



PURPOSE AND NEED

US 219 SECTION 050

US 219 from Meyersdale to Old Salisbury Road Project

July 2022





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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in 1970 requires federal agencies to consider the impacts of their actions on the environment. NEPA requires that a purpose and need statement be established documenting the reasons why an agency is proposing a project and justifies the expenditure of public funds.

This document is intended to serve as a reassessment of Visions and Goals discussed in the *US 219: I-68 (MD) to Meyersdale (PA) Planning and Environment Linkage (PEL) Study* completed in July 2016. This reassessment is required to update the visions and goals to state the project purpose and explain the need for the project (e.g., problems to be addressed) to meet the requirements of NEPA. This document also updates the project’s logical termini and supporting data.

1.1 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The intent of this project is to complete Corridor N of the Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS) through improvements to the section of US 219 between the terminus of the four-lane highway section south of Meyersdale, Pennsylvania and the north end of the newly constructed I-68/US 219 Interchange in Garrett County, Maryland. The project will supplement the interstate system by connecting I-68 and the Pennsylvania Turnpike (I-76), connecting the study area portion of Appalachia to the interstate system, and improving mobility for motorists and freight along US 219. The project will enhance access between existing populations to destinations and markets in the region, generating economic opportunity in previously isolated areas.

1.2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

In 1965, the United States Congress passed the Appalachian Regional Development Act; the legislation was enacted to address “persistent poverty” in the 13 states that comprise the underserved Appalachia region. Two key components of the legislation were to establish the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and to develop the Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS).

The ARC is a partnership between the federal government and the 13 Appalachian states represented by each of their respective governors; the primary mission is to ensure that economic opportunities are pursued and that a capable, ready workforce is available to fill job opportunities. The ADHS is a network of 32-highways spanning 3,090 miles and 13 states. Since its authorization, the legislation has been proven to be effective as 2,814 miles or 91.1%¹ (as of September 2020) of the “eligible mileage” were either completely built or open to traffic. The highway system connects communities to commerce and helps to reduce the number of high poverty counties in the region by nearly 70%.² **Figure 1** depicts the ADHS network.

In continuing the vision of ADHS, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), the Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA), and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) are pursuing an improvement project along US 219 between Meyersdale, Pennsylvania and Old Salisbury Rd in Maryland. The US 219, Section 050 Improvement Project is a part of ADHS Corridor N and represents the final remaining uncompleted 7-mile segment. This project is a critical component of completing the ADHS, helping to provide an improved connection between I-68 and US Route 22 including the towns of Meyersdale, Somerset, Johnstown, and Ebensburg, as well as creating a linkage between I-68 and the Pennsylvania Turnpike (I-76). This project will serve as a foundation for the long-term goal of promoting economic development in the Appalachian Region.

