

NW 26th STREET 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 north-south roadway within the study area of IA 415/Oralabor Road to the north, Hickman Road to the south, Merle Hay Road to the west, and NW 2nd Avenue to the east.

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 proposed action is to safely and efficiently accommodate existing and projected local and regional traffic between the Des Moines CBD (including the Des Moines International Airport) and areas to the north, in addition to traffic traveling to the CBD or northern metro suburbs via I-35/80.

The project is needed due to the following:

- A discontinuous north-south arterial roadway network in the Des Moines metro area
- Existing and projected traffic congestion
- Regional transportation access deficiency to support the existing roadway network and accommodate planned metro area growth
- Local street traffic safety concerns
- Out-of-distance travel associated with I-35/80 spacing

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 NW 26th Street progresses as proposed, the three projects would not occur at once but in phases. The proposed NW 26th Street interchange is proposed to be constructed in 2010, the new roadway connection between Euclid and I-35/80 is proposed to be constructed in 2020, and the NW 26th Street expansion is proposed for year 2030. However, based on FHWA policy, it is likely that the local street system improvements would need to be in place before an interchange would be constructed, so the projects may be reprogrammed to a different implementation order.

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

A: No cost estimates have yet been developed for the proposed project because the range of alternatives includes twelve alternatives. 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

Q: What are the proposed alternatives for this project:

A: Project alternatives include:

- No Build Alternative
- Transit Alternative
- Merle Hay Road
 - Roadway expansion to six lanes
- NW Beaver Avenue
 - Roadway expansion to five lanes
- NW Beaver Drive/Lower Beaver Road
 - Roadway expansion to five lanes
- NW 26th Street/West Alignment
 - Expand NW 26th Street to five lanes
 - Add I-35/80 interchange
 - Construct new four-lane alignment from I-35/80 to Euclid Avenue in area immediately south of NW 26th Street (across Des Moines River)
- NW 26th Street/Morningstar Drive/East Bank Alignment (*With option for MLK Connection Road*)
 - Expand NW 26th Street to five lanes
 - Add I-35/80 interchange
 - Expand Morningstar Drive to five lanes
 - Construct new four-lane alignment along east bank of Des Moines River (Aurora to Euclid Avenue)
 - The alternative would end at Euclid Avenue. An option for another alignment would be to construct new four-lane alignment from Euclid Avenue south to Hickman Road (across Des Moines River).
- NW 26th Street/Morningstar Drive/12th Street
 - Expand NW 26th Street to five lanes
 - Add I-35/80 interchange
 - Expand Morningstar Drive and 12th Street to five lanes
 - The alternative would end at Euclid Avenue. An option for another alignment would be to construct new four-lane alignment from Euclid Avenue south to Hickman Road (across Des Moines River).
- NW 16th Avenue/NW 6th Avenue
 - Expand NW 16th Street to five lanes (IA 415/Oralabor Road to NW 6th Drive)
 - Expand NW 6th Drive/Avenue to five lanes
- NW 16th Avenue/NW 6th Drive/12th Street
 - Expand NW 16th Street to five lanes (IA 415/Oralabor Road to NW 6th Drive)
 - Expand NW 6th Drive to five lanes
 - Construct a new four-lane alignment between NW 6th Drive and Morningstar Drive

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

- Expand Morningstar Drive and 12th Street to five lanes to Euclid Avenue
- NW 2nd Avenue
 - Expand NW 2nd Avenue to six lanes

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

Q: The local streets within the study area are not severely congested at this time. Why is the proposed project needed to reduce local street traffic congestion?

A: In 2004, approximately 2,500 – 3,000 vehicles per day traveled on the 12th Street/Morningstar Drive corridor, with less than a thousand vehicles per day on NW 26th Street. However, traffic projections developed by the Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization show large traffic increases on these corridors before the year 2030. Without the proposed project, 12th Street traffic is projected to increase to 10,000 vehicles per day, nearing 12th Street's capacity. The proposed roadway corridor will reduce 12th Street traffic to more reasonable levels, in addition to providing traffic reductions for 6th Avenue, Cornell Street, Euclid Avenue, and Beaver Drive. In addition to increasing traffic volumes, many of these streets are residential and not designed to be arterial roads, carrying both local and regional traffic.

