND USE

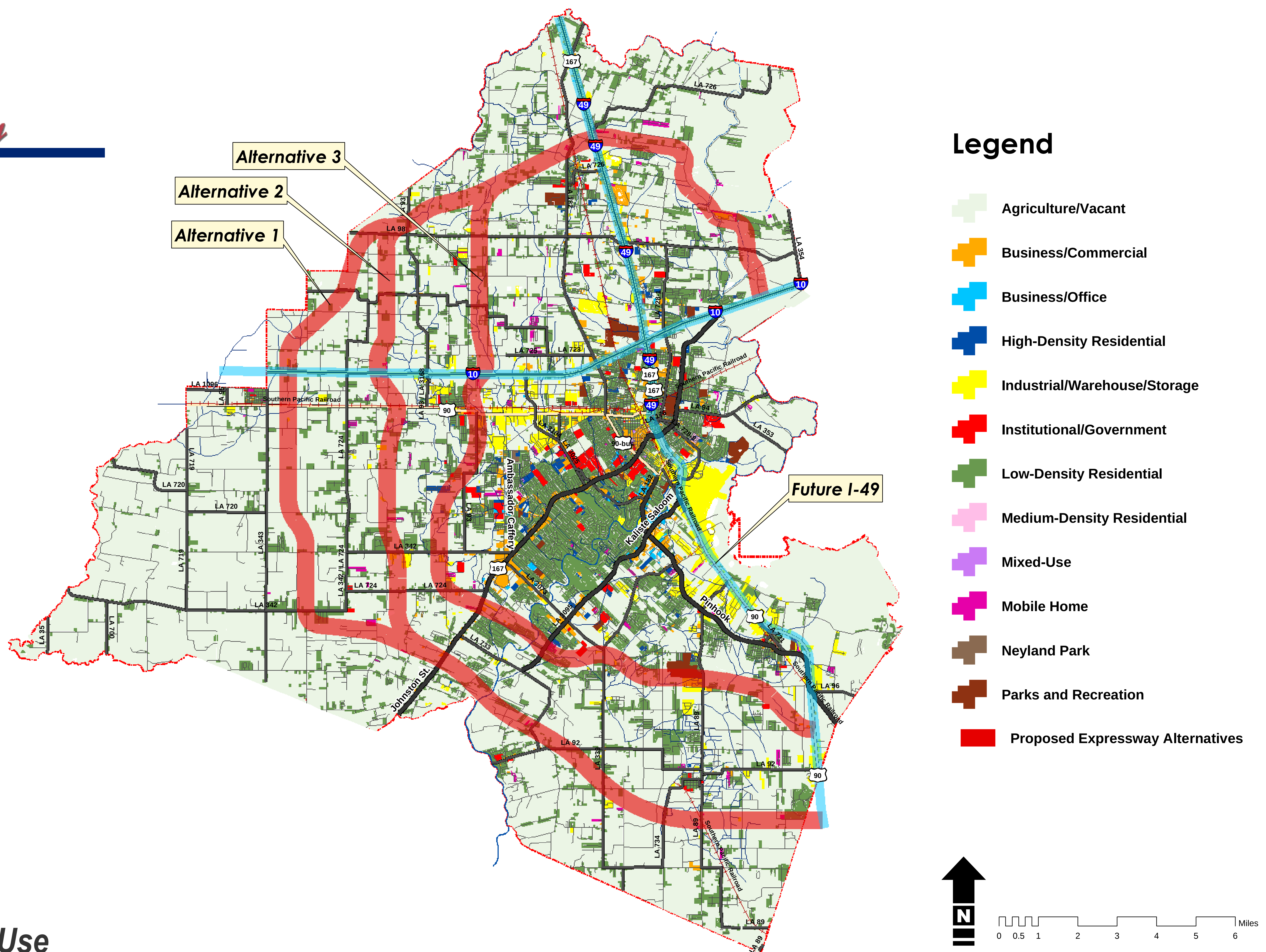
Lafayette Parish contains a large unincorporated area and six municipalities: Lafayette, Broussard, Carencro, Duson, Scott, and Youngsville. With the exception of the city of Lafayette, the remaining five

municipalities currently have no zoning regulations. The city of Lafayette is relatively compact, encompassing about 50 square miles with a fairly concentrated urban core. The five remaining smaller municipalities mostly serve as single-family residential communities with scattered agricultural, light industrial, commercial, and vacant land uses. Lafayette's city limits contain a strong mix of land-use types that primarily include low, medium, and high-density residential, retail and office, industrial, and open space/parks. The city of Lafayette represents the center of the economy for the parish and has significant land use impacts on each of the remaining five communities.

As illustrated in *Figure 4-2*, the three proposed alternatives for the LME fall within the middle to western portions of the parish. These areas have a predominance of agriculture and undeveloped land use with scattered, smaller pockets of low-density residential use. Agriculture and undeveloped areas make up the largest percentage of land use in the entire parish and involve raising such crops as sugarcane, rice and soybean. These types of land use areas are found almost entirely in the unincorporated areas of the parish.

Alternative 3, the eastern most of the three alternatives, is the only one of the three that has a portion falling within Lafayette's city limits. However, like the other two alternatives, most of the land use types that this alternative traverses consists of vacant, agriculture, and scattered, low-density residential. Additionally, Alternative 3 also passes near small portions of light industrial land uses. This alternative also travels through incorporated areas of Scott, located in the central portion of the parish, and Broussard in the southern end of the parish. It also passes in proximity to Southside Regional Park, near its southern termini, just outside the city of Broussard. This park is about 225 acres in size and is comprised of ball fields and an 18-hole golf course. At this time, it is not anticipated that Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act 49 USC 1653 (f) would be applicable with regard to this park. However, more detailed studies will be made during any future environmental documentation occurring beyond this study to determine full compliance with federal regulations regarding the use of land from, or impact to, a park or recreation area.

