



# US ROUTE 51

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Volume 1, Issue 1, September 2008

### Did you know that US 51 is being studied?

The Illinois Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration are conducting a transportation planning study of US Route 51 from the Christian/Shelby county line to Illinois Route 177 south of Centralia. Many residents in the area can recall previous studies of the same route, but this study is a little different. This planning study is called an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and its goal is to determine whether improvement of US 51 will meet local and

regional travel needs while improving safety and enhancing mobility. Another difference from previous studies is that it is using Illinois' new public involvement process called Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS).

The planning process is long and this study will not be finished until 2012. This newsletter is a way to keep residents, businesses and anyone with a stake in the project informed of the project's progress. Inside, you will find helpful information about CSS, committee work by volunteers in your community, and a map of the project study area. Newsletters will be sent to stakeholders periodically throughout the project, but for more detailed and up-to-date project information, please visit the project website [www.us51-IDOT.com](http://www.us51-IDOT.com).



Tank Farms near Patoka & Vernon

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### Public Involvement —the Context Sensitive Solutions Process

The US 51 Environmental Impact Statement Project is being developed using the principles of Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) per the Illinois Department of Transportation CSS policy and procedures. CSS is a different approach to public involvement that seeks effective transportation solutions by working with stakeholders to develop, build and maintain cost-effective transportation facilities which fit into and reflect the project's surroundings – its "context". Through early, frequent and meaningful communication with stakeholders the resulting projects should improve safety and mobility for the traveling public, while seeking to maintain the scenic, economic, historic, and natural qualities of the settings through which they pass. In the past, the public was not typically involved in a project until some level of engineering had already been performed. Through CSS, numerous meetings are held before pen ever hits paper.

Five Citizen's Advisory Groups (CAG) have been formed for the communities directly impacted by the US 51 alignment. These communities are Ramsey, Vandalia,



US Route 51 in Centralia

Vernon/Patoka, Sandoval, and the Junction City/Central City/Centralia/Wamac area. Through July, there have been three CAG meetings with each CAG working towards identifying their context, or what specifically is important to their communities. The groups will be meeting again starting in September and October to review some basic engineering fundamentals, and to start looking at potential alignment options through and around the communities.

#### Special Points of Interest:

- Public Information Meeting
- The EIS Planning Process
- Public Involvement — the CSS Process
- CAG Meetings
- Project Timeline
- Contact Information
- Project Study Limits



Historic Vandalia State House

### 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 Fall 2008 to update stakeholders on the project's progress. You can request a speaker for your group or organization or contact the study team or advisory group members. To get in touch with the project team call 217-373-8951.

## What's the difference between a CAG and a RAG?

An important component of the Context Sensitive Solutions process is the development of the Advisory

Ramsey Citizen's Advisory Group is comprised of approximately 12 citizens of Ramsey who represent a diverse cross section of the community. These 12 representatives attend meetings where topics discussed range from existing transportation problems to community context, or what is important the community of Ramsey. By working with the communities through the CAG, we hope to identify potential positive and negative impacts.

woodland, and sparse residential areas. An advisory group is needed to look at these areas in addition to the individual communities. To accomplish this, a Regional Advisory Group or RAG was developed to assist in identifying US 51 expansion impacts to these areas outside of the separate communities. The RAG is made up of representatives of the various CAG's throughout the corridor. The diagram below depicts the relation between the CAG's, the RAG and agencies.



