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News from the Prairie Parkway Study • Issue 6 • Spring 2006

This publication provides a format to keep you informed about the new study developments.

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Initial Footprints of Prairie Parkway Envisioned

Based on the decision made last October to advance IL47 in combination with B2, B5, and "No Build" alternatives for further study, the environmental research teams went to work. Surveys of environmental conditions in the two corridors were conducted during the fall and winter months, and will continue during the spring and summer. The surveys verified existing conditions, plus checked for previous unidentified constraints that could affect the location of the project.

The surveys assessed wetlands, soils, streams and rivers, threatened and endangered species, and historic and cultural sites. These surveys required a significant amount of field investigations, looking for species and various types of wetlands, checking soils and water flows, taking photos, and documenting the findings.

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Using these environmental survey results, the project engineers varied the roadway location, height, width, curves, bridges, entrances and exits to minimize environmental impacts. As was noted in the beginning of this study, IDOT was not tied to using the previously recorded corridor. In fact, many proposed changes have occurred based on the environmental surveys, engineering analysis, and public input. Several of the proposed changes were in response to sensitive areas near waterways. A significant example is the Prairie Parkway crossing of the Fox River. Environmental surveys identified a sensitive site near the Fox River. The Study Team worked closely with environmental agencies and took special field tests to assure that a new location of the Prairie Parkway would not impact the sensitive area. With that assurance, further geological surveys are underway. The initial footprint location is illustrated on Figure 1.

Initial Footprints, continued on page 2

Study Area Alternatives

You're Invited!

April 4, 2006 • Yorkville, IL • April 5 • Morris, IL

(See back for details)

Working Together to Plan a Better Future...

A Message from Illinois Department of Transportation

Since last October's decision to carry forward the B2, B5 and "No Build" alternatives, we have been busy conducting engineering and environmental studies for these options. Draft locations and overall footprints for the B2 and B5 alternatives have been developed based on information we have assembled to date. They represent our attempt to balance environmental, cost, and engineering factors. These draft locations and footprints are being presented now to offer everyone interested the opportunity to provide input prior to the final evaluation of alternatives.

Your comments have been vital to the success of this study and, as with prior decision points, we need your help at this project milestone. We appreciate your commitment to the Prairie Parkway planning effort and look forward to your participation in the upcoming meetings.

Sincerely,

Gregory L. Mounts, P.E.
Deputy Director of Highways,
Region Two Engineer

The natural environment isn't the only factor being considered.

Figure 1: Fox River Realignment

Initial Footprints continued from page 1

The natural environment isn't the only factor being considered. The project engineers are also sensitive to the built environment and varied the roadway location to minimize impacts on buildings and facilities. Other important factors, such as planned developments and future population and employment were also updated and reviewed. With rapidly developing areas, like Kendall and Kane Counties, keeping track of the various municipalities and their new developments can be almost a full time job. Each of these developments, whether it's a new subdivision, shopping center, warehouse or factory, brings people to the area and the need for convenient, safe travel.

Population and employment are also affected by new transportation facilities. Communities that offer good transportation accessibility will draw new businesses and residents, affecting the population and employment conditions and in the end, the transportation network. Preparing for these changes requires a repetitive process of estimating population and employment, assessing the impact of the new growth, and adjusting the transportation network to respond to the new demand. Comments received about this issue have resulted in a segment of the Prairie Parkway much closer to Yorkville where the development is expected and farther from the open space and farmland near IL 52.