Lafayette Metropolitan Expressway



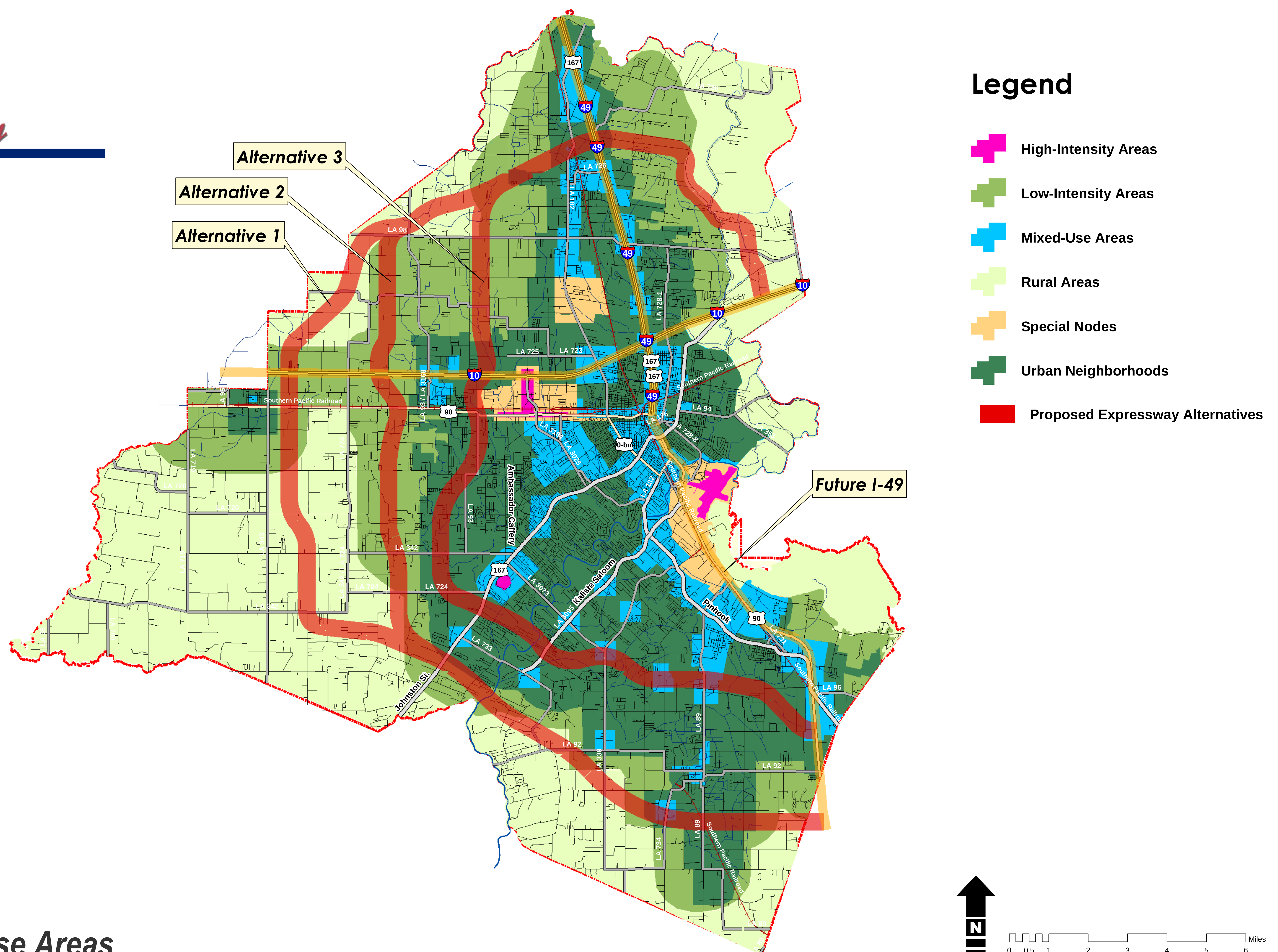
FUTURE LAND USE

Figure 4-3 illustrates proposed future land use areas as developed for the Lafayette Parish Land Use Master Plan and Land Use Policy Plan, September, 2002. Alternative 3 passes through a large amount of proposed urban neighborhood use areas in its southern half as well as smaller, scattered portions of proposed mixed-use areas. The northern portion of alternative 3 would pass through mostly proposed low-intensity use areas. Alternatives 1 and 2 would only pass through a relatively small amount of proposed urban neighborhood and mixed-use areas near their southern termini and along the southern edge of the city of Youngsville. The remainders of these two alternatives travel through a majority of proposed rural use areas and proposed low-intensity use areas. It should be noted that, as of this writing, this proposed Future Land Use Area plan has not yet been officially adopted by the Lafayette Consolidated Government.

The city of Lafayette, as well as the remaining areas of the parish over the years, has reflected a compact and ordered community development pattern that is primarily due to the prominence of wetland and floodplain constraints. In the 1990's however, Lafayette parish saw new commercial and residential development occur in its southern and western portions, including areas within and around the communities of Broussard and Youngsville. These new residential developments make up the main component of what is characteristic of a sprawling development pattern. This low-density residential sprawl can be defined as one or two houses per acre, consuming a large amount of land for relatively few people. These land uses are typically located the farthest distance from retail, commercial and office use areas and are the most consumptive of resources. The continuation of this land use trend in the parish will greatly increase the need for significant transportation and other infrastructure improvements such as the Lafayette Metropolitan Expressway. Lafayette has the potential to capitalize on several other key transportation projects in addition to the LME such as improvements to major arterial roadways as well as the I-49 and I-10 corridors.

