

Eastern Bypass Study Community Advisory Group

Eastern Bypass Study

From Interstate 74 to Illinois Route 6
Peoria, Tazewell and Woodford Counties
Job No. P-94-021-07; Catalog No. 033514-00P

MEETING SUMMARY

Community Advisory Group Meeting #4 April 2, 2009

The fourth meeting of the Eastern Bypass Study Community Advisory Group (CAG) was held at the Countryside Banquet Facility, in Washington, on Thursday, April 2, 2009 at 6:00 P.M.

Representing IDOT's Study Team for the Eastern Bypass Project were the following individuals:

- Eric Therkildsen (IDOT District Four Program Development Engineer)
- Mike Lewis (IDOT Eastern Bypass Study Team Leader)
- Tom Lacy (IDOT)
- Maureen Addis (IDOT)
- Paula Green (IDOT)
- Dave Zawada (H.W. Lochner, Inc.)
- Jeff Schlotter (H.W. Lochner, Inc.)
- Dennis Jennings (Technology of Participation (ToP) Network)
- Judy Weddle (Technology of Participation (ToP) Network)
- George Ghareeb (TERRA Engineering, Ltd.)
- Scott Presslak (TERRA Engineering, Ltd.)
- Sande Wilke (TERRA Engineering, Ltd.)

Presented below is a summary of the meeting, organized by the agenda items.

PART 1

Welcome Study Status and Agenda Overview

The meeting began with Jeff Schlotter opening the meeting and reviewing the agenda for the evening. Jeff reminded the group of the analogy of a three-legged stool to envision the three categories of information required to establish a solid base for developing alternative corridor locations (the categories being: valued community elements, traffic analysis, and environmental resource mapping). Jeff stated that the first leg of the stool is now complete, and the other two are nearly complete.

Jeff then reintroduced the funnel-shaped diagram that illustrates the Eastern Bypass Study process. He reminded the group that a funnel is a good analogy because the study starts out with a broad level of analysis, and progressively gets more detailed and narrow in its focus. Jeff pointed out how the graphic shows that the Study is now at the point where a problem statement needs to be developed.

The floor was then opened for questions or comments on the previous meeting and the summary notes prepared for it. In response, Keith Bachman (Community Impacts) suggested that the Stakeholder Involvement Plan (SIP) be modified to allow for voting by the CAG members on all matters that require consensus. A question was then raised by the CAG as to whether voting was intended in the CSS process. Eric Therildsen (IDOT) clarified that voting was not envisioned because the process being used at CAG meetings allows for the entire Group to analyze the ideas from all in the Group and, through discussion, reach conclusions on the best course of action -- in other words, reach consensus. Also, not all CAG members are able to attend every meeting.

The question was then asked if consensus was understood to be a lack of opposition, or as a majority position, and, if it is the latter, would it not be okay to have voting. Norman Durlinger (Village of Morton) was against the idea of voting, saying that voting would polarize the group, as opposed to trying to reach consensus, which would bring the group together. Carey French (Caterpillar Inc.) pointed out that if voting was included, the CAG would also need to define "majority" in terms of voting. Randall Jacobs (Property Impacts) said that a vote is a more demonstrative form of reaching consensus, and that without something demonstrative it can be hard to determine whether or not a consensus was reached. A comment was made that consensus without voting may allow the group to act on a decision that may not have actually had a consensus. William Belshaw (Village of Metamora) pointed out that the CAG has already reached consensus on other issues thus far, and cited the fact that the Group is continuing to proceed as proof that consensus is being reached.

At this point, Jeff Schlotter noted that not much decision making has actually been required so far in the study, as the prior CAG meetings were mostly about gathering input from the CAG members for use by the Project Study Team (PST), but that this would change as corridors are drafted and will need to be discussed and agreed upon. A CAG member said that it is implicitly stated in the consensus process that it is the responsibility of each CAG member to speak up if they have an objection, and therefore any silence from the group can be taken as a form of agreement with no objections or nothing further to add to the conversation. Karl Bryning (Property Impacts) asked about who carries the "burden of proof" regarding a consensus, and the danger that if silence implies a consensus, the group may move forward in the process with an actual non-consensus.

