

Coulee Region Transportation Study, Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) Work Plan

**INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR THE
21ST CENTURY**

**WISCONSIN
DEPARTMENT OF
TRANSPORTATION
(WISDOT)**

WISDOT ID: 1630-08-00

February 2015



Building a Better World
for All of Us®

Engineers | Architects | Planners | Scientists



TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.01 Planning History and Background.....	1
1.02 Report Objectives	4
1.03 PEL and MAP-21	5
1.04 Acronyms, Abbreviations, Terms, and Definitions.....	7
SECTION 2 WORK PLAN SCHEDULE	10
2.01 Outline	10
2.02 WisDOT Equivalent Approach Process.....	11
2.03 PEL NEPA Linkages.....	14
2.04 PEL Work Plan	16
SECTION 3 AGENCY COORDINATION	18
3.01 Outline of Agency Coordination	18
3.02 Federal and State Agencies.....	20
3.03 Local Public Agencies.....	21
SECTION 4 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT.....	23
4.01 Outline of Public Involvement	23
4.02 Media	23
4.03 Meetings.....	24
4.04 Environmental Justice.....	25
SECTION 5 ENVIRONMENTAL DATA COLLECTION	26
5.01 Land Use Review	26
5.02 Cultural Resource Review	26
5.03 Environmental Resource Review	27
5.04 Potential Impact Review	28
SECTION 6 TRAFFIC.....	30
6.01 General.....	30
6.02 Transit	30
6.03 Pedestrian and Bicycle	30
6.04 Motor Vehicle and Transit Data Collection	31
6.05 Demand Modeling	31
6.06 Motor Vehicle Operations Modeling	32

List of Tables

Table 1	Linkages between PEL Components and NEPA/WEPA.....	14
Table 2	Draft Listing of Potential Participants	18

List of Figures

Figure 1	CRTS PEL Five-Stage Work Plan.....	10
Figure 2	PEL Seven-Step Process (WisDOT Equivalent Approach)	13
Figure 3	Linkage Components within the Five Work Plan Stages	15
Figure 4	Coulee Region PEL Detailed Work Plan	17

List of Appendices

Appendix A	Draft WisDOT Equivalent Approach Process Report	
------------	---	--

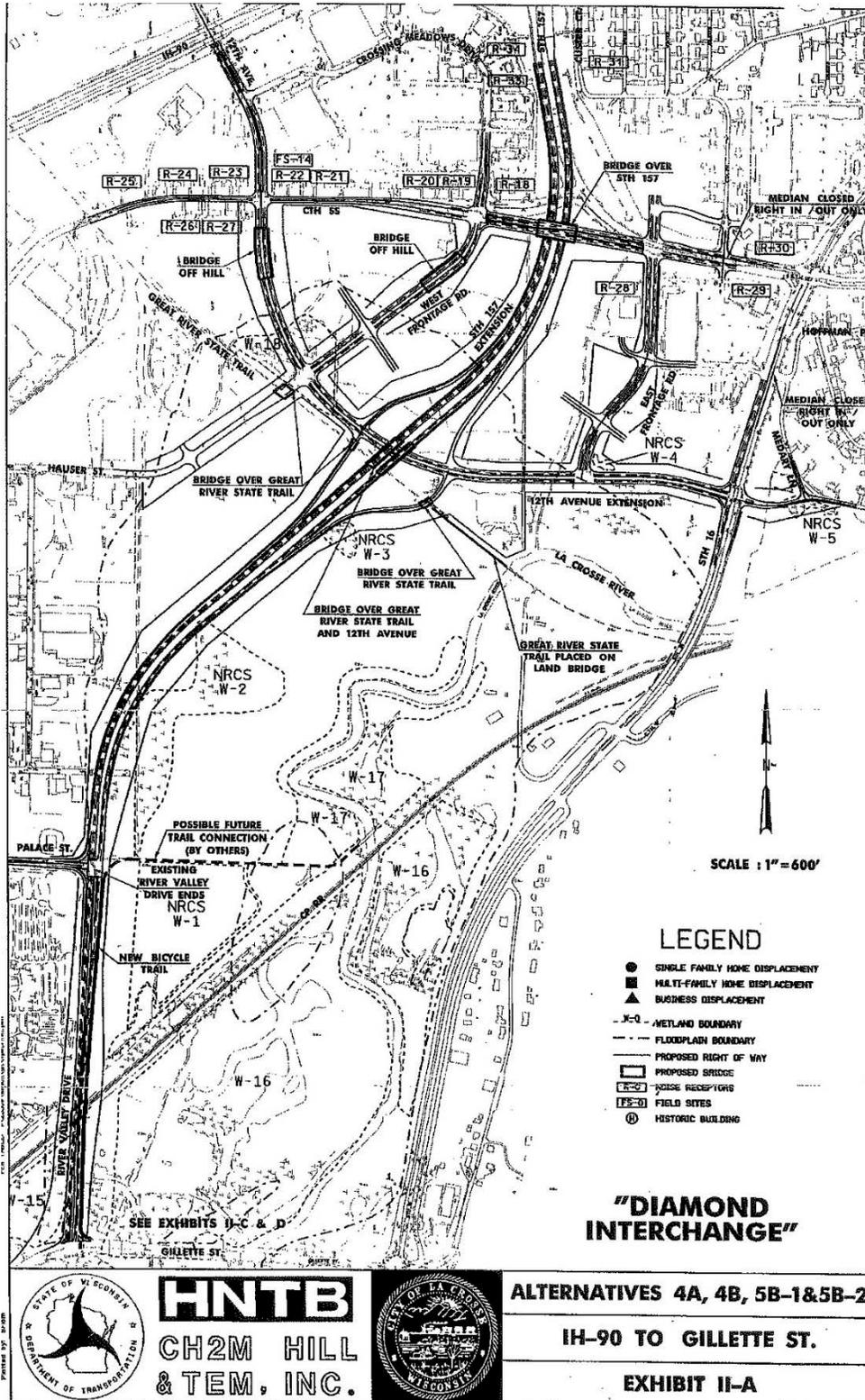
SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION

