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We're on the web! Find out more
information with our new website
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US 51 Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: What is an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)?

A: An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) documents possible significant impacts to the natural and built environment as a result of a major transportation improvement.

Q: Where can I read more information about this EIS project?

A: More information such as project background, agency and public participation, advisory groups, and project development can be found in the Stakeholder Involvement Plan (SIP) which is available for download at the website.

Q: How long will the US 51 EIS process take?

A: The EIS process will take approximately 4 years. We anticipate completion of the study in the first half of 2012.

Q: Where will the new US 51 go?

A: The US 51 EIS is in the early stages of the study process. An alignment has not been developed. Public input along with the gathering of environmental and traffic data during the course of the study will help in identifying where the new US 51 will go.

Q: When will construction start?

A: Currently, there are no funds allocated to construct this studied

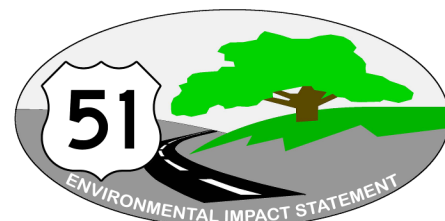
section of US 51.

Q: Has Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) been used on the previous sections of US 51?

A: CSS is relatively new to the State of Illinois. It became official policy for the Department of Transportation in August of 2005. The previous sections of Route 51 (Pana on north to Rockford) did not utilize CSS.

How to get involved

Are you a stakeholder in the project? If you live, work or travel the corridor, you are a stakeholder. Opportunities for involvement in the US 51 Environmental Impact Statement are numerous and will continue throughout the project. An open house will be held in late summer 2009 to update stakeholders on the project's progress. 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.



US ROUTE 51 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Issue 2, May 2009

Special Points of Interest :

- Purpose and Need
- Crash Analysis Report
- Advisory Group Updates
- Environmental Data Collection
- New Website

Where is the Project now?

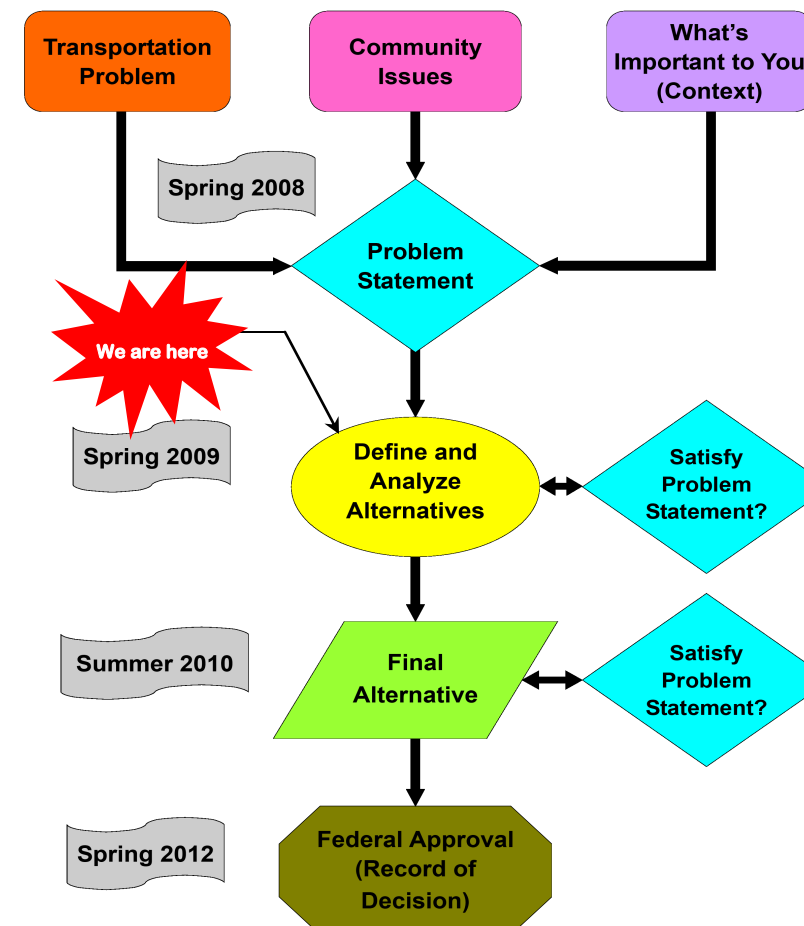
The US 51 Environmental Impact Statement is entering its second year of study. Over the course of the last year much has been accomplished by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and the project study team. The Project Process chart below shows the steps required in reaching Federal approval. This newsletter contains brief updates of the project's activities in 2008 and what is ahead in the remainder of 2009.

