

## SECTION 4

# Agency Coordination and Public Involvement

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This section describes the regulatory requirements associated with NEPA, SAFETEA-LU, and Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS), as well as the communication strategies that have been developed consistent with those requirements. Also described are the public and agency outreach activities that have been conducted throughout the project.

Tier Two of the EO-WB project has been a continuation of the extensive agency coordination and public involvement process that was prevalent throughout Tier One. Given the scope and scale of the project and the numerous stakeholders that are affected by the project, IDOT has organized a public and agency outreach program that seeks valued input and works toward a consensus solution that balances the many factors influencing this project. In Tier One, coordination with stakeholders, community leaders, and regulatory agencies led to decisions about the type and location of transportation improvements that satisfied the needs of the area.

As the EO-WB project has advanced to Tier Two, the focus has been on the design details; therefore, stakeholders, community leaders, and regulatory agencies have been providing their views on topics such as interchange configurations, lane requirements, access, drainage provisions, and noise impact mitigation. Every step of the Tier Two process for the EO-WB project continues to be vetted with community leaders, regulatory agency representatives, and the public at large. In Tier Two, project team members have conducted more than 200 meetings with community leaders, local agencies, area businesses, and regulatory agencies. Governor Pat Quinn, recognizing the project's national and regional importance, convened an Advisory Committee in late 2010 to investigate and recommend approaches to implement the project.

## 4.1 Public and Agency Coordination Requirements and Communication Strategy

### 4.1.1 Legal Requirements

The NEPA, SAFETEA-LU, and CSS each contain objectives and requirements for public and agency outreach for federally sponsored highway projects.

- NEPA has formal communication requirements with those most affected by the proposed project. Among these is the requirement to identify regulatory agencies with jurisdiction or special expertise in an environmental resource and invite them to participate as “cooperating agencies.” Such agencies are asked to provide input on the project early and regularly during the NEPA approval process. The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) also mandates that the lead agency “scope” or solicit concerns from federal, state, local, and tribal agencies, as well as any interest groups, early in the process. Finally, CEQ requires that comments be solicited from agencies and the public on the Draft EIS. Illinois developed a NEPA/404 Merger Agreement, which assembles IDOT, FHWA, and regulatory resource agencies on a consistent basis to obtain input at key project milestones, including Purpose and Need, Alternatives to be Considered, and Preferred Alternative. This ensures that the

agencies' input is incorporated into the project's process early and often, minimizing the possibility for issues to arise later in the process and causing a delay in the project schedule.

- SAFETEA-LU includes a set of agency and public involvement measures that increases the required level of public participation. Specifically, SAFETEA-LU adds "participating agency" as a category for agencies. Agencies or organizations that have a specific interest in the outcome of the project will be allowed to serve as a participating agency, which provides them access to project information as it is developed. SAFETEA-LU also requires that the public be involved in the development of the purpose and need, as well as in the determination of the reasonable alternatives to be considered in the Draft EIS. According to SAFETEA-LU, lead agencies are required to develop and make available a coordination plan that structures public and agency participation during the environmental review process.
- CSS is a strategy for developing a transportation solution that improves safety and mobility and that reflects the project's surroundings or "context." The emphasis of CSS is the development of projects that fit within their environment and result in a community asset. At the heart of CSS is public outreach, designed to seek from stakeholders the project needs and the solutions that best satisfy those needs without community disruption. In Tier Two, CSS has been used effectively to assess a range of creative design measures that result in a project that fits within its environment.

#### 4.1.2 Objectives

This project seeks not only to develop the optimal transportation solution for the needs of the project area but also to create a transportation solution consensus. Interaction with community representatives, resource agencies, members of the public, and other stakeholders is critical to achieving these goals.

#### 4.1.3 Outreach Methods

The core of the EO-WB project's outreach program is a structured hierarchy of meetings. These include one-on-one meetings with communities and agencies, working group meetings with transportation engineers and planners, public meetings, Governor's Advisory Council, and project management team (PMT) meetings. The value of each of these types of meetings is the opportunity to conduct in-depth conversations about particular issues important to the attendees. Other aspects of the outreach program include the project newsletters, public meetings, and the project website.

##### 4.1.3.1 Outreach Groups

Several outreach groups were formed to assist in developing the proposed EO-WB project. The following subsections briefly describe each of these outreach groups.

##### Project Organization

The project is being guided by a management team (PMT), which consists of the lead agencies and consultant team. The PMT establishes technical direction, renders policy decisions, establishes the overall project schedule, reviews deliverables, and more. Per CSS, a Project Study Group (PSG) was assembled for this project (see Figure 4-1). Its primary responsibilities are to facilitate project development and make recommendations to the PMT. It consists of four discipline-focused working groups – Geometrics Working Group (GWG), Environmental

Working Group (EWG), Drainage Working Group (DWG) and Transit Working Group (TWG). These groups consist of FHWA, IDOT, and project consultants, as well as representatives from discipline-related organizations (e.g., Illinois Tollway, Regional Transportation Authority [RTA]).

