

Advisory Group – Meeting #4 Summary

Overview:

The Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) hosted the fourth U.S. 69 Expansion and Modernization Project Advisory Group Meeting virtually on Apr. 1, 2021, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The objectives of the fourth meeting were to discuss future traffic forecasts; roadway configurations for the toll-free and express lanes alternatives; environmental justice; screening results; the traffic and revenue study initial results; and to seek feedback from the Advisory Group.

Meeting Summary

1. The meeting and its contents are summarized in the attached:
 - a. Meeting PowerPoint
 - b. Meeting Recording
2. **Welcome and Meeting Logistics** – The meeting kicked off with a welcome and introduction by Robyn Arthur, HNTB.
3. **Opening Remarks** – KDOT Deputy Secretary Lindsey Douglas described how the Project is at an important milestone. This meeting will focus on sharing initial analysis from data collected on the corridor, from survey responses, and from focus groups. Solutions for the corridor will be discussed as well as the pros and cons for each. She thanked the advisory group for their valued input on the Project.
4. **Future Traffic Forecasts** – Cameron McGown, HNTB Project Manager, discussed how traffic is rebounding but has not fully returned to pre-COVID levels. Daily traffic volumes on U.S. 69 were presented to the Advisory Group showing the data from Jan. 2018 to Feb. 2021. Traffic on the corridor is down 6% daily from pre-pandemic volumes. The Project team also looked at population growth in Johnson County projected out to 2050 to help with traffic forecasting and calculated a range of average daily traffic on the corridor. The range allows flexibility when planning for uncertainty and the future.
5. **Roadway Configuration** – The Project team has narrowed down the proposed solution for the corridor to two potential configurations: the toll-free concept and the express toll lanes (ETL) concept. Pros and cons to each alternative were examined and compared against the no-build scenario.

ETL vs. Toll-Free – Both toll-free and ETLs improve today's congestion but in different ways. Toll-free lanes would have an average speed of 40 mph in the general-purpose lanes while ETLs would have an average of 35 mph in the general-purpose lanes with a speed of 55 mph in the express lanes.

Attributes & Impacts – Each solution would have a different impact on the footprint of the highway, with the general-purpose lane configuration requiring more land to accommodate the greater number of lanes it requires to move the same amount of traffic that ETLs can carry. For example, the general-purpose lane option would require 11 lanes north of I-435 – or three more than the ETL version. In this configuration, the general-purpose option would require so much additional land that it would encroach on surrounding property and would require demolition of an adjacent business building located in the northeast quadrant of I-435 and U.S. 69 intersection.

Q: What percentage of the traffic in the corridor comes from Overland Park versus from areas outside of the city?

A: Right now, it's about a 50/50 split using the corridor. We will look into this further. In past studies, we have underestimated growth, so a range helps account for this and provides flexibility.

Q: I assume you are taking into account the changes in land use planning in southern Overland Park with much lower densities of development. Southern Johnson County is assumed to be lower density residential and lighter commercial. Is that part of your analysis?

A: Yes, this is a part of the analysis.

Q: Are you anticipating a difference in induced demand for toll-free vs toll-lanes?

A: No, we're using the same traffic volumes and showing how different solutions handle those same volumes. A phenomenon with ETLs is that the toll is more effective for spreading out peak hour periods on the roadway.

Q: In the more affluent communities with more people willing to pay for the express toll lane, will these numbers change? With more people willing to pay, will the ETL move faster?

A: In the traveler preference survey, we will see what folks are willing to pay based on income level and what the price could be set at. There are price points to set it at that would help curve that result.

Q: Is there a percentage of vehicles that are anticipated to be in the toll lane and does the variable pricing determine that?

A: This is similar to the previous question. Pricing that's applied to the lane makes the lane well used but not so that it reduces the performance of the lane.

Q: Have you considered the impact of adding additional mass transit on roadway speeds?

A: The team has evaluated some transit options that we feel are realistic (improving bus operations for example).