Jeff stressed that while the Group's role in the study process is advisory, intended to help the Project Study Team select the best corridor for the Eastern Bypass, the CAG's role in the CSS process is more elevated than that of the general public, and IDOT is very

interested in ensuring a consensus on the CAG is reached, as opposed to the “decide-announce-defend” approach often taken by public agencies in the past. He further explained that the CSS process is designed to allow for intellectually honest discussion between IDOT and the stakeholders, with opportunities for everyone to speak in an open manner. The aim of the CSS process is to ensure that everyone can express their thoughts and opinions with the assurance that they were heard and considered by IDOT and the Group as a whole, and further, that even if their opinions did not prevail, they were not just “swept under the rug.” Jeff elaborated that it is important to remember that the ultimate decision-making power is IDOT’s, but IDOT heavily factors the advice of the CAG. Voting may be an option if the group is stuck in a “log-jam,” but every effort should be made beforehand to reach a compromise such that some may have to give up a little but everyone can live with the end result.

Keith Bachman said that it seems unclear when the CAG is ready to make a consensus decision, noting that the CAG technically reached consensus on the SIP but that it was hard to realize when the consensus was reached. Keith added that the CAG’s role is to act as a liaison between the Project Study Team and the stakeholders of the area, and he does not want to go back to the stakeholders without notable results, otherwise the process seems too vague and “cloaked.” Jeff said the goal of the CSS process is to avoid being cloaked, and, in fact, to be as transparent as possible.

A suggestion was offered from a CAG member that the Study Team clearly announce those times when a formal consensus is being sought, stating that this would allow the topic to be resolved while not resorting to a formal vote. Jeff said this might be a good solution. Keith added that when the group comes to a point of consensus, IDOT ask for additional questions or comments.

Michael Godar (Economic Impacts) asked how the CAG will communicate the degree of agreement (or disagreement) with a corridor once corridors begin being selected, adding that thus far the process has been very objective, but by human nature the corridor selection process will become more subjective as members begin to express NIMBY (“Not In My Back-Yard”) concerns. He noted that members were to approach the study process with an open mind and honest participation. Jeff said that the CAG will address this concern once the corridor selection begins. Eric added that corridors are flexible and that any “lines on paper” are not definite and will be tailored to address issues.

At this point, Jeff asked if the group can agree to a solution in which the Project Study Team states when it feels consensus needs to be reached on a given topic, and then ask for further discussion to ensure that all have a chance to be heard. Jeff further asked if this provision should be added to the SIP. The CAG agreed, with the understanding that the provision would be added to the SIP.

PART II

Development of the Study's Problem Statement

Jeff then turned to the next agenda item, stating the main objective of tonight's meeting is to work on the draft problem statement for the Eastern Bypass Study. The problem statement, according to IDOT's CSS process, is a written declaration of the problems a project is intended to solve. The CAG's development and endorsement of the problem statement is a key part of the CSS process. The problem statement provides a measure against which proposed solutions can be compared, and it provides a starting point for the official Purpose & Need statement required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in the next phase of the study process.

To provide a better understanding of the project and its history, Maureen Addis, of IDOT, gave a brief history of the Eastern Bypass concept, dating back to a 1968 East Peoria Comprehensive Plan that included a limited access, north-south street on the east side of East Peoria. In 1972 a study was performed for construction of a highway from the Illinois Central College area south to a point just west of the Interstate 74/474 interchange, coordinating with a similar Pekin bypass project. An Eastern Bypass was identified as a priority in 1995 as a result of the feasibility study for the Heart of Illinois Highway (a Peoria to Chicago Highway). The study included three Peoria-to-Chicago corridors and three eastern bypass corridors, which also included a new Illinois River crossing. Building upon the 1995 study, a Major Investment Study for an eastern bypass was conducted in 1996, which was required at the time by Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) policy. A 1998 "Ring Road" corridor study selected a corridor for the highway, corridor B5. It was during this study that the attention was shifted from the Peoria-to-Chicago highway to the ring road; however, the project did not progress past the 1998 study. In 2002, the "ring road" was again identified as a transportation priority in the region by a transportation symposium.

A CAG member asked if the Peoria-to-Chicago highway was also brought up as a priority in the 2002 symposium. Mike Lewis, IDOT's Team Leader for the current study, said that the Peoria-to-Chicago Highway and the Eastern Bypass were consistently the top two priorities at the region's symposiums. Eric Therkildsen added that there was not discussion as to whether the two highway projects could be completed independent of each other, or if the two should be studied together. However, the Peoria-to-Chicago highway project was put on hold in favor of improving Illinois 29 from Chillicothe to Interstate 180 west of Hennepin.

Maureen mentioned the supplemental freeway system studies of the 1960s and 1970s, and Eric noted that nearly all the four-lane highway studies in IDOT - District 4 were previously supplemental freeway studies.

A CAG member asked if the Pekin and East Peoria bypasses from the 1972 study were still being looked at. Maureen said the Pekin bypass is currently underway and the East Peoria corridor is not being looked at as high-capacity roadway facility.

