



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 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, January 20, 2021 from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM
- Session 2 was held on Thursday, January 21, 2020 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 #3. 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 share the additional engineering and design refinements that were conducted to address community concerns and additional 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 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 team's analysis and recommendations on the engineering and design refinements, proposed mitigation measures, acquisition and relocation needs and benefits, and community feedback. 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:

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Summary Overview

The first session of the meeting was attended by 36 individuals and the second session of the meeting was attended by 43 individuals. The purpose of this meeting was to share the additional engineering and design refinements, acquisition and relocation needs and benefits, proposed mitigation measures, and next steps and action items. Participants were informed that there will be an additional community partner meeting where final recommendations will be shared, and additional input requested from the community partners to finalize the report.

Additional Engineering and Design Refinements

Concerns were raised by the community about construction vehicles utilizing local residential streets, as well as dust, air quality and potential damage to nearby properties during construction. In addition, the community noted concerns about construction activities being located adjacent to

residences and that there were concerns about safety to nearby residences. To address these community concerns, the project team further analyzed construction needs and worked to develop conceptual construction access routes. Based on this analysis, maps of conceptual construction routing were presented and reviewed with community partners. The following construction access routes are proposed to minimize the need for construction vehicles to use local roads:

- The primary route on the west side of the river would use the eastbound I-80 exit ramp to Center Street. A temporary construction access ramp would be created near Jasper. A secondary route using a new Shelby connector is also proposed where I-80 cannot be used and to allow for safe entrance and egress to and from the construction site.
- The primary access route on the east side of the river would use the southbound Chicago Street entrance ramp onto I-80. A temporary construction access ramp would be created to provide this access. When access from the south of the exiting bridge is required, a secondary route to access the construction site would use Chicago Street to Patterson Road to McKinley to Edwards to River Street. There could be some temporary limited use of local Water Street on the east side; however, use of Water Street would be for short durations and only when the primary and secondary routes cannot meet construction access needs.

The community also expressed a desire for a more modest bridge structure to blend into the community. They further indicated a desire for greater landscaping and other visual elements to better shield the bridge and roadway from community views and to provide space for more pedestrian connectivity within the community. The project team evaluated the design and found:

- The initial design, which was developed to minimize property acquisition needs, proposed to have a tall retaining wall and additional noise barriers on top of the walls to address noise. This design would provide a very tall wall within the community and would not allow for natural buffers or additional improvements between the walls and the surrounding community.
- The project team worked to develop a landscape buffer design. A diagram was shared. This design would either provide a sloped embankment or elevated structure with greater room between the expressway and homes for greater landscaping to shield the structure. It would also allow more space for pedestrian/sidewalk connections thorough the community and around the bridge.

Based on the additional analysis of construction access and refinements to the bridge design, there would be more property acquisition needed.

- An additional 31 properties would be needed to accommodate these engineering and design refinements. Property acquisition needs were shown on a map to community partners. The new map will be made available on the project website with a full list of properties required.
- Several of these additional properties needed are ones that property owners previously requested voluntary acquisitions due to proximity to construction and the new bridge.

The project team also provided information on additional mitigation proposed for the development of a Community Plan in coordination with the City of Joliet and the community. This Community Plan is proposed to address community cohesion and neighborhood connectivity enhancements desired. The Department is committed to funding this plan. Based on outreach efforts to date, the community has expressed desire for a new multi-use path connecting Varnado Park to properties south of the existing expressway, lighting for this multi-use path, additional landscaping around the

bridge, and a commemorative plaque at Varnado Park to recognize the key local civil rights leader in the community that shares this park name.

Community partner feedback included:

- **Bridge Construction:** The community is concerned that traffic will be an issue when the bridge is removed. The project team noted that traffic will be maintained on the existing bridge while the new bridge is constructed and on the new bridge while the existing bridge is being demolished. A detailed maintenance of traffic plan will be developed for construction and is proposed as part of the mitigation to address these community concerns.
- **Landscaping:** A community member raised a concern about ongoing maintenance under the bridge and ensuring that their community is appealing and attractive. The project team noted that the design under the bridge, including the proposed knee wall and higher and transparent fencing is proposed to address these concerns. Additionally, IDOT is committed to developing a landscape plan as part of design activities.
- **Varnado Park:** A community member raised a concern that the project team did not correctly pronounce Reverend Varnado's last name. The project team thanked the community for this comment and will make this note for future reference and confirmations on pronouncement.
- **Grocery Stores:** One community member noted that there are not enough grocery stores within the community and asked whether the project team had considered the potential for a grocery store. The project team noted that there may be several improvements proposed by the community when the Community Plan is developed and outreach efforts to date did note this as a comment received. There will be some vacant land remaining following implementation of the project and the Community Plan will help to envision the potential for that redevelopment area. Currently, land use and zoning in this neighborhood prohibits a grocery store and establishing new grocery stores is done by private development and not the government.
- **Funding:** The community is concerned whether there has been funding identified for the improvements identified in the Community Plan. The project team noted that IDOT is committed to funding the Community Plan. Based on community input to date, a multiuse path, pathway lighting and a commemorative plaque in the park have been brought up as ideas. The Community Plan itself will likely identify additional needs and priorities. IDOT is committed to working with City of Joliet to provide funding for these types of community cohesion improvements.