1.01 PLANNING HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The "Coulee Connections Study" (ID # 1630-08-00) has been an ongoing, comprehensive effort to address La Crosse's transportation system since 2006. The Coulee Connections area is a broad geographic area within the La Crosse region that is bordered by I-90 on the north, US 53 on the west, WIS 16 on the east (north of La Crosse Street), WIS 35/West Avenue on the east (south of La Crosse Street), and US 14/61 on the south.

The Coulee Connections Study focused on resolving long-term transportation issues between I-90 and US 14/61. The focus of the study had been to address current and projected congestion and safety concerns to, from, and through the La Crosse area. The east side of the La Crosse area is bounded by limestone bluffs while the west side is bordered by the Mississippi River. Because of these geological constraints, alternative development has been limited.

A Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) was completed for this area in the late 1990's and referred to the project as the "La Crosse North-South Transportation Corridor Study". The FEIS evaluated a range of alternatives and selected a Preferred Alternative (Alternative 5B-1) which is shown on the next page. The anticipated environmental impacts for the EIS were documented in the FEIS which was issued a Record of Decision (ROD) in 1998. The project was never constructed due to a local cost-share by the City of La Crosse that was not approved in a referendum.



The 2030 La Crosse and La Crescent Metropolitan Area Transportation Plan was updated in 2005 and recommended the construction of a portion of the original Alternative 5B-1, which was the northern part of the adopted alignment (12th Avenue extended from I-90 to WIS 16 and WIS 157 extended from I-90 to Gillette Street) and to initiate a corridor study to determine the most feasible improvements south of Gillette Street. The Coulee Region comprises the cities of La Crosse, Onalaska, Holmen, West Salem, La Crescent and the surrounding communities. This area has geological formations such as rivers and bluffs that pose unique challenges for the transportation system.

Rather than updating the original EIS, WisDOT has directed their efforts to conducting a Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) Study called the Coulee Region Transportation Study (CRTS). A PEL Study is a FHWA-recommended planning initiative to streamline decision-making. The PEL process is used as an effective and efficient way to integrate early planning into the highway development process and reduce delays in meeting transportation needs. This study would develop and evaluate strategies for the area that are supported by the local units of government and the general public, while addressing the goals and objectives established in the study.

The Study focuses on existing and long-term transportation challenges in the Coulee Region. The purpose of the study is to identify strategies that address safety, infrastructure deterioration, congestion, multimodal deficiencies, environment and support economic development and livability in the Coulee Region.

These issues lead to unreliable travel times and increased crash costs. They have negative economic and environmental consequences for area residents, commuters, businesses, and freight movements. Because of these problems, WisDOT is initiating the Study that will broadly evaluate regional transportation strategies and will feed into future National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) environmental studies within the Coulee Region. PEL is a Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) initiative that considers transportation, environmental, community, and economic goals early in the planning stage and carry them through environmental documentation and construction.

The Coulee Region Transportation Study will:

1. Develop a problem statement, goals, and objectives for the Coulee Region.
2. Develop screening criteria that will be used to evaluate alternative strategies.
3. Develop alternative strategies that may address the problem statement, goals, and objectives.
4. Evaluate alternative strategies.
5. Identify alternative strategies which address the project goals and objectives that should move forward into the NEPA process.
6. Document findings in a draft and final report.

Agency coordination and public involvement will be continuous throughout the process.

1.02 REPORT OBJECTIVES

This report documents the Study’s Work Plan that broadly outlines major activities, coordination points, public and agency involvement, and analysis tasks. This work plan provides a framework for progression of the study. As the PEL progresses, it is anticipated that public and agency involvement will provide new circumstances that will require modifications in the work plan, so it will be a living document. Adjustments will be made when needed to provide the appropriate levels of public and agency involvement, alternative development, analysis, and review. The final report will document the entire PEL process.

1.03 PEL AND MAP-21

The PEL was initiated as part of FHWA's Every Day Counts initiative. State departments of transportation are encouraged to use PEL as an effective way to integrate early planning into the highway development process and reduce delays in meeting transportation needs. Appendix A to Part 450, Section 6001 of the final rule detailed how information analysis and products from the transportation planning can be incorporated into and relied upon in NEPA documents using laws existing at that time.

With the passage of the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) Highway Bill, 23 U.S.C. was amended by adding a new Section 168 for the integration of planning and environmental reviews¹. The new section allows federal lead agencies to adopt and use planning products in the environmental review process of a project. A PEL is encouraged by FHWA legislation to help streamline decision-making.

“(e) Effect of Adoption.--Any planning product adopted by the Federal lead agency in accordance with this section may be incorporated directly into an environmental review process document or other environmental document and may be relied upon and used by other Federal agencies in carrying out reviews of the project.”

Examples of planning decisions and analyses that may be adopted are provided in the statute. Section 138(d) of the law establishes the requirements for the adoption of the planning products. Planning products adopted through the process may be relied upon and used by other federal agencies in carrying out reviews for the project.

