

DATE: 09-24-08

HNTB JOB NUMBER: 45218



PROJECT: WisDOT *Connections 2030* Plan

ATTENDEES:

See attached list

Meeting Summary

Resource Agency Consultation Meeting #3

Purpose of Meeting Summary – The meeting summary notes are intended to document key discussion points, comments/questions, and mitigation examples discussed during the third Agency Consultation Meeting. In general, the organization of these notes follows the meeting agenda.

Chapter review

Following brief introductions, a recap of the consultation process and the roles of agencies, as well as a review of key comment themes from prior meetings, Aileen presented a review of the *Funding Wisconsin’s Transportation System* chapter. There are two parts to the funding chapter:

- Funding / trends
- Recommendations and strategies WisDOT would follow through 2030 to address transportation finance needs.

Funding for Wisconsin’s transportation system comes from state revenue, federal funding, bonding and other funds. Funding trends include an eroding revenue base and increasing costs for litigation, construction, and real estate acquisition. Addressing funding needs at a corridor level by integrating funding for transit, highway, and other modes, is one of the key issues WisDOT is investigating. WisDOT is also working to address the anticipated increase in freight movements.

In general, transportation revenue is expected to be flat through 2015 with no significant increases or decreases in revenue. Transportation funding is a challenge at a national level and WisDOT will continue to monitor funding issues to identify future challenges and funding options.

Unlike the balance of the chapters, the public involvement chapter will not be reviewed by the agencies. This chapter highlights the phases, processes, and meetings conducted during the *Connections 2030* Plan development.

Aileen introduced the *Implementing Connections 2030* chapter. This chapter does not address implementation for individual policies, but looks at the overarching implementation effort for the entire plan. Implementation will be based on a range of priorities, divided into short term, mid to long term, and those priorities that would be implemented over the entire planning period. During plan development, WisDOT sought to make the Plan both realistic and tangible for readers. WisDOT's Central Office, regions, as well as stakeholders, have varying roles in implementing *Connections 2030*. Aileen discussed the features of methods and tools anticipated to assist during implementation:

Corridor management

- Multimodal perspective
- Offers an investment-focused approach
- Incorporation of WisDOT's vision for specific corridors (preservation vs. expansion)
- Linkage of statewide transportation plans to local plans

Value Engineering

- Occurs at design stage and involves stakeholders and FHWA
- Maximizes investment and increases value
- Reduces maintenance costs

Schedule and funding

- Incorporates corridor management approach
- Addresses funding at a broader level to address multiple modes

System Plan Environmental Evaluation

- Caron reviewed the System-Plan Environmental Evaluation (SEE). The SEE is unique to Wisconsin and is intended to estimate impacts at a broad level. The SEE's purpose is to identify significant effects, primarily through qualitative analysis, though some quantitative analysis may be used in specific cases. The SEE identifies and compares the potential impacts of the draft plan and the base case and does not replace more detailed project-level environmental analysis. T

Connections 2030 addresses the issues raised by the public through initial outreach efforts. Some key issues that were raised include:

- Deteriorating infrastructure
- Availability of funding
- Availability of transportation choice

The draft plan was originally envisioned to be a needs-based plan. Based on public input, WisDOT shifted the focus of Plan development to a more policy-based approach.

Question: What is the difference between a needs-based and a policy-based approach?

Meeting response: The needs-based approach focuses and too specific to existing STH programs. The needs-based approach was not responsive enough to public goals identified during early outreach. The policy-based approach addressed modal choice and would allow for more flexibility in the future. The policy-based approach would also allow WisDOT to communicate WisDOT's decision-making process to the public.

Question: Did WisDOT take a prescriptive approach to *Connections 2030* in terms of following Trans 400 or was the Trans 400 approach tailored to address current issues?

Meeting response: Trans 400 makes a number of recommendations for analysis which WisDOT followed. WisDOT added discussions of climate change and indirect and cumulative effects.

Question: Does Trans 400 require separate analysis by mode?

Meeting response: No. WisDOT chose to analyze plans by using modal comparison. This allowed WisDOT to discern incremental impacts and distinguish between the draft plan and base case alternatives. Refer to tables at the beginning the SEE to distinguish differences between the base case and draft plan.

