

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 #2 December 4, 2008

The second meeting of the Eastern Bypass Study Community Advisory Group (CAG) was held at the Countryside Banquet Facility, in Washington, on Thursday, December 4, 2008 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)
- Greg Larson (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)
- Jamil Bou-Saab (TERRA Engineering, Ltd.)
- 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 and Introductions

Eric Therkildsen opened the meeting by welcoming all attendees. He then asked the CAG members to briefly introduce themselves for the benefit of those who were not able to attend the first meeting.

Following the introductions, Jeff Schlotter, the Study Team's public involvement coordinator, introduced himself and the Team's professional facilitators, Dennis Jennings and Judy Weddle. Jeff then stated that because a study process for a large project can be confusing, it is important to take a moment at the beginning of each meeting to explain where the study is in terms of the overall highway development the process. Jeff then gave a brief explanation of the process and reminded the Group that the ultimate decision-making authority is held by IDOT.

Jeff then gave an overview of the agenda, explaining that the Group would be discussing: 1) the study's Stakeholder Involvement Plan, 2) valued elements of the study's communities and how those communities might be changing, 3) the possible benefits and impacts of the Eastern Bypass, and 4) the status of the study and meeting wrap up tasks. Jeff went on to explain how those elements fit into the overall study process.

With there being no questions from the Group, Jeff moved on to the next agenda item.

PART 2

Discussion of Stakeholder Involvement Plan Comments

After reviewing each section of the Stakeholder Involvement Plan (SIP), Jeff and Eric responded to questions and comments related to various sections of the document, as described below.

Section 3.0 - Regulatory Environment

A question was asked about how the Stakeholder Involvement Plan relates to the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission and its regional land use planning work.

Eric responded that the Eastern Bypass Study will proceed in tandem with the TCRPC's current transportation planning efforts, with neither plan "driving" the other but instead working in harmony with each other.

Section 3.2 - Agency Involvement

A comment was made about the fact that three informal meetings between IDOT and regulatory agencies are anticipated; a question was raised about how this number was determined.

In response, Eric explained that because the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) will not officially come into play on the study until after the Study's corridor stage is finished, coordination with regulatory agencies during the corridor stage is informal, intended to keep agency representatives informed of the study's progress and to gain their input from an agency perspective. Three meetings were seen as appropriate for this purpose, although that number is flexible.

Section 3.3 - Context Sensitive Solutions and Section 3.4 Study Authority

It was noted that the SIP refers to Context Sensitive Solutions as an "interdisciplinary approach," and that a "multidisciplinary" Project Study Team will be formed to provide oversight. A question was raised about the meaning of inter- and multi-disciplinary, and whether these terms meant that IDOT can take disciplinary action regarding the CAG members.

Eric clarified that "multidisciplinary" refers to academic or professional disciplines, not punitive discipline. For example, the study's participants are "multidisciplinary" in that they include engineers, planners, environmental specialists, etc. Jeff added that he was glad this point came up because professionals in planning and engineering often get so comfortable with the industry's jargon, such as the word "multidisciplinary," that they tend to forget how easily that jargon can be confusing or misunderstood. Jeff encouraged this kind of discussion and clarification at the CAG meetings.

Section 3.4 Study Authority

A comment was made regarding the statement that Project Study Team membership "is not intended to be static and will evolve as project conditions change." A question was asked about how leadership, governance, and continuity can be assured if the membership changes.

Eric responded by pointing out that certain disciplines are not active until later in the process. The core part of the Project Study Team stays constant, but special disciplines can be brought in, as needed. For instance, structural engineers would not necessarily be active in the process until the alignment stage of the study, after a preferred corridor is selected. Also, the Project Study Team's operations and responsibilities are outlined in an IDOT memo, in order to maintain consistency. The memo is guidance for IDOT, but is not a part of the Stakeholder Involvement Plan.

Section 4.0 Stakeholder Involvement Goals and Objectives

It was pointed out that there is a phrase in this section that says IDOT is looking for “exceptional, acceptable results,” and that this wording seems contradictory.

Jeff agreed that this phrase is confusing and said that the intent of this sentence would be clarified in the update to the document.

Questions were raised about the statement that the stakeholder involvement process is intended to “Develop evaluation criteria that address community, agency and technical concerns to assess the proposed corridors.” What is meant, exactly, by “develop criteria”? Is this the responsibility of the Community Advisory Group members, or IDOT?

Eric responded that IDOT would use some criteria from similar past projects and add or modify those criteria as needed to fit the context of this project. It is the CAG members’ responsibility to contribute to IDOT’s understanding of this project’s context, so that the appropriate evaluation criteria are used.

The fact that the public involvement process is intended to allow everyone who chooses to participate to “feel their input has been sought out” was noted as problematic. A question was raised about whether it is enough for people to just “feel” this way?