The majority of the land uses in the parish where all three alternatives are located remain undeveloped with scattered areas of low-density residential. Each of the three alternatives will serve to facilitate future development and managed growth opportunities for these areas of the parish. Most importantly, they will serve to improve travel time savings for motorists in the Lafayette metropolitan area due to improved accessibility and an expanded transportation network. Additionally, these facilities could attract more tourism-related traffic and improve the efficient mobility of goods and services.

Overall, because all three alternatives pass through low-intensity to undeveloped use areas of the parish, none are anticipated to negatively impact the existing land use or future land use plans for the parish.



POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS AND TRENDS

The population of Lafayette Parish has grown from 57,743 in 1950 to 190,503 in 2000, an increase of over 300 percent in the last 50 years. The largest rate of growth occurred during the decade of the 1950's, and a substantial rate of growth also occurred between 1980 and 1990. The Lafayette Consolidated Government Department of Planning, Zoning, and Codes has projected that by the year 2015, more than 221,400 persons will be living in Lafayette Parish. This reflects an average annual growth rate of 1.1 percent over the 20 years between 1995 and 2015. Major growth is expected to occur in the southern and western portions of the parish, including within and around the cities of Broussard and Youngsville, while another area of growth is anticipated to be north of I-10 and west of I-49.

Per Capita Personal Income

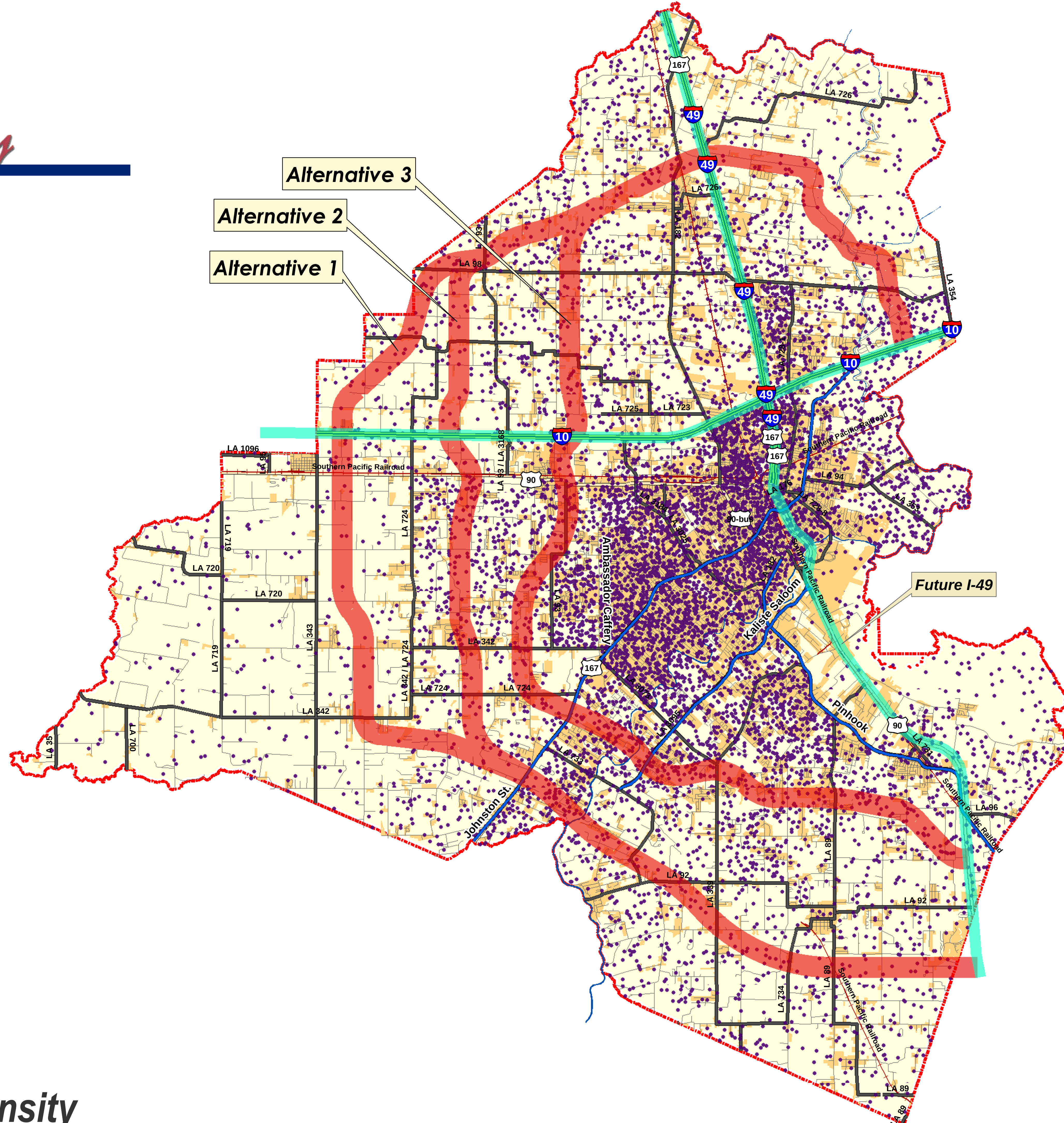
According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, Lafayette parish had a per capita personal income of \$29,646 in 2002. This ranked third in the state and was 117 percent of the state average of \$25,296 and 96 percent of the national average of \$30,906. The parish generally has had per capita income levels higher than the State over the last 30 years. However, when analysing the 2000 census data regarding households by income, this data indicates a significant disparity between the wealthier and poorer segments of the parish population. It should be noted that this trend is becoming more common throughout the rest of the country as well.

