Throughout the study process the study team used multiple approaches to involve local officials, residents, and business leaders in the project. Methods of public outreach included the formation of a Policy Advisory Committee and a Technical Advisory Committee, newsletters, creation of a project Web site, information booths at local events, distribution of a Transportation Needs Survey, focus groups, public workshops, personal interviews, and a public information meeting. The following section describes the public involvement activities in greater detail.

2.01 COMMITTEES

From the beginning of the Needs Assessment in February 2003, two advisory committees met approximately every other month to discuss the study's process and progress. The meetings insured regular interaction between local officials, agency representatives, and study team members.

A. Policy Advisory Committee

The Policy Advisory Committee consisted of the following individuals:

- Dane County Highway Commissioner
- City of Stoughton Mayor
- Village of McFarland President
- Town of Dunn Chairman
- Town of Albion Chairman
- Town of Dunkirk Chairman
- Town of Dunkirk Representative
- Town of Rutland Chairman
- Town of Pleasant Springs Chairman
- Madison Area Metropolitan Planning Organization Board Member

The Policy Advisory Committee offered input on public involvement activities, nominated individuals for focus groups and interviews, raised questions to be answered during data collection, and communicated with constituents regarding the USH 51 Needs Assessment. Representatives of the study team served as support staff to the committee.

B. Technical Advisory Committee

The Technical Advisory Committee consisted of the following individuals:

- WisDOT District 1 Planning Representatives (4)
- WisDOT Central Office Representatives (2)
- Madison Area Metropolitan Planning Organization Transportation Planning Manager
- Madison Area Metropolitan Planning Organization Representative
- Department of Natural Resources Environmental Coordinator

- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Representative
- Dane County Assistant Highway Commissioner
- City of Stoughton Director of Planning and Development
- Village of McFarland Director of Public Works
- Town of Dunn Chairman
- Dane County Planning Representative
- City of Madison Planning Representative

The Technical Advisory Committee provided detailed comment and guidance during each study component. The committee drew from each member's individual areas of expertise and local familiarity. Representatives of the study team served as support staff to the committee.

2.02 NEWSLETTERS, WEB SITE, AND LOCAL EVENT INFORMATION BOOTHS

In April and July 2003 and January 2004, the study team mailed newsletters to approximately 18,000 area addresses. Each of the three newsletters introduced the project, described opportunities for participation, summarized other WisDOT studies in the area, and listed project contacts who could respond to questions or concerns.

The July 2003 issue contained additional information on traffic modeling, traffic volumes, and the corridor's crash history. It was mailed with the transportation needs survey described in Section 2.03.

The January 2004 newsletter provided an overview of the Needs Assessment results and an invitation to the public information meeting.

WisDOT's project Web site, located at http://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/projects/by-region/sw/5139901218/default.aspx provided up-to-date project information. It described the project, its purpose and schedule, and opportunities for public involvement. It also provided maps, the transportation needs survey, and study team contact information. Figure 2.02-1 shows a screen capture of the Web site.

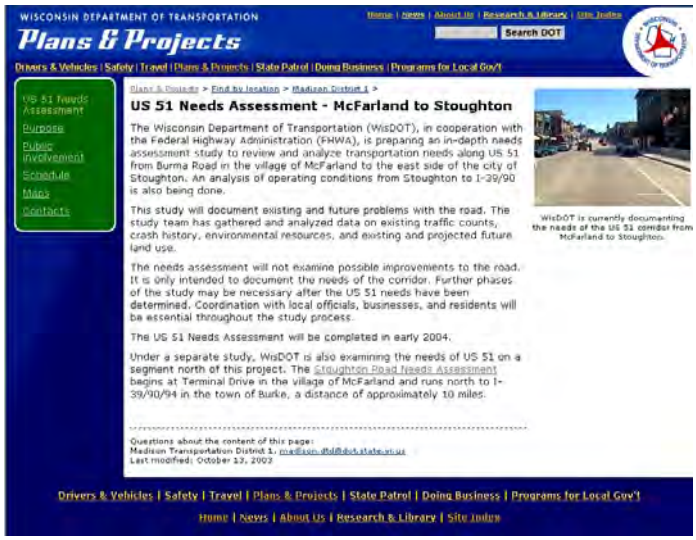

Figure 2.02-1 Project Web Site Homepage

To provide another opportunity for public involvement, study team representatives staffed two local events in 2003: the Stoughton Junior Fair (over the Fourth of July weekend) and the McFarland Family Fest (September 12 to 14). Representatives were available to provide information, answer questions, and encourage further participation in the study process.

