

NORTHEAST BELTWAY ROADWAY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Commonly-Used Acronyms and Terms

NEPA National Environmental Policy Act

The NEPA process consists of an evaluation of the environmental effects of a federal undertaking including its alternatives. There are three levels of analysis depending on whether or not an undertaking could significantly affect the environment. These three levels include: categorical exclusion determination; preparation of an environmental assessment/finding of no significant impact (EA/FONSI); and preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS).¹

EIS Environmental Impact Statement

DEIS Draft Environmental Impact Statement

FEIS Final Environmental Impact Statement

ROD Record of Decision

Section 4(f) Section 4(f) of the USDOT Act of 1966 was developed to protect publicly-owned park and recreation land, publicly-owned wildlife or waterfowl refuges, and both public and private historic sites from conversion to a transportation use. Land within the study area must be assessed for a Section 4(f) determination, and if Section 4(f) land would be impacted with a project alternative.

DMAMPO Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization

DOT Iowa Department of Transportation

OLE Office of Location and Environment of the Iowa Department of Transportation

FHWA Federal Highway Administration

Section 404 Section 404 of the Clean Water Act is the wetland permitting process.

CBD Central Business District, or downtown

LOS Level of Service, a measure of traffic operations on an A-F scale. LOS A-D is typically considered acceptable in the Des Moines area; LOS E and F are considered unacceptable operational levels.

¹ U.S. EPA <http://www.epa.gov/compliance/resources/faqs/nepa/index.html>

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is being proposed?

A: A new or expanded roadway to provide a high-speed connection between Interstate-80 and U.S. Highway 69 that will reduce congestion on key corridors and promote economic development opportunities in northeast Polk County.

Q: Why is the project being proposed?

A: The purpose and need statement for the project outlines why the project is being proposed.

The purpose of the project is to provide a high-speed connection between Interstate-80 and US Highway 69 that will reduce congestion on key corridors and promote economic development opportunities in northeast Polk County.

The need for the proposed Northeast Beltway is based on a combination of factors relating to transportation system improvements and supporting economic development in the Northeast Des Moines metropolitan area. The proposed action is projected to address the following needs:

- Increasing traffic volumes and congestion on key corridors in the Northeast metro area
- US 65/IA 5 circumferential route is not continuous
- An improved incident management alternative for the Northeast Mixmaster is needed
- The Northeast metro area needs economic development to balance growth and land development patterns

The purpose and need statement for the project outlines these topics more thoroughly.

Q: Why is the Purpose and Need Statement for the project needed?

A: The Purpose and Need Statement clearly identifies the purpose of the proposed project and why it is needed. The Purpose and Need Statement is a vital part of the EIS, for it is used to consider and assess alternatives within the project's range of alternatives, and affects the final selection of a preferred alignment.

Q: Why are you preparing an Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed project?

A: The proposed roadway and interchange represents a major project with the potential to impact the human or natural environment. For this reason, the Federal Highway

Administration determined that an Environmental Impact Statement should be completed for the project. The Environmental Impact Statement is a full-disclosure NEPA document and a comprehensive analysis of the project's potential impacts and benefits to the human and natural environment.

Q: *How is environmental clearance obtained for the project?*

A: The project may move forward if the Environmental Impact Statement is signed by all the joint lead agencies, after all environmental analysis is completed and reviewed by a wide variety of public agencies. Polk County is sponsoring this project, and is a joint lead agency with Iowa DOT and Federal Highway Administration. In addition to the joint lead agencies, any cooperating agencies must also agree to the Environmental Impact Statement for this project; the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been invited as a cooperating agency for this project. Participating Federal, State, and local agencies will also have opportunities to review and comment on the EIS work.

Q: *How could the proposed project be implemented?*

A: After the EIS is complete and any engineering documents (such as the Interchange Justification Report) are completed, the project may be designed and then constructed. The Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization has programmed these projects into the area's Long Range Transportation Plan. If the Northeast Beltway progresses as proposed, the projects may not occur at once but in phases. The proposed Northeast Beltway between I-80 and US 69 is proposed to be constructed near the year 2020.

Q: *How much will the proposed project cost to build?*

A: Detailed cost estimates have yet been developed for the proposed project. Estimated costs will be developed for alternatives carried forward for detailed analysis in the Environmental Impact Statement process.