Question: Is it the case that there are no major differences in the expansion of the STH system between the two alternatives?

Meeting response: There are very few differences. Note that the mileage of expressway and freeway conversion projects is greater with the draft plan. Bear in mind that the mileage reported for expressway and freeway conversion projects covers the stretches of the highway system that may only require spot improvements. Thus, the total mileage most likely over-estimates the actual lengths of STH that would be impacted by expressway and freeway conversions.

Caron reviewed the potential impacts identified in the SEE for specific impact areas. The key points include:

- The anticipated impacts are comparable with both the base case and the draft plan. There are only relatively minor differences.
- The draft plan provides more modal choice and more benefits in terms of congestion, economic development, and air quality, primarily through the support of alternative modes.
- The draft plan includes support for expansion of programs that enhance passenger rail and freight transportation. These programs, along with increased freeway and expressway conversions, can result in the draft plan potentially impacting more resources such as agricultural lands, wetlands, and uplands.

SEE discussion - questions and comments

Comment: The SEE indicates that the draft plan reduces congestion and benefits air quality, but the SEE should acknowledge that not all free-flow of traffic results in reduced emissions. The emission-speed curve indicates that traffic speeds that exceed 55 mph tend to release comparatively more emissions than lower speeds.

Question: Does the *Connections 2030* plan include policies to specifically reduce VMT?

Meeting response: No, but the plan provides more choices and strives to manage corridors to consider alternatives to avoid jumping right to capacity expansion and to first consider other options to address user needs.

Comment regarding the VMT growth graph: It would be informative to show exactly what that VMT trend line looks like over 30 years. The line should eventually be shown to taper off over time. The basis for the models along with assumptions should also be identified.

Comment regarding transportation energy usage: The higher the speed, the greater the energy usage.

Comment regarding air quality: Add a bullet on Mobile Source Air Toxics as it relates to public health, roadways, and exposure.

Comment regarding influence of TDM on VMT: The SEE text suggests that TDM strategies are relatively ineffective in reducing VMT. The SEE needs to use caution when extrapolating data from an MPO level up to a statewide level. The SEE should recognize that TDM strategies have changed since 2002. In addition, there are other techniques such as bundling that can increase effectiveness beyond what is being reported. Much of the draft plan is trying to promote alternative modes, the SEE should be careful not to over-generalize. In the future, TDM may prove to be more effective.

Question: Governor Doyle asked agencies to implement the findings of the Task Force on Global Warming. What is WisDOT doing in response?

Meeting response: The last time an inquiry was made, the Secretary's Office was unaware of Governor Doyle's request. At this point, with respect to the Task Force's findings, WisDOT is unaware of what recommendations Governor Doyle will support. The Plan will be modified to reflect these recommendations once they are known.

Comment regarding freight rail: Increased and improved rail service would benefit agriculture in Wisconsin. The SEE should have some additional discussion of benefits to agriculture from freight movement.

Meeting response: Some class I railroads have discontinued service to northern Wisconsin. WisDOT will continue to monitor this issue. WisDOT's support of local roads programs also benefit agriculture.

Comment regarding biofuels: Creating and enhancing programs that specifically support the biofuel industry would benefit Wisconsin's economy and agricultural community. WisDOT should consider adding contract requirements, similar to requirements for DBE participation, to mandate the use of biofuels.

Also, biofuel facilities require transportation. For example, Wisconsin produces a large amount of wood biomass as by-products of the timber and paper industries. This biomass needs to be transported to biofuels processing facilities.

Comment regarding fuel taxes: A large increase in federal fuel tax would likely reduce private auto use. The Plan should call for large increase in the federal gas tax. Currently, the fuel tax rate in the US is far less than Europe's fuel tax rate.

Comment regarding fuel supply: *Connections 2030* should address potential supply disruption issues that could result from an oil embargo. This issue might be appropriate for transportation security chapter.

Comment regarding NEPA: The Plan seems to highlight schedule impacts of NEPA analysis. WisDOT should deemphasize the length of time the NEPA analysis takes. Often times, schedules are a function of funding and not only the NEPA analysis. The Plan should explain that there are many reasons for lengthy project schedules. Also, the discussion should refer to 'NEPA analysis' rather than 'NEPA review'.

