



THE NEW US 31 HAMILTON COUNTY

MEETING NOTES

DATE/TIME: June 6, 2008 FILE CODE: 0710215 –US 31 Hamilton County

LOCATION: Oak Trace Elementary School

SUBJECT: Community Advisory Committee Meeting #5

ATTENDEES: Representative stakeholders

NOTES BY: US 31 Hamilton County Team Members

PURPOSE: The purpose of this meeting was to inform CAC members of recommended interchange designs for several interchanges, and update them on the environmental impacts and bike-pedestrian connections.

DISCUSSION:

- Jennifer Dzwonar, Public Outreach lead, opened the meeting at 8:10 a.m. with a welcome and reviewed the agenda. She explained that the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) has been posted on the web site and is available at locations throughout Hamilton County for review. The SDEIS was approved by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) on May 21, 2008.
- Public comment period: The formal comment period began on May 30 and will end on July 25, 2008. Jennifer explained that the primary goal of the public hearing is to make public response. She emphasized that there will not be immediate feedback from INDOT, the design team, the FHWA or the public outreach team. Instead, public comments will be addressed collectively in the FEIS document, which is reviewed by the FHWA when making the final Record of Decision on the project. Everything within the window from May 30 to July 25 will be taken into consideration.
- The informational open house and public hearings will be on June 26 at Carmel High School. The formal public hearings will be at 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. Engineers and INDOT representatives will be available to answer questions during the informational open house only, from 1:30 – 9 p.m.
- Jennifer explained that the advertising plan began on May 29 and includes newspaper ads, online ads, radio ads, and mailed invitations. She advised the CAC to please spread the word throughout their networks and to check the web site for more information.

Recommended interchange designs

Kelli McNamara, a lead designer, presented the design interchange recommendations for Old Meridian and 126th/131st St.

Old Meridian – A slip ramp going northbound on Us 31 is recommended for the following reasons:

- It will help reduce congestion at 116th Street.
- It will provide southern access to commercial buildings and St. Vincent Hospital.
- It will help promote Old Meridian Street as the primary local route.

131st Street – The recommended interchange design option for 131st Street is the teardrop roundabout for the following reasons:

- It provides continuity of existing 131st St. aesthetics and proposed thoroughfare plan.
- It operates well with closely spaced intersections.
- It allows for the construction of the roundabout planned for Pennsylvania Street.
- Local drives are familiar with roundabout operations.
- It provides for uninterrupted traffic flow.
- It provides low-speed pedestrian and vehicle interaction.

The possibility of lowering US 31 starting just south of 126th Street and ending just north of 131st Street is being investigated. Lowering US 31 will reroute drainage and will cause relocation of two watersheds. The drainage team is still in the process of gathering data to present to the Hamilton County Drainage Board and continue discussions with the Hamilton County Surveyors Office

Steve Fleming, project manager, presented the design interchange options for 136th St., 161st St., 191st St., SR 32 and SR 38.

136th Street – The recommended interchange design option for 136th St. is the roundabout for the following reasons:

- There wouldn't be any traffic signals or traffic signal maintenance.
- This design is more perpendicular to the roadway.
- This design allows for greater wetland protection.
- Fewer displacements.
- It will reduce air pollution.
- It is in line with the existing Carmel thoroughfare plans.
- Provides lower right of way costs.

161st Street – The recommended interchange design option for 161st St. is a tight diamond for the following reasons:

- This design will lower construction costs.
- This design accommodates a right turn in and out drive at Pinetree Development.
- It is consistent with the proposed development plan.
- It will increased pedestrian safety for Midland Trace trail users through the protected traffic signals.

Steve mentioned that a roundabout also works well as a design option. City of Westfield has expressed their desire to relocate the trail off of 161st Street.

191st Street – The recommended interchange design option for 191st St. is a tight diamond for the following reasons:

- Driver familiarity.
- Lower right of way costs.

- Supported by the IMMI Corp., located at that interchange.
- Reduced right-of-way impacts.
- Adaptable to future improvements.

