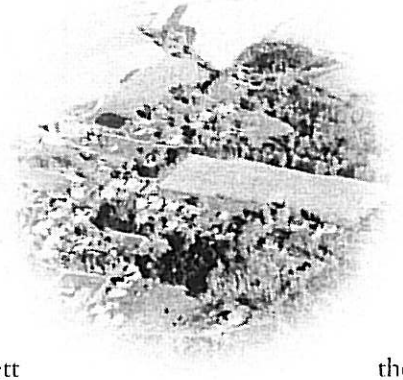
CHAPTER I: PURPOSE AND NEED

A. Project Description

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), the Maryland State Highway Administration (MD SHA), and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) have initiated preliminary engineering and environmental clearance studies for Section 019 of US 219. Section 019 extends 13.0 kilometers (8.1 miles) from the southern end of the Meyersdale Bypass in Somerset County, Pennsylvania to Interstate 68 (I-68) in Garrett County, Maryland. The study area encompasses portions of Elk Lick and Summit Townships in Somerset County, Pennsylvania and the northeastern corner of Garrett County, Maryland, **Figure I-1, Project Location Map**.



The proposed project is included in PennDOT's 12-Year Transportation Plan and Maryland Department of Transportation's Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP) FY 2006-2012. US 219 is a principle arterial on the National Highway System (NHS) and is on the Pennsylvania Priority Commercial Network (PCN). US 219 is one of only a few direct north-south routes in western Pennsylvania and Maryland. It links I-68 in Maryland to I-76 (Pennsylvania Turnpike) and I-80 to the north.

In 1992, PennDOT completed the "Needs Analysis, US Route 219, I-68 (MD) to Somerset, Pennsylvania" that evaluated transportation needs of the two-lane US 219 between I-68 in Maryland and the Pennsylvania Turnpike in Somerset, Pennsylvania. This study revealed numerous deficiencies along the entire corridor. However, it was determined that the section of US 219 through Meyersdale demonstrated the greatest, most immediate need for transportation