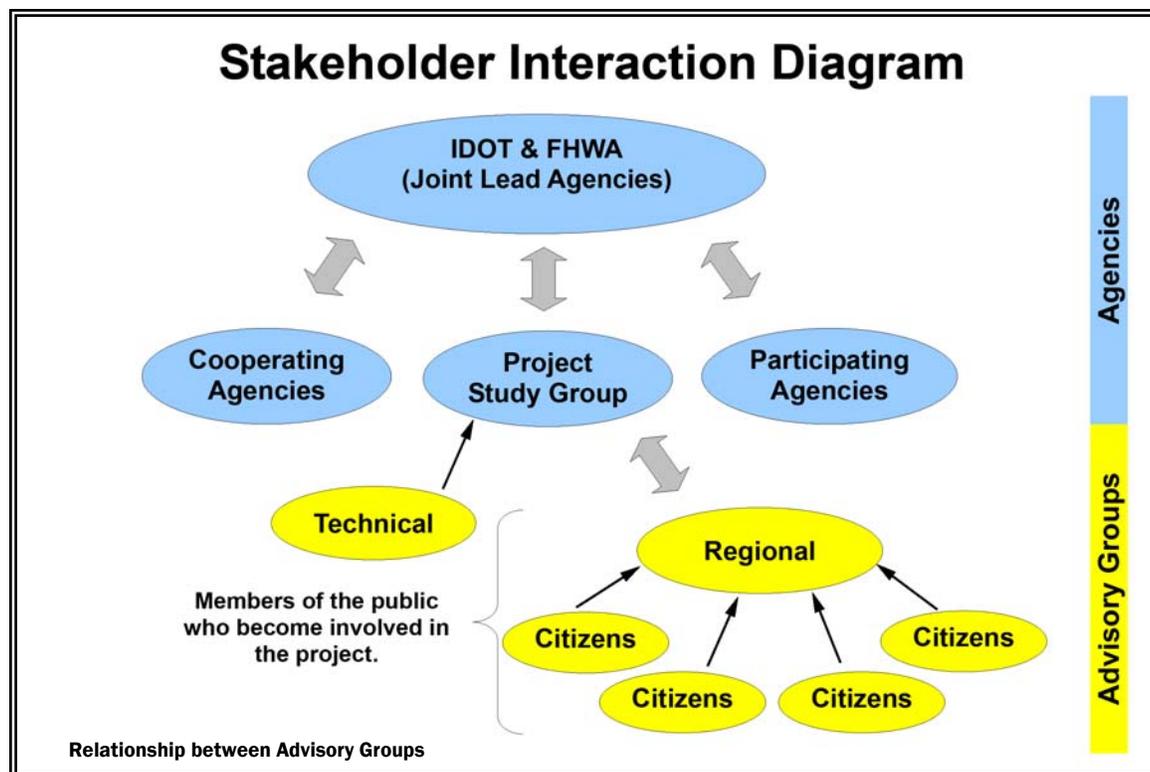
The CSS Process in action in Centralia

Groups. Advisory groups serve as representatives of the public or stakeholders. As an example, the

CAG's have been established for communities where expanding US 51 to four lanes could have significant impacts. The 70 miles of study corridor, however, are not comprised solely of towns, villages, and cities. A majority of the corridor runs through unincorporated farmland,

The first RAG meeting was held in late August.

To find out who is serving on the RAG or the CAG in your area call the project study team at 217-373-8951 or send an email to US51EIS@clark-dietz.com.



### Project Activities to Date



- January to March, 2008 – Public Information Meetings, gather public interest for and create Citizen Advisory Groups (CAG's)
- March to April, 2008 – CAG Meeting #1, discuss transportation problems
- May to June, 2008 – CAG Meeting #2, context audit, raise community issues
- June to July, 2008 – CAG Meeting #3, develop project problem statement
- September to October – CAG Meeting #4, workshops to develop possible alternatives
- July to October, 2008 – Develop project Purpose and Need

Trusting the project process is not easy for the members of the CAG, but meeting after meeting, their active participation is shaping the project. Below is a brief overview of the meetings and how they fit into the project process.

Check out the CAG progress in the Public Information Forum/Advisory Group Information area of the project website: [www.us51-idot.com](http://www.us51-idot.com).

## Identifying Community Issues – CAG #1

The first step in the Project Process is to identify transportation problems and community issues. IDOT can identify a transportation problem by collecting and analyzing data, but a community's issues are best heard from the community themselves. The first Citizen's Advisory Group (CAG) meeting got people thinking and talking about transportation issues in their communities by posing the question, "What problems do you foresee by expanding US 51 to four lanes in your community?" Aerial photographs of the new bypass around Moweaqua were on hand to lend inspiration to the exercise. Existing problems with US 51 and future benefits of an improvement were touched on as the groups debated their answers to the question. The ideas shared by the CAG #1 participants were recorded and are available on the project website.

