
8.0 Coordination

Mn/DOT is committed to public involvement/outreach at all levels in decision-making related to the Highway 23/71 Improvement Project. Mn/DOT will continue to engage community organizations, area property owners, business owners, residents, and local, county, regional, and state agencies in the development of the project. The public involvement/outreach efforts will include:

8.1 Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

A TAC was formed in early 2007 to engage local agency officials in the development, review, and adjustment of project alternatives. The TAC brought staff representation from Kandiyohi County, the City of Willmar, and Dovre Township, and the Kandiyohi County Soil and Water Conservation Service. The TAC met periodically in 2007 and will continue to meet during the completion of the EIS phase of the project.

8.2 Project Advisory Committee (PAC)

The PAC was formed to establish a communication link with the affected communities, organizations, and agencies. The PAC for the EIS phase of the project includes a combination of members of the TAC and PAC from the Scoping process. The committee represents a wide range of special interest groups to communicate their concerns to the PAC through their representative to ensure that their community values/interests were expressed. The PAC comprises representatives from State agencies, local governments, businesses, and area property owners.

To date, the PAC has met four times and is scheduled to meet quarterly throughout the planning and preliminary design phase of the project. Although the PAC is an advisory committee, their input is an important influence on the direction of the project.

8.3 Participating Agencies

Participating agencies were assembled in 2006 during the scoping phase of the project. These agencies, as specified by the 2005 Federal transportation legislation (SAFETEA-LU), have been given a role by the Federal government to participate in the development of the project's Purpose and Need and alternatives, presentation of technical methodology, issue identification and resolution, and review and recommendation processes in the identification of a preferred alternative. An Agency Participation Plan was prepared for this project, which identifies a schedule of project committees, products, and participatory roles for agencies identified at the Federal, State, and local levels who agreed to be involved in the proposed project. The project's Agency Participation Plan is on file at Mn/DOT's District 8 office in Willmar.

To date, two formal participating agency meetings have been held to discuss the project. Representatives from the FHWA, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Minnesota Department of Transportation, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Kandiyohi County, the City of Willmar, and Dovre Township comprise the Highway 23/71 EIS Participating Agencies.

8.4 Neighborhood Subgroups

Due to the anticipated complexity and range of issues associated with the proposed improvements, several neighborhood subgroups became active in the proposed project. These subgroups emerged during the Scoping process and are focused more specifically on the main project issues that have been identified by Mn/DOT and the PAC. The

subgroups will become more active once a preferred alternative is identified and the specific issues of concern are further identified.

Neighborhood Subgroups that have met to date on the project include the following:

- Eagle Lake Association
- North Willmar Chamber Businesses
- Point Lake Drive/26th Avenue Northeast
- Skataas Lake / 48th Avenue NE
- 66th Street NE

8.5 Public Open Houses

An open house meeting was held for the Scoping Document/Draft Scoping Decision on June 17, 2006. The purpose of the meeting was to inform individuals of the upcoming planning efforts and opportunities to get involved in an important transportation project in their area and to gather information from the public regarding the range of alignment alternatives. A second open house was held on June 27, 2007, to provide additional details on the DEIS alternatives, an update on the evaluation process, and preliminary environmental review findings. Future open house meetings will provide up-to-date information on the preferred alternative for the project and to receive verbal and written comments and suggestions, and answer questions from the public.

8.6 Project Newsletters

A series of informational newsletters will be prepared with the intent of providing project-related information to the public. To date, three newsletters have been distributed to property owners and business owners in the project area.

8.7 Project Web Page

An informational project web page has been established on the World Wide Web at (http://projects.dot.state.mn.us/seh/23_71/). The site provides an additional means of distributing information and gathering input with an e-mail reply feature. The site is periodically updated to reflect project updates, planning/design changes, and to address new issues.

8.8 Summary of Public Input

The following section provides a summary of public input regarding this project. Comments listed below are intended to present general thoughts and issues rather than the desire for a specific alternative.

- Local accessibility when access closures occur
- Safety for vehicles pedestrians, bicyclists, and school buses crossing Highway 23/71
- Private property impacts, especially takings and partial acquisitions of residential properties remaining near a build alternative
- Effects of the project on sound (noise) levels
- Emergency service vehicle travel time changes when accesses to the highway are reduced
- Effects on property values

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- Desire to make no changes in the highway corridor
 - Economic development/redevelopment opportunities in commercial and vacant lands adjacent to the highway corridor
 - Impacts to existing farming operations and loss of farmland
 - Impacts to existing businesses, including highway exposure and acquisitions
 - Water quality effects (Eagle Lake) and roadway drainage onto private properties