A polling question on landscaping alternative was asked and the input captured indicated a consensus that the landscape buffer design presented was a greater community benefit than the initial retaining wall alternative. A few community members said that they did not know or were indifferent. Some community members verbally noted that the refined design with landscaped buffer and sidewalk would be a welcome addition to the community.

Acquisition and Relocation Needs and Benefits

The project team provided a review of benefits to property owners and tenants who would be displaced as part of the project. Based on the project team's additional engineering and design analysis, a total of 106 parcels are needed for the project. A number of these are vacant properties; however, there are 72 properties that will require both acquisition and relocation. For all owners or tenants that would be impacted, they may be entitled to benefits under the Federal Uniform

Relocation Act (URA). A conceptual timeline for beginning acquisition and further design, and construction activities was reviewed.

- Appraisal Process: The community expressed some concerns about when the appraisal process will start. Many of the community members are older and afraid that they will pass away before the appraisal process begins. The project team noted that IDOT is working through this outreach and environmental phase as quickly as possible. Completion of the environmental review process is expected this year and environmental approvals from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) are required before IDOT may begin the acquisition process.
- Residential Property Maintenance for Potentially Displaced Homeowners: One community member expressed concern that given the timeline for acquisition, they would not be able to conduct needed repairs on their home, such as roof replacement. The study team noted that property owners should continue to maintain their properties as they deem necessary. Keeping documentation of improvements made could be helpful once acquisition coordination can be initiated between IDOT and property owners.
- Crime: The community expressed some concerns that homes will be left vacant after acquisition and before the demolition, possibly resulting in criminal activity in the surrounding neighborhood.

Additional Mitigation Proposed

Several proposed mitigation measures were reviewed with community partners based on community input received through this outreach effort.

Communication and Outreach During Design and Construction

Several comments and questions received from the community have been about how the community will continue to be apprised of project progress and timelines. IDOT is committed to continuing to keep the community informed of project progress through future phases of design and construction. IDOT is committed to the following:

- Developing a Construction Outreach and Coordination Plan.
- Providing updates and community meetings at key milestones of project progress during final design. This will include sharing information on construction access and maintenance of traffic plans prior to construction.
- Providing a dedicated public liaison during construction who would be the regular point of contact to the community. This liaison would help to provide advance notification on access changes and detours and other construction updates. The public liaison will serve as a direct point of contact via a dedicated telephone number and email address to answer community questions.

Community partner input received at the meetings included the following:

- Public Liaison: The community is concerned that construction would start before relocation. They agreed that a dedicated public liaison is necessary during construction. The project team noted that acquisition and relocation would occur prior to construction in the community.
- Bridge Construction: The community noted concerns about the entire bridge being removed at once, which will lead to rerouting of all I-80 traffic through the south end of Joliet. The project team noted that traffic will be maintained on the existing bridge while the new bridge

is constructed and along the new bridge while the existing bridge is being demolished. A detailed maintenance of traffic plan will be developed for construction and is proposed as mitigation to address these community concerns.

Addressing Transportation Impacts –Construction and Permanent Impacts

The community has indicated concern about traffic both during construction and following implementation of the project. During construction, IDOT is committed to the following:

- Creating a detailed construction access plan and a maintenance of traffic plan during the design process. These plans will provide further details on maintaining traffic and access.
- Placing requirements on the contractor to maintain community access during construction and identifying any local roadway access needs.
- Defining any repaving requirements prior to or following construction.
- Detailing within the Construction Outreach and Coordination plan how the community will be notified about temporary changes during construction.

Concerns were also raised by the community about existing difficulties turning in and out of neighborhoods to McDonough/US 52 and concerns that these conditions will become worse once the I-80 project is implemented. Access and mobility were brought up as concern areas. To address those concerns IDOT is committed to:

- Conducting a traffic signal and stop sign warrant study from major access points to the community east and west of the river.
- Implementing safety improvements including channelization of turning movements at the intersection of Chicago Street and 5th Avenue.
- In coordination with Pace, providing improvements to bus pads and Americans with Disabilities (ADA) access. This will include new sidewalks along Chicago Avenue from 5th Avenue to Doris Avenue through the existing railroad viaduct.

Addressing Noise Concerns

The community has noted a desire to advance community voting on proposed noise wall locations. Many within the community also indicated a strong desire for these proposed noise walls. To address those concerns, IDOT is committed to:

- Conducting community noise wall voting early, in accordance with IDOT and FHWA requirements. Completion of voting will confirm noise wall locations.
- Posting final recommendations for noise wall locations to the project website once voting is complete to communicate final findings to the community.
- Providing a community mailing to all residents that voted and property owners and tenants within 1000 feet of proposed noise walls.

Based on some of the engineering refinements reviewed during this meeting, the project team is confirming the noise benefits from the analysis conducted to date. This information will be shared with community partners at the next community partner meeting.

