

Case Study in the United States

The Langdon Group - West Davis Corridor Environmental Impact Statement, 2009 - Current

Project Overview

The West Davis Corridor EIS is the largest transportation environmental study currently underway in Utah. The study is analyzing potential transportation solutions through Davis and Weber Counties. This EIS has significant history tied to past environmental studies that were surrounded by high conflict and required consensus-building among a wide cross-section of stakeholders. The Langdon Group (TLG) was selected to lead this public involvement effort because they not only understand the intricacies of UDOT's process, but they also bring a wealth of experience in assessing and managing conflict and in using collaborative processes among those with diverging interests. TLG initiated an aggressive PI campaign, which includes conducting one-on-one stakeholder interviews with local governments; meeting with special interest groups and agency leaders to gauge public perceptions; door-to-door grassroots outreach; a series of public scoping meetings and alternatives workshops; regular mass email updates and website communication; and consistent team availability via phone and email. All of this has been done in accordance with outreach requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Background

Throughout the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process, the West Davis Corridor (WDC) team led by The Langdon Group, has proactively shared project information and sought comments from the public at large, resource agencies, federal and state regulatory agencies, Counties, municipalities, and other interested individuals and organizations. One of the goals of the WDC team from project initiation was to engage all project stakeholders in a proactive and cooperative manner to solicit feedback, resolve concerns, and build consensus throughout the process.

Section 6002 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA LU; Public Law 109-059; 23 United States Code [USC] 139) requires the federal lead agency for an EIS process to develop a plan for coordinating public and agency participation and comments early in the environmental review process. SAFETEA LU also requires lead agencies to identify and invite cooperating and participating agencies, and to provide opportunities for the public and agencies to comment on the project's purpose and need, the range of alternatives to be considered, and the alternatives-screening methodology.

For the WDC Project, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) developed a SAFETEA LU Agency Coordination and Public Involvement Plan that is posted on the project website (www.udot.utah.gov/westdavis).

Scoping is a key part of the EIS process that involves soliciting public and agency participation in order to identify issues and develop alternatives. The official scoping phase for the WDC EIS began January 25, 2010, and ended March 22, 2010. As part of the scoping effort, the project was published in the January 25, 2010, Federal Register with an invitation for the public to provide initial scoping comments. A complete description of scoping activities and results is provided in the West Davis Corridor Scoping Summary Report (HDR 2010).

Public scoping outreach by the WDC team included the following elements:

- Media outreach

- Introductory meetings and presentation with mayors and city and county representatives
- Three scoping open houses in Farmington (south), Syracuse (central), and south Ogden (north) on February 23, 24, and 25, respectively
- Posters and flyers distributed to the city government offices at all 14 cities in the study area to advertise the scoping open houses; this also included distribution to post offices, libraries, shopping centers, and Hill Air Force Base
- Door-to-door visits in Farmington to deliver postcards announcing the scoping open houses
- Facebook and Twitter updates through UDOT's social media
- A project website (www.udot.utah.gov/westdavis), e mail address, office address (466 North 900 West, Kaysville) and telephone comment line

As a result of the efforts of the WDC team, more than 300 people attended the scoping open houses in February 2010. At these meetings, 189 attendees submitted comments. For the purpose of this chapter, a comment is a letter, e mail, phone call, or other communication by which a person or agency provided input on one or more issues. Often a single comment contained multiple issues or substantive points.

Public scoping comments revealed four distinct areas of interest and concern.

- First, the public recognized the work of previous studies in the area and encouraged the WDC team to consider or use previously adopted plans for a corridor route through the study area.
- Second, citizens were concerned about effects on their quality of life, the division of existing neighborhoods, and impacts to community facilities.
- Third, the public was interested in the preservation of the environment, open space, and the importance of farmland.
- Fourth, the public expressed concerns regarding direct and indirect impacts on air quality, noise, and property values and the equity of acquiring right-of-way.

The WDC team compiled a list of about 149 transportation options and components based on public and agency comments. These transportation options and components were combined with those found in the Wasatch Front Regional Council's (WFRC) Regional Transportation Plan and previous planning studies and were screened using a vigorous two-level screening process. A complete description of the screening process and results is provided in Technical Memorandum 15: Alternatives Screening Report (West Davis Corridor Team 2012).

References

Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) – Lead state agency

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) – Lead federal agency

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is a document required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for certain actions "significantly affecting the quality of the human environment." An EIS is a tool for decision making. It describes the positive and negative environmental effects of a proposed action, and it usually also lists one or more alternative actions that may be chosen instead of the action described in the EIS. Several U.S. state governments require that a document similar to an EIS be submitted to the state for certain actions. depth analysis, and final stage before project can be funded, designed and constructed.

Important Notes

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By Ms. Robin Coursen

Stakeholder engagement targeted a wide cross section of stakeholders all along the transportation corridor—which was over 40 miles. Public meeting and workshops were held in several locations to include all stakeholders.

Stakeholder meeting objectives were to engage in a proactive and cooperative manner to solicit feedback, resolve concerns, and build consensus.

Types of stakeholders included project affected people, farmers, citizen groups, businesses, environmental groups, city and state government, federal agencies with interest (EPA to review and rate the EIA, and Army Corps of Engineers to issue a permit for wetland impacts).

Many outreach tools were used depending on the stakeholders and size of the group. Public meetings, workshops, charrettes, open houses, on-site visits with farmers, postcards, media and social media.

Scoping efforts narrowed down the main areas of interest and concern to focus on. See handout.

As a result of EPA, Army Corps of Engineers interest in wetlands protections, new options/alternatives were developed and included. The community also developed an option for consideration which was evaluated.

This was a massive transportation corridor and the Public Participation/EIA process took more than 8 years to complete and was very costly. Unfortunately, projects of this magnitude in highly populated areas do take longer and cost more because there are many impacts, including the social and environmental.

The above reflects requirements in the U.S. federal transportation laws. Your process would look different in approach but this reflects ideas about how a linear transportation corridor in a populated area with many stakeholders might look.

Key message: Doing perfect P2 does not guarantee a conflict free process but transparency in the process is essential and will build trust and help continue dialogue/gain acceptance.