

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 #3 February 19, 2009

The third meeting of the Eastern Bypass Study Community Advisory Group (CAG) was held at the Countryside Banquet Facility, in Washington, on Thursday, February 19, 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)
- 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 Agenda Overview

The third meeting of the Eastern Bypass Study's Community Advisory Group (CAG) was held at 6:00 pm on Thursday, February 19, 2009 at the Countryside Banquet Facility in

Washington. Members signed in and received an updated CAG member contact list, as well as the benefits/impacts brainstorm lists they created at the prior meeting of the CAG on December 4, 2008. Members were seated at eight tables in the room, with five to seven members per table.

Eric Therkildsen opened the meeting at 6:00 pm, welcoming the members of the CAG. Eric introduced the meeting by noting that the meeting would be the last meeting to “gather information” from the CAG regarding the community context and subsequent meetings would be focused more on the planning and development of corridors.

Eric then introduced Jeff, who opened with a brief PowerPoint presentation showing an electronic version of the “funnel” diagram that was hand-drawn at the previous CAG meeting. Jeff used this diagram to indicate we are in the early stages of the Eastern Bypass Study.

Jeff then showed a graphic of a three-legged stool to demonstrate the three tasks needed to create corridors: community values, traffic data, and constraints mapping. He explained that the CAG work in prior meetings has been focusing on identifying community values, including tasks such as the consensus building workshops and completion of the context audit. Meanwhile, the project study team has been working on the traffic data and constraints mapping and will be able to present these items to the CAG in upcoming meetings.

Jeff concluded this agenda item by outlining the goals of the meeting, which were to report the results of the context audit exercise, complete the benefits and impacts exercise, discuss the purpose of a problem statement, update the CAG on the compilation of traffic and GIS data, and endorse the Stakeholder Involvement Plan.

PART 2

Results of the Context Audit Exercise

Jeff presented the results of the context audit survey that had been sent to CAG members, noting that not all had responded. As additional responses are received, those responses will be incorporated into the data. (In order to bring closure to the exercise, however, responses need to be received by IDOT in the next week or so.)

Jeff noted that the values listed on the context audit came from the brainstorming session at December’s CAG meeting. The highest-rated items on the context audit were:

- Quality Schools
- Clean Water
- Strong Values
- Safety
- Good Community Planning
- Skilled Workforce
- Safe Transportation
- Parks
- Growing Business

The lowest-rated items included County Seat, Pumpkins, and View of I-74.

Jeff said the results of the context audit will be useful when laying out corridors, as they may point out areas that would sway the location of a specific corridor. Jeff clarified that the results displayed at the meeting were based on a five-point scale, and the mean score was reported. Jeff also responded to a question on whether other analyses of the data, beyond just the mean scores, would also be looked at. He noted that the study team may indeed look further into the data, when all the context audit forms have been received and processed. Jeff also showed the responses received in the “write-in” category that some respondents included in their context audits. The “write-in” categories were:

- Economic competitiveness of greater community
- Travel Time
- Avoid bypass adjacent to existing neighborhoods
- River Conservation
- Road Enhances Quality of Life for Central Illinois
- Improve commercial tax base - Washington, Metamora, Spring Bay, Germantown Hills
- No negative impact on privacy at Peoria proving grounds
- Peoria Museum, and
- Air Quality.

PART 3

Benefits and Impacts Exercise Completion

Jeff then briefly introduced the method the group would be using to complete the benefits and impacts discussions. Jeff noted that the benefits will be used to help develop the study's "problem statement," while the impacts will be used as a way of distinguishing the most important possible effects of the project from those that might not be significant. He noted that the evening's discussion would include the community input that the CAG members received following December's meeting.

Dennis Jennings then facilitated the benefits portion of the evening. He began by reintroducing the brainstorm list question from the December meeting: "As you imagine your hoped for future, what are some of the benefits of the Eastern Bypass project?" After reviewing the prior brainstorm lists, Dennis asked the CAG members to take three minutes to add items that they may have heard from other members of the community. Members who were not at the December meeting were asked to create their own brainstorm lists. The members were then asked to discuss at their tables their brainstorm lists and to have each table choose six to eight of the most important ideas to write on half-sheet cards. The cards were then posted on the front wall and grouped into categories. The categories listed were selected based on the initial responses from December's meeting. Cards that could fit under several headings were to be sorted by the header that best represents the card. A new topic, Regional Cooperation, was formed from several cards that did not fit adequately under the other headings.

The group then took a short break while Study Team members moved the cards from the front wall to a side wall to make room for the next portion of the meeting.

The CAG reconvened after the break to perform an exercise similar to the benefits exercise, this time focusing on the potential impacts of the project. Judy Weddle facilitated the discussion, asking the CAG members to think about the question: "What are the impacts of the Eastern Bypass project on our hoped for future?" The impacts discussion focused on significant negative effects or potential negative effects.

