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We're on the web! Find out more  
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## Public Meeting Announcement...

The modified preferred alternatives being recommended for further study around the communities of Ramsey, Vandalia, Vernon, Patoka, Sandoval, and Centralia will be presented at the fourth series of Public Information Meetings. There will be a formal presentation\* starting shortly after six o'clock followed by an open-house format where your questions can be answered by representatives of the project team. Comments on the preferred alternatives will be taken at the meeting, by mail, by email or by fax until May 20, 2010.

### Upcoming Public Meetings:

Wednesday, May 5th - 6:00 to 8:00 PM  
Kaskaskia College - Vandalia Extension  
2310 West Fillmore  
Vandalia, IL 62471

Thursday, May 6th - 6:00 to 8:00 PM  
America's Best Value Inn - Bell Tower  
200 East Noleman Street  
Centralia, IL 62801

Tuesday, May 11th - 6:00 to 8:00 PM  
Patoka Civic Center  
210 West Bond Street  
Patoka, IL 62875

\*Content presented at each meeting will be identical

**We want your input!**

The preferred alternatives recommended for further study requires approval through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)/404 merger process. The preferred alignments will be presented at the June NEPA/404 merger meeting, which will be attended by numerous governmental and resource agencies. The comments received from the public after the May Public Information Meetings are important, and will be discussed with the resource agencies during the NEPA/404 merger meeting. At the conclusion

of the meeting, concurrence on the preferred alternatives will be sought from all the agencies involved. Once concurrence is granted, the project team will begin the next step in the project process, the preparation of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The preferred alignments will be studied in detail in the DEIS.

## How to Stay Involved

Are you a stakeholder in the project? If you live, work, or travel the in the study area, you are a stakeholder. Opportunities for involvement in the US 51 Environmental Impact Statement are numerous and will continue throughout the project. You can request a speaker for your group or organization by contacting us. To get in touch with the project team call 217-373-8951.



## What is the US 51 Study?

The US 51 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) has entered into its third year of study. The US 51 EIS is a transportation planning study administered by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT). The purpose of this planning study is to evaluate a transportation improvement that will meet local and regional needs while improving safety and mobility. Public input is critical to the success of the study and this newsletter is one way the project team keeps residents, busi-

## Project Development Update

At a series of Public Information Meetings (PIM #3) held in November 2009, the project team presented the preliminary alternatives recommended to be carried forward for further study. At that time, the project team indicated that additional environmental resource information from the Illinois Natural History Survey (INHS) had not yet been received, which could influence the recommended alternatives.

The additional information from the INHS was received in December 2009. The information identified natural resources along the bypass corridors around Centralia/Central City, Sandoval, Patoka, Vernon, and Vandalia. Information received from INHS includes the location of:

- Wetlands, including high quality wetlands
- Important habitat areas

No threatened or endangered species were found in these areas but the areas are considered important because they contain a diverse community of species.

After the additional information was received, the project team reviewed the data and met with environmental regulatory agencies to discuss minimizing wetland impacts. Once input from the regulatory agencies was received, the project team met with the Community Advisory Groups (CAGs) for the respective impacted areas. The meetings with the regulatory agencies and CAGs are discussed on the following page.

Preliminary alternatives presented at PIM #3 were modified based upon the continued avoidance of environmental impacts, resource agency input, and community input. In the Centralia-Sandoval area, in Vernon, and Vandalia, modified or additional alternatives are being considered. Modifications were not necessary in Ramsey because the alternatives presented in November did not impact high quality wetlands or important habitat areas.

The revisions to the recommended alternatives will be presented to the public via another series of information meetings, occurring in early May, 2010. Please see the back of this newsletter for meeting dates and locations.

# US ROUTE 51

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Issue 4, April 2010

### Special Points of Interest:

- Project Development Update
- CSS Update
- Resource Agency Coordination
- Updated Project Process

**Early May Public Information Meetings Scheduled - See Back Cover for Details**

nesses, and anyone with a stake in the project up-to-date on the project's progress and informed of new information.

If you are new to the project or want to learn more about the study and the EIS process, please visit the project website at [www.us51eis-idot.com](http://www.us51eis-idot.com). If you do not have access to the internet and would like additional project information discussed in this newsletter, please call 217-373-8951.



Winged monkeyflower (*Mimulus alatus*) is a native plant species that may be found within a high quality wetland (Photo by Dan Busemeyer, INHS).

## What is a Wetland?

A wetland is an area of land where soil is saturated permanently or seasonally. The prolonged presence of water creates conditions that promote the growth of specially adapted plants and the development of characteristic wetland soils. Wetlands include a variety of habitats, including forested areas, wet meadows, and wet prairies.