Some of the key requirements that must be fulfilled to allow the use of a planning product (in this case the PEL study) in a NEPA document are:

1. The planning product must be developed through a planning process conducted according to applicable federal law.
2. The planning product must be developed by engaging in active consultation with appropriate federal and state resource agencies and Indian tribes.
3. The planning process must include broad multidisciplinary consideration of systems-level or corridor-wide transportation needs and potential effects including effects on the human and natural environment.
4. During the planning process, notice must be provided through publication or other means to federal, state, local, and tribal governments that might have an interest in the proposed project, and to members of the general public, of the planning products that the planning process might produce and that might be relied on during any subsequent environmental

¹ <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/map21/docs/title23usc.pdf>

review process, and such entities have been provided an appropriate opportunity to participate in the planning process leading to the planning product.

5. After initiation of the environmental review process, but before determining whether to rely on and use the planning product, the lead federal agency must make documentation to the planning product available to federal, state, local, and tribal governments that may have an interest in the proposed action and to members of the general public. The agency must also consider any resulting comments.
6. There must be no significant new information or new circumstance that has a reasonable likelihood of affecting the continued validity or appropriateness of the planning product.
7. The planning product must have a rational basis and be based on reliable and reasonably current data and reasonable and scientifically acceptable methodologies.
8. The planning product must be documented in sufficient detail to support the decision or the results of the analysis and to meet requirements for use of the information in the environmental review process.
9. The planning product must be appropriate for adoption and use in the environmental review process for the project.
10. The planning product must be approved within five years or less before its adoption within the environmental review document.

Further rule-making is in progress that will provide more detail on the implementation of the PEL process.

1.04 ACRONYMS, ABBREVIATIONS, TERMS, AND DEFINITIONS

Acronym, Abbreviation, or Term	Definition
APE	Area of Potential Effect
CAG	Community Advisory Group
CRTS	Coulee Region Transportation Study
CUBE	A type of demand modeling program created by Citylabs ²
DATCP	Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection
DIADOEAIR	Department of Administration Division of Energy And Inter-governmental Relations
EDC	Every Day Counts
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EJ	Environmental Justice
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
FE+C	Future Existing plus Committed System (used in describing a scenario used in travel demand modeling)
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FRA	Federal Railroad Administration
GIS	Geographical Information System
HCM	Highway Capacity Manual published by the Transportation Research Board. It describes methods for evaluating congestion and defines service levels ³
HCS	Highway Capacity Software —A macroscopic operations modeling software based on algorithms of the Highway Capacity Manual
HUD	United States Department of Housing and Urban Development ⁴
ITS	Intelligent Transport System
L RTPC	Long Range Transportation Planning Commission
LOM	Local Officials Meeting
LOS	Level of Service —A measure of congestion ranging from A (excellent) to F (very poor)

² <http://www.citilabs.com/>

³ <http://hcm.trb.org/?qr=1>

⁴ <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD>

Acronym, Abbreviation, or Term	Definition
MAP-21	M oving A head for P rogress in the 21 st Century (federal transportation bill) ⁵
MOA	M emorandum of A greement
MOEs	M easures of E ffectiveness
MOU	M emorandum of U nderstanding
MPO	M etropolitan P lanning O rganization
NEPA	N ational E nvironmental P olicy A ct of 1969
NGO	N on- g overnmental O rganization
NHPA	N ational H istoric P reservation A ct
NRCS	USDA’s N atural R esources C onservation S ervice
Operations Modeling	A computer model that determines how well roadway networks operate (e.g., congestion) in terms such as average delay, average speeds, and queue lengths given certain traffic volume and geometry inputs ⁶ .
O-D	O igin- D estination–Used to describe travel patterns
Paramics	A type of operations modeling program (microsimulation) created by Quadstone ⁷ .
PEL	P lanning and E nvironment L inkages–A process encouraged by FHWA as part of its Every Day Counts initiative to deliver transportation projects more efficiently.
PI	P ublic I nvolvement
PIM	P ublic I nvolvement M eeting
QR	Q uick R esponse C ode
ROD	R ecord of D ecision–The final approval and decision of an Environmental Impact Statement
SHPO	S tate H istoric P reservation O fficer
SOS	S afety and O perations S tudy
Synchro	An operations modeling software created by Trafficware ⁸ that uses the algorithms of the Highway Capacity Manual
TAG	T echnical A dvisory G roup
TAZ	T raffic A nalysis Z one
TIA	T raffic I mpact A nalysis

⁵ <http://www.dot.gov/map21>

⁶ http://www.wisdot.info/microsimulation/index.php?title=Main_Page

⁷ <http://www.paramics-online.com/>

⁸ <http://www.trafficware.com/>

Acronym, Abbreviation, or Term	Definition
TMDL	T otal M aximum D aily L oads–Associated with pollutants and water quality
TOD	T ime o f D ay–Used to describe travel demand models that are broken into several daily periods and aggregated to develop daily traffic volumes.
TPB	T ransportation P lanning B oard
Travel Demand Model	A computerized network of roadways and land uses that forecasts traffic volumes
USC 23	United States Code 23 and 139. Formerly referred to as Section 6002 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU 6002 ⁹)
USC 139	United States Code 23 and 139. Formerly referred to as Section 6002 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU 6002 ⁹)
USFWS	U nited S tates F ish and W ildlife S ervice
USACE	U nited S tates A rmey C orps of E ngineers
USDOI	U nited S tates D eartment o f I nterior
WDNR	W isconsin D eartment of N atural R esources
WEPA	W isconsin E nvironmental P olicy A ct
WisDOT	W isconsin D eartment of T ransportation

⁹ <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/HEP/section6002/appx.htm>

SECTION 2 WORK PLAN SCHEDULE

2.01 OUTLINE

Within the Coulee Region, there are numerous regional strategies that could be investigated to determine whether they address congestion and safety deficiencies on the major arterials. Because of the many solutions, the Coulee Region Transportation Study's Work Plan uses multiple stages to identify strategies that address transportation problems in the Coulee Region. With each stage, the Study narrows its focus from very broad countywide strategies to more geographically centered strategies. Each stage develops and confirms project objectives and screening criteria, develops and refines screening criteria, evaluates strategies, and identifies alternative strategies to advance to the next stage. Each stage also identifies which strategies do not advance. The multistage approach allows the Study to devote the appropriate amount of detail and effort for each range of alternative strategies. Figure 1 illustrates the five stages of the Study's Work Plan.

