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February 22, 2018

FHWA / ADOT I-11 Corridor Stakeholder Group Engagement Meetings

Summary of Stakeholder Interviews

Joy Keller-Weidman, Senior Program Manager, and Mitch Chrismer, Senior Program Associate, of the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution (U.S. Institute) conducted a series of interviews with various stakeholders located in and around the Tucson area who had expressed interest in the proposed I-11 Corridor project. Twelve interviews in total were conducted, and the interviews took place between February 5 and February 13, 2018.

Interviewees were selected following outreach by FHWA and ADOT to determine local interest in the Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed I-11 Corridor between Nogales and Wickenburg, AZ. Those that were interviewed represented two different geographic areas: Group B interviewees represented the urban I-10 Tucson area, and Group C/D interviewees represented the areas west and northwest of the Tucson mountains.

The organizations participating in Stakeholder Group B meetings include:

- Barrio Hollywood Neighborhood Association
- Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection
- Drachman Institute
- Erickson Terrascape
- FBM Sales
- Friends of Ironwood Forest
- I-10 Self Storage
- Menlo Park Neighborhood Association
- Northwest Fire District
- Peach Properties HM Inc.
- SALC
- Sonoran Institute
- Statistical Research Inc.
- Sun Corridor Inc.
- Tucson Audubon Society
- Tucson Historic Preservation Foundation
- Tucson Metro Chamber

The organizations participating in Group C/D meetings include:

- Altar Valley School District
- Arizona Heritage Alliance
- Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum
- Avra Valley Coalition
- Avra Water Co-Op
- Caterpillar
- Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection
- Columbine Enterprises
- Drachman Institute
- Freeport McMoRan
- Friends of Ironwood Forest
- Friends of Saguaro National Park
- Marana Chamber of Commerce
- Marana Unified School District
- National Parks Conservation Association
- Northwest Fire District
- Sonoran Institute
- Tucson Metro Chamber

As mentioned, the U.S. Institute conducted individual phone interviews with twelve of the participating stakeholder organizations from groups B and C/D. Organizations that participated in the Group B phone interviews were: Sonoran Institute, Drachman Institute, Menlo Park Neighborhood Association.

Organizations that participated in the Group C/D phone interviews included: Freeport McMoRan, Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, Marana Unified School District, Drachman Institute, Arizona Heritage Alliance, Sonoran Institute, Northwest Fire District, Altar Valley School District, and Caterpillar.

During the interviews, interviewees were each asked the same eight questions:

- 1) Tell us who you are, what stakeholder group/organization you represent and your role, and describe your reason for participating in these meetings.
- 2) How would you define your interest / perspective re: the I-11 Corridor?
- 3) What is your desired outcome for these meetings? What would you like to see accomplished?
- 4) What might be some barriers/obstacles to accomplishing your desired outcomes?
- 5) Do you have any concerns or questions related to these meetings?
- 6) Is there anything you think we should keep in mind as we design and facilitate these meetings?
- 7) Are there agenda items/topics that you feel are especially important to include?
- 8) Do you have other recommendations?

General themes discovered during the interviews are outlined below, sorted according to each question.

Interest/ Perspective re: I-11 Corridor:

- Economic development
 - What are the economic benefits to this project? What are the costs?
 - Impacts to tourism?
- Environmental concerns
 - Impacts to viewsheds, species connectivity, preserving natural landscapes
- Population sprawl / growth
 - Model predicted growth that would accompany the corridor
- Public safety / public planning
 - Impacts to emergency response, school district planning, government infrastructure
- Multi-modal transportation
 - How is this being considered?
- Impacts to locals along proposed routes
 - Increased traffic and access to rural areas
 - Traveler safety
- Long – term vision
 - Are models accurate?
 - How will increased automation factor in to the future of transportation?
- More info re: proposed corridors
 - Expressed desire to learn more about the proposed project
- Cost/funding
 - Who is funding the project?
 - Who will fund maintenance?
 - Will AZ taxpayers be affected?

Desired outcome for these meetings:

- Explore multi-use along corridor
- Identify impacts of building a new freeway
- Look at no-build alternatives (upgrade existing infrastructure)
 - Use existing corridors in way the doesn't increase pollution/ exhaust/ noise/ light pollution
- Share various points of view re: proposed corridor
 - Stakeholders voices heard and considered throughout process
 - Hope that outcome not already predetermined
- Get better understanding of what is being proposed

- Timelines, maps, exact locations of proposed routes, scope
- Look at design capabilities of mitigated impacts
- Find solution that works for everyone
- Move project forward
- Address doubts / concerns about creating a new corridor
- Better understand potential impact to future population to inform long-term planning

Barriers/obstacles to accomplishing desired outcomes:

- Concern that there is not enough time to review all material
- How detailed can meetings get in relation to broad-brush alternative routes?
- Strong pre-set firm positions /opinions held by some
 - Small determined group that opposes any type of construction
 - Remote property owners prefer to live away from congestion and industry
 - Group supports construction and economic development and may disregard environmental concerns
 - NIMBY-ism
- Not enough study on exact environmental impacts of corridor creation
- Include design early in the process

Concerns or questions related to these meetings:

- Hope that decision-makers take stakeholder input seriously
 - Outcomes of meetings should be absorbed into final decision making
- Decision will be driven by economics – what is simplest and cheapest
- Discussion will be viewed as a fight between rural and suburban interests
- Stakeholder input won't be used just as window-dressing
- Need more detail about the process
- Current maps not detailed enough
- Are future traffic projections accurate? How be sure?
 - What volume of traffic need to plan for?
 - What alternatives have been considered to accommodate these projections?
- Need to be able to protect natural spaces
 - Concern about negative impact to visitors and residents
 - Damage to natural beauties may be too high
- Why freeway and not rail?
- Concern about the development that would naturally occur/ be encouraged along corridor
- Are we planning for the future correctly? Need to be more creative

Considerations re: meeting design and facilitation:

- Design meetings so everyone stays engaged throughout
 - Keep meetings productive and effective
 - Use time wisely
 - Gather input from stakeholders equally
- Focus on segments of proposed route individually
 - Include detailed economic impacts
 - Include updated base maps
 - Include clear information on projected models of future traffic

Agenda items/topics that you feel are especially important to include:

- Stakeholder engagement process
 - Purpose of process
 - Explanation on how stakeholders were contacted and notified
 - Interview process
 - Meeting design / outcomes / agenda / timeline
 - Agreements for participation
- Rationale for I-11
 - Include future vision / need
 - Project background
 - Clarify location of routes
 - Include updated base maps
 - Proposed timelines
 - Costs associated with proposed corridor
 - How will routes be financed?
 - Where will funding come from?
- Viability of proposed corridor
- Traffic projections and forecast
- Impacts on environment / wildlife / plant life
 - How maintain connectivity?
 - What are the water considerations?
- Stakeholders values and interests related to proposed corridor
- Clarify long and short-term impacts on communities along proposed routes
 - Identify benefits to communities that feel most at risk and have most to lose
- Explore alternatives and options
 - Ways to invest in existing infrastructure
- Economic cost-benefit analysis
 - Include environmental economics if possible
 - Economic impact from taking private land

- Value off-set from earnings lost on land taken
- How will final decision be made?
 - Who will make final decision?

Other recommendations:

- Condense the documents for meeting participants
- Have data on hand specific to what group is discussing
- Include detailed cost/benefit analysis
- Ensure stakeholders kept apprised of decisions throughout process
- Transparency regarding what is / is not being considered
 - Be transparent about legalities and areas in need of negotiation
- Address concerns about putting the corridor in environmentally sensitive areas
- Design away concerns
- Include background on tribal involvement
 - How will tribal lands be impacted?
- Consider impact of national / international news on the project
- Provide clear next steps after meetings conclude

Summary of themes heard

Throughout the interviews, a number of patterns emerged from the responses. The question of correlated economic development that would come from the development of the I-11 Corridor was an important topic to many. Many were interested in learning more about the proposed growth that would accompany this project, and how this could change the region. Others were interested in examining the overall costs and benefits, especially as pertains to the local communities.

Environmental concerns related to the development of a new freeway was also important to many interviewees. Affects to the viewsheds, noise pollution, light pollution, restriction of wildlife corridors, and overall effects of the project on the desert landscape were very important issues to many that were interviewed.

Information gathering during the meetings was very important to many of those interviewed. The information that is currently available feels overwhelming to some, and incomplete to others. For example, some requested that maps with much greater detail be provided, while others asked that information currently on the I-11 Study website be condensed down for meeting participants. Interviewees also asked that a detailed project background be provided towards the beginning of the first meeting, so that all attendees can better understand the future vision and need for the project, funding available, proposed timelines, anticipated effect on sprawl, projected traffic models, decision-making processes, and general costs/benefit analyses of the proposed routes.

Many expressed a desire that the new corridor be as future-minded as possible, to include multi-modal aspects and be built with a more automated transportation future in mind. There was hope from some that the creation of this new corridor will allow for energy transmission along the same path. Others asked that creative solutions be considered, including high-speed rail, and the expansion of existing corridors.

Though there were some concerns about the location of the proposed corridors, impacts to the environment and effects of population growth and sprawl, most interviewees expressed a desire to work collaboratively and to keep an open mind about alternatives. Many expressed positivity and interest in this project, and generally interviewees hope that the final product will be something that is both environmentally friendly and keeps the interests and values of local communities in mind.