In response Eric and Jeff explained that the purpose of the SIP is to explain how individuals and groups with a stake in the project can become involved in the study, and further, to explain that all comments will be considered and documented. Once all the elements described in the SIP are carried out over the course of the study, it is reasonable to expect that individuals will agree, or “feel,” that their views have been respected.

Section 5.2 Project Newsletters

It was pointed out that the document states “as the geographic focus of the study narrows, the mailing list will be trimmed to exclude those addresses that are in areas no longer being considered for potential corridors.” A question was asked as to whether this does not simply cut out the potential opposition, and whether people should have to ask to be removed from the list. A suggestion was made to keep entire group on the mailing list, throughout the study.

In response, Eric and Jeff pointed out that keeping the current mailing list, which contains some 43,000 addresses, may not be practical from a cost standpoint. It was also pointed out that no reductions in the mailing list will be made without prior announcement -- with instructions to notify IDOT in order to remain on the list for the duration of the study, regardless of location. It was further pointed out that all newsletters are posted on the

study's website and are thus available to all. Nevertheless, IDOT will consider the cost implications of keeping the original mailing list before making a final decision.

A follow-up question was asked about what the criteria were on past projects to determine the area of interest related to selected corridors.

In response, Eric said he did not recall other projects that utilized mass mailings like the Eastern Bypass Study, and that other projects have relied on newspaper ads to get the word out about project information. This project will also rely on more grass-roots informing, posting announcements in grocery stores, churches, and other places in the community.

5.7.4 Ground Rules and Operating Procedures

It was noted that the document states "The role of the stakeholders is to advise IDOT. IDOT will make the ultimate decisions on this project. A consensus of stakeholder concurrence on project choices is sought, but the ultimate decisions remain in the hands of IDOT and the State of Illinois."

Jeff clarified that the SIP documents the many ways IDOT will receive suggestions, comments, advice and concerns from the public, and that the statement is included to remind the public that the final say on project decisions rests with IDOT, and, because federal funding would be used, with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

Concern was expressed about the statement that CAG members may be asked to relinquish their membership if they are unable to fulfill their duties as a member.

Eric explained that if an individual was consistently absent at CAG meetings, for instance, then they would not be fulfilling their duties on the CAG. Jeff added that the stated purpose of the CAG is to help the study team find the best possible corridor. If it becomes apparent that a member's true motive is to stop the project and to only advocate for the no-build alternative, then that individual would not be abiding by that stated purpose. At that point, that individual may be asked to step down from the CAG and to express his or her ideas using any of the other methods described in the SIP.

5.4 Community Group Briefings

A question was raised regarding small-group meetings outside of the CAG environment.

Jeff stated that members of the Study Team would be available for what he called "living room" meetings with homeowners' associations, church groups, and other community

groups, if so desired. Jeff also mentioned that IDOT is willing to provide meeting space for any organization or association wanting to meet to discuss the Eastern Bypass project.

Jeff further noted that the SIP is considered a “living document” and that lists and schedules would be updated as necessary over the course of the study.

General Comment

A question was raised about the old study's the B5 corridor (referring to the selected corridor in the prior study of the area), asking if it is still viable in certain areas, or whether it has been determined that the corridor is not feasible.

Eric responded that at the present time no corridors have been identified, stating that IDOT is “starting from scratch” with just the study area. He said prior corridors may also be examined as part of the study process. It was noted that the team needs to determine selection criteria first, before selecting or eliminating corridors.

Typographical Errors Noted

Three typographical errors were pointed out for correction:

- In Section 3.2, first sentence, there is an inadvertent capitalization of the word “Involvement.”
- The section previously shown as 3.3 (Study Authority) was mis-numbered and should be changed to 3.4.
- In Section 5.3, last sentence, the word “to” is missing.

Jeff responded that these corrections will be made.

The meeting then moved on to the topic of the CAG ground rules and operation procedures, Judy Weddle distributed a set of informal “etiquette” guidelines for CAG meetings. These included such courtesies as silencing cell phones, letting only one person speak at a time, and the like.

To conclude this agenda item, Jeff mentioned that the project study team will review the CAG's comments on the SIP and re-present the SIP with changes at or before the next CAG meeting. He also noted others, including the FHWA, will be reviewing and possibly commenting on the document.

PART 3

Group Exercise on Valued Community Elements and Possible Bypass Effects

Dennis Jennings began the Valued Community Elements portion of the meeting by asking the CAG membership to share the results of their “homework assignment” about the resources they most value in their community and the directions, or trends, they see in their communities relative to these valued elements.

For the purposes of the exercise, CAG members were asked to think of their communities without an Eastern Bypass in place and to use their homework notes to begin discussions with their fellow CAG members seated at their table. Members were instructed to record their table group’s responses on flip chart paper. Jeff reminded the members that these responses are intended to build on the CAG’s homework assigned at the first CAG meeting. Dennis added that not everyone at the table has to necessarily agree with everything the table may put on their pages. The table groups were then given approximately an hour to discuss and to compile their findings.

