

SECTION 1
INTRODUCTION AND PROCESS

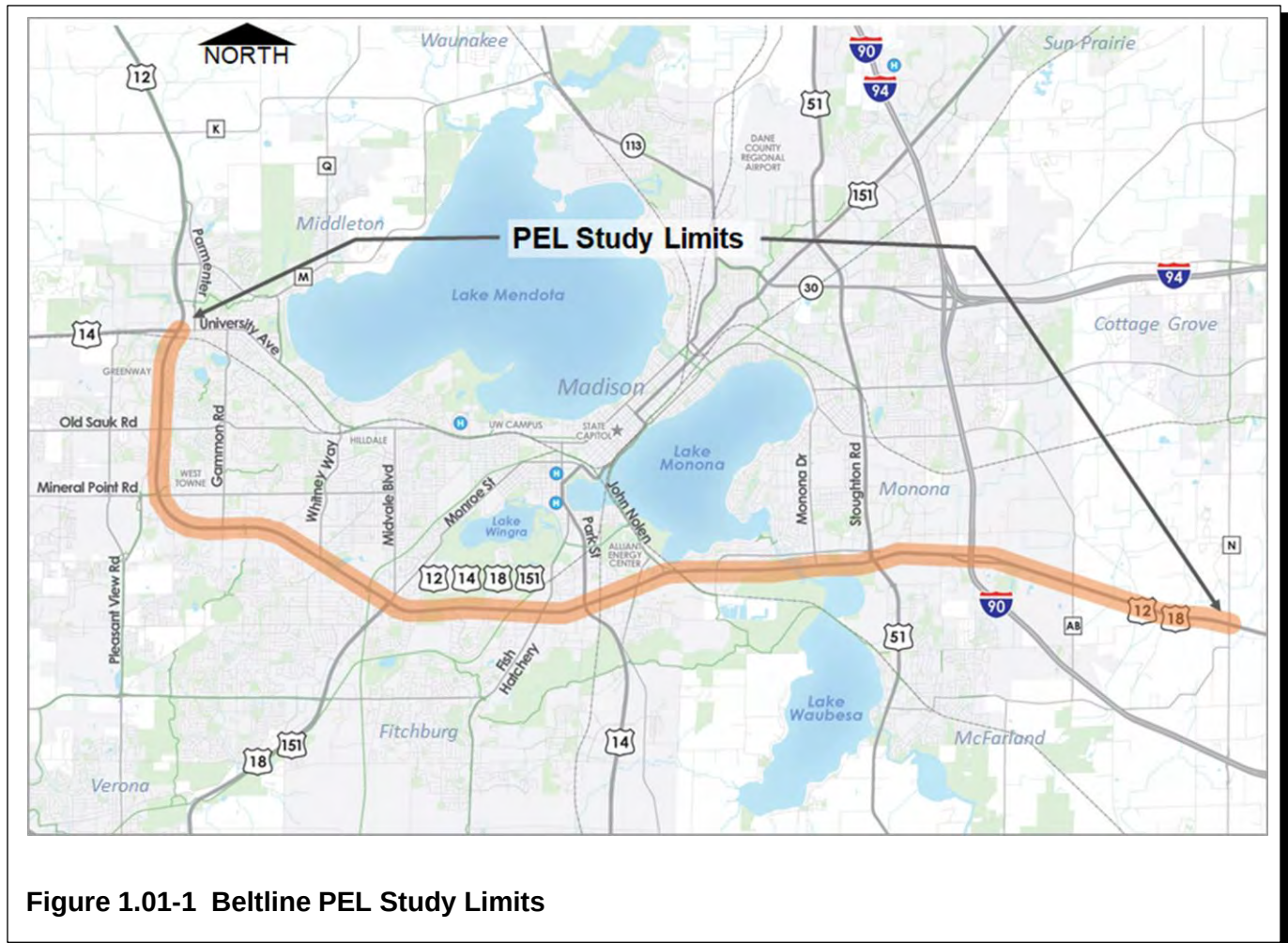
1.01 INTRODUCTION

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) conducted a Madison Beltline Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) Study, herein referred to as the Beltline PEL Study. The collaborative PEL process follows 23 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 450 to bring together local agency partners and other stakeholders to consider environmental, community, and economic goals early in the transportation planning process and build consensus on a range of multimodal improvements that could be implemented over the next 10 to 20 years following further study and design during subsequent National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) studies. This Beltline PEL Study was developed consistent with law, regulation, policy, and agency guidance applicable at the time the analysis for the study was conducted. Should any of the planning information in the Beltline PEL Study be used for future environmental review and permitting processes, environmental documentation will be prepared consistent with 42 United States Code (USC) 4321 et seq, 23 USC 139, 23 CFR 771, other applicable laws and regulations, executive orders, agency policy and guidance.

