

Interstate 55 Reconstruction

Environmental Assessment & Design Study (Sangamon County, IL)

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Stakeholder & Public Involvement Plan



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I. Overview

1.1 Introduction

The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) is preparing a design study that involves an environmental assessment for the portion of Interstate 55 (I-55) that is in the vicinity of Springfield, in Sangamon County. This three-year study will examine ways to improve the interstate's capacity and will provide preliminary engineering for additional lanes and for the reconstruction of five of the study's seven interchanges. The project study area generally starts at the section of I-55 beginning at the Business 55 loop at Sherman and continues to just south of the Sixth Street interchange. Leading the study team for this project will be IDOT and its consultant Hanson Professional Services, Inc.

1.2 Project Background

The new I-55 study is the latest component of a long-term effort by IDOT to address traffic flow issues along I-55 around Springfield. Traffic congestion and public safety have been chief among the agency's concerns as it seeks to modernize a highway whose design can no longer accommodate increasing traffic volumes. The reconstruction study will explore adding to the existing four-lane interstate as a means of eliminating delays at busy points. It will also look at ways to improve the area's interchanges so that they meet modern design standards.

1.3 Stakeholder & Public Involvement Plan – Purpose & Approach

The successful reconstruction of I-55 in the Springfield area and Sangamon County requires the involvement of community stakeholders and citizens throughout the planning process. The purpose of this document is to present a comprehensive approach to engaging impacted stakeholders and the general public in the I-55 reconstruction study. As such, it describes goals, objectives and tactics for advancing public awareness, comprehension, and participation in study activities. These components form the study's Stakeholder & Public Involvement Plan (SPIP) and are subject to modification in response to changing internal demands and external realities.

Context Sensitive Solutions

The content featured in this SPIP is guided by IDOT's commitment to the development of Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS). As an approach, CSS is an interdisciplinary planning method that uses meaningful stakeholder involvement and flexible design to generate transportation solutions that respond to a project or study's community context. Stakeholder and public engagement is critical to this approach because the insights gained help the study team devise alternatives that preserve and enhance the community's social, economic, and environmental assets, while furthering transportation goals like increased public safety and mobility.

Guiding Principles

In addition to following CSS protocols, the SPIP adheres to long-established public involvement principles that inform the scope and design of the study's outreach and engagement program. When practiced, these principles work to ensure that the program 1) adopts a process that is open and responsive to the different interests affected by interstate reconstruction; and 2) yields meaningful stakeholder and public participation in the study's decision-making. These principles, which include sustainability, transparency, accessibility, representation and results, are expounded upon below.

- **Sustainability**: Compels the study team to rely upon existing communications and outreach channels to raise awareness and involvement among community members and stakeholders. Working through established networks (like regularly scheduled civic, neighborhood and business association meetings) assures that trusted means of connection will be used to reach affected publics; fosters relationships with local community groups and organizations; and contains project expenses by decreasing reliance upon advertising and costly communications channels.

- **Transparency**: Works to make the planning process clear and easy to follow. The roles and responsibilities of the study team, stakeholder groups and the public at-large will be plainly and repeatedly articulated in order to manage expectations. Process participants will understand the part that they play in shaping reconstruction alternatives and all agendas will be revealed. In addition, planning activities and events will be well publicized so that the public has ample notice of participation opportunities.

- **Accessibility**: Maintains multiple points of entry into the planning process. Affected publics and stakeholder groups will be given a variety of ways to get involved from completing motorist surveys to attending public information meetings to participating in business roundtables. No matter when people enter into the planning process, they will be able to understand the logic of events and activities. As a result, they will be able to participate with ease and can provide input at various stages of study decision-making.

- **Representation**: Means that a broad range of stakeholder and community interests will be taken into consideration throughout the planning process. Citizens' issues, concerns and ideas will help guide plan outcomes. Here, representation is defined both in terms of demography – that is participants' physical and social characteristics (i.e. race, ethnicity, property ownership, etc.) and interest area– that is what motivates participants to get involved (i.e., residential, commercial, environmental or political concerns, etc.). This approach attempts to invite all facets of the community, from the “easy to reach” to the “hard to reach” into the planning process.