After reviewing the brainstormed impact lists from the December 4, 2008 meeting, members were asked to create six to eight topic cards per table, one impact per card, based on the table's brainstorm lists. Once the cards were created, the cards were placed on the front wall under designated headings.

After all the cards were placed on the front wall, seven cards did not appear to fit under the provided headings. The seven cards included: Disruption to bluff homes/subdivisions; Fear of conflict with local comp[rehensive] plan; Bypass towns; Resistance to change; Future need for other community Infrastructure; Disruption during construction; and Negative economic impact.

Creating an additional category, to accommodate some of the uncategorized cards, was discussed. Judy told the group that in the days following the meeting, the Study Team may modify the headings to better describe the impacts submitted by the CAG.

Jeff noted that the Study Team will provide the results of this benefits/impacts exercise back to the CAG.

PART 4

Eastern Bypass Problem Statement

Jeff then explained how the project's problem statement would be created and what relevance it has to the process. The problem statement, Jeff explained, is a declaration of the problem(s) the project is intended to solve. The problems can exist today, or they can be something that is fairly certain to happen in the future. Jeff said the CSS process is designed to get the public involved in the problem statement development, and getting endorsement from the CAG on the problem statement is a key step and the foundation of the rest of the "funnel" process. Jeff also pointed out that the problem statement forms the basis for an important part of the NEPA process.

Jeff reminded the group that all projects receiving federal funding are subject to NEPA (the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969). The NEPA procedures are well-established and have three different levels based on project complexity – the Eastern Bypass Study falls into the most complex level of NEPA, which requires the preparation of is what is known as an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The purpose of the EIS is to understand the consequences of implementing the project. The EIS document is composed of several chapters, one of which documents the project's purpose and need. The Purpose and Need chapter includes: population and employment data, land use information, data regarding accidents and safety, and other considerations. Other chapters include: Affected Environment, Alternatives Considered, Alternative Impacts, and Comments and Coordination.

Jeff said that the next (fourth) meeting of the CAG will focus on developing the problem statement for the study. One idea being considered is that the Project Study Team will prepare an initial draft of the problem statement and send it to the CAG for review, with the goal of reaching a consensus on the problem statement at the next CAG meeting.

A question was raised why we are still trying to define the problems the Eastern Bypass will solve after so many iterations of the project. Jeff explained that this study will take work done in the past, such as information from transportation symposiums and prior studies, as well as the work completed at today's meeting to develop a problem statement that collects all the ideas into one formal statement.

Another question was asked if the CAG will have access to the information from past work done on the Eastern Bypass. Jeff said that the Study Team is looking into the best way of providing that information, and that nothing is "off the table" at this point.

PART 5

Status of the Study's Traffic Data & Geographic Information System (GIS) Mapping

Jeff gave an overview of the traffic data and how it is used to predict future traffic volumes. Jeff explained that the approach volumes of each leg of the major intersections will be important to the traffic modelers in describing how well the intersections are working and how well traffic is flowing. The traffic model can also predict what traffic flows would be like in the future, if a bypass were constructed. The modelers may try arbitrary locations for the bypass (west, central, and east) to show how traffic would vary on the new highway, as well as on the existing network.

Jeff gave an update regarding the constraints mapping work going on. Constraints mapping is a method of determining what factors on the ground in the study area could have an influence on the location of a corridor. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software would be used to create maps to show these constraints graphically. GIS software is based on layers which can be turned on and off to show different information in different ways. It is also an analytical tool that can be used to quantify acreages (or other units of measure) of land the project would affect. Aerial images can also be added to GIS maps for ease of reference and to confirm the layers are correct.

Reflecting back to the three-legged stool analogy Jeff used earlier (the community values, traffic data and constraints mapping), Jeff said that the three legs of the stool will come together within the coming months and the CAG will be able to start drafting corridors.

A question was raised regarding the traffic modeling and whether or not future population of the area was included as an input. Jeff said that it was, and the next CAG meeting will focus more on how the traffic modeling was done.

Another CAG member asked if the graphics presented at the meeting would be available on the website. Jeff said that they will be soon, but at the time of this meeting they were not ready for the web.

PART 6

Stakeholder Involvement Plan (SIP) Update and Endorsement

Revisions to the Stakeholder Involvement Plan (SIP) were also discussed. The agenda package sent out prior to the evening's meeting included an updated SIP annotated with lines showing where revisions were made, as well as a summary of those changes and how they were addressed in the SIP document. Jeff reviewed the comments and changes with the group. Jeff asked if anyone in the group could not endorse the SIP as written, noting that the SIP can and will evolve as a living document as the study continues and that the Study Team would welcome questions and comments on the SIP.