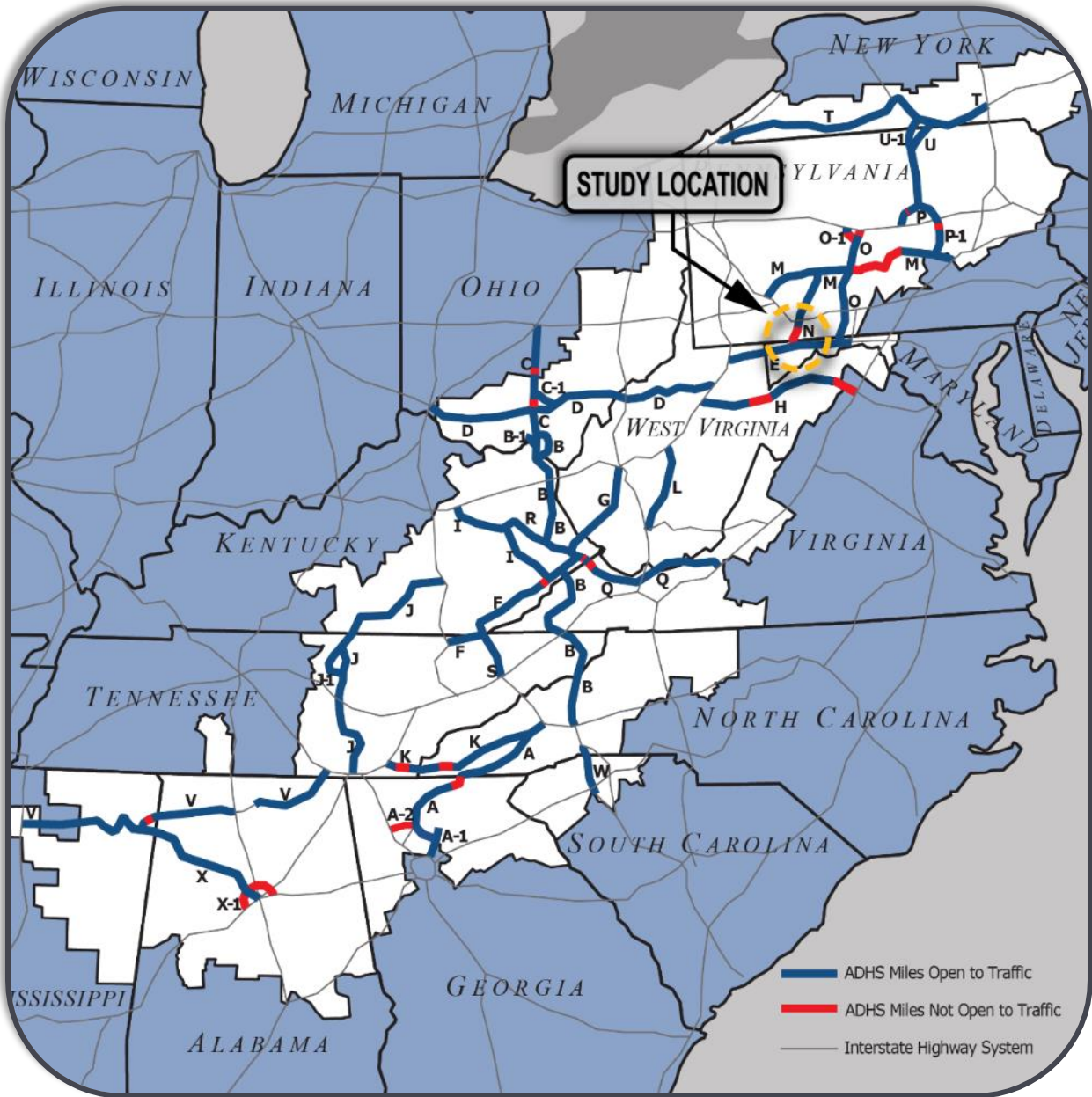


Figure 1: ADHS Highway System Map – source: ADHS Highway System Status Report FY2020



1.3 PROJECT HISTORY

In 1998, the PennDOT pursued improvements to US 219, south of Somerset, Pennsylvania, by building a five-mile section of US 219 around Meyersdale, Pennsylvania: known as the Meyersdale Bypass project. This facility is a four-lane, limited-access highway, located to the west of the previous US 219 alignment in the vicinity of Meyersdale Borough and Summit Township in Somerset County, Pennsylvania.

The *US 219, I-68 (Maryland) to Somerset, Pennsylvania Needs Analysis*, prepared by PennDOT in 1999, identified two additional projects with independent utility and logical termini on US 219. These projects were:

- US 219, Section 019 (From I-68 in Maryland to the southern terminus of the Meyersdale Bypass in Pennsylvania); and
- US 219, Section 020 (From the northern terminus of the Meyersdale Bypass to Somerset, Pennsylvania)

Preliminary engineering and work towards a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) for US 219, Section 019, originally began in 2001 by PennDOT and MDOT SHA but was put on hold in 2007 due to funding constraints. As a result, a DEIS for Section 019 was not issued. Since that time, PennDOT has completed construction of US 219, Section 020, Meyersdale to Somerset. That project consisted of the construction of a new 11-mile, four-lane, limited access roadway extending from the northern end of the Meyersdale Bypass of US 219 (a four-lane limited access roadway) to the southern end of the existing four-lane limited access US 219, south of Somerset.

On July 23, 2014, a revised notice of intent (NOI) was published in the Federal Register to restart the NEPA process for Section 019. The revised NOI for this second NEPA evaluation effort was rescinded on February 16, 2016, due to varying funding constraints between Maryland and Pennsylvania. Through collaboration between FHWA, MDOT SHA, and PennDOT, a solution was found which allowed the evaluation of Section 019 of US 219 to be continued for future project phases. The solution was a planning and environment linkages (PEL) study, which allowed the transportation agencies, resource agencies and the public to work together to identify goals and objectives, deficiencies and needs, possible solutions/alternatives, and to conduct a preliminary screening of solutions.

The *US 219: I-68 (MD) to Meyersdale (PA) PEL Study* was completed in July 2016 and recommended two alignments that could move forward into the NEPA process: Alignments E and E-Shift. The PEL study also identified an independent, stand-alone breakout project within these two alignments in Maryland: from I-68 to Old Salisbury Road. This 1.4-mile project was then advanced, and construction was completed in 2021.

Due to a lack in funding to complete Section 019, PennDOT performed a subsequent safety study in 2020 along the remaining 2-lane section of US 219 entitled *US 219 Existing Corridor Safety Study, SR 219, Seg 0010 to Seg 0114*. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the existing corridor and determine safety needs/problem areas for which future projects could be developed to address the current needs and deficiencies.

