

NORTHEAST BELTWAY ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
PRELIMINARY PURPOSE AND NEED STATEMENT

Project Background

Polk County and the incorporated cities of Altoona, Ankeny, Bondurant, Elkhart and Polk City entered into a 28-E Agreement for the purpose of considering the merits of identifying a transportation corridor to serve the northeast quadrant of the Des Moines Metropolitan area (Phase I Study). Snyder & Associates, Inc. was retained by the Northeast Beltway Coalition to examine the feasibility of identifying a transportation corridor.

A steering committee was created by the governmental entities participating in the study. Representatives from the Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (DMAMPO), Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT), Eastern Polk Regional Development, Inc. and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) served in an advisory role to the Northeast Beltway Coalition Committee. The committee met six (6) times. The purpose of the steering committee was to provide guidance and a forum for dialogue among the governmental entities participating in the study.

Three (3) public information meetings were conducted in late January 2005 through early March 2005. The meetings were conducted as open houses to afford each person attending an opportunity to gather information and discuss issues and concepts that were specific to them.

A Citizens Advisory Committee was created. The Committee, consisting of four (4) persons appointed by Polk County and one (1) person appointed by each of the five (5) incorporated cities participating, met three (3) times.

The Northeast Beltway Corridor Study Area extended over a 22-mile distance between IA 141/415 and I-80/US 65 (Exit 141) (Figure 1-2). The corridor varies in width from 100 feet (West Bridge Road-Polk City) up to two (2) miles north and east of Ankeny. In general, the corridor extends north from I-80/US 65 (141) to a location near NE 118 Avenue and the Union Pacific Railroad. The corridor extends west along NW 126 Avenue to a point of intersection with NW 44th Street.

The corridor area extends southwesterly where it crosses US Army Corps of Engineer lands. The corridor provides an opportunity to consider several alternative roadway alignments including the existing IA 415 highway (between NW 44th Street/Mile Long Bridge). The corridor extends along West Bridge Road (Polk City) across the existing Mile Long Bridge and IA 415 to an existing interchange at IA 141/415.

The Northeast Beltway Corridor Feasibility Study was completed in August of 2005 by Snyder & Associates, Inc. The purpose of the feasibility study was to identify and protect a roadway corridor extending north from I-80/US 65 to NE 118th Avenue, west to I-35 and IA

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141 via the Mile Long Bridge and IA 415. The study concluded that adjacent facilities such as I-35, I-80, and I35/80 would approach traffic carrying capacity between 2010 and 2020. Future land use and economic growth favor a new facility to accommodate the traffic demand. The traffic volume demands suggest that a minimum of a four-lane divided facility be constructed within the corridor.

Independent Utility and Logical Termini

The Iowa DOT and FHWA provided determination concerning logical project termini on October 20, 2005. It was determined that the 22-mile Northeast Beltway corridor could be divided into two segments, for each segment would have independent utility:

- East Segment with termini located at I-80/US 65 (141) and US 69/NE 126th Avenue
- North Segment with termini located at US 69/NE 126th Avenue and IA 141/IA 415

The division of the original 22-mile Northeast Beltway facility into two segments was found to satisfy the three (3) general principles set forth in FHWA regulations 23 CFR 771.111(f) which should be used to frame a highway project:

- 1) The action shall connect logical termini and be of sufficient length to address environmental matters on a broad scope.
- 2) It shall have independent utility or independent significance, i.e., be usable and be a reasonable expenditure even if no additional transportation improvements in the area are made.
- 3) Consideration of alternatives for other reasonably foreseeable transportation improvements shall not be restricted.

A 28-E agreement was entered into by five (7) incorporated cities (Alleman, Altoona, Bondurant, Ankeny, Des Moines, Elkhart, and Polk City) and Polk County to proceed with preparing the required NEPA documentation (Environmental Impact Statement) for the East Segment only. The East Segment NEPA documentation would include an analysis of cumulative impacts as related to the future planning of the West Segment. A separate NEPA document will be later written to address potential impacts of the West Segment.

The proposed project was placed in the recent transportation bill: Safe, Accountable Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2005 (SAFETEA-LU) passed by Congress. The first step is to prepare the required NEPA documentation (Phase II). In March 2006, FHWA gave Polk County authorization to proceed with Phase II of the project, beginning the NEPA process.

Proposed Action

The Northeast Beltway Corridor is located east of the City of Ankeny and north of the City of Altoona in Polk County, Iowa. The study corridor begins at the I-80/US 65 interchange in

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Altoona, extends to the north and angles to the west, then terminating at US 69. The north terminus on US 69 would be at a location within the study corridor, from south of NE 126th Avenue to IA 210 in Story County. See Figure 1-1 for the study corridor.

Purpose of the Proposed Action

The purpose of the project is to provide a high-speed connection between Interstate-80 and US Highway 69 that will reduce congestion on key corridors and promote economic development opportunities in northeast Polk County.

Need for the Proposed Action

The need for the proposed Northeast Beltway is based on a combination of factors relating to transportation system improvements and supporting economic development in the Northeast Des Moines metropolitan area. The proposed action is projected to address the following needs:

- Increasing traffic volumes and congestion on key corridors in the Northeast metro area
- US 65/IA 5 circumferential route is not continuous
- An improved incident management alternative for the Northeast Mixmaster is needed
- The Northeast metro area needs economic development to balance growth and land development patterns

A facility should provide traffic congestion relief for regional transportation facilities in the northeast metropolitan area by adding a linkage to the US 65/IA 5 circumferential route, reducing traffic volumes on key corridors within the study area, and providing incident management options for the Des Moines metropolitan area.