2.03 TRANSPORTATION NEEDS SURVEY

In July 2003, the study team mailed the second of three project newsletters to 18,000 business and residential addresses in the City of Stoughton, the Village of McFarland, and the Towns of Albion, Dunkirk, Dunn, Pleasant Springs, and Rutland. The newsletter included a transportation needs survey that asked ten questions about corridor issues, needs, and priorities. The questionnaire was designed to take a few minutes to complete and could be mailed back without cost to the respondent.

Of the 18,000 questionnaires mailed, about 1,350 (7.5 percent) were returned. Since participants were largely self-selecting, the survey helps understand the concerns of individuals with the greatest interest in the corridor.

Appendix B contains the survey and its results, which are summarized qualitatively in the following sections. Not every participant responded to every question, and many wrote additional comments.

A. Participant Profile

Survey participants included residents, business owners, and farmers. While most were from the general corridor area, some indicated that they lived, farmed, or owned a business on USH 51. Most drove on USH 51 during the peak AM and PM periods at least a few times a week.

B. Perception of Existing Conditions

Most participants felt that USH 51 was congested during the peak AM and PM periods. CTH B (west)/ CTH AB, CTH B (east), Roby Road, and STH 138 (west) were the intersections most frequently identified as congested during these peak periods. While there was some congestion noted around the noon peak, few participants felt that these intersections were congested at times other than the peak periods.

CTH B (west)/CTH AB, CTH B (east), Roby Road, and STH 138 (west) were also the intersections most frequently identified as unsafe. The most common safety concern was the inability to safely enter or cross USH 51. Poor visibility and bicycles/pedestrians were also frequent concerns at these intersections. Fourteen participants added comments to their questionnaires about the need for clear lane markings at the CTH N intersection.

Existing bicycle facilities were rated as poor, although facilities in Stoughton were rated better than rural facilities. Most participants indicated that they did not use sidewalks or crosswalks within the corridor. Participants who did use facilities outside of downtown Stoughton were more likely to rate them as inadequate than adequate.

C. Perception of Corridor Needs

When asked about the importance of certain corridor needs, participants generally indicated that safer intersections should be a high priority. Additional turn lanes on USH 51, passing opportunity improvements, and additional travel lanes on USH 51 were also rated highly. A quarter of the respondents selected the highest rating for improved/new transit service while a quarter selected the lowest rating.

Participants were asked to rank the needs. For every need listed, at least 15 percent of respondents gave that need the highest rating. This suggests many priorities.

In comparison to other needs, additional pedestrian facilities and additional bicycle facilities were ranked low. When asked if they would bike more frequently if facilities were upgraded, roughly half of respondents responded in the negative. Over a third indicated they would bike more frequently in Stoughton, over a quarter indicated they would bike more frequently in McFarland, and 15 percent indicated they would bike more frequently between Stoughton and IH 39/90.

2.04 FOCUS GROUPS AND WORKSHOPS

In April and May 2003, the study team held one session with each of four focus groups that consisted of interested stakeholders in the study area. The team met with 27 representatives from local governments, businesses, farms, and environmental/service organizations. The Policy Advisory Committee nominated focus group participants.

In late October 2003, the study team promoted and facilitated three workshops to assess corridor needs. Figure 2.04-1 shows the publicity poster used to promote the workshops. Nearly 30 community members participated in the three 2-hour sessions.

