

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 #6 November 19, 2009

The sixth meeting of the Eastern Bypass Study Community Advisory Group (CAG) was held at the Countryside Banquet Facility, in Washington, on Thursday, November 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)
- Tom Lacy (IDOT)
- Paula Green (IDOT)
- Greg Larson (IDOT)
- Jeff Schlotter (H.W. Lochner, Inc.)
- Ken Hemstreet (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.)
- Lindsey Ford (TERRA Engineering, Ltd.)
- Maggie Browning (TERRA Engineering, Ltd.)

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

Welcome and Agenda Overview

Jeff Schlotter opened the meeting by welcoming the participants back, since the previous meeting was several months ago. He then explained the evening's agenda and what was hoped to be accomplished at tonight's meeting.

Review of Study Status and Activities

Next, Jeff gave a review of the study status, with an accompanying PowerPoint presentation. The presentation opened with an updated “funnel” diagram showing the current stage of the process including the next steps. The diagram showed the work entering the second year of study with the task to “Analyze and Compare Effects.”

Jeff briefly discussed the status of the study’s traffic analysis, noting that the traffic model in development from the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission is further along than the IDOT team originally expected it would be at this point and, because of this, the Study Team will be checking the study’s model against Tri-County’s to ensure they reflect the same assumptions.

Jeff also mentioned that more detailed GIS data will be used as the corridor phase continues and as analyses are prepared for the proposed corridors.

Review of Comments from the August Public Meeting

Next, Jeff discussed the comments received from the public in response to the August 20 Public Open House. He briefly summarized the overall findings from the meeting, explaining that the CAG members were provided with more detailed public meeting results in their agenda packages.

Initial Corridor Refinement Presentation and Discussion

After discussing the comments received from the public meeting, Jeff turned to the main topic of the meeting: the initial corridor refinement process and the CAG members’ input on the Study Team’s initial refinements. Jeff explained that consensus would be sought from the CAG regarding the refinements. This portion of the presentation relied heavily on graphics contained in the PowerPoint presentation. (A printout of the presentation is attached).

Jeff noted that the Study Team began by focusing on the possible endpoints for the Eastern Bypass. Starting along Interstate 74, Jeff explained how the Study Team consolidated the seven different endpoints from the CAG’s corridors into five endpoints (at Interstate 474, Interstate 155, Tennessee Avenue, Washington Road, and Dee-Mack Road). Jeff then presented the advantages and disadvantages of each endpoint individually, explaining the Study Team’s recommendations for each endpoint. The Study Team felt that four of the five endpoints were reasonable and should be carried forward for further study.

The Study Team concluded that the endpoint at Interstate 155 should not be considered for further study due to interchange spacing issues, nearby developed areas, and complex re-engineering of an existing interchange that would be required. Before reaching consensus

on carrying the four remaining southern endpoints forward, Jeff asked for comments from the CAG, with Dennis Jennings and Judy Weddle outlining the CAG's agreed-upon procedure to be used when seeking consensus on study decisions. Comments and questions from the CAG included the following:

- 1) Bill Royer (Property Impacts) asked for clarification regarding what "connect to areas south of I-74" meant for the Tennessee Avenue interchange. Eric Therkildsen from IDOT explained that the endpoint locations east of Morton could be designed such that areas south of Interstate 74 would also have access to I-74 and the Eastern Bypass.
- 2) A CAG member asked if topography was considered when determining whether or not an endpoint was feasible. Jeff confirmed that the Study Team was aware of the topographic challenges in this area, and Eric indicated that such an issue is mostly a cost issue and is not considered a key determinant at this point in the process. He explained that the key determinants at this stage are more a matter of feasibility, noting the difficulties of constructing an interchange at I-155 due to existing development and a lack of space between interchanges.
- 3) Randall Jacobs (Property Impacts) asked if the consensus point being considered was for eliminating the Interstate 155 endpoint but not necessarily endorsing the other four locations. Jeff clarified that it was indeed the case.

At this point, Dennis Jennings asked if the group agreed that consensus had been reached on the southern endpoints. No CAG members indicated they could not accept the conclusion, so it was determined that consensus was reached.