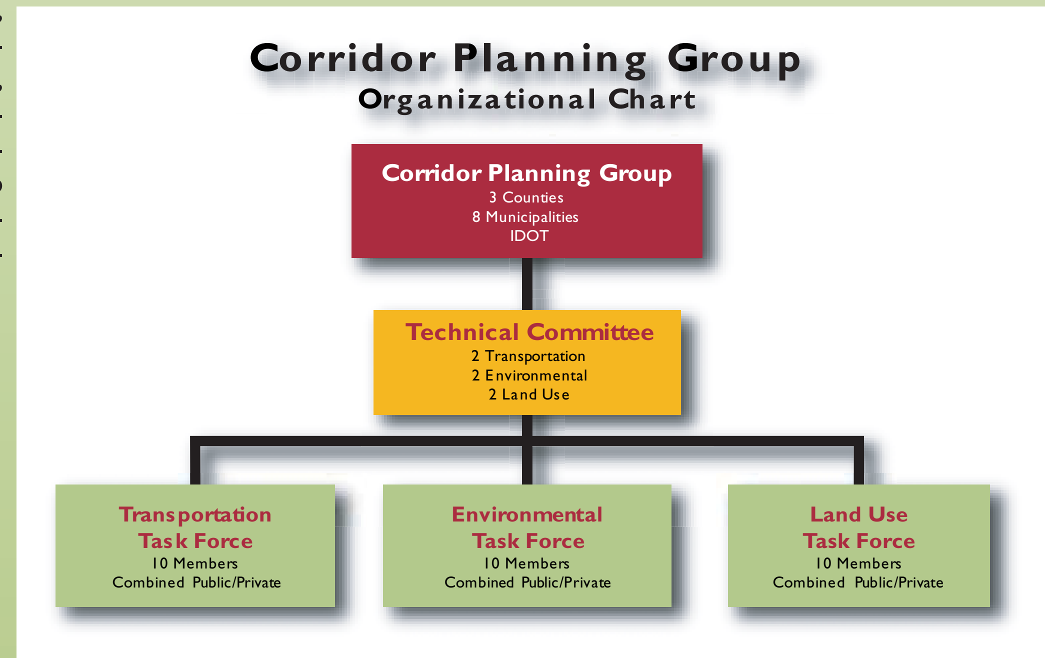
Corridor Planning Group Providing Community Input

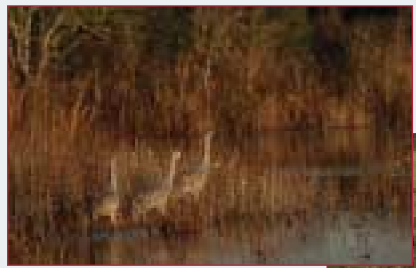
IDOT has realized from the start of the study that feedback from potentially affected communities was important to ensuring that IDOT proposals are consistent with community goals and objectives. To provide a forum for discussions of details about the location and design of the Prairie Parkway, IDOT has established a Corridor Planning Group. The Corridor Planning Group includes elected officials from the three counties and eight municipalities located within a 3 mile wide band of the proposed corridors. These include the counties of Kane, Kendall, and Grundy; and the municipalities of Big Rock, Elburn, Sugar Grove, Plano, Yorkville, Lisbon, Morris and Minooka.

The elected officials on the Corridor Planning Group are supported by Technical Task Forces, whose members are selected from farm bureaus, transportation and land use planning agencies, economic development councils, forest preserve districts, and environmental conservation groups. The task force members have experience and knowledge of local issues related to land use planning, environmental resources, and transportation.

The Corridor Planning Group and supporting task forces provide a place for discussion about the proposed roadway footprint, potential impacts, opportunities to establish a corridor theme, and community responses to those proposed ideas. The group also provides a framework for local government cooperation on land use and enhancements to the region. The task forces may address project transportation issues, including horizontal and vertical location, crossroad closures and interchange locations, interchange design and adjacent property access, right-of-way width, accommodation of utilities, emergency vehicle access, non-motorized trails, maintenance of traffic, design standards; and environmental issues including agricultural preservation, open space preservation, storm water discharge, water quality, wetlands, home and business displacements, construction impacts, and secondary impacts stimulated by the project. Land use planning can be addressed by the task force by providing a framework for development of corridor land uses and development plans.

When the group raises issues or have suggestions, IDOT and the project team work hard to accommodate the request or reduce the impact. Often times this results in adjustments that eventually provide a good solution for all parties. These draft footprints may change based on public comments or new environmental conditions that are identified during the ongoing surveys. IDOT and the project team will also periodically brief other agencies, local jurisdictions, and interest groups on study progress, as well as continue to hold public meetings and workshops.





