



Frequently Asked Questions Columbia, Missouri June 30, 2004

During the course of the Improve I-70 effort a number of questions have been asked. Here is a summary of frequently asked questions and the most current issues.

1. Why is this study being conducted?

Interstate 70 was designed and built in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It is an outdated facility that no longer efficiently moves cars, trucks and people. To improve it, the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) is responsible for ensuring that dollars spent on improvements today are consistent with long-term growth patterns and Missouri needs. The Improve I-70 studies will develop a comprehensive plan for how I-70 will look and operate in the future. The plan will allow MoDOT to make short-term improvements that advance I-70 toward its long-term vision. Additionally, completion of the studies is required by the federal government before more detailed design, and ultimately construction, can begin.

2. When can we expect construction to improve I-70 to begin and how long will construction take?

Currently no funding is available to completely design, rebuild and widen I-70. However, MoDOT continues to spend what it can to maintain I-70's pavement and bridges, including investing \$87 million in the rural portions of I-70 in the past five years. At a minimum, in the coming years motorists will see continued resurfacing projects and installation of guard cable barriers in the median of rural areas to improve safety.

In Columbia, an interim project at the US 63/I-70 Interchange is underway as part of MoDOT's ongoing maintenance and safety improvement approach.

3. How will this project be funded?

Long-term improvements will require funding substantially beyond MoDOT's current funding levels. A number of implementation plans are being developed based on a variety of funding scenarios. Ultimately, MoDOT will improve I-70 to the extent it can with the funds available. MoDOT is keeping transportation policy makers informed on the needs of I-70 and encouraging local, state and federal officials to support special funding for I-70 improvements.

4. What are the estimated costs of the entire project?

Cost estimates for this 18-mile stretch of I-70 will be developed as this study moves to its conclusion and will be included as part of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) expected to be available in fall 2004.

5. Could I-70 become a toll road to help address I-70 improvement needs sooner?

Studies have indicated that if tolls were implemented they could generate from 70-90 percent of the cost to widen I-70. But at the present time, MoDOT does not have the constitutional authority to operate toll roads. A constitutional amendment would have to be approved by the legislature and, ultimately, by a vote of the people. Given the importance of the I-70 improvement needs and the shortfall in funding, MoDOT's number-one legislative priority is seeking tolling authority.

Current federal law does not allow the imposition of tolls on existing interstate highways. However, this is a serious impediment for all state departments of transportation. Reauthorization of the federal transportation bill, currently underway in Congress, is expected to address this issue.

6. What is the priority of Columbia in the context of a statewide construction schedule? How are construction priorities going to be determined?

The statewide construction schedule has not been determined. Columbia's higher capacity needs, though, would likely place it high on the priority list. Construction priorities will ultimately be based on the needs in the corridor at the time funding is received, the amount and timing of the funding.

7. The decision to widen I-70 seems based on the assumption that long term traffic growth will continue. Does the study consider other scenarios such as a long term reduction in traffic due to increased oil prices or new technological developments?

Traffic projections for I-70 in 2030 consider estimated population growth, land use changes, and continued demand for roads to get goods to the marketplace and people to jobs. It is also clear that the existing I-70 is already an outdated facility that has difficulty meeting even today's demands. While telecommuting and other technological advances may reduce some travel demand and make future travel more efficient, it is critical that efforts get underway to address existing and future mobility needs. While trends might change, recent national traffic trends show that vehicle miles driven is rising faster than population growth and that truck traffic is growing faster than automobile traffic.

8. Would the existing interstate need to be expanded if there is a separate bypass?

Yes. Building a bypass around Columbia does not move sufficient traffic off the existing interstate. Traffic projections for 2030 indicate that there will be increased demand for existing I-70 even if a new bypass is built, thus the need to build more highway lanes in the existing corridor.

9. It seems like expanding I-70 in its current location fails to recognize the growth that is occurring north of Columbia. Wouldn't a more strategic, longer-range solution be to develop a bypass that accommodates future growth?

Two northern bypass options were considered and eliminated because they didn't remove enough traffic off of the existing I-70 to solve the capacity problem. The existing route would still have needed more lanes, and as long as improvements had to be made to the existing corridor, it made more sense to invest only in the existing interstate and avoid many of the costs, financial and other, associated with acquiring

right-of-way and constructing a bypass. Future growth north of I-70 may be more appropriately accommodated with an arterial loop such as is on the CATSO long range plan, or through some other local roadway system.

10. Two of the obvious weaknesses of I-70 currently are how it handles local traffic and interstate truck traffic. How are these problems being addressed in the study?

In the urban area of Columbia, the alternatives under consideration include methods to separate local traffic from through traffic. These methods are associated with the type of frontage road system in place. Feasible concepts for this include one-way frontage roads or a collector-distributor system for the Rangeline/Providence/Business 70E interchanges. Either of these two systems enables local traffic to access local streets without getting on and off I-70. Each alternative has advantages and disadvantages, so engineers are looking at a combination of techniques that moves traffic smoothly with the least amount of impacts. In addition to the frontage road system, several connections are being made between local streets, such as linking the north and south frontage roads across Perche Creek and extending Clark Lane across I-70 to Business Loop 70.