Development Patterns

Both past and present development patterns in Lafayette parish have been characterized by compact development. This historic trend is beginning to show signs of sprawl as growth and development pressures within the parish become more intensive. Recently, historic development constraints including natural landform, infrastructure limitations, wetlands, and floodplains have helped generate innovative types of residential housing in the Parish. These new types of housing trends include new urbanism style developments such as River Ranch. These developments yield higher density communities that efficiently use the landscape to create socially desirable and environmentally sensitive dwellings and neighborhoods.

As previously described, the current major growth areas are in the southern and western areas of the city of Lafayette as well as the parish, including the municipalities of Broussard and Youngsville. Recent subdivision development in these areas has created undeveloped pockets in the parish's overall layout. These undeveloped pockets have the potential of creating a variety of land-use problems such as lack of infrastructure, incompatible adjacent land-use, compounded transportation problems, and the fragmentation of agricultural land. In recent years, Broussard, Youngsville and the southern unincorporated areas of the parish have seen a significant increase in residential construction. This has placed enormous pressures on infrastructure in these areas including roads, schools and all types of public utilities. *Figure 4-4* shows the population density for the Lafayette Parish according to the 2000 U.S. Census.

Lafayette Metropolitan Expressway



Legend

- Proposed Expressway Alternatives
- 1 Dot = 20 Persons

Figure 4-4
Population Density

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

Many types of public facilities and services accommodate people in specific areas and are subject to impacts resulting from a new transportation facility. Schools are typically one of the most impacted types of public facility since they sometimes have defined service areas. As defined for this study, other public facilities include churches, medical facilities and hospitals, cemeteries and parks and recreational facilities. These facilities located within the overall study area are listed below with the number corresponding to the facilities shown on *Figure 4-5*:

Schools

1. Carencro Heights Elementary
2. Carencro Middle School
3. Carencro Catholic Elementary School
4. Rogee School
5. Ossun Elementary School
6. Westside Elementary
7. L. Leo Judice Elementary School
8. Scott Middle School
9. Family Life Christian Academy
10. Acadiana High School
11. Alleman Center School
12. New Hope Center School
13. Judice High School
14. Indice High School
15. Saint Thomas More Catholic High School
16. Verot School
17. Simon School
18. Green T. Linon Elementary School
19. Youngsville Middle School
20. Burke School

Churches

1. St. Annes Catholic Church
2. Central Church
3. Kimble Chapel
4. Bethel Church
5. Family Life Christian Fellowship
6. St. Peters Catholic Church

Parks and Recreational Facilities

1. Southside Regional Park
2. Pelican Park

Medical and Emergency Facilities

There are no medical or emergency facilities located within the study area.

Cemeteries

1. Anderson Cemetery
2. Bethel Cemetery
3. Simon Cemetery
4. Broussard Cemetery 1
5. Broussard Cemetery 2

Because the characteristic of the landscape through which most of the proposed alternatives will be passing through consists of low-density residential, undeveloped or agriculture land-use, at this time, adverse impacts to residences and community services, including any environmental justice issues are anticipate to be minimal. More detailed investigations and determinations on community service facilities will be made during any future environmental documentation occurring beyond this study. The proposed alternatives will be designed to avoid and minimize effects to all community service facilities to the extent feasible.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Archaeology