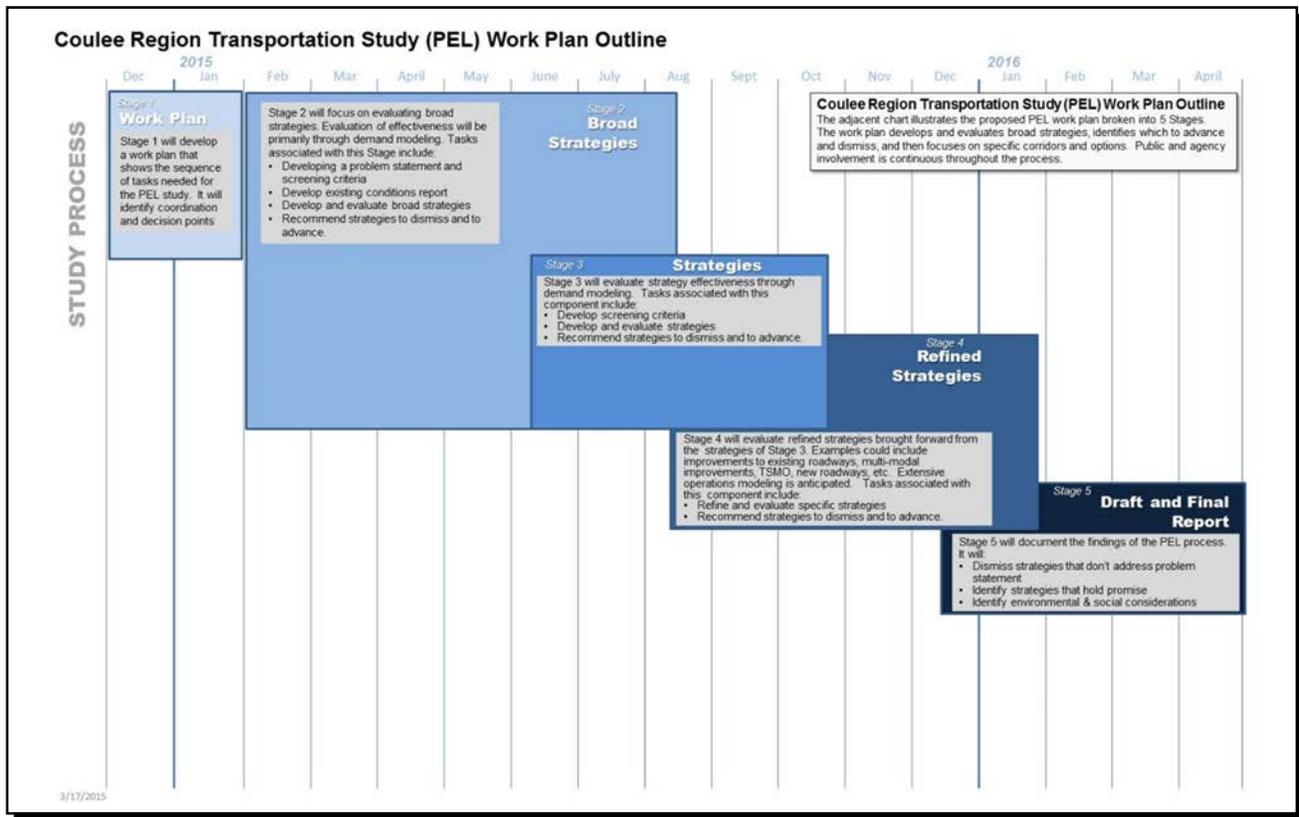


Figure 1 CRTS PEL Five-Stage Work Plan

Stage 1 is the work plan, which is the focus of this document. The work plan shows the sequence of tasks needed for the PEL process as well as coordination and decision points.

Stage 2 focuses on evaluating broad regional strategies. Examples of these could be improvements to existing roadways, multi-modal improvements, Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO), new roadways, etc. In this stage, evaluation of effectiveness will be primarily through demand modeling, which forecasts traffic volumes but does not provide great detail on traffic congestion. Tasks associated with this Stage include the following:

1. Developing a problem statement and screening criteria.
2. Developing existing conditions report.
3. Developing and evaluating broad strategies.

Stage 3 will evaluate potentially effective strategies brought forward from Stage 2. It is likely these strategies would be more geographically focused than the broad regional strategies evaluated in Stage 2. Examples could include improvements to existing roadways, multi-modal improvements, TSMO, or new roadways. Alternate mode strategies, if not feasible as stand-alone projects, will be coupled with motor vehicle strategies to provide multimodal solutions. Effectiveness, again, will be primarily evaluated through demand modeling. Tasks associated with this component include the following:

1. Develop specific screening criteria (if necessary).
2. Refine strategies brought forward from Stage 2 into more specific corridor concepts.
3. Evaluate the strategies against the screening criteria.
4. Identify concepts to dismiss and to advance.

