



Chapter 8: Public Outreach, Comments and Coordination

8.1 Public Involvement

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) recognize that a key component in the success of any transportation project depends on many factors, none of which are more essential than the involvement of the local elected and appointed officials, and community members. An open line of communication between local officials, the public, and the Project Management Team is a key component in developing a transportation plan that will best address the concerns of the community. The public involvement process begins with the gathering of information from those local officials and community members that will live with the project upon its completion. The process continues by providing information to these same stakeholders and keeping them informed of the project's progress and direction. This exchange of information is a dynamic process that will continue throughout the life of the project. Goals of the Public Involvement Program include the following.

- Identifying potential project stakeholders such as local officials and community members impacted by the project.
- Developing partnering activities that assist with gathering information from stakeholders.
- Fostering a positive relationship with stakeholders and keeping them informed of the project progress.
- Adequately evaluating potential levels of controversy to address specific concerns and develop context sensitive plans.
- Working together to develop a transportation problem solution that has broad public support.
- Providing productive forums for members of the public to provide comments.

The US 31 Plymouth to South Bend Project includes an extensive Public Involvement Program. Elements of the Program consist of:

- Project web site,
- Series of public meetings,
- Stakeholder meetings,
- Public Hearing,
- Community Advisory Committee (CAC) meetings,
- News releases,



- Elected Officials Briefings,
- Project toll-free hotline.

8.1.1 Project Web Site (www.us31study.org)

To provide the public with access to the most current project information available and to provide additional opportunities for public input, the US 31 Management Team has established and maintains a website for this project. This website provides:

- Project news and updates;
- Specific Project Information such as project schedules, listings of project meetings and copies of various project-related documents;
- Electronic forms for comments;
- Subscription to a project mailing list;
- Alignment information (maps);
- Link to other websites including INDOT and other US 31 projects.

8.1.2 Public Meetings

Open house public meetings were advertised and held at key points in the projects' development. Three such meetings have been held to date.

Public Meeting #1, March 21, 2002

The first public meeting was held at LaVille High School. The purpose of this meeting was to present an overview of the US 31 Study process and to solicit input from local officials and the public. Approximately 250 people were in attendance at the meeting.

Participants were presented with a PowerPoint presentation; given informational handouts, and viewed display boards featuring maps of the project study area. Project Management Team members answered questions and addressed comments following the presentation. Approximately nine citizens provided verbal comments, including Mr. Steve Luecke, Mayor of South Bend. Everyone spoke in favor of the project. Approximately 20 people provided written comments, mostly in favor of the project and encouraging a speedy study.

Public Meeting #2, April 10, 2003

The second public meeting was held at LaVille High School. The purpose of this meeting was to present the draft Purpose and Need Statement and Preliminary Alternatives for the study and again to solicit input from local officials and the public. Approximately 200 people were in attendance at the meeting.



Participants were presented with a PowerPoint presentation; given informational handouts, and viewed display boards featuring maps of the project study area and the preliminary alternatives. Project Management Team members answered questions and addressed comments following the presentation.

Public Meeting #3, September 4, 2003

A third public meeting was held at Old Lakeville School Project Newton Center. The purpose of this meeting was to present the Preliminary Alternative Analysis and Screening Report and to again solicit input from local officials and the public. Approximately 500 people were in attendance at the meeting.

Participants were presented with a PowerPoint presentation; given informational handouts, and viewed display boards featuring maps of the preliminary alternatives recommended for further study in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). Project Management Team members answered questions and addressed comments prior to and after the presentation.

Participants were provided a comment period following the presentation. Approximately 20 citizens provided verbal comments. Many comments were opposed to any alternative that would potentially impact their home or neighborhood. Several comments supported the No-Build Alternative as a savings to tax payers. Several comments were in favor of the project stating that it is past due. Several comments were made in opposition to Alternative G.