Interchange Locations Identified

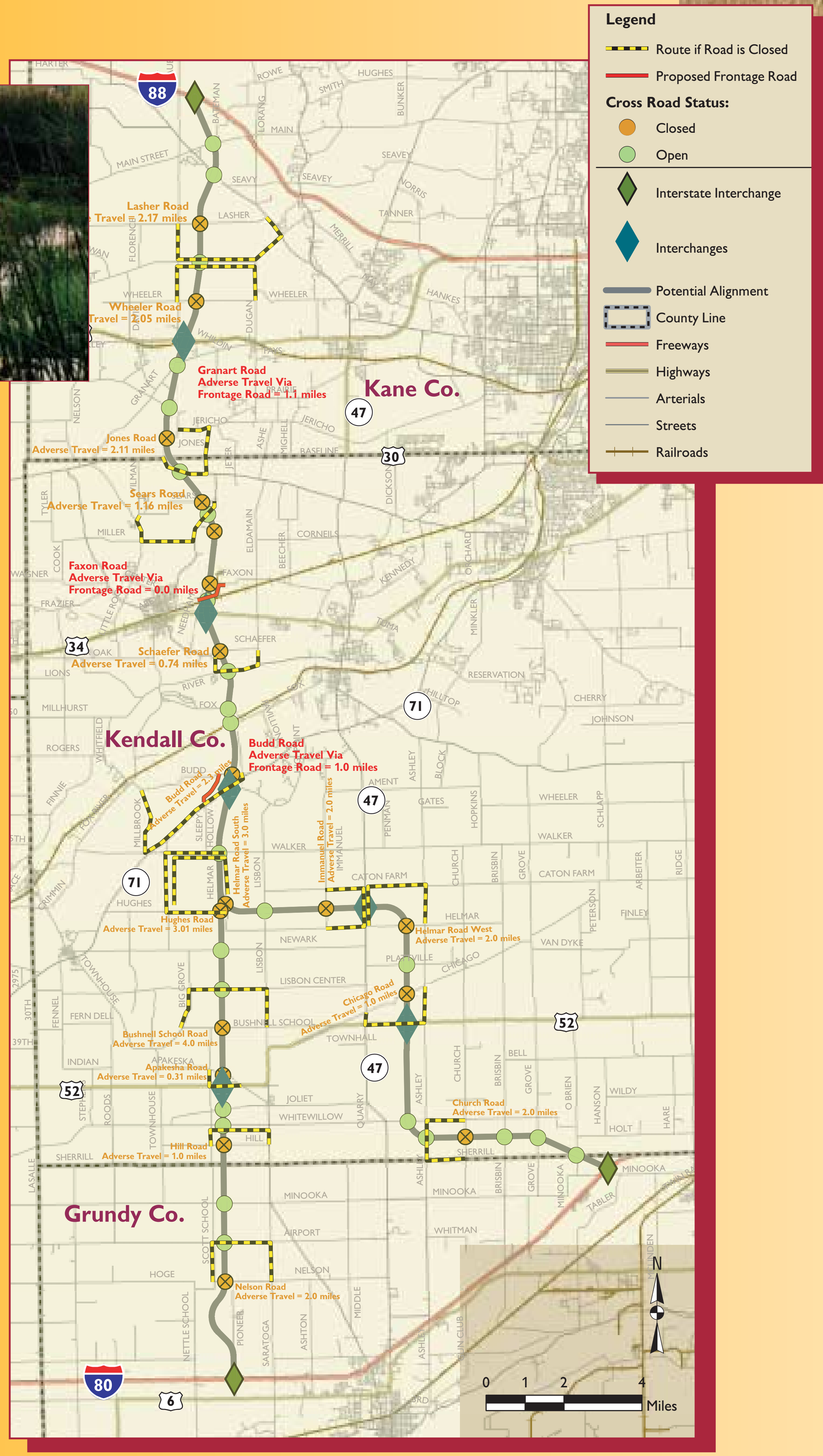
Providing interchanges for Prairie Parkway access at State and US highways addresses the purpose and need for the Prairie Parkway improvements, and directs traffic to roads that are planned and designed to handle the change in travel patterns created by a new freeway. The current plan includes interchanges for local access at US 52, IL 47, IL 71, US 34, and US 30.