External working groups were assembled to contribute to specific aspects of the project. They include the Corridor Planning Group (CPG), Task Forces, and a CAAT. In addition, Governor Quinn has created the Elgin O'Hare - West Bypass Advisory Council (see Figure 4-2).

### Corridor Planning Group

The CPG membership consists of representatives from each of the 27 communities and two counties in the project area. The CPG, which represents the views of all

the stakeholder communities, was assembled to obtain input and consensus on key decision points throughout the study process. The membership of the CPG is presented in the Appendix A of the *Stakeholder Involvement Plan*.

### Task Force Groups

The Task Force Group membership includes representatives of municipalities, counties, and other governmental organizations in the project area. Members may also include representatives from other organizations with an interest in topics being discussed at meetings (e.g., CP railroad, CMAP, Chicagoland Bicycle Federation). During meetings, attendees are organized into four geographic groups (west, central, north, and south) to better address the needs and interests specific to each section of the project corridor.

### Corridor Aesthetics Advisory Team

This team consists of project team members and representatives from communities immediately adjacent to the proposed facility. The team is tasked primarily with developing a set of aesthetic design guidelines to apply to the proposed improvements. The CAAT membership is presented in Appendix A of the *Stakeholder Involvement Plan*.

### Governor's Advisory Council

The Governor's Advisory Council is an organization of representatives from public and nongovernmental agencies, including IDOT, Illinois Tollway, Illinois Finance Authority, CDA, RTA, DuPage County Board of Commissioners, DuPage Mayors and Managers Conference,

FIGURE 4-1  
PROJECT STUDY GROUP ORGANIZATION CHART

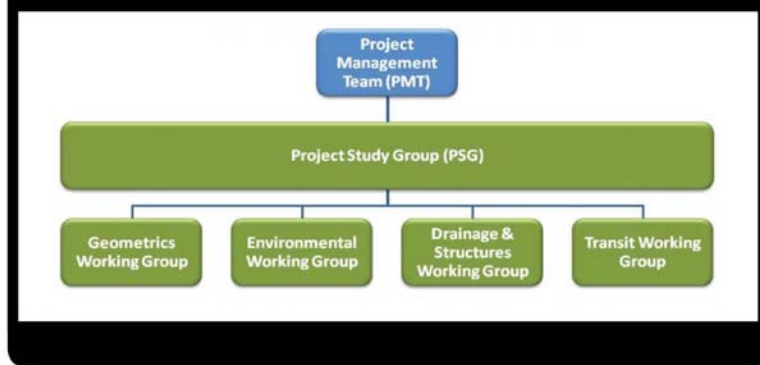
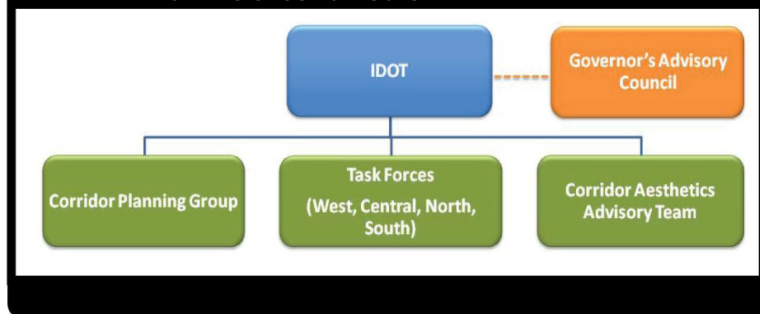


FIGURE 4-2  
EXTERNAL WORKING GROUP STRUCTURE



West Central Municipal Conference, and Northwest Municipal Conference. Its mission is to advise the governor and make recommendations that would advance the project, including financing, economic impact, sustainable practices, and workforce diversity. The Governor's Advisory Council comprises four topic-related groups – Project Financing, Sustainability, Economic Impact, and Diversity. Project team members acted in an ex officio role that involved attending meetings and providing project-specific information as requested.

### **Speakers' Bureaus**

Project team members are attending functions conducted by local community groups to apprise them of project updates or to discuss a project-related topic that is of particular interest to the organization. Attending these functions has provided the project team with an understanding of issues relating to active local organizations.

### **NEPA/404 Merger Process**

The NEPA/404 merger process consists of representatives from federal and state regulatory resource agencies meeting at major project milestones to discuss the project. The goal of the NEPA/404 Merger Group is to involve regulatory resource agencies early and at key project milestones to minimize the potential for unforeseen issues that may arise during the later stages of the NEPA and Section 404 permitting processes. The major topics of the meetings include scoping, project updates, and concurrence on the project's purpose and need, alternatives to be carried forward, and preferred alternative.