Key points discussed at the focus groups and workshops include:

- Problem intersections
- Increased traffic on USH51
- Access to adjacent properties and businesses
- Posted versus actual speeds on the road

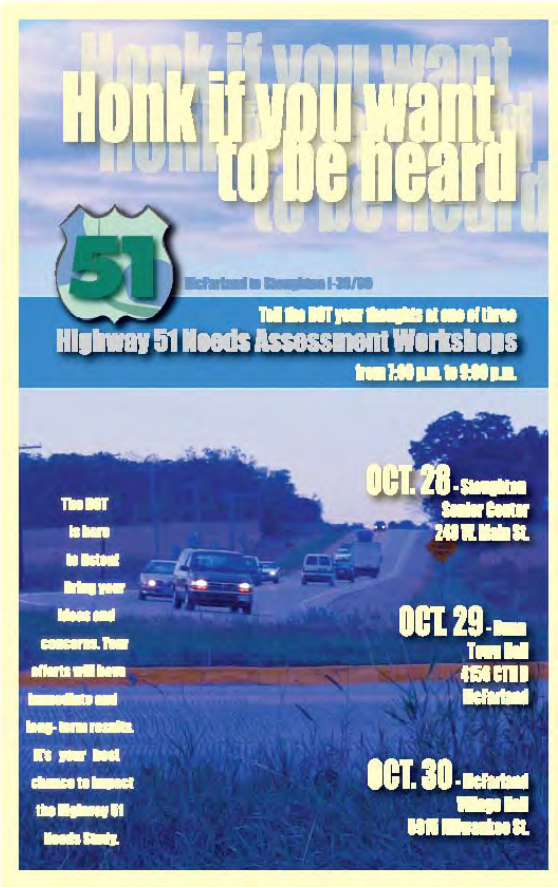

Figure 2.04-1 Workshop Publicity Poster

- Impatient drivers
- Poor bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- Educating drivers about following and passing farm equipment
- Pedestrian and bike concerns
- Possible short-term improvements, such as signage and turning lanes
- Existing and potential effects on the character of the communities and the lakes in the study area
- Need for mass transit between Madison and Stoughton

The narratives that follow incorporate the specific comments from the focus groups and workshops.

A. Problem Intersections

1. Exchange Street

Southbound USH 51 traffic accelerates as it leaves McFarland, while northbound traffic does not yet begin to slow down. Also near this intersection, the cross section of USH 51 changes, narrowing southbound and widening northbound. The "right turn only" pavement markings for the northbound exclusive right turn lane have faded, and there is no signage to indicate that it is an exclusive right turn lane. The widening of the road and the ambiguous lane assignment create hazards for traffic on USH 51 and on Exchange Street. Northbound drivers who accelerate in what they assume to be a second through lane are surprised to encounter slowing, right turning vehicles. Similarly, drivers on Exchange Street do not know if vehicles in the northbound right turn lane will actually turn right.

Figure 2.04-2 USH 51 and Exchange Street Intersection (Looking North)

Concerns were also raised about school traffic, and it was suggested that the southbound merging sign be placed farther north. Figure 2.04-2 shows the USH 51/Exchange Street intersection.

2. Roby Road

The issues at Roby Road – changes in speed and road geometry – are similar to those at Exchange Street. There has been significant development around this intersection, and it is used frequently by business park traffic and other commercial vehicles. However, the speed limit remains 55 mph. Survey participants suggested installing signals at this intersection.

3. CTH B (east)

Speed reduction and the installation of signals were suggested for the CTH B (east) intersection. Cars on CTH B do not always stop for the stop sign if there is a break in traffic on USH 51.

4. Mahoney Road

The right turn lane is too short and not clearly marked as a right-turn only lane. It is unclear whether vehicles will turn onto Mahoney Road or into an adjacent business, and it is difficult to see vehicles turning from the upper driveway to this business. The large number of signs is distracting.

Figure 2.04-3 USH 51 and Lake Kegonsa Road Intersection (Looking South Toward Curve)

5. Lake Kegonsa Road

The curvature of USH 51 creates a blind corner at the Lake Kegonsa Road intersection. There are no turn or bypass lanes on USH 51 at this intersection. Figure 2.04-3 shows the USH 51/Lake Kegonsa Road intersection.

6. CTH W

This intersection is located near the crest of a hill and has no turn lanes.

7. CTH N

The lane markings at this signalized intersection are ambiguous. Each USH 51 approach has two lanes separated by a solid white line, but there are no signs or pavement arrows to indicate usage (see Figure 2.04-4). Drivers become confused and unexpectedly merge or turn.

