



I-80 Des Plaines River Bridge Replacement Community Partner Meeting Summary

As part of the Illinois Department of Transportation's planned I-80 improvement project, the Department has been conducting focused environmental justice community outreach to understand and address community concerns about the proposed replacement of the I-80 Des Plaines River Bridge. A virtual Community Partner Meeting was recently held via Microsoft Teams through two identical sessions.

- Session 1 was held on Wednesday, March 30, 2022 from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM
- Session 2 was held on Thursday, March 31, 2022 from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM.

These meetings were attended by community members, federal, state and local agency staff, and several local community organizations, community centers and local and regional chambers of commerce. We would like to thank all the community members who attended and participated in Community Partner Meeting #4. We are appreciative for your valued and meaningful input.

A meeting summary is provided below for your information and review. These recent sessions were held to summarize outreach efforts to date, discuss the publishing of the Draft Community Impact Assessment and associated comment period, provide a timeline for the remainder of the project, and review project impacts as well as proposed mitigation measures. Additionally, these sessions were held to collect further input and consensus from community partners and to ensure that the Department has accurately captured and addressed all community concerns. For anyone wishing to view the presentation, these materials may also be found on the project website:

<http://i-80will.com/information/newsroom.html>.

Please review the meeting summary below for further details on the project impacts identified through the outreach process and proposed draft mitigation measures, including acquisition and relocation related measures. If any community member has any comments or would like to provide further input, please contact the project team bilingual Outreach Specialist, Melody Carvajal by phone, text or email:

- **24-Hour Phone/Text:** (331) 233-3555
- **Email:** melody.carvajal@I-80ej.com

Summary Overview

The first session of the meeting was attended by 25 individuals and the second session of the meeting was attended by 28 individuals. Each meeting was identical in content and format. The purpose of these meetings was to summarize outreach efforts to date, discuss the publishing of the Draft Community Impact Assessment and associated comment period, provide a timeline for the remainder of the project, and review project impacts as well as proposed draft mitigation measures. In addition, the purpose of this meeting was to gather feedback on the proposed mitigation measures to ensure that all community concerns have been addressed.

Review of Outreach

Over the course of conducting environmental reviews and outreach to agencies, stakeholders, and the public for the overall project, several public involvement engagement efforts were undertaken between 2017 and 2019 to identify project impacts and select the Preferred Alternative. Public involvement efforts within the bridge replacement area specifically included 3 public meetings, a survey conducted in June 2019, 2 community outreach meetings for residents and stakeholders in the affected community, a focused neighborhood meeting held in July 2019, and a public hearing held as two sessions in November 2019.

Based on findings from the EA, the Department identified that there could be disproportionately high and adverse effects to the Des Plaines River Bridge communities as a result of the project, without further mitigation. In spring of 2020, additional outreach efforts with this community were initiated. Over 2020 and 2021, extensive outreach efforts in the community occurred to engage the community to better understand community impacts and concerns and to develop solutions to those concerns. Direct outreach including mailings and office hours in the community and a community impact questionnaire were key elements of outreach conducted. Three community partner meetings were held between 2020 and 2021 to share findings and obtain input at each major milestone of outreach. Community Partner Meeting number four, this meeting, focused on reviewing draft recommended mitigation measures and obtaining further community input.

Draft Community Impact Assessment

The findings from outreach over the last 2 years have been documented in a Draft Community Impact Assessment (CIA) Report that has been published to the I-80 website for review. Hard copies of the document are available for review at the City of Joliet offices and at the Joliet Public Library. A 30-day comment period, from March 14 to April 14, 2022, has been established to take comments from the community on the findings and recommendations in the Draft CIA. All comments received are being documented and a response to comments document will be developed to help the Department finalize mitigation measures and publish the Final CIA.

Timeline

Many community partners have expressed interest in moving forward with acquisition and relocation. This cannot begin until this outreach is concluded, and the Department receives approval from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) that the environmental analysis phase is complete. It is expected that this phase will conclude in the next several months. After this concludes, the Department can move forward in conducting additional design activities and can start working directly with property owners and tenants. Design and acquisition/relocation is expected to happen over the next 2 years. Once final design and all properties are acquired, demolition of those properties and advance construction efforts can occur. This process is expected to take a year. Once construction begins, the Department will first work to construct the new bridge. This process is exceedingly complex and may take approximately 3 years. The new bridge is expected to be complete and open to traffic in 2027. Demolition of the old bridge will not occur until traffic has been moved onto the new bridge. Demolition is expected to require approximately a year. The current estimate is that construction would be complete in 2029.