8.1.3 Stakeholder Meetings

Throughout the project, neighborhood associations, civic organizations, local officials, community and business groups, and any other interested individuals were welcome to meet with members of the US 31 Project Management Team to share information and ideas. Project Management Team members had numerous contacts with stakeholders throughout the project (see Table 8.1-1).

Additionally, project management team members answered numerous questions and addressed comments throughout the project via e-mail through the project website and by telephone.

8.1.4 Public Hearing

A formal Public Hearing on the US 31 – Plymouth to South Bend Improvement Project is scheduled for March 18, 2004. Two public hearing sessions will be held. The first will be at Old Lakeville School Project auditorium with doors opening to the public at 1:00 pm and the hearing beginning at 2:00 pm. The address for the Old Lakeville School Project is 601 N. Michigan Street, Lakeville, Indiana, 46536. The second public hearing will be later that the same evening at LaVille Jr.-Sr. High School cafeteria, with doors opening to the public at 6:00 pm and the hearing beginning at 7:00 pm. The address for the La Ville Jr.-Sr. High School is 69969 US 31 South, Lakeville, Indiana, 46536. Information presented will be the same at both sessions; the latter being a repeat version of the first. Comments on the DEIS are due by April 26, 2004, and should be submitted to:

Carl D. Camacho, P.E.

Project Manager

Bernardin Lochmueller & Associates, Inc.

7830 Rockville Road, Suite C

Indianapolis, IN 46214-3105

Comments may also be submitted via the project website at www.us31study.org.



DATE	ORGANIZATION/GROUP/INDIVIDUAL	MEETING TOPIC
12/02/03	Marshall County Economic Advisory Committee	Preliminary Alternatives Analysis and Screening Report
11/13/03	Town of LaPaz	Preliminary Alternatives Analysis and Screening Report
10/17/03	Elkhart County Chamber of Commerce	Preliminary Alternatives Analysis and Screening Report
9/30/03	St. Joseph & Marshall Counties Emergency Service Personnel and School Systems	Preliminary Alternatives Analysis and Screening Report
9/29/03	Jeannine and Richard Machowiak	Impacts to Personal Property
9/29/03	Robert and Charlotte Wolfe	Impacts to Personal Property
9/10/03	St. Joseph County Chamber of Commerce Legislative Affairs Committee	Preliminary Alternatives Analysis and Screening Report
9/9/03	South Gateway Business Group	Preliminary Alternatives Analysis and Screening Report
9/9/03	South Bend City & Chamber Officials and Local Developer	Preliminary Alternatives Analysis and Screening Report
6/9/03	Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG)	Project Status/Schedule Meeting
6/2/03	US 31 Coalition Members	Project Status/Schedule Meeting

8.1.5 Community Advisory Committee Meetings

Early in the development of this project, a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was formed. The CAC established a method of communication that facilitated distribution of information from the US 31 Management Team, which consisted of representatives of INDOT, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG) and the consulting engineering firm of Bernardin, Lochmueller & Associates, Inc. (BLA), to the public. The CAC also provided a central location from which the US 31 Management Team could gather public input and feedback on possible alternatives. The CAC consisted of approximately 25 members, representing a diverse cross section of the public, elected officials and appointed officials, and was a valuable source of information and direction to the US 31 Management Team. The first CAC meeting was held on March 21, 2002, the second was held on April 10, 2003, and the third was held on September 4, 2003.

8.1.6 News Releases

The US 31 Management Team provided news releases during the study process. The releases were distributed to regional media at key study milestones and were the primary method for informing and involving a wide public audience. The first news release was distributed on August 19, 2003, and announced the completion and publication of the Preliminary Alternatives Analysis and Screening Report. The second news release was distributed on December 17, 2003, and announced modifications made to the remaining four preliminary alternatives that were



carried forward in the Preliminary Alternatives Analysis and Screening Report. These modifications were aimed at minimizing both social and environmental impacts associated with each of the preliminary alternatives.