Upon reconvening after the break, the tables were asked to present their flip chart pages to the group as a whole.

Dennis reviewed the common themes presented by the tables, which included such items as: small towns, quietness, good schools, and growth. Dennis also reviewed some features unique to the area, which included the Illinois River, the area’s history, a sense safety and security, and the presence of Illinois Central College.

It was noted that an important part of the conversations were the common variables the group members identified because they will help develop a “base line” to begin the corridor selection process.

Comments from CAG members during this session are summarize as follows:

It was mentioned that City of Peoria interests were not brought up in the discussion, even though the west side of the river would stand to be impacted by the project. The CAG representative from the City of Peoria stated that he participated in the discussion from the perspective of a resident who lives east of the river. A CAG member stated that the CAG still needs to understand that Peoria would also benefit from the Eastern Bypass and that this is important. It was further noted that the concept of “regionalism”, or thinking of the area as one unit rather than a gathering of smaller communities, is still catching on in the

Tri-County region and could end up being a positive trend. It was stated that, currently, the Tri-County region does not “do regionalism” very well.

The CAG member representing Caterpillar mentioned that whatever affects CAT would potentially also have a similar affect on a variety of other area industries and businesses, and because of this, CAT shouldn’t be singled out throughout the study.

There being no other comments or questions, Judy Weddle continued the meeting agenda by leading the Benefits and Impacts exercise.

Judy encouraged everyone to keep an open mind and to try to envision “What life would be like with the Eastern Bypass built,” even if it isn’t built for a number of years. CAG members were asked to take five minutes to write down what they might see as benefits of the Eastern Bypass.

Judy then informed the CAG members to take an additional five minutes to create a personal list of impacts that might result from the Eastern Bypass project, with the word “impacts” meaning negative effects for the purposes of this exercise.

The CAG members’ lists of benefits and impacts were then collected, with Judy stating that these lists would be compiled and distributed to members for them to share with interest groups. She further stated that the topic of benefits and impacts would be discussed further at the next CAG meeting.

PART 4

Study Status Report

Jeff then turned to the next agenda item, giving the CAG members a status report of the other work being conducted for the study. Jeff pointed out that the Study Team is currently working on gathering a wide variety of base map data, such as school boundaries, land use plans, floodplains, and the like. He noted that these features are being mapped using Geographic Information System (GIS) software and can be overlaid onto aerial photographs. Jeff also mentioned that the Study Team has completed gathering traffic data from the field and has met with local governments and large employers in the area to gather traffic-related information. He concluded this portion of the agenda by stating that the Study Team will now begin creating traffic models to help predict how the Eastern Bypass would affect traffic flow in the region, and how different corridors might vary in terms of these affects.

PART 5

Action Items and Next Meeting Preview

Jeff reiterated the action items that were identified over the course of the meeting. These included updating the Stakeholder Involvement Plan and processing the benefits and impacts information.

Jeff noted that the benefits information will help augment the study's formal purpose and need statement, and that the impacts data help the Study Team determine the most important factors to examine in developing corridor assessment criteria.

As part of the next meeting preview, Jeff stated that the next CAG meeting (meeting No. 3) will likely be held in February, and that CAG meeting No. 4 will likely follow in late March or early April. Eric reminded the CAG members that IDOT is willing to provide meeting space for small groups and that interested groups should contact IDOT to make arrangements.

Prior to the adjournment of the meeting, a few general questions and comments were discussed:

A question was raised regarding who eventually makes the "build" or "no-build" decision.

Eric responded that it is IDOT's responsibility to make this decision, but that it is heavily dependent on the results of the Study's Context Sensitive Solutions process. It is hoped that the CAG can reach a consensus about the key study questions, and IDOT will make the build/no-build decision based on that. Jeff added that a build alternative would also require the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to be in agreement to procure funding, and other agencies (such as the Department of Natural Resources and the Army Corps of Engineers) also have a say in the project. It was noted, too, that this decision will not be made during the current corridor phase of the process. This decision is made at the end of the alignment phase

A question was asked about clarification regarding the term "stakeholder."

Jeff defined "stakeholder" as anyone who has a stake in the project, which not only includes residents and businesses in the area but state and federal agencies as well. It was noted that these agencies may not become involved until alignment phase of the process.

The question was asked: if the final decision is IDOT's, is there a reason IDOT would not become active in the CAG until the end of the process?

Eric responded that, at this point in the process, the IDOT Study Team wants to avoid steering the project to a specific outcome. IDOT wants to understand the study area's context now, without swaying the CAG. IDOT cannot, however, wait until the end of the process to get involved. Jeff mentioned that this is why it's important for everyone to work together to create the best possible outcome for the study.

At this point, with no other questions or comments being raised, the meeting was adjourned, at approximately 9:10 P.M.