The preferred alignment for 191st Street will be shifted back towards the existing 191st Street alignment. The Hunt House was deemed ineligible for Historic Preservation which will allow this to happen and reduce residential impacts.

SR 32 – The recommended interchange design option for SR 32 is a tight diamond for the following reasons:

- It provides for improved traffic movements.
- It decreases the accidents at the Sun Drive Park and Westfield Drive Park.
- It provides better access for increased bicycle and pedestrian safety.
- It will lower construction costs and will be easier for construction staging.
- There is greater flexibility to increase capacity later as needed.

SR 32 will be shifted west and south to avoid interfering with Westfield High School. It's possible to reduce the amount of lanes from this original footprint. A large number of the existing businesses on the west side of US 31 and on the south side of SR 32 will be eliminated with any alternative considered.

SR 38 – The partial folded diamond was the only interchange design option under consideration for SR 38. This design option will protect McGregor Park and historic Lindley Farm property. It will also provide ease of access to SR 38.

The three remaining interchanges (I-465/106th, 116th St. and 136th St.) are still under consideration and are pending recommendations until the final traffic analysis is completed. Steve Fleming discussed these.

106th St. – The roundabout interchanges are what the City of Carmel Thoroughfare Plan indicates as a preference in this area. Traffic analysis shows the interchange working, however traffic flow outside of the interchange is showing traffic problems in the analysis. Before a final commitment to the teardrop roundabout is considered, acceptable upgrades to the surrounding road network must be identified.

116th St. – The pending recommendation for 116th St. is a diamond interchange which will work with the Old Meridian slip ramp. Carmel would like to see a teardrop roundabout, which is currently being evaluated. The team is still analyzing whether US 31 over 116th Street versus 116th Street over US 31 is a better option and which option best addresses the needs and safety of the project. Before a final commitment to the teardrop roundabout is considered, acceptable upgrades to the surrounding road network must be identified.

146th St. – The design for this street is still under consideration. The additional ramps being considered over the split diamond interchange with flanking services roads are:

- US 31 NB exit to 151st Street
- US 31 SB entrance at 151st Street

- US 31 SB exit to Rangeline Road (Clay Terrace)
- Rangeline Road access to US 31 SB

Steve explained that this area represents the toughest and most expensive design along the corridor, and the team keeps returning to the original alternative with the added enhancement of additional ramps. This Rangeline Road access presents safety concerns because of its proximity to the next interchange to the south.

It was stated that comments and questions have been coming in through the website and that these questions were being addressed by the team. Some of the public comments have been positive, e.g. I really like the roundabout interchange option at 131st; while others are negative, e.g. Please reconsider an interchange at 169th St. The team encourages groups, organizations or businesses to give their input on formal letterhead and mail it to INDOT or bring it to the hearing.

Several questions about the 146th Street option arose that focused on traffic movement and access in the immediate area. These options are all still being analyzed and as the decision comes closer to selecting a preferred alternative maps will be generated that show how to access areas.

Another CAC member inquired if the possibility of a bridge over Greyhound Pass was still an option. That option is still being evaluated, but it doesn't appear to work or fit well with a northbound exit ramp to 151st Street.

A CAC member asked about Westfield's Union Street. Steve explained that the team is still talking with the City of Westfield about a route for Union Street through the area. There is a possibility of a Union Street overpass.

Transit Update:

Steve presented an update on the transit discussion that occurred at the May CAC meeting. He explained that the SDEIS language states that the Mass Transit Alternative continues to not address the purpose and need of this project as a "stand alone" alternative because mass transit would not significantly reduce congestion or improve safety, using the projection year of 2035. He further explained that while it is not provided in the US 31 Hamilton County project, this does not preclude transit from future consideration in the area. INDOT and the team agree that transit is part of the solution to reduce congestion in Hamilton County. Steve said that the current corridor design could accommodate the addition of rail transit in the future, but that transit is not a part of this project. The comment was made that the improved US 31 will better accommodate the commuter buses that are traveling the corridor now.