Commercial land use exists today along most State and US highways. The future land use plans for communities along the Prairie Parkway reflect continued commercial land uses along the State and US highways. State and US highway improvements are being planned through other studies to accommodate commercial land uses and maintain mobility.

Several proposals for additional local access interchanges at locations other than State and US highways have been brought forth, and will likely continue to be brought forth for consideration. These proposals are in various stages of discussion or implementation at the local level, but are not being considered in the Prairie Parkway Study. Additional interchanges provide accessibility to the new transportation system,, but without local land use control the greater accessibility can result in land use changes different than those that were planned.

The addition of interchanges can also affect safety and congestion levels on the freeway and crossroads. The Prairie Parkway Study has received a consensus of comment for preserving open spaces and limiting unplanned growth. While always striving to coordinate land use and transportation, the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) does not have the authority to regulate land use. This authority lies with the local municipalities and counties. The Corridor Planning Group may serve as a forum for providing cooperative planning of land uses along a new freeway that passes through multiple jurisdictions. For other interchange proposals that are suggested, the Study team is continuing to encourage regional and local planning to occur within the oversight of the Corridor Planning Group.

If additional local access interchanges are found to be warranted and supported, but not added directly through the Prairie Parkway Study, additions can be proposed to the Federal Highway Administration and IDOT as stand alone studies. The amount of local coordination and consensus will factor into future decisions for new interchanges.



Potential Road Closures

Potential Road Closures Identified

The Study Team, Corridor Planning Group, and local officials have made an initial recommendation to close several crossroads, rather than provide an overpass of the Prairie Parkway. These decisions were made primarily by comparing the additional costs to the cross road users to the cost of building an overpass. A Road Closure Analysis was performed for each crossroad along the B5 Corridor and B2 Corridor.

The cost of a road closure is the increase in cost for road users to travel the additional distance to reach their destination. These costs are based on the amount of traffic, added detour distance, and operating costs of the vehicles. The costs of the new overpass include right-of-way and construction costs for building the overpass, including bridges, earthwork, drainage pipes, pavement, guardrail, and landscaping.

To determine the feasibility of either closing a crossroad or providing an overpass, the road user costs incurred in the case of road closure were compared with the overpass construction costs. If the road user costs resulting from road closure are less than the overpass costs, then the closure was considered to be cost effective.

Although cost was a primary factor, consideration was also given to not closing two consecutive crossroads. This was done to ensure that local road system integrity is maintained without significant changes in travel patterns that could impact road users, school bus routes, emergency services, social services, mail routes, and local businesses.

The crossroads identified for closure along the B5 corridor are Church Road, Chicago Road, Helmar Road West, Immanuel Road, Helmar Road South, Schaefer Road, Sears Road, Jones Road, Wheeler Road, and Lasher Road.

The crossroads identified for closure along the B2 straight south corridor are Nelson Road, Hill Road, Apakesha Road, Bushnell School Road, and Hughes Road.

Feedback from the public will be requested on proposed road closures at the upcoming public meeting scheduled for the April of 2006. Roads that are proposed to be closed will also be the subject of a future road closure hearing.