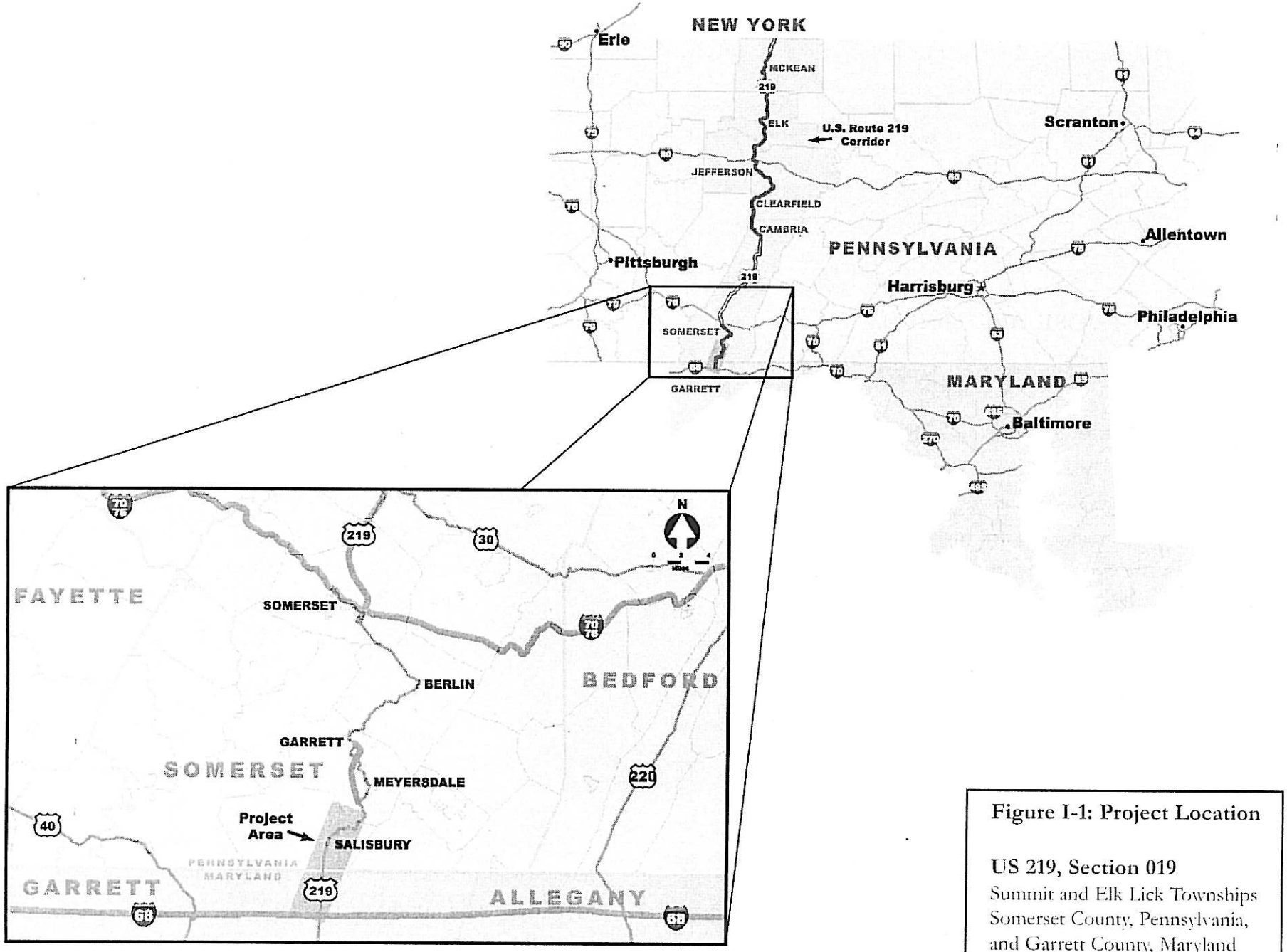


Figure I-1: Project Location

US 219, Section 019
Summit and Elk Lick Townships
Somerset County, Pennsylvania,
and Garrett County, Maryland

improvements and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Meyersdale Bypass was prepared. The EIS subsequently led to the selection, design, and construction of the Meyersdale Bypass, a 8.0 kilometers (5.0 mile), four-lane, limited access highway open to traffic in October 1998.

Two sections of US 219 in Somerset County, one north and one south of Meyersdale, remain as two-lane facilities. Currently, the section north of Meyersdale is undergoing preliminary design and environmental studies as a separate project. Section 019, the link between Meyersdale and I-68 in Maryland, is the subject of this study. As the last link to Interstate 68 in Maryland, this section of US 219 is recognized as a key improvement project.

The northern terminus for this project is the southern end of the four-lane, limited access, Meyersdale Bypass. The southern terminus is near the existing I-68 and US 219 interchange. As stated in the project needs section that follows, the project termini were selected in order to address deficiencies along this section of US 219 and to resolve a system continuity issue. Support for the southern project terminus also stems from the 2001 North-South Appalachia Corridor Feasibility Study, discussed in more detail in the following section of this document. This study showed that the US 219 corridor from I-68 to the Pennsylvania Turnpike had the greatest potential to benefit the region economically. This proposed project, along with PennDOT's US 219 project north of Meyersdale, would complete the four-lane, limited access highway from I-68 to the Pennsylvania Turnpike. The chosen termini for this proposed project (the Meyersdale Bypass in the north and I-68 Exit 22 in the south) are logical termini having independent utility. While this project is part of a larger corridor extending from Canada to Florida, improvements to this current two-lane section of existing US 219 will improve the connectivity of US 219 to the limited controlled access, four-lane I-68 to the south and to the completed limited access, four-lane Meyersdale Bypass to the north.