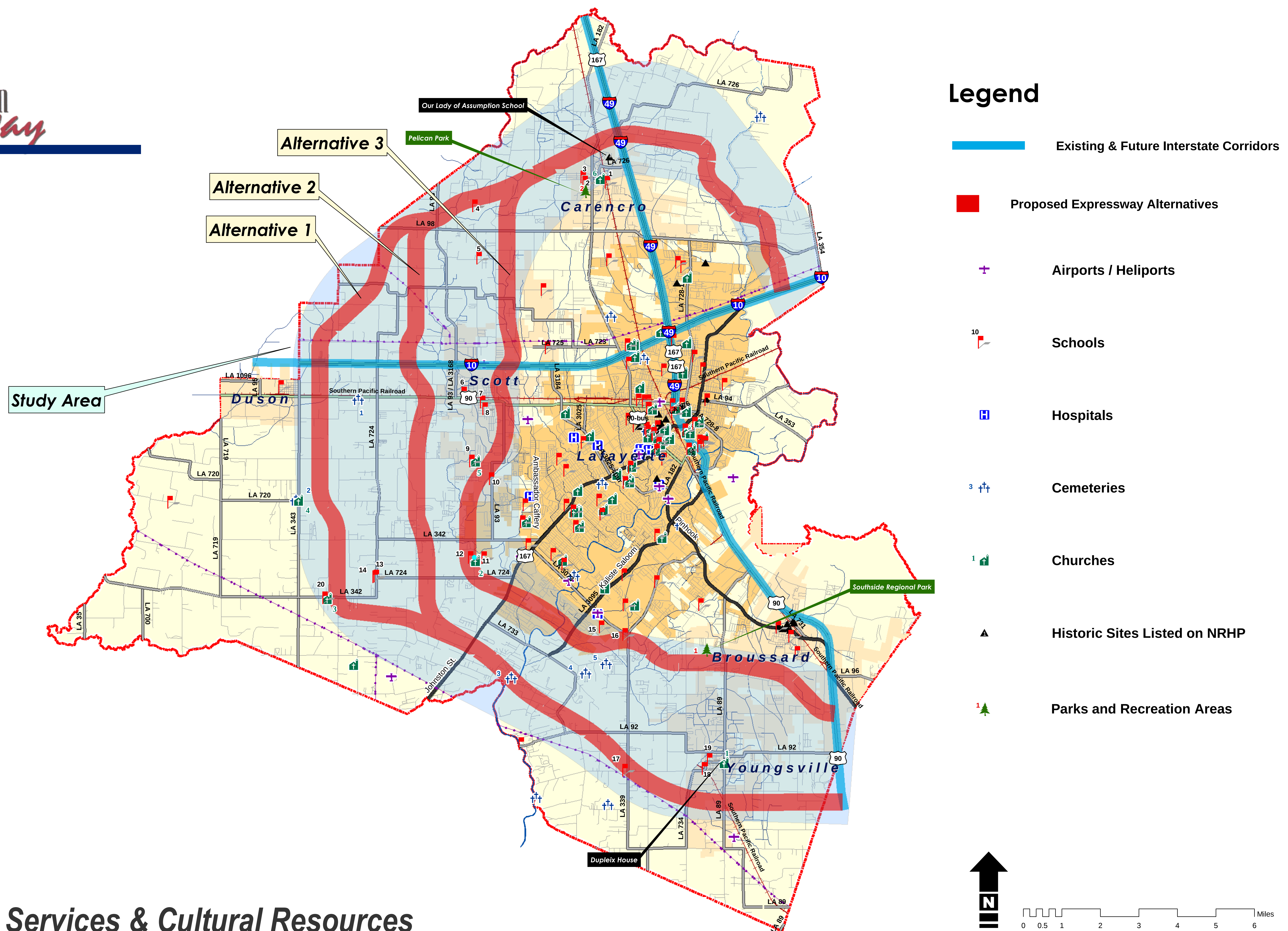
An archaeological records search was not conducted during this study. If this project proceeds to future environmental documentation, records will be searched at the Division of Archaeology (DOA), Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism for any known historic or prehistoric archaeological sites found within any preferred alternative corridor study area.

Historic Sites

According to the Louisiana Department of Culture Recreation and Tourism, there are two structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) within the overall study area. One of these structures is the Duplex House, a circa 1895, two-story frame residence with Queen Anne Revival and Colonial Revival elements. This structure is located near the southern portion of the study area in downtown Youngsville. The other structure is Our Lady of the Assumption School, a circa 1934, one-story, un-styled frame school building. This historic school building was constructed for African Americans and stands within a small Roman Catholic religious complex located near the northern portion of the study area in Carencro. The locations of these two structures are shown on *Figure 4-5*. Neither of these structures falls directly within or is adjacent to any of the three preliminary corridor alignments.

A more intensive standing structure survey will be conducted during any future environmental documentation occurring beyond this study. At that time, records will be searched on the standing structures within any preferred alternative corridor study area that are over 50 years of age to determine historical, cultural and architectural significance that could make them eligible for the NRHP. This research and investigation will be conducted in order to comply with the Section 106 (National Historic

Preservation Act) process requiring federal, federally assisted, and federally licensed undertakings to take into account the proposed effects of the undertaking on properties included on or eligible for the NRHP.



AIR QUALITY

The Federal Clean Air Act of 1970 required the adoption of ambient air quality standards. These were established in order to protect public health, safety, and welfare from known or anticipated effects of air pollutants. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has established National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for six pollutants considered harmful to public health and the environment: carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen dioxide, ozone, particulate matter, and sulfur dioxide. Congress directed that the standards should be reviewed at least every five years by EPA to keep up with current science, and that proposals to revise them should be based solely on public health effects, not economic impacts.

The LME study area is located in Lafayette Parish, which previously had been in non-attainment for ozone. In 1995, EPA re-designated the Lafayette Parish from ozone non-attainment to ozone attainment with limited maintenance plan requirements. Lafayette Parish is in attainment for all other criteria pollutants of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards.

Projected construction activities and the motor vehicles that will use a completed Lafayette Metropolitan Expressway are not expected to jeopardize the existing maintenance plan requirements. An Air Quality Study will be conducted as part of any future NEPA documentation for the proposed project.

NOISE

The Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Noise Abatement Criteria and the LaDOTD Highway Traffic Noise Policy will be used in the analysis of the acoustic impact of the three proposed alternatives during any future environmental documentation occurring beyond this study.