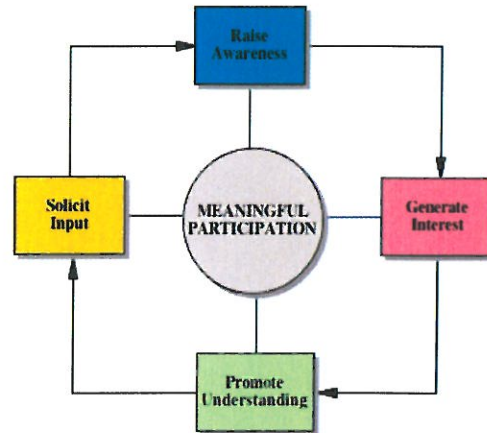
- **Results:** Focus the study team on implementing a proactive public involvement program that is aligned with IDOT's project goals and effectively anticipates and responds to community needs.

By following these guiding principles, the study team will undertake a proactive involvement process that facilitates constructive exchanges of information and ideas between the public and the study's decision makers. This process will provide community stakeholders with multiple opportunities to share their comments and concerns about project objectives, alternatives and activities as well as improve the study team's understanding of and response to any issues raised.

II. Public Involvement Goals & Objectives

2.1 Involvement Program Goal

The central aim of the I-55 reconstruction study's public involvement program is to obtain the Springfield community's meaningful participation. Accomplishing this requires that stakeholders and the public have an appreciation of study facts as well as an understanding of major project decisions and their implications. More specifically, meaningful participation is most likely to occur when the involvement program increases project awareness among stakeholders and the general public; stimulates people's interest in the study's activities and findings; deepens comprehension of the study and its eventual outcomes; and solicits constructive public input. These objectives are described below in greater detail.



2.2 Involvement Program Objectives

Raising Awareness

Expanding the community's awareness of IDOT's interstate improvement efforts in Springfield requires the study team to provide clear, accurate and easily attainable information on the study's purpose and need, existing highway conditions, improvement alternatives and desired outcomes. To achieve this, the study team will:

- Develop and maintain an excellent working relationship with IDOT so that all public information needs are expertly addressed and proper communications protocols are established;
- Participate in regular planning and coordination meetings with IDOT to assure the accuracy of information products and communiqués;
- Employ a variety of communications vehicles to deliver reliable, timely project information to the public and regularly engage stakeholders through person-to-person interfaces; and
- Work with local media organizations and information outlets to maximize the study's community exposure and positive media coverage.

Generating Interest

While public information and awareness activities will deepen the community's knowledge of the study, they will not, by themselves, guarantee the public's interest in interstate reconstruction. Getting people to care about the study means first helping them

to understand how highway conditions impact their quality of life. By focusing on the outcomes that matter most to people like reduced traffic congestion, faster travel times, and greater public safety, the study team will shape a project identity that firmly establishes the study's relevance.

Promoting Understanding

Once community members are aware of and interested in the study, the team will need to intensify its explanation of project issues as well as deepen its comprehension of stakeholders' values, needs and priorities. Through community meetings and other communications vehicles, the study team will facilitate the public's learning about key project components, including:

- Existing and future interstate conditions;
- Study team responsibilities and deliverables;
- Study requirements, process, and schedule;
- Reconstruction alternatives (lane additions and interchange reconfigurations); and
- IDOT's activities after the study's completion.

Since different people have different learning styles, the study team will present the project information outlined above in multiple formats (ex. visual, audio, electronic, etc.). This promotes greater understanding among a wide array of people with various educational attainment levels, professional training and learning abilities. Whatever the information format, study team members will maintain two-way lines of communication with stakeholders and the public so that they not only impart project information, but also listen to people's thoughts about the study and its findings.

Soliciting Input

The study team's work to educate the community about I-55 reconstruction efforts and planning activities will be an ongoing part of the public involvement program and is necessary to prepare the public to provide input into the process. The more informed stakeholders and community members are about the study, the more likely they are to generate feedback that is helpful and insightful. To solicit stakeholder and community input, the study team will:

- Regularly convene a study Advisory Committee (see page 12 for more details) comprised of members of the public and leaders from various stakeholder groups;
- Maintain open communication with civic and business interests, elected officials, motorists, neighborhood associations, affected subdivisions, environmental groups *et.al.*;
- Hold public information meetings and if needed, meetings will be held on a smaller scale with, for example, affected property owners; and

- Employ a host of communication channels such as comment forms, email messaging, direct mail notifications, an interactive project website and others.

