



UPDATE

US 321 Improvements Environmental Impact Statement
Watauga and Caldwell Counties, North Carolina
North Carolina Department of Transportation
TIP No. R-2237C

No.6 Spring 2001

WORK ON THE DEIS CONTINUES

The impact assessment and the landscape and revegetation design work began in December. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), which was scheduled to be published in the spring of 2001, is now expected to be released for public review in the summer of 2001. Following the distribution of the DEIS, a public hearing will be held, and a preferred alternative will be selected.

This past fall, the study team concentrated on refining the preliminary design of the alternatives selected for detailed study. A brief description of these design plans is presented on pages 2 and 3 of this newsletter. A full and detailed description will be included in the DEIS. Two design options were developed for each of the bypass corridors.

Therefore, the DEIS will evaluate five preliminary designs: a Widening Alternative, Bypass Alternatives 1A and 1B, and Bypass Alternatives 4A and 4B.

CHANGE OF STATUS OF HISTORIC FIVE POINTS SHUFORD HOUSE

Because of recent internal and external renovations to the Five Points Shuford House on Green Hill Road, the house is no longer considered eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Although the structure would not be directly affected by any of the alternatives, Bypass Alternative 4 would encroach along the rear property line. Since the house is no longer eligible for listing on the National Register, Bypass Alternative 4, by avoiding an historic resource, now may be considered an avoidance alternative as required by Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966. Bypass Alternative 1 is also an avoidance alternative. It is possible, however, that the Federal Highway Administration may conclude that the impacts of Bypass Alternative 4 on views of the Blue Ridge Parkway are a "constructive", or indirect yet substantial, use of the Parkway's public park and historic resource qualities. If this determination is made, Bypass Alternative 4, by not avoiding a public park/historic resource, would not be considered an avoidance alternative.

FIELD ACTIVITY

The study team visited the project area three times during the fall of 2000. Construction and blasting experts performed an initial field visit in September to identify the construction process appropriate for each alternative and to determine the best approaches in order to minimize construction disturbance. These experts returned a second time in November with representatives of the design team to confirm their initial findings and discuss further design refinements. The DEIS will present these findings and recommendations.

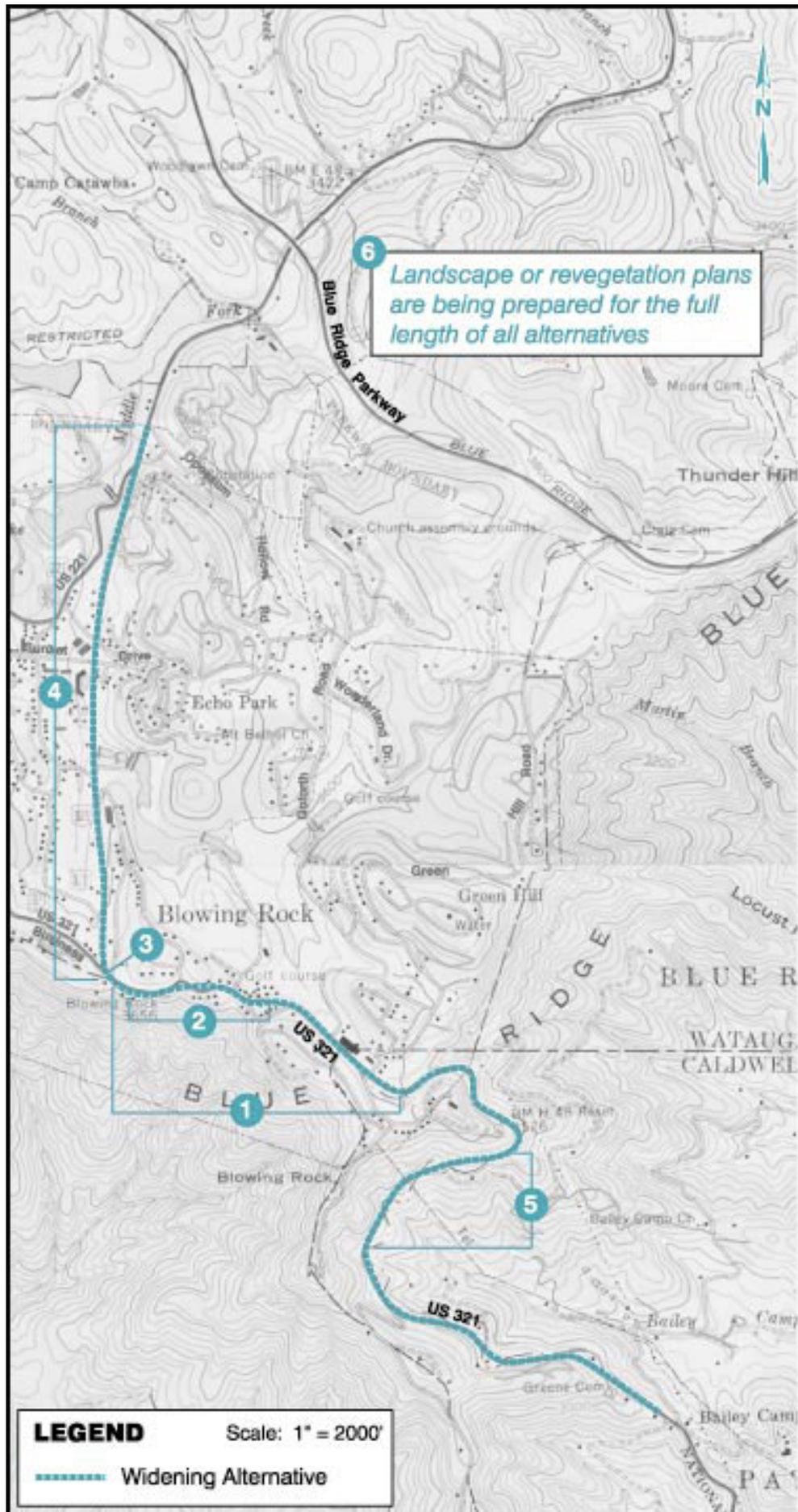
In October, the project's Public Involvement Specialist and the NCDOT Project Manager conducted informational meetings with various representatives of the Citizens Advisory Committee. The meetings provided a project update and an opportunity for participants to ask questions regarding the project and its status. The Citizens Advisory Committee was originally formed in 1995 to assist the study team in developing alternatives for the proposed US 321 improvements.

