directions

Prairie Parkway Study
Planning for the Region's Future

News from the Prairie Parkway Study • Issue 5 • Fall 2005

IDOT Announces Shortlist of Prairie Parkway Alternatives

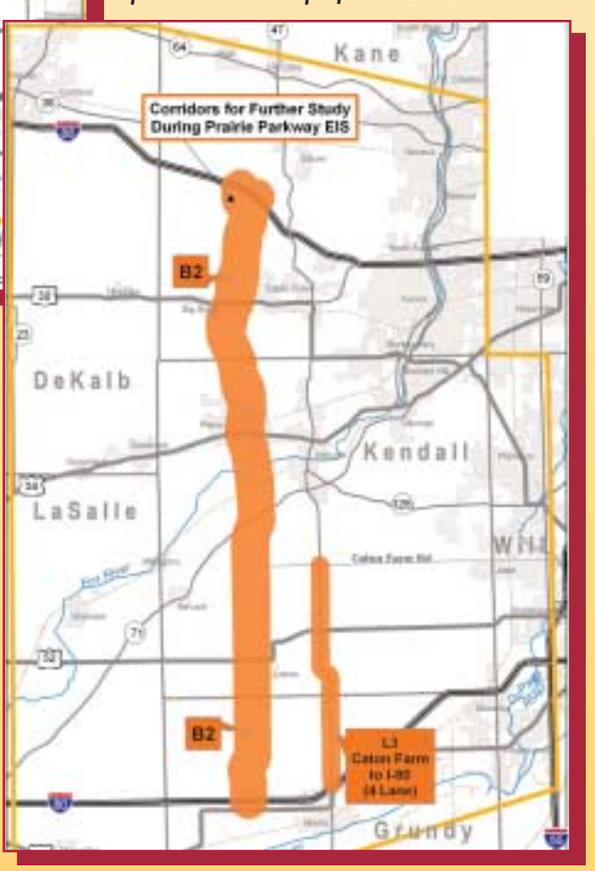
This publication provides a format to keep you informed about the new study developments.

In This Issue:

IDOT has concluded the screening of preliminary alternatives, considered the public preliminary commentary, and selected the shortlist of alternatives to fix the growing travel problems of the region.

Based upon the evaluation of travel benefits, a freeway alternative in combination with widening IL 47 and the WiKaDuKe corridor offers the best overall performance. These combination alternatives address the diverse travel demands in the study area and best address the Purpose and Need.

Transit and travel management techniques (such as intersection improvements, car and van-pools, signal timing, bus service, reserved transit right-of-way, and non-motorized trails) will be considered for incorporation into the preferred alternative.



Since the initiation of this study, progress has been made by others in the planning and construction of improvements to IL 47 from north of Caton Farm Road to I-88, and to the WiKaDuKe Corridor (Eola Road, Stewart Road and Ridge Road) between I-88 and I-80. Improvements are being planned and built by others regardless of the Prairie Parkway Study, so IDOT now assumes that those sections will be built by year 2030. The remaining segment of IL 47, from Caton Farm to I-80, will move forward into the next phase of the Prairie Parkway study as a part of the build alternatives.

When assessing which freeway corridor to combine with IL 47 the location of the similar performing freeway corridors becomes a distinguishing factor. The environmental impact analysis indicates higher overall impact for freeway corridors located to the east and north of Yorkville. The forecasted travel benefits between these corridors are not great enough to warrant the greater impacts created by corridors to the east and north of Yorkville. The freeway corridor alternatives west of Yorkville are comparable to alternatives east of Yorkville at addressing the purpose and need, but without the higher level of environmental impacts. Alternatives to the far west do not sufficiently reduce the level of anticipated environmental impacts enough to offset the loss in overall travel benefits.

continued on page 3

Communities Working Together... **Planning for the Future...**

A Message from Illinois Department of Transportation

We have reached a significant decision point in the Prairie Parkway Study, and that is the selection of two build alternatives and the no-action alternative to advance for additional study.

The alternatives advancing for more detailed evaluation in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) represent a blend of factors such as providing the most travel benefits, compatibility with future land use plans, and minimizing environmental and development impacts.

The next step in this process is to conduct a detailed environmental impact analysis of the selected build alternatives and refine the travel benefits associated with the alternatives. Using this information, the alternatives will be designed to first avoid environmental impacts, and if that is not possible, then to minimize and mitigate environmental impacts while ensuring that the improvement meets existing and future travel demands.

The new federal transportation bill was signed into law by the President Bush on August 10, 2005 just outside of Aurora. The bill includes $152 million in funding for the construction of an I-80 to I-88 North-South Connector, and $55 million for the construction of a Route 34 interchange and improvement, both as part of the National Corridor Infrastructure Improvement Program. Our challenge remains to apply these funds towards the best transportation solution for the traveling public in this region.

