



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, October 14, 2020 from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM
- Session 2 was held on Thursday, October 15, 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 #2. 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 findings from the Community Impact Questionnaire that was conducted over Summer 2020, to summarize the Department's understanding of community concerns raised to date through the questionnaire and direct outreach efforts, and to obtain additional input and consensus from community partners that the Department has accurately captured all community concerns. Because these findings will help the Department with the next step of identifying potential solutions to community concerns, it is essential that these community concerns are captured as comprehensively as possible. For anyone wishing to view the presentation, these materials may also be found on the project website: <http://i-80will.com/contact.html>

Please review the meeting summary below for further details on the community concerns gathered to date. If any community member has any comments or would like to provide further input on community concerns identified through this process, 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 30 individuals and the second session of the meeting was attended by 33 individuals. Both meeting sessions provided a meeting agenda, a refresher on community partner roles, meeting purpose, and updates on the community partner meetings that are scheduled. The purpose of this meeting was to share findings from the Community Impact Questionnaire, summarize community concerns raised through the questionnaire and direct community outreach efforts and to solicit additional input and consensus that the project team has captured all community input as comprehensively as possible. Participants were informed that there will be additional community partner meetings held to share potential solutions and ideas, and to solicit feedback on recommended measures to address community concerns. Two additional Community Partner meetings are planned as part of this outreach process and will help establish recommendations.

Community Impact Questionnaire

The project team reviewed outreach efforts, particularly for the Community Impact Questionnaire. The survey covered four major topics with 25 questions. The participants were informed that 577 direct mailings were sent as part of the project team's outreach. It was noted that the questionnaire was also made available online in English and Spanish, with links shared on local organization and community partner social media sites. The questionnaire was advertised through newspapers, posters placed in the community, radio interview, and local food drives. Reminder postcards were delivered door-to-door and office hours were held in the community to assist community members with filling out the questionnaire. The deadline for receiving questionnaires was also extended to further solicit as much input as possible from the community.

The project team found that the majority of survey respondents heard about the project through social media, direct mailings or from community members and neighbors. The Department received 287 completed questionnaires through mid-September 2020 and now have had over 130 direct interactions in the outreach area with those impacted and close the proposed project. The project team provided highlights and key findings from the responses to the questionnaire for each of the four major areas covered in the questionnaire: having your voice heard, community experience, household mobility needs and project impacts. Charts and graphics were provided in the presentation to highlight questionnaire results and input received. A more detailed overview of the questionnaire results can be found in the PowerPoint presentation from the meeting on the project website.

Summary of Community Concerns Raised

Based on the questionnaire findings and direct outreach conducted, the project team provided a summary of community concerns raised for additional input and to reach consensus with community partners that all community concerns have been identified. The project team reviewed community concerns about construction impacts, permanent project impacts, as well as indirect or cumulative impacts from the project. These concerns were summarized as follows:

Construction Impacts

Four major areas of construction-related concerns have been raised by the community and were reviewed. These included:

- **Increased Traffic:** The community is concerned about increased congestion and traffic in and around major roadways connecting to I-80 during construction. There are existing challenges entering and exiting these communities today and there are concerns about this worsening during construction. As projects currently underway around the community area have commenced, there have already been similar congestion issues. In addition, there are concerns about the ability to maintain access to and from the community during construction.
- **Air Quality:** The community is concerned about air quality degradation during construction and the impact of dust and other construction activities near residential homes as the existing bridge is demolished and the new bridge is constructed. Many community members near the construction area are elderly and suffer from other underlying conditions, such as COPD or asthma.

- Construction Activities/Equipment: The community is concerned about trucks and construction vehicles within the community and safety during construction. Existing truck traffic, particularly on Water Street east of the river, deviates through the neighborhood streets and damages local roads and there are concerns about additional impacts to the local roads from construction vehicles. The community is also concerned about construction equipment and materials being stored adjacent to their homes.
- Construction Noise and Vibration: The community is concerned about hours of construction, particularly night-time construction and disturbances. Given the proximity of the project to residential homes, there are also concerns about potential damage to these homes during construction.

Permanent Impacts

Four major areas of permanent impacts as result of the project have been raised by the community and were reviewed. These included:

- Property Value Changes: The community is concerned about property value changes that may occur as a result of the project. A number of community members have indicated that both construction and the resulting project, which will further reduce property near the I-80 Des Plaines River Bridge, will negatively impact the attractiveness of living in the area and property values.
- Increased Traffic and Noise: The community is concerned about increased traffic as a result of the I-80 improvements and additional cut-through traffic in the community. As noted in construction related impacts, trucks are currently detouring? cutting through? through local roads such as Water Street today and there are concerns that this will be increased due to the project. Given the proximity of the project to homes in the community, there is also a concern about noise increases due to traffic. There is a strong desire within the community for implementation of noise walls as part of the project.
- Visual Impact of New Bridge: The community has expressed a desire for the new bridge to be modest in design and blend into the community as much as possible. Landscaping, lighting, and better fencing is needed. The community has expressed concerns that the existing bridge has continued to deteriorate, that there is trash building under the bridge and behind fencing, and safety of the new bridge is a major concern.
- Acquisition and Relocation of Property Owners and Tenants: Those potentially impacted and identified to date have expressed concerns about the appraisal price of their homes being low or that they currently have no mortgage and therefore finding replacement housing for similar costs will be a challenge. They have also raised concerns about relocation to other areas with higher property taxes and increases in housing costs. Tenants have expressed concerns about finding comparable rents and pricing. Both property owners and tenants have also cited the potential need for special considerations in their relocation needs. Some community members are low-income and need comparable low-income housing, others have noted having poor credit, and others noted due to their age that they may require senior housing. In addition to those that have been identified as directly impacted by the project, several community members have also requested voluntary acquisition and relocation. These property owners and tenants have cited the proximity of the project to their homes, concerns about accessing homes throughout construction and living very close to the new bridge, as well as being left as only one or two homes on an existing block once identified property acquisition and demolition occurs.

Indirect or Cumulative Impacts

The project team noted that several concerns raised through the outreach process indicated community concerns related to indirect or cumulative impacts they have experienced. These are impacts, not necessarily from this project alone, but are concerns due to this project when combined with other past, present and future foreseeable actions. Key input from the community on indirect and cumulative impacts have been related to the history of public works projects in the community. Many residents indicated having lived in the community for over 50 years and have indicated that the original I-80 project bisected a once cohesive community into two areas north and south of the bridge. The community has also indicated that the implementation and more recent expansions of the Water Treatment Plant and Recycling Plant on the east side of the Des Plaines River and south of I-80 have led to more industrialized uses in their community, reduced residential property, and resulted in more truck traffic in the community and on the local roads within the community.

Polling and Additional Feedback Received

Following review of these impacts, community partners were asked a polling questions on whether this had captured all community concerns on temporary construction impacts, permanent impacts from the project, and indirect/cumulative effects of the project. Community members agreed that the project team had done a thorough job of highlighting all areas of concern to community members living in the project areas.

Additional input on construction level impacts were received. There are concerns, given current construction, about bridges being out in the community area, including at Jefferson Street and Brandon Road. One community member noted that Brandon Road has been closed permanently. Community members were concerned about similar issues resulting from this project. Community members reiterated that they are concerned about construction impacts from vibration to their nearby homes and cited existing poor foundation and concerns about impacts from heavy equipment and construction.

Additional community input was received about property impacts both during construction and permanently as a result of the project. Due to the long duration of construction expected and the permanent impacts, community members need answers to questions about increased traffic, noise and property value changes and whether they need to sell their homes.. Some community members reiterated concerns about wanting voluntary acquisition and relocation and air pollution impacts from the project.

Additional input on indirect/cumulative effects were 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 bulleted below.

- *Noise Walls:* Need answers from the Department regarding location and confirmation on where noise walls will be implemented, when will they be built and who gets to vote on noise walls. Concerns were raised regarding some west side community members not being able to vote on the noise walls even though they are close to the project and will be impacted by decisions on whether noise walls will be constructed.

The project team noted they had received this feedback and will follow up with this community member following the meeting about reasons that he was not previously

identified as a voting member for noise walls.

- *Desire for Answers to Concerns:* Community partners raised concerns about when they will receive answers from IDOT. The project and outreach efforts have been going on and these concerns have been raised multiple times. The community would like answers as quickly as possible to their concerns. The project team noted that the outreach process is serving to do this. The purpose of this meeting is to make sure all concerns have been identified so that these answers can be comprehensive when future meetings occur.
- *Property Acquisition/Relocation:* Concerns about homes impacted and which homes will be acquired. A resident stated that their home located at 700 S. Des Plaines Street is deteriorating and will be impacted since they live next to the where the construction will occur. There were requests from community partners to provide a timeframe for when the Department will decide on properties that will be acquired.
- *Property Acquisition/Relocation:* Concerns regarding relocation and limited affordable housing options, especially for Black and Brown communities. There are concerns about being able to stay in the Joliet area.
- *Community Questionnaire Findings and Community Needs:* Parks and amenities should be moved to the top of the list of priorities, such as adding green space with the possibility of a community garden and walkway. A space to host a farmer's market. Additionally, Water Street has become a speed lane and there are currently police monitoring that area for speeding. Adding speedbumps would slow traffic and speed along the street.
- *Traffic Concerns and Transparency:* Need for the Department communication to be open and constant so that other projects do not affect local traffic any more than expected.
- *Outreach Process:* The recent outreach process with Melody Carvajal and the project team has been great. The survey captured everything that the community members from south of the bridge have noted.

Next Steps and Action Items

The meeting ended 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. Moreover, 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 as well as 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.