A CAG member asked for clarification regarding the purpose and mission of the CAG, as he did not feel it was well defined in the SIP. The member said that the CAG is charged with reaching consensus on a corridor, then on an alignment within that corridor, but would that be the only thing the group would be asked to make a decision on? Likewise, would the group be asked to come to a consensus on a build/no-build decision? Eric Therkildsen responded that it is hoped the CAG will reach a consensus on all decisions for the project, including a build/no-build decision, even though IDOT does have the final responsibility for the decisions. IDOT's goal and role in the process is to work with the CAG to come to a consensus. If a consensus on a corridor cannot be reached, either IDOT will make a decision, or the CAG will be asked to continue work to reach a consensus. IDOT does have the option to continue with the project's process even if the CAG comes to consensus against the project; however, that would be undesirable for IDOT, as they would not have public support for the project, and thus it would be very difficult to implement. Jeff added that the Study Team is being deliberate and is operating with as much transparency as

possible in the process, so if a member does not agree with the final outcome, at least the basis on which the decision was made is open for all to see. The process is in place to make sure everyone has a voice and a role.

A concern was then raised that the group is by default only supporting the build option if the tasks of the CAG are to determine the best corridor and alignment. Jeff said that the CAG's role is to help IDOT find the best corridor and alignment locations -- which will then be compared to the no-build option. Once that comparison is completed, the build/no-build decision will be made. Jeff said the Study Team wants to make an informed decision on whether or not to build the Eastern Bypass, and the CAG will help ensure all effects of the project are approached and evaluated.

A member asked if the group would be asked to vote on the build/no-build decision. Eric said the group will, hopefully, reach a consensus on the build/no-build decision, and if there is a consensus on the build decision, the CAG will continue through the design and construction phases. This is a way to ensure decisions are documented and carried into future plans. Jeff said the Study Team can explore changes in the text of the SIP to clarify this if the CAG requests this.

A member commented that he is not offended that the CAG won't be making the big decisions, stating that the Study Team members are the experts and do this sort of thing as a career. He appreciated that IDOT is gathering the input.

A member asked for clarification on the ways the benefits and impacts would be used -- whether the consensus on negative impacts and benefits would be used to help evaluate the corridors. Jeff said that is true but state and federal agencies also weigh in on the process, and the sole responsibility isn't entirely on the CAG. To clarify one of the ways agencies come into play, they fall under the "constraints mapping" branch of the three-legged stool, providing geographic information to the Study Team. Jeff also said that it depends on the significance of the impacts, as minor impacts can be acceptable if the benefits outweigh them. A CAG member noted the positive impacts/benefits would be weighed just like the negative impacts. Jeff confirmed the statement.

A statement was made by a member that the public can look at the record to see how IDOT used the process to help make decisions. Jeff stated the process requires that IDOT document the benefits and impacts process and thus avoid selection of a corridor location without public input. Jeff said that NEPA is in place to provide informed decision-making

and to make sure we have the best possible information in the hands of the IDOT and the public before a decision is made.

Jeff asked the CAG members if any of them could not endorse the SIP as it stands today; no members stated that they could not endorse the document.

PART 5

Meeting Summary and Next Meeting Preview

Jeff then gave a brief preview of the upcoming meetings. Meeting #4, tentatively scheduled for Thursday, April 2, would deal primarily with the problem statement and also include an update on traffic modeling and constraints mapping. Meeting #5, tentatively some time in May, will begin the process of drawing corridors on maps and applying benefits and impacts to the drafted corridors. Once the corridors are refined, there will be another large public meeting to present the status of the study and receive comments from the public on the alternative corridor locations.

Jeff mentioned that the Study Team urges CAG members to talk to their constituents to make sure the community's voices are being heard. The Study Team will send letters to non-selected CAG applicants to urge them to contact CAG members. IDOT is willing to provide space for small group meetings, if the CAG members would like to meet with their constituents.

PART 6

Discussion

The meeting was then opened to general discussion. One member asked if the Study Team was counting cars as part of the traffic modeling. Jeff said that was part of the process and had recently been completed and noted that "origin/destination" studies were not a part of the process. More thorough discussion of the traffic data collection methods will be discussed at the next meeting.

A member asked why the "funnel" process takes so long, being estimated at five years. Jeff said the timeframe is an estimate based on the transportation industry's 30 years of experience with the NEPA process. Projects of this scale actually tend to average seven years in length, but the Study Team feels the Eastern Bypass Study can be completed more

quickly. The process requires gathering, sorting, and analyzing data, as well as holding public meetings, soliciting agency reviews, and other processes. While all levels of government are trying to streamline the process, the process can only be sped up so much before running the risk of overlooking some items and tasks.

Eric added that the goal is to complete the “funnel” within five years, but some projects take ten years or longer. The CSS process is intended to streamline the NEPA process and help prevent mandated “do-overs” from the federal government. Jeff mentioned that some of the delays in the process could come from federal review. The expedited nature of the prior study may have been a contributing factor in the project’s demise, as some felt the project was forced upon them without their input. Jeff said it is a tough balance to strike – taking too long seems wasteful; not allowing enough time seems too rushed.

At this point, with no other questions or comments being raised, the meeting was adjourned, at approximately 9:00 P.M.