

Merrill Rail Crossing Elimination Planning Study

Fact Sheet | May 2026

Project Overview

This Study will identify ways to:

- Improve highway safety and traffic flow in the Merrill area.
- Mitigate a physical barrier posed by the rail corridor in the community.
- Reduce the risk of future highway-rail grade crossing crashes/incidents along this half-mile portion of the rail corridor through the elimination and/or improvement of three at-grade crossings.

Purpose & Need

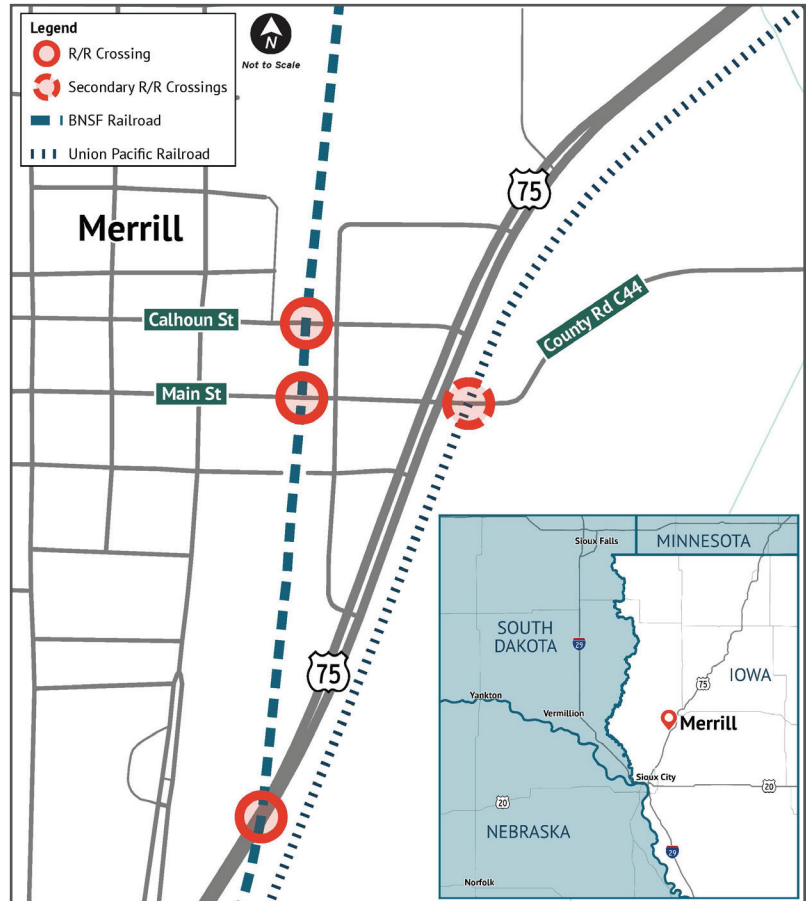
Project Purpose Statement

The Study's purpose is to mitigate the challenges posed by the BNSF Marshall Subdivision railway in Merrill, Iowa with safety and traffic flow upgrades at the U.S. 75, Main Street (in conjunction with County Road C44), and Calhoun Street crossings.

Project Need

The Study is needed to:

- Improve the mobility of people and goods
- Correct rail and roadway geometric deficiencies
- Reduce the potential for rail crossing-related crashes



Project Location

The following existing highway-rail crossings will be examined in this study:

- U.S. 75
- Main Street
- Calhoun Street
- County Road C44*

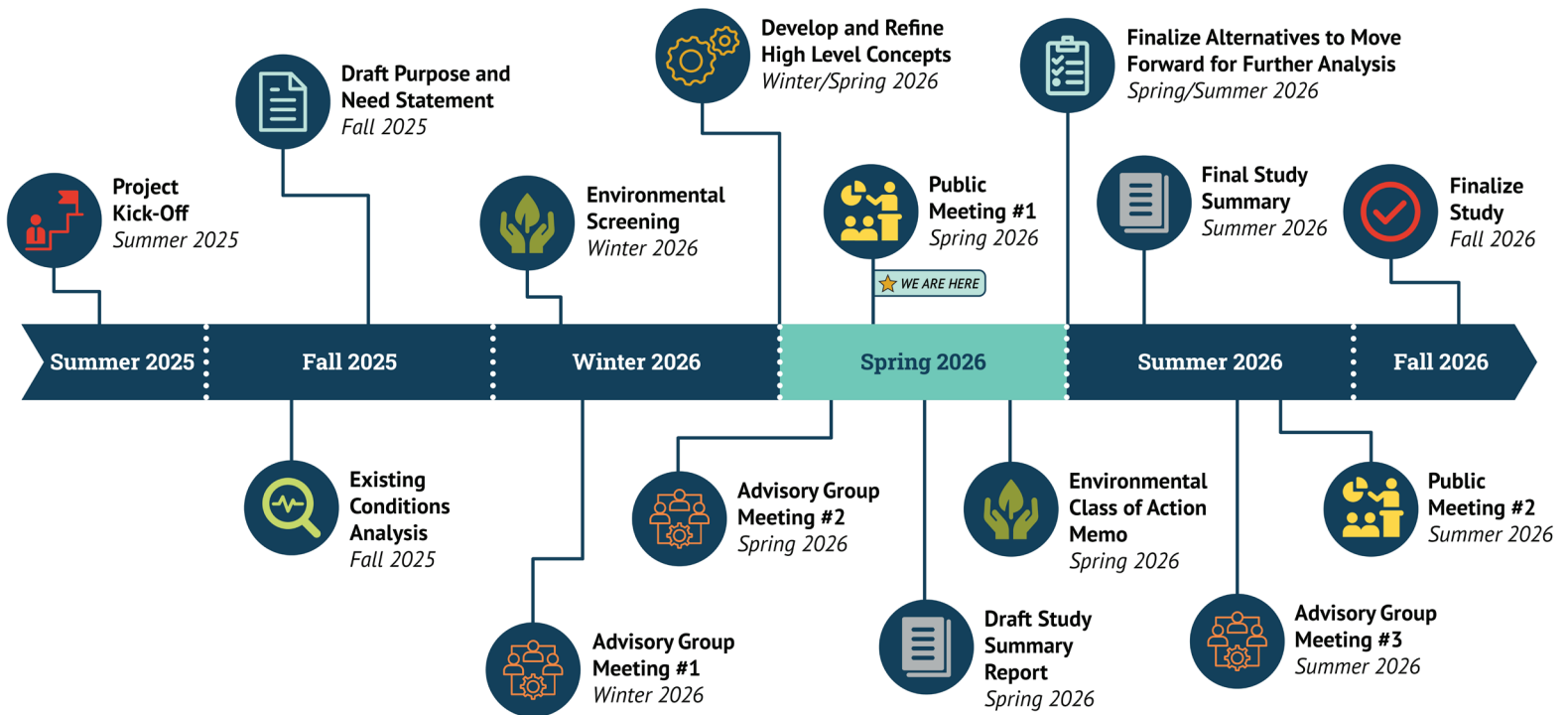
*County Road C44 is being reviewed in conjunction with the Main Street rail crossing and may be considered for improvements, if applicable.

