



South Alpine Road Improvement: Phase I Study

Linden Road to Charles Street
City of Rockford
Winnebago County, IL

Stakeholder Involvement Plan

September 2025

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1 *Introduction*

1.1 Project Background

The City of Rockford is the lead agency (Table 1) for the Phase I Preliminary Engineering Study to address the need for transportation related improvements to South Alpine Road, extending for approximately 2.5 miles in length from Linden Road on the south to the jurisdiction limits just north of Charles Street (Project Corridor). However, the study limits for bicycle and pedestrian accommodations will extend to the southwest and southeast corners of the Newburg/Broadway intersection.

An unmarked state route, South Alpine Road is within the municipal limits of the City of Rockford, in Winnebago County. South Alpine Road is a heavily traveled roadway with an average daily traffic count of approximately 28,000 vehicles and with a history of pedestrian fatalities occurring along the corridor. This section of roadway is currently under IDOT jurisdiction, and the Phase I study is being funded by IDOT.

The study area includes residential (single family and multi-unit homes), commercial, and industrial land uses, as well as major employers, along the route. There are also places of worship, community organizations, as well as the Starkey/Union Cemetery on the southeast corner of the Harrison Avenue intersection.

The South Alpine corridor is considered one of the city's roads in the greatest need for improvements and repair. Rockford officials have publicly emphasized the importance of its repair for the community and region. In 2023, Governor J.B. Pritzker visited Rockford to highlight the corridor as a priority for improving the safety, quality of life, and economic opportunity of residents, businesses, commuters and other stakeholders.

Prior to the launch of the project, the Illinois Department of Transportation invested \$1.5 million to resurface just under a mile of the roadway from Harrison Avenue to Charles Street. Before that, improvements included a traffic signal replacement at the intersection of Cleveland Avenue and Florida Drive in 2021 and resurfacing from Harrison Avenue to Sandy Hollow Road in 2014.

The South Alpine Road Improvement project will advance through a partnership between the City of Rockford and the Illinois Department of Transportation. Under the partnership, the city will serve as the lead agency for the project. Phase I is funded through the State of Illinois with the expectation that federal funding will be pursued for the following engineering and construction phases. At the conclusion of the project, the city will accept a jurisdictional transfer of South Alpine Road from the state. However, the bridges along this segment are not included in the jurisdictional transfer.

The project includes Phase I Preliminary Engineering Studies which will examine various alternatives for improvements to roadway section, signage and signal modifications with consideration of transit access, and examine alternatives to incorporate pedestrian and bicycle facilities such as new sidewalk and shared use path. The various alternatives will be evaluated to identify those alternatives that best support the project goals; account for project costs and constructability; and avoid, minimize or mitigate environmental impacts. These alternatives will be presented to project stakeholders and the public to gain input as part of the ultimate determination of the Preferred Alternative. Public involvement will be conducted throughout the process and will follow requirements stated in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Figure 1-1 Location Map

[corridor map in development]

1.2 Context Sensitive Solutions

This project is being developed using elements of Context Sensitive Solutions, or CSS, as outlined in the Illinois Department of Transportation CSS Policy and Procedural Memorandum 48-06.

The process is defined as follows:

“CSS is an interdisciplinary approach that seeks effective, multi-modal transportation solutions by working with stakeholders to develop, build, and maintain cost-effective transportation facilities that fit into and reflect the project’s surroundings - its “context.” Through early, frequent, and meaningful communication with stakeholders, and a flexible and creative approach to design, the resulting projects should improve safety and mobility for the traveling Stakeholder, while seeking to preserve and enhance the scenic, economic, historic, and natural qualities of the settings through which they pass.”

Elements of the CSS approach will provide stakeholders with the tools and information they require to effectively participate in the study process including providing an understanding of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, transportation planning guidelines, design guidelines, and the relationship between transportation issues (needs) and project alternatives. In other words, using the CSS process should provide all project stakeholders a mechanism to share comments or concerns about transportation objectives and project alternatives, as well as improve the ability of the project team to understand and address concerns raised. This integrated approach to problem solving and decision-making will help build community collaboration and promote involvement through the study process.

Stakeholder involvement is critical to project success and the process strives to achieve the following:

- Understand stakeholders’ key issues and concerns.
- Address all modes of transportation.
- Set a project schedule.
- Apply flexibility in design to address stakeholders’ concerns whenever possible.

1.3 NEPA Study Process

The South Alpine Road Improvement Project will follow the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and is expected to be processed as a Categorical Exclusion. Services will include preparation of a Project Development Report for State approval. Following NEPA will allow the study team to balance the need for safe and efficient transportation improvements with any potential impacts to the human and natural environment.

