

Memorandum

TO: 14th Amendment Highway Expert Working Group

FROM: Cambridge Systematics

DATE: September 29, 2010

RE: 14th Amendment Highway Expert Working Group, Minutes from First Meeting,
September 14, 2010

Attendees List

- Project Team
 - Kevin Adderly, FHWA
 - Stefan Natzke, FHWA (phone)
 - Marc Cutler, Cambridge Systematics
 - Elizabeth Sanford, Cambridge Systematics
 - Bruce Spear, Cambridge Systematics (phone)
 - David Kall, Cambridge Systematics
 - Harry Rice, PBS&J
 - Wendy Dyson, PBS&J
 - Billy Bachman, GeoStats
 - Martin Weiss, Consultant
- Expert Working Group
 - Federal Members
 - Bill Farr, FHWA Georgia Division
 - Shaun Capps, FHWA Alabama Division
 - Claiborne Barnwell, FHWA Mississippi Division (phone)
 - Jerry Ziewitz, US Fish and Wildlife
 - Randy Warbington, USDA Forest Service
 - Lewis Grimm, FHWA, Eastern Federal Lands
 - Ntale Kajumba, US EPA
 - Ed Johnson, US Army Corps of Engineers
 - Sarah Kennedy, US CDC
 - State Members
 - Kaycee Mertz & Matthew Fowler, Georgia DOT

- Carey Kelly, Alabama DOT (phone)
 - Keith Purvis, Mississippi DOT (phone)
- MPO Members
 - Paul DeCamp, Augusta MPO
 - Robert Smith, Montgomery MPO
 - Don Tussing, Macon MPO
 - Rick Jones, Columbus Consolidated
- Expert Working Group Members Not Present
 - Gene Stinson, Southern Economic Development Council (Non-Federal Member)
 - Bill Triplett, Delta Regional Authority (Federal Member)

Introduction and Overview

- Self-introductions were made around the room and on the phone.
- Kevin Adderly, FHWA, provided some introductory comments about the project. The study will be conducted in two phases, the first (current phase) providing cost estimates and steps to complete a roadway in the corridor, and the second, if approved by FHWA, would have more planning elements. Cambridge Systematics is the consultant selected by FHWA to manage the project and is an extension of the FHWA staff, which will serve in an advisory role. Martin Weiss, a former FHWA employee working on the consultant team, knows much of the history of the legislation and the project. This is an unusual project because the legislation that requires this project calls for the conceptual engineering to be performed before the planning. This could be looked at as estimating the costs first and the benefits second. The first phase cost is about \$400,000. If optional sub-studies are also conducted as a Phase II it could total \$1.3 million, which is the amount authorized in the legislation.
- Marc Cutler, Cambridge Systematics, provided additional overview. There are five cities included in the statutory language of SAFETEA-LU that the corridor must travel through: Augusta, GA, Macon, GA, Columbus, GA, Montgomery, AL, and Natchez, MS. These cities form the control points for any alternative alignments. There is a companion study called the 3rd Infantry Division study, which is also included in SAFETEA-LU. The studies have been called the I-14 and I-3 projects, but this is not accurate; interstate level design standards are only one of four alternative design levels that will be considered. These projects do not have an official “interstate” designation today. Neither will the projects definitely lead to any specific highway improvements. The work being performed is very precursory to the formal project development process. The expert working group (EWG) is limited to 9 non-federal members due to additional regulatory complexity that would come with adding a 10th member. The number of federal members is unlimited. The purpose of the EWG is to provide input to the project team at key project milestones. Some members have already provided data.

- The study will examine a range of options including full interstate and incremental improvements to existing roads along with two options that are a combination of those two.
- Several maps that provide information on the corridor were reviewed (found in presentation) including ones that show agencies, population density, minority populations, and protected lands. These characterize the study corridor as a low density region with a large minority population and many protected lands.