Evaluation of the remaining uncompleted portion of section US 219, Section 019 is ongoing. This project is now being referred to as US 219, Section 050, and is the only remaining two-lane, non-limited access section of US 219 in more than 70 miles of the four-lane expressway between I-68 to the south and US Route 22 to the north. Refer to **figure 2**, US 219 Corridor Map and **figure 3**, US 219 History Map.



Figure 2: US 219 Corridor Map

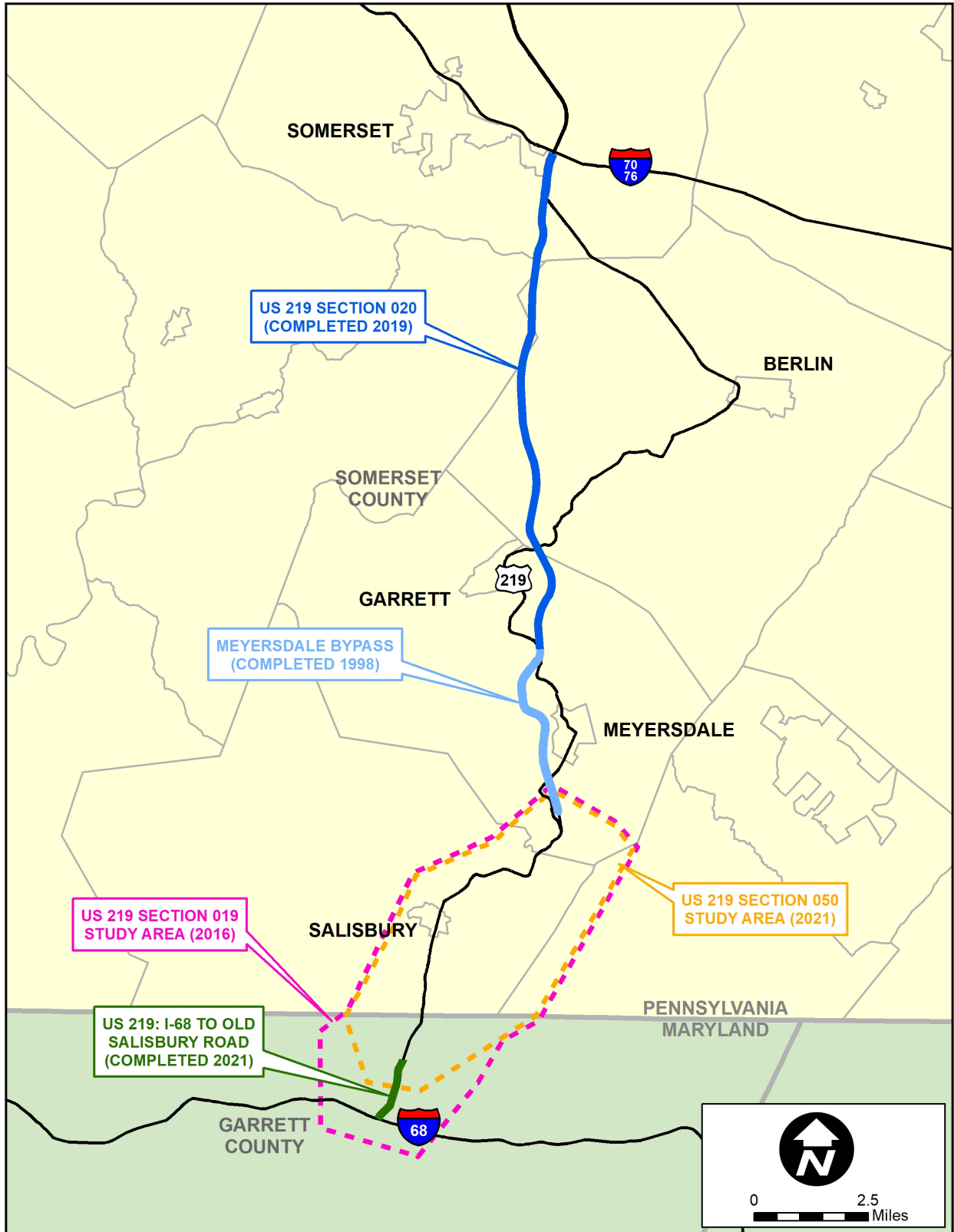


Figure 3: US 219 History Map

2.0 LOGICAL TERMINI

The US 219 PEL study completed in 2016 evaluated alternatives which connected the logical termini of I-68 to the south, and the existing 4-lane section of the Meyersdale Bypass to the north. The recently completed US 219 project in Maryland (US 219 from I-68 to Old Salisbury Road Project) constructed a new 1.4-mile section of 4-lane highway north of I-68.