Maureen said that the Illinois 29 study is in its final stages, waiting on the final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and receiving a Record of Decision (ROD). Eric noted that Corridor A of the Peoria-to-Chicago study was actually 5-8 miles west of Illinois 29 and the improvements on Illinois 29 are not technically the Peoria-to-Chicago project.

Jeff said the history of the project is important to put things in context, to refresh peoples' memories, and to allow others who may not have been aware of this history to see what has gone on before.

Jeff then moved on to the topic of IDOT's responsibility for safety and mobility. Jeff noted that while safety and mobility are the key objectives of IDOT projects, the CSS process builds upon those two objectives by seeking ways to maintain or enhance scenic, economic, historic, or aesthetic features of the area.

With that introduction, Jeff presented to the Group some information about traffic accidents in the Bypass study area, noting that officially, traffic accidents are called "crashes." He then discussed the Crash Locations Map that was on display at the meeting, stating that crash data can sometimes be an important factor in deciding corridor locations. The map shows locations with a high frequency of severe crashes, as defined by IDOT statewide policy. Jeff noted that crash data will continue to be compiled and processed throughout the study process. Eric added that IDOT analyzes each location to seek possible engineering improvements; however, the CAG members can help identify locations that remain troublesome with respect to crashes and locations that may not be able to be improved without major new construction.

Following this explanation, Jeff turned to the topic of mobility, explaining information contained on a Traffic Data map that was distributed to CAG members. The map contains information on existing traffic volumes and 2045 volume predictions. The map also shows Level-of-Service (LOS) for intersections today and predicted LOS for 2045. Existing volumes were based on actual traffic counts, with a computer model used to predict volumes in 2045. The year 2045 was chosen as a target date based on IDOT's practice of making forecasting estimates 20 years after the proposed completion date for a facility. [Note: there is no actual completion date for the project, but one is assumed for planning purposes.] Jeff then defined the term "Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT)" as measure of the average traffic on a roadway on any given day in the year without factoring seasonal traffic, weekends/weekdays, etc. He also defined level-of-service (LOS) as a qualitative way to describe the amount of traffic at an intersection, based on a grading scale from A to F, with A being no congestion, to F, which describes conditions approaching gridlock. Jeff also mentioned that the traffic data will continue to be refined as the study progresses.

Jeff then invited the Group to begin the problem statement exercise by referring members to information from the benefits exercise conducted at CAG Meeting 3. Jeff mentioned that the impacts data generated at that same meeting was inadvertently omitted and would be mailed the CAG members the following week, adding that the impacts data is not necessary

for the problem statement exercise. Jeff asked that the CAG keep in mind the benefits of the highway, however, while thinking about the problem statement.

The floor was then turned to Dennis Jennings (one of the Study Team's two facilitators), who began the problem statement session. Dennis stated that CAG members would be working on the exercise with the members at their respective tables. Tables 6 and 7 were combined because enough members were missing at those tables that they could be made into one group.

Dennis explained that, to help the CAG get started, IDOT prepared a version of a problem statement. Dennis stressed that the problem statement is not final. It is available for modification by the group. It is, however, based on what IDOT felt it was hearing through the work of the CAG in its benefits exercise, as well as based upon previous studies and IDOT experience in the region. Dennis read the problem statement aloud, noting that it is made of broadly formed phrases which might encompass several ideas:

“The problems to be addressed by a new transportation facility within the study area include: increased future transportation demands, limited regional access and mobility, diminished safety with the existing transportation network, reduced economic stability, and impeded regional economic development potential.”

Dennis pointed out how the work done in February by the CAG is reflected in these phrases. He demonstrated how the items from the benefits list fit under the phrases of the problem statement. He then asked the group to discuss the problem statement one phrase at a time and suggest changes if they felt revisions are needed or to note that no changes are recommended, if that were the case.

At this point, CAG member Karl Bryning asked if the group reached a consensus that there is a problem the Eastern Bypass would solve, or if the Group is expected to simply assume there is a problem that requires a new highway to solve. Dennis responded that this exercise is intended to help identify the problems in the area. Eric added that there needs to be a clear understanding of the transportation problem that is being solved before the decision can be made to build a transportation facility. He noted the Eastern Bypass project has been around in some form since the 1960s, and prior studies have identified problems that necessitate a new highway.

Eric noted that the problem statement IDOT drafted for tonight's meeting was based on purpose and need statements from the past studies, as well as on issues already brought up by the CAG. Eric clarified that if a community cannot receive a desired benefit, then that might be considered a problem. The problem statement is used to identify problem areas and is used to analyze corridor options. The goal of the study is to find the best possible facility location and design, the benefits of which would be weighed against the negative impacts in order to make a decision whether to build the project or not. The problem statement endorsed by the CAG would also be used later in developing the purpose and need statement.