Control Points Options

- Harry Rice, PBS&J, discussed control points and sub-control points along the corridor. There are only 5 control points, which the corridor must serve as mandated by SAFETEA-LU. Sub-control points are decision points in which the route could go different directions. Harry then proceeded to go through the corridor in detail state-by-state to show different routing and sub-control point options and gather input from the EWG. Specifically, he asked them to keep in mind the following questions:
 - Are these the right points?
 - Are there any that should be added?
 - Are there any that should be eliminated?
 - Other comments?
- Mississippi corridor begins in Natchez and follows US-84 to Brookhaven (sub-control point). From there it can follow I-55 and I-20 through Jackson and Meridian or continues on US-84 to Laurel. In Laurel, it can follow I-59 north to Meridian or continue east on US-84. Comments gathered on this portion of the corridor:
 - Alabama DOT says that US-84 in Alabama is under construction to the state line as a 4-lane facility.
 - Meridian meets the I-85 extension from Montgomery, AL. This route could be attractive for an interstate option.
 - US-84 is centrally located within the corridor and provides a high level of service. It is four laned until US-45 at Waynesboro just before the Alabama line. Therefore, this route could serve as the corridor with minimal improvements.
 - US-98 (another east-west corridor south of US-84) also is in the process of being upgraded to a four lane facility. The project team noted that going this far south may make it hard to get back to Montgomery.

- A question was asked, what is the importance of Natchez being a control point considering that if the corridor did not have to go through there it may be able to go through some more logical places in Texas. The project team responded that they believed it had something to do with the Congressional sponsors of the law that mandated this study. The project team also mentioned that it was possible that a second phase could look into a different route that goes into Texas.
 - The route of US 61 to Jackson, MS (I-20) was raised. Harry Rice noted that US 61 was discussed as a potential connection between Natchez and Jackson; however, due to previous local and environmental issues related to the widening of US 61 and to its proximity to the Natchez Trace Parkway, this route was not included as a means to reach Jackson and I-20. MDOT also noted that US 84 and I-59 currently operate at a higher LOS while I-20 in the vicinity of Vicksburg and Jackson is substandard and operates at capacity.
- Alabama corridor could go on a northern route from Cuba to Montgomery either along the I-85 extension or along US-80. A southern route would go from the Mississippi border to Grove Hill (sub-control point) where it could either continue on US-84 southeast to I-65 at Evergreen or take a directly east route on a new alignment to I-65 at Greenville. Both of these options would then travel north on I-65 to Montgomery where it could either travel through downtown or take the outer loop. All routes would then travel east on I-85. There are two points where the route could exit I-85, either at Tuskegee or Opelika. Both of these routes would lead to Columbus, GA. Comments gathered on this portion of the corridor:
 - On the question of US-80 versus the I-85 extension, the I-85 extension would be the preferred route because, although US 80 is primarily four lanes, it has historical designation as the Voting Rights Trail from Selma to Montgomery. The DEIS for the I-85 extension has been circulated for comments.
 - ALDOT noted that US 84 from the state line to I-65 is mostly a two lane facility.
 - Several people recommended the outer loop around Montgomery.
 - ALDOT and the Montgomery MPO noted that US 80 between Tuskegee and Columbus is an even mix of two and four lanes.
 - A question was raised about the direction of construction. The project team noted that this study does not attempt to address that level of detail.
- The Georgia corridor would follow the Fall Line Freeway (SR-96) for much of the way. It would go from Columbus to Fort Valley on SR-96. Then it could go north to Macon, partially along I-75 or it could continue on SR-96 to the south of Macon. From Macon it could take various roadways (SR-57, SR-243, SR-24, SR-88) to a point outside of Augusta (US-221/SR-88). From Macon it could also go southeast along I-16. The SR-96 route would also join in with I-16. Both of these would exit I-16 at Dublin and follow US-319 and US-1 north to a point outside Augusta (US-221/SR-88). All routes converge at US-

221/SR-88 intersection point outside of Augusta. At this point the route could go north on US-221 and east on I-20 to Augusta or go northeast on US-1 to Augusta. Comments gathered on this portion of the corridor.