Stage 4 will evaluate refined concepts brought forward from Stage 3. Examples could include more detailed refinements from Stage 3. In Stage 4 the feasibility of the concepts is brought under greater scrutiny. This stage will likely use operations modeling, which provides detailed information on congestion relief to provide greater detail on the effectiveness of the concepts. Tasks associated with Stage 4 include:

1. Refining and evaluating specific options.
2. Identifying options to dismiss and to advance into Stage 5.

Stage 5 prepares the draft and final report. The report will dismiss concepts that do not address the Study's problem statement and objectives, identify concepts that should advance to the NEPA stage of project development, and identify environmental and social considerations of these concepts. The report will also identify that strategies, while not satisfying the Study's objectives, have merit and should be considered in other transportation improvement programs.

2.02 WISDOT EQUIVALENT APPROACH PROCESS

WisDOT proposed a seven-step PEL process in the May 2012 Equivalent Approach Paper (see Appendix A). The Equivalent Approach Paper was designed to be used for the first PEL process in Wisconsin on the Madison Beltline. The 7 steps will also be used for the Coulee Region Transportation Study and include the following:

Step 1: Develop study work plan.

- Step 2: Develop existing and projected conditions report.
- Step 3: Identify needs, issues, goals, and screening criteria.
- Step 4: Develop a range of alternative strategies and determine which to advance and not advance.
- Step 5: Recommend alternative strategies.
- Step 6: Prepare draft study report.
- Step 7: Make recommendations in a final report.

The work plan addresses these seven steps through the five stages. Stage 1 addresses Step 1. Stage 2 addresses Step 2, existing and projected conditions report. Because the work plan uses stages to develop and evaluate broad strategies before focusing on specific strategies and concepts, some steps of the equivalency process are repeated several times. Stages 2, 3, and 4 cycle through the development and evaluation of strategies and address steps 3, 4, and 5. Stage 5 addresses Steps 6 and 7.

Supporting the 5 stages are a series of analysis tasks that are used in the evaluation and screening of alternative strategies. These tasks include environmental resource review, alternate mode review, traffic analysis, and geometric concept alignments. Figure 2 illustrates how the seven steps coincide with the five work plan stages.

2.03 PEL NEPA LINKAGES

The Draft PEL WisDOT Equivalent Approach Process (Appendix A) prepared by WisDOT and FHWA described the linkages between components of the planning product and of a future NEPA document. Table 1 illustrates how they equate.

Long-Range Planning/PEL Equivalent Approach	Project Development (NEPA/WEPA)
Problem statement	Purpose and need
Alternative strategies development	Alternatives considered for study
Alternative strategies that do not address screening criteria	Alternatives that are not selected for detailed study
Alternative strategies that address screening criteria	Alternatives selected for detailed study
Multimodal analysis	Multimodal alternatives
Environmental resource impacts review	Environmental impacts analysis
Corridor land use effects assessment	Indirect and cumulative
Stakeholder coordination and involvement	Public involvement and agency coordination
Mitigation opportunities	Mitigation needs and opportunities

Table 1 Linkages between PEL Components and NEPA/WEPA

Figure 3 illustrates how the PEL linkages correspond to the five stages of the work plan. Again, because the work plan develops and evaluates broad strategies before focusing on specific strategies and concepts, some linkage components are repeated several times.