INVITATION TO CONSULT ON HISTORIC PROPERTIES

The assessment of effects on historic properties and the mitigation of adverse effects on those properties is an important part of the EIS. In order to help ensure that parties with an interest in the various historic resources in the project area have an opportunity to be heard, the Federal Highway Administration would like to invite anyone with an interest to be a historic resources "consulting party." Typically, consulting parties have an economic, historic, or legal interest in at least one of the potentially affected historic resources, or have a concern with the project's effects on historic properties. If you would like to receive more information about the role of consulting parties, or participate as a consulting party, please submit a letter of interest to: Mr. Nicholas L. Graf, PE, Division Administrator, Federal Highway Administration – NC Division, 310 New Bern Avenue – Suite 410, Raleigh, NC 27601-1418.

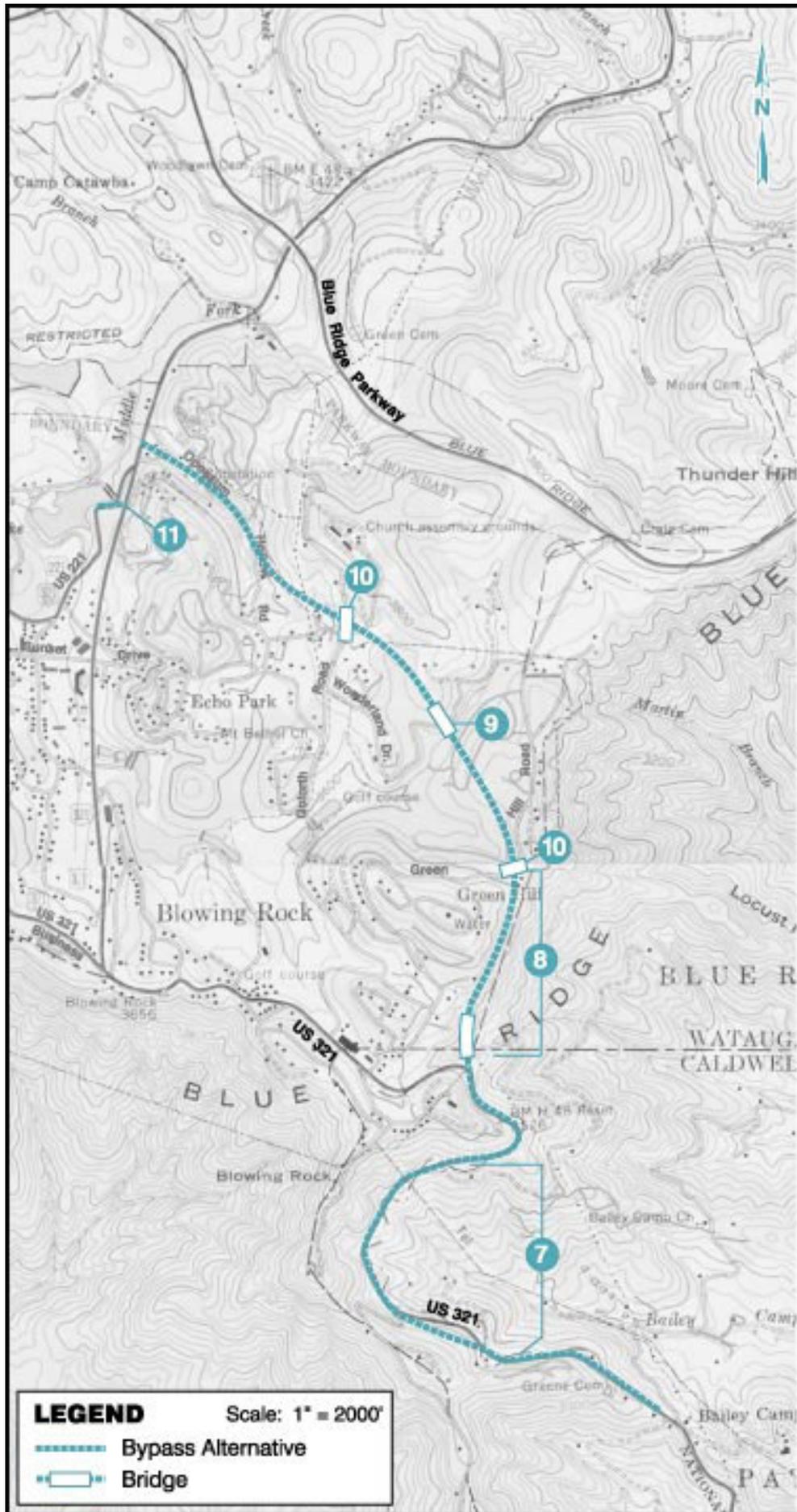
Inside: ✓ **Work on DEIS Continues**
✓ **Description of Alternatives**
✓ **Contact the Study Team**

DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES TO BE EVALUATED IN THE DEIS



