

8.0 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public involvement is an important component critical to the success of any project. As part of the Heartland Expressway Corridor Development and Management Plan (CDMP), the study team and Nebraska Department of Roads (NDOR) prepared and implemented a public involvement plan (PIP) that would engage stakeholders along the corridor. The PIP is included in Appendix E.

The purpose of PIP was to describe the intent and scope of the public involvement effort to be implemented. The objectives of the communications and public participation effort for the project were to: efficiently and effectively obtain useful input from a broad, inclusive, and representative set of informed community members. The emphasis of the PIP was to engage stakeholders with specific business and economic interests in corridor improvements. The plan was designed in compliance with the NDOR public participation/ involvement manual “Pursuing Solutions through Public Involvement” and the other applicable requirements. This plan was customized for the Heartland Expressway project.

The study team made a concerted effort to share information with and gather input from federal, state and local officials, interested resource agencies, stakeholders, and the general public.

The following discussion summarizes the outreach activity completed during the preparation of the Heartland Expressway CDMP. Appendix E contains more information on outreach activities.

8.1 STEERING COMMITTEE

A Steering Committee was formed to provide technical direction; assistance in developing solutions to problems; guidelines for alternative development, evaluation and refinement; and review and comment on various documents. The committee consisted of representatives from the Nebraska Department of Roads (NDOR), representatives from the Heartland

The Steering Committee was comprised of the following members:

- Randy Peters Nebraska Department of Roads (NDOR)
- Mike Owen NDOR
- Craig Lind NDOR
- Doug Leafgreen Nebraska Highway Commission
- Travis Hiner Heartland Expressway Association
- Deb Cottier Heartland Expressway Association
- Joe Kiely Ports to Plain Alliance

Expressway Group and representatives from the Ports to Plains Alliance Group. Steering Committee meetings were held at key milestones during the project to provide updates on the status of the study. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) provided input throughout the study process.

8.2 PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING

Two public information meetings were held in Gering, Nebraska. The first public information meeting was held October 13, 2011 at the Gering Civic Center from 4:30 to 7:30 PM. The meeting was an informal open house. The meeting featured a series of display boards and a video summarizing the purpose and objectives of the study. Attendees were greeted at the door, given handouts and maps, and asked to sign-in. In addition, each attendee was given a comment form and was encouraged to complete it before they left or to mail it back following the meeting.

Display boards were placed around the room with study team representatives who were available to explain the study process and answer questions. Meeting attendees were encouraged to complete comment forms and send them to Greg Weinert, NDOR Public Hearings Officer.

A second public information meeting was held on June 7, 2012, at the Gering Civic Center from 4:00 to 6:00 PM. The meeting was an informal open house with a format similar to the October 13th meeting. Attendees were greeted at the door, given handouts and maps, and asked to sign-in. In addition, each attendee was given a comment form and was encouraged to complete it before they left or to mail it back following the meeting. NDOR prepared a summary of both public input meetings and is included in Appendix E.

8.3 ECONOMIC WORKSHOP

An economic workshop was held prior to the first public information meeting on October 13, 2011. Meeting invitations were sent to local business leaders and representatives from the local communities. The workshop was held to provide an open discussion about how the Heartland Expressway corridor relates to and supports the local economy. The conversation helped the study team understand more about local businesses, and provided local stakeholders with an understanding of how the local freight and agricultural industry is dependent upon the state and national roadway system. The information obtained from the workshop was used as part of the economic analysis and cost benefit cost analysis (BCA) prepared for the project

8.4 INTERAGENCY COORDINATION MEETING

NDOR and Alfred Benesch & Company presented the Heartland Expressway Corridor Development and Management Plan at an interagency coordination meeting on September 1, 2011 at NDOR Headquarters in Lincoln, NE, to provide a general overview of the study.

In addition, an interagency meeting, focused solely on the Heartland Expressway Corridor Development and Management Plan, was held on March 20, 2012 at the NDOR District Office in North Platte, NE. This meeting was held to obtain more specific environmental information along the corridor. Information obtained from this meeting was used in Chapter 3 of the CDMP.

The agencies invited to this meeting are listed below:

- Federal Highway Administration
- Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Nebraska Land Trust
- Nebraska State Historical Society
- U.S. Forest Service
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- University of Nebraska State Museum
- Nebraska Department of Roads
- Bureau of Reclamation
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- National Park Service
- Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality
- Upper Niobrara White Natural Resources District
- North Platte Natural Resources District
- South Platte Natural Resources District

8.5 WEBSITE AND PROJECT COMMUNICATIONS

The project team created a project website and various documents to clarify project goals and objectives, corridor details, planning issues, and the overall process and schedule. The website clarified how and when the public could participate. The handouts included key project messages, graphics and maps. The public notices and handouts are included in the NDOR public meeting summaries.