Figure 2.04-4 CTH N Intersection

8. Other Intersections

Participants identified several additional intersections as potentially dangerous:

- Curtin Road/Dale Road in McFarland (north of study limits)
- Burma Road
- Tower Road (south of McFarland)
- Dyreson Road
- Rutland-Dunn Town Line Road
- CTH B (west)/CTH AB

9. USH 51 Field Entrances

The last reconstruction of USH 51 raised the roadbed, which left some farm driveways with an uphill access to the highway. When pulling heavy equipment, it is very difficult to pull out of these driveways and onto the highway within the short traffic gaps. Although mentioned by property owners during the previous construction, this issue has not been addressed. Figure 2.04-5 shows an example of a driveway with an uphill approach to USH 51.

Figure 2.04-5 Driveway with an Uphill Approach to USH 51

10. Railroad Crossing

It was noted that trains traveling through the double-tracked Wisconsin and Southern Railroad crossing in Stoughton cause congestion on USH 51.

B. Problems with Existing Roadway

Left turns onto and from USH 51 are difficult and dangerous, while passing was described as nearly impossible. Concern was frequently expressed with aggressive drivers and lack of traffic law enforcement. While there are definite peak periods, heavy traffic is steady throughout the day.

Existing centerline and edge line markings are insufficient for dark and inclement conditions. In the morning, sun glare is a hazard for vehicles, particularly near Schneider Road. There is a need for greater queuing space, as many intersections currently lack left turn lanes. Intersection warning signs were also suggested.

The corridor is not bicycle-friendly. Experienced bicyclists avoid traveling on and crossing the roadway, while commuter bicycling is limited by the lack of safe Beltline crossings. It was observed that bicyclists are willing to commute long distances as long as they feel safe.

Within McFarland, there is concern that USH 51 splits the community. The wide cross section and high speeds create access issues for local businesses and severely restrict pedestrian and bicycle mobility. This affects campers and boaters at Babcock Park. Boaters launch their boat, drive across USH 51 into the Babcock Park overflow lot located east of USH 51, and then have to walk back across USH 51 to the park. The speed limit is 45 mph, but drivers do not slow down until farther north into McFarland. Speed reduction and the installation of signals at Larson Beach Road were suggested. Figure 2.04-6 shows the entrance from USH 51 to the Babcock Park overflow lot.

Figure 2.04-6 Looking Across USH 51 at Babcock Park Overflow Lot

USH 51 does not divide Stoughton as much as McFarland, likely because of the lower speeds. However, traffic problems will begin to be a detractor for new industries considering locating in Stoughton. Traffic volumes have increased on CTH B north of Stoughton, but there are no pedestrian or bicycle accommodations on this road.

C. Typical Routes Used to Avoid USH 51

Participants identified several routes used to bypass the USH 51 corridor. These include:

- CTH B (east) to CTH N – perceived heavy truck usage
- CTH N to Koshkonong to Door Creek to CTH MN
- CTH N to IH 39/90
- STH 138 to USH 14
- CTH B (west) to Lacy Road
- CTH B (west) to Rimrock Road
- Hoelscher Road to Sigglekow Road
- USH 51 to Beltline to IH 39/90

Figure 2.04-7 illustrates these bypass routes.