A. Study Corridor

The Beltline PEL Study corridor begins at the US 12/14 (University Avenue) interchange in the city of Middleton and extends approximately 20 miles to the US 12/18 and County N interchange in the town of Cottage Grove (see Figure 1.01-1). Four United States Highway routes (US 12, 14, 18, and 151) are entirely or partially routed on the Beltline. All four routes are concurrent between the Verona Road (US 18/151) and Park Street (US 14) interchanges. Within the corridor study limits, US 12 passes through the cities of Middleton, Madison, Fitchburg, Monona, and town of Cottage Grove. Figure 1.01-1 shows a map of the Beltline and vicinity. The WisDOT's Transportation Asset Management Plan, adopted April 2023, identifies US 12 as a Region 3R National Highway System (NHS) route west of Verona Road and east of Interstate (I)-39/90 and a Backbone Route from Verona Road to I-39/90¹. The Beltline corridor is also a WisDOT-designated long truck route and is part of the NHS as determined by FHWA.

¹<https://www.wisdotplans.gov/plan/tamp>. See Chapter 3 map, page 21, accessed on September 6, 2023.



The Beltline corridor is critically important for the local and regional economy in Dane County and the Madison metropolitan area. The unique geography of the area with numerous lakes, wetlands, and other natural resources impacts travel demand along the Beltline highway. As articulated in the Beltline PEL Study Problem Statement in Section 3 of this report, the Beltline PEL Study corridor was selected for study primarily because of:

1. Roadway safety concerns.
2. Increasing travel demand and congestion.
3. Limited or insufficient accommodations for alternative travel modes.

B. Report Purpose

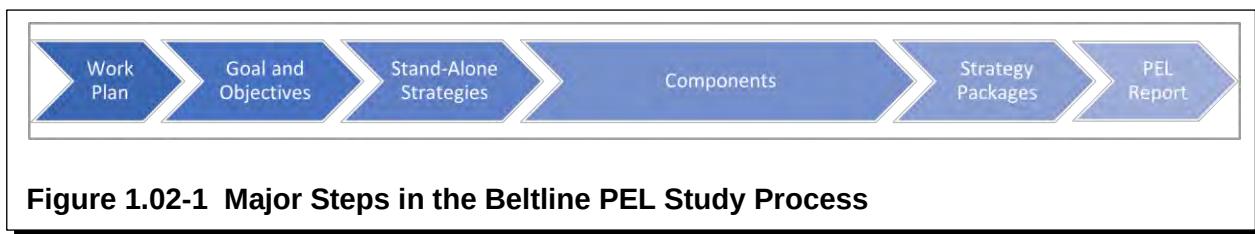
This Summary Report for the Beltline PEL Study (Beltline PEL Study Summary Report) identifies decisions and analyses that will be incorporated directly into or serve as a source of information for future studies or NEPA documents. The contents of this report may be used in the development of future project purpose and need; selection of general travel corridors and defining travel modes; the preliminary screening of alternatives and elimination of unreasonable alternatives; and the basic description of the environmental setting.

This report summarizes the results of the Beltline PEL Study process including the development of the Problem Statement, Goal, and Objectives; the evaluation of strategies; screening of strategies; and dismissal of strategies that are unreasonable. Other reports from the Beltline PEL Study, listed in Appendix A, provide additional information on the full process and results of the study.

1.02 STUDY PROCESS

A. Major Steps of the Beltline PEL Study

The Beltline PEL Study started in 2012 as a multiyear project. In early 2013, the study team finalized a work plan and then moved forward with the next steps in the Beltline PEL Study process (Figure 1.02-1).



The study process emphasized public outreach and agency coordination. The study team engaged numerous stakeholders including Native American Tribes, federal and state resource agency staff, local municipality officials, members of the public, and focus or special interest groups early in the Beltline PEL Study to develop the Beltline PEL Study Problem Statement, Goal, and Objectives. This engagement continued throughout the Beltline PEL Study. Section 2 summarizes coordination with the public, stakeholders, and agencies. Appendix A provides a list of reports that have been used for reference or created to document in more detail the process, interactions, and results and recommendations from the Beltline PEL Study.