Merrill Rail Crossing Elimination Planning Study



Fact Sheet | May 2026

Project Schedule



Contact

Sarah Tracy, PE
Iowa DOT District 3 Planner
Sarah.Tracy@iowadot.us
712-274-5831

Or email: e41673@publicinput.com

Comments

Please share your feedback with us by:
Thursday, May 28, 2026



Scan the QR code or visit <https://publicinput.com/e41673> to leave comments.

Project Overview

The U.S. 75 corridor through Merrill is a key part of the transportation network through northwest Iowa. The active BNSF corridor, with up to 10 trains per day, intersects this important highway and cuts through the City of Merrill with several at-grade intersections, creating safety risks and traffic delays.

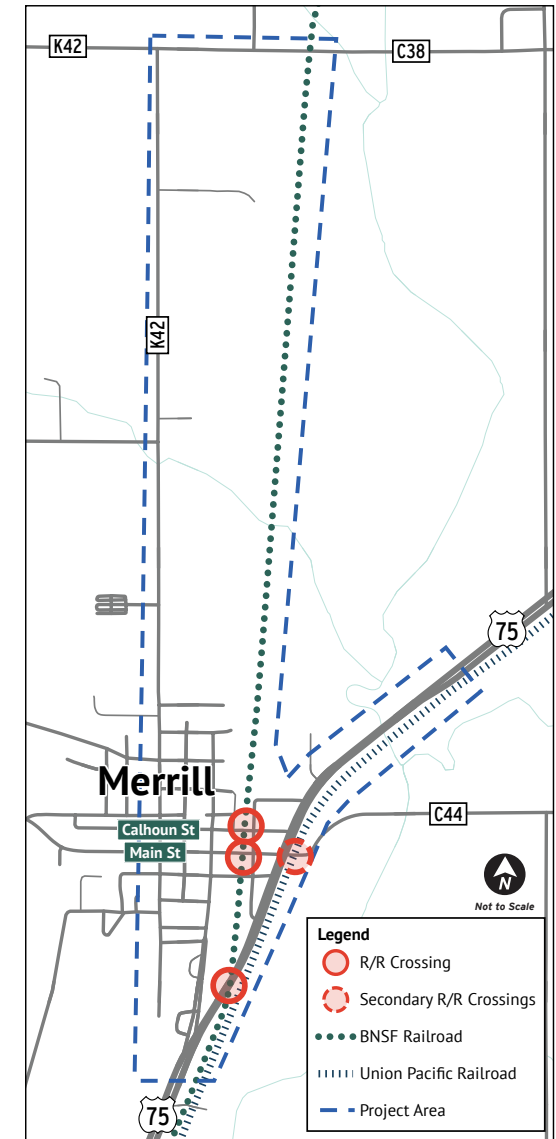
This Study will identify ways to:

- Improve highway safety and traffic flow in the Merrill area.
- Mitigate a physical barrier posed by the rail corridor in the community.
- Eliminate the risk of future highway-rail grade crossing crashes/incidents along this half-mile portion of the rail corridor through the elimination and/or improvement of three at-grade crossings.

The following existing highway-rail grade crossings will be examined in this study:

- U.S. 75
- Calhoun Street
- Main Street
- County Road C44*

**County Road C44 is being reviewed in conjunction with the Main Street rail-crossing and may be considered for improvements, if applicable.*



➤ Purpose & Need

Project Purpose Statement

The Study's purpose is to mitigate the challenges posed by the BNSF Marshall Subdivision railway in Merrill, Iowa with safety and traffic flow upgrades at the U.S. 75, Main Street (in conjunction with County Road C44), and Calhoun Street crossings.

Project Need

The Study is needed to:

- Improve the mobility of people and goods
- Correct rail and roadway geometric deficiencies
- Reduce the potential for rail crossing-related crashes



➤ Evaluating Alternatives

The process to develop project alternatives begins with existing conditions data collection, environmental screening and engineering review. Based on this, the project team determines a range of initial design concepts. Each concept is evaluated how well it meets the project goals and the needs of the community.

Initial Concepts

The project team developed eight (8) initial concepts for review and consideration. Each were reviewed to determine pros, cons, and how well they met the project purpose and need. These include:

- **Concept 1** - Improved at Grade-Crossing
- **Concept 2** - U.S. 75 Bridge Shifted West (45 degree)
- **Concept 3** - U.S. 75 Bridge Shifted West (60 degree)
- **Concept 4** - U.S. 75 Bridge On-Alignment
- **Concept 5** - U.S. 75 Shift East + Track Relocation South
- **Concept 6** - U.S. 75 On-Alignment + Track Relocation North
- **Concept 7** - U.S. 75 Shifted West + Track Relocation North
- **Concept 8** - Elevated BNSF Tracks

➤ Concept Screening Summary

The project team used multiple factors to evaluate each concept to determine how well they met the Purpose and Need. Below is a chart that outlines the analysis.

