

1. What is a “preferred alternative”?

A preferred alternative is the alternative that best addresses specific transportation and safety needs for the traveling public while having an acceptable level of environmental and social impacts. A preferred alternative must also meet the study’s identified purpose and need.

The purpose and need and the alternatives considered for US 12 in the Fort Atkinson area are described in the project’s Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). Alternatives considered included improving and adding capacity to the existing route, bypassing the city or doing nothing at all.

2. Is there a preferred alternative for US 12 in the Fort Atkinson area?

WisDOT has determined that a southern bypass route is preferred, however the exact alignment is still to be determined. The preferred alternative will be selected after additional detailed study is completed on the potential southern bypass routes.

3. How will the preferred alternative be selected?

The selection process is complex and involves many steps. The first steps began with the Needs Assessment conducted back in 2001 and continued through the alternatives analysis and completion of the DEIS in late 2005. Throughout this time, hundreds of public comments from property owners, citizens, agencies and legislators were gathered and considered. Multiple alignments were analyzed to determine their impacts and ability to meet purpose and need. Using technical information, engineering requirements and public and agency input, WisDOT staff weighed the pros and cons of each alternative presented in the EIS. They also considered whether there were any better alternatives by conducting a “Value Engineering/Planning Study”.

The three step process described in the sidebar on the right was selected as the best solution to the identified problems and needs.

In December 2007, WisDOT adopted a southern bypass concept plan for US 12 in the Fort Atkinson area. After carefully considering the agency and public input, WisDOT proposed the following three-step approach to address the area’s US 12 safety and traffic issues.

1. Make short-term/interim improvements to the existing route, including spot safety improvements and pavement restoration. This is similar to Alternative 1a in the Draft EIS also known as TSM or Transportation System Management.
2. Officially map a southern bypass route under Wis. Stat. Sec. 84.295. The route would be similar to Alternative 7 or 7a as presented in the Draft EIS or would be a further refinement thereof. Additional study on the bypass alternatives will be done to address remaining public and agency questions regarding impacts and design. The intent is to identify a bypass corridor that minimizes impacts and cost, adheres to design requirements, and meets project purpose and need.
3. Construct the bypass when safety and congestion indicate the need and when funding is available.

WisDOT will continue investigating a southern bypass route and expects to decide on a preferred corridor in 12 to 18 months. This will be followed by publication of the Final EIS 3 to 6 months later.

4. Which alignment is favored?

Based on studies and public and agency input, a southern bypass route is a better choice than a through-city route or a route on Rock County N. The exact southern bypass alignment has not been decided pending further studies and comparisons of the potential alignments. WisDOT will continue to examine alignment adjustments that further minimize impacts to natural resources and property while meeting all engineering and safety standards. As engineering plans are refined, more impacts may be identified and further refinements made. After detailed environmental studies are conducted, WisDOT will conduct a final comparison of the overall impacts and benefits of the potential southern bypass routes and identify a single, final corridor. This corridor will be the official Preferred Alternative. The environmental review process will continue through 2008 and culminate with completion of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

5. If WisDOT does not plan to build a bypass now, why continue studying it?

In order to move forward with final design, the study must be completed. If conditions in the area worsen such that construction is warranted sooner than currently anticipated, the full study would need to be completed at that time, which could delay construction by as much as two additional years.

Completing the study now will allow WisDOT to map the lands needed for the selected alternative. Mapping discourages development within the future right of way, which in turn keeps the cost of right of way down. Completing the study will also finalize recommendations for relatively low-cost interim improvements to the existing roadway that focus on operations and safety and maximize the facility's service life.

6. What is mapping?

Mapping is a statutory process WisDOT uses to protect and preserve right of way for future transportation needs. After extensive coordination with landowners and other stakeholders, a draft map is created. This map consists of one or more sheets of drawings that legally define and depict the location and amount of right of way needed. The right of way is broken into parcels based on existing property ownership. A public hearing is held for all interested persons to review and comment on the draft map. The map is then finalized and recorded in the county in which it is located. The mapped land remains in private ownership but a description of each owner's parcel is created and recorded so that all current and future landowners are aware that the map exists. Landowners within the mapped areas are required to contact WisDOT at least 60 days prior to construction of any structural improvements in the mapped areas.

7. What are the advantages of mapping?

The lands through which a southern bypass alignment would cross are relatively undeveloped at this time. This makes it easier to avoid or minimize impacts to homes, businesses, and sensitive habitat. Maintaining the corridor in the same relatively undeveloped condition until the bypass is needed is advantageous. Future right of way acquisition costs associated with buying future buildings and improvements will likely be less. Likewise, the need to realign the corridor to avoid future developments will be less likely. Often, such realignments result in an increase in overall environmental impacts on the replacement alignment. For these reasons, WisDOT anticipates that mapping will reduce overall costs associated with a bypass.

Mapping will also facilitate local land use and transportation planning. A defined and mapped bypass corridor can be incorporated into the long-range comprehensive plan updates currently underway in Fort Atkinson and Koshkonong. A fixed location will help guide their future zoning and development choices in a way that enhances their community goals and policies. Mapping by one or

both of the affected communities can further ensure that the future corridor is preserved and managed as part of a comprehensive planning process.

8. When will a bypass be built?

After the environmental review process is complete, traffic and safety assessments will be conducted periodically to help determine when the final step – construction of a south bypass - is needed. Before construction of a southern bypass, WisDOT and the FHWA will reevaluate the Environmental Impact Statement and conduct additional environmental review as required to account for any existing conditions that change between now and then.

The exact timing of construction is difficult to predict. It will depend on future traffic and safety along the existing US 12 route, state funding priorities, and where this project is prioritized among the state's other highway projects. Given the State's existing identified improvement needs, anticipated priorities, and findings of this study, construction of a bypass would be unlikely until sometime after 2020.

9. What can I do with my property after it is mapped?

After the right of way for the freeway is mapped, state law would prohibit construction within the mapped right of way without the property owner first giving WisDOT 60-day's notice. "Construction" includes erecting or moving in a structure, or rebuilding, making alterations or additions to existing structures within the proposed rights-of-way. If the property owner does give notice, WisDOT will decide at that time whether it is necessary to acquire the property before the proposed structure is built or wait until just before the new road is built. If the property owner does not give this notice, WisDOT will not be required to compensate the property owner for the structure when right of way acquisition occurs.

10. Why is the environmental process taking longer than anticipated?

Studies for major highway improvement projects typically require extensive study of many issues and options and broad-based, thorough, and frequent coordination and communication with local communities, landowners and agencies such as DNR. The completion time is very closely tied to the number and complexity of alternatives and issues analyzed. In this instance, both were higher than expected, so the process is taking more time than WisDOT anticipated. Allowing additional time in this project for further analysis and coordination helps ensure that the preferred alternative is the best alternative possible.

11. How is bypass construction funding authorized?

The environmental study process will be completed when the FEIS is signed and a Record of Decision (ROD) is issued by FHWA. However, final design and construction cannot occur until funding of the selected preferred alternative is requested of and enumerated by the Transportation Projects Commission (TPC)¹. WisDOT times such requests based on a variety of factors including highway program priorities, changes to traffic patterns, and safety. The TPC will then recommend projects that most deserve funding to the Legislature and the Governor. Only then would WisDOT proceed with final plans, real estate acquisition, and construction.

¹ The TPC consists of fifteen members including the Governor, three citizen members appointed by the Governor, five senators and five representatives appointed by the Legislature, and the secretary of transportation as a non-voting member. The commission's responsibility is to review candidate major projects and recommend projects to the Governor and the Legislature for statutory enumeration.