IDOT maintains its commitment to public involvement throughout the Prairie Parkway Study. We will continue to seek your input on many details of the study. Thank you for your participation in this process.

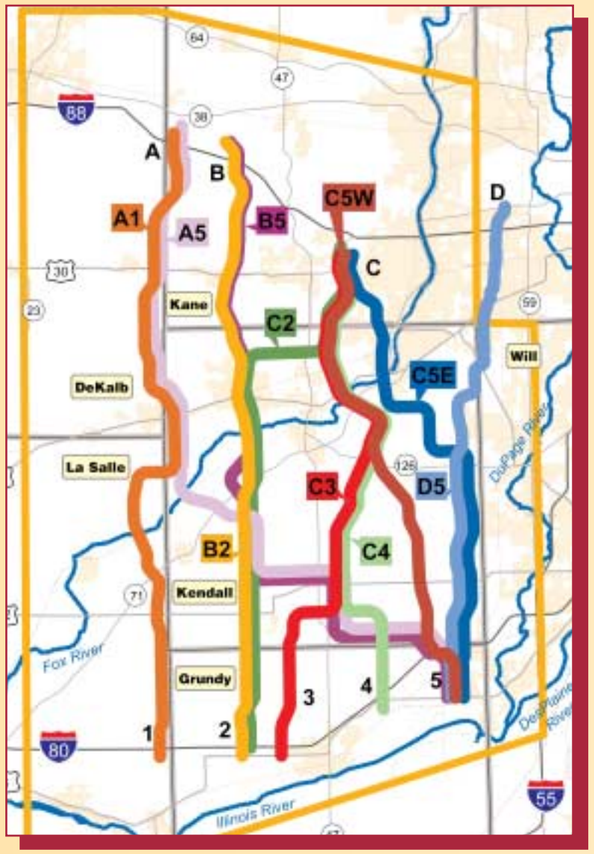
Sincerely,

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

Decision Builds Upon Prior Work

The Purpose and Need will serve as a guide throughout the study for identifying an appropriate solution. The purpose of the project is to identify a Transportation System Improvement(s) that will help enhance north-south mobility between I-80 and I-88 and address the four project needs:

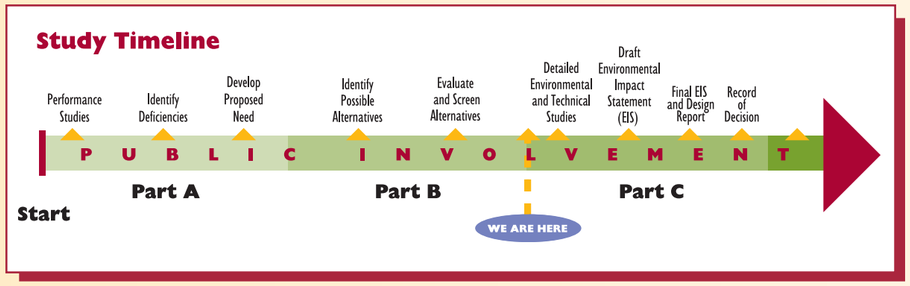
- **Improve regional mobility**
- **Address local system deficiencies**
- **Improve access from the study area to regional jobs**
- **Improve safety**



Initial Freeway Corridor Alternatives

The public and key stakeholders suggested more than 150 ideas. These ideas were organized and combined into a set of preliminary alternatives that included arterial improvements, new freeways, transit improvements, and travel management strategies and improvements.

IDOT then conducted an evaluation of the travel benefits of the preliminary alternatives to determine the best performing corridors, followed by an environmental evaluation of the preliminary alternatives to identify the corridors having high probability of environmental impacts. The results of these evaluations were presented at the May 2005 public meetings and extensively reported in the last issue of Directions. IDOT has since been collecting and evaluating the comments and suggestions on the evaluation results and have applied that input to develop the shortlist of alternatives.



Initial Arterial Roadway Alternatives

IDOT Announces Shortlist, continued from page 1

The B2 and B5 corridors represent the corridors having the preferred blend of rating high at addressing the range of diverse travel needs, while being located close to the population centers, and resulting in a lower level of anticipated environmental impacts.

This recommendation represents a blend of factors:

1) **Providing travel benefits by addressing the transportation Purpose and Need measures.**
2) **Minimizing potential environmental and development impacts.**
3) **Allowing for compatibility with local planning**
4) **Incorporating context sensitive principles.**

These factors contribute to the following recommendation of alternatives to advance for further detailed engineering and environmental studies for the Prairie Parkway Draft Environmental Statement.