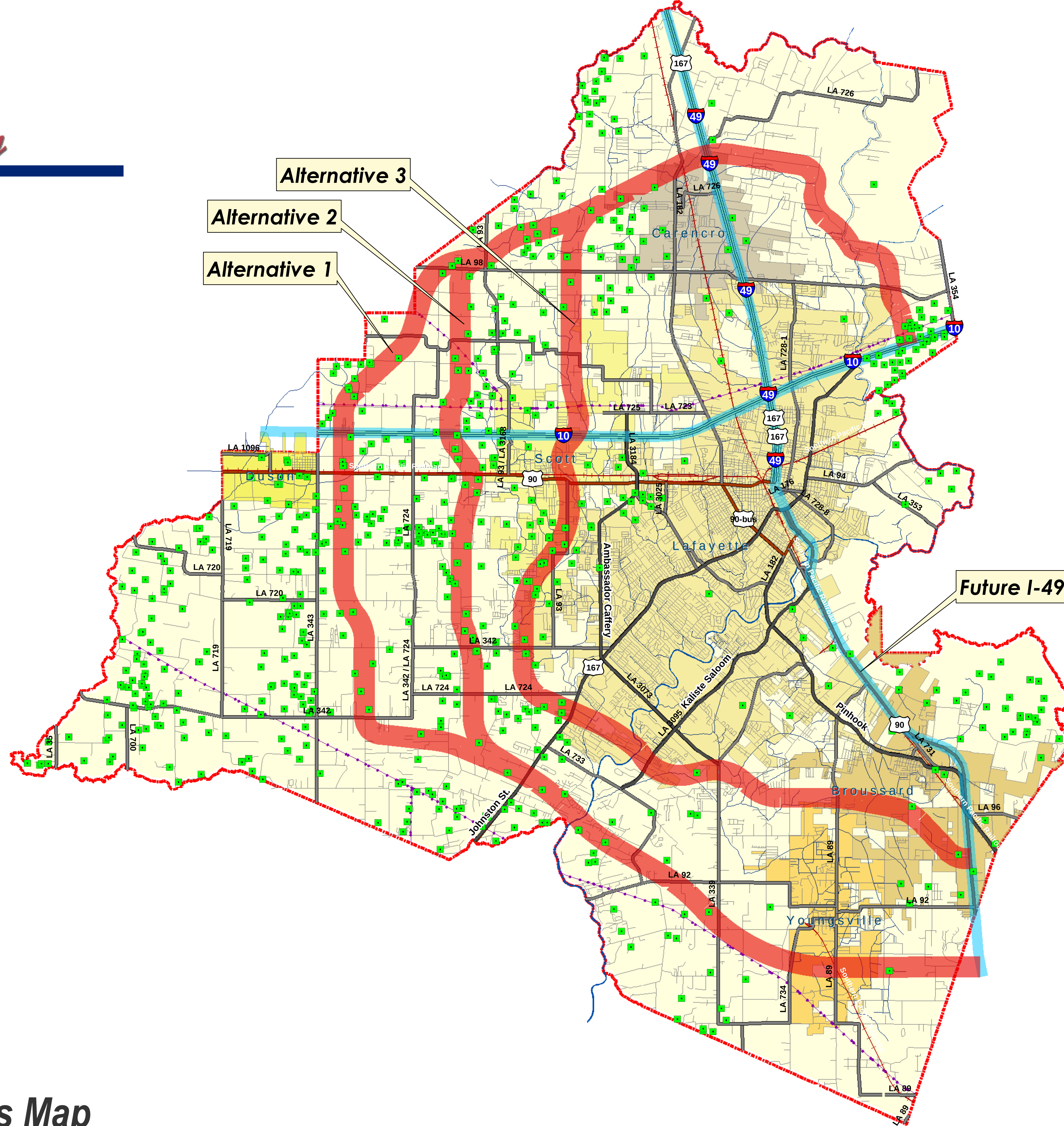
HAZARDOUS WASTE SITES

A Phase I site assessment was not conducted during this study. An intensive hazardous waste and storage tank study will be conducted during any future environmental documentation of selected alternatives occurring beyond this study. At that time, a Phase I site assessment will be performed to identify specific substances contained in these sites as well as identification of any potential new waste sites or underground storage tanks.

OIL AND GAS WELLS

Information and locations for oil and gas wells within Lafayette Parish were provided in Geographic Information System (GIS) format by the Louisiana Geographic Information Center of Louisiana State University and are shown in *Figure 4-6*. This data contains the current record for all of the wells permitted and drilled in Lafayette Parish. A more intensive oil and gas well study will be conducted in any future environmental documentation occurring beyond this study. At that time, active, abandoned or capped status for each well will be identified, and the potential for impact from construction operations of the proposed alternatives will be assessed.