Concept Protects Water Resources

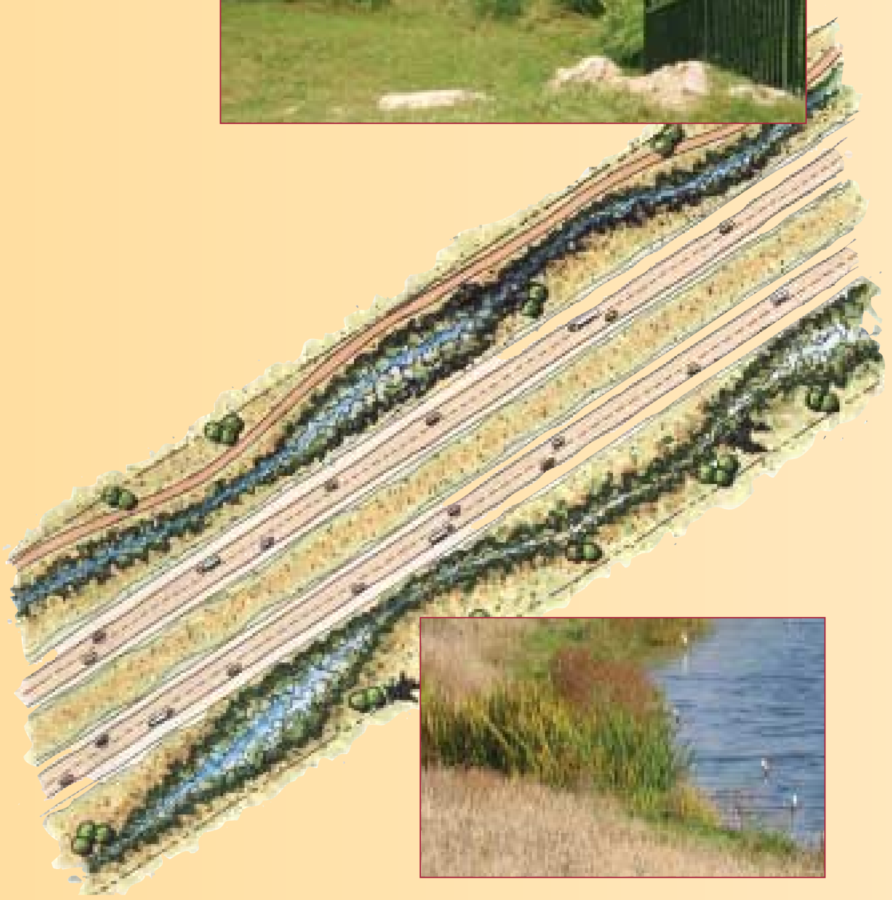
Water quality is an important issue to the communities along the corridors. Groundwater serves as the main source of drinking water to area residents, and biological natural resources are dependent upon a clean water supply. The B2 and B5 corridors cross the high quality watersheds of the Big Rock Creek, Aux Sable Creek, Nettle Creek and Fox River. Environmental resource agencies, the Corridor Planning Group and the Study Team have identified storm water management as a priority objective for the Prairie Parkway. The goal is to identify sensitive water resources and avoid or minimize impacts.

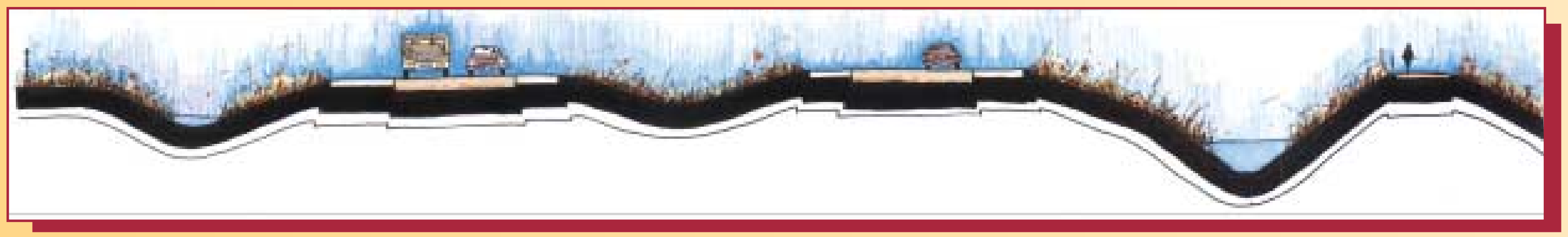
The Study Team and the Corridor Planning Group have developed an approach to the design of the Prairie Parkway corridor that exceeds the standard level of care for maintaining water quality along roadways. The development of this approach required trade offs between the benefits of enhanced storm water management and the larger footprint those improvements require. The study team used parcels of land that are severed by the roadway improvements and considered those areas of excess right of way suitable for locating water treatment areas.