The southern terminus of the project would be near the US 219 and I-68 Interchange.

PennDOT's integrated Transportation Development Process guided the development of this project. MD SHA's guidelines and regulations were consulted throughout the process to ensure consistency. However, the project focused on PennDOT's process, which includes 10-steps that integrate the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 404 of the Federal Clean Water Act. To comply with NEPA, this EIS is being prepared in accordance with the Council for Environmental Quality's implementing regulations for NEPA (40CFR 1500-1508), FHWA's implementing regulations for NEPA (23CFR § 771), and PennDOT Publication No. 278. The 10-steps involved in preparation of an EIS are outlined below:

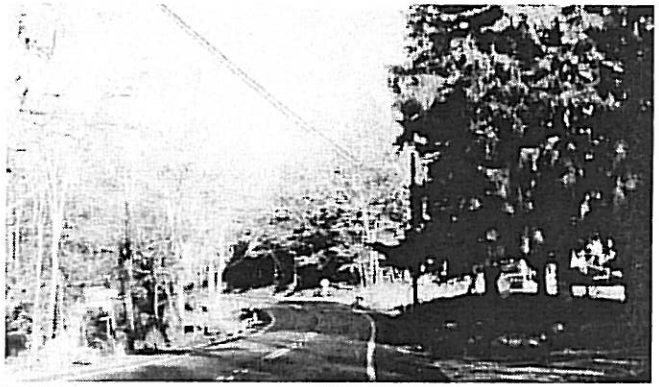
- Steps 1-3: Project Need
- Step 4: Preliminary Alternatives Development and Review

- Step 5: Detailed Alternatives Development and Review
- Steps 6 & 7: Preparation of the Draft EIS
- Step 8: Preparation and Distribution of the Final EIS
- Steps 9 & 10: Preparation and Issuance of a Record of Decision.

As stated throughout the development of the EIS, coordination with MD SHA was conducted to ensure the project meets with Maryland regulations. Maryland's Project Planning Manual and Streamlined Environmental and Regulatory Process (for Transportation Projects) were consulted during the development of the EIS.

B. Project Need

A March 1999 report, "Needs Analysis, U.S. Route 219, I-68 (MD) to Somerset, Pennsylvania," prepared for PennDOT District 9-0 summarizes the needs for this project. The Needs Analysis is contained in the Project Technical Files maintained by PennDOT District 9 and MD SHA. An index of the Technical Support Data in located in Appendix A. The analysis included the two-lane sections of US 219 north and south of Meyersdale. The Needs Analysis evaluated existing and future traffic congestion, traffic movement patterns, existing roadway geometric constraints, accidents, system linkage and continuity, socioeconomic characteristics, and economic development potential of the study corridors. FHWA and the Pennsylvania and federal resource agencies granted needs concurrence in April of 1999. The following summary includes only the needs as they pertain to the portion of US 219 from Meyersdale south to I-68 in Maryland.



Existing substandard curvature of US 219 was identified as one of the project needs.

- Forty-three percent (17 segments) of the 39 total roadway segments on US 219 have accident rates that exceed either the Pennsylvania or Maryland statewide average accident rates. Seven of these roadway segments (18 percent) on US 219 have accident rates that are more than twice the Maryland or Pennsylvania statewide accident rates, **Figure I-2, Accident Rates.**
- Current and future transportation demands result in deficient levels of service for most of US 219, **Figures II-12, II-13 and II-14 in Chapter II.**
- Numerous roadway geometric features on US 219 do not meet current design standards concerning lane and shoulder width, vertical grade, horizontal curvature, and sight distance, **Figure I-3, Roadway Geometric Constraints.**

