

Thorncreek Road to Moscow



Idaho Transportation Department District 2

Project Name: Thorncreek Rd to Moscow
Project Number: DHP-NH-4110(156)
Key Number: 9294

Public Involvement Plan *Executive Summary*

September 2004

Introduction

This public involvement plan executive summary documents how the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) District 2 will engage the public in the Thorncreek Road to Moscow Project. This plan includes the public involvement goals and the activities that will take place to meet those goals. The concepts in this document have been reviewed by the Idaho Transportation Department District 2 (lead agency) with input from partnering agencies and key stakeholders.

The public involvement plan for this project meets the requirements set forth in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the guidelines of ITD and the Federal Highway Administration.

Project Background

U.S. Highway 95 is a major route for commercial, agricultural, recreational and residential traffic. It is the major link between northern and southern Idaho. This highway is of statewide significance and is designated as part of the National Highway System in the Transportation Efficiency Act of the 21st Century. The highway through Idaho begins at the southwestern Oregon/Idaho border approximately 35 miles south of Caldwell. From this point, the route extends northward approximately 530 miles to the Idaho/Canada border.

The existing highway is classified as a principal arterial. The present roadway consists of an approximately 6.8-mile long, two-lane facility. The highway is operating at near capacity and has several substandard horizontal and vertical curves. There are several spot locations that currently have high accident rates. Several of these accidents can be attributed to poor highway geometrics in combination with public/private approaches, and poor weather conditions during certain periods of the year.

An Environmental Assessment was completed from the top of Lewiston Hill to Moscow (approximately 22 miles). In September 2003, the U.S. District Court in Boise negated the northern third of the EA and required the ITD to prepare a separate Environmental Impact Statement for the segment from Thorncreek Road to Moscow.

Project Description

The project area begins at milepost 337.200 (approximately Thorncreek Road) and ends at milepost 343.982 in the city of Moscow. The proposed project consists of replacing the existing two-lane facility with a four-lane, divided highway using Type IV access control.

The project will look at potential alignments (the exact location of the roadway), and a “no build” option. The process includes:

- **Environmental analysis** – Identifying environmental impacts of possible alignments, including noise, air quality, land use, natural features (for example wildlife and wetlands), climate, socioeconomic/community facilities and hazardous materials.
 - An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be included as part of this project. An EIS is intended to help public officials make decisions that are based on an understanding of environmental consequences and take action to protect the environment.
- **Engineering analysis** – Providing the design parameters for a safe and efficient facility.
- **Right-of-Way impacts** – Reviewing alignments to show the impacts on the property that would occur.

Project Purpose and Need

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to improve public safety and increase highway capacity on U.S. 95 between Thorncreek Road, south of Moscow at MP 337.200 and Moscow at MP 343.982.

Need

Within the project limits, U.S. 95 does not meet current American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Standards (widths, clear-zones, grades and sight distance). Additional concerns include high accident locations and insufficient highway capacity.

Goals and Objectives

ITD's mission is: "We provide high quality, cost-effective transportation systems that are safe, reliable and responsive for the economical and efficient movement of people and products."

To accomplish its mission, ITD is committed to involving the public in meaningful ways during the development of its projects.

The project's public involvement goals are to:

- Communicate complete, accurate, understandable and timely information to the public throughout the Thorncreek Road to Moscow project
- Actively gather input from the community by providing citizens with meaningful opportunities to participate in the development and decision-making process
- Provide opportunities for early and continuous involvement
- Comply with requirements of Title VI Civil Rights Act of 1964 and ensure all citizens regardless of race, income or physical limitations have the opportunity to participate
- Design public involvement processes that are consistent with state and federal (NEPA) laws and are sensitive to local goals and objectives

The project's public involvement objectives are to:

- Use many sources to inform the residents of Latah County about the project and how to provide input
- Communicate the project decision-making process with the community and identify their role in this process
- Communicate the public involvement process with the community and maintain flexibility to change or enhance the process as needed
- Provide monthly community updates on the project status
- Provide an opportunity for the public to provide input on the range of alternatives/alignments
- Communicate clearly why alternatives and alignments are being carried forward for further environmental review and why others are not

Communication Materials

Public information materials support all the public involvement efforts in this project. Providing complete, accurate, understandable and timely information to the public throughout the project is vital to a successful effort. Several public information materials will be produced to inform the public about this project and let people know what opportunities exist for them to give input.

Following is a list of communication materials planned for this project:

- **Brochure** – A project brochure will be produced that provides the public with an overview of the project, including its background, components and the opportunities for public participation.
- **Web page** – ITD will update and maintain a project Web page for this project. ITD has created a project-specific email address so the public can communicate directly with District 2.
- **Newsletters** – ITD will prepare monthly project newsletters. The newsletters may include a project update, feature story/person, technical information and next steps.
- **Postcards** – Postcards will be used to invite people to participate in public opportunities for input.
- **Letters** – Letters will be used to communicate specific information to targeted stakeholders during the project.
- **Display ads** – Display ads will be designed and placed in the Moscow-Pullman Daily News, Lewiston Morning Tribune, Latah Eagle and the Argonaut (University of Idaho newspaper) to announce public opportunities for input.
- **Sandwich boards** – Sandwich boards will contain information similar to that on the postcards and will be used to notify people about an upcoming project activity. These boards will be placed in high-use pedestrian areas or in businesses or shopping centers.
- **Fact sheets** – Fact sheets will be developed if detailed information about a particular issue needs to be distributed to a wide audience.