The study team will consider a variety of factors that may have an impact on the environment and submit the final findings to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and to the public for review.

Some of the environmental aspects included in the study will be: socio-economic, cultural resources, natural resources, air quality, noise, water quality, wetlands, floodplain, special wastes and indirect/cumulative impacts.

1.4 Environmental Justice

Project outreach will seek to overcome linguistic, cultural, institutional, geographic, and other barriers to ensure meaningful outreach to underrepresented groups/audiences. The project team is aware of the diverse constituencies within the study and will seek complete representation of the community as a whole, within the Corridor Advisory Group (CAG), Public Information Meetings, and other project outreach activities. This plan also recognizes that community participation must occur as early as possible if it is to be meaningful.

2 *Goals and Objectives*

The purpose of this plan is to provide a guide for implementing stakeholder and public involvement for the South Alpine Road Study. This Stakeholder Involvement Plan (SIP) will be used as a blueprint for defining methods and tools to educate and engage the public in the decision-making process for this project. The SIP has been designed to ensure that stakeholders are provided several opportunities to be informed and engaged as the project progresses.

2.1 Stakeholder Involvement Plan Goals and Objectives

The goal of the SIP is to actively seek the participation of communities, agencies, individual interest groups, and the public throughout the project development process. The SIP provides the framework for achieving collaboration and communicating the decision-making process between the stakeholders, agencies, and governmental officials to identify transportation solutions for the project.

The SIP:

- Identifies stakeholders.
- Establishes the timing and type of involvement activities for all public engagement.
- Establishes stakeholder requirements for providing timely input to the project development process.

2.2 Stakeholder Identification Procedures

The public involvement program will be conducted in accordance with the City of Rockford and Illinois Department of Transportation's guidance and NEPA requirements that lead to outcomes that are in harmony with the community and preserve the environment. Those outcomes are arrived at through the exploration and gathering of input by a full range of stakeholders. A stakeholder is anyone who is interested in or could be affected by the project and has a stake in its outcome. Stakeholders for this project may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Elected and appointed local, regional, state and federal officials.
- Local, regional, state and federal environmental, economic, historic, cultural and transportation agencies.

- The corridor business community, professional associations, developers, small businesses and large corporations.
- Corridor landowners & neighborhood groups.
- Local, regional, and state environmental, community and civic organizations.
- Local & Regional print, electronic and broadcast media.
- Schools, EMS, police, etc.

The identification of stakeholders will be completed through a combination of desktop searches and input from local community leaders, municipal and county staff, businesses, and agencies. All individuals and organizations expressing interest in the project will be added to the project mailing/email list and will be able to participate in the process through various public outreach opportunities. These opportunities include, but are not limited to, the project website, one-on-one/small group meetings, public information meetings/hearing, newsletters, and press releases. The project mailing/email list will be updated and maintained throughout the duration of the project and the public may sign up for updates via the project website.

2.3 Stakeholder Involvement Ground Rules

The public outreach efforts associated with this study will be conducted based on a set of ground rules that forms the basis for the respectful interaction of all parties involved in this process. These ground rules will be established initially below, but must be agreed upon by the stakeholders and, therefore, may be modified based on stakeholder input. These rules include the following:

- Input on the project from all participants is valued and duly considered in order to yield the best solution to problems identified in the process. The list of stakeholders is subject to revisions/additions at any time as events warrant.
- All participants must keep an open mind and participate openly, honestly, and respectfully.
- All participants should work collaboratively and cooperatively to seek a solution.
- All participants in the process shall treat each other with respect and dignity.
- The project must progress at a reasonable pace, based on the project schedule.

Final project decisions will be made by the City of Rockford in consultation with the Illinois Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration.

3 *Project Study*

3.1 Project Study Team

The City of Rockford is the lead agency for this project and will make final project decisions in consultation with the Illinois Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration. Alfred Benesch & Company (Benesch) is the lead project consultant and oversees a team of sub-consultants. The City of Rockford will oversee the project development process. Following the federal project development process (NEPA) allows the project to be eligible for possible federal funding in the future.

3.2 Implementation

Public involvement in the planning process begins as soon as the study starts and continues throughout the project. This document serves as a guide for public involvement in the Phase I study but includes strategies that can be used through all project phases. Implementation of this plan requires the commitment and efforts of all involved parties. As an implementation guide, this plan links specific strategies to the study schedule and identifies the audience each strategy is intended to reach. Implementation of this plan requires the commitment and efforts of all study participants and includes actions, responsibilities, and timing. The project team will be responsible for the overall development, implementation and coordination of the SIP.