8.1.7 Elected Officials Project Status Briefings

In conjunction with the news releases that were issued during the study process, the Management Team held project status briefings for elected officials. These project status briefings were held at Old Lakeville School Project in Lakeville, Indiana, on the same day that the news releases were distributed. The intent of the project status briefings was to provide supporting information related to the items presented in the corresponding news release. The first project status briefing was held on August 19, 2003, and provided information related to the Preliminary Alternatives Analysis and Screening Report. The second project status briefing was held on December 17, 2003, and presented additional information related to the modifications made to the remaining four preliminary alternatives that were carried forward in the Preliminary Alternatives Analysis and Screening Report. These modifications were aimed at minimizing both social and environmental impacts associated with each of the preliminary alternatives.

8.1.8 Project Toll-Free Hotline

There is a toll-free project hotline at (800) 731-8731 available for information related to the project and for leaving comments. The toll-free hotline also identifies the project web site at www.us31study.org as another source of information.

Information and or actions available on the toll-free hotline included:

- Information about upcoming public meetings,
- Opportunity to be added to the project mailing list and to receive project updates via mail or e-mail,
- Opportunity to leave a comment regarding the project.

8.2 Agency Coordination

Resource Agency coordination efforts related to the US 31 – Plymouth to South Bend Project included the following.

- Issued Early Coordination Letter, August 6, 2002.
- Submitted Draft Purpose and Need Statement to agencies, February 20, 2003.
- Resource Agency Meeting and Project Tour, May 15, 2003. This meeting focused on the Draft Purpose and Need Statement and Preliminary Alternatives. The following agencies attended the meeting and tour:
 - United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), Region 5
 - Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM), Section 401
 - INDOT
 - FHWA

US 31 Plymouth to South Bend

Draft Environmental Impact Statement



- Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), Fish and Wildlife
- IDNR, Heritage Program
- United States Army Corp of Engineers, Detroit District
- United States Fish and Wildlife Services

- Submitted Preliminary Alternatives Analysis and Screening Report to agencies, August 19, 2003.
- Resource Agency Meeting, September 30, 2003. This meeting focused on the Preliminary Alternatives Analysis and Screening Report. The following agencies attended the meeting:
 - USEPA, Region 5
 - IDEM, Section 401
 - INDOT
 - FHWA
 - IDNR
 - United States Army Corp of Engineers, Detroit District
 - United States Fish and Wildlife Services
 - United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
 - St. Joseph County Engineering Department

The Early Coordination Packet was distributed to the following agencies and organizations.

Federal

- United States Army Corp of Engineers, Detroit District – Regulatory Branch
- United States Army Corp of Engineers, South Bend Regional Office
- United States Department of Interior, National Parks Service
- United States Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Services
- USDA, NRCS
- USEPA, Region 5
- FHWA



State

- INDOT, LaPorte District
- INDOT, Division of Preliminary Engineering and Environment
- INDOT, Intermodal Transportation Division – Aeronautics Section
- IDNR, Division of Fish and Wildlife
- IDNR, Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology
- IDEM
- Indiana Geological Survey, Environmental Geology Section

Local

- MACOG, South Bend area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)
- St. Joseph County
- Marshall County
- LaPorte County
- City of Elkhart
- City of South Bend
- City of LaPorte
- City of Plymouth

Coordination efforts related to the US 31 – Plymouth to South Bend Project’s Section 106 consulting parties included the following:

- Early Coordination Letter submitted to consulting parties, May 21, 2003
- Historic and Archaeological Properties Meeting, June 6, 2003
- Identification and Evaluation of Historic Properties Letter to SHPO, August 20, 2003
- Eligibility and Effects Meeting, September 4, 2003

Section 106 Consulting Parties

- Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana

US 31 Plymouth to South Bend

Draft Environmental Impact Statement



- Marshall County Historical Society/Museum
- South Bend City Council
- Historic Preservation Commission of South Bend and St. Joseph County
- St. Joseph County Commissioners
- INDOT, LaPorte District
- IDNR, Division of Fish and Wildlife
- IDNR, Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology
- St. Joseph County Engineering Department
- Marshall County Commissioners
- Town of Lakeville

Table 8.2.2 contains the names and dates of agencies that have corresponded during the course of the project. Appendix C contains the agency correspondence that has been received during the course of the project. Comments made by the various agencies have been addressed in the appropriate sections of the DEIS.

