

FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

FOR

US HIGHWAY 61 CORRIDOR

From ½ MILE NORTH OF IOWA HIGHWAY 78 to NORTH OF 130th STREET

Louisa County, Iowa

NHSX-061-3(61)--3H-58

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has determined that this project will have no significant impact on the human and natural environment. This Finding of No Significant Impact is based on the attached Environmental Assessment (EA) which has been independently evaluated by FHWA and determined to adequately and accurately discuss the purpose and need, environmental issues, and impacts of the proposed project and appropriate mitigation measures. It provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. FHWA takes full responsibility for the accuracy, scope, and content of the attached EA.

9/17/19
Date

Michael Sabatini
For FHWA

Description of the Proposed Action

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT) are proposing to improve the U.S. Highway 61 corridor from ½ mile north of Iowa Highway 78 to just north of 130th Street, near the City of Wapello, in Louisa County, Iowa. Improvements will include an interchange at County Road G-62 west of Wapello along with improvements to the side-road network for access control along the corridor.

Environmental Assessment Availability

The Environmental Assessment (EA) was signed on December 6, 2017 and distributed to selected federal, state, and local resource agencies for review and comment. A notice of the public availability of the EA and notification of a public hearing on May 8, 2018, was published in both the Wapello Republican and the Morning Sun News Herald on April 19, 2018 and April 26, 2018. A Spanish version was also placed in the El Heraldo Hispano on May 2, 2018. Notice of the public hearing was also included on the Iowa DOT website at www.iowadot.gov/pim.

Review and Comment Period

Following publication and distribution of the EA, a review and comment period was established for receipt of comments on the EA. The review and comment period closed on June 8, 2018. A public hearing for the project was held at the Charles Briggs Civic Center located at 317 N. Water Street in Wapello, Iowa on May 8, 2018. The public hearing used an open forum format with a formal presentation. A written record of this meeting has been prepared and is available upon request.

Agency Comments

There were no comment letters received on the EA from regulatory agencies.

Public Hearing Date and Summary

A public hearing was held on May 8, 2018 from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Charles Briggs Civic Center located at 317 N. Water Street in Wapello, Iowa. The purpose of the meeting was to present the Proposed Alternative and to gather feedback from the public on Proposed Alternative and the EA. The hearing was conducted using a combined open forum and formal presentation format. The hearing began with an open session during which attendees could express their views and ask questions in an informal setting. A formal presentation, followed by a question and answer session, was held after the open forum session. Approximately 174 people attended the public hearing. Overall, there was general support for the project, however, there were several comments related to limited access to the City of Wapello by routing all traffic to the existing County Road G-62, limited access to the City of Wapello from the south, property impacts, and emergency response times and access. Other comments received related to safety concerns and the ROW/acquisition process. A

transcript of this hearing is included by reference as a separate document to the FONSI and is available upon request.

New Information

Several changes and new information have occurred since the publication of the EA and public hearing. These updates are described below.

Subsequent to publication of the EA, design modifications have occurred as a result of comments received at the public hearing and comments received from a local coalition representing Louisa County, City of Wapello, Wapello Fire and Ambulance, Wapello School District, and local businesses. The Study Area and Impact Area were adjusted in some areas where the Preferred Alternative has been modified.

The Iowa DOT has agreed to the following modifications to the Preferred Alternative:

- To improve County Road G-62 and remove the S-curve just to the west of existing U.S. Highway 61 due to potential traffic safety and vehicle operation concerns. The installation of storm sewers along County Road G-62 would involve a partnership between the State and the City if final design requires these improvements.
- To maintain access continuity of K-Avenue by constructing mainline bridges on proposed U.S. Highway 61 over K-Avenue. This would better accommodate oversized loads traveling on the proposed corridor.
- To remove the proposed mainline bridges over 70th Street and maintain access continuity of K-Avenue. The preferred alignment will show 70th Street closed off from proposed U.S. Highway 61.
- To include an impact analysis of paving 142nd Avenue in our environmental document and agree to accommodate it during the final design phase of the proposed interchange. Construction of 142nd Avenue improvements would be locally funded.
- To study turning movements along the project corridor during the final design phase to ensure current design standards are met and additional turn lanes are warranted. The Iowa DOT typically plans for left turn lanes on 4-lane expressways.

The modifications have resulted in changes to the overall project impacts shown in Table 5-7 of the EA. The table below shows the revised impacts on resources based on the changes made since the EA was published.