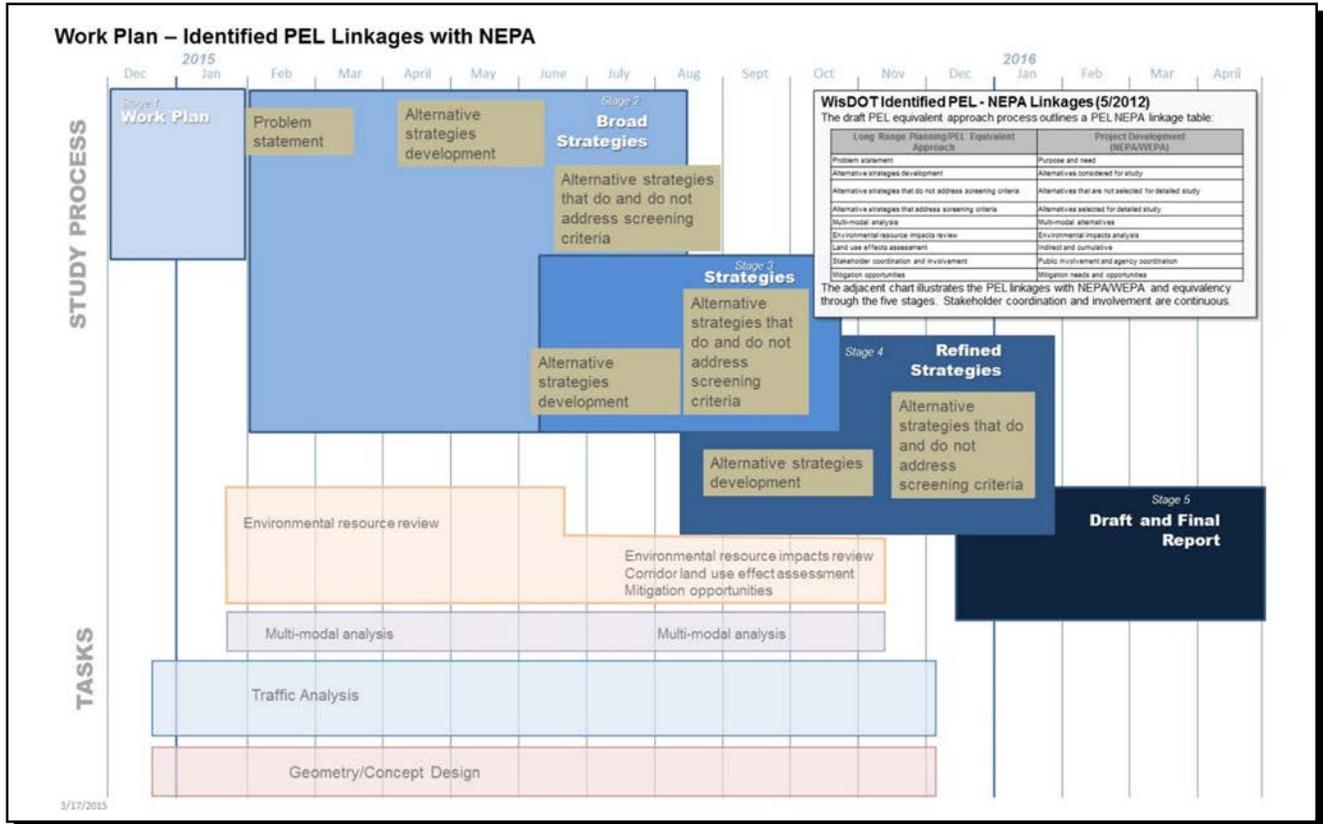


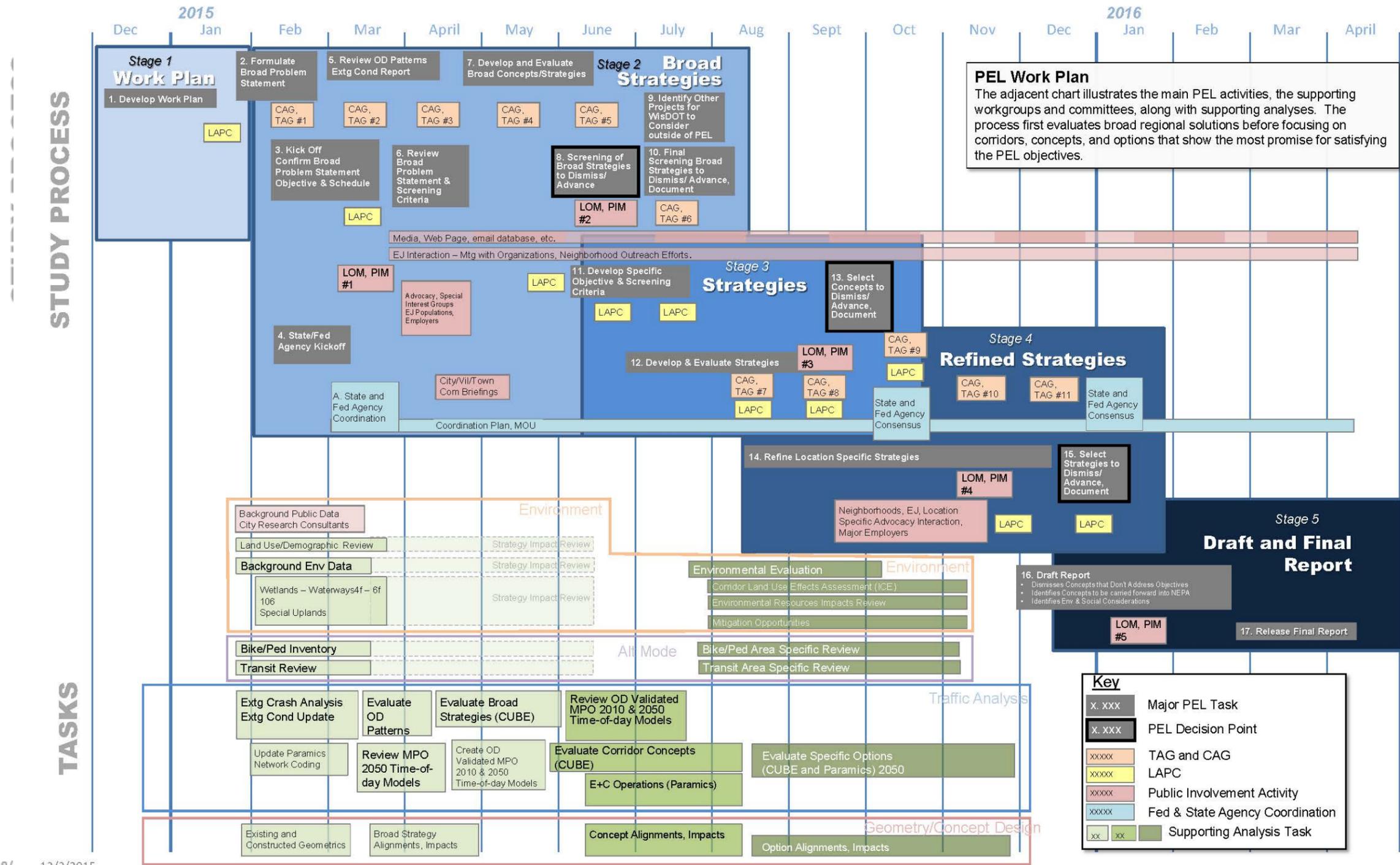
Figure 3 Linkage Components within the Five Work Plan Stages

2.04 PEL WORK PLAN

Figure 4 provides a more detailed listing of the study process and the supporting tasks. Major process elements are shown in the dark grey boxes, with supporting agency coordination, public involvement, and data analysis feeding into these major tasks.

Sections 3 through 6 of this work plan provide greater detail on agency coordination, public involvement, environmental and cultural review, and traffic analysis.