- GDOT noted that a new alignment roadway is programmed to connect I-16 north to the Fall Line Freeway near Gordon. No engineering work has occurred for this project.
- The Fall line freeway is an at grade 4-lane highway that connects Columbus to Augusta.. All environmental work has been completed except for a 10-15 mile section in Macon. 70-80% is open to traffic, the remaining sections are under construction or in the ROW acquisition phase.
- According to the Macon MPO, the Fall line freeway in Macon is dead in the water due to permitting issues and environmental concerns. It would be extremely expensive to build and there are seemingly insurmountable issues with the boundary of the Traditional Cultural Property associated with the Ocmulgee Indian Mounds. Environmental documentation is underway in the Macon area for an extension of Sardis Church Rd. to Avondale Mill Road at SR 247. A separate project has been endorsed by the Middle Georgia Regional Council to extend Sardis Church Road beyond the Avondale Mill Road/SR 247 intersection to I-16 at Sgoda Road. The Macon MPO will send the study team a proposed alignment for this project. Another option is also under consideration which would extend SR 49 to the Avondale Mill Road area.
- SR-96 near Columbus is a 4 lane facility now. Parts are near residential areas and upgrading it to a limited access facility could cause local opposition.
- The Macon MPO noted that the highway should consists of as much limited access as practicable and that future residential areas should be taken into consideration. Some general discussion occurred next. This included the following topics:
 - Since the legislation does not require a purpose and need to be established in this phase, the project team is not considering traffic. The legislation only calls for estimating the cost and steps to complete for several alternatives, unless the optional sub-studies are subsequently approved by FHWA.
 - The question was raised if the legislation provides a definition of “corridor.” The project team replied that it was not, and the questioner suggested that instead of a 50 mile buffer around the centerline, a corridor could be defined as getting to the interstate as fast as you can. For example, from Natchez you could follow US-61 to I-20 even though this goes slightly outside the 50 mile buffer. Some discussion amongst the group occurred on this proposal and it was noted that the Natchez Trace Pkwy is the reason US-61 is not 4 lane near Port Gibson. Also, there is a problem with traffic on I-20 near Vicksburg, but they are trying to improve this. The project team noted that they chose US-84 instead because it had a higher level of service already.

- There are several examples of Ohio DOT upgrading rural arterials to limited access highways. This type of design should be looked at for this study.
- The project team noted that the EWG should send any additional comments on the control points by email within 1 week – September 24.. Written comments received by this deadline are incorporated into these minutes as Addendum A.

Outreach Options

Liz Sanford, Cambridge Systematics, led the discussion on public outreach. She noted that the primary focus of gaining input on the study was the Expert Working Group, which included FHWA Division representatives, State DOTs, and many of the MPOs along the corridor. A list of working group members was distributed for review and discussion. While the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs had not been included in the EWG, it will be added before the next EWG meeting to facilitate communication with tribal nations. Liz Sanford led a discussion on the need for any additional non-federal members, noting that a 9th slot was still open. The group discussed the potential of adding either the Jackson or the Auburn-Opelika MPO and concluded that there may not be a need. Similarly, the Macon MPO said that they would keep the Warner-Robins MPO informed. The Montgomery MPO suggested a representative of the I-85 extension corridor alliance, Tuskegee University, or Auburn University. It was asked whether the 9th slot had to be filled or whether it could be kept open. The project team replied that it could remain open to allow for additions later. {Per the attached comments, ALDOT subsequently suggested including the Auburn-Opelika MPO and they will be so invited.}.

- Several outreach options for more general public involvement were then discussed including a speaker's bureau where briefings on the project are conducted upon request by State DOTs or MPOs. Given resource constraints, these engagements would need to be limited, with perhaps one set of speaking engagements per state. Other options presented were unstaffed information kiosks in public buildings, building a contact list of stakeholders that would be sent updates, and hosting one webinar at the end. Comments received on these options included:
 - The Columbus MPO believes the basic strategy should be internet-based because people do not have time to go to public meetings these days and they can look up information on the project at anytime if they want to online. Additional comments on this idea were related to the environmental justice demographics of the corridor. The EPA noted that the internet may not be the best way to reach environmental justice communities.
 - The CDC proposed site specific meeting at the 5 control points since the legislation requires the corridor to go through these locations.
 - The Montgomery MPO likes the Speaker's Bureau idea.