Comment regarding wetlands: The expected impact to wetlands appears to be reasonable.

Question: Does WisDOT have the ability to keep up with mitigating the wetlands that are anticipated through 2030?

Meeting response: There is a potential that the estimated wetland impacts are greater than the impacts that will actually occur due to double counting. Nonetheless, WisDOT has observed that the cost of wetland mitigation is increasing, including both land costs and monitoring. WisDOT will do what is necessary to mitigate and is currently working to accumulate all costs associated with wetland mitigation.

Comment regarding wetlands: It might make sense to buy land or invest in properties for wetland banking ahead of time. This would allow WisDOT to mitigate at a 1:1 ratio.

Meeting response: Appropriate properties are becoming more difficult to find. WisDOT probably needs to start now to establish wetland banks because this process now takes longer than it used to.

Comment regarding waste disposal and contracting: As land is cleared for roads, contractors could be required to recycle waste. Also highway maintenance offers a potential for biomass production. WisDOT has the potential to be proactive and contribute to biomass production. A proactive approach may support economic development goals.

Meeting response: Many contractors already address waste disposal in bid process. They may sell or burn biomass. Some contractors already recycle and beneficially reuse it. Specifications could direct contractors to recycle. Currently, it is up to contractor to determine which materials to recycle or reuse.

Comment regarding burning of waste: Currently, in southeastern Wisconsin, contractors are not allowed to burn waste. The contractors are currently contributing to a growing wood-products market. The presence of Emerald Ash Borer will need to be considered in future wood-waste disposal.

Comment regarding cost-sharing and maintenance costs: WisDOT could participate in cost sharing with counties, outdoor marketing contractors, and other entities to proactively divert grass and wood wastes to beneficial reuses.

Comment: Indirect impacts analysis should mention long term potential impacts of WisDOT's transportation facilities and tools that affect land use decisions, such as access management.

Meeting response: WisDOT is hoping that corridor management approach will engage communities and help them plan accordingly. WisDOT does not control land use. The corridor management approach allows WisDOT to communicate its vision and facilitate local governments in making land use decisions.

Comment: The indirect and cumulative impacts analysis needs to be expanded. It should be more tangible and meaningful, and describe in more detail the cumulative impacts to resource areas. The indirect effects analysis also seems to be focused mainly on land use. Other potential indirect effects should also be addressed.

Comments received following WisDOT's inquiry about whether other agencies had ideas or tools to address indirect and cumulative effects:

- The potential impacts from biofuels projects are difficult to discern beyond a project level. Difficulties include the determination of where the industry is heading and market volatility. Analysis is generally limited to a project level.

- The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Protection incorporates secondary impacts analysis of transportation projects.

Comment regarding cumulative effects: Consider addressing cumulative effects in each separate resource section. There is a trend of addressing indirect and cumulative impacts on a resource by resource basis. If WisDOT decides to keep in one stand-alone section, the discussion needs to move beyond transportation.

Comment regarding tools: There are some land use and air quality analysis tools to identify cumulative effects.

Comment regarding transit: Clarify the statement regarding induced travel that results from transit service. Also, WisDOT should discuss latent demand in terms of STH capacity expansion.

Comment regarding formatting of mitigation: In terms of readability, mitigation should be included in a separate section at the conclusion of the SEE. While mitigation measures are addressed in the Plan chapters, mitigation should also be noted in SEE because many people will only read the SEE and not all the Plan chapters. The SEE tables are helpful.

Comment regarding alternatives in SEE: Consider inclusion of additional alternatives that would result in mid-range of impacts.

Meeting response: There is some discussion at the beginning of the SEE. Also, Trans 400 requires comparison with base case. WisDOT will review the base case and draft plan alternatives and will amend the alternatives as needed.

Comment regarding agriculture: The SEE should contain more discussion of transportation's effects on agriculture, especially impermanence syndrome.