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: The project is proposed to extend through the Des Moines River Greenbelt. How will you determine if this project could impact the greenbelt area?

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. A Section 4(f) analysis will be completed to determine if the Greenbelt area and land about it is Section 4(f) land. Per Federal law, Section 4(f) land is not to be used for roadway projects unless there is no feasible and prudent alternative available. At this time, environmental analyses are underway to determine all potential alternatives for the study area, and assess impacts if the project were to use lands within the Des Moines River Greenbelt, including wetlands, biotic communities, threatened and endangered species,

water quality, . 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: Could this project impact the Neal Smith Trail and the Trestle-to-Trestle Trail, both located within the study area?

A: Several NW 26th Street project alternatives cross or are in close proximity to trails. It is the County's priority to maintain and continue the existing trail system, and it is hoped that a NW 26th Street project could increase trail mileage as well as increase trail accessibility.

Of the proposed project alternatives, the NW 26th Street/West Alignment alternative is proposed to either cross or align alongside the Trestle-to-Trestle Trail, and is proposed to cross the Neal Smith Trail on a bridge. There are approximately eight other trail crossings on bridges that exist between Saylorville Lake and downtown Des Moines.

The NW 26th Street/Morningstar Drive/East Bank Alignment alternative is proposed to align alongside the Trestle-to-Trestle Trail.

The option for the East Bank Alignment and the 12th Street alternative to build a new four-lane road south to connect to MLK Parkway is proposed to cross the Neal Smith Trail on a bridge. There are approximately eight other trail crossings on bridges that exist between Saylorville Lake and downtown Des Moines.

The proposed project has the potential to benefit the Central Iowa trail network. Bicycle facilities could be included in any of the alternatives, resulting in a denser bicycle facilities network in Central Iowa. Alternatives including a NW 26th Street interchange would provide better regional trail access for those living outside the Des Moines metro area or those who prefer to ride shorter distances.

Potential impacts or benefits to bicycle facilities, in addition to opportunities to expand the bicycle facility network, will be discussed in the DEIS.

Q: I have heard that some land in the study area is Section 4(f). What does that mean?

A: Section 4(f) is a law initially passed in the USDOT Act of 1966, with a goal of preserving countryside, publically-owned park and recreation land, publically-owned wildlife and waterfowl refuges, and historic sites. It is important to note that Section 4(f) land is classified within specific projects, and Federal Highway Administration has not yet designated any land within the NW 26th Street project area as Section 4(f) land. A Section 4(f) analysis is in process that will allow FHWA to designate Section 4(f) land within the study area as appropriate. Then, Section 4(f) evaluation may take place, which will determine how Section 4(f) land is proposed to be impacted. "Avoidance alternatives," or

alternatives that would not impact Section 4(f) land, must be considered before an alternative using Section 4(f) land may be used as a preferred alignment.

Q: *Will the proposed project influence land development growth and patterns and encourage urban sprawl?*

A: Within the study area, the future land use plans for Polk County, Ankeny, and Des Moines are not significantly different from the current land use plans. This means that existing development patterns and land uses will continue in the study area, even with the implementation of the proposed project.

The majority of area about the proposed project alternatives is built-out (completely developed).

The NW 6th Avenue and NW 26th Street alternatives are the only alternatives located in areas that are not completely built-out. However, there is little land development opportunity on either corridor. NW 6th Avenue is built-out from I-35/80 to the south, and partially built-out with residential uses for the remainder of the corridor. Where development has not occurred, land is agricultural but portions of this land may be used for sand and gravel mining in the future.

Much of the adjacent land about a proposed NW 26th Street interchange is Federally-owned (is not projected to develop) or is currently or is proposed to be used for sand and gravel mining, leaving little opportunity for other types of land development. Much of the area northeast of the proposed interchange is and will be used for sand and gravel mining as well; most end uses of these mining operations are recreation areas with little available land for land development.

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

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