Increasing traffic volumes and congestion on key corridors in the Northeast metro area

Per the DMAMPO, the Interstate system within the study area is projected to be overcapacity by the year 2020. To reduce projected traffic congestion, Iowa DOT has identified several potential Interstate widening projects within the Des Moines metro area. These improvement projects are listed in the DMAMPO 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan. Interstate-35 between the Northeast Mixmaster and E. 1st Street was widened to a six-lane facility in 2005. Interstate-80 from US 65 to east of Altoona is identified in the DMAMPO 2030 LRTP to be widened to a six-lane facility in the 2020 to 2030 time frame. Also during the same time period, the Northeast Mixmaster is also identified to be widened and reconfigured, and I-35/80 west of the Northeast Mixmaster is also identified to be widened to eight lanes in order to reduce anticipated traffic congestion. Although Interstate system capacity improvements are planned or have been constructed in the study area, the Interstate system is projected to be at or overcapacity by the year 2030, even after the projects noted above would be constructed.

Non-Interstate roadways in the area are also projected to have increasing traffic congestion in the future. US 69/E. 14th Street is located approximately two miles from the Northeast

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Mixmaster, and is the first I-35/80 interchange west from the Mixmaster. US 69 is a regional traffic route and an arterial road through Des Moines (E. 14th Street) and Ankeny (Ankeny Boulevard), and is expected to experience large traffic growth into the future, with various traffic projections indicating needed roadway expansion.

The IA 415/ NW 2nd Avenue corridor is located approximately two miles west of E. 14th Street, and also has an I-35/80 interchange. The IA 415/NW 2nd Avenue corridor is currently a four-lane divided roadway north of I-35/80, and the DMAMPO projects traffic volumes to more than double on NW 2nd Avenue by the year 2030.

Delaware Avenue closely parallels I-35 west of the study area, and does not have an I-35/80 interchange. Although Delaware Avenue has no direct Interstate access, it currently carries considerable traffic between Ankeny and Des Moines, and has close Interstate access by way of the I-35/Corporate Woods Drive interchange in Ankeny. The DMAMPO projects that in the 2030 No Build condition Delaware Avenue traffic could double north of I-35/80, and more than triple near Ankeny, north of Corporate Woods Drive.

US 65/IA 5 circumferential route is not continuous

From the south terminus of the proposed project, US 65/IA 5 is a four-lane divided highway that extends around the south and east areas of the Des Moines Metro area and terminates at I-35. US 65/IA 5 allows users to access Altoona, Pleasant Hill, Carlisle, and the south side of Des Moines via a controlled access, 65-mph facility. At I-35, U.S. 65 jogs east, away from the metro center, and tracks northeast to IA 330 which continues to Marshalltown, with no continuation of the circumferential route through which traffic is routed to Interstate-80.

An improved incident management alternative for the Northeast Mixmaster is needed

The DMAMPO, in cooperation with the Iowa DOT and metro area counties and cities, has identified incident management plans for the Des Moines metropolitan area. The incident management Diversion Routes are alternative travel routes used if Interstate routes are blocked by an incident. Diversion Routes identified for I-35 north of the Northeast Mixmaster and I-80 east of the Northeast Mixmaster utilize a range of streets for incident management purposes. The route used to divert I-80 east of the Northeast Mixmaster uses US 6/Hubbell and Euclid Avenues as a primary diversion route; therefore, traffic diverted from the Interstate would be routed through Des Moines. Several Diversion Routes are used to divert sections of I-35 north of the Northeast Mixmaster, utilizing NE 29th Street, Delaware Avenue, or US 69. There is no available diversion route that would allow complete avoidance of the Northeast Mixmaster yet provide efficient travel paths similar to those offered north and east of the Mixmaster on I-35 and I-80. The current Diversion Routes in this area are not facilities constructed for higher volumes of regional traffic.

The Northeast metro area needs economic development to balance growth and land development patterns

The northeastern suburbs of Ankeny and Altoona are experiencing rapid residential and commercial growth. As metro area communities continue to grow in and adjacent to the study area, additional roadway capacity will be needed to accommodate anticipated local and regional traffic demand throughout the entire metro area. The continuation of land

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development in the northeast Des Moines metro area is anticipated to balance the large amounts of land development in the west and southwest portions of the metro area.

The concept of a new circumferential roadway north and east of the Northeast Mixmaster has been adopted in comprehensive plans for Polk County, Ankeny, Alleman, Elkhart, and Altoona. These communities and county are anticipating the construction of such a facility will complement the future growth of their respective communities. Polk County and cities participating in the study have or are in the process of amending their respective Comprehensive Plans in order to provide for corridor protection as well as direction for potential future land development.

The Northeast Beltway corridor planning process culminated with the Northeast Beltway's inclusion in the Des Moines Area MPO Year 2030 LRTP. The land use component of the LRTP is based on a balanced growth scenario for the Des Moines metropolitan area. Balanced growth includes goals to balance land development in the metro area and promote the orderly growth of the cities of Ankeny, Elkhart, Bondurant, Alleman, and Altoona.