



MEETING NOTES

Project: East Side Highway Environmental Assessment
Subject: Community Working Group Meeting #5
Date: April 14, 2011, 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.
Location: McLean County Government Center

Project Team Attendees: Jerry Payonk (CDI), John Lazzara (HDR), Linda Huff (Huff & Huff), Jamie Bents (Huff & Huff), Eric Schmitt (McLean County), and Gene Brown (Town of Normal)

Main topics discussed at the meeting are as follows:

1. Welcome (Jerry Payonk)

The project team staff introduced themselves and briefly explained their roles in the project. An overview of topics to be discussed at the meeting was presented.

2. Alternatives Development (John Lazzara)

The alternatives map was shown to the CWG. The map displayed 116 total alternatives comprised of different segment combinations. These combinations are comprised of three general areas: northern, middle, and southern areas. The alternatives were developed by the CWG and the Project Study Group (PSG) over the last several months.

a. East West Alternative

The volume/capacity ratio map for the project area was presented. Roadway segments shown in orange and red were projected to have volume/capacity ratios in excess of 1.0. Based on this modeling, some east-west roads identified by the project team for potential improvement include:

1. U.S. 150
2. Ireland Grove Road
3. Empire Street
4. Old Route 66

Comment 1: You may want to consider another alternative on Fort Jesse Road.

Project Team response: The east-west road selection was based on modeled capacity needs (v/c). The project team will look at this road.

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Comment 2: There is a problem traveling from east to west in this area, and this needs to be addressed. If a road is built on the east side, an east-west connection also needs to be improved.

Project team response: There are projects included in the long range plan that focus on east-west improvements beyond the project.

b. Transit Alternative

Existing transit on the east side was described. Existing transit options in the Bloomington-Normal Public Transit System with routes serving the ISU campus, Central Illinois Regional Airport, and the State Farm campuses.

The Transit Alternative consist of dedicated transit corridors along the existing Union Pacific/Amtrak rail line; the Norfolk Southern rail lines; Towanda-Barnes Road; US 150; Empire Street; General Electric Road; and Fort Jesse Road. These corridors would connect the east side to the various activity centers, existing bus routes, and the multi-modal center and each of these routes would include improved pedestrian and bicycle accommodations. The transit alternative that is the most robust and could meet the Purpose & Need of the project will be studied in detail.

Some considerations for the Transit Alternative would include: Commuter rail, light rail, bus rapid transit (express bus with or without dedicated lanes or signal preemption), streetcars/trolleys, and local bus service.

Comment 3: There is a problem traveling to the middle of town from the west side of town using transit.

Project Team response: The transit alternatives for this project were developed to complement the existing transit system and to provide access to other existing routes.

The project will consider all proposed transit improvements for the area, including planned high-speed rail projects. Transit alternatives could include bike/pedestrian access and park and ride lots.

c. Transit Systems Management/Travel Demand Management

Transportation Systems Management (TSM) consists of the management of existing facilities to optimize current system. Such improvements might include the installation of dedicated turn lanes, construction of spot geometric changes, or the adjustment of signal timing to increase capacity efficiency.

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Travel Demand Management (TDM) consists of policy decisions that affect travel behavior, such as ridesharing or flexible work hours.

The McLean County Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) contains a range of TSM and TDM options for the area; the project team will determine if any of the LRTP options can be used as alternatives for this project.

3. Alternatives Evaluation Criteria (Jerry Payonk)

With the meeting notice for CWG#5, a draft of the Evaluation Criteria Memo was attached. This memo identified the process for screening and eliminating ESH alternatives. Five steps for screening were summarized in the memo and presented for comment and discussion.

a. Initial Screening Evaluation

The first step consisted of the Initial Screening Evaluation. The purpose of this step was to eliminate unrealistic or non-feasible options. Three criteria for this step were identified:

1. Federally or state protected sites
2. CIRA vertical and horizontal clear zone
3. Divide or isolate a neighborhood or community

Comment 4: There is a move to create a database of conservation easements nationally. Only tax records can tell you where conservation easements are currently. Will any of that work fit into the initial screening?

Project Team response: Conservation easements would not be considered at this level of screening, but would be assessed later in the screening. The initial screening is a global level screening.

Comment 5: Each of the screening questions will be proposed to a segment or alternative?

Project Team response: Evaluation criteria will be applied to segments, and as segments are screened out, the alternatives that include that segment will be dropped.

Comment 6 (from CIRA): The airport clear zone is known as “imaginary surfaces” that extend out from the airport that need to remain clear for aircraft takeoff and landing. The three-dimensional shape of this clear zone varies between the east, west, north, and south.

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b. Purpose and Need Evaluation

The second step of the evaluation consists of the analysis of the alternatives with respect to meeting the project's Purpose & Need. In this step, alternatives are tested in their ability to accommodate managed growth, address regional and local mobility, and address regional and local access.

Comment 7: Leapfrog development is a function of economics. Leapfrog development may not happen just because a road is constructed.

Project Team response: Leapfrog development also may not occur if a corridor is located too far from the urban core.

Comment 8: Developers are behind the leapfrog development in the county. How realistic is it to use a road to constrain development when developers are developing leapfrog development anyway? The CWG then discussed several developments recently completed in the county in the project area.

Project Team response: Much of the developments discussed by the CWG are in the land use plan for year 2035.