WIDENING ALTERNATIVE

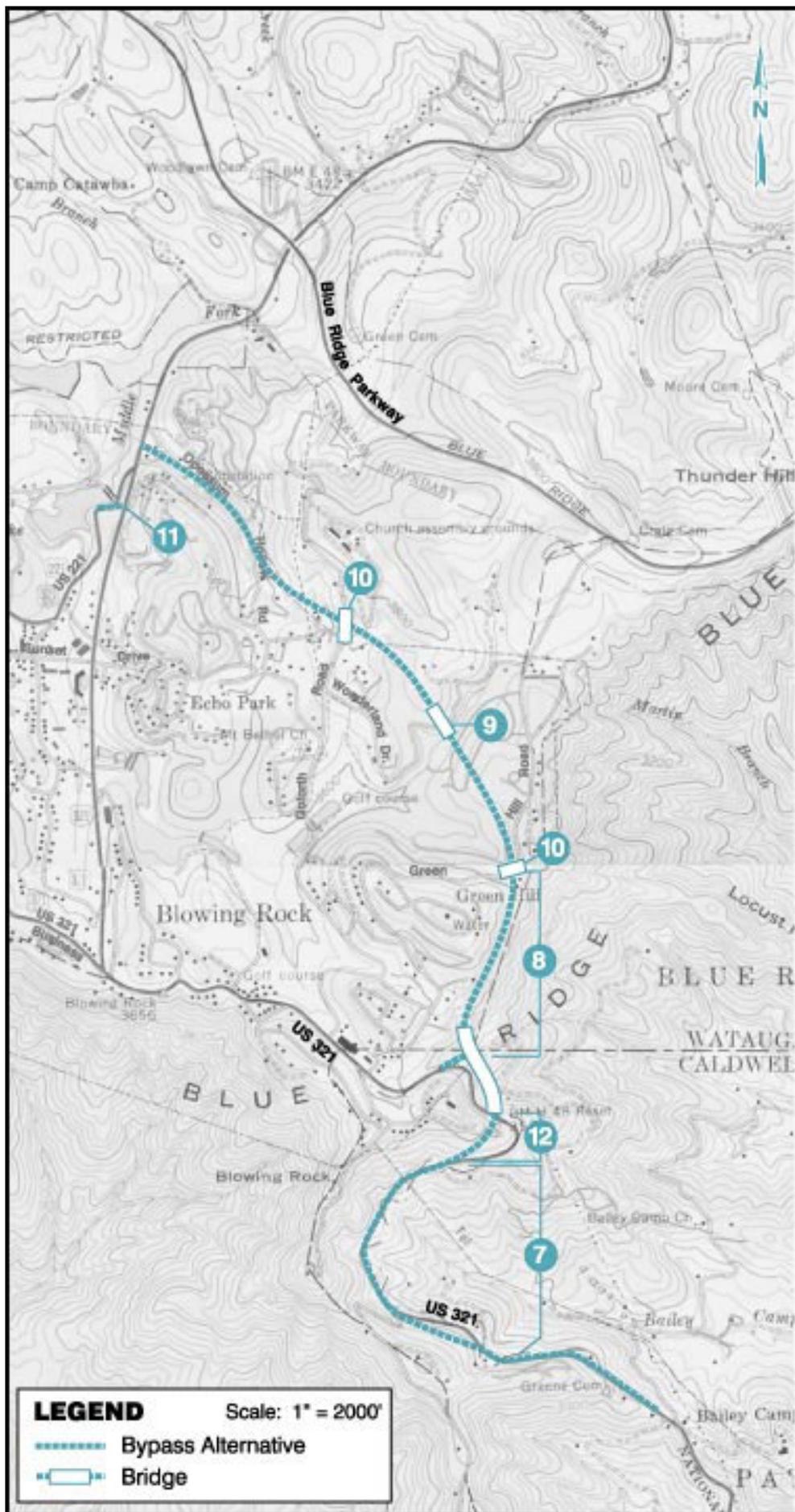
The Widening Alternative is similar to that presented at the 1994 public hearing. US 321 would be widened to four lanes along its existing route. ① In Blowing Rock, south of the intersection of US 321 and US 321 Business, it would be four lanes with no median, except at the Green Park Inn where a landscaped median is proposed. ② The sharp curves south of US 321 Business would be made less severe. ③ The US 321 Business and Skyland Drive intersections would be combined into a single signalized intersection, ④ and a landscaped median and left turn lanes are proposed along Valley Boulevard. ⑤ The 1994 design included large cuts into Gideon Ridge near the Blowing Rock. These cuts have been greatly reduced or eliminated. ⑥ Landscape plans for this alternative include sidewalks, rock walls, period lampposts, and underground utilities.



