

Study Process

The proposed improvements to the US 64 corridor will involve state and federal funds. Any agency that proposes a project involving federal funds must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Under the NEPA, an agency must study the adverse and beneficial environmental impacts of alternatives that meet a project's purpose and need and identify the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative (LEDPA). This planning process can be divided into eight steps described in detail below. Steps 1 through 7 are complete and Step 8, holding a Design Public Hearing, is scheduled for March 2008.

Planning Process Steps

Step 1 : Initiate project and collect data

- *Develop the purpose and need for the project*

The purposes of the US 64 project are to improve access around the City of Asheboro and to the North Carolina Zoo, relieve traffic congestion on existing US 64 in Asheboro, and enhance high-speed regional travel along the US 64 intrastate corridor.

- *Inventory issues that affect project options*

The presence of dense commercial development along existing US 64 precludes widening of the roadway. A new bypass to the north of existing US 64 is not feasible due to the presence of water supply watersheds, the lack of space for an additional interchange on I-73/74 north of existing US 64, and the inability to provide improved access to the NC Zoo (located south of Asheboro).

- *Define a study area (south of existing US 64)*

Step 2 : Identify alternatives

- *Develop Land Suitability Mapping*

The Land Suitability Map is a map of major features and constraints that can affect the location of the new bypass. These features include steep topography,

wetlands, floodplains, streams, neighborhoods, industrial sites, hazardous waste sites, historic sites, federal lands, and community facilities such as parks, schools, libraries, fire stations, and hospitals. Sources for this information include the US Geological Survey topographic maps, US Fish and Wildlife Service National Wetland Inventory, and geographic information provided by Randolph County.

- *Perform Preliminary Field Studies*

These studies included preliminary surveys to field check the data obtained for the land suitability mapping.

- *Hold the 1st Citizens Informational Workshop*

This workshop was held on September 28, 1998 to solicit public comment and input on the purpose and need for the project, the proposed study area, and the land suitability map.

- *Document Community Concerns*
- *Identify Preliminary 1,000-foot Wide Corridors*
- *Hold the 2nd Citizens Informational Workshop*

This workshop was held on June 17, 1999 to solicit public comment and input on the preliminary corridors

- *Select Alternatives for Detailed Study*
- *Nine 1,000-foot wide corridors were selected as the Detailed Study Alternatives*

Step 3 : Conduct detailed studies

- *Perform Detailed Field Surveys*

These include intensive field surveys for protected plant and animal species, wetlands, and streams within the boundaries of the Detailed Study Alternatives. Field studies for noise and housing impacts have also been conducted.

- *Perform engineering studies*

Preliminary engineering designs have been developed for the nine Detailed Study Alternatives.

- *Environmental Analyses*

Issues to be addressed include traffic, land use, farmland, socio-economic factors, residential/business relocations, environmental justice, air quality, noise, natural resources (wetlands, streams, endangered species), hydraulics, floodplains, archaeological resources, historic resources, hazardous substances/underground storage tanks, visual impacts, and construction impacts.

Step 4 : Prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement

- *Publish a Draft Environmental Impact Statement*

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will include the purpose and need for the project and summaries of the alternatives analysis, detailed field surveys, preliminary engineering, and environmental analyses.

- *The Draft EIS was approved July 2002.*

Step 5 : Hold a Pre-Hearing Open House and a Formal Corridor Public Hearing
The pre-hearing open house provides the public opportunity to discuss the DEIS & hearing maps in an informal setting. The corridor public hearing provides a formal opportunity for public comment and input regarding the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and the proposed detailed design of the various alternatives.

The Pre-Hearing Open House Meeting was held May 8, 2003. The Corridor Public Hearing was held May 22, 2003.

Step 6 : Select the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative

- *Review comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and review the Public Hearing Transcript*
- *Select the Least Environmentally Damaging Preferred Alternative*

The North Carolina Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration will select the Preferred Alternative based on the results described in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and input received from citizens and

governmental agencies (i.e. local government officials, state environmental agencies, and federal agencies).

- *Alternative 29 was selected as the Preferred Alternative August 10, 2004.*

Step 7 : Prepare a Final Environmental Impact Statement

- *Conduct intensive environmental studies on the Preferred Alternative*
- *Complete the Preliminary Engineering Design Plans*
- *Publish the Final Environmental Impact Statement*

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) included the purpose and need for the project, summaries of the alternatives analysis, and intensive environmental analyses of the Preferred Alternative. A newsletter was mailed out announcing the completion of the Final EIS.

Step 8 : Hold a Design Public Hearing

The hearing provides a formal opportunity for public comments and input regarding the selected alternative.

Beyond the Environmental Study Process

After the Design Public Hearing is held, the engineering designs for the roadway will be finalized, then right-of-way acquisition (buying of property needed to construct the road) can begin.