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You're invited! Public information meetings

NEWS

Public information meetings scheduled

Please join the Zoo Interchange study team at either of two, open-house public information meetings: Wednesday, **May 21**, from 3 to 7 p.m. at the Tommy Thompson Youth Center in State Fair Park; or Thursday, **May 29** from 5 to 8 p.m. at Wauwatosa West High School. You will view study information and may submit input on initial corridor alternatives. See the back panel of this newsletter for more information.

WisDOT studies Zoo Interchange

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) is undertaking an environmental and engineering analysis of the Zoo Interchange, which connects I-94, I-894 and US 45 near the Milwaukee County Zoo.

The interchange opened in 1963 and is the busiest interchange in Wisconsin. It moves commuters, retail customers, health-care patients and freight to major commercial areas, residences, businesses, recreational and institutional sites.

WisDOT is committed to an open study process that offers many opportunities for the public to provide input and ask questions.

Zoo

Interchange study limits ▶

East – I-94 at 76th Street; **west** – I-94 at 116th Street; **south** – I-894/US 45 at the Union Pacific railroad (south of Greenfield Avenue); **north** – US 45 at Center Street.



The study process

The Zoo Interchange team is conducting environmental and engineering work now through the end of 2009. This phase of the study includes developing alternatives to improve the corridor, evaluating impacts of those alternatives, preparing a document that addresses environmental concerns, and selecting a preferred alternative.

Two design workshops were held at the Milwaukee County Research Park and the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center in December 2007 and January 2008. More than 320 people attended two general public workshops that were also held in January. WisDOT uses attendees' written comments and ideas discussed at the workshops to help develop initial improvement alternatives. The team has also met with elected officials, municipal representatives, and other organizations and businesses in the corridor. WisDOT is also communicating with area utilities companies and railroads.

The study team is now defining the purpose and need for the study and developing alternatives to improve the corridor. These activities include ongoing data gathering and assessments of potential impacts.

A conversation about the Zoo Interchange

You're almost done with the Marquette Interchange and now you're going to reconstruct the Zoo Interchange? Why?

Most of the freeway system in Southeastern Wisconsin was built over a 10-year period (in the late 1950s through the late 1960s). It makes sense that the need to rebuild various segments would happen over a parallel 10-year time frame as traffic, weather and other factors age the pavement and structures. The interchange and each of its four freeway legs carry large traffic volumes, have higher than average crash statistics, and most have operational issues that must be addressed.

Will construction begin right away?

No. We need a couple years to develop a range of improvement alternatives, evaluate potential impacts of each alternative, and then work with the public on a preferred interchange design that fits the communities' needs. Construction likely won't start until 2012 and depending on the selected final design, will last about five years.



But the Zoo Interchange doesn't seem like it's in bad shape. Is it?

The interchange is well maintained, but soon the ability to maintain it in a cost-efficient manner will no longer be possible. We want to avoid having to do costly, short-term, patchwork types of repairs that require disruptions in traffic. All the structures and pavement must eventually be replaced anyway, so we need to determine whether to rebuild the interchange as it is now or make improvements for the future. The need for replacement is compounded by the interchange's age and outdated design elements, including left-side ramps, narrow shoulders, short weaving sections and congestion.

Is there enough traffic at the Zoo Interchange to justify reconstruction?

Yes. The Zoo Interchange is the busiest interchange in the state of Wisconsin. The Zoo Interchange carries an average of 345,900 vehicles every weekday, according to 2004 data. This is three times the amount of traffic it was designed to handle when it opened to traffic in 1963. The heaviest traffic is on US 45, the north leg, which handles an average of 178,200 vehicles each weekday. The most heavily used ramp is westbound I-94 to northbound US 45, which carries about 30,500 vehicles each weekday.

Is the Zoo Interchange busier than the Marquette Interchange?

Yes. All four legs of the Zoo Interchange are key links within the integrated freeway system in southeastern Wisconsin and are very heavily used.