BYPASS ALTERNATIVE 1A

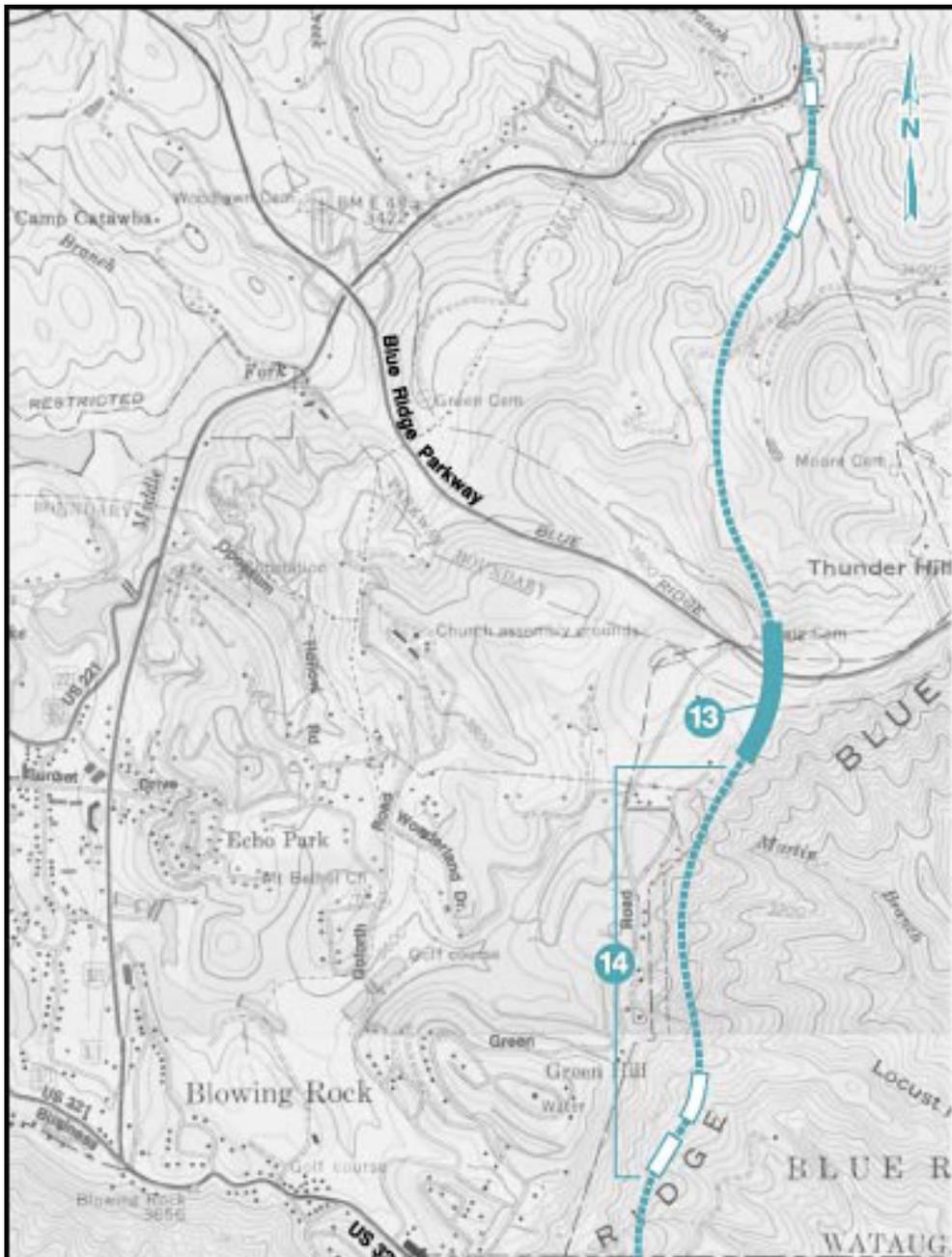
This alternative begins with widening the existing US 321 south of the Blowing Rock town limits until just south of Gideon Ridge.

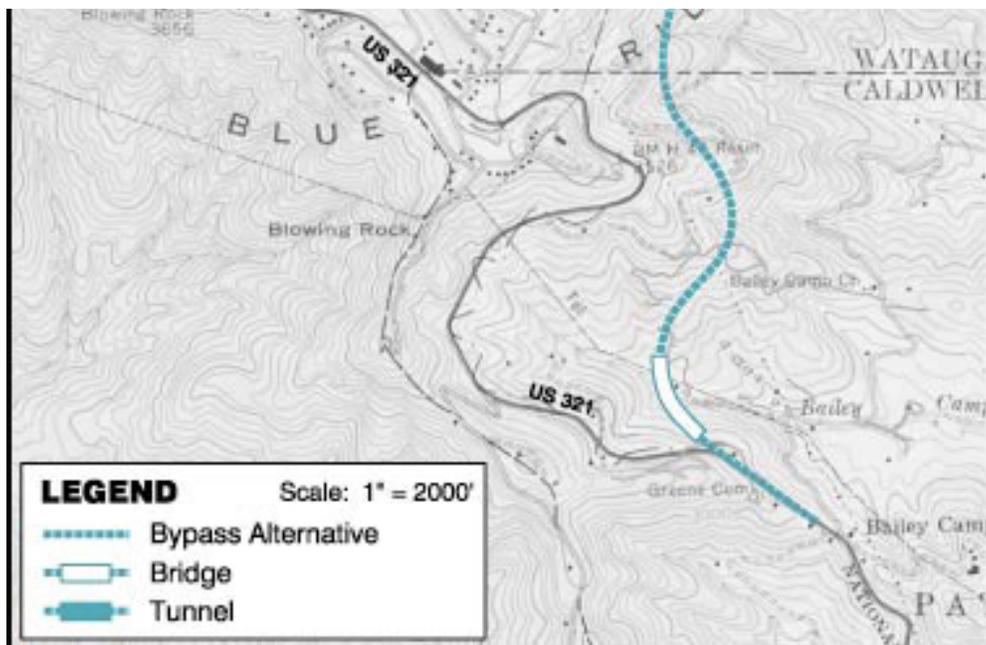
⑦ Here the design deviates from what the Widening Alternative proposes by making the curves in the road gentler all the way to the Blackberry Condominiums. ⑧ At Green Hill, a combination of bridges and retaining walls would minimize the disturbance to the hillside. ⑨ The new subdivision at Wonderland Wood Drive would be split by this alternative. A bridge at Wonderland Wood Drive and Wonderland Drive will provide access between the two parts of the subdivision. ⑩ Bridges would carry both Green Hill Road and Goforth Road over the bypass. ⑪ Because of the heavy traffic in the US 221/Shoppes on the Parkway area, the existing US 221 intersection would be moved south to the Westview Drive area, while the bypass would intersect with the Shoppes on the Parkway entrance. This separation and the additional turn lanes would help ease traffic congestion.