Since the bottom 1.4 miles of US 219 has been completed and existing Interchange between I-68 and US 219 has been upgraded, it would no longer be logical to consider Alternatives which would create a new interchange on I-68. Nor would a new interchange meet current design criteria for interchange spacing. Therefore, the study area for US 219 Section 050 has been condensed and new logical southern terminus has been established at the newly completed section of US 219 project near Old Salisbury Road. **Figure 4** shows the logical termini for this project which have been established as follows:

- Southern terminus: north end of the existing four-lane limited access facility constructed as part of the project: US 219, I-68 to Old Salisbury Road, in Maryland.
- Northern terminus: south end of the existing four-lane limited access facilities constructed as part of the project: US 219, Meyersdale Bypass, in Pennsylvania to the north.

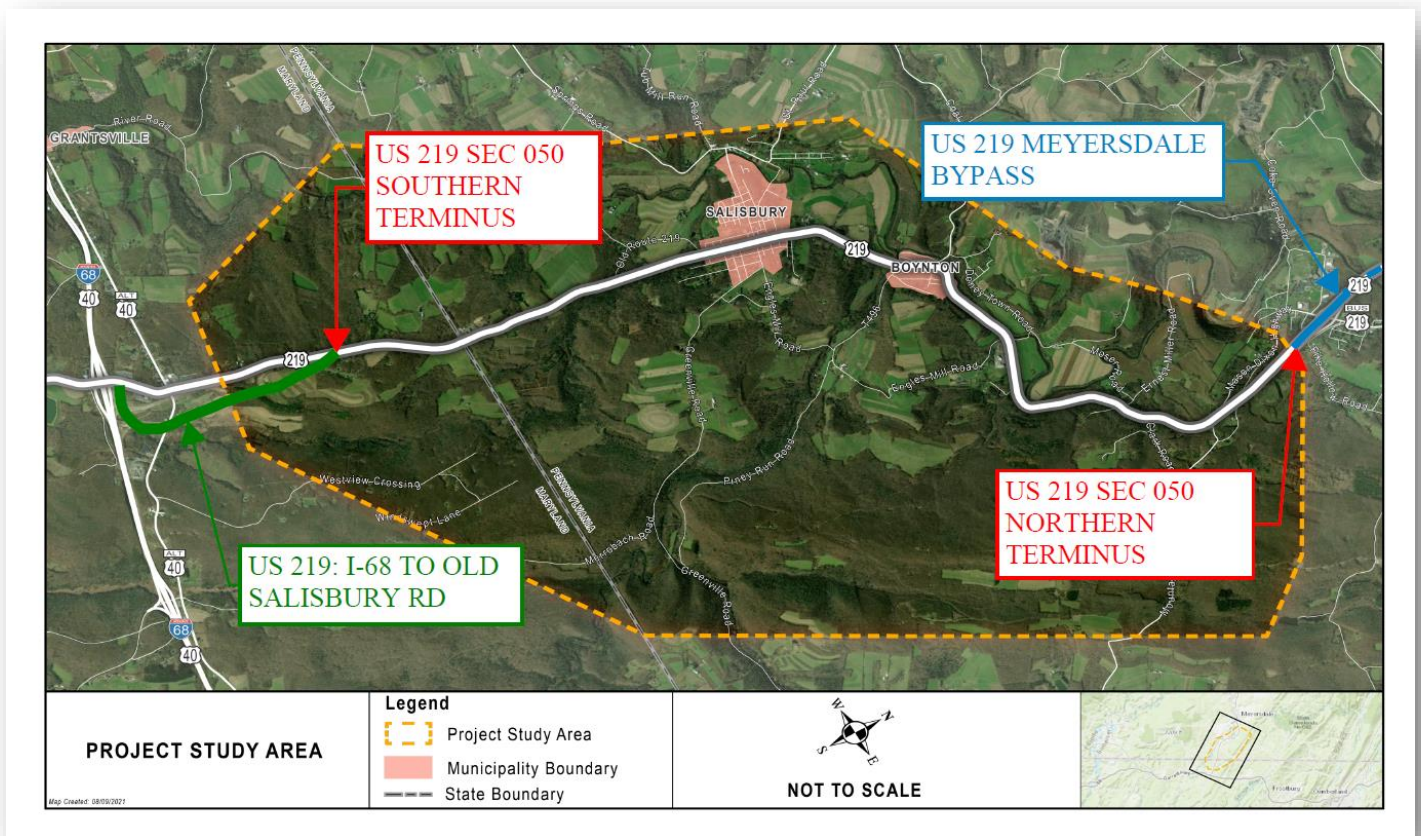


Figure 4: Project Study Area

3.0 PROJECT PURPOSE AND NEED

3.1 PROJECT PURPOSE

The purpose of the US 219 Section 050 from Meyersdale to Old Salisbury Road Project is to complete Corridor N of the Appalachian Development Highway System, to improve the system linkage in the region, provide safe and efficient access for motorists traveling on US 219, and provide transportation infrastructure to support economic opportunities in existing and planned communities and employment/business centers and natural resource-based industries within the Appalachian Region.