Viewed broadly, the I-55 public involvement program is designed to cultivate the public's trust in IDOT's stewardship of an important community asset. This trust is fostered over time, through an accountable and responsive public involvement program that clearly connects the study's work to important community needs.

III. Stakeholder Identification & Involvement Approach

3.1 Stakeholder Identification Procedures

One of the first and most critical steps of the SPIP is to identify project stakeholders. A stakeholder is defined as any person or organization interested in or directly affected by the study's activities. This usually includes, but is not limited to, residents or property owners, neighborhood or subdivision groups, business owners and operators, elected/community officials, governmental resource agencies, special interest groups, religious and civic institutions, and motorists who travel along the study corridor. Stakeholders for the I-55 reconstruction study will be identified using background information from other area studies, input from local community leaders, IDOT, and Internet searches.

Below is a list of potential stakeholders:

- Residents and neighborhood groups adjacent to the study area. These include, *but are not limited to*:
 - Hazel Dell Neighborhood Association
 - Lake Springfield Neighborhood Association
 - North End Neighborhood Association (Village of Sherman)
 - West of I-55 at Ridgely Road (group of homes)
 - West of I-55 at Crabapple Lane (group of homes)
 - Pheasant Run Mobile Home Park (west of I-55 at Cook Street)
 - West of I-55 at Stevenson Drive
 - West of West Lake Shore Drive
- Residents of Springfield and Sangamon County
- Businesses adjacent to the study area. These include, but are not limited to:
 - Capital City Shopping Center (Big Lots, AMC Theater, Hallmark, Panera, Radio Shack, Jo-Ann Fabric, etc.)
 - Big box stores along Dirksen Parkway and Sixth Street (ex. Walmart SuperCenter, Lowe's, Menard's, Kmart)
 - Hotel services industry – restaurants, gas stations, hotels, etc. There are more than 1,400 hotel rooms in the study area.
- Business groups and associations (ex. Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Springfield Inc., Springfield Black Chamber of Commerce, Capital Area Association of Realtors)
- Motorists
- Truck drivers and truck service providers. These include, but are not limited to:
 - Mid-West Truckers Association Inc.
 - Road Ranger Truck Stop #222
 - RailSplitter rest area
 - Truck terminals

- Elected/community officials
- Environmental groups (ex. Sustainable Springfield, The Sangamon Valley Group of the Sierra Club, Springfield Bicycle Club)
- Unions (ex. Teamsters Local 916, Central Illinois Building and Construction Trades Council, *et.al.*)
- Educational and religious organizations (ex. Springfield Public Schools District 186, Faith Coalition for the Common Good, Springfield Ministerial Alliance)
- Emergency responders
- Area hospitals
- Civic/community organizations (ex. Citizens' Club of Springfield, City of Springfield Community Relations Commission, Hope In Action - The Springfield Project, NAACP of Springfield, Springfield Urban League)
- Springfield Green
- State and federal resource agencies

The abovementioned stakeholders are among a larger group of impacted and interested parties, many of whom will be identified through the study team's outreach and engagement efforts. All stakeholders will be entered into the study's database so that they can be kept abreast of project details and participation opportunities. These opportunities include the study advisory committee, public information meetings, business roundtables, elected officials briefings, study website, and project newsletters, among others.

3.2 Stakeholder Involvement Expectations

Meaningful connections with project stakeholders will help the study team develop transportation solutions that are context sensitive and community supported. Recognizing this, the team expects that stakeholders involved in study planning will: 1) share their project issues, concerns and priorities; 2) provide insight on effective public involvement and outreach strategies; and 3) help build public interest and involvement in the study. Those who sit on the study Advisory Committee will also be expected to serve as liaisons between their constituents and the study team, helping to deepen its understanding of and responsiveness to community needs and desires. Input received from stakeholders and the public will be incorporated into the study findings and considered by IDOT.

IV. Public Involvement Tools/Activities

The public involvement and communications activities presented on the following pages describe the core work of the SPIP and are the primary means by which its goals and objectives will be achieved. Responsibility for the coordination and execution of these activities rests with the study team.

4.1 Public Involvement Tasks

Background Research

The study team's first task is to review background information and documentation on the project and study area. Data sources include IDOT, previous studies, media outlets, community organizations and the Internet. Findings from the team's research will expand its knowledge and understanding of the study's context and provide valuable insights for its public involvement efforts.