The INHS identified wetlands within the study area, and provided information regarding the plant species composition of each wetland. High quality wetlands are those that contain an abundance of native plant species with specific habitat requirements. Numerous high quality wetlands were identified around the communities in the study area, particularly near Centralia.

Wetlands are protected by law. First, wetlands must be avoided if feasible; second, when wetland impacts are unavoidable, impacts must be minimized; and third, impacts must be mitigated.

## Context Sensitive Solutions Update

### Public Information Meeting #3

The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) held Public Information Meetings series #3 (PIM #3) in Centralia, Vandalia, and Ramsey on November 17, 18, & 19, 2009, respectively. The purpose of the meetings was to review the project study to date and to present the recommended alternatives for further study around the communities of Ramsey, Vandalia, Vernon, Patoka, the Sandoval-Centralia area, and along US 51 between these locations. There was a formal presentation followed by an open-house where questions were answered by representatives of the project study team. The Macro Analysis Screening Exhibits and Recommended Alignment Exhibits were displayed. At that time, the project team indicated that additional environmental resource information from the Illinois Natural History Survey (INHS) had not yet been received, which could influence the recommended alternatives.



### CAG #7- Modified Corridor Review

After the project team reviewed the additional environmental information received from the Illinois Natural History Survey (INHS) and met with the resource agencies, several corridors were modified to avoid high quality wetlands. At CAG #7, the group members were given the opportunity to review the modified corridors, and were encouraged to provide input. After the CAG meetings, the project study team revisited the Macro and Alignment Analysis in light of the new environmental data (see project process chart on opposite page). The team used input from the meetings with the resource agencies and the CAGs to further evaluate the corridors and developing alignments within the corridors.



over wetlands when state funds are utilized. The INDR also has jurisdiction over Illinois Natural Area Inventory Area (INAI) sites. The INAI is a list of significant or unique natural resources in Illinois. INAI sites include high quality natural communities, habitats of endangered species, and outstanding geological features. There is one INAI site within the project study area, the Vandalia Geologic Area. The INAI site had been avoided by the alternatives presented at the November, 2009, PIM #3 meeting. Some high quality wetlands, however, could be avoided by traversing the INAI site. The IDNR indicated that complete avoidance of the INAI site is not required, if the integrity of the site is maintained. Therefore, alternatives that traverse a portion of the Vandalia Geologic Area INAI site were evaluated by the project study team.

### Resource Agency Coordination

The project team, which consists of the FHWA, IDOT, and the engineering consulting firms, maintains ongoing coordination with state and federal agencies. The project team met with several environmental regulatory agencies that have jurisdiction by law and special expertise regarding wetland issues. The purpose of the meetings was to update the agencies on the project progress and to identify measures taken to avoid and minimize impact to high quality wetlands while balancing impacts to other environmental resources.

A summary of the meetings follows.

#### United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)

The project team met with the USACE-St. Louis District on February 3, 2010. Section 404 of the Clean Water Act gives the USACE federal jurisdiction over Waters of the U.S. (including rivers, streams, and lakes) and wetlands that abut Waters of the U.S. The USACE is required to protect wetlands; however, due to the number and location of wetlands the USACE agreed it was not feasible to avoid all wetland impacts. The USACE considered the impacts to all resources, including community impacts, in making this determination. Since all wetlands cannot be avoided, mitigation will be required. The mitigation type and mitigation acreage will not be determined until the Final EIS.

#### Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR)

The project team met with the IDNR on February 16, 2010. The Interagency Wetlands Policy Act of 1988 gives the IDNR jurisdiction

