

US 51 Partners, A Joint Venture
Clark Dietz, Inc. and HDR
Engineering, Inc.
125 West Church Street
Champaign, IL 61820

Phone: 217-373-8951
E-mail: US51EIS@clark-dietz.com

We're on the web! Find out more
information @ www.us51eis-idot.com

Sherry Phillips
IDOT Project Engineer
400 West Wabash
Effingham, IL 62401
Phone: 217-342-3951
E-mail: Sherry.Phillips@illinois.gov

US ROUTE 51

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Issue 3, November 2009

Special Points of Interest:

- Environmental Studies Update
- Project Process
- CSS Update
- Alternative Development Overview
- CAG #6
- Next Steps

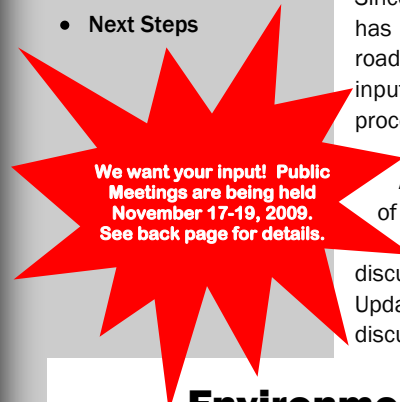
What's New with the US 51 Study?

The US 51 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is completing its second 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 enhancing mobility.

The project reached a milestone in February 2009 with the approval of the Purpose and Need statement. Since that time, the primary focus of the project team has been the development of a reasonable range of roadway alternatives for detailed study. Stakeholder input has been important throughout the entire project process from project kick-off through the alternative development phase. The project's Community Advisory Groups (CAGs) helped in the development of and narrowing to the reasonable range of alternatives. The process the CAGs went through is discussed in this newsletter under the CSS Process Update and the evaluation of the alternatives is discussed under the Alignment Process Overview.

This newsletter is one way the project team keeps residents, businesses, and anyone with a stake in the project informed of the project's progress. If you missed the first two project newsletters, want to learn more about the EIS process, or want to find out about CAG input, please visit the project website at 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.



Levee South of Vandalia

Environmental Studies Update

The environmental studies of potential US 51 project corridors near Ramsey, Vandalia, Vernon, Patoka, Sandoval, and Centralia that began in 2008 have continued into 2009. The Illinois Natural History Survey (INHS) conducted additional field studies of threatened and endangered (T&E) species. These include birds, mammals, amphibians, fish, mussels, and vegetation. Other resources, such as floodplains, wetlands, high quality natural areas, 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 potential soil or groundwater contamination may occur.

Results from the 2008 field studies indicate the following:

- 30 stream locations were evaluated for habitat and selected locations were sampled for fish, mussels, and water quality. There were 52 fish species collected at 16 sites during 2008. Mussels were searched for at 17 sites but only 5 sites contained live mussels. The stream environment for fish and mussels was rated as "poor" conditions at 28 of 30 sites and "fair" at two sites by INHS.
- 23 common species of mammals, and approximately 141 types of birds were encountered in the project area.
- T & E species include all types of plants and animals which face possible extinc-



Ramsey Railroad Nature Preserve
Photo courtesy of INHS

tion in the near future if steps are not taken to protect them. One endangered fish species, the Western Sand darter, was found in the Kaskaskia River. Two endangered bird species, the Northern Harrier and Osprey, were also recorded in the project area.

- There were 106 wetlands identified within the project limits totaling approximately 142 acres. Ten wetlands were identified within the project limits as being of high quality. No high quality forest stands were identified in the 2008 studies. The 2009 studies include higher quality areas near Vandalia.

The environmental data collection also includes identifying cultural and economic resources of the region and within each municipality. Cultural resources include cemeteries, museums, historic sites like the Vandalia Statehouse, as well as archeological sites. The environmental information being gathered plays a part in decision-making, but to date no decision has been made as to the future location of US 51.

Project Next Steps - Review of Alignments



With lines finally drawn on paper, the next step in the project development process is to study the reasonable range of alternatives in further detail and write a Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The project study team will be presenting the development process and asking for public input prior to seeking approval on the range of recommended alternatives from the Federal Highway Administration.

The preliminary alignments being recommended for further study around the communities of Ramsey, Vandalia, Vernon, Patoka, Sandoval, and Centralia will be presented at the meeting. There will be a formal presentation* starting shortly after six o'clock at all three locations followed by an open-house format where your questions can be answered by representatives of the project team. Comments on the preliminary alignments will be taken at the meeting, by mail, by email or by fax until December 4, 2009.

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.