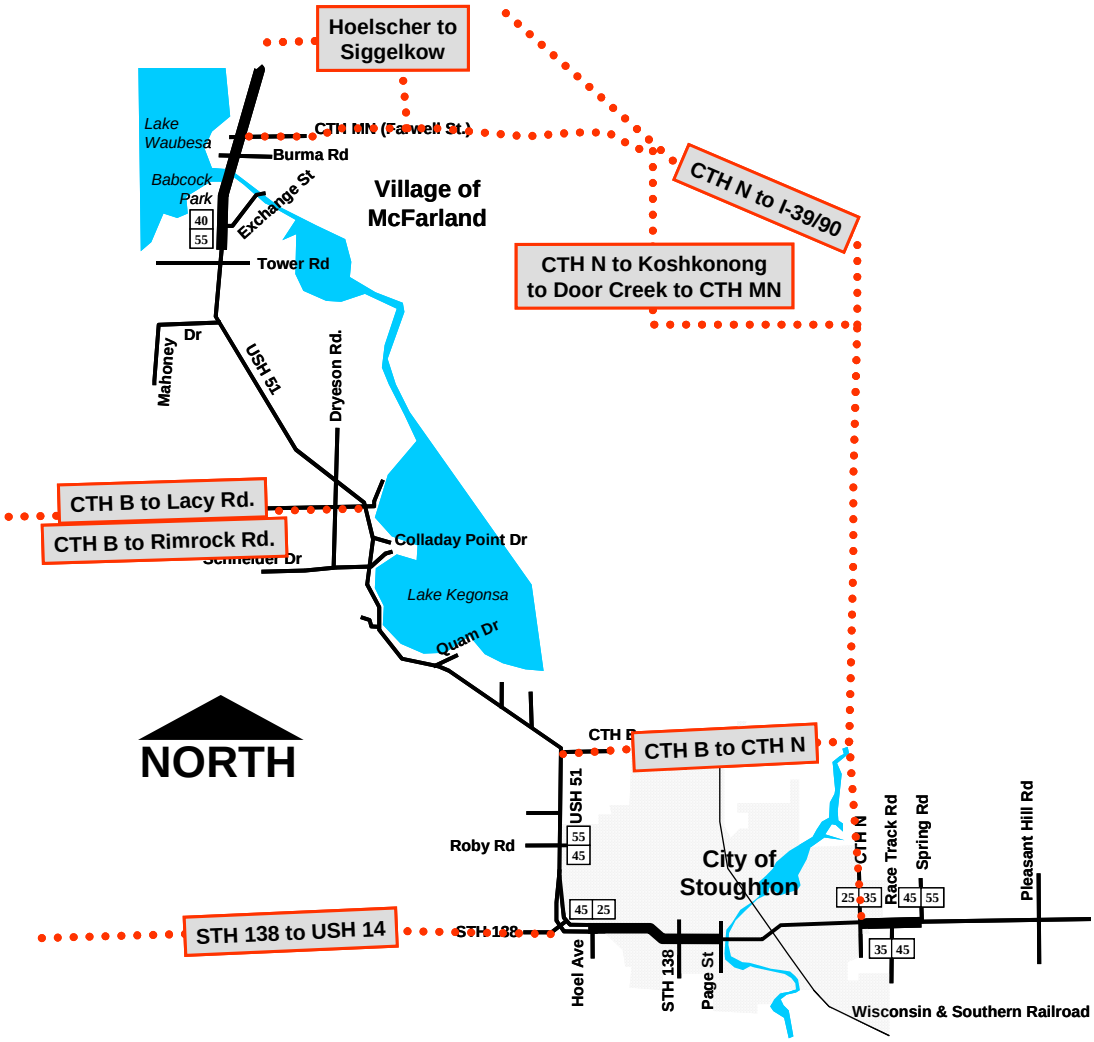

Figure 2.04-7 Typical Routes Used to Avoid USH 51

D. Corridor Planning Priorities

This study documents the existing and future needs of the corridor and does not examine specific alternatives. However, during discussion of these needs, participants shared general priorities for the corridor. These include the following:

- Increase enforcement of traffic laws within the corridor. Many participants felt that there is "no problem with the highway; the problem is with the drivers."

- Limit development and restrict access on USH 51, similar to land use strategies within the USH 12 corridor between Middleton and Sauk City.

- Develop mass transit, including commuter rail.

- Develop road designs that represent long-term solutions. Concern was expressed about underbuilding on past projects.

- Provide an intersection between McFarland and Stoughton where drivers can safely access USH 51.

- Establish an off-road trail system along the corridor that connects to Madison's Capital City Trail. An example is the trail along USH 12 between Middleton and Sauk City. County Parks is also interested in creating a trail loop system near Viking Park and the Yahara River in Stoughton.

If further phases of this study are deemed necessary, participants indicated that any corridor alternatives proposed would need to:

- Reflect the different needs of different corridor segments.
- Consider the secondary impacts of facility construction.
- Recognize facility design limitations, including wetlands and adjacent development.
- Address stormwater and provide erosion control.
- Protect the vitality of downtown areas.
- Accommodate existing industries in Stoughton that use large trucks on USH 51 north to Madison. These large trucks require intersections with large turn radii.

E. Perceived Process Deficiencies

Some participants shared experiences and concerns about WisDOT and the planning process.

- A two-mile portion of USH 51 between Burma Road and Terminal Drive in McFarland is not included in either this Needs Assessment or the Stoughton Road Needs Assessment. The corridor study process seems to exclude a critical area within McFarland.