Q: *What is the public's role during the EIS process?*

A: The public has an important role in the NEPA process, particularly during scoping, in providing input on what issues should be addressed in an EIS and in commenting on the findings in an agency's NEPA documents. The public can participate in the NEPA process by attending NEPA-related hearings or public meetings and by submitting comments directly to the project sponsor, Polk County. The project sponsor must take into consideration all comments received from the public and other parties on NEPA documents during the comment period.²

² U.S. EPA <http://www.epa.gov/compliance/resources/faqs/nepa/index.html>

Q: What are the proposed alternatives for this project:

A: Project alternatives include:

- No Build Alternative
- Transit Alternative
- Alternatives expanding one or two of the below existing roadways to a four-lane divided road:
 - NE 46th Street
 - NE 56th Street
 - NE 126th Avenue
 - NE 142nd Avenue
 - NE 158th Avenue
 - IA 210
- New alignment alternatives (one or two of the below alignments could be chosen):
 - New alignment west of NE 46th Street
 - New alignment between NE 46th and NE 56th Streets
 - New alignment north of NE 126th Avenue

Please refer to the project website for a current map of the proposed project alternatives.

Q: The Interstate system within the study area doesn't seem to be severely congested. Why is the proposed project needed to reduce traffic congestion?

A: Per the DMAMPO, the Interstate system within the study area is projected to be overcapacity by the year 2020. To reduce projected traffic congestion, Iowa DOT has identified several potential Interstate widening projects within the Des Moines metro area. These improvement projects are listed in the DMAMPO 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan. Interstate-35 between the Northeast Mixmaster and E. 1st Street was widened to a six-lane facility in 2005. Interstate-80 from US 65 to east of Altoona is identified in the DMAMPO 2030 LRTP to be widened to a six-lane facility in the 2020 to 2030 time frame. Also during the same time period, the Northeast Mixmaster is also identified to be widened and reconfigured, and I-35/80 west of the Northeast Mixmaster is also identified to be widened to eight lanes in order to reduce anticipated traffic congestion. Although Interstate system capacity improvements are planned or have been constructed in the study area, the Interstate system is projected to be at or overcapacity by the year 2030, even after the projects noted above would be constructed.

Q: The project is proposed to extend through an area of Polk County with prime farmland. How will impacts to farmland be determined?

A: The purpose of the Environmental Impact Statement-level analysis is to determine any impacts, negative or positive, which could occur with the implementation of the proposed action. The EIS process includes a farmland analysis, where prime farmland locations within the study area will be determined, and each alternative's impact to prime farmland will be analyzed. In addition, it is recognized that many farming operations work

multiple parcels in the study area; farmland impacts such as farm-to-market transportation, farm partitioning as an impact of the project, and other issues will be studied.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will detail the potential impacts of the proposed project, and outline mitigation strategies. At this time, impacts are unknown because the study is in progress.

Q: *How will traffic noise impacts be measured and accounted for?*

A: Traffic noise impacts are projected and assessed during the EIS analysis. Existing noise levels are measured, and a noise model is developed using these field measurements and existing traffic volumes on nearby roadways. Future traffic noise levels are projected, both assuming the project were not completed (No Build) and if the project were completed, per specific alternative. The noise levels are projected at noise “receptors,” or sensitive noise locations such as homes or parks, and these levels are compared to state and Federal noise guidelines to determine if the noise level exceeds an acceptable level. If noise exceeds an acceptable level, noise mitigation methods will be analyzed, including but not limited to berming, tree planting, or noise walls.

Q: *Will the proposed project encourage urban sprawl?*

A: Within the study area, the Polk County future land use plan does not show future land uses that are significantly different from the existing uses. This means the majority of existing development patterns and land uses will continue in the study area, even with the implementation of the proposed project. Polk County plans for areas within *unincorporated Polk County* to largely remain for agricultural use away from the Interstate system within the planning horizon.

Cities within the study area may plan for land development near or along the proposed transportation corridor; however, this growth would be planned to fit within each City’s development goals and infrastructures. Currently, some cities along the corridor have planned development along the corridor that is contiguous to the city (a continuation of the existing development, not leapfrog development). The majority of planned development with the Northeast Beltway would begin at the US 65/I-80 interchange, where land development is already occurring.

The project is proposed to make the regional roadway network more efficient and to support planned development within metro cities. *The project is not expected to encourage urban sprawl in unincorporated Polk County; the project is planned to incorporate planned growth in Polk County cities.*

Q: *How will the proposed project be financed?*

A: Funding for the proposed project has not yet been determined.

Q: *If I submit a comment regarding the project, will I receive a response?*

A: Comments received regarding the proposed project will be included in the official record, and comments will be acknowledged. Comments will typically be addressed as a group within the Environmental Impact Statement document.

Q: *Where can I get more information on this project?*

A: The project website will be updated periodically as new information becomes available. (<http://www.polkcountyiowa.gov/PublicWorks/pages/specialProjects.aspx>)
In addition, mail comments may be submitted to either:

Larry Land, Director
Polk County Public Works
5585 NW 14th Street
Des Moines, Iowa 50313

Jerry Searle or Jamie Tunnell Bents
Snyder & Associates, Inc.
2727 SW Snyder Blvd.
Ankeny, Iowa 50023