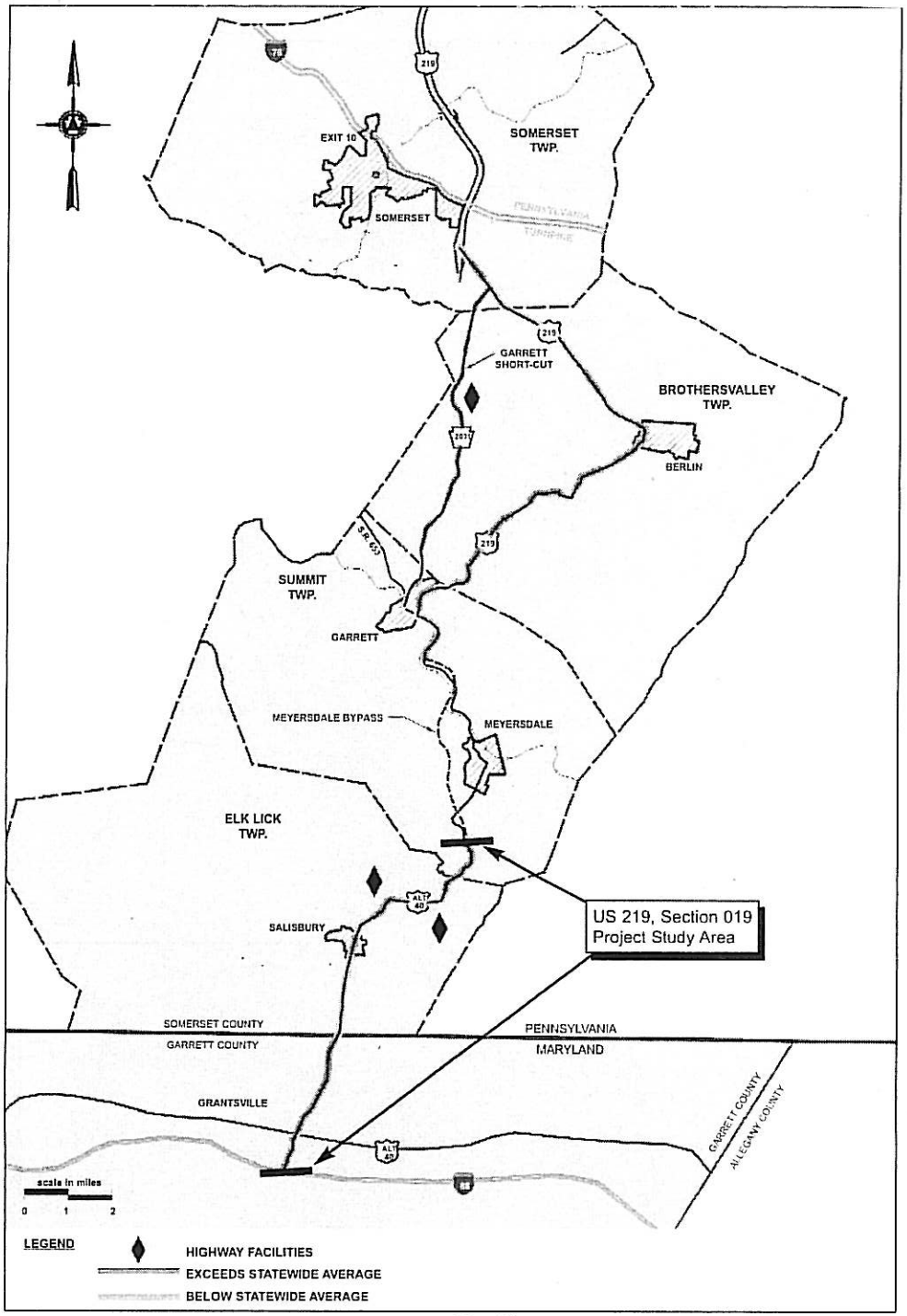


Figure I-2: Accident Rates

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Summit and Elk Lick Townships
Somerset County, Pennsylvania,
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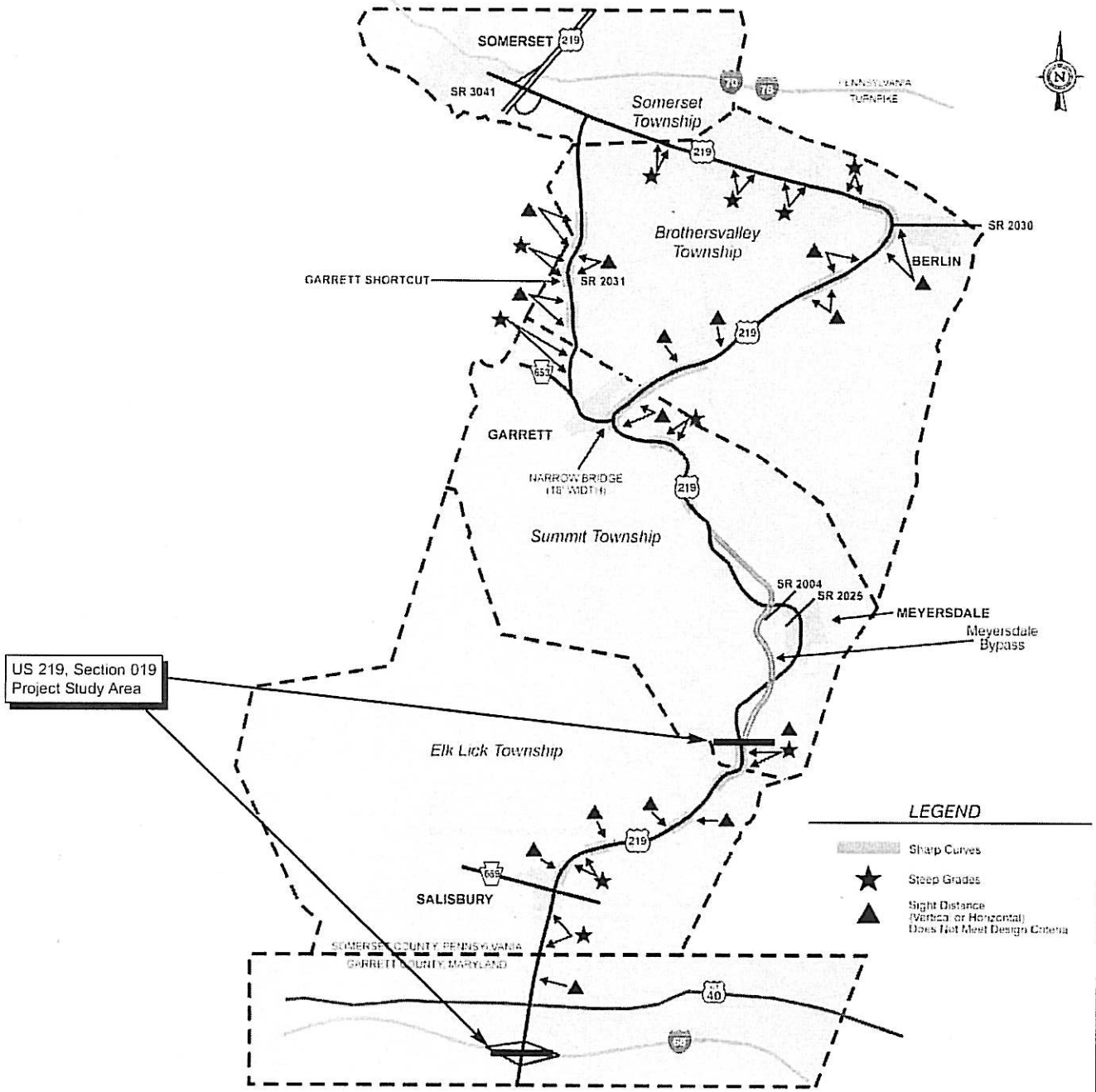


Figure I-3: Roadway Geometric Constraints

US 219, Section 019
Summit and Elk Lick Townships
Somerset County, Pennsylvania,
and Garrett County, Maryland

- Deficient levels of service, geometric constraints, and lack of passing zones along US 219 result in increased travel times and delays.
- The two-lane section of US 219 represents a less efficient system linkage for motorists traveling between the four-lane section of US 219 or the Pennsylvania Turnpike in Somerset, Pennsylvania, and I-68 in Maryland.
- US 219 does not provide adequate access to the surrounding municipalities and is a significant contributing factor in limiting economic development.