You may have seen members of the project team gathering data in the project study area on traffic, crashes, drainage structures, farmland, potential historic and archaeological data, and community economics and culture. Seeing project team members in the field does not mean a new roadway location has been se-

lected. We are looking for information in a large area and this work will continue through the end of the summer.

This newsletter is a way to keep residents, businesses and anyone with a stake in the project informed of the project's progress. Newsletters will be sent to stakeholders periodically throughout the project, but for more detailed and up-to-date project information, please visit the new project website at <http://us51eis-idot.com/>. If you missed the first project newsletter, it can be accessed at the new website created in February.

Project Process



Context Sensitive Solutions

Update — Using public involvement to improve US 51

The project study team has met with the Citizen Advisory Group's (CAG) and Regional Advisory Group (RAG) numerous times to discuss transportation problems, community issues, and what is important to those who live and work in the project study area. Talking with project stakeholders before making decisions is a new process for IDOT called Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS).

Through CSS, conversations between the public and the project team have been beneficial in identifying common objectives for both the DOT and the individual communities. The meetings have also served as forums for gathering important information from the communities that would be difficult to obtain otherwise.

As an example, at a recent CAG meeting in Ramsey, it was brought to the project team's attention that a curve on US 51 north of town has been the location of numerous accidents. A CAG member indicated that a possible problem with the curve appeared to be a short passing zone stripe. This information was relayed to IDOT, the maintenance operations unit looked into it, and the roadway is being restriped to extend the no passing zone centerline.

Without CSS, this dialogue may never have occurred. CSS promotes the transfer of information that benefits all involved parties.

Purpose and Need — Development and Concurrence

The Purpose and Need Statement (P&N) of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) establishes why a proposed improvement project is needed even though it may cause environmental impacts. The P&N of a project also establishes a basis for the development of reasonable alternatives and identifies the eventual selection of a preferred alternative.

The P&N requires approval through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. The NEPA/404 merger process is lead by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and is designed to improve the efficiency of the environmental review process by using interagency coordination to focus efforts on reaching an environmentally sound project. Both the NEPA and Section 404

processes involve the evaluation of alternatives, the assessment of impacts to resources, and the balancing of resource impacts and project need.

The P&N for this EIS was developed with the project stakeholders through the CSS process. The CAGs identified transportation issues with the existing US 51 and developed a series of problem statements for their community. The Regional Advisory Group (RAG) summarized the individual community's problem statements into a single statement for the entire project. The preferred alternative must satisfy the project's problem statement as can be seen by the turquoise colored diamonds on the Project Process chart on page one.

The Project Study Group (PSG) used the problem statements from the advisory groups, data collected about the study area, and input from agencies to develop a draft P&N in November of 2008. In December of 2008 the P&N was made available to the advisory groups and the public. Comments received on the draft were incorporated in the final document and reflect concerns of those affected by a US 51 project. The final P&N was presented at the February NEPA/404 merger meeting and obtained concurrence by all government agencies involved. This concurrence gives the approval to begin development of alternatives for US 51.

The approved P&N can be found on the US 51 website.

CAG #4 — Brainstorming Alternatives

At the fourth CAG meeting in each community, participants were asked to draw lines on a map for potential US 51 locations. The idea was to brainstorm without any limitations on where the lines could go. Prior to beginning the brainstorming of possibilities, members of the CAGs were presented with a series of preliminary criteria that engineers, planners, and scientists use when beginning to identify possible locations for a transportation improvement. The information presented as Engineering 101 and Environmental 101 was considered when the groups brainstormed ideas. The ideas developed at CAG #4, RAG, and PSG meetings were compiled and served as the starting point for the refinement of alternatives at CAG #5. The preliminary corridors for each community are posted on the project website on the advisory group pages.



CAG #5—Consolidating Corridors

The fifth set of CAG meetings were held in late February and early March, 2009. The purpose of these meetings was to review the range of preliminary corridors for US 51 and eliminate or consolidate corridors that did not meet the project's P&N. The range of alternatives included the ideas brainstormed at CAG #4 in addition to corridor options added by the Regional Advisory Group (at RAG #2) and by the Project Study Group (PSG). Prior to beginning the review of corridors, the advisory groups reviewed the alternative analysis process and design criteria. The design criteria presented was similar to the information presented at CAG #4 but focused in more detail on specific roadway design elements. The corridors selected by the CAG for further evaluation will be reviewed by the RAG and PSG; additional corridors may be added by these groups to ensure that a reasonable range of alternatives meeting the project Purpose & Need is evaluated. The corridors will undergo an evaluation by the engineering team; these will consider environmental, cultural, community, agricultural, historical and operational impacts. At this time, each of the corridors under consideration is 500' wide. A narrower roadway alignment will be determined within the 500' corridor later in the project.