Jeff then presented the Study Team's recommendations with respect to the northern endpoints, outlining the five potential locations' advantages and disadvantages. After presenting the five locations, Jeff summarized that the Study Team recommended keeping only the northernmost and southernmost of these five locations. Comments from the CAG members included the following:

- 1) Steve Van Winkle (City of Peoria) asked if an interchange would be proposed at IL 29 if the endpoint along the Illinois Route 6 curve were chosen. Eric said that the Eastern Bypass would most likely be grade-separated at Illinois Route 29. If the endpoint along the Illinois Route 6 curve were chosen, the existing trumpet interchange would remain to provide access between Illinois Route 29 and the Eastern Bypass.
- 2) William Belshaw (Village of Metamora) asked where the Illinois Route 6 extension would run west of Chillicothe. Eric stated and showed on an aerial photograph that the Illinois Route 6 extension would head north past Rome West Road and bypass Chillicothe to the west and north, linking with Illinois Route 29 north of the railroad underpasses. Access to

Chillicothe would also be available via various interchanges with east-west roads in the area.

3) Randall Jacobs asked if, by removing the three “middle” endpoints, numerous corridors would then also drop out. Eric clarified that the only areas affected and removed would be sections leading to those three endpoints, not full-length corridors themselves. In the case of these three endpoints, the portions of the corridors east of the Illinois River would be minimally affected by the removal of these endpoints and the sections that lead to them.

4) A CAG member asked about the distance between the Illinois Route 6 curve endpoint and the endpoint north of Cedar Hills Drive. Mike Lewis estimated that the distance between the locations was about 3.5 to 4 miles. Follow up questions were then asked by William Dietrich (Agriculture): Wouldn't the northern crossing carry less traffic, and would the northern endpoint be a disadvantage if east-west through traffic (e.g., Spring Bay to/from Dunlap) had to travel an extra three or four miles to cross the Illinois River? Eric clarified that the priority at this stage in the process was to remove connections that are not possible from an engineering standpoint. Eric also mentioned that the northern crossing might be an “avoidance alternative” (avoiding Section 4(f) properties) if, during the NEPA process, the southern crossing was found to have significant 4(f) impacts. Jeff Schlotter also noted that as the study continues, traffic as well as other details, will become part of the evaluation process.

5) A CAG member asked if the crossing length was considered during the endpoint elimination process, as some of the removed alternatives may have provided for shorter crossings. Eric said that, while it is possible that a bridge could be shorter in one of the eliminated areas, it wouldn't be possible to fit in an interchange at Illinois Route 6 with such an alignment, and thus, a longer bridge in a better location may be the best alternative. A follow-up question was asked regarding the cost of a longer bridge in relation to the project as a whole. Jeff and Eric answered that, while the cost of the crossing is important, a shorter crossing that leads to a location that is not feasible means the crossing needs to be moved, even if it is to a longer location.

6) John McCarty (Village of Spring Bay) asked what the environmental impacts are on the east side of the Illinois River. Jeff said that the environmental screening, which will include wildlife impacts, would be part of the next screening level.

7) Paul Corcoran (Property Impacts) asked if there is flexibility with the location of the northern endpoint (#5) and if there would be any benefits to tying the Eastern Bypass connection directly into the Rome West Road interchange on the Illinois Route 6 extension. Eric said that the location of the interchange is still flexible; Mike Lewis added that if the Illinois Route 6 and Eastern Bypass interchange were right at Rome West Road, the access to Rome West Road from the Illinois Route 6 extension might be eliminated, so careful consideration will have to be made at this location.

8) A CAG member asked for a clarification regarding the endpoint at the trumpet interchange, asking for clarifications on the restrictions imposed by "Section 4(f)" land. Jeff Schlotter explained that Section 4(f) properties are parcels that must be avoided if at all possible, due to their status as parks, wildlife refuges, or historic sites. In the case of the potentially affected areas near the trumpet interchange, some of the areas in the corridor's path along the riverbank are conservation properties. Mike Lewis noted the environmental impacts are higher with the trumpet interchange location (#2) than with the Illinois Route 6 curve location (#1) in the categories of Section 4(f) properties, floodplains, and wetlands. The Section 4(f) impacts are to properties such as the Rutherford Wildlife Preserve and State of Illinois owned conservation property.