Upcoming Public Meetings:

Tuesday, November 17, 2009 - 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM
Centralia Recreation Complex
115 E. Second Street
Centralia, IL 62801

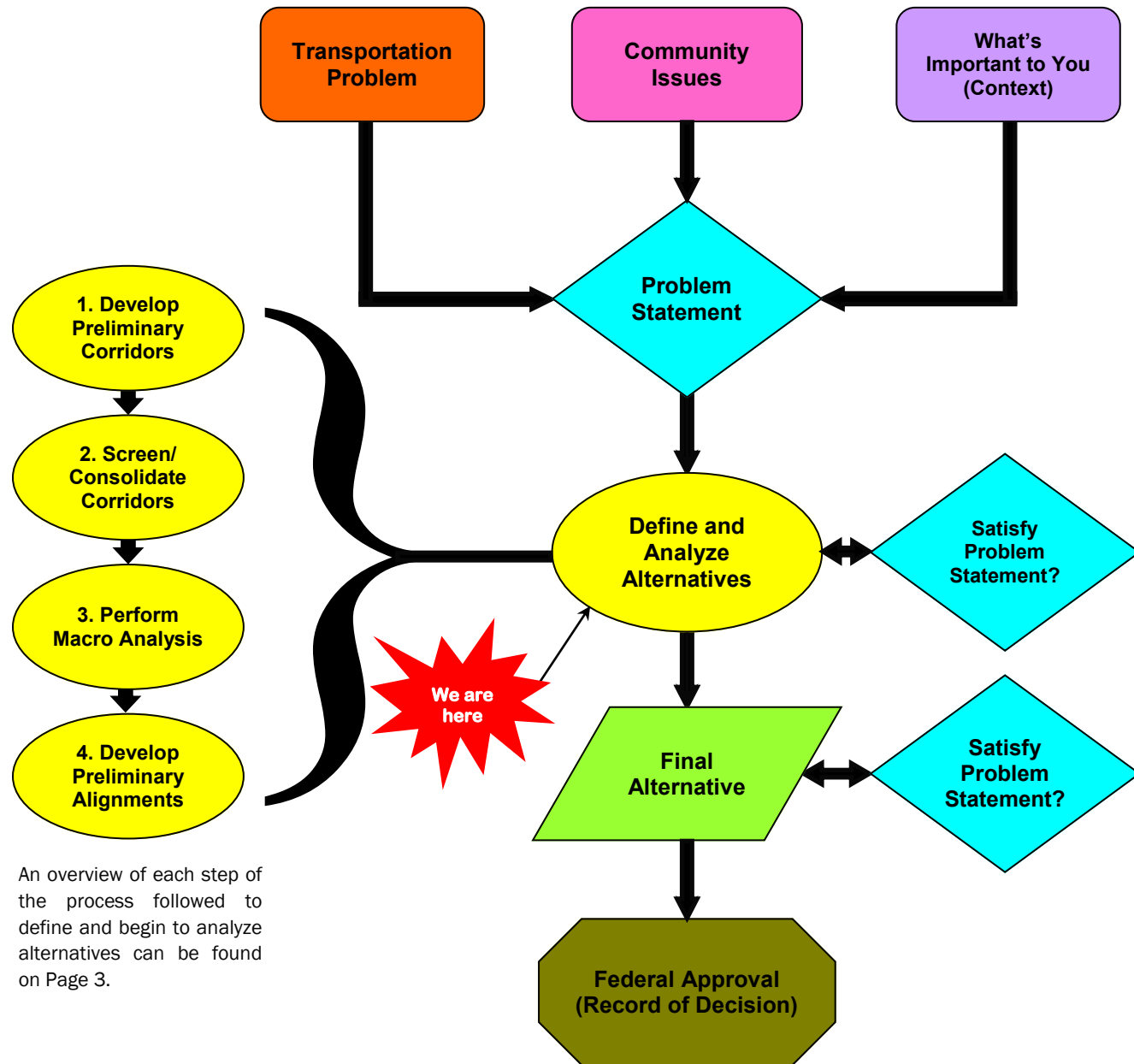
Wednesday, November 18, 2009 - 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM
Vandalia American Legion
321 S. 7th Street
Vandalia, IL 62471

Thursday, November 19, 2009 - 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM
Ramsey High School Library
716 W. Sixth Street
Ramsey, IL 62080

*[Content presented at each meeting will be identical]

We want your input!

US 51 EIS Project Process



An overview of each step of the process followed to define and begin to analyze alternatives can be found on Page 3.

Context Sensitive Solutions Update

The US 51 EIS is being developed using principles of Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS). The CSS process seeks to ensure that stakeholders' views are carefully considered in the project decision-making process. The information gained from stakeholder communication with the project team is used by IDOT to develop feasible solutions and to plan and design transportation projects that "fit" into their surroundings. In the past, the public input was not typically considered in a project until some level of engineering had already been performed.

A recent example of how the CSS process is working in the project is in the development of alternatives around the City of Vandalia. The preliminary analysis of the corridors developed by the Community Advisory Groups (CAGs) and Regional Advisory Groups (RAGs) found that the location of some of the bypass corridors resulted in significant secondary impacts to the commercial property at I-70 and residences on the northwest side of Vandalia. A CAG meeting was held to discuss potential impacts to businesses and residences and get the community's input on the corridor loca-

tions. The result from meeting with the CAG was a new corridor to better serve the same purpose in that location.