A CAG member asked if they [any CAG member] felt one of the phrases didn't apply or isn't a problem, could they suggest deleting the phrase. Eric confirmed that yes, this is an option.

CAG member Michael Godar asked how the CAG's prior input on impacts works into the problem statement. Jeff differentiated between the two by noting that the problem statement deals with issues that exist currently, or are predicted to exist in the future, in the study area, while the impacts are defined as the detrimental or negative effects as a result of the construction of the project itself.

CAG member Stephen Van Winkle (City of Peoria) asked if there was any formal way to analyze the economic issues in the area that would help in the decision-making process. Eric said that there is a possibility that IDOT will partially fund an independent economic development study to see how the highway might factor into an overall economic development plan for the region. Vickie Clark (EDC for Central IL) asked if the group should be looking for economic value, whether it be positive or negative. Eric responded that, yes, the road may not solve all the problems, or that while satisfying problems on a more macro scale there may be micro problems, such as interfering with economic development in some areas or limiting mobility in some areas.

A comment was made regarding the difficulty of forecasting problems fifteen years into the future, especially with little direction on how to analyze and interpret study data, economic benefits and impacts, and other factors. Eric said that it's equally difficult for the Project Study Team to forecast that far ahead, too. To clarify, Eric said that traffic locations with a Level of Service (LOS) of D or worse are what IDOT typically seeks to remedy and that prior studies have identified the Eastern Bypass as an economically feasible manner to improve the road network LOS, rather than piecemeal improvements at individual locations.

CAG member Ken Maurer (Community Impacts) suggested that the group look at the benefits of similar projects in the area, such as the U.S. 24 bypass in Washington and the widening of Illinois 116, and to remember how things were before those projects were built.

Bringing the discussion back to the problem statement exercise, Jeff pointed out that the problem statement does not serve as the official Purpose and Need statement for the NEPA process. The problem statement is a requirement in the IDOT CSS process to help determine purpose and need. The Purpose and Need statement will become a chapter in the study's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which is reviewed and, if done correctly, approved by the Federal Highway Administration before the project can continue. If it does not receive approval, the FHWA instructs IDOT to conduct additional analyses. A CAG member then asked if, without significant input from the CAG, the problem statement would be sent to the FHWA as it is written now. Eric clarified that IDOT does not submit the problem statement to FHWA; IDOT uses the problem statement as the foundation for the purpose and need chapter of the study's Environmental Impact Statement.

A CAG member stated that a highway or interchange does not always promote economic development, citing as an example the Goodfield interchange with Interstate 74, which has not generated the economic development that Goodfield originally thought it would lead to. He said economic development occurs where the people are located.

The CAG members were then instructed to discuss the various parts of the problem statement and, using the consensus-building “sticky wall” workshop method (used in prior meetings), submit their proposed changes (if any) to the various parts of the problem statement. Facilitator Judy Weddle conducted the workshop.

Upon completing the exercise, Jeff said the Study Team would note the results of the sticky wall exercise, refine the IDOT’s draft problem statement, based on the received input, and would mail an updated draft to CAG members for discussion at the next CAG meeting.

PART III

Introduction to the Initial Corridor Mapping Exercise

Jeff announced that at the next CAG meeting, which is scheduled for Thursday, May 7 at 6:00 P.M., the group will begin the corridor development process. He noted that CAG members will be submitting their own ideas on where to begin drawing alternative corridors for the project. He also noted that once initial corridors are in place, the traffic forecasting model can be processed again to see the effect each of the corridors would have on future traffic patterns, which may, in turn, result in modifications to the corridor locations.

Three large-sized maps (1 inch = 0.5 miles) were then distributed to the CAG members. These included a base map, a “constraints” map with an aerial background, and a constraints map without an aerial. Jeff told the CAG members to feel free to begin marking up the maps with ideas on corridor locations, keeping in mind the 3000-foot scale included on the maps when considering the width of the corridors. He asked the CAG to consider all the things that have been discussed, as these will provide a foundation to start drawing corridors. Jeff noted that the May CAG meeting would include finishing the problem statement work and continuing with the corridors identification process.

PART IV

Meeting Wrap-up and Open Discussion

Jeff asked the group for any other comments or concerns. CAG member Keith Bachman recommended setting a more flexible agenda for future meetings, noting that some members get restless during extensive discussions, which can impede the progress of the group. Jeff thanked Keith for his feedback on the study process and welcomed questions and comments about the CAG meeting process and not just project-related issues.

Eric closed the meeting just before 9:00 pm, encouraging members to review the various maps that were on display and that were distributed to the members.