## Understanding Community Context – CAG #2

The next step in the Project Process is to try and understand what is important to a community. The characteristics that make a community unique are best identified by its residents. Representing a cross section of their neighbors, Citizen's Advisory Group members took a survey at CAG #2 to help IDOT better understand the context of their community. Participants taking the survey were given the opportunity to prioritize what characteristics in the survey they believe are most important to their community. Although each community's context is different, a passion for maintaining and improving the quality of life along the US 51 corridor was evident in each group. The results of each group's Context Survey and a list of important features can be seen on the project website.

## Defining a Problem Statement – CAG #3

The last step in the Project Process before defining and analyzing alternatives is to define a Problem Statement. The Problem Statement will be referred to throughout the rest of the project. The first measure as to whether an alternative should be studied is, "Does this solve the problem statement?" If yes, the alternative will be considered. IDOT's problem with US 51 starts with continuity and connectivity. If people, goods and services cannot efficiently get to where they need to go, problems also develop with economic development potential and safety. Using IDOT's problem as a starting point, at CAG #3 each group tailored a statement that was specific to their problems of continuity, connectivity, economic development, and safety. The Problem Statements for each CAG can be viewed on the project website.

## The Next Step – CAG #4 and beyond

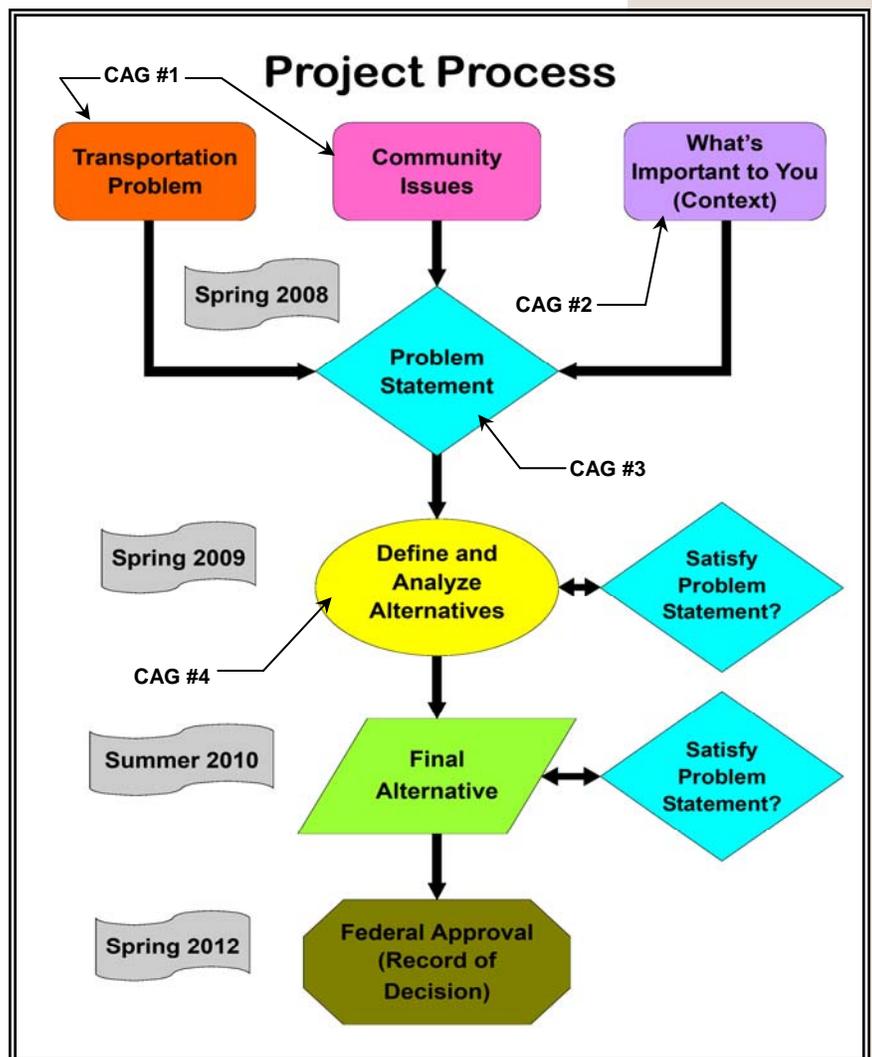
The next step in the Project Process is to define and analyze alternatives. Several workshop type meetings with the CAG's will take place over many months to develop alternatives. The first of the meetings to develop preliminary alternatives