Community Comments/Concern Areas: During the meeting, community members expressed concern that the acquisition and relocation would take up to the year 2024 to be completed. It was

not well understood why this process should take so long. Community members noted that they were concerned about a lack of communication from the Department between now and 2024.

Project Impacts and Recommended Mitigation

Acquisition and Relocation

Based on the additional engineering and design refinements made throughout this outreach effort, there will be a total of 107 parcels that are needed for the project. A number of these are vacant properties (33); however, there are 70 properties that will require both acquisition (sale of the property) and relocation, and there would be 4 partial acquisitions. All owners or tenants that would be impacted will be entitled to benefits under the Federal Uniform Relocation Act (URA).

All property owners and tenants affected by acquisition and relocation will be compensated and provided relocation assistance. Potentially displaced residents will be presented with a relocation package that includes comparable housing options available to them, based on current housing needs and the size of the existing dwelling. The URA also has housing of last resort provisions that in certain circumstances, can provide added monetary assistance when a replacement dwelling cannot be found within the monetary limits for a property owner or tenant.

In addition to benefits provided to all potentially displaced residents under the URA, the Department and FHWA have been working to develop additional mitigation to eliminate or minimize the possible increase in annual property taxes that a current owner-occupied resident may have in moving to a new dwelling. This mitigation will apply to those that own and live in their home in the Des Plaines River Bridge community and that would be potentially displaced and required to relocate due to the I-80 project. The Department calculated the amount to compensate these owner-occupied displaced residents by looking at average number of years in residence and based on comparable properties' tax rates in the City of Joliet. Based on that research, the Department identified the average duration of displaced owner-occupied residents to be 27.4 years, which was very close to a standard 30-year mortgage timeframe. Based on an average occupancy of 27.4 years and an average property tax differential of \$1,878 annually, the Department is committed to providing these owner-occupied residents with a total payment of \$52,000 that would be paid as a lump sum payment within 60 days of closing.

Because this mitigation is being offered outside of the URA, if chosen, it must be reported as income and therefore may be taxable. For this reason, an owner may choose to decline all or part of this benefit. It is important that recipients of this benefit understand any impacts it may have on their individual or family's taxes, retirement benefits, or social service benefits or eligibility for state and federal programs. Therefore, owners may want to seek their own tax counseling services to determine if this benefit is right for them. The Department and FHWA are currently working with the Community Service Council of Bolingbrook and other potential services to provide an outside resource for those considering accepting this benefit. Provision for these free services will be finalized and shared with the community as those discussions are finalized with the Department and these potential counseling service providers.

Community Comments/Concern Areas: During the meeting, several comments expressed concerns that the tax mitigation does not adequately consider those who have lived in the community for longer lengths of time. Several comments also expressed concerns about the

mitigation measure being reported as taxable income and potential implications on other benefits. Several comments were made expressing that the proposed amount of \$52,000 would not adequately compensate for the financial burden of moving and because the amount is taxed, its value would be even less sufficient to address community needs. It was recommended to offer tax mitigation based on the actual years a homeowner has lived in the community and for the money to be provided in a non-taxable manner.

Questions were raised concerning who would be responsible for appraising properties and whether appraisers would consider the current market's favor for sellers. There were also concerns raised about state agencies leading appraisals.

Community Impacts

The community has indicated concerns related to construction and the bridge proximity to adjacent homes, perceived reduction in attractiveness in the community, perceived impacts to property values, and reduced community cohesion.

Community Plan

The Department is committed to funding \$400,000 to the City of Joliet to develop a comprehensive community plan and to identify and prioritize needed improvements. In addition to funding the community plan itself, over the last year the Department has worked to secure additional funds to commit to the actual construction of prioritized improvements that arise from this plan. The Department is committed to funding \$3.5 million dollars for use in this outreach area for improvements to the community and community cohesion. During outreach, we heard things like a new shared use path, potential lighting and a historic plaque in the park as desired improvements. The money the Department provides can be used on those or other improvements that are identified and prioritized with the community. The community plan will identify the full array of community improvements needed so money can be spent in the best way to improve the community.

Community Comments/Concern Areas: During the meeting, comments expressed a desire for this commitment to be in writing to ensure IDOT and the City of Joliet perform this mitigation.