Factors	Concept 1	Concept 2	★ Concept 3	★ Concept 4	★ Concept 5	Concept 6	Concept 7	Concept 8
	Improved At-Grade Crossing	U.S. 75 Bridge Shifted West (45 degree)	U.S. 75 Bridge Shifted West (60 degree)	U.S. 75 Bridge On-Alignment	U.S. 75 Shifted East + Track Relocation South	U.S. 75 On-Alignment + Track Relocation North	U.S. 75 Shifted West + Track Relocation North	Elevated BNSF Tracks
Mobility and Accessibility (P&N)	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Rail and Roadway Deficiencies (P&N)	0	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Safety (P&N)	0	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Construction Feasibility	+	+	0	-	-	-	-	-
Acquisition/ROW	0	-	0	+	+	-	-	+
Railroad Feasibility	0	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
Community Input	+	-	0	0	0	-	-	+
Infrastructure Footprint/ Area of Impact	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-
Environmental Impact	+	0	0	0	+	-	-	+

Scale

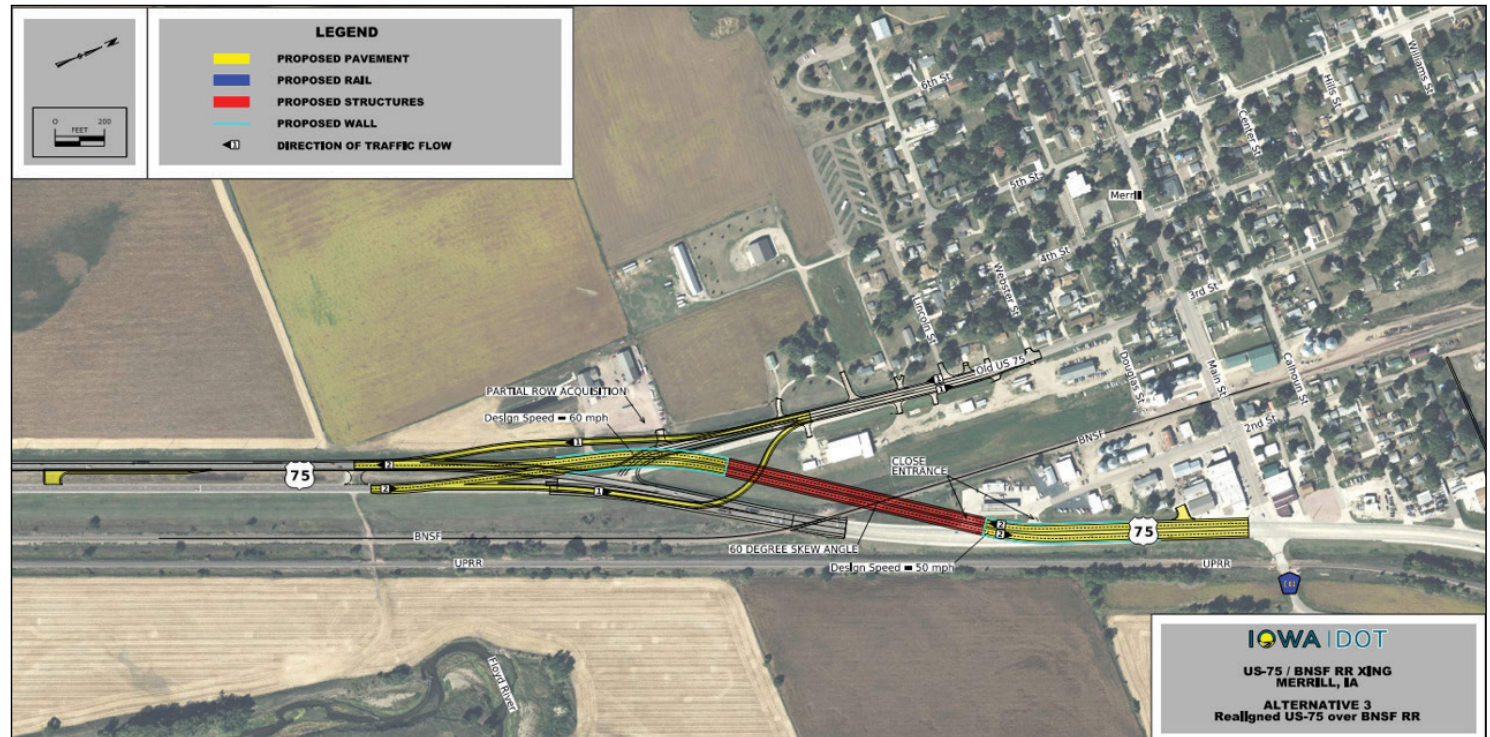
Not Preferred - 0 + Preferred

★ = Concepts identified to move forward for further analysis

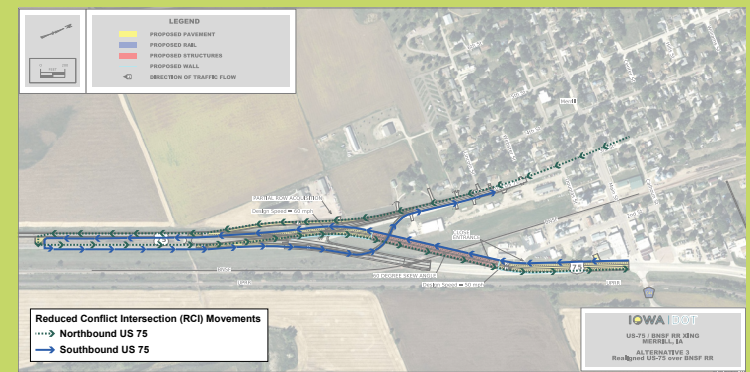
Reasonable Alternative

Concept 3 Benefits

- Grade-separated crossing at U.S. 75
- Maintains U.S. 75 traffic during construction
- No impact to railroad infrastructure
- Maintains east/west traffic access to Merrill