Figure 4 Coulee Region PEL Detailed Work Plan



SECTION 3 AGENCY COORDINATION

3.01 OUTLINE OF AGENCY COORDINATION

The PEL process will interact with federal, state, and local agencies as well as Native American tribes. There will be regular and continuous interaction with these entities. For local governments, there will be two types of coordination. A Technical Advisory Group (TAG) made up of staff from local governments will be used to provide technical input on objectives, screening criteria, and evaluate alternative strategies. The TAG will provide guidance on local government structure and committees. Local Officials Meetings (LOM), made up of elected officials from local governments, will be used to review objectives and screening criteria and evaluate alternative strategies from a community perspective. Agency Coordination Meetings will also be utilized throughout the Coulee Region Transportation Study to keep participating and coordinating agencies up-to-date. Figure 4 from Section 2 shows how the TAGs, LOMs, CAGs and Agency Coordination Meetings are to be used in the Study's Work Plan.

Table 2 provides a draft listing of potential participants in the Study's groups.

Table 2 Draft Listing of Potential Participants

	Entity	State/Federal Agency Coordination	Technical Advisory Group	Local Officials Group	Community Advisory Group
FEDERAL	FHWA	X	X	X	
	USACE	X	X	X	
	USEPA	X		X	
	USDOI-USFWS	X		X	
	USDA-NRCS	X		X	
	USHUD	X		X	
	USFTA	X		X	
	USDOI-Bureau of Indian Affairs	X		X	
STATE	WisDOT SW Region	X	X	X	
	WisDOT Central Office	X		X	
	WDNR	X	X	X	
	DATCP	X		X	
	DOA	X		X	
	SHPO	X		X	
TRIBES	Coordinate with those that accept invitation to participate	X		X	

	Entity	State/Federal Agency Coordination	Technical Advisory Group	Local Officials Group	Community Advisory Group
LOCAL AND ELECTED OFFICIALS	La Crosse County Administrator		X	X	
	La Crosse County Supervisors			X	
	La Crosse County Hwy Dept.		X	X	
	La Crosse County Health Dept.		X	X	
	La Crosse County EMS		X	X	
	La Cross County Clerk's Office			X	
	La Crosse County Sheriff			X	
	La Crosse County Historical Society			X	
	La Crosse County UW Extension			X	
	La Crosse County Land Conservation			X	
	La Crosse County Planning		X	X	
	MPO (LAPC)		X	X	
	MRRPC		X	X	
	State Senator Office			X	
	State Assembly Person's Office			X	
CITY OF LA CROSSE DEPT	City of La Crosse Clerk's Office			X	
	City of La Crosse Parks and Rec.			X	
	City of La Crosse Mayor			X	
	City of La Crosse Planning		X	X	
	City of La Crosse Police Dept.		X	X	
	City of La Crosse Fire Dept.		X	X	
	City of La Crosse Public Works		X	X	
	City of La Crosse Engineering		X	X	
	City of La Crosse Municipal Transit		X	X	
	City of La Crosse (City Council)			X	
CITY, VILLAGE, AND TOWN REPRESENTATIVES	City of La Crescent			X	
	City of Onalaska		X	X	
	Town of Campbell			X	
	Town of Medary			X	
	Town of Onalaska			X	
	Town of Shelby			X	
	Village of Holmen		X	X	
	Village of West Salem		X	X	

	Entity	State/Federal Agency Coordination	Technical Advisory Group	Local Officials Group	Community Advisory Group
COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES	Neighborhood Associations				X
	Businesses				X
	Residents				X
	Community/Non-Profit Organizations				X
	Universities & Tech Schools				X
	Environmental Groups				X
	La Crosse County Historical Society			X	
	La Crosse Municipal Airport			X	
	School Districts		X	X	
	Utility Companies			X	

3.02 FEDERAL AND STATE AGENCIES

In Stage 2, study sponsors (WisDOT and FHWA) will develop sponsor roles and direction before interagency coordination begins. This will include a discussion of a possible problem statement, goals, and objectives for the study as well as example screening criteria that could be used for evaluation of strategies. At this time, WisDOT and FHWA will define each agency’s role in studying and implementing alternative mode solutions. Clearly understanding and defining these roles with regard to transit for the Study will be important in view of recent challenges to roadway projects.

The federal and state agency coordination began with a kickoff meeting on March 3, 2015. Items and objectives for the kickoff meeting and necessary subsequent agencies meetings include:

- a. Introduction of the PEL process and Federal Regulations surrounding it (23 USC 168)
- b. Review and comment on Draft Problem Statement/Objectives

In these initial coordination meetings, WisDOT and FHWA will pursue a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with federal and state agencies that provides consensus on the use of PEL findings in future environmental documents. This MOU will note that this PEL process is an acceptable method of developing and screening of strategies and determining those that will be evaluated in a subsequent NEPA environmental process. The initial agency coordination meetings will also revise and complete a PEL coordination plan similar to the coordination plans used in the United States Code (USC) 23 USC 139 [formerly referred to as Section 6002 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU 6002)] process.

Coordination with federal and state agencies will be continuous throughout the process. Consensus and/or agreement will be obtained on the results of each stage: broad strategies, refined concepts, and draft and final report. Meeting frequency will be determined by the agencies at the kickoff meeting and adjusted as needed. After the draft report has been published, comments and a formal concurrence on the results will be sought from federal and state agencies.

3.03 LOCAL PUBLIC AGENCIES

Before the formation of technical and community advisory groups (TAG's and CAG's), WisDOT representatives will meet with staff members of the public works and planning departments of affected communities to explain the PEL process and the need for involvement from their staff and elected officials. Briefings occurred in February 2015. WisDOT will interact with local officials through Stages 2 through 5 of the work plan as follows.