Following the publication of the Preliminary Alternatives Analysis and Screening Report on August 19, 2003, the Management Team focused on four Freeway Build Alternatives: Alternatives C, E, F and G – and the No-Build (Do Nothing) Alternative. As detailed above in Section 8.1, Public Involvement and in Section 8.2, Agency Coordination, there were numerous meetings with local elected officials in St. Joseph, Marshall, and Elkhart counties, and in LaPaz, Plymouth, South Bend, Bremen, and other communities. Additional meetings were held with local business groups located within the study area, state and federal agencies, and with local residents at a Public Meeting, held on September 4, 2003. Management Team members continued to collect and analyze data related to social and environmental impacts for each of the four alternatives, including spending several weeks in the field walking each of the four alternatives and collecting field data.

The Management Team received numerous verbal and written comments at various meetings and continued to receive additional written comments in the weeks that followed. They also received numerous comments from the project website. Many of these comments and concerns were related to the impacts associated with each of the four alternatives. These concerns ranged from residential and business relocations, wetland impacts, impacts to historic properties, and many other issues related to the alternatives. The number of comments and the amount of interest received from the local communities and residents has been very encouraging and serves as a good indicator that the Public Involvement Process is succeeding.

In an attempt to minimize impacts, the Management Team made some modifications to each of the remaining alternatives. The modifications made to the preliminary alternatives further reinforced the fact that the process is productive and that INDOT and the FHWA has listened to and has accordingly responded by attempting to minimize the impacts. These modifications to Preliminary Alternatives C, E, F, and G prompted the December 17, 2003, news release and the Project Status Briefing held on the same day, as discussed above.



Table 8.2.2: Agency names and dates of correspondence.	
Agency Name	Correspondence Date
U.S. Department of Transportation	April 22, 2003 November 14, 2003
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	July 16, 1997 May 2, 2002 June 27, 2003
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	August 18, 2002
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	November 22, 1996 September 10, 2002 June 10, 2003 October 31, 2003
U.S. National Parks Service	May 20, 2002
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service	January 7, 2004
Indiana Department of Natural Resources	November 25, 2003 November 26, 2003 June 27, 2003 July 1, 2003 January 26, 2004
Indiana Department of Natural Resources – Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology	August 13, 2002 July 25, 2003 September 2, 2003 November 26, 2003
Indiana Department of Environmental Management	October 9, 2003
Indiana Geological Survey	September 27, 1996 January 29, 2004
Indiana Department of Transportation – Aeronautics Section	Not Dated
Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana	April 16, 2003 January 13, 2004
South Bend and St. Joseph County Historic Preservation Commission	September 22, 2003 January 14, 2004
Marshall County Historian	January 7, 2004
Wythougan Valley Preservation Council, Inc. (Marshall County)	December 30, 2003 January 9, 2004
US 31 Freeway Coalition	April 1, 2002



Table 8.2.2: Agency names and dates of correspondence. (continued)	
Agency Name	Correspondence Date
Chamber of Commerce of St. Joseph County	April 25, 2003 December 18, 2003
County of St. Joseph Board of Commissioners	January 26, 2004
County of St. Joseph Department of Public Works	April 25, 2003
City of South Bend	April 24, 2003 September 2, 2003
Marshall County Highway Department	November 13, 2003
Town of LaPaz	December 18, 2003
The Greater Elkhart Chamber of Commerce	March 21, 2002
Peoria Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma	May 28, 2003
City of Nappanee	March 18, 2002
City of Mishawaka	March 20, 2002
The Society of the Preservation of Old Mills	August 11, 2003
US 31 Coalition, Inc.	December 9, 2002
South Bend Community School Corporation	December 3, 2003
Plymouth School Corporation	December 2, 2004