Q: Is it appropriate to add such a high cost because of the bad merging and terminating at Blue Valley Parkway? It seems like a high cost for a bad situation to begin with.

A: The biggest issue is from 135th is southbound. With any concepts we're looking at, we would want to make sure traffic is accommodated with their trips.

A Menti question was posed to the advisory group: What other information, other than the cost of the toll, is most important to you to understand the tradeoffs between the two alternatives?

- Cost (2)
- Impacts to surrounding properties (5)
- Phasing Options (1)
- Additional explanation of the operational benefits (4)
- Other (4)

Q: Can an update on the debate in Topeka be given on the tolling authority issue?

A: A lack of progress on the clean-up bill won't impact choosing the solution. As the legislature works this session, there's talks of tax cuts and infrastructure at the federal levels and what the funds could go toward. We have alternative delivery as a method to construct if additional money came into the pie or the pie grew larger, we could build additional projects. We are working from 103rd Street to 179th Street with the study so we have the full corridor concept ready in case we have additional funding that becomes available. We are wanting you to see some of the other operational pieces besides revenue as to how this will go in the long run.

6. **Environmental Analysis & Alternatives Screening** – Gretchen Ivy, HNTB Environmental, discussed how the Project team conducted an environmental analysis screening using criteria discussed at the previous advisory meeting. The team used the screening process for the following alternatives: no-build, improvement of alternative routes, existing capacity management (Transportation System Management and Transportation Demand Management), multimodal, add capacity general purpose lanes, and add capacity express toll lanes.

The purpose and need criteria include improve safety, reduce congestion, promote sustainability, provide flexible choices, and accommodate local and regional growth. Through the screening process, it was found that the non-capacity alternatives do not appear to address the purpose and need of the Project.

A Menti question was posed to the group: Based on the descriptions of each alternative and your knowledge of the corridor, which description below best describes your reaction to the initial screening against the project’s purpose and need?

- I agree with the conclusions and the ratings are what I expected. (7)
- I agree with the conclusions but would rate some differently. (6)
- I do not agree with the conclusions and disagree with many of the ratings.
- Other.

- a. **Environmental Impacts** – Both add capacity alternatives (general purpose and ETLs) were carried through in the screening to the natural and human environment criteria. The noise impacts were said to be less for an ETL because additional lanes would not have to be built along certain sections of the road thereby not being closer to existing houses. Overall, it was determined that ETLs would have fewer impacts on the natural and human environment.
- b. **Corridor Diversity and Environmental Justice** – Census block group data was used to analyze where low-income populations and minority populations live along the corridor. The Project’s engagement team has developed strategies to reach underserved populations.

A Menti Question was asked to the group: Based on the descriptions of the two capacity alternatives and your knowledge of the corridor, which description below best describes your reaction to the initial screening against the environmental impacts criteria?

- I agree with the conclusions and the ratings are what I expected. (3)
- I agree with the conclusions but would rate some differently. (9)
- I do not agree with the conclusions and disagree with many of the ratings.
- Other. (1)

- c. **Engineering and Costs** – The engineering and costs criteria were roadway and interchange geometrics, right-of-way impacts and displacements; maintenance of traffic/constructability; construction cost; and life-cycle costs. The ratings for the general-

purpose lane alternative had to do mostly with the footprint of the project. The ETL has the ability to be managed better in the long term with regards to cost and maintenance.

A Menti Question was asked to the group: Based on the descriptions of the two capacity alternatives and your knowledge of the corridor, which description below best describes your reaction to the initial screening against the engineering and cost criteria?

- I agree with the conclusions and the ratings are what I expected. (6)
- I agree with the conclusions but would rate some differently. (2)
- I do not agree with the conclusions and disagree with many of the ratings.
- Other.

Q: Would ETLs do better with air quality and congestion?

A: We may see a bit of a separation between two alternatives when we have the qualifiable data. There will be a technical memorandum to support the ratings.

Q: I'd like to know more about the "environmental justice" component - equity and justice for lower income people in our community?