- In the early 1990's reconstruction of USH 51 between McFarland and Stoughton raised the roadbed in some places, which left some farm driveways with an uphill access to the highway. When pulling heavy equipment, it is very difficult to turn out of these driveways and onto the highway within the short traffic gaps. Although mentioned during the reconstruction, this has not been addressed.

- Some believe that during this last reconstruction, the control of run-off was not adequately addressed.

2.05 INTERVIEWS

The study team conducted interviews on November 18 and 19, 2003 with individuals nominated by the Policy Advisory Committee at its October and November meetings. A total of nine interviews were held, five in McFarland and four in Stoughton.

The interviews primarily confirmed the results of the focus groups and public workshops in identifying a range of concerns. These include:

- Growing congestion at morning, noon, and evening peak hours along the study corridor between CTH N east of Stoughton, through downtown Stoughton, between Stoughton and McFarland, and through McFarland.

- Increasing incidents of unsafe driver behavior related to turns onto USH 51, speeding on USH 51 from the west side of Stoughton through McFarland, and dangerous passing maneuvers in areas with poor visibility related to hills and curves.

- The perceived lack of traffic speed law enforcement on the west side of Stoughton, between Stoughton and McFarland, and on the north side of McFarland (for southbound traffic in particular), especially during peak travel times.

- The presence of several intersections and areas perceived as particularly dangerous including:

  - The CTH N intersection with USH 51 on the east side of Stoughton where lane markings are confusing for east- and westbound traffic on USH 51.

  - The Roby Road intersection with USH 51 on the west side of Stoughton where high traffic volumes on Roby Road combine with high perceived speeds on USH 51 to create traffic backups on Roby Road and associated risky crossing and turning movements.

  - The CTH B west and CTH AB intersections with USH 51 where peak-hour traffic delays are prevalent and so are risky turn and crossing movements associated with driver impatience.

  - The Charles Lane intersection with USH 51 that serves a mobile home park containing approximately 250 units.

  - The Exchange Street intersection with USH 51 where the angle of intersection and high school-oriented traffic volumes create complications that are exacerbated by unclear lane markings for northbound traffic on USH 51.

- The stretch of USH 51 through McFarland where numerous closely spaced driveways and intersections, the lack of an alternative north-south route, and the 40 mph speed limit combine

to create problems. These factors are further compounded by inconsistent use of a central left turn lane that, although effective, creates problems by not being used uniformly.

- The perceived rapid growth of traffic on STH 138 between Stoughton and Oregon (USH 14 into Madison's downtown and west side) and CTH N between Stoughton and Sun Prairie (including the Interstate to Madison and Janesville) as alternatives to growing delays in McFarland and at the interchange of USH 51 with the Beltline (USH 12 and 18).

Other concerns raised in the interviews related to continued high residential growth rates in McFarland, Stoughton, and in Madison just north of McFarland, resulting in added congestion on USH 51. An area of particular concern is the USH 51 interchange with the Beltline. Development of the Marsh Road Neighborhood in Madison is further complicating the USH 51/Beltline interchange situation.

Many of the interviewees suggested that left turn bays on USH 51 would be much safer if they were protected with a physical median, rather than just roadway striping.

Several interviewees mentioned that STH 138 between Stoughton and Oregon and CTH N between Stoughton and USH 12/18 should be examined as alternatives to widening USH 51 to four lanes.

Finally, several interviewees mentioned that businesses along the study corridor like the growth in traffic volumes and have not regularly complained about unsafe conditions – with the exception of the Dairy Queen in McFarland.

2.06 PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING

The study team hosted a public information meeting January 29, 2004 to present the findings of the USH 51 Needs Assessment to the public and gather additional comments about the study. About forty people attended. The comments are summarized in Appendix B

2.07 DECISION LEDGER

A Decision Ledger is a quality assurance tool developed by the study team to document critical determinations as the study progressed. Examples of the types of decisions documented include those made during meetings with the advisory committees, or commitments to review issues brought up by the public. The date, decision, reasoning for the decision, and those present when the decision was made are shown on the ledger spreadsheet included as Appendix C. The Decision Ledger will be a valuable resource as WisDOT reviews the direction to be taken following the Needs Assessment.

Return to table of contents << Previous section Next section >>