

The Scott City

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MODOT - SOUTHEAST DISTRICT

Scott City Project Moves Forward

MoDOT is finalizing a Purpose & Need Statement as the first step in improvements to I-55 near Scott City. The document is required by the federal government and analyzes traffic data, future growth and how the transportation system should operate.

“We had no current data on the average daily traffic volumes at the interchanges within the project limits,” says Project Manager Eric Krapf. “So, first we had to complete those counts.”

Krapf says that information was then analyzed, including traffic volumes, speed and roadway characteristics such as width, spacing, etc.

“This information makes up the bulk of the Purpose & Need Statement,” says Krapf. “The document explains what’s necessary and what the scope of the project hopes to

accomplish.”

Krapf says the first draft has been completed, sent to MoDOT’s Central Office for review and is currently undergoing minor revision before being sent to the Federal Highway Administration. Krapf hopes FHWA’s review can be completed by the end of summer. But that doesn’t mean construction will immediately begin.

“This is the first step. Currently, FHWA has requested MoDOT develop an environmental assessment for the project, and that term along with others you’ll be hearing frequently are explained inside the newsletter. Basically what’s important to people about that is that it takes on average about 18 months to complete an EA, and no more than 35 percent of the project can be designed before this document is complete.”

Krapf says it’s easy to get frustrated with what seems like a long period of time to wait for improvements that are needed now, but he cautions us all to be patient.

“I’m as ready as anyone to help the drivers in Scott City with some congestion relief,” says Krapf. “But these are important improvements and we want them to accomplish what they are supposed to. Taking the time to analyze the information will help us find the best solution.”

Krapf also cautions that a longer time-frame doesn’t mean drivers should lose hope.

“I know how it feels to people when you hear of improvements for years, but don’t see work start. The Ramsey Creek project will happen, and while the work isn’t happening onsite right now, there are a lot of things going on to get improvements in the works as quickly as possible.”

What You Can Expect To See This Summer

Just because it may be a while before we see construction doesn’t mean you won’t see some progress this summer. There are a few big milestones you can expect to see along the corridor in the coming months.

First up, you’ve likely already seen MoDOT’s survey crews out and about gathering data in Scott City. If not, they’ll be working there quite a bit this summer.

“People get excited and anxious when they see our survey crews and our survey flags,” said Krapf. “We want everyone to know that just because they see our survey crews in their



neighborhood does not mean that is where a road is going or just because survey flags are on a property doesn’t mean that property is planned for purchase.”

The survey crews must gather data about all buildings, items and conditions in an area so designers know specifically what’s in a location. We’ll use all this information when developing different alternates for the project’s route.

Once FHWA signs off on the Purpose & Need Statement, Krapf says MoDOT will be going to the public to start getting their ideas on alternates for the Ramsey Creek project.

NEPA:

What Is It & What Does It Mean For I-55?

The study MoDOT is conducting to look at connectivity and capacity on I-55 from Fruitland to Scott City is required to follow the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Here's a brief overview of what NEPA is and terms you'll hear used during the course of the location study.

National Environmental Policy Act is a federal law requiring transportation agencies to look at the impacts projects have on the environment to prevent or eliminate damage. Environment in this case includes standards such as wetlands, streams and endangered species but also includes human factors such as people and neighborhoods.

Three Analysis Levels

- Categorical Exclusion (CE)
- Environmental Assessment (EA)
- Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

1. At the first level, an undertaking may be **categorically excluded (CE)** from a detailed environmental analysis if it meets certain criteria that determines the work has minimal impact. MoDOT is currently working on an environmental assessment, the second level of analysis, for improvements to I-55.

However, the project team is investigating the option of breaking the Ramsey Creek project out of the I-55 Environmental Assessment and seeking a categorical exclusion. The idea is that while the Ramsey project will benefit the I-55 corridor's connection and capacity issues, the project won't have any impact on other projects that may result from the EA. This would significantly accelerate the timeframe for the Ramsey project since it could take up to 18 months to complete the EA. FHWA will make the determination if there is enough data to support that the Ramsey Creek project can receive a CE.

2. At the second level of analysis, a written **environmental assessment (EA)** is prepared when it is unclear if the work would have a significant environmental impact. This is what FHWA has determined MoDOT should prepare as part of the study of a northern and southern outer road loop at Scott City. Generally, an EA includes brief discussions of the need for the proposal; alternatives; the environmental impacts of the proposed action and alternatives; and a listing of agencies and persons consulted. If this analysis results in no significant impacts to the environment, Mo-

DOT issues a finding of no significant impact. If the EA determines that the environmental consequences of a project may be significant, an EIS is prepared.

3 An **Environmental impact statement (EIS)** is a more detailed evalua-



tion of the proposed action and alternatives. The public, other federal agencies and outside parties may provide input into the preparation of an EIS and then comment on the draft EIS when it is completed. An EIS should include discussions of the purpose of and need for the action, alternatives, the affected environ-

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Purpose & Need Findings

Once the Federal Highway Administration approves MoDOT's Purpose & Need Statement, it will be released for public viewing. Project Manager Eric Krapf says the findings weren't that surprising.