3.3 Public Involvement

Any member of the public that shows interest in the project may sign up for the mailing list, ensuring they will receive newsletters, meeting invitations, and project updates. The project study team will also be available to meet with organizations on a one-on-one basis throughout the project, if deemed necessary. In addition, the public will be informed about the Department website where they can access information and submit comments.

4 *Tentative Schedule of Public Involvement*

This section describes how the public information activities coordinate with the general project development process, tentative schedule, and project activities.

4.1 Step One: Initiate Project, Identify Stakeholders, Develop SIP, Analyze Existing Conditions

During this stage the project is introduced to the agencies, key stakeholders and the public. Existing data is gathered, reviewed and analyzed and presented to key stakeholders to assist in developing the purpose and need. Key activities include the following:

- Existing Data Analysis.
- Finalize the SIP.
- Build and activate a project website.
- Publicly launch the project.
- Distribute initiation letters.
- Organize and hold one-on-one and small group meetings.
- Create, organize and host an initial meeting of a Corridor Advisory Group (CAG) of representative interests.
- Develop the project Purpose and Need Statement.

4.2 Step Two: Development, and Screening of Alternatives

This stage of the project consists of development and screening of alternatives. The goal of this step is to develop a full and reasonable range of alternatives that would meet the purpose and need of the project. A concept level comparative evaluation of alternatives will be performed to narrow the full range of alternatives to the finalist alternatives for more detailed development and evaluation. Activities in this stage include the following:

- Identify alternative development procedures, planning and design guidelines, and alternative evaluation procedures.
- Develop initial alternatives.
- Determine the alternatives to be carried forward for further evaluation.
- Hold CAG #2.
- Organize and hold Public Information Meeting #1

4.3 Step Three: Preferred Alternative Evaluation and Development, Public Comment

Based on the detailed evaluation of the proposed designs and the results of the Public Information Meeting, a preferred Alternative will be selected for public review. Activities in this stage include:

- Conduct alternative evaluation workshop with City
- Identify the recommended preferred Alternative.
- Initiate the Preliminary Design Plans and Drainage Study
- Hold CAG# 3 to discuss the results from the alternative analysis and the preferred Alternative.

- Hold Public Information Meeting #2 to present the alternatives analysis results and the preferred Alternative.

4.4 Step Four: Finalization of the Preliminary Engineering Study

- Finalize the draft Project Development Report and associated documents and submit to IDOT for review.
- Finalize the Preliminary Design Plans and Drainage Study
- Hold a Public Hearing to present the preliminary design to the public to receive any additional comments.
- Revise the Project Development Report and associated documents to include Public Hearing details and any revisions from comments.
- Submit the final Project Development Report to IDOT for Design Approval.

Phase I concludes.

Figure 4-1 Timeline [Project timeline in development]

5 *Public and Stakeholder Involvement Plan Activities*

The following activities are proposed as the public involvement plan for the Alpine Road Study. Unless noted, the Consultant Team is the responsible party for activities and coordination. All activities will be approved by the City of Rockford before proceeding.

5.1 Project Study Group

The Project Study Group (PSG) delivers project leadership and decision-making at key milestones. The PSG for this project is made up of the City of Rockford, IDOT, its engineering consultant and team, and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The consultant team assisting the City of Rockford and IDOT with this study is led by Benesch, along with subconsultants Willett Hoffman, Huff & Huff, GeoServices, Mathewson Right of Way Company, Street Simplified and Images, Inc.

5.2 Stakeholder Identification

As mentioned in Section 2, stakeholders are identified as all residents and property owners near the study area, and those interested parties who can directly affect the outcome of a planning process. In addition to the stakeholders, key groups of stakeholders identified for this study include those with decision making capabilities related to implementing transportation investments that can speak for the general public and can influence the broader spectrum of opinion. These representatives, divided into two groups, include:

- Local, regional, state and federal elected and appointed officials and agency representatives with jurisdiction over the transportation planning process and affected environmental, historic, cultural and economic resources; and
- Corridor residents, businesses and property owners, professional associations and local, regional and potentially statewide community, civic and environmental organizations.

Media publication and broadcast groups, critical to informing the public and affecting public opinion, are addressed later in this section.

5.3 One-on-One Meetings

The project team will meet with key stakeholders to provide the opportunity to discuss issues, concerns, potential solutions and other potential challenges. The meetings will allow for more specialized discussions and input and provide a better understanding of the project goals and objectives. Potential meetings include impacted agencies, businesses, residents, and special interests. Project handouts or other appropriate meeting materials will be prepared for distribution at these meetings.