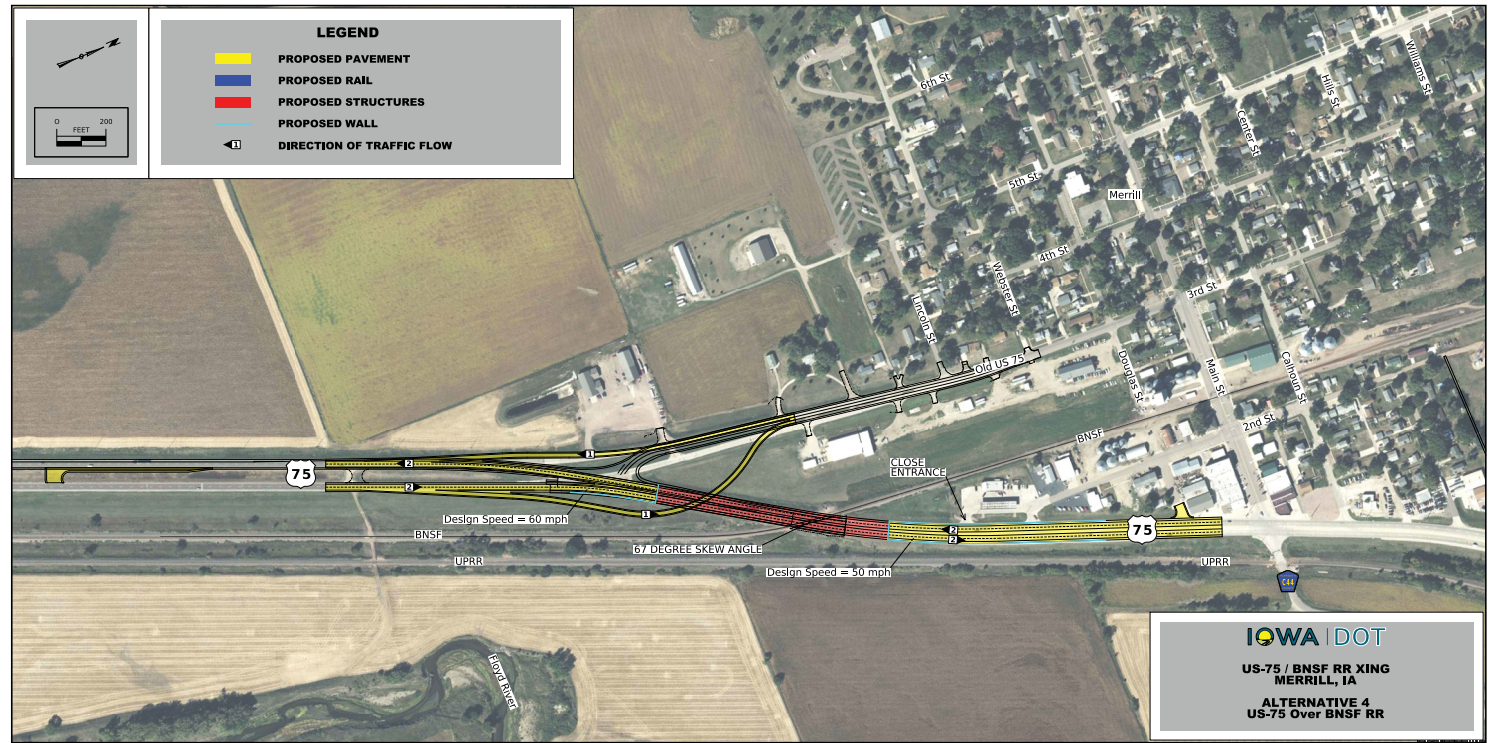
Reduced Conflict Intersection (RCI) Movements



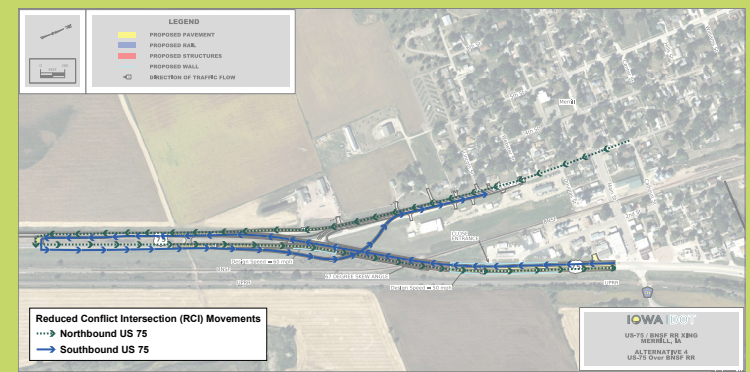
Reasonable Alternative

Concept 4 Benefits

- Grade-separated crossing at U.S. 75
- Limited right-of-way impacts
- No impact to railroad infrastructure
- Maintains east/west traffic access to Merrill