11. Given what would seem like a major disruption to businesses along the interstate with similarly large declines in tax revenue, why doesn't a separate bypass make more sense for this community?

Widening and rebuilding existing I-70 will be disruptive for a short amount of time, but the safety and traffic capacity improvements will be realized for decades. Many of the I-70-area businesses originally located here to attract and serve customers who use this main thoroughfare, and most want to see it improved so it can bring even more people past their doors. Increased traffic can lead to increased business and tax revenues over the long-term.

12. Why are the ramps with Fairview needed at the Stadium Boulevard Interchange?

The study team has conducted an extensive evaluation of the Stadium Boulevard Interchange. They quickly found that focusing improvements only at Stadium would have significant impacts to Cosmo Park and area businesses. The team considered a new interchange west of Stadium (Scott Boulevard extension) and found that while that interchange would provide some regional benefits, it would not significantly improve conditions at Stadium.

The two main issues contributing to Stadium's operational problems are the close location of the Bernadette intersection and the high volume of traffic coming from and going to the east. The team found that providing ramps at Fairview would improve conditions at I-70 / Stadium and at Bernadette.

13. Won't the ramps at Fairview increase the traffic into a residential neighborhood?

Traffic on Fairview will increase in the future with or without a connection to I-70. The increase is projected to be enough that four lanes will be needed on Fairview between I-70 and Broadway. So while the connection to I-70 will increase traffic, it will not be significantly higher than what the City already anticipates in the future.

14. Have area developers had influence in the recommendations for the Stadium Boulevard Interchange and the connection at Fairview?

The Study Team's recommendations for Stadium Boulevard are based on the City of Columbia's land use projections, not on the plans of any particular developer or development. In fact, the study was considering (and publicly showed) connections at Fairview last summer, well before the recent news about a potential Walmart at Fairview.

15. What are the most significant environmental and social impacts associated with I-70 improvements in Columbia?

This study evaluates impacts to both the human and natural environments. Human environment impacts include residential and business displacements and their economic impacts. Natural environmental impacts include acres of affected wetlands, floodplains, woodlands, parklands (Cosmo Park) and agricultural lands as well as impacts to historic properties and threatened and endangered species, like the Bristled Cyperus. For more detail on these impacts, please see the Impact Summary Table posted on the Web at www.ImproveI70.org. Click on Local Focus / Section 4 / Maps and Graphics.

All of this information will be used in evaluating the alternatives and refining the preferred alternative to minimize impacts to the area's residences, local businesses, and environmental concerns.

16. What provisions are being made for pedestrian and bicycling access?

MoDOT will make provisions for bike, pedestrian and wheelchair access across I-70 wherever possible and reasonable, but most likely not at every crossing. For example, it is probably not reasonable to provide access on U.S. 63 over I-70 due to high traffic volumes and traffic mix.

This study will not determine a specific plan for pedestrian, bicycle and wheelchair access across I-70. However, improvement alternatives being considered will not preclude that access. A more specific access plan will be developed during a later design phase.

17. My neighborhood hears a lot of noise from cars and trucks on I-70. What provisions are being made for noise walls?

The Improve I-70 Team is completing a sound analysis of the I-70 corridor to measure today's noise levels and forecast how noise might change by the year 2030 due to I-70 widening. This analysis will help the team identify general areas where noise walls might be needed in the future. The team's analysis and recommendations will be included in the study's environmental impact statement.

This study will NOT determine exactly where noise walls could be or what they might look like. Those decisions would be made during a detailed engineering design phase which would follow this study but that is currently unfunded.

During the design phase, MoDOT would use federal and state policies to guide decisions about noise walls. In general, the following criteria must be met before a sound wall can be constructed:

- Noise levels must exceed 65 decibels (the sound of normal conversation three feet away);
- The sound wall must provide noise reduction of at least five decibels for those homes closest to the highway;
- The sound wall must provide decreased noise for more than one home;
- The sound wall cannot be taller than 18 feet;
- The sound wall must not interfere with normal access to the property;
- The sound wall must not pose a traffic safety hazard; and
- The majority of the benefited residents must agree that a sound wall is desired.

For more information on sound walls, visit MoDOT's Web site at www.modot.state.mo.us/local/d6/hottopics/MiscTopics/swbrochure.html.

18. Are provisions being made to save room for eventual rail service along I-70 some day?

All Improve I-70 studies across the state are using criteria that would enable possible passenger (not freight) rail service along I-70 to be considered in the future. In the rural areas, the median will be extra wide and the horizontal and vertical alignments would work with passenger rail in the median. However, in urban areas like Columbia and other areas along existing I-70, placing any kind of rail service in the median would not be possible. Instead, rail service would likely leave the I-70 corridor in urban areas and be routed to a community train station that would be easily accessible by all residents. In the event passenger rail service is not determined to be the right solution, the wide median in the rural areas could accommodate some other type of transportation improvement as well.