Construction Outreach

Concerns were raised by the community about how outreach would work and how they would be connected to the project and get updates going forward after this outreach effort is complete. Many community members noted that a dedicated point of contact to answer questions has been very helpful and assisted in giving valuable feedback. To continue to involve the community throughout this project from the next stage of design through construction, the Department is committed to developing a construction outreach and coordination plan as the next phase of design is being done and before construction begins. It will detail advance notification requirements for access changes and detours during construction and detail community meetings and updates planned during construction. During design the Department will have community meetings at key milestones of project progress and at the conclusion of the design phase, share information on construction access and maintenance of traffic plans, lighting and landscaping plans, and visual enhancements. As construction begins, there will be a dedicated public liaison during construction activities to provide a regular point of contact to the community.

Jobs and Training Opportunities

Concerns were raised that the historic implications of I-80 to this community have been great and continued expansion of and encroachment of more industrial uses have all contributed to a disconnected community. The community has noted that providing job opportunities to the communities as part of the project is desirable. To that end, the Department has the Highway Construction Careers Training Program (HCCTP), which is designed to provide both training and skill improvement opportunities in the roadway and construction industry. The Department has committed to promoting this program within the community. Based on input from community partners at the last community partner meeting requesting a social media campaign be developed, the Department has incorporated that recommendation into proposed mitigation measures.

Visual Impacts

The community has noted a desire for a modest bridge structure that blends into the community and greenery/landscaping for aesthetics. Additionally, lighting in the community was a top ranked need. Finally, there was a desire for fencing under the new bridge to minimize garbage dumping and improve attractiveness underneath the bridge compared with conditions under the bridge today.

Refined Bridge Design

As presented in the last community partner meeting, the design of the bridge has been modified for this reason. A new landscaped buffer has been developed which would either be a sloped embankment or elevated structure with greater room between the bridge and homes to allow for greater landscaping, and to allow more space for potential new sidewalk connections through the community and around the bridge. This additional landscaped buffer effectively creates a larger buffer between the bridge itself and nearby homes.

The Department will develop design plans indicating where fencing is required under the Des Plaines River Bridge structure for access to regular Department maintenance activities. The Department is committed to installing any needed fencing at least 6-8 feet tall and with materials that maintain visibility between fenced and unfenced areas for safety. The Department is committed to design of the bridge underpass on the east side of the Des Plaines River to include a concrete knee wall (approximately 2 feet high) or other design parameters to limit the ability for vehicle access under the new bridge, and thereby minimizing trash and other debris to accumulate under the bridge.

Lighting and Landscape Plan

To address concerns raised related to lighting and landscaping, the Department is committed to conducting a lighting study to determine the need for and proposed locations of lighting under the proposed bridge, at locations along the bridge as well as along new local roads proposed to enhance safety. Lighting improvements will depend on these findings and will be shared with the community as it is completed in the design phase.

The bridge will be constructed to blend into the surrounding community and landscaping will be used, where practical, to shield bridge view naturally and aesthetically. As part of the design process, a landscape plan will be developed detailing proposed landscaping elements to be incorporated into the new bridge construction and for new noise walls. As part of the community meetings to be held during the design process and prior to construction, the Department will share findings of the lighting study, landscape plan and other elements of the aesthetics proposed for the new bridge.

Community Comments/Concern Areas: Comments received during the meeting expressed concern that maintenance underneath the bridge and of landscaping would not occur. It was noted that there is an existing lack of maintenance around the existing bridge, despite repeated complaints.

Transportation Impacts

During outreach efforts, several concerns were raised about transportation impacts. These included the need to maintain local access during construction and to and from I-80. Concerns raised about construction truck traffic and the potential for safety issues or damage to the local roadways during construction from these trucks. Community members also said it was important to provide local access and connectivity following construction within the community.

As part of the project construction, temporary barriers are proposed between nearby homes and construction activities and equipment storage. On the west side of the river, primary construction access will be provided from I-80 across Center Street. This primary route will require construction of a temporary ramp for construction use only from I-80 to the construction area and will limit the need to access local roads. A secondary construction route has also been identified for when I-80 could not be used for safety or other reasons. This secondary access will use the Shelby connector to US 6 to provide direct access for construction vehicles to the construction site while limiting the need to use local roadways.

On the east side of the river, primary access will be provided off Chicago Avenue to the westbound entrance ramp onto I-80. A temporary construction access ramp will be built to directly access the construction site from I-80, reducing the use of local roads. A secondary construction route was identified to address construction access needs when this temporary construction ramp cannot be used or when construction access is needed from south of the existing I-80 bridge. The secondary access route would come off Chicago Avenue at Patterson using perimeter streets. In only limited circumstances, there may be a need to access the site through local Water Street; however, this would be an option of last resort and only for short durations during construction.

