



FACT SHEET -2016

Perception: *The ESH is not needed.*

Fact: The ESH is being planned to accommodate Year 2035 traffic. It is important to plan for the future so that when the need occurs, there is a transportation system in place that can accommodate the growth. Should that growth not be realized, the highway construction schedule can be adjusted. At this time, there are no funds for construction.

Perception: *The ESH will not be used locally.*

Fact: The ESH is not intended as a bypass. The purpose of the proposed ESH is to serve both local and regional travel, increase mobility, and enhance transportation options on the east side with an emphasis on serving forecasted/expected growth in the Bloomington-Normal area. In the future (2035), congestion will increase on portions of the existing local road system if an ESH is not built.

Perception: *Widening Towanda Barnes Road is the best solution.*

Fact: Widening Towanda Barnes Road was included in the range of alternatives but resulted in disproportionately high impacts to residences, commercial buildings, and parks when compared to the other alternatives under consideration. Thus, alternatives using Towanda Barnes Road were eliminated. Even if Towanda Barnes Road were constructed to four lanes from Towanda (I-55) to I-74, the traffic congestion forecasted for 2035 would not be relieved without an ESH facility.

Perception: *The ESH should be located further east, such as along Lexington-Leroy Road.*

Fact: Numerous alternatives that were located to the east of the preferred alternative were developed and evaluated. These alternatives were eliminated for a number of reasons, including the inability to meet the Purpose and Need of the project, which is to accommodate growth on the east side and address both local and regional mobility and access. Locating the ESH further east, such as along Lexington-Leroy Road, would make the ESH less desirable for local traffic. Some eastern alternatives were eliminated due to a higher number of farmland impacts in comparison to other alternatives. The far eastern alternatives were less compatible with future land use plans and may have encouraged sprawl or other unintended negative land use consequences.

Perception: *The projected employment and population data is outdated or not realistic.*

Fact: The population and employment forecasts have been adjusted with the most recent data available (2013). The forecasts are obtained from national and state agencies (Woods & Poole Economics, IHS Global Insight, and Illinois Department of Employment Security) that have no stake in the ESH project. Based on the revised forecasts, there is continued need to plan for this project. Independent of the ESH project, population and traffic are predicted to increase within the study area. The transportation agencies have a responsibility to plan for orderly improvement to the infrastructure to accommodate that growth

or the result will be congestion, and the negative impacts that it brings (increased fuel emissions, safety issues). According to the U.S. Census Bureau 2012 data, both Bloomington and Normal are in the top five fastest growing cities in Illinois.

Perception: *The ESH will negatively impact residential areas and property values.*

Fact: Residential displacements and proximity to existing and planned residential areas is considered when planning the ESH. Both direct and indirect impacts of the ESH have been analyzed in detail. This analysis includes acquisition of residences, farmland conversion, safety, potential impacts to land use, noise levels, air quality, community impacts, and water quality. Generally, research has not yielded any definitive property value impacts from transportation projects. National research has found that property value benefits may occur for those living near a transportation facility that provides reduced travel times and increased accessibility. The impact of the ESH on property values may vary depending on the location of the property in proximity to the project.

Perception: *The ESH is being initiated by developers, the planning commission, or engineering firms.*

Fact: The ESH EA is being conducted through the joint efforts of McLean County and the communities of Bloomington and Normal, who recognize the need for additional future transportation capacity on the east and southeast sides of the communities to accommodate forecasted growth. The project team has not and continues to have no involvement with developers.

Perception: *This project will pave over some of the best farmland in the U.S. and result in agricultural impacts.*

Fact: Agricultural impacts, including adverse travel, severances, prime farmland acreage, farm outbuildings, farm residences, uneconomical remnants, and landlocked parcels were evaluated for the ESH alternatives. The alternatives with the highest agricultural impacts were eliminated during the alternative evaluation process. The 2035 Land Use Plan was considered during the alternative evaluation process. According to the 2035 Land Use Plan, it is expected that much of the area within the alternatives will be developed by 2035.

Perception: *The data used to assess impacts is outdated.*

Fact: Flights to obtain aerial images are not flown on a monthly basis due to cost issues. Therefore, the aerial images shown in public meeting materials may not show all of the recently constructed homes on the east side of Bloomington-Normal. However, the project team conducts field visits of the project area to gather data on location of new homes, schools, parks, etc. and update the proposed impacts accordingly. The future phases of the east side subdivisions are known and considered in the ESH project. Future parks and schools are included in the analysis; however these structures must be planned.



Frequently Asked Questions – 2016

What type of roadway is recommended?

Three different facility type options were considered for the north-south Build Alternatives: Freeways, Expressways, and Arterials. The Freeway Option is recommended as the most appropriate facility type for the ESH. It is the best option to accommodate future traffic volumes, enhance mobility, provide appropriate access, and reduce crash potential.

When will the roadway be constructed?

At present, Phase II (Detailed Engineering) and Phase III (Construction Phase) are not yet funded. One of the reasons for performing the Phase I (Environmental Assessment) is to determine if the project should go forward. As such, construction funding is often not available for projects until the Phase I study has been approved by the FHWA. The source of funding for construction has not been determined, but funding can come from a variety of sources. There are many Federal programs which fund construction projects. Some State funds may be available, and some funding may come from the County or City.

Who is responsible for maintaining the ESH?

The agency (i.e. IDOT or McLean County) responsible for maintaining the ESH has not yet been determined. That will be determined later in the project process.

Could the money for the ESH planning study have been used for other purposes such as improving existing roads or schools?

The funding for this project comes from the "Illinois Jobs Now!" Capital Bill. The Illinois Jobs Now! program specifically identified funds for preliminary engineering on the ESH. Capital Bill funds can only be used for projects identified by the legislature or the governor's office. If the McLean County Board would have voted against studying the project, the funds could not be used elsewhere in McLean County for any other purpose and cannot be reallocated for use on any other activity.

How can I trust that the data used in this project is not being shaped to fit the desires of government agencies?

Through the CSS process, the public was involved at every major step of the project development. The Purpose & Need Statement, which was developed with stakeholder input during the Corridor Study, was refined based on public input, the alternatives were developed based on public input, and the criteria used to evaluate the alternatives were developed using public input. The project team posted all project-related documents on the East Side Highway website for public review as the project progressed.

Is the ESH being designed to induce urban sprawl by assuming "If you build it they will come"?

A road can induce sprawl when not built as part of a comprehensive land development strategy. On the other hand, carefully coordinated planning for roads is among the most effective means of implementing desired plans for harmonious land use development. This study was designed to coordinate land use and transportation planning, while meeting future mobility needs, minimizing future levels of congestion, and promoting transportation safety within the study area. Adopted comprehensive plans for the area formed the basis for predicting future travel demand requirements and were integral in this planning process.

Shouldn't the project focus be to address east/west traffic in place of or in addition to north/south traffic?

The scope of the project addresses the study of an infrastructure to accommodate anticipated growth on the east side. An important component of this is access to both I-55 and I-74. While improvements to east-west streets were analyzed within the project study area, to look only at east/west roads would not address the primary future traffic movement of developing areas which includes access to the Interstate system. With or without an east side highway, traffic volume will continue to increase through Towanda and Downs, overloading the existing two-lane streets through these communities. This would result in unsafe road conditions. Improved access to I-74 and I-55 potentially relieves congestion in these two communities. The traffic modeling performed for this study identified east/west routes that could be considered for improvements as part of future planning efforts. Recommendations to that effect were included in the final report.