B. Problem Statement, Goal, and Objectives

In 2013, the study team worked with the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) to develop the draft Study Problem Statement, Goal, and Objectives for the study. In the Beltline PEL Study process, the Problem Statement, Goal, and Objectives form the foundation for the purpose and need for future studies or NEPA documents. The TAC consisted of technical staff from agencies and local municipalities, and the PAC consisted of local elected officials and other municipal and stakeholder representatives. After the TAC and PAC review of the Draft Study Problem Statement, Goal, and Objectives, these items were circulated for comment to the public, local businesses, minority and low-income residents, and groups representing them, as well as state and federal agencies invited to participate in the Beltline PEL Study. Comments were addressed and the Problem Statement, Goal, and Objectives were refined. TAC and PAC participants, additional stakeholders, and participating agencies are identified in Section 2. Details of the Problem Statement, Goal, and Objectives are provided in Section 3 of this report.

C. Stand-Alone Strategies

The first step of the Strategy Package development process was to develop and test Stand-Alone Strategies. Because Beltline volumes are forecasted to increase significantly without any capacity expansion, the Beltline PEL Study examined Stand-Alone Strategies with high people-moving potential that, if constructed, might eliminate or reduce the need to complete additional Beltline mainline improvements to satisfy root Beltline PEL Study Objectives for improving safety and reducing traffic congestion.

D. Components

Following the evaluation and elimination of Stand-Alone Strategies, the study team investigated different improvements at specific locations along the Beltline that, when combined, could address the Beltline PEL Study Goal and Objectives. Components, as referred to in this report, are individual improvements that generally have the capability to address some but not all root Beltline PEL Study Objectives. The Components considered were developed through a collaborative process among the study team, the study's TAC and PAC, focus groups, expert panels, and other stakeholders.

E. Strategy Package Development Process

Because the Beltline PEL Study Objectives addressed multiple transportation modes and outcomes, multiple Components were assembled into Strategy Packages. The term Strategy Package refers to a potential long-term vision for the Beltline corridor. Taken as a whole, each package was intended to address the broad range of Study Objectives. The Strategy Packages developed in the Beltline PEL Study proposed different levels of improvement that ranged from a Strategy Package that keeps the Beltline as it is today with only essential improvements and maintenance to a Strategy Package that does everything needed to allow the Beltline to operate the best possible while offering the highest level of mobility and accessibility to all modes of travel.

The Strategy Package development process is summarized in Section 3 of this report.

F. Beltline PEL Study Summary Report

This report documents the Beltline PEL Study process, as well as the results and recommendations for next steps.

1.03 POTENTIAL FUTURE ADOPTION INTO NEPA DOCUMENT

As mentioned in Section 1.01, 23 CFR 450 provides many opportunities for Beltline PEL Study planning products to be used in future NEPA documents.

1. Portions or all of the Beltline PEL Study Problem Statement, Goal, and Objectives can form the basis for the purpose and need in a future NEPA document. The Beltline PEL Study Problem Statement, Goal, and Objectives were developed with extensive outreach to the community and agencies and well represent the transportation desires of these stakeholders.

2. Beltline PEL Study decisions regarding the general travel corridor or modes can be adopted within a future NEPA document. For example, the decision to dismiss Stand-Alone Strategies that do not meet the Beltline PEL Study Objectives could be carried forward into a NEPA document. A dismissed Stand-Alone Strategy could also be included as a Component in a Strategy Package that is carried forward into a document. This allows the NEPA document to focus on corridors and modal combinations that have the most potential to satisfy the project purpose and need. The Beltline PEL Study provides a preliminary screening of alternatives and eliminates unreasonable alternatives.
3. Other documents created under the Beltline PEL Study, such as the existing conditions report, can contribute to the description of the environmental setting (e.g., affected environment) in a future NEPA document.
4. The preliminary identification of potential environmental effects and potential mitigation measures can be identified and used as background for the environmental consequences of a future NEPA document.
5. Much of the analyses performed for the Beltline PEL Study in the evaluation of strategies can be adopted and used in further alternatives analysis during the NEPA phase. This includes travel demands; regional development and growth; local land use, growth management, and development; population and employment; natural and built environmental conditions; environmental resources and environmentally sensitive areas; and potential environmental effects, including the identification of resources of concern.

With the complicated transportation challenges in the Madison metropolitan area and the growing demands placed on the Beltline, the Beltline PEL Study process developed and reviewed solutions on a regional, modal, and corridor level. A wide range of alternatives were considered that provided a basis for future NEPA documentation.