

5.2 Federal, State, and Local Agency Coordination

From the beginning of the study, two groups were established to provide a forum for discussing the project and for engaging various federal, state and local agencies. One consisted of regular NEPA/404 Merger agency meetings to discuss the transportation issues in the study area, the purpose and need for the improvements, the methodology for developing and screening alternatives, methods for evaluating environmental impacts, and the rationale for dismissing alternatives. These discussions were accomplished in individual meetings, as well as the formal NEPA/404 concurrence meetings. The other group (meetings of the Project Management Team, consisting of IDOT and FHWA representatives and their consultants) comprised the study leadership and focus on the overall technical and process aspects of the project, ensuring that the planning requirements of IDOT and the Federal Government are satisfied.

5.2.1 NEPA / 404 Merger Process

The project was coordinated under the Statewide Implementation Agreement for Concurrent NEPA/404 Process, which was designed to ensure appropriate consideration of the concerns of the USACE, the USEPA, the USFWS, and others as early as practicable in the highway project development process. It is intended to involve these agencies at key decision points in project development to ensure environmental clearances for the project are secured. Project team members attended regularly scheduled meetings held by regulatory/resource agencies to discuss the project. The NEPA/404 process seeks to obtain concurrence from the signatory agencies at three key decision points: Project Purpose and Need, Alternatives to be Carried Forward, and Preferred Alternative.

5.2.1.1 Scoping Meeting

Early in the process, an Agency Scoping Meeting was held (December 12, 2007) with the regulatory and resources agencies to identify the important environmental issues and concerns to be considered in the EIS. The meeting included an overview of the process, a description of the Tiered EIS process, and a review of the analytical tools. The GIS was a specific focus, and details were presented concerning data layers, sources of data, level of detail and gaps in the data. The agencies agreed that the level of detail in the GIS database was appropriate for comparing impacts of alternatives and for making decisions about transportation system solutions.

The principal purpose of the meeting was to solicit the agencies' input on key resource issues and topics to be addressed in the EIS. Topics that were suggested included the need to avoid and minimize impacts to environmental and socioeconomic resources, consideration of sustainable design measures, multimodal transportation solutions, and the need to ensure the project is compatible with concurrent transportation improvement projects. (See the Scoping Document in Appendix H for a detailed description of the issues the agencies discussed.)

5.2.1.2 Supplementary Scoping Meeting

A second scoping meeting was held January 11, 2008, to obtain input from the USACE and IDNR, who were not present at the first scoping meeting. The agenda for the meeting mirrored the first meeting and included an overview of the project organization, process, and analytical tools and methods. Both agencies agreed that the process and methods of

analysis were acceptable for this type of study and sufficient for making decisions about transportation solutions.

The USACE and IDNR reviewed the list of resource issues generated from the first meeting. The agencies added several topics to the list including the source and extent of the Cook County soils information and consideration of BMPs to manage water quality in the area. (See the Scoping Document in Appendix H for a detailed description of the issues the agencies discussed.)

5.2.1.3 NEPA / 404 Meeting Number One

A meeting was held June 23, 2008, to seek concurrence on the purpose and need statement. The purpose and need statement was founded on technical analysis and stakeholder information and input. As such, information from the TSPR (FHWA and IDOT, 2009), the report documenting the detailed technical analysis of travel performance for existing and future travel in the study area, and stakeholder involvement activities, which provided an insightful local perspective of the transportation issues in the study area, were presented. Highlighted was the finding that when the results of the technical analysis were compared with the stakeholder issues there was a remarkable similarity. At the conclusion of the meeting, concurrence on the Purpose and Need was obtained.

5.2.1.4 NEPA / 404 Merger Meeting Number Two

The EO-WB project team met with the NEPA/404 Merger group on September 4, 2008, to provide a project update. The status report focused on the tiered process and advances in alternative development and evaluation. Whereas the EO-WB project is the first in Illinois for which tiering is being applied, the meeting represented another opportunity to state the fundamentals of the process. Tier One was explained as a planning step used to identify the location and type of preferred improvements at a conceptual level of detail, and Tier Two would be used to advance project development for priority elements of the plan.