3.2 PROJECT NEEDS

The project needs identified for this project are that existing US 219 does not provide efficient mobility for trucks and freight, there are numerous roadway and geometric deficiencies present along the existing US 219 alignment, and the existing roadway infrastructure is a limiting factor in economic development opportunities in the Appalachian Region. Details on the project needs are summarized below:

3.2.1 The existing US 219 roadway network does not provide efficient mobility for trucks.

The existing alignment of US 219 does not provide efficient mobility for trucks. Current truck percentages on existing US 219 are between 19% and 25%⁴. Trucks interacting with local traffic (including automobiles, bicycles, pedestrians, and Amish buggies) contribute to the mobility issues and cause extended travel times throughout the corridor. Truck volumes will continue to increase from future growth and there is a potential for increased truck volumes from the proposed Chestnut Ridge Development Corridor which includes an 8-lot, 160-acre industrial park and a 33-lot residential development accessed from US 219 near the southern terminus. Lack of mobility through the corridor is projected to result in a potential loss of more than 19 million hours of travel time to the public over a 25-year period.³

US 219 is a vital route in the region for the trucking industry. In August of 2020, FHWA designated the entire segment of U.S. 219 as a Critical Rural Freight Corridor (CRFC). A CRFC is a roadway that provides access and connection to the Primary Highway Freight System Network (PHFS) in 23 U.S.C. 167, and the interstate system with other important ports, public transportation facilities, or other intermodal freight facilities. This designation recognizes a specific route as an important freight route for a variety of reasons: percentage truck traffic, freight access points (like farming, mining, distribution), access to other multimodal transportation assets (like ports and rail). US 219 provides access to natural gas exploration, wind energy production, active coal mining and other mining operations, agricultural facilities producing livestock and crops, a class 1 rail line in Somerset and in Meyersdale, and several industrial parks in Somerset and in Meyersdale⁶. **Figure 5** details the limits of the CRFC designation. In 2019, MDOT SHA and FHWA completed the process to designate the remaining two-lane segment of US 219 in Maryland a CRFC as well.

The CRFC designation is a component under the National Highway Freight Program (NHFP). The goals of the NHFP are to invest in infrastructure and operational improvements on the highways of the United States; improve the safety, security, efficiency, and resiliency of freight transportation in rural and urban areas; improve the state of good repair of the National Highway Freight Network; to improve the safety, efficiency, and reliability of the National Highway Freight Network; to improve the efficiency and productivity of the National Highway Freight Network; to improve the flexibility of states to support multi-state corridor planning and the creation of multi-state organizations to increase the ability of states to address highway freight connectivity; and to reduce the environmental impacts of freight movement on the National Highway Freight Network.