"We evaluate our roadways based on level of service. And, that's rated from A to F. An A rating would be a road where you almost never meet another car much less have to slow down for traffic. An F is basically gridlock. When we look at level of service on a rural interstate such as I-55, we strive for a level of service C, which means most of the time traffic

moves smoothly," he says.

The Purpose & Need Statement analyzes traffic data and factors in growth over the next 20 years to determine how I-55 between Fruitland and Scott City will continue to perform.

"Our analysis shows that for the most part, I-55 will continue to perform at an acceptable level. There are a few areas that degrade to a level of service D or worse, where improvements are necessary," he says.

Those areas, Krapf says, were really no surprise either. The Scott City interchange, specifically three of the ramps,

show a decreased level of service with continued traffic growth, according to the study. Congestion is also predicted at the Route AB interchange southbound off-ramp.

"We anticipated a need for improvements at the Scott City interchange based on its current congestion issues," says Krapf. "When the Diversion Channel Bridge was replaced several years ago, the ramp at Route AB wasn't widened; however, we did install conduit in the pavement for future traffic signals. It's possible that signaling the intersection or widening the ramp could address any

NEPA cont.

ment, the environmental consequences of the proposed action, lists of preparers, agencies, organizations and persons to whom the statement is sent. MoDOT had to complete an EIS prior to improvements to the Route 67 corridor in Butler, Wayne and Madison Counties.

After a final EIS is prepared, a record of decision is prepared detailing how the findings of the EIS were incorporated into the agency's

During the process, MoDOT will host several public hearings to gather input on various locations and designs.

decision-making process.

Of course, the process isn't as simple as preparing the documents.

During the preparation, input is solicited from the public and other agencies, several drafts are prepared and revised.

The process can be lengthy depending upon which level of analysis is pursued, but the many steps involved are to ensure that improvements to our transportation system aren't a detriment to our natural resources and neighborhoods.

future congestion at that interchange.”

The only other place the study found congestion a problem in the future was near the new I-55/Main Street/LaSalle Avenue interchange. And, Krapf says a fix is already in the works at that location.

“The cities of Cape and Jackson are working on a future outer road system, which should address the potential for decreased service in this area,” says Krapf.

That leaves the Scott City interchange without a decided improvement plan, and Krapf says that's why the study is so important.

“The Ramsey Creek project will

MoDOT/City Council Meet

Project Manager Eric Krapf met with the Scott County Commission and the Scott City Council in June to give the groups an update on the I-55 study. Krapf explained the process, the progress and answered questions during his visits.



Scott City Mayor Tim Porch was pleased with the progress and the initial findings of the Purpose & Need Statement. “We may not get the interchange, but we sure hope we do,” said the Mayor. “The town is in good shape now, but it's a struggle. We've fought hard to continue to grow. Our young people need good jobs, and I want people to come to Scott City.”

Krapf told the council that MoDOT would hopefully know soon whether the Ramsey Creek project could get the categorical exclusion classification, thereby accelerating the project. He said MoDOT's environmental personnel would be building the case over the next few weeks.

“Keep pushing,” Mayor Porch said. “We like to see things fired up. We're appreciative of your efforts and all the work of the Bootheel Regional Planning Commission stepping up for us and keeping the focus on the work.”



certainly help alleviate congestion at the existing interchange,” says Krapf. “We have a good idea of the area in which to construct the new outer road. It will be a matter of making it close enough to I-55 that drivers see it as a good alternative to the interstate, but far enough away that we can relieve congestion in that area.”

As for an additional interchange in Scott City, Krapf says the EA will determine what exactly is needed to keep traffic moving at the level it should, and it will be up to the public involvement mixed with the engineering data to then determine the appropriate improvements

and possible locations.

“We'll be having quite a few public meetings during the course of studying the project,” says Krapf. “We really want those who live, work and drive near Scott City to attend and give us their thoughts. These are important improvements for the area, and I look forward to working with the community to make sure their needs are addressed as best we can.”

For questions or more information, contact Krapf at (573) 472-5261, toll-free at 1-888-ASK-MODOT (1-888-275-6636) or at eric.krapf@modot.mo.gov.

The Path To Progress

STEP 1

Gather information

- environmental
- historical/cultural
- traffic studies

STEP 2

Prepare Purpose & Need Statement

- MoDOT Review
- FHWA Review

We're Here

STEP 3

Develop Preliminary Alternatives

- meet project objectives
- environmental consequences
- public input

STEP 4

Select Preferred Alternates

- best meets objectives
- minimizes impacts to people and natural environment
- public input

STEP 5

Select Final Study Alternate with detailed analysis of:

- environmental/cultural impacts
- engineering feasibility
- people/land impacts
- public input

STEP 6

Finalize Location

- based on public comments and comments of state and federal agencies

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