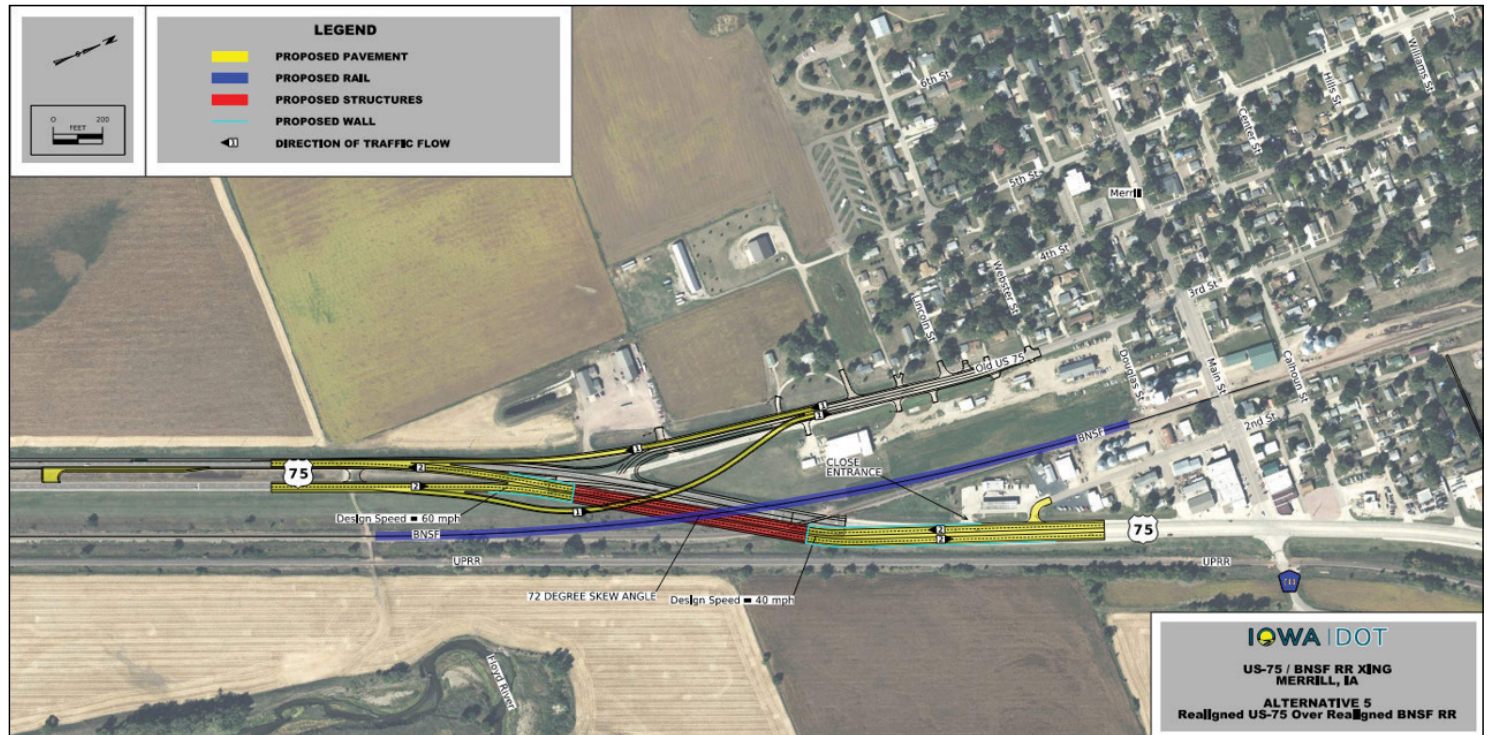
Reduced Conflict Intersection (RCI) Movements



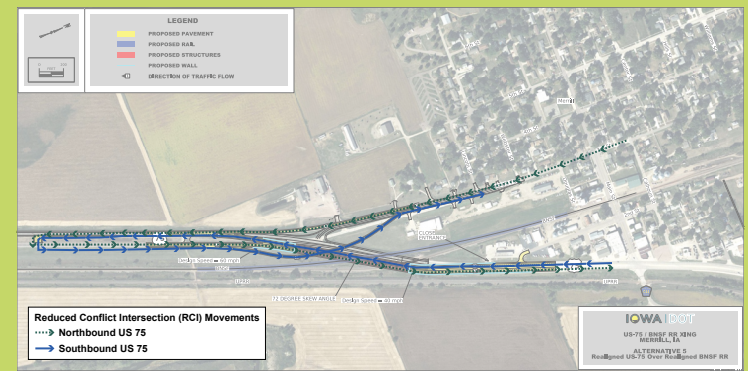
Reasonable Alternative

Concept 5 Benefits

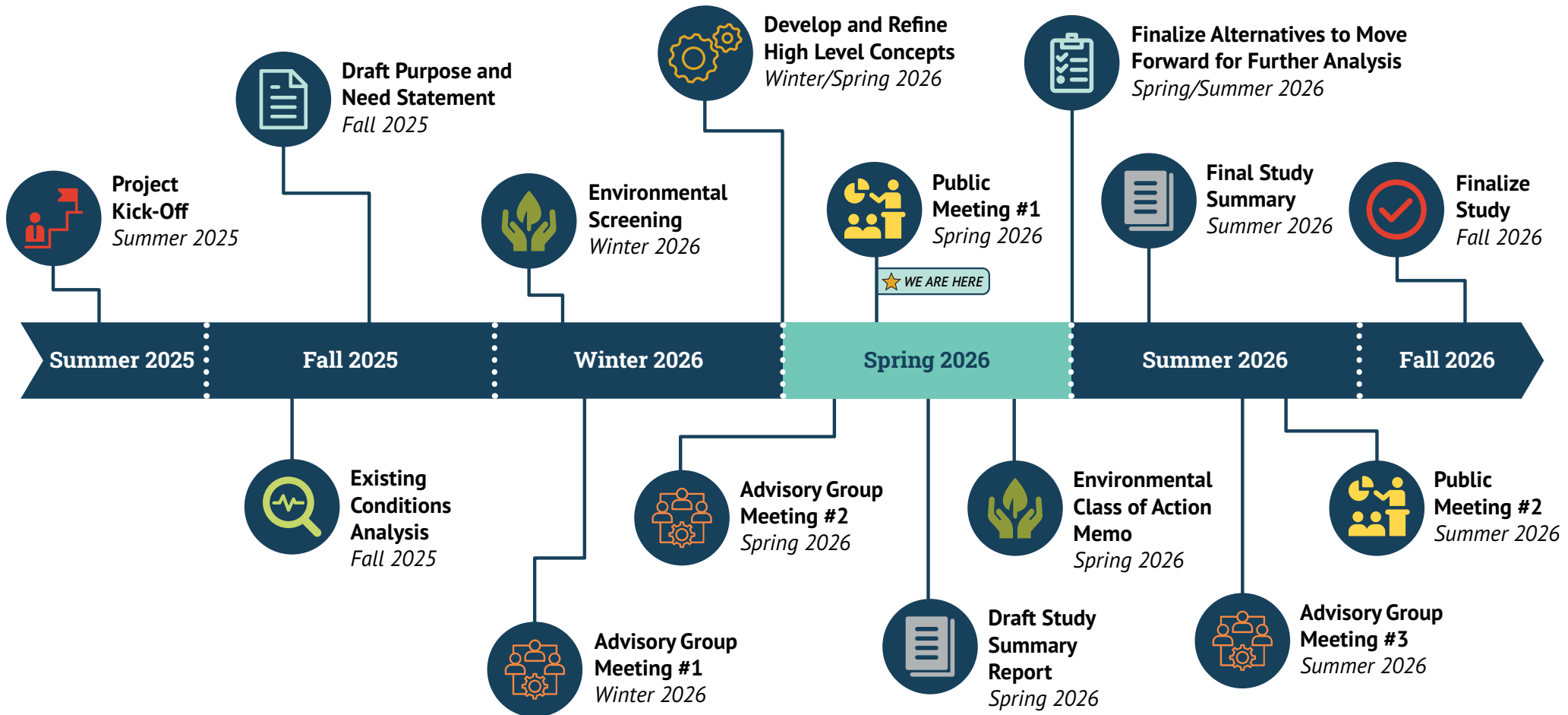
- Grade-separated crossing at U.S. 75
- Maintains U.S. 75 traffic during construction
- Limited right-of-way impacts
- Maintains east/west traffic access to Merrill