The group responded favorably to the use of tiering. In particular, it recognized that there was no preconceived solution for the area given the complexities of the transportation issues in the study area. The development of an overall master plan for the area was viewed as a benefit, more so as a framework from which projects with independent utility could advance in Tier Two. The agencies expressed satisfaction with the process because their early involvement gave them a context within which resource impacts were assessed on a broader scale.

The second part of the meeting was an update regarding the development and evaluation of alternatives. The analytical methods and evaluation criteria used to screen alternatives was described. The first evaluation step compared the travel performance of the initial 15 roadway alternatives. Five alternatives were dropped because they failed to satisfy purpose and need. The remaining 10 were evaluated against environment and socioeconomic factors, and three more were dropped because of high socioeconomic impacts. The agencies concurred with the analysis, agreeing that the socioeconomic evaluation criteria were the most discerning. They also agreed with the approach that further detail would be incorporated into the process as it advances.

The meeting updated the merger group and sought their input on progress to date, and on methods that may be applied in future steps. Several members of the NEPA/404 group were not present, and it was suggested that the agencies have a joint agency meeting on

October 8, 2008 in Schaumburg, thus giving the team the opportunity to give another status report. The EO-WB team agreed to be present at that meeting. See Table 5-3 for a description of topics discussed at the meeting.

TABLE 5-3
Meetings and Coordination with Resource Agencies and Other Organizations

Date	Participants	Topics Discussed
October 30 and November 30, 2007, and June 11, 2009	IDNR	Ecological Compliance Assessment Tool (EcoCAT) submitted and results received. Consultation initiated.
November 7, 2007	IDNR, IEPA	Meeting to discuss/obtain available information from state databases.
November 29, 2007	IDNR	Refinement of state-listed plant species data (e-mail).
December 21, 2007	DuPage County	Received available DuPage County GIS data.
January 18, 2008	JAWA, MWRDGC	Received utility atlases.
February 5, 2008	USFWS	Letter with information pertaining to potential federal-listed threatened and endangered species within the study area.
February 7 and March 14, 2008	FEMA	Letters with requirements pertaining to floodplain impacts and the Tiered EIS.
April 10, 2008	USFWS	Letter stating that the Indiana bat likely is not present in northeastern Illinois.
August 2008	FPDDC, INHS	Received and refined wildlife information.
August 6, 2008	Bensenville	Received additional information pertaining to potential historic sites. (Original information was obtained through the Context Audit.)
October 8, 2008	USACE, USFWS	Tiered approach for the EIS (the process, how critical decisions are made, level of detail in each tier, expected results and documents for each tier); alternatives development and evaluation process (screening from 15 system alternatives to 10, then to seven, future screening of four transit alternatives); current travel modeling efforts (redistribution of traffic onto other roadways, potential capacity improvements beyond major improvements) that led to proposal to expand the study area (agencies concurred).
October 13, 2008	USEPA	Received list of CERCLIS sites in Cook and DuPage counties.
October 17, 2008	Baxter & Woodman, Village of Bensenville, Cook County Highway Dept., City of Des Plaines, DuPage County Public Works Department, Elk Grove Village, Village of Hanover Park, Village of Roselle, Village of Schaumburg, Village of Schiller Park, City of Wood Dale	Letter documenting telephone conversation requesting the appropriate drainage information for incorporation into the drainage study. The following material was requested: storm sewer plans, combined sewer atlas, utility plans, contour mapping, proposed and current drainage improvements, identification of flooding experience associated with the highway or adjacent properties, and local ordinance.