As IDOT moves into construction and as part of final design, there will be development of a detailed construction access plan and maintenance of traffic plan. These plans will in greater detail address community concerns, such as requirements for the contractor to maintain community access during construction, identifying local roadway access needs, defining repaving needs prior to and following construction.

The Department is also committed to creating a more cohesive and connected local roadway network following construction. The Department is committed to making improvements to the local street network both east and west of the Des Plaines River Bridge to improve local connectivity.

- East of the river, local road improvements will include some new roadway construction at River Street and Lucas Street, rehabilitation of the roadway at River and Water Streets, creation of new cul-de-sacs at locations along Joliet Street and roadway or alley removal at several locations.
- West of the river, local roadway improvements include roadway rehabilitation along Shelby Street, new cul-de-sacs at Market and Illinois Streets, and roadway or alley removal at several

locations. IDOT is committed to making these improvements so that the local road network remains consistent and cohesive following construction of the new bridge.

In addition, to mitigate for transportation related impacts, the Department will also:

- Conduct a traffic signal and stop sign warrant study for major access points along US 52 to/from communities on the east and west side of the Des Plaines River Bridge
- Provide safety improvements, including improvements to channelization and turning movements at the intersection of Chicago Street (IL 53) and 5th Avenue
- Coordinate with Pace Bus Services to construct improvements to existing bus pads along Chicago Street between Doris Avenue and 5th Avenue
- Provide new sidewalk along Chicago Avenue from 5th Avenue to Doris Avenue though the existing railroad viaducts.

Noise and Air Quality Concerns

During outreach efforts, the community raised concerns about increased noise from construction, particularly at night, potential for noise or vibration impacts to nearby homes from construction, and a strong desire for noise walls and an ability for the community to vote early on locations of noise walls proposed to solidify noise wall locations. In addition, with regard to air quality, community members were concerned about permanent impacts from the I-80 expansion, and the need for air quality monitoring during construction particularly because many residents in the community are elderly and suffer from COPD or asthma. To address these concerns:

- The Department has identified locations for proposed noise walls both west and east of the river. To solidify implementation of these noise walls at the locations shown, a voting process is always conducted by the Department according to federal policy. As identified in FHWA regulations for noise wall voting, “benefitted receptors” that are able to vote are those where the noise analysis indicates a at least a 5-decibel reduction. Noise wall voting will occur prior to December 31, 2022.
- The Department is committed to developing a Noise Monitoring Plan for construction. The plan will detail provisions for how monitoring and managing vibration of buildings, structures, and other locations susceptible to vibration from construction activities.

Based on the air quality analysis conducted, which was done in accordance with all state and federal air quality standards, the project will not have substantive permanent impacts to air quality as a result of the project being implemented. The project is in conformity with air quality standards that are in place. A project level air quality analysis was conducted, which analyzed potential for increases in hazardous air pollutants from cars and trucks as well as potential air quality impacts based on additional 2040 projected traffic. The results showed no meaningful increases to air quality pollutants. Additionally, and based on the analysis findings, emissions will likely be lower than present levels as a result of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s national control programs.

For air quality impacts during construction, the Department is committed to developing a project specific Dust Control Plan. This plan will address construction-related air quality concerns for communities near the Des Plaines River Bridge. Specific measures will be developed by the Contractor based on the Department’s requirements and reviewed and approved by the Department Engineer.

Next Steps and Action Items

The meeting concluded with next steps and action items. The project team notified participants that content from the virtual meeting, in English and Spanish, will be available online on the project website: i-80will.com. An e-blast will be sent with meeting notes and links to the virtual meeting presentation. Community partners were encouraged to share this information with their neighbors and others in the community and through their social media and other outlets for communicating with the community. It was noted that once the comment period ends on April 14th, all comments on the draft CIA and recommended mitigation measures will be compiled and a response to comments document will be developed and shared with community partners and on the project website. This input will shape final decision making and mitigation measures in the final CIA. Once finalized, the final CIA will be published to the project website along with additional documentation to finalize the environmental review phase of the project. These documents will get approved by IDOT and FHWA so this project can move forward into the next stages of design and initiating acquisition.

A final polling question was asked to gauge the effectiveness of the virtual meetings. Attendees were asked if they felt like they had good ways to engage and provide input during the virtual meetings. The polling results and input captured indicated that the meeting format and ways to engage were effective.