The community also noted concerns about noise and vibration and potential damage to their property, particularly those who are very nearby proposed construction. IDOT is committed to:

- Developing a Construction Noise and Vibration Monitoring Plan in advance of construction activities.

- This monitoring plan will detail how buildings, structures and other locations susceptible to noise and vibration will be monitored and provide ways for managing noise when nighttime construction is required.

Whenever possible, the contractor will conduct construction during the daytime and during weekdays. However, when nighttime work is required, the contractor will be required to define these activities and durations, as well as techniques that will be taken to monitor and minimize noise. During construction, the dedicated community public liaison will communicate nighttime work notifications in advance to the community. This liaison will serve as a direct point of contact for addressing noise concerns during construction.

Addressing Air Quality Concerns

The project team received some questions during the outreach process about whether there would be permanent impacts to air quality as a result of the project. An analysis was conducted in accordance with all state and federal air quality standards. The project will not have substantive permanent adverse impacts to air quality.

Several comments received during outreach were about maintaining air quality during construction. Several community members have indicated that they are senior citizens living nearby and have COPD, asthma, and/or other breathing problems. IDOT is committed to developing a project specific Dust Control Plan prior to construction. This plan will address construction-related air quality concerns for communities near the Des Plaines River Bridge. Elements of the Dust Control Plan will include and specify, at minimum:

- Ways to limit tracking soil onto nearby roadways.
- Required speed reductions for contractor vehicles (particularly on unpaved surfaces).
- Requirements for covering haul vehicles and application of dust suppressants or water to exposed surfaces and vehicles.

These measures are best practices that have demonstrated benefits in reducing air quality impacts. IDOT is committed to developing this plan and setting contractor requirements. The project team also noted that with the design refinements proposed and additional properties that will now be needed, many who may have raised this concern are now within the construction footprint of the project.

Addressing Neighborhood Impacts – Visual and Aesthetics under the Bridge

During outreach efforts, the community raised concerns about how garbage currently collects underneath the bridge and that there were concerns about continued poor visual quality/aesthetics under the new bridge once constructed. To address these concerns, IDOT is committed to:

- Installing fencing, where needed for maintenance, to be at least 6 to 8 feet tall and with materials that maintain visibility between fenced and unfenced areas.
- Incorporating a knee wall (approximately 2 feet in height) or other design elements to minimize the potential for debris or garbage under the bridge.
- Provide additional sidewalk connections and lighting near the bridge.

A visual aid for these design items was presented. Comments received concerning visual and aesthetics under the bridge included:

- Garbage Under the Bridge: The community has dealt with garbage under and near the bridge for years and have picked up the garbage mostly themselves. They expressed concerns that this problem would continue in the future with this project. The project team noted that the proposed design under the bridge, with a knee wall and higher transparent fencing, is proposed to address these concerns proactively in design of the new bridge and underpass area.
- Bridge Security and Video Monitoring: The community is interested in having video monitoring under the bridge. The project team appreciated this comment and will review this option. It is not typical for IDOT to provide this type of equipment on their infrastructure and is often more of an effort undertaken by local emergency services agencies, like police departments.

Addressing Indirect and Cumulative Impacts – Jobs and Training

During outreach efforts, the project team received some comments that while it is not a direct impact from this project, the historic implications of I-80 combined with the continued expansion of more industrial uses have further contributed to disconnection in the community. Those commenters noted that providing job opportunities as part of the project to the community are desirable.

IDOT has a program in place, the Highway Construction Careers Training Program (HCCTP). The program is designed to provide both training and skill improvement opportunities in the roadway and construction industry. IDOT is committed to promoting this program within the community in the following ways:

- Working with community leaders to place informational flyers at local community centers in the area to promote the program.
- Provide more information on the program at future community meetings and have staff available to answer questions.
- During construction, the dedicated public liaison will serve as a source for answering questions and promoting involvement in the program.

Comments received concerning the program included:

- Social Media Marketing Plan Recommendation: A suggestion from a community member noted that this is a great program and that having a marketing plan for how to distribute these materials to local social media outlets would help make the community aware of the program. While postings in community centers and churches is helpful, local leaders have found social media postings to have the greatest reach in the community.

Additional Feedback Received

Additional input indicated that it is essential for the Department to address community concerns and that there could be further disengagement with the government if people are left unhappy with the results. Other comments were also captured from community partners and are noted below.

- *Drainage Under the Bridge*: The community raised a concern about drainage under the bridge. The project team noted that the drainage from the bridge will be collected to a pipe underneath the bridge and taken to either side of the bridge.
- *Additional Communication*: Community members asked for additional ways for the project team to follow-up with the community and to advertise future community meetings. This

included more radio and newspaper ads, social media marketing and advertising, and mass texting. The project team reviewed the multiple ways that engagement has occurred and noted that all materials are available on the project website. These materials and links are continually shared with community partners to encourage sharing information on community social media sites and with neighbors.

- Several community members complimented the team's outreach specialist, who has been proactive in meeting with them and answering their questions and concerns.

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.

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 a consensus that the meeting format and ways to engage were effective.