9) A CAG member additionally noted that during this time of year the area is a popular resting place for migratory birds. Mike clarified that according to NEPA the only time Section 4(f) properties can be affected by a project is if there is no practical or feasible alternative. Eric added that other issues with the endpoint at the trumpet would include requiring a larger interchange footprint and a far more complex interchange to maintain connectivity between Illinois Route 6, Illinois Route 29 and the Eastern Bypass.

10) Pete Streid (Agriculture) asked if these would be the only two locations considered or if areas further south would also be considered. Eric said that the endpoint areas are fairly large and could account for various alignments. Eric further explained that topography issues would likely prevent areas south of the Illinois Route 6 curve from being considered, as they would still have to connect with Illinois Route 6 to be feasible.

11) Pete Fenner (Peoria Audubon Society) asked if any of these corridors would affect Singing Woods Nature Preserve or the Peoria Park District properties in the area. Mike said there could be potential impacts to Singing Woods Nature Preserve, and possibly on a bird sanctuary, from the endpoints near Cedar Hills Drive (Locations #3 and #4). These are two of the locations IDOT is not recommending for further study. Mike also noted there could be some affects on the preserve at the Illinois Route 6 curve location (#1).

At this point, Judy Weddle asked if the group agreed that consensus had been reached on keeping the southernmost and northernmost locations (Illinois Route 6 curve and north of Cedar Hills Drive) and dropping the three "middle" endpoints (located at the trumpet interchange and the two endpoints south of Cedar Hills Drive.) No CAG members indicated they could not accept these conclusions, so it was determined that consensus was reached.

Steve Jaeger (Heart of Illinois Regional Port District) asked if the Eastern Bypass would carry the designation of Interstate 474, completing a full beltway around the Peoria area and signed as I-474. Eric said that while that is a possibility if the bypass is a freeway, that kind of decision would ultimately be made by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Eric added that Illinois Route 6 was constructed to interstate highway standards and would be suitable to be given an interstate designation.

Jeff continued the corridor refinement presentation, turning to the portions of the corridors inside the study area to be deleted or added to. Four areas were proposed for removal. After presenting the reasoning for removing these four areas, Jeff opened the floor up for questions.

- 1) Randall Jacobs asked how far away from the developed areas near Bay View Gardens and Lake Santa Fe the deleted areas covered. Eric said that the proposed deletions were not that detailed yet and, as reflected on the map, the intent was simply to avoid the residential areas.
- 2) A CAG member noted that expanding one of the deleted areas would include her home. Jeff noted that the proposed deletions were broadly drawn and are not intended to be precise at this stage of the study.
- 3) Mike Honnold (Illinois Valley Wheelm'n) asked to see the Farmdale Reservoir area in greater detail and if the deletion only covered the reservoir itself or all the land owned as part of the reservoir. Scott Presslak expanded the map and showed the boundaries of the property owned by the Army Corps of Engineers and how the deleted area would avoid all land owned by the Corps.
- 4) Karl Bryning (Property Impacts) asked what criteria were used to eliminate the Bay View Gardens area from consideration. Jeff explained that the recommendation to remove the area was based on the density of the built environment and whether there were reasonable alternatives nearby without significantly altering the corridor.
- 5) A CAG member asked if the Lake Santa Fe deletion (Area 2) included Lourdes Church. After locating Lourdes Church on the map, Jeff showed that the church itself was not included in the deleted area but reminded the CAG that the Study Team was not yet screening the corridors at the level of small, individual parcels.

With no further questions, Judy asked for a consensus from the CAG approving the removal of these four areas from consideration. With a visual confirmation of nodding heads, it was determined that the CAG had reached consensus on deleting these four areas from consideration.