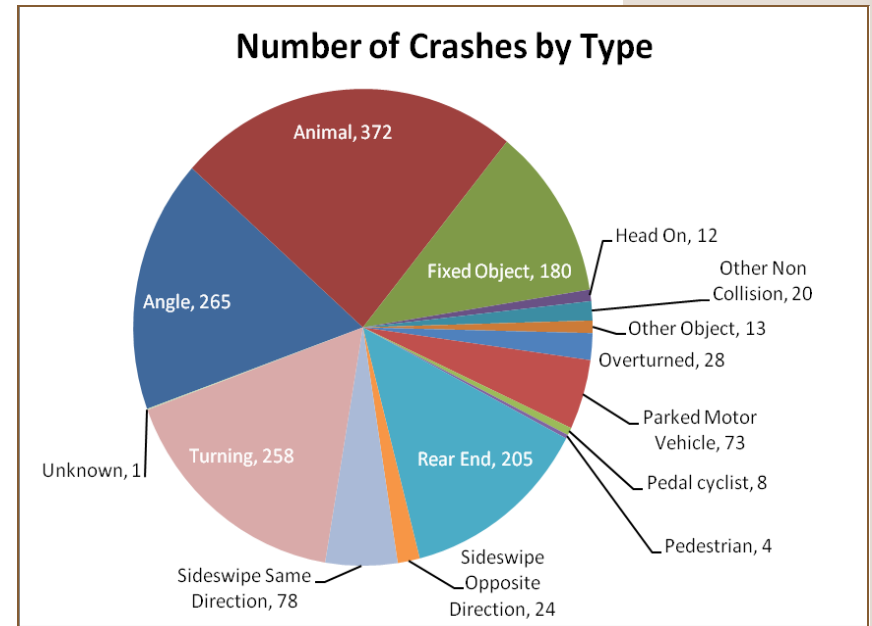
Crash Analysis Study and Report

Part of understanding the transportation issues on existing US 51 is to study the crash or accident trends in the project study area. Crash data is collected by IDOT each year. IDOT looks at crashes with fatalities and serious injuries and compares them with similar roadway types with similar traffic volumes throughout the State. This method identifies areas that may be experiencing a higher number of crashes than expected. The US 51 study has looked at approximately 1500 crashes along the ~65-mile study area to see not only where the most serious injuries are occurring but if there are any other trends.

The pie chart to the right outlines fifteen crash types and frequencies throughout the project length. The five most frequent crash types involved animals, angled vehicles, fixed objects along the road, rear end, and turning vehicles. Collisions with animals occurred throughout the rural areas of the project. Nearly one-third of the non-animal accidents occurred in Centralia.

There are factors that affect crash conditions such as weather, roadway surface conditions, roadway geometry, and driver ability. The US 51 crash report hopes to identify if any of these conditions play a part in causing certain types of crashes to occur more often than oth-

ers. The report will be provided to IDOT for their use in determining if there are methods to reduce the crash tendencies (called countermeasures) prior to expansion of US 51 to a four-lane roadway.



Environmental Studies

The environmental studies in the US 51 study area are ongoing and will continue through 2009. The Illinois Natural History Survey (INHS) is conducting detailed field studies of threatened and endangered (T&E) species, birds, mammals, amphibians, fish, mussels, wetlands, vegetation, and high quality natural areas. Other resources, such as floodplains, soils, noise, historic sites, archaeological sites, agricultural resources, and air quality are also included in environmental studies. The Illinois State Geological Survey (ISGS) is assessing sites within the study area where the soil or groundwater may be contaminated.

Preliminary data from INHS indicates that US 51 crosses about 30 streams in the project area, including Ramsey Creek, which is a high quality stream. Over 50 wetlands have been identified. T&E species include all types of plants and animals which face possible extinction in the near future if steps aren't taken to protect them. Even though several T&E species have the potential to occur in the stream or wetlands, no T&E species have been identified in the study area to date. Areas of high quality natural areas exist near Ramsey and Vandalia.

The environmental data collection includes identifying cultural and economic resources of the region in addition to those within each municipality. Cultural resources include cemeteries, museums, historic sites like the Vandalia Statehouse, as well as archeological sites. Economic information on population, businesses, and future plans of communities is also being gathered.

Detailed information from the INHS regarding these resources surrounding existing US 51 is expected in summer 2009. Studies are continuing near Ramsey, Vandalia, Vernon, Patoka, Sandoval, and Centralia in summer 2009. You may see the biologists and scientists in the field. Their study area is expanded so that there is a good understanding of the natural resources in the general area. The environmental information being gathered plays a part in decision-making but to date no decision has been made regarding the future location of US 51.