The first step of the approach was to avoid sensitive water resources altogether by changing the location of the Prairie Parkway. The Study Team and the Corridor Planning Group also focused on locations where the Prairie Parkway crossed streams. Locations were selected that avoided sensitive features and minimized the footprint in high quality areas.

For minimizing necessary impacts, the design will increase infiltration to maximize groundwater absorption, minimize concentrated discharge of roadway rainfall runoff into streams, and detain rainfall runoff, so it is released into the streams at the rate that won't exceed the conditions that existed before the road is built. To achieve these objectives, the concept includes bio-swales along each side of the roadway that are designed to provide a water treatment effect of cleansing the rainfall runoff, increase the ability for the ground to soak up the rainfall, and slow the rate of release for the rainfall runoff. This is done in an aesthetic manner incorporating a proposed multi-purpose trail that meanders around and over the water quality features.

An attractive containment swale between the road and trail is planned to capture roadway runoff. A meandering swale with a varying shape will slow flow and provide better visual effect for the driver and trail user. The bio-swale and aesthetics is further improved with prairie plantings, and the use of deep rooted vegetation in the swale bottom which will allow the ground to soak up more runoff and recharge the groundwater. It will also cleanse the water as it slowly flows through the grasses in the swale. The bio-swale will include basins to capture and divert the first rain flush that often contains the salts and oils from the roadway. Detention basins will be added to slowly release the treated rainfall. The holding basins will also allow more time for the rainfall to soak into the ground water. For safety reasons, the detention basins will be shallow depth and drain out within 72 hours. "Best Management Practices" defined by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources will be used to assure the high quality water resources are protected.





Land Resources Management Rendering

Non-Motorized Trail Is a Regional Asset

Whenever a major investment, such as the Prairie Parkway, is being planned, opportunities exist to find ways for the improvements to fit into the fabric of the community. Kendall County has taken a big step toward planning the community around the Prairie Parkway with scenic route guidelines that are included in their Land Resources Management Plan. A key feature of that plan is a continuous, non-motorized (bicycle and pedestrian) path along the Prairie Parkway. The Study Team and the Corridor Planning Group are developing a plan to accommodate a future trail within the Prairie Parkway corridor or along existing road rights-of-way available for public uses such as biking and hiking.

The diverse interests and points of view represented on the Corridor Planning Group have provided a good forum for considering the merits and trade-offs of adding the trail. The recognition that the added footprint width required for the trail can conflict with other interests such as farm and conservation, and environmental impacts, has resulted in a plan that allows for the trail where appropriate demand and needs for connectivity exist, but retains the space to allow flexibility for plans that emerge as the region develops. The current proposal is to provide rough grading for the trail embankment at the time of initial construction of the Prairie Parkway. Drainage facilities, landscaping, fencing, special bridges, and surfacing will be installed when the sponsor is ready to start operating and maintaining the trail.