Jeff then continued by presenting four areas proposed to be added to the corridors. Jeff presented each, explaining why it was seen as beneficial to add them to the previously drawn corridors. The CAG was then asked for comments, to which there was only one:

- 1) A CAG member noted that an alignment south of Black Partridge Park could affect existing cemeteries and a future golf course. Jeff said that the Study Team would look at those impacts more closely later in the study.

At this point, Dennis and Judy together facilitated a discussion with the CAG about whether consensus had been reached on adding these areas to the corridors. A fair amount of discussion then ensued, as summarize below.

1) A CAG member asked if a corridor through Black Partridge Park was still a possibility, considering the park itself was not removed from consideration. Jeff said that, technically, the park was still a possible location; however, given the park's status as a Section 4(f) property, there is little chance that an alignment through the park would be considered. Most likely, alignments in that corridor would go around Black Partridge Park.

2) A CAG member then asked if the Section 4(f) status also covered Quail Meadows Golf Course. Mike said that, since it is a public golf course, then it is also covered under Section 4(f).

3) A CAG member asked if we would be officially calling the additions around Black Partridge Park as the "Black Partridge Park Additions." Eric clarified that labeling the area as such was for internal discussion only and would not be presented to the public as such.

4) Caroline Schertz (Environment) noted that privately owned, forested areas north of Black Partridge Park should be avoided and the entire corridor section should not be considered. She explained that the area is a forested songbird corridor. Another CAG member noted that the trumpet endpoint area at Illinois Route 6 was eliminated due to Section 4(f) implications, and thus the Black Partridge Park section of the corridor should also be eliminated.

Bill Royer noted that if the additional area was not added around Black Partridge Park, the corridor would drop out because there would be no way around the park. Eric Therkildsen clarified that other factors in addition to the Section 4(f) impacts contributed to the recommendation to eliminate the trumpet endpoint. He also noted that in crossing the Illinois River, there is no alternative that can miss Section 4(f) impacts because of the large amount of conservation property along the river. In the case of Black Partridge Park, however, just widening the corridor allows for that avoidance and keeps the corridor section viable.

Eric directed a question to the CAG sub-group that originally drew the corridor in question, asking how they felt about the location of the corridor. Steve Jaeger of that sub-group responded by saying that his group was not aware of the park's exact location and that their intention was to include a corridor that crossed the Illinois River north of Mossville and provided access to Metamora from the west rather than the east. Randall Jacobs added he would still like to see an option west of Metamora.

At this point it was noted by a CAG member that if the corridor was shifted west to avoid Black Partridge Park, it may affect more residential areas. A suggestion was made to include additional areas for corridor consideration around Black Partridge Park.

Dennis Jennings asked for consensus on adding all the proposed additions except the area around Black Partridge Park, with the understanding that the CAG would revisit this topic after a short break. The CAG agreed and reached consensus to add in the proposed additions other than Black Partridge Park.

The group then took a short break.

After the break, Jeff resumed the presentation, asking the CAG to momentarily put on hold the Black Partridge Park discussion, stating that a quick summary regarding the future screening process may assist in making a decision about the Black Partridge Park area.

Jeff then explained that, once finalized, a Purpose and Need Statement would be used as the first screen for the initial corridors, determining whether any would drop out of consideration because they do not meet the purpose and need of the study. The subsequent screens would then consist of environmental and engineering screenings on the remaining corridors, which would require additional CAG guidance.

Jeff then asked the CAG if, keeping the screening steps in mind, they could agree that substantially widening the corridor area around Black Partridge Park to allow for a variety of potential alignment locations would be a viable option to eliminating that corridor segment altogether. It was further explained that if a reasonable alternative corridor can be located in the area, this is the preferred method of dealing with the issue to avoid risking complications with NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) guidelines later. It was explained that if it is determined by the FHWA that this area was removed from consideration prematurely, then the FHWA could require the Study Team to reconsider this area later in the study process.

At this point, several CAG members stated that this area is part of a songbird flyway for migratory birds.

Eric said that IDOT does not have an issue with widening the corridor in this area to avoid impacting Black Partridge Park. Using the corridor maps that were being projected on a large screen for this portion of the presentation, the expanded corridor area around Black Partridge Park was drawn onto the corridor map. The boundaries of this added area are, roughly, the northeastern-most corridor on the north; Lourdes Road on the west; the existing drafted corridors on the south; and Washington Road in Metamora on the east.