Development of corridor and alignment alternatives relied heavily on stakeholder input. The alignment process overview details how the CAG and RAG has helped steer the project to date. Public Meetings to review the work done to date is another method of involving stakeholders. For more information on the CSS process and how it is working in Illinois, see IDOT's website: <http://www.dot.state.il.us/css/home.html>

Alternative Development Overview

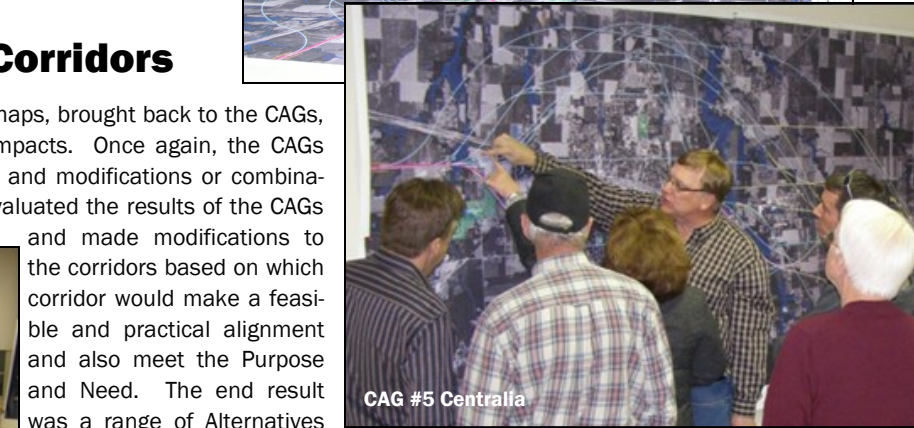
1. Develop Preliminary Corridors

After multiple meetings with the Community Advisory Groups (CAG), Regional Advisory Group (RAG), and a Project Study Group (PSG), a range of Alternatives were developed. These groups were given the opportunity to brainstorm potential corridors and draw their ideas on aerial maps. The potential corridors were then evaluated by the project team for possible fatal flaws, such as impacting Special Lands, State Parks, Natural Area Sites, or Threatened and Endangered Species. If any of these areas were impacted, the corridor was eliminated. Remaining corridors moved on to the Screening and Consolidation step.



2. Screen and Consolidate Corridors

The remaining preliminary corridors were drafted on maps, brought back to the CAGs, and evaluated as "Alternatives" for environmental impacts. Once again, the CAGs reviewed the Purpose and Need for each Alternative and modifications or combinations of corridors were created. The RAG and PSG evaluated the results of the CAGs and made modifications to the corridors based on which corridor would make a feasible and practical alignment and also meet the Purpose and Need. The end result was a range of Alternatives to be studied further in the Macro Analysis.



3. Perform Macro Analysis

After the advisory groups narrowed the range of corridor alternatives to only those that met the Purpose and Need statement, the PSG began a large (macro) scale determination of potential impacts. This Macro Analysis considered the possible environmental, cultural, community, agricultural, historical, and operational impacts of each specific corridor alternative. A team of engineers and scientists collected field data and analyzed each corridor alternative using aerial maps, satellite imaging, and geographical information systems (GIS). The project study team evaluated impacts to wetlands, streams, residential, commercial and municipal buildings, prime farmland, and historical sites, as well as operational features, such as travel time, for each corridor alternative.

The resulting data was then compiled and analyzed in order to determine which corridor alternatives had the least amount of impacts. The remaining corridors were presented to stakeholders at CAG #6.



CAG #6 - Corridor Review

After brainstorming at CAG #4 and consolidating and eliminating at CAG #5, the group members were given the opportunity to review the corridors that were undergoing the Macro Analysis. As the preliminary corridors that were developed during the previous CAG, RAG, and PSG meetings went through each step of the analysis process, some were modified or combined by the project team if they met the same intent as a similar corridor (or corridors), had the same beginning and end points, and were located in the same general area. From these efforts, a reasonable range of corridors was identified for preliminary alignment development. Public review of the preliminary alignments is scheduled for mid-November 2009. See the back page of this newsletter for dates and locations.

4. Develop Preliminary Alignments

A conceptual roadway alignment is currently being developed within each of the remaining corridors to minimize or avoid environmental resource impacts. The Alignment Analysis evaluates the alignments based on environmental criteria similar to the Macro Analysis. The Macro Analysis resulted in five (5) corridor alternatives in the Centralia and Sandoval area, three (3) in the Vernon and Patoka area, four (4) in Vandalia, and two (2) in Ramsey being recommended for preliminary alignment development. After the analysis of the impacts of each preliminary alignment, two alternatives in Centralia and Sandoval, one (1) in the Vernon and Patoka area, two (2) in Vandalia, and two (2) in Ramsey are being recommended for detailed study in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.