Based on the identified transportation needs, the purpose of the project is to:

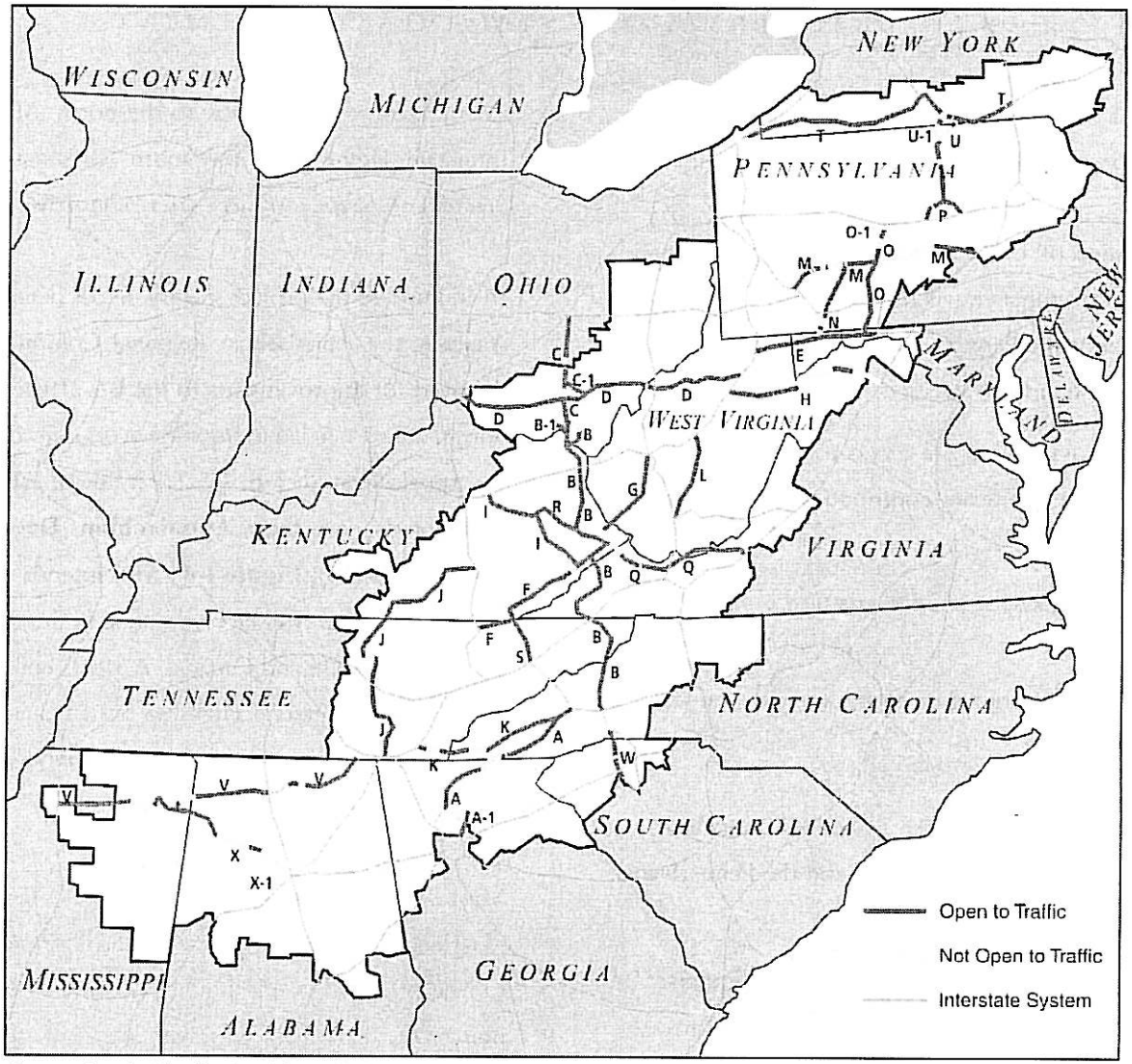
- Improve (the level of) safety for motorists traveling on US 219.
- Improve the level of service on US 219.
- Improve the system linkage between I-68, the Meyersdale Bypass, the four-lane section of US 219, and the Pennsylvania Turnpike.
- Provide safe and efficient access for the southern Somerset County and northern Garrett County regions in order to improve economic development potential.