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Date	Participants	Topics Discussed
November 12, 2008	USACE, USEPS, USFWS	Meeting to discuss wetland data collection and data refinement methodology; quantification of potential wetland impacts; the use of available data to identify wildlife resources in the study area. Field visit to view environmental resources, specifically wetlands.
November 19, 2008	DuPage County Dept. of Economic Development and Planning	Request for a copy of <i>Upper Des Plaines River Tributaries Watershed for Willow-Higgins Creek, Bensenville Ditch, Crystal Creek and Addison Creek Tributaries</i> .
December 2008 and February 2009	FPDCC, FPDDC, INHS	Received and refined wildlife information for original and expanded study area.
December 12, 2008	IDNR	Updated information pertaining to state-listed threatened and endangered species and natural areas, including the expanded study area.
December 22, 2008	FPDDC	Received exhibit showing proposed forest preserve acquisition area located southwest of the Elgin O'Hare Expressway and Medinah Road (adjacent to the west side of Medinah Wetlands Forest Preserve).
December 30, 2008	IDNR	Received maps with biological integrity and diversity stream ratings.
January 20, 2009	Cook County Assessor's Office	Received available Cook County GIS data.
January 21, 2009	USEPA	Received list of RCRA-regulated facilities in Cook and DuPage counties,
January 22, 2009	USACE, USEPA, USFWS	Project status update, expanded study area and supporting improvements, updates to the purpose and need document, the TSPR, and the finalist system alternatives update.
January 29, 2009	USFWS	Letter with revised information pertaining to potential federal-listed threatened and endangered species for the study area, including the expanded study area.
February 18, 2009	IDNR	Written permission to use the information provided by the state in the Tier One EIS.
March 9, 2009	DuPage County Dept. of Economic Development and Planning	Phone conversation regarding DuPage County trail lengths.
April 3 and June 4, 2009	IDNR	Received information pertaining to public lands that were purchased and/or developed using LWCFR or OSLAD funds.
July 22, 2009	SHPO	Finding of No Architectural Resources Affected.
July 27 and July 30, 2009	USEPA, USFWS	Conference call to discuss the treatment of air quality in the Tier One EIS, schedule to complete the Tier One EIS, and accelerated schedule for Tier Two.

5.2.1.5 NEPA / 404 Merger Meeting Number Three

On February 3, 2009, the EO-WB team met with the NEPA/404 Merger group to provide a project status update. The topics included a revised study area, updated purpose and need statement, and an update of the alternatives evaluation and screening.

Traffic data and analysis caused the project team to reconsider the project limits in the later half of 2008. Traffic analysis of the roadway alternatives examined the affects of the improvements on traffic for the adjacent roadway network. The Elgin O'Hare Expressway was consistently affected by all alternatives and showed increases in traffic levels that warranted capacity improvements. Therefore, the study area was expanded to the west to include the Elgin O'Hare Expressway. The decision to expand the study area required that the purpose and need statement (concurrent upon in June 2008) be reconsidered to determine if the larger area changed the fundamental need statement. The basic transportation performance metrics that supported the purpose and need findings were presented. Each measure was evaluated, comparing the old study area metrics with the new study area. It was concluded that the basic message in the original purpose and need statement did not change with the expanded study area. The NEPA/404 Merger group acknowledged the findings but agreed to wait until the next meeting for formal concurrence.

The environmental and social impacts of the seven roadway alternatives were presented to the group. It was noted that the accuracy of the database had improved since the last impact assessment. The environmental resource impacts are remarkably similar for all alternatives, including wetlands, waters and floodplains. Three alternatives have potential impacts to threatened and endangered species, but the others have none. The greatest differentiators were building displacements and tax revenue losses.

The presentation concluded with a preview of the February 2009 stakeholder meeting and March 2009 public meeting, at which the remaining roadway and transit alternatives would be presented and meeting participants would be asked to comment on them. Following the public meeting, information supporting the selection of the alternatives to be carried forward in the Draft EIS would be compiled, reviewed by FHWA, IDOT, stakeholders, and the NEPA/404 Merger group, and presented at the next NEPA/404 Merger meeting in June 2009 for concurrence.

5.2.1.6 NEPA / 404 Merger Meeting Number Four

The EO-WB project team met with the NEPA/404 Merger group on June 24, 2009, to seek concurrence on the project purpose and need, and the alternatives to be carried forward in the Draft EIS. The group originally concurred on the project purpose and need in June 2008; however, since that time the study area boundary was expanded and the purpose and need was revised to conform to the new boundary. In February 2009, the group was briefed as to the expanded boundary and changes to the purpose and need. The revised version of the purpose and need was submitted to the group for review and summarized at the June 24, 2009 meeting. Although the study area was expanded, the original purpose and need statements remained valid, with metrics showing that congestion remained as high for the larger study area, the area with travel times of greater than 10 minutes to a freeway connection remained the same, the longest travel times in the study area continued to be those to the west, and transit ridership remained the same. After answering a few questions for the project team, the NEPA/404 Merger group unanimously concurred with the project purpose and need.

