

Interstate 90 Corridor Facilities Study Newsletter

September 2005

La Crosse and Monroe counties

Introduction

This is the second in a series of newsletters to keep interested persons informed about the Interstate 90 (I-90) Corridor Facilities Study being conducted by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) and their consultant team led by CH2M HILL. The I-90 study area extends from the Wisconsin/Minnesota state line at La Crosse to Tomah. Existing facilities include the French Island Welcome Center, the safety and weight enforcement facility (SWEF) near West Salem, the eastbound Bangor rest area and the westbound Sparta rest area (see location map).

The study will provide a long-range facilities plan that serves the traveling public and commercial trucking, enhances freeway operations and safety, and that is compatible with local land use plans. The alternatives include improving existing facilities, developing facilities at new locations, combining or eliminating facilities (see page 2 for more information). The study will conclude in early 2006 with a recommended improvement plan. The project will then proceed to final design and land acquisition. Construction of the first facility is targeted for 2009.

Need for improved facilities

The existing roadside facilities were built in the 1960's and 1970's and do not meet the needs of the traveling public and commercial trucking as they once did. At the French Island Welcome Center there are conflicts with entering and exiting traffic due to overlapping entrance and exit roads, inadequate space for truck parking maneuvers, and the building is too small for tourism and other services it provides.

The existing SWEF uses an outdated/slow truck weighing process that leads to delay for trucks and occasional backups on I-90. The small building lacks space for equipment and staff, outdoor safety inspections are difficult in bad weather and there are no amenities for truck drivers other than a few parking stalls.

The Bangor and Sparta rest areas are the oldest in the state. The buildings do not meet modern design standards and maintenance costs are increasing. The Sparta rest area already has more truck parking demand than it can handle and the Bangor rest area is nearing capacity for truck parking.

Contact information

For additional information about the I-90 corridor facilities study, contact one of the following study team members:

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Public Meeting Scheduled

The second public information meeting will be held on Wednesday, September 28, 2005 (see page 2 for details).

Mission Statement:

To provide leadership in the development and operation of a safe and efficient transportation system



Public information meeting set

The second public information meeting will be held on Wednesday, September 28 at the Hazel Brown Leicht Memorial Library (community room) in West Salem, 201 Neshonoc Road just north of the I-90/County Highway C interchange. The meeting will be open house and will run from 5 to 7 p.m. You may stop in anytime between those hours to visit with the project team, learn more about the study, review the displays and share your ideas and concerns. There will be additional newsletters and another public information meeting as the study progresses.

Study update

The first public information meeting was held on February 16, 2005 (Onalaska) and February 17 (Sparta). Approximately 20 people attended the sessions to find out about the study, provide comments on the existing facilities, share ideas on ways to improve the existing facilities and to suggest possible new locations for one or more of the facilities.

Since February, the study team has continued to develop project purpose and need factors and a preliminary range of alternatives for addressing project need. Traffic forecasts for the I-90 corridor have been developed for Design Year 2030 and future use of the existing roadside facilities has been estimated based on the 2030 forecasts. Field investigations have also been underway for archaeological sites, historic structures, natural resources and other constraints that guide alternatives development.

The second project advisory committee meeting was held on September 22, 2005 to review purpose and need factors and the range of alternatives being considered. Advisory committee members include local officials and representatives from the Department of Tourism, Rehabilitation for Wisconsin, State Patrol, Federal Highway Administration, Federal Motor Carriers Association and the Wisconsin Motor Carriers Association.

Range of alternatives being considered

The following conceptual alternatives were developed and screened against key project need factors including benefits of rest areas and SWEFs, deficiencies at the existing facilities, existing and future demand, and financial constraints in maintaining and operating the facilities in the future.

No build

This alternative would leave all facilities unimproved. It would not meet project purpose and need but will be carried forward as a baseline for comparison to the build alternatives.

Eliminate all existing facilities

This alternative is not viable because there is a demonstrated need for the tourism and rest area function served by the Welcome Center and for the truck weighing and inspection provided at the SWEF.

Improve the Welcome Center and SWEF, but eliminate the Bangor and Sparta rest areas

This alternative is not viable because eliminating the Sparta rest area would result in no westbound rest area between Tomah and La Crescent, Minnesota.

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Improve the Welcome Center, SWEF and Sparta rest area, but eliminate the Bangor rest area

This alternative is viable because the Bangor rest area is not essential for meeting project need. It is only 20 miles from the Welcome Center, less than WisDOT's spacing guideline of 60 miles/1hour between rest areas. The services provided by the Bangor rest area including truck parking could be accommodated at other facilities.

Improve/expand all four existing facilities

This alternative is potentially viable with respect to the Welcome Center, SWEF and Sparta rest areas, but would not apply to the Bangor rest area if that facility is eliminated.

Based on the conceptual alternatives for the I-90 corridor, the following site specific alternatives are being considered or proposed:

French Island Welcome Center

Improve the existing facility with or without truck parking (no new right-of-way required).

Safety and weight enforcement facility (SWEF)

- Expand the existing site to accommodate truck parking (additional right-of-way required).
- Construct a new SWEF at the Bangor rest area site (assumes Bangor rest area eliminated, additional right-of-way required).
- Construct a new SWEF at a new location just east of Bangor or west of the I-90/STH 27 interchange at Sparta (new right-of-way required).

Bangor rest area

Eliminate this facility and replace some of its truck parking at the new SWEF.

Sparta rest area

Improve/expand this facility and provide additional auto and truck parking (no new right-of-way required).

What's Next?

After the public information meeting, the study team will use public input to assist in choosing the recommended plan for the I-90 roadside facilities. Coordination with state and federal review agencies will also be completed and the environmental document will be prepared. There will also be another project advisory committee meeting and public information meeting to present details of the recommended plan including required right-of-way and impacts.

Schedule

Key schedule milestones are as follows:

- Availability of environmental document to public and agencies—December 2005
- Complete engineering analysis for recommended plan—January 2006
- Final project advisory committee meeting—February 2006
- Final public information meeting—February 2006
- Final Environmental document—March 2006
- Recommended plan and study report—April 2006

Location Map



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