Complete Environmental Impacts Assessment:

Jason Hignite gave an overview of environmental impacts. He first explained the difference between "broad footprint" and "construction limits." The broad footprint is the "worst case" scenario, with the most environmental and right of way impacts. Once the interchange designs are finalized, the project footprint can be narrowed, sometimes significantly. The footprint of the largest interchange option is carried through the project and then reduced as found fit. If a small footprint was selected and then it was determined that the footprint needed to be expanded, the NEPA process would have to be reopened in order to reevaluate the wider footprint. Therefore, the broadest footprint is used for the Environmental Impact Statement.

He then discussed the impacts and how they have changed from the initial assessment in 2003 to now. He explained that the three alternative columns at the top of the chart show changes in the project and changes in land use. The first alternative labeled as F4 (original) is the preferred alternative from the original DEIS. The second column labeled as F4 (current) is the same footprint as the previous column, but reflects current data and changes in regulation. The final column labeled Major Moves is the current recommended alternatives with current data and regulations.

Jason stated that some of the most notable changes are for streams, ditches and wetlands impacts which have significantly increased. This is because the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Indiana Department of Environmental Management have changed their regulations and are now considering all roadside ditches as within their jurisdiction, where in the previous assessment they were not. Another notable change is in traffic analysis, where the required software used for analysis has changed. One last notable change is Hazardous Material Sites, which reflects better record keeping by the federal government.

Indirect & Cumulative Impact Evaluation:

Steve Ott then explained indirect and cumulative impacts to the group. Indirect impacts are those that occur at a different time or location from the direct impacts. Indirect impacts are for areas that have not been identified for future development. Cumulative impacts are those that result when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, regardless of what agency or person undertakes the action. Cumulative impacts are for areas that have been identified for future development and site plans have been approved, or land has been zoned for development.

He stated that these impacts have been derived by reviewing comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances, and watershed management plans that have been written for the areas in the US 31 Corridor and that most have been updated since the DEIS was prepared. The study area that is assessed is one-quarter mile on each side of the highway, the length of the project corridor. He showed a table similar to the one in the SDEIS that reflects the quantities of indirect and cumulative impacts. He again pointed out that the cumulative impacts are not directly related to the US 31 project, but they take into account planning that has occurred in Westfield and Carmel.

Steve mentioned that five 14-digit HUC subwatersheds are located in the study area of the US 31 project. Using these subwatersheds, they were able to look at current land use and projected land use. Land use was broken down into three categories: urban/developed, agriculture, and green space. Land use for 2006 shows a pretty even distribution among the three categories. However, using the information from comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances, projected land use changed considerably to almost all urban/development land and very little green space and agricultural land. He noted one important clarification, however, relative to the drastic change in the increase of urban/developed land: Many of the zoning ordinances require a percentage of green space to be included in new developments which can't be quantified., and understates the amount of land that would be retained as green or open space in the future. Based on these land use predictions, two of the subwatersheds are at risk of potential overdevelopment. These are Cool Creek Watershed, which spans 55 percent of the corridor length, and Hinkle Creek which currently has only two percent urban land. He closed the discussion with a brief summary of current or proposed watershed studies in the project area

and benefits that may result from the implementation of these plans.

Pedestrian/Bicycle Facilities & CSS:

Dawn Kroh explained that she is looking at jurisdictions (Indianapolis Metropolitan Planning Organization, Hamilton County Alternative Transport Plan, City of Carmel Bicycle Loop Plan and the City of Westfield Thoroughfare Plan) to take everything into consideration. She is looking at all requests per interchange crossing. The cities of Carmel and Westfield were asked to submit their preferences for each interchange so the project can try to accommodate local access requests. Of course there are budgetary restraints.

Dawn then explained the Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) process. She explained that the first step, identifying the issues and community aesthetics, has been completed and that they are now establishing CSS targets that are both reasonable and feasible. She explained that there will be more information after she receives input from the public comment period, open house and public hearings.

Jennifer concluded the meeting with with a reminder about the public hearing to take place at Carmel High School on June 26. The next CAC meeting will take place in late summer or early fall 2008.