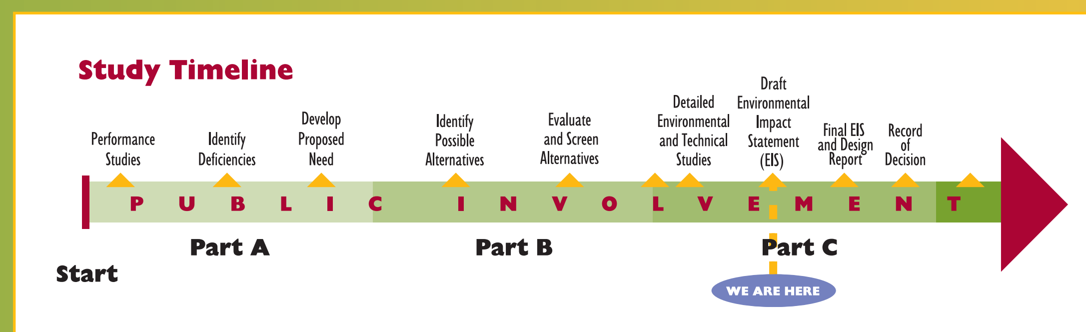
Concerns for environmental issues have resulted in an approach that uses existing roadways/bridges at major river or stream crossings, such as the Fox River and Big Rock Creek, to minimize the footprint of new construction through sensitive areas. Crossing of local roads and access to and from the Prairie Parkway trail would typically occur at crossroad turnoffs. The Study Team worked with the Corridor Planning Group to identify locations for connections with other trails or open space areas, and to find opportunities to utilize existing or currently planned trails in the project area. Desirable sites also have nearby supporting facilities (parking, restrooms, picnic tables, etc.)

Next Steps: Draft Environmental Impact Statement

After the series of spring public meetings, more revisions to the plans will be made, and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will be submitted to the reviewing agencies for comment. This document describes the environmental impacts of the proposed alternatives. After this review, the DEIS will be released for public review and comment in the fall. A public hearing will be held to formally record comments, which will be incorporated into the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

The FEIS, when complete, is sent to the reviewing federal agencies, including Federal Highway Administration, US Environmental Protection Agency, US Army Corps of Engineers, US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and others. The agencies then have a specified period of time to comment on the FEIS and return a Record of Decision (ROD). Once the ROD is issued, IDOT will have the approval to build the preferred alternative.

The next phase of the project – final design and construction – has many steps, including finding funding for all the pieces of the project. These pieces include land acquisition, final engineering and cost analysis, right-of-way negotiations, coordination of construction with local communities, and more. This is a long process, and one that will continue the partnership between IDOT, the communities, and regional residents and business.



IDOT Looks Again for Public Comment

IDOT has scheduled two public information meetings on April 4 and 5 to present and receive public comment on the initial locations and footprints of the two build alternatives that were announced last year to be carried forward for further studies. The initial locations of the alternatives result from the latest environmental field investigations and engineering studies. Also, these potential alternatives represent the results of close coordination between the Study Team and environmental groups, land owners, communities, and the Corridor Planning Group.

The Corridor Planning Group is led by elected officials of the communities affected by the improvements. These elected officials are supported by technical task forces members selected from farm bureaus, economic development councils, forest preserves, and environmental conservation groups having experience and knowledge of local land use planning, environmental resources, and transportation.

Through this coordination, the footprint incorporates community features such as a multi-purpose trail, enhanced storm water management, ground water recharge, water quality improvements, future transit compatibility, and a range of aesthetic improvements, such as prairie plantings, open space access, and bio-swales.

You will be able to see a number of draft changes to the previously recorded corridor, as well as the proposed B2 roadway location south to I-80, and widening of IL-47 south of Caton Farm Road.

At the meetings, there will be a short presentation beginning at 6:30 PM, followed by a facilitated question and answer session. Prior to and following the presentation, IDOT representatives will be available to discuss the study results with you one-on-one, as we have done in the past. We will also provide an update on the next steps for the project.

Meeting information:

April 4, 2006
Yorkville High School
797 Game Farm Road
Yorkville, IL 60560
5:30-8:00 PM

April 5, 2006
White Oak Elementary School
2101 Dupont Avenue
Morris, IL 60450
5:30-8:00 PM

*At the open house, you will be updated on the study, have the opportunity to review exhitbits and participate in a question and answer forum with IDOT representatives, which will begin each day at 6:30 PM.

Both locations are accessible to persons with disabilities. If special accommodations are required, contact the District Engineer's office at 815-434-8435.

Get Involved:

Check our website for project updates, to sign-up for the mailing list, and to send comments to us! Go to www.prairie-parkway.com or contact us at Illinois Department of Transportation Division of Highways-Region 2, 700 E. Norris Drive, Ottawa, IL 61350-0697. Telephone 815-434-6131.

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