At this point, some CAG members asked if, with the additional area included, the footprint of Black Partridge Park itself could be removed from consideration. Jeff suggested that this might result in the need to remove every Section 4(f) property in the study area at this stage, no matter how small a parcel. Rather than removing the Section 4(f) properties from the shaded corridor areas, the Study Team suggested indicating the properties with a color that would help them be identified. This would help everyone understand where the Section 4(f) properties are located and how alignments within the corridors could be designed around

them. It was also noted by the Study Team that, due to the Section 4(f) status of the park and the park's importance to the community, an alignment through the park would not be likely.

At this point, Dennis asked if the group agreed that consensus had been reached on adding to the corridor map the large area around Black Partridge Park, as drawn on the map during the meeting, with the condition that the IDOT Study Team conduct additional research on environmental impacts and the status of the area as a migratory bird / songbird flyway. No CAG members indicated they could not accept this course of action, so it was determined that consensus was reached.

Purpose and Need Presentation and Discussion

Jeff then turned to the next agenda item: the Purpose and Need Statement for the study, explaining that the Purpose and Need Statement is an integral part of the NEPA process. Jeff also described how the Study's Problem Statement was incorporated into the Purpose and Need Statement, referring the CAG to a document from their agenda packets that presented a side-by-side comparison of the Problem Statement and the Purpose and Need Statement. Jeff also described the measures the Study Team plans to use to evaluate how well the corridors meet the Purpose and Need.

Jeff then opened the floor for discussion about the draft summary of the Purpose and Need Statement, pointing out that the actual Purpose and Need Statement for the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is a full chapter but that at this stage of the study all that is needed is a summary of the Purpose and Need.

1) Randall Jacobs said he was not familiar with Purpose and Need Statements and asked if this was a relatively standard "boilerplate" statement that is similar for all the other highway projects. Eric explained that while they may often appear to be similar, they are in fact specific to each project. Eric also said that the Purpose and Need draft can evolve as new information is uncovered during the study. Jeff added that Purpose and Need statements often look similar because in reality various projects often do have similar purposes and needs.

2) Caroline Schertz asked for an explanation on the difference between mobility and traffic flow. Jeff defined mobility as an individual's ability to travel from one location to another within the study area, while traffic flow is based more on travel conditions on specific roadway links within the study area. Eric added that IDOT also considers consistency and typical conditions when assessing traffic flow.

3) A CAG member asked if the measures proposed to determine whether needs are met are included in the Purpose and Need summary. Jeff verified that they are included.

4) Keith Bachman (Community Impacts) asked about the status of land use plans for the study area and if they will be used in the study. Jeff said that most of the communities in the study area either have a plan in place or are developing one. Eric said that the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission is in the process of developing a combined comprehensive plan for all three counties in the area with funding provided to Tri-County from a federal grant. Eric added that an economic development study for the region is currently being prepared by the Economic Development Council for Central Illinois and should be available by the end of the year. Once these documents are completed, they will be provided to the CAG members.

5) Paul Kinsinger (Cycling-Rec-Alt Modes) asked if the phrase “motorized and non-motorized” could parenthetically be added to the Purpose Statement of the Purpose and Need summary to indicate a need for non-motorized modes of transportation as well. Eric said that including that phrase in the official Purpose Statement would mean that providing for non-motorized transportation is a primary purpose of the project.

6) Pete Fenner added that with rising fuel prices, emphasizing non-motorized transportation may be a good idea. Jeff pointed out that while they’re not considered primary, non-motorized transportation and multimodal transportation are already included in the Needs portion of the statement and will be evaluated by the multi-modal measures.

7) Karl Bryning asked if accommodations for bicycles on the proposed river crossing would be more likely if non-motorized transportation was officially included in the Purpose of the project. Eric said that if non-motorized transportation was made part of the Purpose, accommodating non-motorized transportation would become part of the criteria in corridor selection. Eric also added that regardless of the type of facility constructed, bicycle access across the Illinois River would be considered.