The mobility and access components of this evaluation step are measured through miles and duration of travel between A and B destinations within the Bloomington-Normal area. A description of these points is summarized within the memo. Project team asked the CWG if any other A locations need to be included.

Comment 9: Add St. Joe Hospital (by Eastland Mall)

Project Team response: This can be added.

Comment 10: Has the project team spoken to the large employers to determine if their employees will be working at home or traveling, and to determine future hiring levels?

Project Team response: Our socioeconomics consultant (The al Chalabi Group) is currently working on this. The project team will use employment data provided by the employer where it can be provided.

Comment 11: Is the multimodal station in Normal considered as a destination point?

Project Team response: This can be added.

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Comment 12: There are other significant buildings on GE Road (corporate headquarters) that could be included as destination points. The project team should look at those businesses.

Project Team response: The locations selected are representative of destinations and will provide sufficient information to assess travel times.

Comment 13: Does the type of roadway proposed result in different results for these criteria?

Project Team response: Yes, and the project team will be performing different analyses for controlled access freeways, and partial access control expressways. When the CWG meets again, an update on this analysis will be provided.

A brief review of Traffic Analysis Zones (TAZ's) was presented. The region is divided into small geographic boundaries called TAZ's. The TAZ is the primary unit of analysis in a travel demand forecasting model. TAZ's contain socioeconomic information such as number of households, population, employment, etc. The Project Team's socioeconomic consultant has made some revisions to the TAZ in the area, and the regional planning commission is currently reviewing this.

c. Macro Analysis Evaluation

The third step of the evaluation consists of the Macro Analysis. In this step, quantitative measures for socioeconomic and environmental resource data are identified. Impacts will be assessed within a 500-foot wide corridor

As identified in Table 3 in the memo, the following resources are considered:

1. Water quality and water resources
2. Wetlands
3. Special waste
4. Forested area
5. T&E species
6. Residences
7. Businesses
8. Public facilities and services
9. Section 4(f) and 6(f)
10. Utilities
11. Utility infrastructure
12. Noise

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13. Agricultural – prime and important farmland, farmstead, severances, centennial/sesquicentennial farms, farms otherwise affected
14. Cultural resources
15. Design – right of way and termini connections
16. Traffic safety analysis

Comment 14: It would be good to determine the workforce impacted by an alternative rather than number of businesses.

Project Team response: TAZs address employment but not at a detailed level. Employment will be studied at a detailed level as screening continues.

The project team presented a demonstration of the alternative screening process identifying how thresholds for elimination are determined and how alternatives are screened out. A goal is to minimize as many impacts as possible. The process is documented and presented to the Federal agencies and reviewed in detail.

Comment 14: Are certain factors weighted?

Project Team response: We do not weight resource categories because different agencies would assess the importance of resources differently. We look for outliers on those alternatives with the greatest impacts to remove. We also do sensitivity screening to ensure that screening results would be the same regardless of the order the resources are assessed.

d. Alignment Analysis Evaluation

The fourth step of the evaluation consists of alignment analysis. For this step, the criteria are similar to those for the macro analysis; however the analysis now looks at a roadway alignment measuring approximately 200' in width, instead of the 500-foot corridor width used in the previous step.

Sustainability considerations are introduced in the alignment analysis. These considerations include right-of-way impacts, farmland preservation, watershed impacts (% impervious area that will be added to each watershed area and amount of affected riparian areas), highly erodible soils, and bike and pedestrian access.

Upon completion of the alignment analysis, the project team would look to present a limited number of alternatives to move forward with. The alternatives would be presented to the Federal Highway Administration

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(FHWA) for concurrence in February of 2012. If concurrence is received, the Project team would commence work on the draft Environmental Assessment with the objective of moving towards a single preferred alternative.

e. Environmental Assessment Evaluation

For this step in the evaluation, a limited number of remaining alternatives are evaluated in greater detail.

Comment 15: Is there a national norm for this type of process? How is this process compared to other areas that need transportation improvement across the state? The government can't pay for all needed projects.

Project Team response: Regardless of the project area, the project must be supported by a need. Funding decisions have to be made, but those decisions are made independently of this process.

Comment 16: Where in the process is it considered if the road will intersect with rail crossings?

Project Team response: IDOT policy that any four-lane or greater crossing will be a grade separated crossing. This will also be assessed in the safety analysis.

Comment 17: Has the 2035 land use plan been presented to the CWG before?

Project Team response: The land use plan is identified in Mclean County's Comprehensive Plan and has been presented to the CWG at prior meetings. The project team will bring the 2035 land use plan to future meetings for the CWG to view.

Comment 18: Why does the airport clear zone only have three legs?

Response from CIRA: The west approach to the airport does not have a precision approach.

4. Next Steps (Jerry Payonk)

- a. Continue refinement and development of alternatives
- b. April 2011: Purpose and need evaluation, start macro evaluation
- c. June 2011: CWG (June 9) and PSG (June 23) meetings, review work to date

{Postscript: The next CWG meeting date has been tentatively revised to be the evening of June 16th.}

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- d. July 2011: Alignment analysis evaluation
- e. August 2011: CWG and PSG update of ongoing work
- f. December 2011: CWG and PSG meetings
- g. February 2012: Reasonable range of alternatives presented to FHWA and NEPA/404 Merger Meeting.