Environmental Justice

The Environmental Justice (EJ) chapter identifies the locations of EJ populations and discusses public outreach activities. To ensure participation by minority and low-income persons, the EJ chapter was developed to supplement the SEE chapter. Aileen reviewed the guiding principles of Executive Order 12898 and the methodology used in the EJ chapter.

WisDOT expanded the definition of EJ populations to include persons aged 65-years and older and households without vehicles. This system-level EJ analysis is not intended to replace project level EJ analysis.

The *Connections 2030* EJ analysis is unique and more rigorous than previous system-level analyses. The EJ analysis focused on five themes:

- Inter city travel
- Access to jobs
- Highways
- Intermodal connections
- Transit

The analysis concluded that while the implementation of specific components of the plan could potentially impact EJ populations, overall, the whole plan would not disproportionately impact EJ populations. Additional analysis will be conducted at the project level to determine if an individual project would result in disproportionate impacts.

Comment: EJ chapters should also include bike and pedestrian modes and identify connections between EJ populations and bike and pedestrian facilities. WisDOT should acknowledge the impact to bike and pedestrian routes from highways and other transportation facilities.

Comment: The EJ conclusion statement needs to be expanded. WisDOT should include the basis for making this decision.

Question regarding transit: Is it the case that transit systems themselves are inefficient or is the administration of funding from multiple sources inefficient?

Meeting response: While there are some disincentives built into transit systems, much of the inefficiency is a function of administration. WisDOT should clarify what its specific goals are and what it intends to improve with its transit focus. This is addressed in the *Mobility and Transportation Choice* chapter. WisDOT will review the discussion in the EJ chapter.

Comment regarding meeting location: The meeting location at the Wisconsin Community Bank is inconvenient because it is not accessible by transit.

Meeting response: This is the last meeting with agencies, but the public information meetings will be accessible by multiple modes.

Comment: USEPA is currently working on an EJ-related GIS layer called EJ SEAT. NEPA-assist is also available to help environmental analysis.

WisDOT is open to suggestions regarding the EJ analysis. Tennessee is the only other state that appears to conduct a detailed analysis of its long-range plan.

Corridor Maps

The maps are intended to assist with future project implementation. They are primarily conceptual and are current through December 2007. Eventually, the maps will be distributed to the regions for use. Agencies should revisit the corridors with WisDOT regions.

Neil provided an overview of the corridor maps. He noted that the maps contain an overall vision for the corridor and a broad discussion of general trends. Some of the key points regarding the corridor maps include:

- Metropolitan Planning Areas have their own corridor maps
- Some policies and programs on the timeline are not mapped, such as continued support of shared ride taxi service.
- The maps provide the basis for some WisDOT policies and programs
- The maps themselves indicate that projects are not guaranteed
- The maps provide the public with an idea of how decisions are made

- The regions were involved in the development of corridor maps
- While the maps are highway-based, they incorporate all modes

Comment: Corridor maps may be useful for resource agencies, especially when specific projects are discussed during liaison meetings. They may also be helpful during cumulative impacts analysis.

Question regarding aviation: Who funds aviation improvements in Wisconsin?

Meeting response: Airport managers compete for funding and the FAA awards funding. FAA funds are administered through WisDOT. In some ways, aviation is funded like transit.

Question/comment: Does WisDOT support the conclusion of a study that recommended that CMAQ funding be discontinued? CMAQ funding should continue.

Meeting response: Not all recommendations would be followed and the recommendations of national studies would be tailored for Wisconsin.

Comment regarding plan comparison: WisDOT should add Wisconsin's State Implementation Plan to the plan comparison.

Question regarding WisDOT's response to previous comments: Have the chapters been changed to address comments previously received from agencies?

Meeting response: Yes. In some cases, the chapters have changed considerably.

Question regarding comment matrix: Some of the responses to comments within the matrix are generalized responses. Are WisDOT's responses or text that is actually added to chapters more detailed and comprehensive?

Meeting response: Yes. The matrix is intended to serve as a generalized comment tracker.

Comment: It would be helpful to see how the draft plan was influenced by the plan comparison exercise.

These minutes reflect comments as interpreted by the writer. Please contact Caron Kloser at 414-359-2300 or ckloser@hntb.com for any revisions or comments.