- Kevin Adderly, FHWA, noted that the new website for this study will include a place to submit public comments.
- FHWA-Federal Lands thinks that State DOT websites should have an introduction to the study on their website and link to the FHWA website. However, the question arose in the room about whether the State DOTs would want to do that.
- GDOT noted that there is no silver bullet when it comes to public outreach. Their comment was that the study should do a website and speaker's bureaus, with the caveat that you will still only get a small fraction of people to participate.
- The public outreach message should focus on what this study does and does NOT do.
- Public access television was also suggested.
- The outreach discussion concluded with agreement that the study would recommend a combination of speakers bureau engagements to gain input and internet-based techniques to share information.

Next Steps

- Augusta MPO will send a contact for Ft. Gordon and Columbus MPO will send a contact for Ft. Benning.
- The next meeting will be held in the same location in Atlanta at FHWA-GA offices. A videoconference option will be added next time linked to FHWA Division offices in Jackson and Montgomery.
- USFWS noted that they have transportation liaisons in all three states, and stated that they would give the project team the pertinent contact information so that these staff could be included in the next meeting.
- The date of the next meeting was set for Dec 7, but due to an unforeseen conflict in the project team's schedule, it is proposed to be held Dec 9 at 2 PM EST (1 PM CST). Please confirm your availability.

Addendum: Written comments received after meeting

Lewis Grimm, FHWA Eastern Federal Lands Division, 9/20/2010

I'm going to be out of town Wednesday – Friday of this week on business and wanted to pass on a few comments before I left. In no particular order of importance, my general comments are as follows:

The attendance list looks a bit incomplete; none of the consultant team members appear to have signed in nor are those who participated via telephone (Mississippi DOT and Mississippi Division FHWA, perhaps others). The “final” list of meeting participants that accompanies the meeting notes/minutes should reflect everyone who participated in the activity. *[Note from project team: The meeting minutes have the complete attendance list and an updated list of EWG members with contact information is attached with these minutes]*

Presentation handout comments:

Nice document overall, good color selection and level of detail.

Editorial comment on cover – the prominent photo of a major 6-8 lane urban/suburban freeway might not be the image you want to present to the general public. Perhaps several smaller photos of other road types and/or a general corridor study area map would be more appropriate.

Data / graphic compatibility – Slides 12 and 13: Slide 12 shows the county level boundaries for all of the MPOs and RPDs in the study area (this is a good thing). Slide 13 seems to be somewhat less comprehensive around the edges of the study area boundary (which is itself relatively generic). Slide 13 looks to be more like census tract boundaries; showing full county level data on both slides would seem to be more consistent. Also, is there any more recent population data than 2004? I believe the US Census does annual estimates at the city, county and state levels so 2009 should be available until such time as the “official” 2010 Census data is released.

Slide 15 – Protected Land: The title is a bit awkward and fails to mention the full range of federal land management agencies (US Forest Service – national forests; USFWS – wildlife refuges; and National Park Service – national parks, scenic rivers, historic sites, battlefields, etc.) and the properties that each is responsible for. Decent first attempt to show such a large area but additional detail / more figures (at least one per state) likely necessary to document what is there today. (see <http://www.nps.gov/state/AL/>) for an example. Might also want to include a minor stream called the Mississippi River on the list of “Major Rivers and Lakes.” When showing more detail on larger scale maps, might want to consider illustration of FEMA defined flood plains.

Slide 19 – Definition of Control Points. Suggested change to definition of both types as follows:

“...Those that *identify the general terminus* of a hypothetical section of highway improvement of independent utility and are near the *cities / metropolitan areas* cited in the statute...”

Think about this as an alternative definition.