A: We do have a rigorous methodology to use in line with federal guidance and MARC analysis methods for evaluating environmental justice. This is something we'll be coming out with. There might be an opportunity to offer different pricing to use the lane in that concept.

Q: Will there be opportunities to incorporate elements of the other strategies (transit, TSM/TDM, etc.) into the final preferred alternative? If so, will the impacts of the refined alternative be re-evaluated?

A: Right now, we're more at a qualitative look with the ratings. We will have more information in the future, and this is the next step in the screening process. More details to come when we get closer to the proposed solution.

7. **Traffic & Revenue Study** – Scott Cooper, HNTB, discussed the traffic and revenue study that aims to establish potential toll rates and estimate annual revenues for local contribution.

- a. **Stated Preference Survey Summary** – The questionnaire set out to maximize insights of the respondents. The survey asked questions about reference trip characteristics, stated preference experiments, frequency of use, future use, and respondent demographics. As part of the survey, stated preference results reveal consistent toll rate per mile choices. The average minimum per mile toll price is \$0.11 while the average maximum per mile is \$0.56.
- b. **COVID Impact** – Data from the survey showed that COVID has had a slight impact on people's commutes on U.S. 69. While work commutes have decreased since the start of the pandemic, trips to run personal errands and shopping trips have increased. Some remote work will continue post COVID. 59% of people expect to travel to work daily while 31% anticipate working from home 1-3 days a week.

- c. **Origins & Destinations** – Trip origins and destinations were analyzed. It was found that half of all trips on U.S. 69 start and end in Overland Park. The median trip length was 10 miles with 5 of those miles being on U.S. 69.
- d. **Analysis and Report** – Analysis of the survey findings is ongoing and a full report will be available in May.
- 8. **Next Steps** – The Project team will be working on what the toll signs and lanes could potentially look like as well as calculated anticipated toll rates, example trip costs, and cost and phasing options.
- 9. **Engagement Update** – 69Express is on Facebook, Twitter, and Nextdoor. There are many opinions about the tolled option and the Project. The team has been sending out newsletters and will be hosting council briefings by ward. There is a public meeting on Tuesday, April 20th from 5:00 – 7:00 pm with a virtual open house starting on Friday, April 16th. After the public meetings, there will be an additional survey and a focus group in May. Community presentations are also being presented upon request.

10. **Open Discussion**

Q: The toll project will have impacts on different populations. For instance, delivery drivers get paid for how efficient to get from point A to point B. If it comes out of their pocket, then they're stuck in a dilemma. Has this been thought out?

A: In other parts of the country, the user is charged those rates on Uber and other taxi services. Food delivery depends on the company.

Q: Could we subsidize the toll for those making under \$50,000 or does that defeat the purpose of a less populated toll lane?

A: This has been done before. Under limited use it wouldn't defeat the purpose unless the program is designed to where you are exceeding the allowable capacity of the facility. KTA does have partnerships with bank pass to allow for backing things by cash and could help address some needs of lower income populations as they use toll facilities.

Q: For ETL signs, sometimes the distance between signs and vehicles and spacing can be a concern. In some areas it's 65 mph and most people travel just below 75 mph. Where will the signs be located on the roadway?

A: Signs are installed in accordance with traffic device rules. There is guidance for where to place ETL signs. If you enter at one price, won't get charged a higher price when you exit.

Q: An example of what we've been hearing is 'We pay gas tax so why do we have to pay a toll?'

A: The project is less and less about local contribution and more about congestion management. Think more about managed lanes and not just revenue. The ultimate toll-free roadway configuration is 11 lanes and no one wants 11 lanes going through.

Comment: A portion of the toll will be paid by non-residents that use U.S. 69, so it's good to point out that we shouldn't raise taxes on everyone in Overland Park.

Q: Has the survey shown people thinking the ETL is not needed at times that aren't the AM and PM peak hours?

A: Respondents to survey were asked to sort what they're trip purpose was. We have the information and are analyzing it.