5.4 Agency Coordination

To ensure that this project meets minimum requirements for State and Federal funding, a Project Development Report must be prepared, which requires compliance with many local, state and federal rules, regulations and laws. In order to ensure compliance, coordination will be carried out with resource agencies periodically throughout the Phase I study. Initially, a general meeting will be held with local, state and federal resource agencies as part of the process. As the project progresses, meetings may be held with individual resource agencies to discuss environmental findings and compliance with local, state, and federal requirements. These agencies serve as final approval authority and will provide a review of major milestone points and compliance with all state and federal project development procedures and guidelines.

5.5 Corridor Advisory Group Meetings

To assist in the study and evaluation of proposed improvements, a Corridor Advisory Group (CAG) will be established. The purpose of the CAG is to primarily provide input on the project's evaluation criteria, environmental impacts, and proposed alternatives. The CAG will consist of community leaders representing various interests in the city and region, including:

- Elected officials and community leaders representing the City of Rockford area
- Municipal staff, as well as representatives from public safety, hospitals, schools, major businesses, chambers of commerce, special interest groups, and community organizations located in proximity, or facing impacts from improvements to, the project corridor.
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and other transportation/engineering officials, land use/transportation planning agencies, and environmental agencies, and;

The CAG members will be identified and will be leaders of organizations, agencies, business groups, etc. that can speak on behalf of their organization. Members of the CAG may have technical expertise in transportation and/or planning and will represent the views of their organizations, agencies, and businesses within the study area.

The CAG will meet up to three (3) times, throughout the project. The meetings will be designed to encourage timely and meaningful opportunities for input and to encourage information sharing and collaboration between the City of Rockford and the Illinois Department of Transportation and the CAG. In addition, individual meetings with CAG members to address specific concerns will be coordinated as needed.

5.6 Public Information Meetings

Public involvement for the Phase I Study will be an ongoing process from project initiation through completion. Various meetings will be held throughout the project development process to provide outreach opportunities to all.

The Phase I Study also includes opportunities for broader public involvement in the form of public information meetings and a public hearing. These large-scale meetings will foster public awareness of project developments and Alternatives that are being evaluated. These meetings also provide a forum for general input, including concerns and comments regarding project Alternatives. Two public information meetings and one public hearing will be held to coincide with major milestones during the project development process. Please note that the timeframes shown below are tentative and subject to change.

- The first Public Information Meeting serves as a project kickoff providing information regarding the study process, goals and objectives, data collection, existing conditions, criteria development for evaluating Alternatives, present concepts for Alternative development and solicit input from the public.
- The second Public Information Meeting serves to present the alternatives analysis results and the preferred Alternatives and solicit public input.
- A Public Hearing will be held. The Environmental documents and reports and the preliminary design plans will be presented to the public for review and to provide formal testimony.

Meetings will utilize various informational techniques such as project boards, handouts, and multimedia presentations summarizing the project work and findings to date. The meetings will be advertised by postcard and e-blast invitations to identified stakeholders, media briefings, press releases, public notices placed in area newspapers, on the project website and on third-party websites. Stakeholders will have the opportunity to provide written comments during the entire study process, however those that are submitted during the public information meeting/hearing comment period will be part of that meeting/hearing record.

5.7 Other Mechanisms for Public Involvement

In addition to the meeting opportunities described in the preceding section, there will be several other methods for the public to obtain information about the project. These methods (noted below) will provide information and opportunity for feedback regarding upcoming meeting events, project schedule, and general project status updates within the study area.

5.7.1 Mailing List

To support public information meeting invitations and other direct public contact, a mailing list will be developed and updated. Phone numbers and e-mail addresses will be added to the list, as they become available.

The mailing list will include recipients such as landowners; federal, state, county and local officials; special interest groups; resource agencies; and businesses. The mailing list will be developed using existing resources (names and addresses of officials from other recent projects in the area), as well as other identified stakeholders. The mailing list includes government and business leaders and addresses in the immediate area. This list will be updated throughout the project by various means of communication, such as sign-in sheets.

5.7.2 Project Website

A website for the project will be developed and updated as needed to provide a centralized source of information, available to anyone with access to the internet, at any time while maintaining a history of the project. The public site will contain general project information, including the project schedule, organization, photos, meeting notifications and materials, FAQs, etc. The information published will be mobile friendly.

The site will be used as a tool for communicating major project milestones and will be updated periodically. The website address is www.ReImagineAlpineRoad.org.