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When you say "Zoo Interchange," does that mean just the ramps in the middle, or will the study include freeway sections to the north, south, east or west?

The boundaries of the study are Center Street to the north (between the North Avenue and Burleigh Street interchanges); the 76th Street bridge to the east; the bridge over the Union Pacific railroad tracks between the Lincoln Avenue and Greenfield Avenue interchanges to the south; and the bridges over 116th Street (west of the WIS 100 interchange) to the west. The study will also include interchanges at Greenfield Avenue, Bluemound Road, Wisconsin Avenue, Watertown Plank Road, WIS 100, North Avenue and 84th Street.

How will construction be funded?

WisDOT projects are funded through the biennial state budget process. Interstate improvements are funded by state and federal governments, and bond funds are often used. As with other state projects, WisDOT, Gov. Jim Doyle, the Wisconsin Legislature and the state's congressional delegation will work together to obtain funds.

Will you be able to relieve the backups on southbound US 45 that happen in the morning and afternoon?

Reducing backups on US 45 is one of our primary objectives. We'll look at various design options to make each leg of the Zoo Interchange work more efficiently. We'll also develop alternatives for the local roads that intersect with the Zoo corridor, such as Bluemound Road, Wisconsin Avenue, Watertown Plank Road and North Avenue.

Are you doing this study because of all the growth in Wauwatosa?

The main reasons are the age of the interchange, existing congestion, and safety issues. However, the economic vitality of the region is dependent on sound public infrastructure. The Zoo Interchange is part of a transportation system that includes local roads, county highways, freeways and transit systems. Each part of the system needs to work efficiently and collaboratively for the entire system to support the planned growth in our region.

Are there many crashes in the area?

From 2001 through 2005, there were 3,637 crashes in the Zoo Interchange, including crashes on ramps and at connecting streets. Six crashes



resulted in fatalities, while 1,092 crashes resulted in injuries. This is two to three times the statewide average for interchanges, equates to two accidents per day during that five-year period. Studies and reconstruction projects around the nation prove that implementing some of the reconstruction and modernization improvements being considered by this study can reduce crashes and the resulting delays.

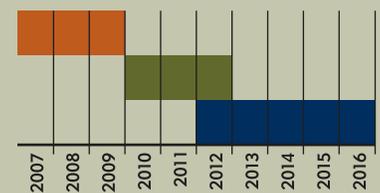
Aside from engineering designs, what else is involved in the study phase?

As we study the existing interchange and its operational, physical and safety characteristics, we will prepare a comprehensive environmental document. This document will examine potential impacts to the surrounding area, such as noise and air-quality issues, impacts to wetlands and many other environmental factors. We'll also study traffic data, land use and future development issues, and other economic and social factors that are and will be impacted by Zoo Interchange well into the future.

What's next?

WisDOT will conduct public information meetings on May 21 and 29, 2008, when it will share the progress on the environmental and engineering analysis. The time line below shows the schedule for the environmental and engineering analysis as well as the anticipated schedule for final design and construction.

Study time line



2007-09 – conduct environmental and engineering analysis

2010-12 – conduct final design; begin addressing real estate/utility issues

2012-16 – reconstruct the interchange

FROM 2001 THROUGH 2005, THERE WERE 3,637 CRASHES IN THE ZOO INTERCHANGE. THIS IS TWO TO THREE TIMES THE STATEWIDE AVERAGE FOR INTERCHANGES AND EQUATES TO TWO ACCIDENTS PER DAY.



Jim Liptack
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SE Transportation Region
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Public Information Meetings

YOU'RE INVITED

- Review initial corridor reconstruction alternatives.
- Ask the Zoo Interchange study team questions.
- Submit your comments about the corridor study.

Study information:

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MAY 21 from 3 to 7 p.m.

State Fair Park
Tommy Thompson Youth Center
Gate #5
640 S 84th St., West Allis
MCTS Route 67

MAY 29 from 5 to 8 p.m.

Wauwatosa West High School
Cafeteria
11400 W. Center St., Wauwatosa
MCTS Route 85



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