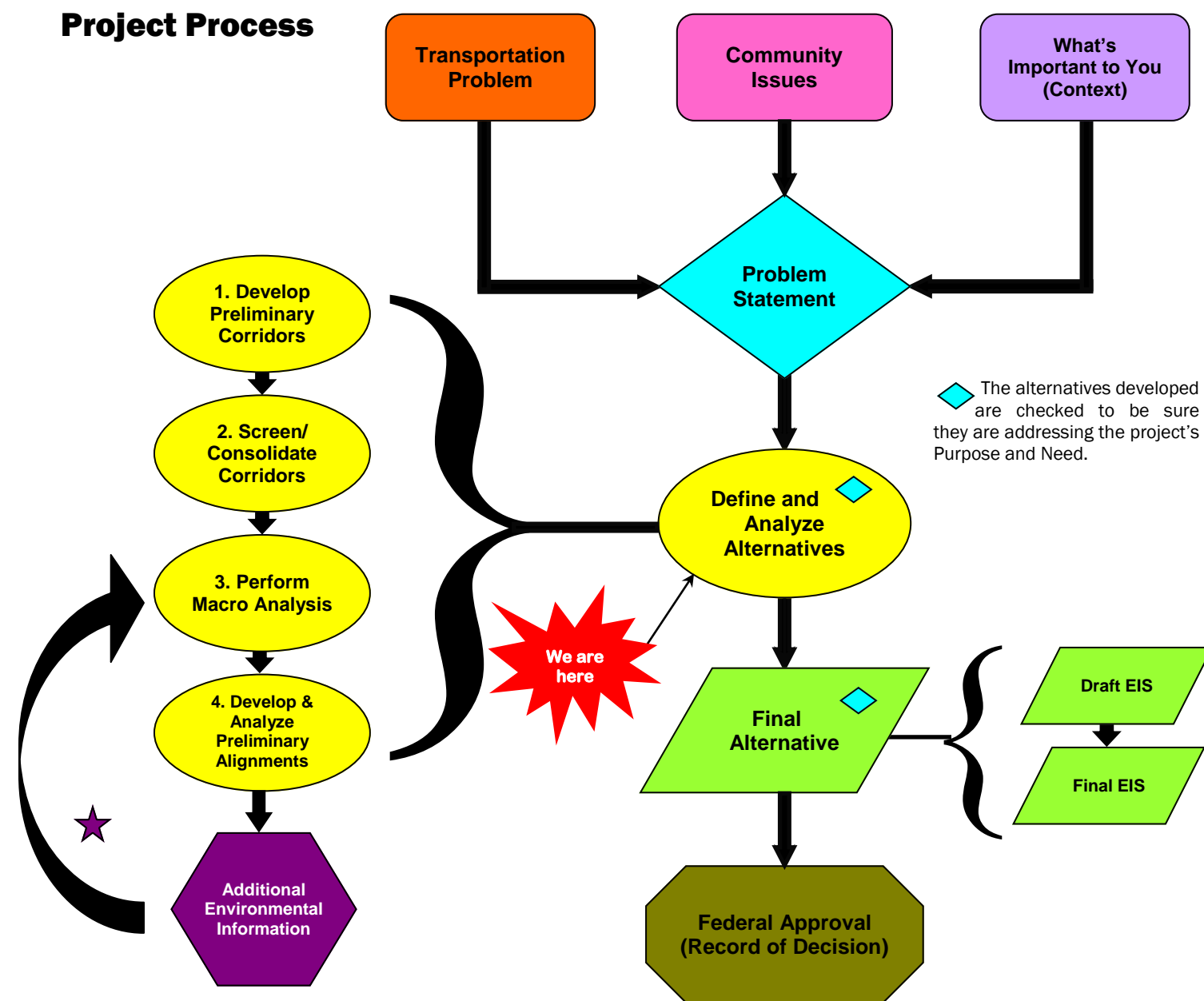
## New Information and the Project Process

The US 51 EIS is being developed using IDOT's Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) and the guidelines of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for public involvement. Stakeholder input is desired throughout the project process, especially before major decisions are made. The project team has been meeting with stakeholders and gathering input for the study at public meetings, through the Citizen's Advisory Groups (CAG), the Regional Advisory (RAG), and through coordination with agencies that have jurisdiction over resources in the study area since the project began in 2008. The Public Meetings held in November 2009 were to share information and gather input before a decision point: concurrence from FHWA and other signatory agencies on the range of alternatives to be studied further. Receiving new information that influences the range the alternatives to be studied was a halting point in

the project process while the project team re-evaluated the alternatives. The chart below shows the project process and the point we are at now. The previous newsletter and project website contain more detail on the project development process. The project team also met with resource agencies and the CAGs to share the new information and gather input. The resource agency and CAG meetings held in January and February of 2010 are included on the previous page.

The revised range of alternatives will be presented at upcoming public meetings. For those who have attended previous meetings, the revised range may look similar to what has previously been presented, but there are changes in the alternatives around Centralia, Sandoval, Vernon and Vandalia that will be presented.

### Project Process



★ The project team revisited steps three and four in the Define and Analyze Alternatives step of the project process. Modifications to the preliminary alternatives presented in November were required based upon updated environmental resources information and agency and community input. This has resulted in modified or additional alternatives being considered. As a result of CAG #7, the project team has developed alignments within the revised corridors and will present them at Public Information Meeting #4 in May 2010.