5.7.3 Community Events

In consultation with the City of Rockford, the project team will identify community events and secure a presence at appropriate venues to distribute project information, receive feedback and raise public awareness of, and participation in, the initiative.

5.7.4 Media Outreach

An effective method of informing the public about a project and its results is through broadcast, online, and print media. Several media outreach methods will be employed to provide accurate and frequent coverage of the study, including media briefings, press releases, fact sheets, and other materials. The project will take a proactive approach to working with the media. Specifically, a comprehensive plan will be created to identify milestones at which it would be appropriate to update media, and in turn the public, on the initiative.

5.7.5 Social Media

Social media channels and content, including graphics, videos, and other informational materials, will be created to raise awareness of the project and public involvement opportunities, and receive public feedback. The content will be updated on project Facebook, Instagram and YouTube pages as appropriate, with the City of Rockford sharing content to reach additional audiences and gain followers. Social media handles will be identified.

5.7.6 Public Response and Communication

Throughout this study, direct public comments will come in the form of e-mail (via the project website), standard mail, phone calls, and comment forms from meetings. Indirect public comment will come through the media, non-agency sponsored meetings and third-party websites. It is important to address public comments so that the commenter understands that their concerns and opinions are being recognized. It is also important to monitor indirect public comments and to be able to respond to potentially problematic issues such as misinformation.

Monitoring other meeting activity, third party websites and media reports will continue throughout the study. Reports on the activity will be detailed and documented as they occur.

6 *Plan Availability, Monitoring and Updates*

The SIP is a dynamic document that will be available to stakeholders and updated as appropriate throughout the duration of the project. This section describes SIP stakeholder review opportunities and plan update procedures.

6.1 Availability of the Stakeholder Involvement Plan

The City of Rockford will make the SIP available to stakeholders for review on the project website. As the project proceeds forward, the City of Rockford will update the SIP on a regular basis to reflect appropriate changes or additions. The City of Rockford will advise stakeholders of future SIP updates and post updates on the project website.

6.2 Modification of the Stakeholder Involvement Plan

The plan will be reviewed on a regular basis for continued effectiveness and updated as appropriate. Plan administration includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Maintaining a current list of project stakeholders.
- Maintaining a detailed public involvement record (log) that includes records of all stakeholder contacts, meetings, and comments.
- Ensuring two-way communication and timely responses to stakeholders through formal and informal channels.

Plan updates will be tracked in Table 2 in Appendix A.

Appendix A

Tables

Table 1

Lead Agencies

Agency Name	Role
City of Rockford	Lead Agency
Illinois Department of Transportation	Consulting Agency
Federal Highway Administration	Consulting Agency

Table 2

Stakeholder Involvement Plan (SIP) Revision History

Version	Date	Document Name
I	November 2024	Stakeholder Involvement Plan DRAFT

Appendix B

Glossary and Acronyms

Alternative

An alternative includes various improvements designed to address transportation deficiencies in the project area.

Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS)

An interdisciplinary approach that seeks effective, multimodal transportation solutions by working with stakeholders to develop, build and maintain cost-effective transportation facilities which fit into and reflect the project's scenic, economic, historic, and natural surroundings.

Environmental Justice (EJ)

The fair treatment of all people in the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

Division of the U.S. Department of Transportation that funds highway planning and programs.

Illinois Department of Transportation (Department)

The Illinois Department of Transportation has responsibility for planning, construction and maintenance of Illinois' extensive transportation network. This network encompasses highways, bridges, airports, public transit, and rail freight and rail passenger systems.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

NEPA guides federally funded projects and projects that require a federal permit to lessen potential damages to the environment. The NEPA process requires federal agencies to integrate environmental values into their decision-making process. Environmental factors such as air quality, wildlife, vegetation, water quality, wetlands, geology, neighborhoods, park/recreation areas, utilities, visual quality, and cultural resources will be assessed. NEPA encourages early and frequent coordination with the public and resource agencies throughout the project development process. Public comments that are received during the alternative analysis phase are considered in the draft environmental document. Following NEPA guidelines, a document called an Environmental Assessment will be prepared.

Purpose and Need

The Purpose and Need incorporates detailed technical analysis and public involvement findings to date to define the purpose of the project and the need for the improvements

Stakeholder Involvement Plan (SIP)

The SIP is a blueprint for defining methods and tools to educate and engage all stakeholders in the decision-making process for a project. The SIP provides the framework for achieving consensus and communicating the decision-making process between the general public, public agencies, and governmental officials to identify transportation solutions for the project.