Even though congestion relief is not a need because of the low existing and future traffic volumes, current and future deficient levels of service exist north of Salisbury, PA, primarily due to existing geometric deficiencies. There is also a system continuity issue due to the current two-lane section of US 219 located between a four-lane limited access roadway to the north (Meyersdale Bypass) and Interstate Highway to the south (Interstate 68, which requires greater consistency to meet safety concerns.)

In addition to the project specific needs detailed in the 1999 Needs Analysis, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) supports the need for improvements to the US 219 corridor as a vital transportation link needed to improve economic and social conditions in the Appalachian Region. US 219 is one of ARC's priority corridors, Corridor N, on their **Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS), Figure I-4**. ARC intends the ADHS to be a system of interstate type highways linking the Appalachian Region to the rest of the US and Canada. A 1960s era ARC study found that the Nation's Interstate Highway System has mostly bypassed the Appalachian Region. This isolation hinders the economic and social development of the Region.

Most of US 219 between Somerset, Pennsylvania and I-68, Maryland operates as a free access facility, meaning vehicular access can be provided at any point along the roadway. These multiple points of access result in travel delays due to slower moving vehicles, higher incidences of accidents due to the multiple points of access, and a less efficient utilization of highway capacity due to slow moving or stopped vehicles. However, on four-lane limited access highways, such as the section of US 219 north of Somerset and the Meyersdale Bypass, interchanges allow for safer and more efficient vehicle entrances and exits, and capacity is used more effi-

Appalachian Development Highway System as of September 30, 2005



Source: Appalachian Regional Commission

Figure I-4: Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS) Mapping

US 219, Section 019
Summit and Elk Lick Townships
Somerset County, Pennsylvania,
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ciently due to fewer traffic flow disruptions. Within the US 219, Section 019, project study area, two interchanges are provided within an eight mile stretch of roadway; however, the roadway between these two interchanges is a two-lane, free access roadway, which, as stated, causes travel delays, higher accident occurrence and inefficient use of capacity. A four-lane limited access facility between the existing Meyersdale Interchange on US 219 and the existing I-68 interchange with US 219 would allow more vehicles to travel safer and with less delay, making development in the region more appealing.

A recent study, the North-South Appalachia Corridor Feasibility Study (2001), evaluated the potential economic development support generated by highway improvements in the Appalachian Region. Pennsylvania, Maryland, West Virginia, and Virginia jointly completed the study. Four corridors from I-66 in the south to the Pennsylvania Turnpike were evaluated, with I-68 dividing the corridors into northern and southern corridors. The study identified two corridors, one each of the southern and northern corridors, as having the greatest potential to benefit Appalachian economic development. The selected northern corridor was US 219 from I-68 to the Pennsylvania Turnpike. The study found that improvements to US 219 would support between 2,400 and 2,600 new jobs in Pennsylvania, the highest percentage (8 percent) of job growth of the four northern corridors. Upgrade to a four-lane facility was the recommended improvement.