Communication Mechanisms and Opportunities

The following communication mechanisms will be used to keep the Latah County community and surrounding areas informed about the project and aware of opportunities to give input.

- **Community presence** – ITD will maintain a community presence by having an information kiosk that will be placed in shopping malls, community gathering places and high-use pedestrian areas. Other methods for maintaining a community presence will include monthly breakfast meetings and presentations to community organizations.
- **Media** – The media will be invited and encouraged to participate in the project. A media day will be hosted during the scoping process in order to provide the local media with information about the project. News releases will be developed and sent to the local media to keep it informed about project progress and public opportunities for input.
- **Project Video** – The project video will include an overview of the project and key information and can be used in multiple venues over the course of the project, including the project scoping meeting.
- **Visuals and graphics** – Due to the technical nature of this project, ITD will develop visual tools to help people understand alternatives/alignments

Formal Opportunities for Public Input

The public will be provided with many formal opportunities to learn about the project, its progress and to provide input. These opportunities include:

- Scoping meetings
- Alternatives/alignments workshops
- Open houses
- Public hearing
- Distribution of the EIS for review and comment
- **Scoping meetings** – ITD will host four public NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) scoping meetings on consecutive days at different times. The purpose of conducting four meetings is to accommodate the schedules of different stakeholders. The purpose of the scoping meetings is to provide the public with an opportunity to:
 - Learn about the project
 - Identify their concerns and needs regarding the project
 - Express the nature and extent of issues and impacts to be addressed in the EIS
 - Identify areas of concerns (wildlife, historic sites, vegetation, etc.)
 - Learn how to participate in the project

- **Alternatives/Alignment workshops** – Following the scoping meetings, ITD will have a grasp of the issues and concerns identified by the public. The next opportunity for public input will be the alternatives/alignments workshops, which will allow invited stakeholders and the public to review, refine and/or add to possible alternatives/alignments. There will be four alternatives/alignments public workshops. The purpose of these workshops will be to provide the public and targeted stakeholders with an opportunity to:
 - Continue to learn about the project and the environmental analysis required to complete an EIS
 - Learn about the issues and concerns that will be addressed in the EIS
 - Assist in determining the range of alternatives/alignments that ITD will carry forward for detailed environmental analysis

- **Alternatives/Alignments public open houses** – ITD will host two public open houses on consecutive days to present the range of alternatives/alignments developed by the project team, alternatives/alignments workshops and agency meetings. The purpose of the open houses will be to provide the public with an opportunity to:
 - Continue to learn about the project and the environmental analysis being conducted for the study
 - Learn about the issues and concerns that will be addressed in the EIS
 - Comment on the proposed recommendations for alternatives/alignments that ITD will carry forward for detailed environmental analysis
 - Learn how to continue to participate in the project

- **Alternatives/Alignment refinement workshops** – ITD will host another round of four alternatives/alignments public workshops. The same participants from the earlier workshops, and anyone else who is interested, will be invited to continue their work narrowing the range of alternatives/alignments. The purpose of these workshops will be to provide the public and targeted stakeholders with an opportunity to:
 - Assist ITD in narrowing the range of alternatives/alignments
 - Review and comment on the detailed environmental analysis of each alternative/alignment

- **Preferred Alternatives/Alignment public open houses** – ITD will host two public open houses on consecutive days to present the preferred alternatives/alignments. The purpose of the open houses will be to provide the public with an opportunity to:
 - Continue to learn about the project and the environmental analysis being conducted for the study
 - Learn about the issues and concerns that will be addressed in the EIS
 - Comment on the preferred alternatives/alignments and the detailed environmental analysis of each
 - Learn how to continue to participate in the project

- **Public Hearing and Distribution of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)** – ITD will make the Draft EIS available for review and comments at easily

accessible locations throughout the project area. ITD will follow the Public Hearing Requirements as defined in the ITD Design Manual and CFR 23.771.123-125 to plan and conduct two Location/Design public hearings for the project. The purpose of the public hearings will be to provide the public and agencies with a formal opportunity to:

- Comment on the project and the recommended alignment
- Provide comments on the Environmental Impact Statement.

Additional Opportunities for Public Input

Written, email and by phone

ITD will respond to public inquiries during the project. It is important that comments from the public, and ITD's response, be documented and included in the Environmental Impact Statement.

Community education forums

Due to the complexity and technical nature of this project, ITD may want to host community education forums. The purpose of these forums will be to provide a greater level of information and discussion about issues important to the project.

Ongoing Public Involvement Process Evaluation

The public involvement team will create a process that allows community members to provide feedback about how ITD is doing in its efforts to inform and engage the community about the progress of this project.