



MEETING NOTES

Project: East Side Highway Environmental Assessment
Subject: Community Working Group Meeting #8
Date: June 6, 2013, 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.
Location: McLean County Arts Center

Project Team Attendees: Jerry Payonk (CDI), Antonio Acevedo (CDI), John Lazzara (HDR), Jamie Bents (H&H), Lindsay Birt (H&H)

Main topics discussed at the meeting are as follows:

1. Introduction (Jerry Payonk)

The presentation made at this meeting and the handout that was distributed, were the same as material presented at the Public Information Meeting (PIM) on June 19th, 2013 (6 – 8 pm). There were two identical presentations made at the PIM, followed by an open house with exhibits review and discussion.

2. Alternative Evaluation Process (Jerry Payonk)

- An updated socioeconomic analysis for the Bloomington-Normal area was presented.
 - The Bloomington-Normal Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) now has an unemployment rate of 5.8%. This is the lowest among Illinois MSAs. This rate has improved from 8.1%, the rate when the ESH EA process began.
 - The population of the Bloomington-Normal MSA continues to increase, and these two cities are among the five fastest-growing in Illinois.
- The alternative evaluation process that has taken place was reviewed:
 - 129 ESH alternatives were originally identified by the project team and Community Working Group (CWG).
 - The initial screening analysis reduced the number of alternatives to 93.
 - The purpose and need screening analysis reduced the number of alternatives to 85.
 - The macro screening analysis (500' wide ESH corridor) reduced the number of alternatives to 40.

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- The alignment analysis (ESH roadway alignments and interchanges) reduced the number of alternatives to 4.
- Four alternatives were considered in the Environmental Assessment (EA), the current phase of the project. The analysis of these four alternatives will be presented to the FHWA and resources agencies in September for their concurrence on the Preferred Alternative.
- The four alternatives considered in the EA analysis were reviewed. Geometric changes in the four alternatives have occurred since the alignment analysis, including a reduction in size for several interchanges, realigning the alternatives at Fort Jesse Road, modifying the type of interchange at Ireland Grove, moving the Towanda-Barnes interchange to Cheneys Grove Road and replacing the I-74 cloverleaf interchange with a trumpet interchange to reduce impacts.
- The Focus Working Groups (FWGs) and CWGs provided valuable input used in screening and revising alternatives.

3. Environmental Assessment Evaluation (Jerry Payonk)

- The EA analysis determined that alternatives using Northtown Road near I-55 (Alternatives 124 and 125) would have higher wetland impacts than alternatives using Ziebarth Road (Alternatives 126 and 127). It also showed that the interchange at I-55 associated with Alternatives 124 and 125 would be more complex, and therefore difficult and costly to construct compared to Alternatives 126 and 127.
- After Alternatives 124 and 125 were eliminated for reasons stated above, Alternatives 126 and 127 remained. Impacts for these two alternatives were less differentiating and it was less clear which alternative could be recommended as a Preferred Alternative. As a result, the Project Study Group (PSG) recommended additional public input on the remaining two alternatives.
- The environmental impacts for Alternatives 126 and 127 from the EA analysis were reviewed.
- A CWG member stated that it appeared that Alternative 127 impacted three times as much farmland as Alternative 126, due to the ESH cutting off access to farmland. Alternative 127 is aligned on CR 2000 N, and if that alternative is selected, another rural road needs to be developed east of CR 2000 N for farm traffic. Alternative 127 should be moved further east, and existing CR 2000 N should be left in place. The presentation needs to clearly state that 127 would require the

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removal of CR 2000 N, because the removal of this road affects farmers.

- John Lazzara (HDR) stated that moving Alternative 127 east would preserve CR 2000 N, but it would require greater use of farmland.
 - *Postscript: This comment assumes the ESH alternatives will not provide east-west access. The ESH will provide east-west access, using either underpasses or overpasses. The comment regarding CR 2000 N is accurate.*
- A CWG member asked if there is funding to build a new north-south rural road to replace CR 2000 N. The member also commented that if there needs to be an ESH, it appears that the two alternatives left are the two alternatives that should be considered.
 - The need for a new north-south rural road will be considered in the EA.
- A CWG member asked if the EA analysis considered the wetland restoration at The Grove.
 - Jamie Bents (H&H) stated that the EA analysis did not consider this impact (the analysis to select the Preferred Alternative considered direct impacts to wetlands), but this will be studied for the Preferred Alternative. The project team will study the water quality effects of the Preferred Alternative and recommend Best Management Practices (BMPs) for that alternative.
 - Lindsay Birt (H&H) stated that a pollutant loading assessment will be completed for the Preferred Alternative so BMPs can be identified.
- A CWG member asked if the PIM would have an open question-and-answer session following the presentation.
 - Jerry Payonk stated that there are two formal presentations that night, and in order to have time for both, questions will be discussed during the open house portion of the meeting.
- A CWG member asked if the aerial photography used for mapping could be updated to show current development.

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Postscript: Aerial was updated to Bing maps with 2012 imagery.

- A CWG member asked if the No Build Alternative is still an option.
 - Jerry Payonk stated that the No Build Alternative does not satisfy the Purpose and Need Statement. If it was determined that the impacts of the Build Alternatives outweigh the No Build Alternative's inability to satisfy the Purpose and Need for the project, then the No Build Alternative would be selected.
- A CWG member stated that the ESH should not be constructed, and that an elevated roadway over Veterans Parkway should be constructed. The member stated that the ESH infringes upon people's right to own property and will redistribute land to developers cheaply by paying current property owners lower prices than what is fair.
- A CWG member said that he believes some local politicians are against the ESH and the current land use plan's future development areas. Had any local politicians requested changing the land use plan to allow less fringe development and include farmland protection areas?
 - Eric Schmitt (McLean County) stated he had not heard of any such request. The land use plan shows growth to the east because the improvements to The Grove made a large part of the east side of the metropolitan area easier to develop due to sewer improvements.

4. Other

- Public comments are now sought for Alternative 126 and 127. The CWG and public can provide comments by e-mail, the project website, comment forms, phone, or fax. The public comment period ends July 3.
- The ESH Environmental Assessment is expected to be completed in 2014. Due to the project's cost, it is anticipated that the project will become an IDOT project; it is currently under the jurisdiction of McLean County. If the ESH comes under IDOT jurisdiction when the EA is completed, it is expected that a centerline for the ESH will be mapped to protect the corridor from future development. After this time, final design, land acquisition, and construction would occur, although none of these phases currently have funding. There will be acquisition funding for "hardship" cases that apply to IDOT, such as properties that are trying to sell but can't sell because the ESH corridor will impact the property.