- **No-Action Alternative (no additional improvements other than those with significant probability of being built by Year 2030)**
- **Combination Build Alternative: Freeway B5 and IL 47 from Caton Farm Rd to I-80**
- **Combination Build Alternative: Freeway B2 and IL 47 from Caton Farm Rd to I-80**

In addition, the potential for inclusion of other transportation improvements, such as traffic management and travel demand techniques, bicycle trails, expanded bus service, or reserving a right-of-way for a future transit improvement will be examined as a component of the build alternative.

On September 9th, these alternatives were presented to representatives of the United States and Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, the Federal Highway Administration, Illinois Department of Agriculture, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and the United States Corps of Engineers. All concurred that these alternatives are appropriate choices to advance for further studies.

Why did IDOT Shortlist these Alternatives?

Travel Benefits Evaluation

The results of the evaluation of travel benefits were presented at the May 2005 public meetings. The stand alone alternatives results showed that freeways out-performed the transit, traffic management, and the stand-alone arterial roadway upgrades. It was recognized that no single stand-alone arterial roadway, or travel management techniques, or transit alternatives addressed all of the travel needs identified.

It was noted that the freeway alternatives performed even better in combination with other arterial roadway improvements. This led to testing a series of combination alternatives.

The combination alternatives showed the best results for the travel benefits evaluation. The combinations included assumed improvements along IL 47 and WiKaDuKe, as local system deficiencies are most prevalent in the central and eastern portions of the study area. Added to these two arterial road improvements were either another arterial road improvement or a new freeway. The results of this analysis determined that the freeway/arterial roadway combinations performed best in meeting the overall purpose and need measures, as arterials address local travel needs and freeways address more regional travel.

The selected alternatives are the best blend of improved travel, land use compatibility, and minimizing impacts.

Environmental Impacts / Locational Evaluation

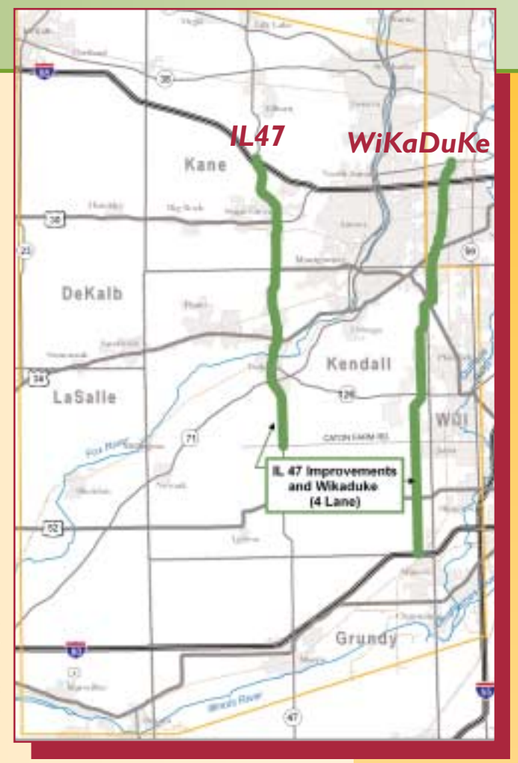
The next step was to address the environmental impacts of the preliminary alternatives. The environmental impact evaluation was performed to identify whether corridors with similar travel benefits had different environmental impacts. This evaluation was performed by analyzing various alignments within the wider corridors.

Environmental data was compiled in a Geographic Information System (GIS). The use of the GIS tool helped to streamline the process and assisted in avoiding and minimizing the impacts to environmental resources in the 1500 plus square mile study area. The data, obtained from a number of sources, provided over sixty types of environmental and other location-based features within the study area. The data sources included national sources, Illinois Natural History Survey (INHS) data and was supplemented and updated by local area conservationists and other local resources.

The natural environment data included wetlands, nature preserves, parks, fens, plant and animal habitats, streams, and floodplains while the built or man-made data included farms, homes, existing and planned developments, historic sites, and consistency with local land use plans. The data was compiled into a base map and each alternative used the same base data.

During the analysis, if there were significant impacts that could be minimized, the alignment was moved and re-evaluated to assess if the environmental impacts could be reduced or eliminated. Upon the completion of the additional analysis, the results were compiled and compared between corridors.

Two sets of environmental evaluations were performed: one for the entire corridor and the second focusing on the Fox River crossing areas. The Fox River crossing environmental evaluation found that impacts for both the natural and built / man-made environment increased as the freeway corridor locations progress from west to east. Crossing locations east of Yorkville and east of Orchard Road are expected to have the most overall impacts especially on open space, natural areas, wetlands, floodplains, and developments. Overall, the Fox River crossings west of Yorkville and Millington had lesser overall environmental impacts, and greater overall compatibility with the natural and built environment.



Portions of the best performing combination alternatives assumed to be built by 2030.