Stakeholder & Public Involvement Plan

Information from the study team's background research will be used to develop the Stakeholder & Public Involvement Plan. This document will describe the range of activities the team will undertake to engage stakeholders and affected publics in the study's decision-making. It will also outline the goals and objectives of the involvement process; identify key audience/interest groups; and present an implementation schedule for all outreach and communications.

Study Advisory Committee

The study team will establish a study Advisory Committee comprised of neighborhood, community and business leaders as well as interested members of the public. Attendees at the first public information meeting who would like to get involved will be able to sign up for consideration to join the Advisory Committee. Additional participants may be invited to join the group if its original composition lacks enough diversity of stakeholder interests.

Three to six Advisory Committee meetings will be held during the 36-month planning period. Most meetings will be scheduled near project milestones like the public information meetings and the release of technical findings. The first Advisory Committee meeting will follow the first public information meetings and will review committee rules and roles, study background information, initial technical activities and analyses, information meetings outcomes and motorist survey results. The materials for this and all subsequent Advisory Committee meetings like presentation handouts and meeting summaries will be uploaded to the study's website for public downloading and review.

Business Roundtables

I-55 reconstruction may impact businesses along five of the seven study interchanges. These interchanges are Sixth Street, South Grand, Stephenson, Clear Lake, and Sangamon. The study team may hold meetings with business owners and operators at each of these interchanges.

Elected Officials Briefings

Elected officials in the study area, including municipal and county officeholders will be invited to meet with the study team periodically to discuss the study's progress, outcomes and likely community impacts. It is anticipated one to three briefings may be needed and may occur before the public information meetings and the public hearing so that officials know and understand the information being presented to the public. This will enable them to serve as better sources of information for their constituents and the community at-large.

Public Information Meetings

The study's two public information meetings will provide opportunities for direct engagement with stakeholders and the general public. At these meetings, study team members will display boards that contain project information as well as discuss and explain the boards' content to facilitate participants' understanding. Team members will also answer participants' questions regarding the logic and impact of study activities. In addition, all attendees will be encouraged to give their input on the project's purpose, process and alternatives.

The initial public information meeting is planned for Fall 2011. This meeting will focus on the study's purpose and background, process and timeline, and current interstate conditions and issues. The study team will also provide an overview of the types of highway improvements being considered, though detailed information on lane additions and interchange reconfigurations will not be available until the second information meetings. In addition to learning about the study at the first meeting, community members will be asked to provide information on:

- How they use the interstate;
- The types of problems they experience with the facility;
- Their desired improvements and project priorities;
- Concerns they have about reconstruction; and
- The best ways to inform them about project activities.

The second public information meeting is scheduled for May 2012. The primary purpose of this meeting is to present possible reconstruction alternatives. The study team will share in-depth information and analyses on the most feasible alternatives as well as solicit input from participants on their preferences and concerns.

Though the two information meetings differ in their content, their outreach and logistics will be the same to minimize confusion. Both meetings will be extensively publicized through public notices, direct mailings, email blasts, flyers, posters, IDOT press advisories and other outreach mechanisms, such as IDOT's interchangeable message signs. They will also be held over a three-hour time period at a facility within the study area. Participants will be able to come at any time during this period as formal presentations are not a planned component of either meeting. Comment forms will also be available at both meetings so that participants can submit written feedback to the study team.

Those who cannot attend the information meetings will be able to view their content, including information boards, handouts, multimedia presentations and comment forms on the study's website. The public comment period will remain open for two weeks following each public meeting.

Public Information Meeting Summary Reports

A meeting summary will be prepared following each public information meeting. These summaries will contain meeting attendance data, information on the effectiveness of outreach tactics, assessments of the study team and the meeting process, and an analysis of the public's comments. Summary reports will be made public via the study's website and will be included in the final environmental document.

Public Hearing

Near the project's conclusion the study team will conduct a public hearing to present its approved environmental document, which will contain information on its preferred alternatives. This meeting will be advertised in the same way as the public information meetings along with having a public notice placed in print media publications 15 days before the meeting. It will also utilize informational tools like project boards and handouts to summarize the study's findings. Participants will be able to fill out comment forms and a court reporter will be available to record any verbal feedback. The public comment period will remain open for 30 days following the hearing, during which time the study team will collect and compile additional public input.

Public Hearing Report

Like the public information meeting reports, the public hearing summary will provide information on meeting attendance and public reaction to the study's recommendations. These reactions will be summarized as well as presented in their disaggregated form for the public record.