The CSS Process in action in Vandalia

will include discussion on engineering considerations and is likely to take place in fall 2008.

If you do not have access to the internet and would like a copy of the CAG meeting output mailed to you, please call 217-373-8951 to request a copy.





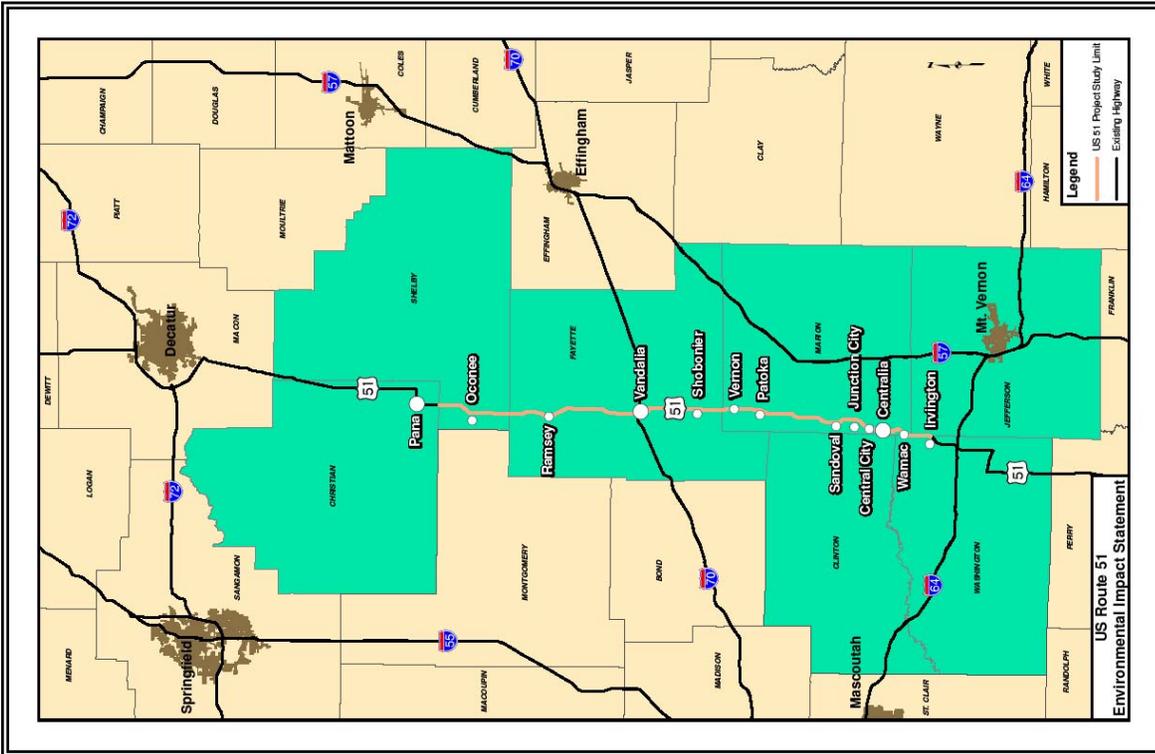
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## US 51 Project Study Limits



The US 51 study corridor is approximately 70 miles in length and extends from the Shelby/Christian County line to the Illinois Route 177 interchange east of Irvington. The existing route is shown in orange on the map.