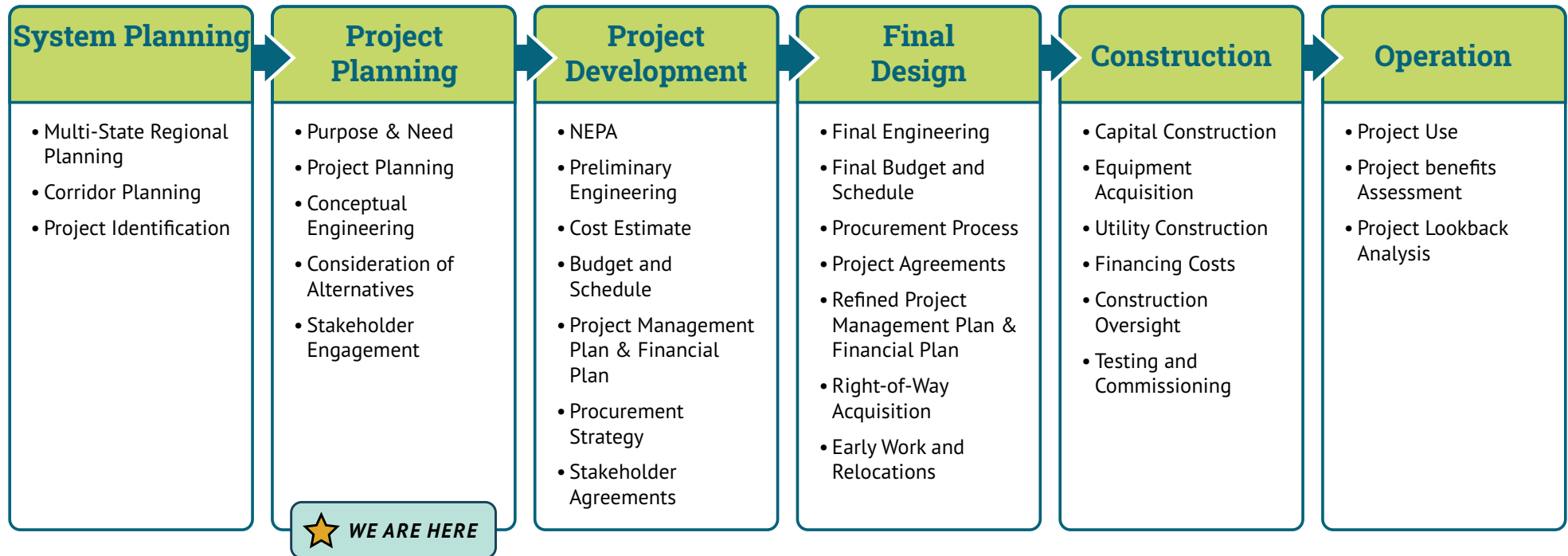
Reduced Conflict Intersection (RCI) Movements