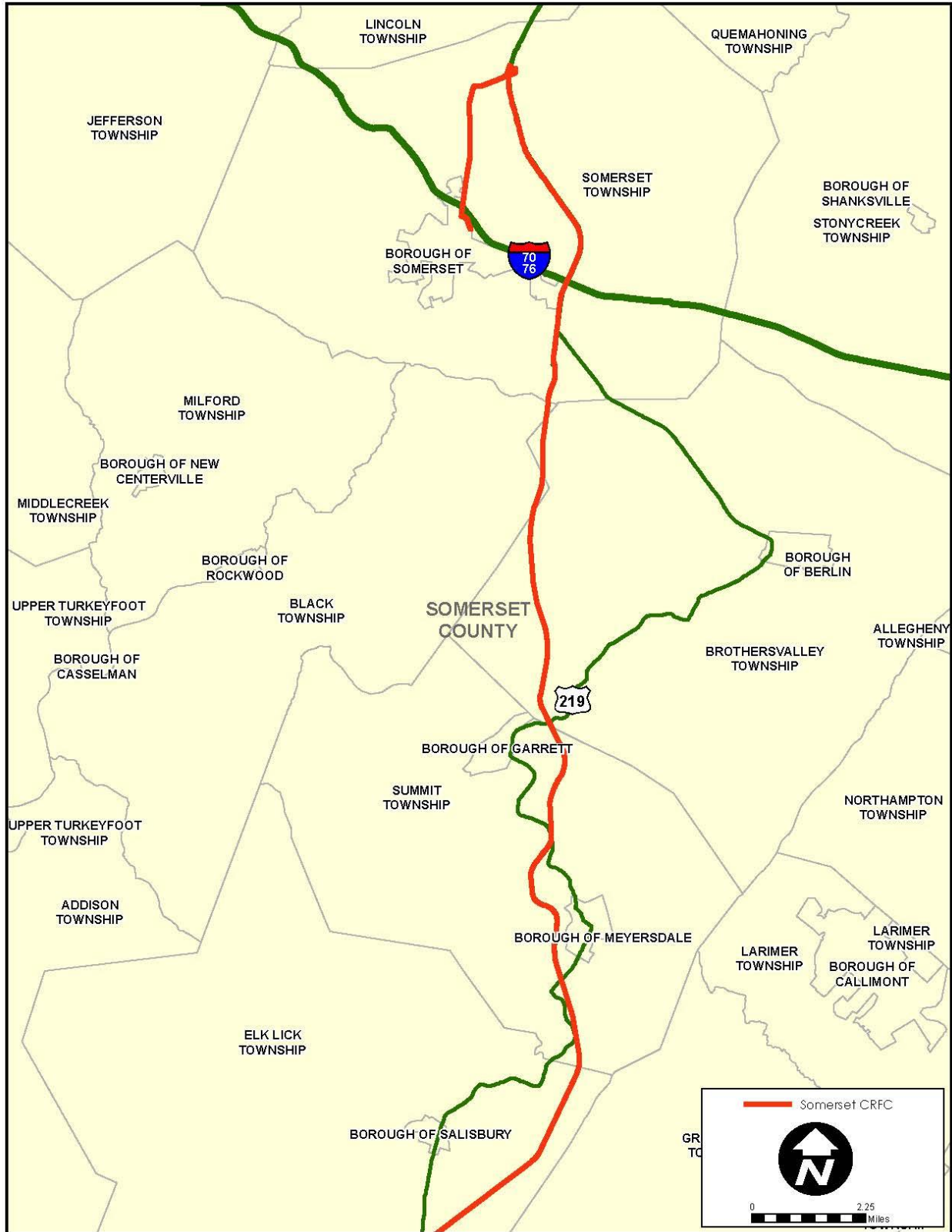


Figure 5: Somerset County Critical Rural Freight Corridor (CRFC)

Compounding the mobility issues is the fact that existing roadway network in the region is limited by a lack of major north-south roadway corridors. **Figure 6** shows the primary roadway network in the region. The three primary north-south routes through the area are US 219, SR 160, and SR 669. SR 160 and SR 669, which are common alternatives to US 219, suffer from safety issues which have led to truck and weight restrictions (for example SR 160 shown on the right) that limit these routes as an alternative, which drives truck traffic onto US 219 through Salisbury. The lack of route options only exacerbates the traffic levels, safety impacts, and delays for businesses operating north-south in the region, particularly on US 219.



Additionally, in accordance with the Southern Alleghenies Planning & Development Commission’s *Pennsylvania-Maryland Corridor N Completion Analysis & Impact Study* (October 14, 2020), the lack of north-south roadways also leads to a lack of network resilience and the ability to choose alternate routes in the event of an incident in the region. The study shows that non-recurring incidents in the region reduce speeds along the north-south routes from ranges of 45 to 65 miles per hour to speeds between 8 and 16 miles per hour. Most notably the study showed that US 219 had the largest reduction with free flow speeds being reduced from 64.4 mph to 8.3 mph.



Figure 6: Regional Roadway Network

3.2.2 There are numerous roadway and geometric deficiencies present along the existing US 219 alignment which do not meet current design criteria and contribute to slower travel speeds through the corridor.

Existing deficiencies are primarily located within the Pennsylvania portion of the study area. In 2020 The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) and Keller Engineers Inc. performed a safety study along the existing corridor of US 219 in Somerset County, Pennsylvania. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the existing roadway corridor geometrics against PennDOT Publication 13M (Design Manual Part 2 Highway Design) and American Association of State Highway and Transportation Official (AASHTO) Design Criteria to determine the safety needs/problem areas. The study identified the following roadway deficiencies⁴:

- a) Fourteen (14) of the thirty-five (35) horizontal curves do not meet design criteria for the posted speed limit. Seven (7) of these curves have a corresponding design speed that is more than 5 mph below the posted speed, with four (4) being 10 mph below the posted speed, and one (1) being 20 mph below the posted speed.
- b) Four (4) of the thirty-five (35) horizontal curves have superelevation rates that are more than 3% below design criteria for the posted speed limit. This lack of superelevation reduces safe travel speeds even more than noted above.
- c) Nine (9) vertical curves may not meet design criteria of stopping sight distance for the posted speed limit, with two (2) that are significantly deficient (> 200’).
- d) Six (6) intersections have deficient sight distance.
- e) Existing shoulders vary between 2 and 6-feet in width through the entire corridor and do not meet the width of 8 to 10-feet required for a Rural Regional Arterial.

Omitted from the list above are several other deficiencies which are being addressed by projects that are currently in either design or construction which include:

- Salisbury Cut (Segment 0020/0030)
- Boynton Curve Slope Layback (Segment 0070)
- T-325 (Engles Mills Road) Slope Layback (Segment 0080)
- US 219 Boynton Slide (Segment 0080)

The results in the 2020 safety study were similar to that of the roadway deficiencies noted in the 2016 PEL Study which noted eleven (11) horizontal and eleven (11) vertical deficiencies in Pennsylvania. The PEL study also evaluated roadway geometrics within the Maryland portion of the study area and identified one additional deficient vertical curve located just north of Old Salisbury Road (See **figure 7** for locations).