Final CSS Stakeholder & Public Involvement Report

The study team will prepare a final account of all CSS public involvement activities and their outcomes at the study's end. This document will serve as an institutional memory for IDOT and can be accessed by interested members of the public via the project's website and archives.

4.2 Outreach & Communications Tasks

Study Logo

At the project's outset, the study team will develop a logo/graphic identity that helps foster public recognition of the project. This logo will be used on communications materials and project documents.

Project Database

An "evergreen" list of residential associations, businesses, municipal contacts, elected officials, community and civic groups, government officials and agencies, stakeholders and meeting attendees will be established and updated for use in study outreach efforts. This database will be organized by stakeholder type and will contain contact information for each individual and organization identified. It will also be used to support public meeting notifications, newsletter distributions, direct mailings and electronic announcements.

Corridor Video

The study team will produce a project video that explains the study's purpose and need, process and activities, and necessary improvements. The video may contain comments from study decision-makers, aerials of the interstate and its interchanges, and animated traffic flow to show current and future highway conditions. The video will be played at the public information meetings and placed on the study's website for viewing at any time.

Project Website

A project website that is linked to IDOT's website (www.dot.il.gov/projects.html#District_6) will be set up and maintained as a tool for public outreach and involvement. This site will include general project information, study contact information, technical documents, and public meeting notifications, displays and materials, reports and comment forms. The website will serve as an electronic home for the study and as such will be an easily accessible source for learning about the project, getting updates and downloading materials. Visitors will also be able to submit their comments and join the study's mailing list via this site.

Communications Log & Binder

The study team will maintain a communications log that documents all electronic and mailed correspondences. This log will be kept in a binder along with summaries of the study team's responses. Each comment submitted will receive an acknowledgement response within 24 hours of receipt as well as more extensive follow-up if necessary. All comments will be added to the official record of public input.

Communication Materials (FAQ & Newsletters)

During the course of the project, several communication materials will be developed that inform stakeholders and the public about the study, answer questions, and encourage dialogue and involvement. The study team will create a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document early in the project for distribution at the public information meetings and posting on the project's website. Team members will also produce three newsletters that will announce the public information meetings and public hearing and give updates on the study's progress. These newsletters will also be available on the website in downloadable form.

Media Relations

The news media is an effective method for informing the general public about the reconstruction study. The primary media strategy for this project will be to produce press advisories, releases and media kits that announce public meetings and study updates. Following IDOT protocol, these and other appropriate materials will be distributed to conventional media outlets like *The State Journal Register*, *Illinois Times*, *Springfield Business Journal*, WMAY/970, WICS News Channel 20, *Capital City Courier*, and *Pure News USA* as well as to electronic media sources.

In addition to sending information to the media, the study team will hold a press conference at the study's launch. This will help to familiarize reporters and the public with the study's decision-makers and pique community interest in the project's kick-off and first public meeting.

4.3 Project Administration Tasks

Project Management

Throughout the 36-month project, the study team will meet regularly amongst itself and with IDOT to plan, coordinate and execute public involvement tasks. It will also track its engagement activities, providing a bulleted list of activities and accomplishments in monthly public involvement reports. These reports will enable team members and IDOT to monitor the program's progress; anticipate contingencies; and if necessary, modify the involvement process so that it better achieves the project's goals.

V. Plan Availability, Administration & Monitoring

This Stakeholder and Public Involvement Plan (SPIP) will be regularly reviewed for effectiveness and amended as appropriate. The SPIP is an “evergreen” document that may be updated by the study team during the three-year planning period.

5.1 SPIP Availability

The SPIP will be posted on the study’s website and made available to community members and stakeholders at project public meetings. As the study progresses, updated versions of this document will also be placed on the website in a downloadable format.

5.2 SPIP Administration

Administration of the SPIP by the study team includes, but is not limited to:

- Maintaining a current list of project stakeholders and interested parties;
- Keeping a comprehensive public involvement record (log) that includes stakeholder contacts, comments and meeting information; and
- Ensuring two-way communications and timely responses to stakeholders through information and involvement channels.

5.3 SPIP Monitoring

The study team will frequently assess the effectiveness of public involvement activities based upon their project experiences and public feedback. Should the SPIP need to be modified, they will do so in a transparent manner that preserves the integrity of the public involvement program.