Project Schedule



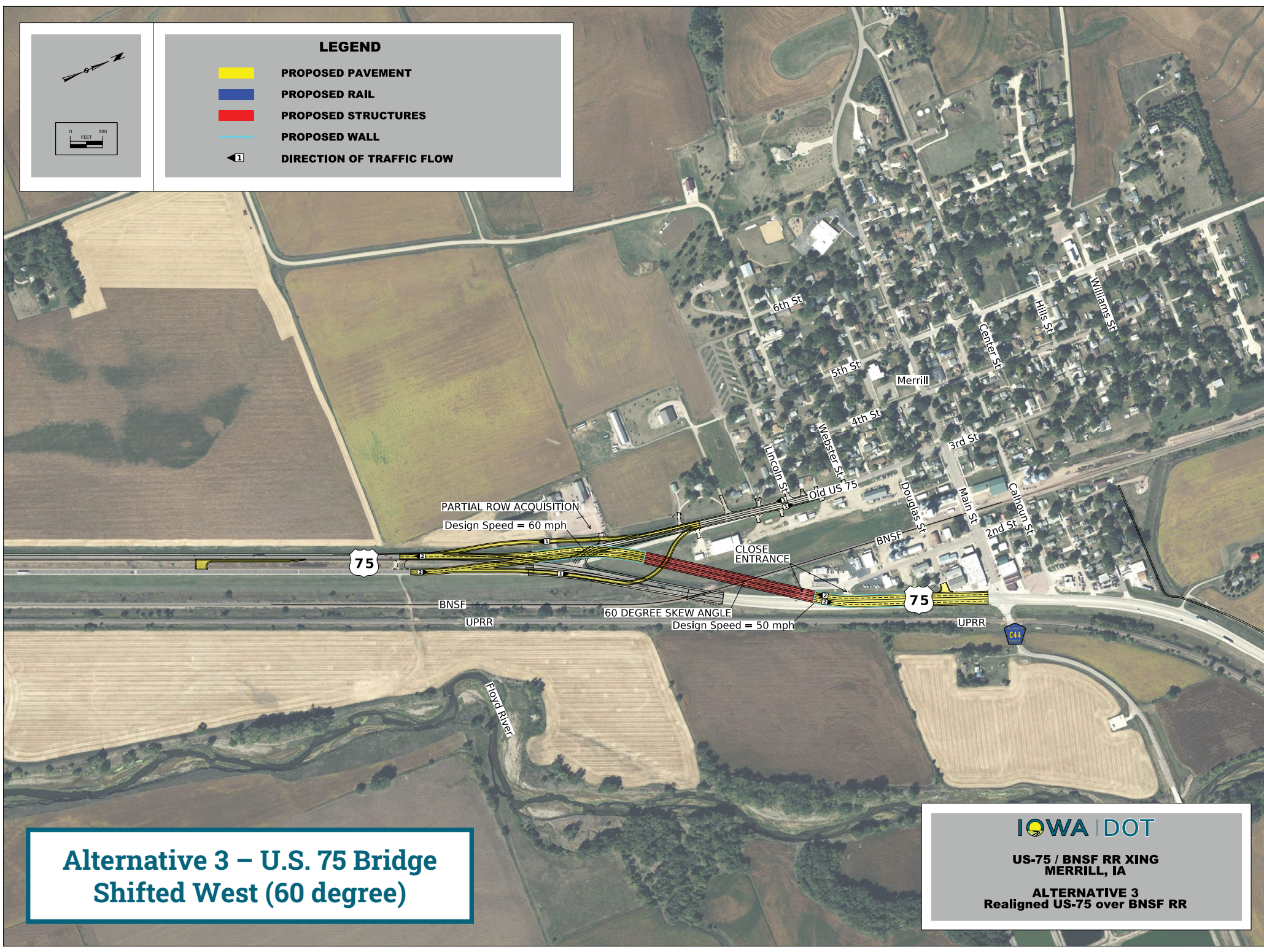
Federal Railroad Administration(FRA) Development Project Lifecycle





LEGEND

- PROPOSED PAVEMENT
- PROPOSED RAIL
- PROPOSED STRUCTURES
- PROPOSED WALL
- 1 DIRECTION OF TRAFFIC FLOW



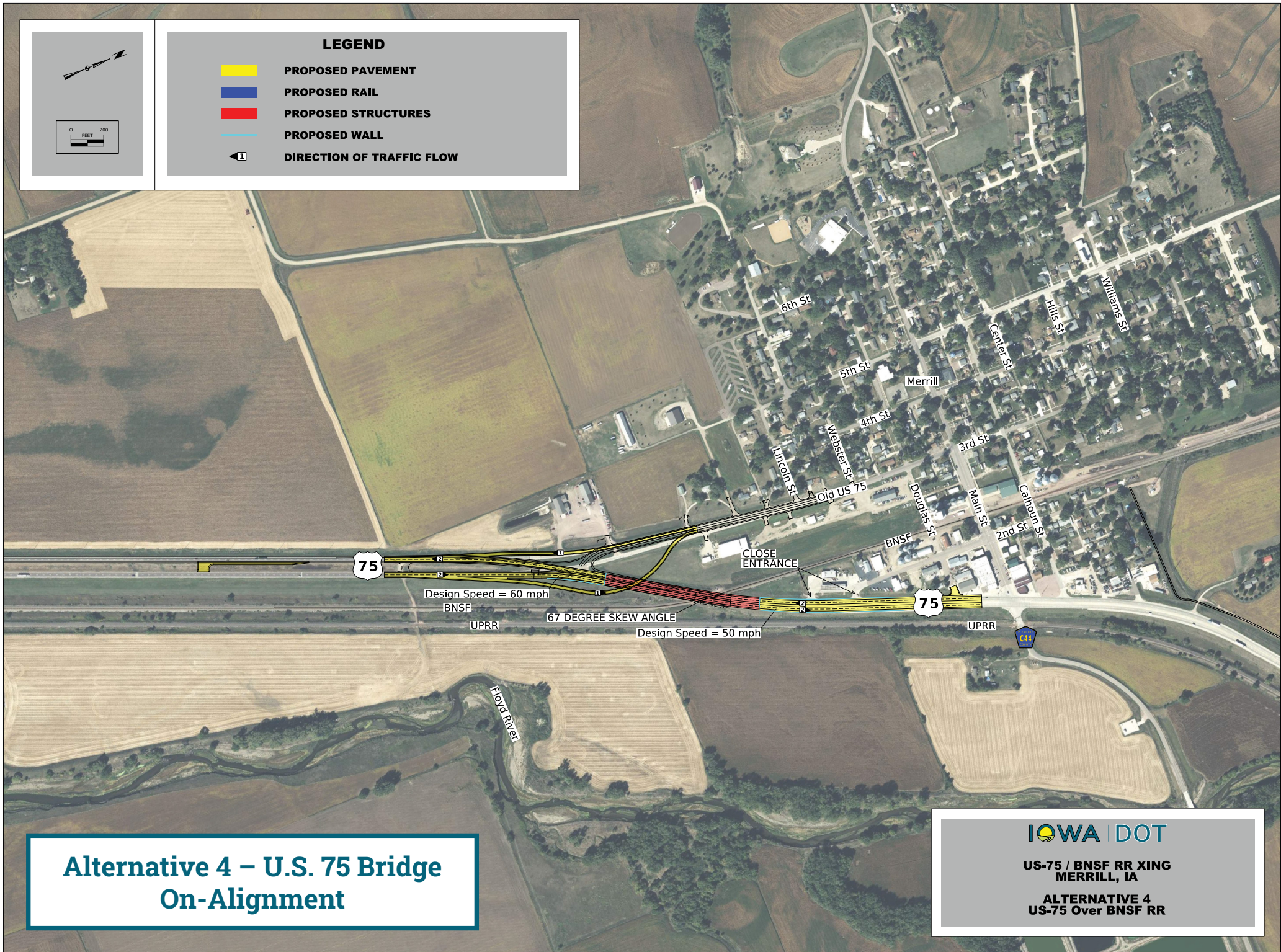
**Alternative 3 – U.S. 75 Bridge
Shifted West (60 degree)**