The results of the full corridor environmental impact evaluation found that the eastern alternatives were found to have the higher impacts on houses, buildings, and planned development, while the western options have greater impact on farmlands and streams. The freeway alternatives east of Yorkville also have greater impacts on parks and natural areas, wetlands, and home displacements. The forecasted travel benefits are not great enough to warrant the greater impacts created by corridors to the east and north of Yorkville.

The eastern freeway corridors are being set aside from further evaluation at this time, in favor of less impacting freeway corridors located to the west of Yorkville which are very highly rated for addressing the project purpose and need.

Based on the evaluation, the freeway corridors west of Yorkville were found to have the overall lower level of impacts. The alternatives just west of Yorkville are comparable to alternatives east of Yorkville at addressing the purpose and need, but without the higher level of environmental impacts. However, alternatives to the far west do not reduce the environmental impact enough to offset the loss in travel benefits.

The B2 and B5 freeway corridors represent the corridors having the preferred blend of rating high at addressing the range of diverse travel needs, while being located close to the population centers, and a lower level of anticipated environmental impacts.

Baseline Adjustment Needed for Progress on IL 47 and WiKaDuKe

In the last three years, progress has been made by others, (outside of the scope of the Prairie Parkway Study), in the planning for and construction of improvements to IL 47 and the WiKaDuKe corridor. This includes the programming of preliminary engineering for IL 47 from the Kane County line to north of US 34, IDOT's Highway Improvement Program additions, Yorkville's plans to widen IL 47 both north and south of Yorkville, the completion of the WiKaDuKe Trail Land Use and Access Management Study, and construction of several segments of the WiKaDuKe Trail.

The widening of Illinois 47 and WiKaDuKe to four through lanes was included in the Prairie Parkway Study of arterial-freeway combination alternatives that were tested. IDOT sees the importance of these projects improving local travel in the Study Area. Therefore, IDOT is now assuming that between now and 2030 the WiKaDuKe corridor will be completed, and IL 47 will be widened to four through lanes from I-88 south to Caton Farm Road.

The remaining segment of IL 47, from Caton Farm to I-80, will move forward into the next phase of the Prairie Parkway study as a component of both of the combination build alternatives.

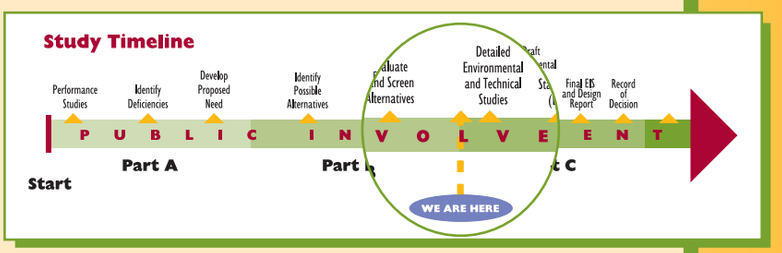
Public Comment

During May and June 2005, the alternatives evaluation results were presented in various public forums, including through the local media, stakeholders and two public meetings. The open period for comments on the evaluations was through June 30, 2005.

Comments had been received from local jurisdictions, interest groups and the general public. The majority of local jurisdictions supported the B5 freeway corridor, along with support and opposition for the "A" and "C" corridors. Comments from interest groups were more varied and included the desire to keep a new freeway in the eastern portion of the study area, opposition to the A1 freeway corridor, and the need to consider improving existing roads. Of the public comments received, the majority expressed support for some type of transportation improvement. The remaining were requests for information, complex comments, or in opposition to specific corridors, such as those ending near Morris. All comments were considered during the evaluation process.

Next Steps: Draft Environmental Impact Statement

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement phase of the Prairie Parkway Study is expected to be an intensive process that will require a wide range of experts. Environmental planners, surveyors, and engineers will be out in the alternative corridors identifying key environmental, topographic, and design features. Detailed environmental impact studies will be conducted on a full range of potential impacts, including water quality, wetlands, threatened and endangered species, agricultural lands, archaeological, cultural, historic, land use, and displacements. At the same time, engineering studies will be performed to determine the specific location of the facility, access, drainage, and right-of-way requirements.



These results will be compiled into a Draft Environmental Impact Statement report, which will be presented to the public and the appropriate federal, state, and local agencies. Comments on the report will be addressed resulting in a Final Environmental Impact Statement that includes a recommended preferred alternative.

With IDOT's commitment to Context Sensitive Design principles, the public and stakeholder representatives will be engaged throughout the Environmental Impact Statement process. All efforts will be made to minimize environmental impacts while addressing existing and future travel needs.

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Get Involved:

Check our website for project updates, to sign-up for mailing list, and to send comments to us! Go to www.prairie-parkway.com or write to 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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