BYPASS ALTERNATIVE 1B

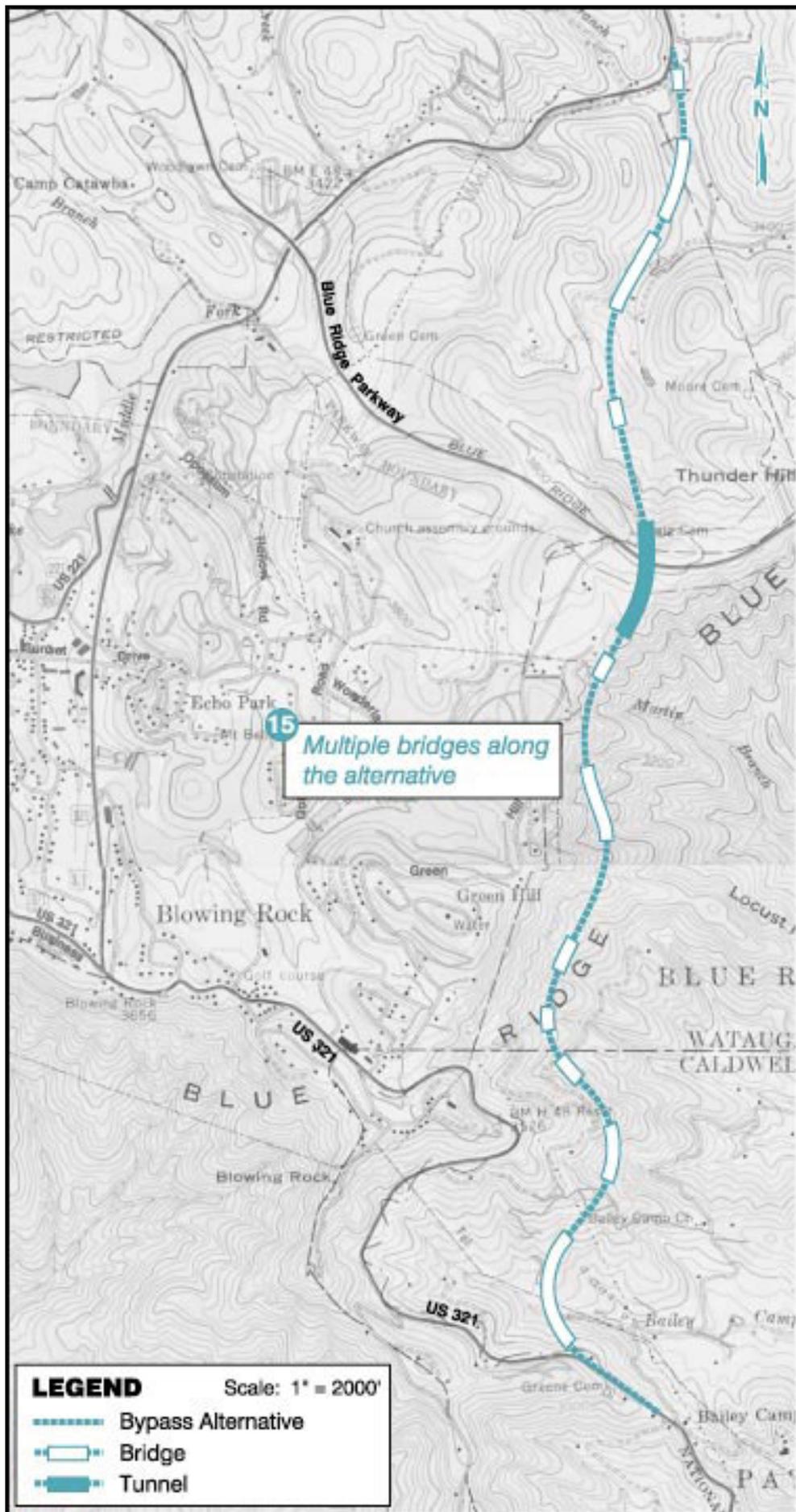
12 This design option is identical to Bypass Alternative 1A with one notable exception: the hairpin curve at the Blackberry Condominiums would be straightened. With this feature, all of the curves of Bypass Alternative 1B would meet the engineering design criteria. Without this feature, southbound traffic would come down hill on a steep grade that ends with a sharp curve. The study team believed that providing an option that avoids this undesirable situation was important. However, this option presented undesirable and severe impacts, including a deep cut at the end of Gideon Ridge and the relocation of three additional homes. Thus, the decision was made to evaluate Alternatives 1A and 1B in full in the DEIS.