The second concurrence point involved a detailed presentation of the alternatives development and screening process that led to the alternatives retained for further study in the Draft EIS. The project team explained that the roadway alternatives were narrowed from 15 to 10 to seven by means of travel performance, environmental, and social measures. The seven remaining alternatives were subject to a more complex screening approach including a quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis, and consideration of stakeholder input. Each aspect of the screening approach evaluated a number of factors including travel performance, design viability, and environmental and socioeconomic factors. This led to the conclusion that transportation system Alternatives 203 and 402 be carried forward as build alternatives. The alternatives development process yielded several options for connecting the south leg of the O'Hare West Bypass with I-294. The process started with seven options that were later reduced to four options. The four remaining alternatives were subjected to detailed comparative evaluations. However, the reasons that two of the four options were dismissed were unworkable railroad conflicts, large loss of tax base, and large displacement of commercial and industrial business. The remaining options (Options A and D) were recommended to the group to be retained for further evaluation in the Draft EIS. Again, after answering a few questions, the NEPA/404 Merger group unanimously concurred that Alternatives 203 and 402 and Options A and D be carried forward into the Draft EIS.

5.2.1.7 Other Resource Agency Meetings and Coordination

Extensive coordination was undertaken with resource agencies and other agencies outside the formal NEPA/404 process. The coordination focused on the exchange of resource information (such as status and general location of endangered or threatened species, acquisition of the latest resource data to populate the project's GIS database, input to the process, and the level of detail needed in a Tier One evaluation) and on field visits to gain perspective of the resources in the area and their quality. Table 5-3 lists the coordination activities. Letters are included in Appendix C.

5.2.2 Project Working Groups

Three working groups were developed to guide the development of the process to a successful conclusion. The groups have different functions, but all are designed to provide timely input to the process so as to satisfy both federal transportation planning requirements and to provide a solution that meets the needs of the study area. The individual project working groups are described in the following sections.

5.2.2.1 Project Management Team

The Project Management Team comprises FHWA, IDOT (District and Central office), and consultant staff. The group provides guidance on the process and technical requirements. Its role is to establish the overall process, methodologies for alternative development and evaluation, detailed procedures for evaluating travel performance, environmental and socioeconomic impacts, and other technical evaluations, stakeholder involvement, and compliance with federal requirements. The group meets monthly to report on project status and to discuss project activities, actions, and required decisions to advance the project upon an agreed schedule.

5.2.2.2 Corridor Planning Group

The Corridor Planning Group (CPG) consists of community leaders from the affected communities and from DuPage and Cook counties (see Table 4-2 in the SIP for a list of members). The role of the CPG is to reflect the views and interests of the individual municipalities while considering the broader transportation needs of the study area, to review and comment upon the interim products from the process, to provide input to the study process for consideration and analysis, and to champion unity within the study area that would lead to the support of a preferred transportation solution. CPG activities are described in subsection 5.3.2.

5.2.2.3 Environmental, Land Use, and Transportation Task Forces

Three task forces were created to focus on technical aspects of the project development process and to provide external subject-matter information and input with respect to environmental, land use, and transportation issues. Task force members have expertise or a particular interest in these areas (see Table 4-3 in the SIP for a list of members). They represent communities and counties in the study area, interest groups, resource agencies, transportation agencies, and individuals. Task force activities are described in subsection 5.3.2.

- **Environmental Task Force** is charged with identifying, evaluating, and making recommendations with respect to various environmental issues and concerns within the study area. This includes providing advisory input to the development of environmental impact evaluation criteria and the evaluation of environmental impacts.
- **Land Use Task Force** is charged with identifying, evaluating, and making recommendations with respect to land use and economic issues within the study area. This includes advisory input regarding land use patterns, the effects of various alternatives on land use and economic centers, and the compatibility of alternatives with the overall land use and economic development goals within the study area.
- **Transportation Task Force** provides advisory input to help identify, evaluate, and make recommendations with respect to various transportation issues within the study area. This includes advisory input for the transportation system performance evaluation, transportation system performance measures to be used to evaluate alternatives considered, and evaluation of the performance of system alternatives.