#### **4.1.3.2 Outreach Tools**

In addition to regularly scheduled meetings with stakeholders, the project team utilized other methods for disseminating information and obtaining input.

### **Newsletters**

Newsletters are distributed at key milestones during the project to notify area residents and stakeholders of recent project decisions and upcoming activities. A mailing list is maintained and updated regularly so that information is being sent to those requesting it.

### **Website**

The project website ([www.elginohare-westbypass.org](http://www.elginohare-westbypass.org)) began service on September 7, 2007 and continues to be updated and maintained with current information. General project information, project documents, and meeting materials are available for viewing and downloading. Viewers are able to access information, such as the project's purpose and need, alternatives screening process, and newsletters. An events calendar with dates of all of the public outreach meetings is maintained and displayed on the website. A page is provided for those who wish to submit comments. Responses to comments are provided and entered into the project record.

### **Public Information Meetings**

Public information meetings (PIMs) have been held at project milestones, and the public is encouraged to attend. These meetings help to maintain public awareness of project developments and alternatives that are being evaluated while providing a forum for general public input, including concerns and comments regarding project alternatives. Attendees are apprised of project activities through various public informational techniques, such as project boards, handouts, and presentations that summarize the project work and findings. The meetings are advertised in newsletters, on the website, by flyers, and in public notices placed in area newspapers. Opportunities for the public to provide written (comment forms) and verbal

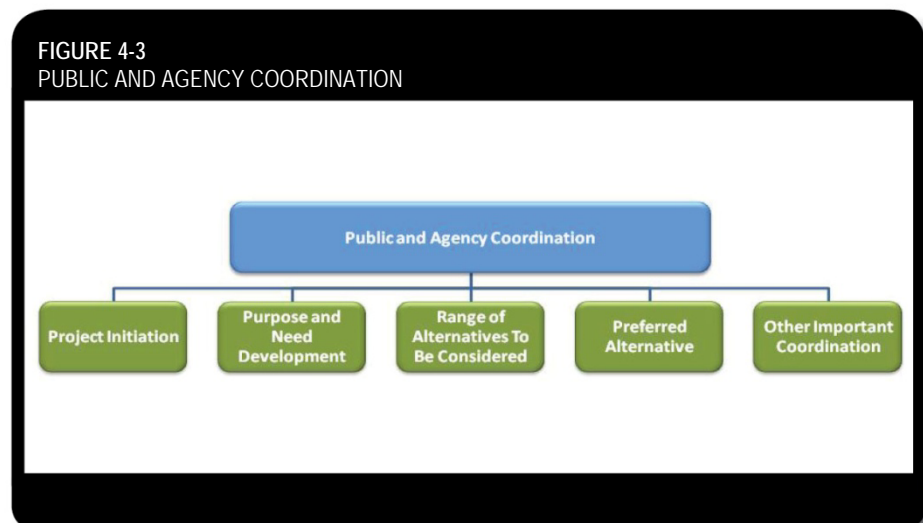
comments (through a court reporter) are available at the meetings. Spanish translation is provided, as appropriate.

### Community Meetings

Reaching consensus on project alternatives and design requires continuous communication with communities affected by the proposed improvements. Meeting with the officials of these communities before and after project decisions are reached ensures that preferences of the communities are considered during the decisionmaking process. Community meetings are conducted to coincide with project milestones, such as elimination or selection of project alternatives and PIMs.

## 4.2 Public and Agency Coordination

The remainder of this chapter describes the public and agency coordination that occurred at each milestone of the project including project initiation, solidification of the project's purpose and need, identification of the alternatives to be considered in this document, and finally, the identification of the Preferred Alternative. The coordination that has occurred with regulatory (and other) agencies, which ensures that the project not only complies with regulatory policies but also minimizes environmental and social impacts, is described (see Figure 4-3).



### 4.2.1 Project Initiation

A number of activities required by NEPA, SAFETEA-LU, and CSS occurred at the outset of Tier Two to begin the project process, including notification of project startup, identification of cooperating and participating agencies, data gathering, the establishment of guidelines for project operations, and scoping. Such activities occurred at several different venues, including project working group meetings, NEPA/404 merger meetings, and public outreach events.

#### 4.2.1.1 Project Initiation Requirements

##### Stakeholder Involvement Plan

As mentioned, SAFETEA-LU requires the development of a coordination plan that establishes the public outreach and involvement structure of the project. As such, a rigorous *Stakeholder Involvement Plan* was developed. The *Stakeholder Involvement Plan* ensures that all legal requirements are satisfied; it documents how agencies, stakeholders, and other members of the public are incorporated into the project's process; and it reflects the unique coordination and