The deficiencies noted above combined with the narrowness of the roadway negatively impact safe travel speeds at multiple locations throughout the project corridor, and in turn contribute to lack of efficient mobility through the project area, especially for trucks.

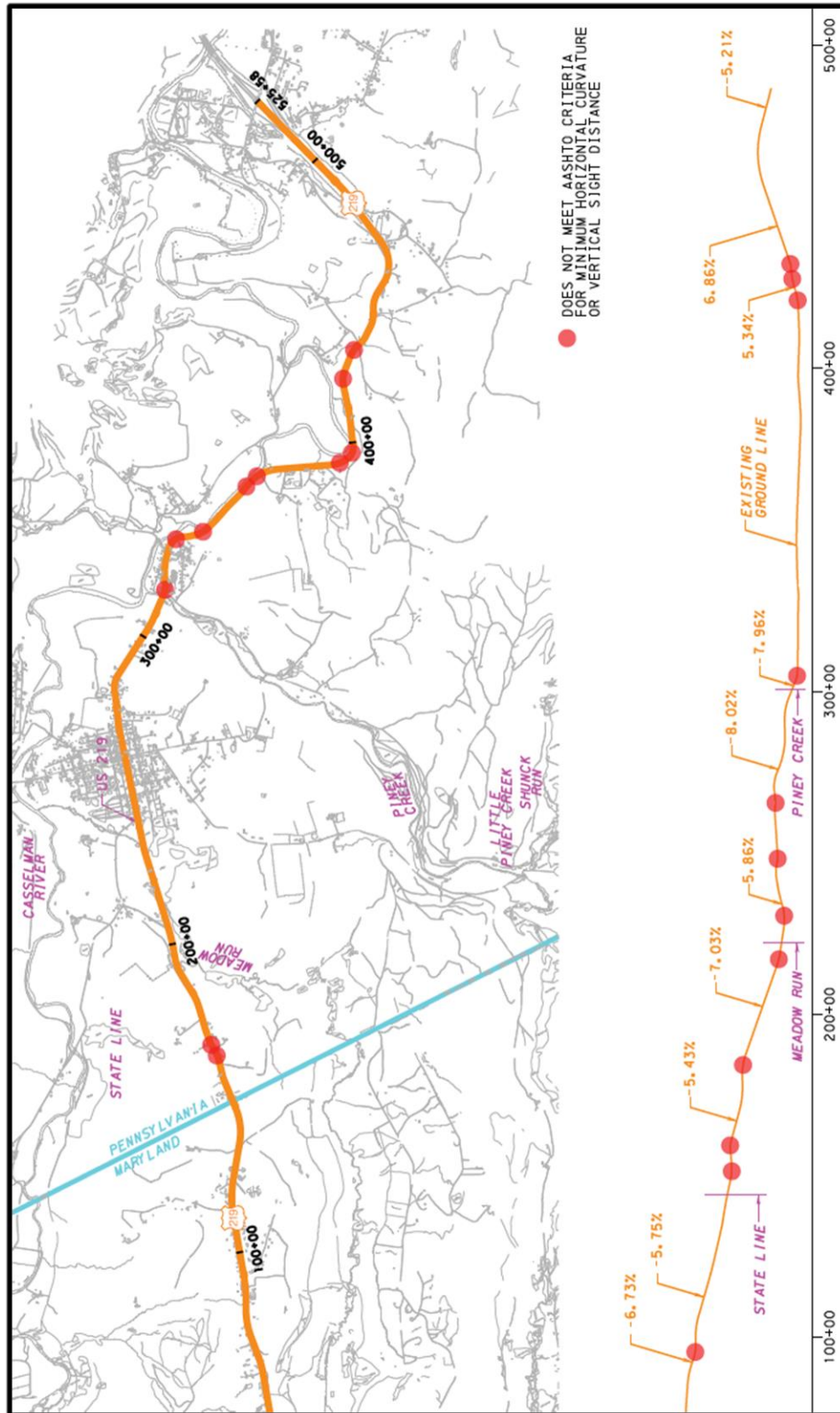


Figure 7: Existing Horizontal and Vertical Deficiencies



3.2.3 Existing US 219 does not provide the infrastructure needed to access the surrounding municipalities along with labor and business markets and is a contributing factor in limiting economic opportunity to the Appalachian Region.

Links between the Appalachian region and the rest of North America are not consistent with other completed ADHS highways (four-lane, limited access type facilities) which contribute to the lack of economic growth within this portion of the Appalachian Region.