8) Caroline Schertz read a portion of the soon-to-be-released Long Range Transportation Plan from the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission which calls for non-motorized transportation to be included in all transportation projects in the area. Eric said that does not mean the Eastern Bypass would have to provide for that, but it would need to account for or enhance non-motorized transportation. For instance, because several underpasses or overpasses would be required to maintain the local roadway network, pedestrian and bicycle accommodations could be improved by providing better shoulders, sidewalks, or dedicated bike paths in these locations.

9) William Dietrich commented that farm vehicles and non-motorized transportation are explicitly prohibited on interstate highways. Eric responded that non-motorized transportation could be accommodated on a portion of the facility separated from the roadway. Eric stressed that by including a phrase like “motorized and non-motorized transportation” in the purpose of the project, the overall purpose of the project would then be to provide a motorized facility and a non-motorized facility for the entire length of the project.

10) Carey French (Caterpillar Inc.) suggested that the Purpose and Need Statement be more project-specific, and stated that since the Eastern Bypass would be a lengthy road, in the case of non-motorized transportation it may be better to use the word “support,” if it is to be added to the overall project Purpose sentence. Another CAG member recommended adding “where applicable” to the sentence. Jeff said that the trouble with including “non-motorized” anywhere in the Purpose section is that it makes non-motorized transportation an emphasis of the project, while the priority of the study is a facility for motorized transportation. He also noted that all of the corridors may be able to accommodate bicycles, so making it a primary purpose won’t necessarily eliminate any alternatives. The distinction between alternatives comes later as the corridors are measured for how well they accommodate bicycles.

At this point, as there was no further discussion, Dennis asked if the CAG had reached a consensus on the Purpose and Need draft summary as written. He pointed out that consensus was being sought on the draft summary (the purpose paragraph and the need bullet points) but not on the measures. The measures were presented for information to the CAG, to help them understand more fully the needs part of the statement, and to seek any comments the CAG had on the measures. No CAG members indicated a disagreement with the wording, so it was determined that consensus was reached.

Jeff reminded the CAG after the consensus point that the consensus process includes making sure that all points of view have been heard and considered, including those of dissenting opinion.

Next Meeting Preview

Jeff then introduced the next agenda item, outlining the next steps in the study process. He stressed that a method similar to the one used to discuss and determine consensus on the corridor modifications would be used as a model for most of the remaining CAG decision points in the study.

Jeff also explained that the next steps for the study team include more detailed mapping data, using the traffic model to assess the “build” traffic conditions for the design year of the project; meeting with regulatory agencies such as FHWA; and conducting the first screening of the corridors to determine whether they meet the project’s Purpose and Need. It was further explained that each of these steps will occur before the next CAG meeting. Eric added that the Study Team’s goal is to provide these items to the CAG in advance of the next CAG meeting.

In response, a CAG member recommended holding the next CAG meeting after February 2nd, as some CAG members are running for positions in the local elections on that day.

Open Discussion and Feedback

Judy closed the meeting with a discussion about the meeting itself, asking for feedback from the CAG. She first asked the CAG what they appreciated about the meeting. CAG members responded that the study team took time to listen to everyone's opinions and were open to all comments, both positive and negative. A CAG member said he was happy that the information was presented in "bite-size" portions. Other CAG members added that the study team was well-prepared and the use of technology was a good way to present information.

Judy asked the CAG for any challenges they encountered during the meeting. One CAG member said the process sometimes feels painfully slow, but understands why the process is in place. Another CAG member felt that the CAG was agonizing over verbiage, which seems outside of the role of the CAG and extends the length of time for the meetings; he further stated that many CAG members simply "want to work on the corridors."

Judy asked for advice from the CAG as the study team prepares for the next CAG meeting. One CAG member recommended avoiding lengthy conversations about areas such as Section 4(f) properties that are legally protected – i.e., if the Bypass can't go through them, state it as such and move on. Other members recommended: avoiding tedium whenever possible; and, maintaining an open mind and being forward-thinking, as this roadway would not be built for at least a decade.

With no further comments, the meeting ended at approximately 9:30 p.m.