Slide 20 – Mississippi Control Points / Sub-Control Points

As discussed at the EWG meeting, a possible general routing would connect Natchez with the I-20 corridor somewhere west of Jackson, MS. An additional potential sub-control point in MS might thus be defined as "...the section of I-20 between the Mississippi River crossing and the I-20 / I-55 interchange at Jackson, MS..." Rather than a single interchange or city, using a section of existing highway might be more appropriate for a broad feasibility study of this nature.

Slide 21 – Alabama Control Points / Sub-Control Points

Here again, the use of a roadway segment as a sub control point (i.e., the section of I-65 generally between the communities of Evergreen on the south and Montgomery on the north) might be more appropriate. Alternatively, if you call out a specific sub control point on the graphic (such as Greenville) be sure to include this on the list of candidates so as not to prejudice the results (or to give that perception).

Slide 22 – Georgia Control Points / Sub-Control Points

Similar comment to those above; might be better to show major highway segments (e.g., I-75 south of Macon, I-16 east of Macon, I-20 west of Augusta, etc.) rather than calling out specific cities.

General comment on the control points / sub-control points graphics: might it be a bit too early to highlight suggested "alternative routes" within such a geographically large study area. A broader (wider) scale "alternative alignment corridor" might be a better description at this time rather than defining a series of relatively specific "routes" which appear to closely follow existing highways in most respects.

Outreach Strategies / Options

If you have not already done so, examining the methods which each of the three state DOTs have recently used (or propose to use) for public outreach in connection with their statewide long-range transportation plans might be useful. The statewide geography is larger and has many of the same issues and concerns cited on Slide 25 – EJ, tribal and rural.

General Comment on the Project:

One of the major areas of discussion at the initial EWG meeting for both the 14th Amendment and the 3rd Infantry Division highway corridor studies was the absence of even any general guidance or direction in the congressional legislation or the associated committee reports. This seemed to be an area with which many of the attendees at both meetings were struggling with.

Following the 3rd Infantry Division EWG meeting on Thursday morning, I offered Martin Weiss a ride to the airport as both of our flights out were departing at similar times. While we were having lunch at the airport, Martin mentioned to me that while he was with FHWA, one of the more ill-defined multistate corridor studies called out in SAFETEA-LU which he had managed was an examination of an east-west corridor stretching from the Hampton Roads region of Virginia across the country to the west coast at San Francisco. Martin could not immediately recall the name of the study and neither could I (Heartland Corridor, Mid-America Corridor, or similar?). In any event, the point Martin made was that he and others on that project's advisory committee had internally developed an initial generalized statement of project purpose which was accepted as being reasonable and logical in the absence of any such direction and guidance in the original congressional language.

Martin and I thought that a similar approach might be considered for application to the 14th Amendment highway corridor study. You may wish to consider distributing copies of the purpose statement developed for the earlier east-west nationwide corridor study to the EWG members and let them use it or not as a basis for describing why the corridor is of importance.

I hope that you find some of these comments useful. If you have any questions regarding any of this discussion, please contact me at your convenience.

Carey Kelley, Alabama DOT, 9/21/1010

Comments from meeting :

After discussion with ALDOT personnel familiar with the Auburn/Opelika MPO, ALDOT recommends that the final slot on the committee be offered to Auburn/Opelika MPO, if still available.

The section of the alternate alignment along U.S. 80 from I-85 to Phenix City/Columbus has many issues with historical structures and of the two ALDOT would recommend the alternate along U.S. 280.

As mentioned in the meeting, the U.S. 80 section from Mississippi to Montgomery has major historical issues (voting rights trail, etc.) and ALDOT recommends that this alternate be dropped from consideration.

The southern alternate along U.S. 84 is all currently two lane except for a short segment around Grove Hill in Clarke County.

Robert Smith, Montgomery MPO, 9/24/2010

We at the City of Montgomery-Montgomery MPO prefer the I-85 Extension corridor control points/sub-control points from the proposed selected location of the Montgomery Outer Loop Road from I-85 through south Montgomery County to the I-65 then on to US-80/Selma Highway and on through the Black Belt Region via the alternate selected based on the EIS document that currently being prepared and finalized.