BYPASS ALTERNATIVE 4A

This design option is similar in alignment to the design option that was illustrated in the March 1999 video presentation, which can be viewed on the project website. The locations and designs of the cuts, fills, and retaining walls are different from the earlier design, taking into account the availability of more detailed topographic mapping and geological information gathered in 1998. ¹³ It includes a tunnel under the Blue Ridge Parkway and is outside the town limits of Blowing Rock. A primary objective of the design work was to “balance the earthwork.” The design team’s goal is to equalize the amount of earth and rock excavated with the amount of earth and rock used as fill. This minimizes the potential need to bring in additional material from other locations for fills or to dump waste in locations outside the project limits. ¹⁴ Displacement of the homes along the ridge between the existing road and the Blue Ridge Parkway is minimized through the use of bridges and retaining walls.



BYPASS ALTERNATIVE 4B

This design option was developed to minimize the visual impact on the Blue Ridge Parkway by minimizing the disturbance of land. One approach considered was placing the two directions of travel on two different levels (bifurcation), one higher on the slope than the other, with a retaining wall in between. However, the constant series of ridges on the slope, plus the very short distance available to separate the lanes and bring them back together before the tunnel, meant that very little reduction in the disturbance to the land could be achieved by this approach. Taking guidance from the Lynn Cove Viaduct solution on the Blue Ridge Parkway, a mostly bridge alternative was developed. **15** Bridges pass over most dips in the terrain. Cuts remain in some locations where high ridges protrude from the slope and project into the alignment of the bypass. Some fills remain to balance the earthwork. This design option would greatly reduce the disturbance of the vegetation along the slope followed by Bypass Alternative 4.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

Feel Free to Contact the Study Team

If you have any questions or wish to be added to our **newsletter mailing list**, please call John Page or Reggie Scales on our **toll-free project information line**, 1-800-263-2434. You may also **write the study team** at:

Ms. Missy Dickens, PE
Project Development and Environmental Analysis
Branch
NC Department of Transportation
1548 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1548

or

You also can e-mail your comments to BlowingRock321@dot.state.nc.us or visit the project's website at www.ncdot.org/projects/blowingrock321

Community groups and other stakeholders can arrange a small group meeting with the study team. Smaller groups can combine with other smaller groups to hold a joint meeting. The organization(s) sponsoring each meeting will be responsible for arranging a meeting site and notifying participants.

This newsletter is being sent to those who have requested to be on the mailing list in the past, as well as all property owners within 500 feet of the centerline of each of the proposed corridor

Mr. John Page, Project Manager
Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas, Inc.
909 Aviation Parkway, Suite 1500
Morrisville, NC 27560

alternatives. If you are not on this list, but would like to be, please contact John Page or Reggie Scales at the project phone number or e-mail address.

Information Line 1-800-263-2434
E-mail Address BlowingRock321@dot.state.nc.us
Website www.ncdot.org/projects/blowingrock321



Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas, Inc.
909 Aviation Parkway, Suite 1500
Morrisville, NC 27560