IOWA DOT
US-75 / BNSF RR XING
MERRILL, IA
ALTERNATIVE 3
Realigned US-75 over BNSF RR



LEGEND

- PROPOSED PAVEMENT
- PROPOSED RAIL
- PROPOSED STRUCTURES
- PROPOSED WALL
- 1 DIRECTION OF TRAFFIC FLOW



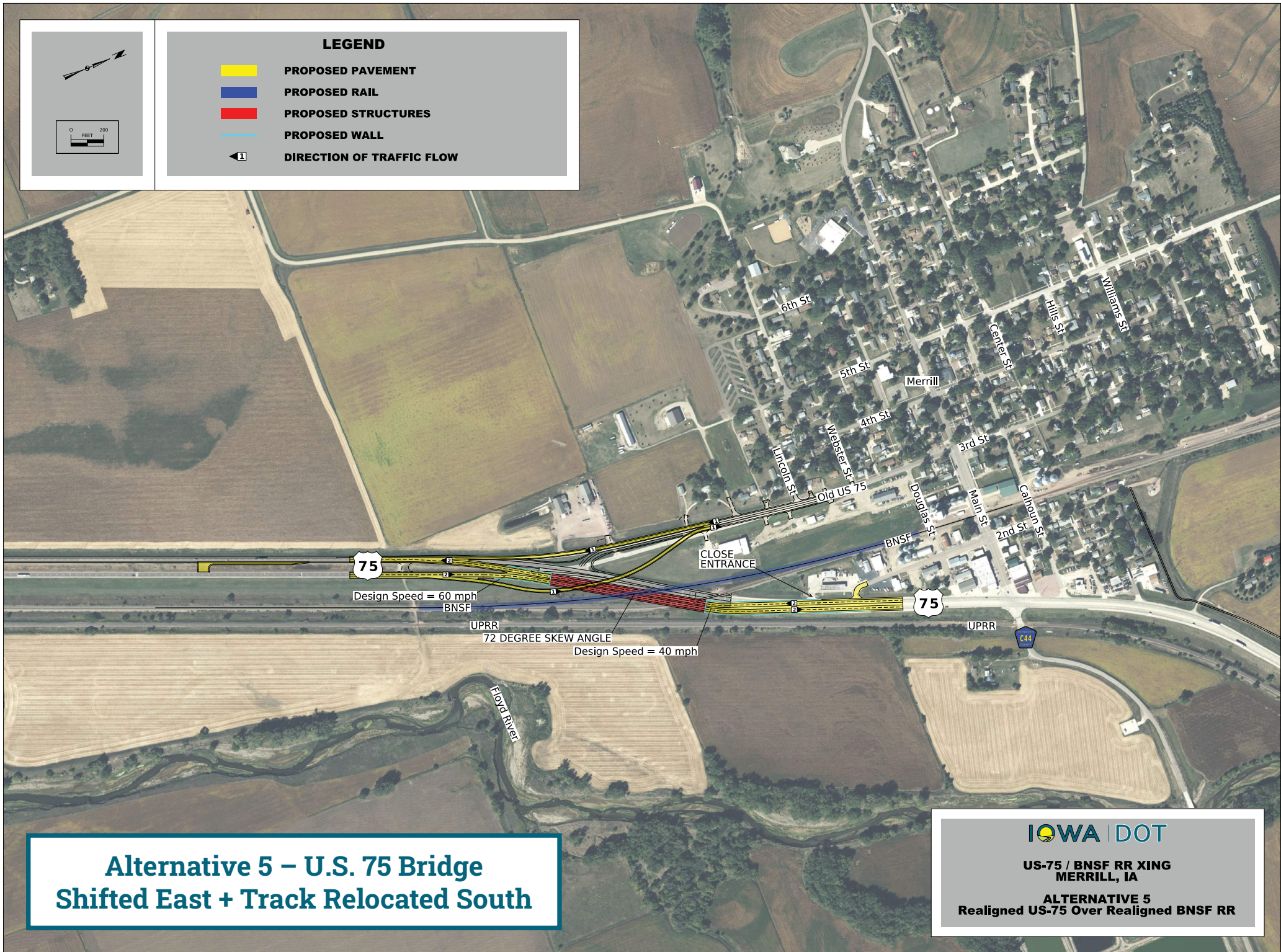
**Alternative 4 – U.S. 75 Bridge
On-Alignment**

IOWA DOT
**US-75 / BNSF RR XING
MERRILL, IA**
**ALTERNATIVE 4
US-75 Over BNSF RR**



LEGEND

- PROPOSED PAVEMENT
- PROPOSED RAIL
- PROPOSED STRUCTURES
- PROPOSED WALL
- 1 DIRECTION OF TRAFFIC FLOW



**Alternative 5 – U.S. 75 Bridge
Shifted East + Track Relocated South**

IOWA DOT
US-75 / BNSF RR XING
MERRILL, IA
ALTERNATIVE 5
Realigned US-75 Over Realigned BNSF RR