	No Build	Proposed Alternative (Revised)
Acres	0	646
Historic Structures	0	1
Historic Districts	0	1 (0.65 acres)
Archaeological Sites	0	1 (0.43 acres)
Floodplains (acres)	0	159
National Rivers Inventory	0	0
Prairies (acres)	0	0
Recreational Areas	0	2 sites
Refuge Areas	0	0
Regulated Materials	0	2 sites (0.7 acres)
Sovereign Lands	0	3 sites (60 acres)
Special Rivers	0	383 feet
Streams (feet)	0	12,213 feet
Woodlands and T&E (Bat Habitat)	0	71 acres
Unique Land Forms (acres)	0	0
Utilities	0	6
Wetlands (acres)	0	67 acres
WMA's	0	2 sites (43 acres)
Businesses	0	4
Cemeteries	0	0
Churches	0	0
Farmland (acres)	0	327 acres
Homes	0	15
Schools	0	0

These revisions were incorporated into the Proposed Alternative and reviewed by the resource agencies (USACE, USFWS, EPA, Iowa DNR) as part of the Iowa DOT's NEPA/404 Merge Process (Concurrence Point 4). All agencies concurred with the revised Proposed Alternative on April 10, 2019.

Basis for Finding of No Significant Impact

The EA evaluated resources present in the project area for effects as they may occur related to the proposed improvements to the U.S. Highway 61 corridor in Louisa County. The EA documents the absence of significant impacts associated with construction of the proposed project. The following resources were evaluated in detail: Land Use, Economic, Parkland and Recreational Areas, Right-of-Way, Relocation Potential, Construction and Emergency Routes, Transportation, Historical Sites or Districts, Archaeological Sites, Cemeteries, Wetlands, Surface Waters and Water Quality, Floodplains, Threatened and Endangered Species, Woodlands, Farmlands, Noise, Contaminated and Regulated Materials, and Utilities.

This FONSI documents compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and all other applicable environmental laws, Executive Orders, and related requirements.

Special Conditions for Location Approval

The following conditions were identified for approval and will be implemented during the design process prior to construction:

Right-of-way requirements will be minimized to the extent possible during final design. Relocations will be conducted in accordance with the Federal Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 and Iowa Code 316, the "Relocation Assistance Law". Relocations will be made available to all affected persons without discrimination.

A Section 401 Water Quality Certification from the Iowa DNR will be required for any unavoidable stream impacts.

A Section 404 permit from USACE will be required for stream and wetland impacts. A permit application and a wetland mitigation plan will be submitted to USACE for approval.

An Iowa DNR Floodplain Development Permit will be required and applied for during final design.

A National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) general stormwater discharge permit for construction will be required from the DNR. Iowa DOT will require the contractor to comply with measures outlined in the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP).

Trees will be cut after October 1 and before March 31 per Iowa DOT Specifications. Any impacted woodlands will be mitigated.

Construction activities will be coordinated with public utilities to avoid potential conflicts and to minimize planned interruptions of service.

Ongoing Discussions with the Local Coalition

After the May 2018 public hearing, the Iowa DOT has continued to work with local officials to resolve their expressed concern to accommodate emergency responders' access south of the City of Wapello.

In August of 2018, Louisa County asked the Iowa DOT if there could be a possibility of a joint partnership between the Iowa DOT and local agencies to fund the additional south interchange.

In September of 2018, Louisa County requested a meeting and informed the Iowa DOT that their consensus was that a south interchange is critical to the County and City and worth the local investment.

In October of 2018, the Iowa DOT met with Louisa County officials to discuss a joint partnership between the state and local agencies.

The Iowa DOT has offered to fully fund a slip ramp type interchange at 65th Street to address local officials' expressed concern to accommodate emergency responders. The local officials' position is for the Iowa DOT to fully fund a diamond interchange at 65th Street to also accommodate economic develop in the area. To date, there has been no agreement between the Iowa DOT and local officials on how to address a second interchange south of Wapello.

At this time, the intent of the Iowa DOT is to complete the environmental process and conclude the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) with the preferred alternative identified in the Environmental Assessment (EA). The Iowa DOT also intends to continue dialogue with local officials and stakeholders to best address concerns at the south end of town. If in the future this involves changes to the preferred alternative, the Iowa DOT will address those changes at that time.