The purpose of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) is to assist the Appalachian region in providing the infrastructure necessary for economic development, develop the regions industry, generate diversified regional economy, and make the regions industrial and commercial resources more competitive. Its secondary purpose is to provide a framework for coordinating federal, state, and local initiatives to respond to the economic competitiveness challenges in the Appalachian region, adapting new technologies, improving access to technical and financial resources, and to address the needs of severely and persistently distressed areas of the Appalachian region.

ARC consistently gathers data for the Appalachian region to evaluate which counties were in greater need for ARC funding. ARC classifies counties according to four criteria: distressed, transitional, competitive, and attainment in their Distressed Designation and County Economic Status Classification System. Both Garrett (Maryland) and Somerset (Pennsylvania) counties are currently rated as transitional counties by ARC in fiscal year 2022. Transitional counties are classified as those that are below the national average for one or more of the three economic indicators (three-year average unemployment, per capita market income, and poverty), but do not satisfy the criteria of the distressed category.

As shown in **table 2**, in Garrett County, Maryland and Somerset County, Pennsylvania, the three-year average unemployment rate and poverty rates for 2017 to 2019 are both better than that of the US average. However per capita income rates for both counties remain lower than the US average, and more significant is the fact that the county per capita incomes are 35% less than the respective statewide values. The per capita income rates for both counties being below the national average is the reason that both counties are designated as transitional by ARC.

Table 2: Economic Indicators (2017-2019)

Geography	Unemployment Rate*	Per Capita Income**	Poverty Rate*	Poverty Rate of Children Under 18*
United States	4.9%	\$54,194	12.9%	17.7%
Maryland	4.9%	\$62,947	9.1%	11.9%
Garrett County, MD	4.8%	\$45,718	10.4%***	12.6%***
Pennsylvania	4.9%	\$55,852	12.2%	16.9%
Somerset County, PA	4.4%	\$41,539	11.3%	17.8%

*American Community Survey, 2017-2019

** Appalachian Regional Commission, 2017-2019

*** American Community Survey, 2015- 2019



The *Comprehensive Plan for the Southern Alleghenies Region*, adopted 2018, identified the need to create jobs and attract worker and their families to the region. Improvements for the region identified in the *Economic Analysis of Completing the Appalachian Development Highway System: Technical Report* (July 2017), include faster and more reliable travel times, reduced vehicle operating and logistical costs, and access to labor and business delivery markets.

The current roadway infrastructure limits access to labor markets and labor mobility. Reduced travel speeds and longer travel times limit the range of markets that existing businesses can serve within the region and limit the range of local labor markets that businesses can attract. This inhibits efficient access to jobs and economic centers in the region.

Within the State of Maryland, areas of economic opportunity need to be focused within Priority Funding Areas (PFAs). PFAs include existing communities and places designated for future growth by local governments. Areas eligible PFA designation include existing communities and areas where industrial or other economic development is desired. Counties may also designate PFAs in areas planned for new residential communities which will be served by water and sewer systems and meet density standards. This project would support economic vitality and job growth opportunities within the Grantsville municipality and Chestnut Ridge Development Center PFAs. Garrett County and the Town of Grantsville in Maryland identified the US 219 Section 050 project as their priority transportation need in the Garrett County 2022 Transportation Priorities Letter. Garrett County also stated that the project is consistent with their comprehensive plan.

An evaluation of the study area was completed ESRI Business Analysis software which is a GIS based tool which is used to identify under-performing markets, pinpoint the right growth sites, and find where target customers live. **Figure 8** shows the anticipated catchment area or travel shed for employees based on a drive time analysis ⁶. The lighter colors in the figure show the existing catchment area that is limited by the lower travel speeds and lack of mobility along the existing roadway network. The darker shades of blue, orange, and green show the expected catchment area for the same time frames at free flow travel speeds.

This study shows that the current roadway infrastructure is limiting the number of skilled employees that businesses can attract, and it is also limiting the market areas that a businesses can serve within a 15, 30, 45 minute travel radius.



References:

¹ Appalachian Regional Commission, “Status of Appalachian Development Highway System”. September 2020.

² Appalachian Regional Commission. “*Appalachian Development highway System Economic Analysis Study: Synthesis of Findings to Date.*” May 2016.

³ Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration. “*US 219 Benefit-Cost Analysis.*” May 11, 2020.

⁴ Keller Engineers. “*US 219 Existing Corridor Safety Study, SR 219, Seg 0010 to Seg 0114.*” January 2020.

⁵ Southern Alleghenies Planning & Development Commission. “*Pennsylvania-Maryland Corridor N Completion Analysis & Impact Study*”, October 14, 2020.

⁶ Southern Alleghenies Rural Planning Organization. “*ADHS Corridor N (U.S. 219) Completion Analysis & Impact Study*”, November 9, 2020.