19. What kind of enhancements might be included in the new I-70 to make it more visually appealing and pedestrian-friendly?

MoDOT has developed an I-70 Corridor Enhancement Plan to ensure that, to the degree funding allows, major improvements to I-70 are attractive and result in a cohesive "look" across the state. While the plan does not recommend specific enhancements for specific locations, it presents a vision for the future look of the interstate across Missouri and establishes a baseline for the types of enhancements MoDOT will fund.

The plan includes a range of possible enhancements that could be applied along I-70 to complement natural features and enhance the visual quality of the route. Images within the plan show how color, textured surfaces, lighting, landscaping and other decorative features might enhance bridges, retaining walls, railings and other elements of I-70. The plan will be available on the project Web site this spring.

The images in the plan provide a general design direction and serve as a starting point for local discussions about I-70 enhancements. Results of those discussions and any commitments made by MoDOT or local communities will be record in the study's environmental impact statement (EIS). The EIS will serve as a guide in later, more detailed efforts to determine where and to what degree enhancements will be included in major I-70 improvements.

20. Will the study determine the economic cost to the community during and after construction of lost business and business and residential relocations?

The Improve I-70 Study looked at the character of the business community and how businesses might be impacted by I-70's widening. In addition, the City of Columbia has commissioned an economic impact study to assess the overall economic impact to the community during and after the construction of I-70. Results are expected later this spring.

All of this information is being used to evaluate improvement alternatives and refine the preferred alternative to minimize impacts to the area's residences, businesses and environmental concerns.

21. Where is information available on how people will be compensated if their property is needed for I-70 improvements? When will such an acquisition process begin?

Property acquisition will not begin until a design phase is complete (which can take several years) and construction funding is in place. At this time, no funding has been allocated for design or construction. The Improve I-70 website includes MoDOT's "Pathways to Progress" brochure, which outlines MoDOT's right of way acquisition policies and procedures. That brochure can be found at www.ImproveI70.org. Click on "The Facts" then on "FAQs" to find a link to the brochure at the bottom of the page. You also may call 1-888-ASK-MODOT to speak to a right of way specialist about your concerns.

22. How have the City of Columbia, Boone County and other local governmental units been involved in this planning process? How will they be involved in the future?

Elected officials and technical experts from the City of Columbia, Boone County and many other organizations, as well as local citizens – those who know this area best – have been involved in this effort. Traffic forecasts, for example, have used CATSO's traffic model and incorporate the city's and county's land use projections. All parties will continue to play an integral role in the planning process as it moves forward. The study team frequently briefs CATSO about its progress and city and county staff have been continually involved with Study Team planning and with the Columbia Advisory Group, which has met throughout the study.

23. What opportunities are there for the community to be involved and provide input? And, does the community input matter?

Public input is critical to the success of this project. The public knows this corridor and issues better than anyone. The study team relies on public input to shape, refine and evaluate the alternatives that are being considered. In developing the alternatives for I-70, the study team has benefited from input from the Columbia Advisory Group, several neighborhood meetings, multiple open houses, a public workshop and other public input.

People can continue to be involved by giving us comments, attending an Advisory Group meeting, leaving comments on the Web site at www.ImproveI70.org, or calling our hotline at 1-800-590-0066.

24. What will happen next in the study?

The Improve I-70 Study Team has evaluated the reasonable alternatives based on how well they solve the corridor's operational problems and how they might impact the natural and human environments. A recommended preferred alternative was displayed at an Advisory Group meeting in March and is displayed on the project Web site. The reasoning behind the recommendation will be detailed in the study's Draft Environmental Impact Statement. This document is required by the Federal Highway Administration and the National Environmental Policy Act, and will be made available for public review, and will be the subject of a formal public hearing expected this fall. Public input received at the hearing will be used to develop a Final EIS, which FHWA will review before issuing a "Record of Decision," hopefully in early 2005. This will be followed by the Missouri Highway and Transportation Commission's approval of the document in 2005. Should funding be available at that time, this project could move into the final design phase and eventually construction.

25. What is the "shelf life" of the EIS and the decision documents that go with it? How will the EIS be augmented or updated if funding is not available for several years?

The EIS has a three-year shelf life after the Federal Highway Administration issues its "Record of Decision." If no project development activities such as plan preparation, right of way acquisition or construction occur within that time but conditions in the I-70 corridor change and/or the project scope changes, a re-evaluation is required. The Improve I-70 study effort, however, would not have to be completely re-done.

If you have questions or concerns about the study, contact the project office at 1-800-590-0066, or log on to www.ImproveI70.org.