Lafayette Metropolitan Expressway

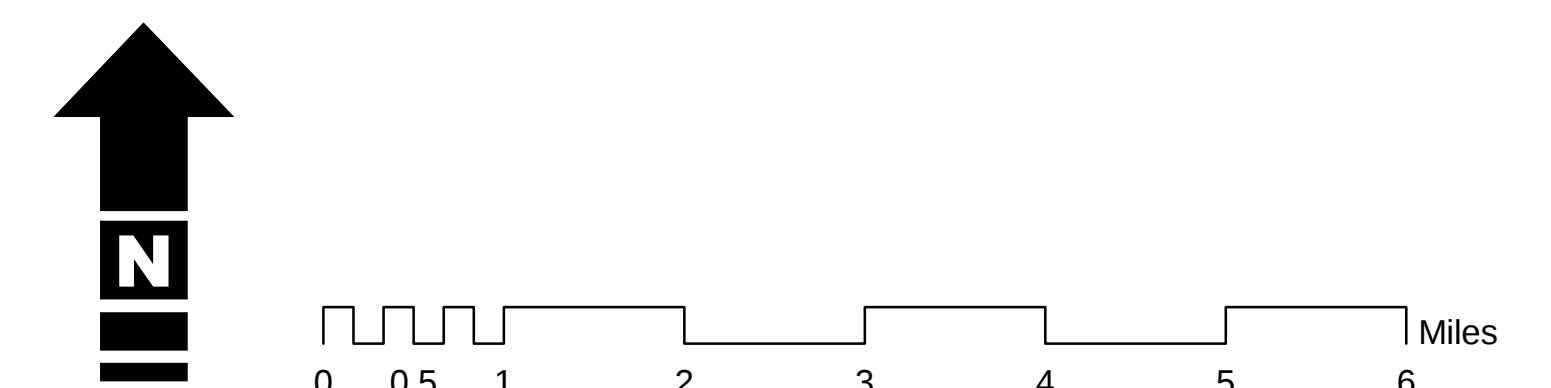


Legend

- Oil & Gas Wells
- Proposed Expressway Alternatives

Future I-49

Figure 4-6
Oil & Gas Wells Map



THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

WETLANDS

Figure 4-7 provides a map showing potential wetland areas in the parish. This data is based on GIS information obtained from the National Wetland Inventory. Wetlands are important ecosystems which help filter waste waters associated with heavy industrial usage and decrease storm water runoff by slowing rates through absorption. An area is designated as a wetland if it possesses three mandatory technical criteria: (1) hydrophytic vegetation, (2) hydric soils, and (3) wetland hydrology. Wetlands are a tremendous environmental and economic asset to Louisiana. Louisiana's wetlands provide habitat to more than five million wintering waterfowl each year and provide refuge for many endangered species.

The largest continuous areas of wetlands in the parish appear to occur within the floodplains along the eastern edge of the parish. The three proposed alternatives have been developed to avoid and minimize impacts to the wetlands in these areas. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) is the regulatory authority that would evaluate and permit any implementation of this project that crosses jurisdictional wetlands. Any unavoidable impacts are subject to mitigation to the extent appropriate and practicable by initially requiring steps to minimize impacts and then to compensate for wetland and aquatic resource values. Policies set forth by the COE and EPA articulate procedures to be used in the determination of the types and level of mitigation that will be necessary for compliance.

FLOODPLAINS

All three alternatives traverse areas identified as floodplains as shown in Figure 4-7. This information is based on information obtained from Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) and provided in GIS format by the Louisiana Geographic Information Center of Louisiana State University. All three alternatives have been designed to avoid and minimize encroachment within the 100-year floodplain to the extent feasible.

Detailed studies will be made during any future environmental documentation occurring beyond this study to determine full compliance with federal, state, and local regulations regarding floodplains.

GROUNDWATER

The project study area is underlain by an extensive groundwater formation known as the Chicot Aquifer. This aquifer has been designated as a sole source aquifer by the EPA. This designation indicates that the aquifer is the sole or principal drinking water source for the designated area. The Chicot Aquifer can be described as a hydrologic system with high permeability, plentiful recharge and high sustained yields to wells. Because of its importance as a designated sole source water supply, the federal government has taken measures to safeguard the aquifer by requiring that a project not pose a contamination hazard before it agrees to participate in the project.

According to the Ground Water Protection Division (GWPD) of the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ), Lafayette does not at this time have an officially designated Wellhead Protection Program. However, any well impacted by the construction of the project would be dealt with in accordance with regulations set forth by GWPD, Water Well Rules and Standards of the Water Resources Division of LADOTD, and any other federal, state, or local regulation that are applicable. This

would include plugging all affected wells and borings to prohibit potential entry of contaminants into the Chicot Aquifer.

