Frequently Asked Questions

Why is this study being done?
In 2004, WisDOT completed a Needs Assessment that showed there are existing problems with safety, congestion, and bike and pedestrian connectivity in the US 51 corridor. These problems will worsen as additional jobs and residences come to the area. WisDOT decided to conduct an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) to determine how travel needs can be met in the future.

What are the concepts under consideration?
At this phase of the EIS, the concepts are still broad strategies for handling traffic demand between southeast Dane County and the Madison area. They are described briefly as follows:

Concept A – No/low build. No additional capacity (new travel lanes) would be provided. Efforts would be focused on improving safety at intersections along US 51. Passing lanes may be warranted.
Concept B – Four lanes on US 51 between Stoughton and McFarland.
Concept C – Four lanes on WIS 138 between Oregon and Stoughton.
Concept D – Four lanes on County N between Stoughton and I-39/90.
Concept E – Four lanes on WIS 138 and County N (Concepts C and D combined).

Concepts B through E include possible improvements on County B and County N on the north and east sides of Stoughton and the option of relocating the portion of US 51 between County B and WIS 138 off the current alignment to a location farther west (the existing portion of US 51 would become a local road).
Concepts C through E include safety improvements on US 51. The table below describes briefly the effects of each of these concepts. The traffic volume effects noted in Concepts B through E are compared to the Concept A (No/low build) scenario for projected traffic volumes in 2030.

Concept A No/low build	• Volumes south of US 12/18 too high for four-lane roadway • Volumes in McFarland and Stoughton too high for existing facilities • Peak hour volumes cause significant congestion and queuing
Concept B Four lanes on US 51	• US 51 draws traffic from major parallel routes • Beltline-type volumes on US 51 north of McFarland • Volumes in McFarland too high for existing four-lane US 51 • Volumes between McFarland and Stoughton well into four-lane range
Concept C Four lanes on WIS 138	• Minor reductions in daily traffic on US 51 north of Stoughton • Minor changes in traffic through downtown Stoughton • Minor reductions in traffic on adjacent parallel routes • Minimal impact on Beltline traffic • Volumes on WIS 138 increase by about 35%
Concept D Four lanes on County N	• Reduces volumes on US 14 and WIS 138 • Increases volumes on Beltline between US 51 and I-39 • Volumes on County N nearly double
Concept E Four lanes on WIS 138 and County N	• Reduces volumes on US 51 in and north of Stoughton and in McFarland • Volumes on WIS 138 increase by about 25% • Volumes on County N increase by about 50%

Traffic modeling indicates that the stretch of US 51 between I-39/90 and Stoughton will not have traffic congestion problems that require lane additions. Safety improvements for this area will be considered.

If this study is about US 51, why are changes to WIS 138 and County B and County N being considered?
Once the study of concepts began, the study team realized that improvements to roads other than US 51 may be feasible options for accomplishing the goal of handling traffic demand in the area. Preliminary computer modeling gives an idea of how changes to various roads affect traffic patterns in the region. This broad consideration of concepts meets the expectations of the environmental process.

When will an alternative be selected?
After comments are received on these initial draft concepts over the next several months, the study team will select alternatives for further study. It is possible that a new concept will emerge, or one or more concepts could be dropped from further consideration. The alternatives to go forward for further study will be developed more fully and brought to the public again. Eventually a preferred alternative will be selected and identified in the final environmental document. The current schedule calls for completing a final EIS with a preferred alternative within the next three years.

What is the role of transit in handling travel needs in this corridor?
The study includes extensive computer modeling to determine how the existing roadway and proposed alternatives will handle the demand for travel in the corridor in the future. The traffic model is based on the "Locally Preferred Alternative" selected by the Transport 2020 study. This alternative assumes a commuter rail system in the Madison area, with express bus service to outlying communities such as Stoughton. Even with a high level of transit service in the region, the problems identified in the Needs Assessment will remain.

How will the alternatives handle the needs of bicyclists and pedestrians?
All the alternatives will consider bicycle and pedestrian facilities along and across the corridor. These will be developed in more detail when the alternatives selected for further study are developed more fully.

When will the public have opportunities to comment?
The plan is to hold two rounds of public information meetings, and a round of public hearings. There will also be meetings with business groups and neighborhoods throughout the process. Comments will be taken throughout the study until it is completed.

What about environmental impacts?
Environmental impacts will be an important part of the comparison of alternatives. Detailed analysis of impacts will be done when alternatives are selected for further study. Environmental impacts will affect the selection of a preferred alternative.

Who has to approve the preferred alternative that is selected for the Final EIS?
WisDOT and the Federal Highway Administration approve the preferred alternative and seek the concurrence of the federal resource agencies, such as the US Environmental Protection Agency. These approvals are sufficient for approval of the final EIS. Before a project is built in the Madison area using federal funds, the Madison Area Metropolitan Planning Organization must approve the project.

When would the selected alternative be built?
Funds have not yet been committed for a project. Depending upon the alternative selected, improvements may be staged to occur as traffic volumes increase.

Why is WisDOT going through all this planning work when funds have not been allocated?
The goal is to have a plan so that as lands develop and redevelop in the corridor, the possible changes to the roadway can be taken into consideration. The best solution may become too expensive to accomplish if it would require removing new buildings and businesses. It is best for all to have a long-term plan developed. Funds cannot be allocated until the environmental impacts of a project are assessed.

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