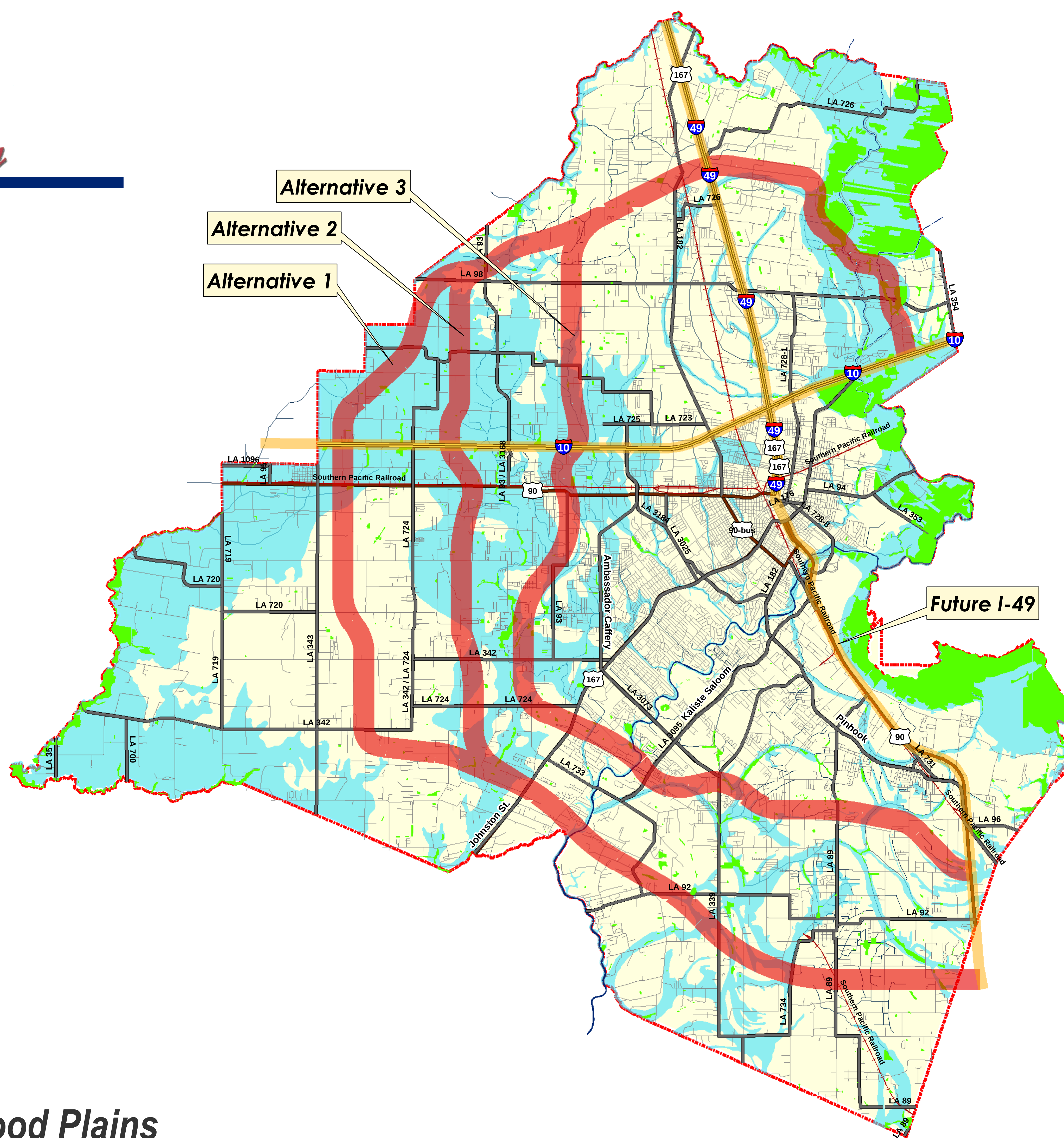
THREATENED & ENDANGERED SPECIES

Information from The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' Natural Heritage Program was researched regarding the presence of threatened and endangered, or otherwise rare plant and animal species throughout Lafayette Parish. For the purposes of this study, a list of all current rare, threatened and endangered species within the entire parish was obtained and is found in *Table 4-1* below:

Table 4-1: Threatened and Endangered Species in Lafayette Parish

STATE COMMON NAME	STATE SCIENTIFIC NAME
EASTERN HARVEST MOUSE	<i>REITHRODONTOMYS HUMULIS</i>
EVENING RAINLILY	<i>COOPERIA DRUMMONDII</i>
HERBERTIA	<i>HERBERTIA LAHUE SSP CAERULEA</i>
OLD PRAIRIE CRAWFISH	<i>FALLICAMBARUS MACNEESEI</i>
POWDERY THALIA	<i>THALIA DEALBATA</i>
RINGTAIL	<i>BASSARISCUS ASTUTUS</i>

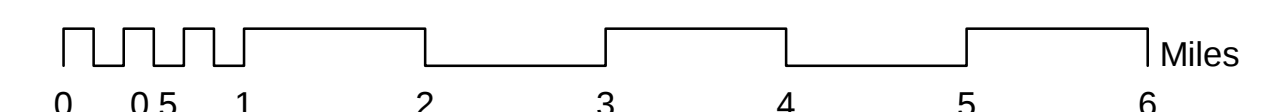
A detailed investigation of records as well as field analysis will be conducted during any future environmental documentation occurring beyond this study. At that time, the occurrence of any threatened or endangered species or critical habitat for them within this study area as well as the potential for adverse impacts to them from proposed roadway construction will be determined.



Legend

- Proposed Expressway Alternatives
- 100-Year Flood Zone
- Wetlands

Figure 4-7
Wetlands & Flood Plains



ALTERNATIVES EVALUATION

Selected human and natural environment impacts for each alternative are estimated in *Table 4-2* below:

Table 4-2: Environmental Evaluation Measures

ALTERNATIVE EVALUATION MEASURES			
	Alternative		
Environmental Factors	1	2	3
% of Alternative through floodplains	33%	46%	37%
% of Alternative through undeveloped land	90%	90%	80%
% of Alternative through wetlands	1.5%	2%	3%
Community Services Within or Adjacent to Alternatives			
Schools	1	1	2
Churches	0	0	1
Cemeteries	1	1	0
Parks & Recreation Areas	0	0	1

Alternative 1 has the least impact to both wetlands and floodplains. The majority of land through which it passes also contains the highest percentage of undeveloped or agricultural land. Additionally, the table above reveals that Alternative 1, along with Alternative 2, has the least impact to community services. Although it has relatively minimal impacts to wetlands, Alternative 2 would have the most impacts to the 100-year floodplain.

The abundance of undeveloped land in Alternatives 1 and 2 could facilitate the development of new retail, commercial and residential development along a new corridor. Growth and an increased pace in development that results from a new facility could leverage significant economic benefits for the parish including the creation of new jobs and the generation of future property and sales taxes. This anticipated growth and development should be managed utilizing a progressive land use planning framework that guides future development decisions, ensures adequate development densities to support infrastructure investment, and preserves the natural as well as the cultural resources of the area.

Like Alternatives 1 and 2, Alternative 3 passes through a majority of agricultural or vacant land use, but impacts more existing residential land use and small amounts of light industrial land use. Alternative 3 is located closer toward the core of the City of Lafayette and crosses the city limits in the southern portion of Lafayette. This alternative has the potential to impact a slightly higher amount of jurisdictional wetlands as well. Because it passes through relatively larger amounts of developed areas than alternatives 1 and 2, the construction of this alternative may be more disruptive to existing transportation routes as well as neighborhoods.

CONCLUSION

As described above, more detailed investigations and determinations will be made on all community, natural and cultural resources within any and all alternatives carried forward from this study. For the level of investigation conducted at this time, it is felt that the construction of any of the three alternatives is feasible and the economic benefits, higher levels of traffic service, travel time reductions and the new hurricane evacuation benefits that would result, will outweigh the projected environmental impacts.