A. Stage 2–Broad Strategies

The Technical Advisory Group (TAG) made up of staff members from potentially affected communities will be formed to provide technical guidance on broad regional strategies. Depending on the coordination activities with federal and state officials, the committee may also contain representatives from resource agencies. The TAG will take part in the development, review, and comment on the problem statement, screening criteria, and strategies evaluation. It is anticipated this committee could meet up to three or more times during the Broad Strategies (Stage 2) part of the project.

A Community Advisory Group (CAG) made up of representatives of area businesses, residents, neighborhoods and community organizations. Meetings will be conducted in order to provide community input on regional strategies. The CAG will meet to develop, review, and comment on the problem statement and screening criteria and evaluate broad regional strategies. It is anticipated this committee could meet up to three or more times during the Broad Strategies (Stage 2) part of the project.

B. Stage 3–Strategies

Following screening, strategies that satisfy the problem statement will be advanced to Stage 3. In this stage, the strategies will be refined as strategies and evaluated. Those that do not address the problem statement and objectives will be dismissed or identified for consideration in other programs.

The TAG will review problem statements, objectives, and screening criteria. The TAG will then evaluate improvement strategies. It is anticipated that the TAG will meet two times or more to evaluate strategies.

The CAG will review problem statements, objectives, and screening criteria. The CAG will then evaluate improvement strategies. It is anticipated that the CAG will meet two times or more to evaluate strategies.

C. Stage 4–Refined Strategies

The strategies portion of the study will develop concepts that satisfy the problem statement and objectives. Following screening in Stage 3, concepts that potentially address the broad problem statement, define objectives, and warrant more detailed study for feasibility and effects are brought forward into Stage 4 where these concepts are refined and further analyzed. Stage 4 is the final stage where strategies are screened. Those recommended to move forward will be identified for future NEPA documents and documented in the PEL draft and final reports.

During Stage 4, the CAG and TAG will continue to review and evaluate the refined concepts.

D. Stage 5–Draft and Final Reports

After release of the draft report, comments will be sought from all process participants. These comments will be addressed in the final PEL report. At this time, endorsements will be requested from communities that were involved in the CAG and TAG process.

SECTION 4 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

4.01 OUTLINE OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The study team will use a variety of public involvement methods through Stages 2 through 5. Methods will include but not be limited to: public involvement meetings, focus groups, newsletters and a website. Figure 4 in Section 2 illustrates the public involvement methods in the process.

The study team will develop a Public Involvement Plan (PIP) that further details public involvement activities. It is anticipated the public communication will begin in Stage 2 and coincide with the beginning of public meetings. From there, consistent and strategic communication efforts will take place throughout the Coulee Region Transportation Study (CRTS) effort. The following paragraphs summarize conventional and electronic communication media options that will be implemented.

4.02 MEDIA

A. Electronic Media

Because of the broad area that could be affected by regional alternative strategies, electronic mediums will be leveraged to efficiently obtain input from Coulee Region residents. The following list summarizes the electronic mediums that are planned.

1. The Study will obtain a vanity website address that directs viewers to the WisDOT website for the study. This will provide a quick method for the public to obtain project information.
2. The study team will maintain an email database of community members that would like to receive study updates and be invited to the Public Involvement Meetings. Community members will be able to sign up for the email list on the study website and at public meetings.

Other electronic media may be implemented as needed to effectively reach different groups, residents, and employers.

B. Conventional Media

Conventional media will also be used to interact with those who do not have access to, or do not use, electronic media sources. Notice of project events, such as PIMs, will be provided through electronic media but notification will also use the following media.

1. News releases will be distributed to media outlets before major study activities such as PIMs.

2. The project team will pursue interviews with media outlets to inform the public of the study and advertise major study events.
3. Editorial board meetings with key media will occur as needed to explain PEL objectives and strategies being considered.

4.03 MEETINGS

A. PIM's

PIM's will be held at critical junctures of the project: The PIM's will include:

1. Stage 2–A PIM kickoff meeting that introduces the study and existing conditions and allows the public to review and comment on draft problem statement, objectives, and screening criteria.
2. Stage 2–A PIM that explains future conditions and allows the public to review and comment on the findings of the Broad Strategy evaluation.
3. Stage 3–A PIM to review the findings of concept evaluation.
4. Stage 4–A PIM to review the findings for the refined concept evaluation.
5. Stage 5–A PIM to review Draft Report.

PIM's will consist of multiple meetings at multiple locations and dates within a one to two week period. Each set of meetings will have identical meeting content and exhibits, but the locations will differ to provide greater opportunity for residents to attend. It is anticipated that each PIM series will be held at two locations. Convenient access for all possible attendees, including persons with disabilities, low income citizens, and environmental justice (EJ) populations will be factors in the selection of meeting locations.

B. Focus Groups

Meetings with local government officials and staff are discussed under agency coordination.

Meetings will be held with special interest, advocacy groups, groups representing EJ populations, and major employers at critical junctures in the PEL process to obtain feedback. Examples could include University of Wisconsin La Crosse, La Crosse public schools, Gunderson Health System, Trane, and the La Crosse Hmong Cultural and Community Agency. Junctures will include:

1. Stage 2–Review of the problem statement and screening criteria, and development of strategies.
2. Stages 3 and 4–Review of strategies.

If strategies and concepts are refined to specific locations, the PEL may also initiate meetings with neighborhood groups to obtain feedback on improvements that could affect them.

4.04 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

An Environmental Justice Plan will be developed in Stage 2 that will detail communication methods and outreach to facilitate the inclusion of EJ populations in the public involvement process. Project staff will meet with organizations in Stage 2 that traditionally are a voice for EJ populations. These populations are outlined in the Study’s Environmental Justice Plan. The meetings will help the project team determine the most effective methods for including EJ populations in the broad study area.

An early activity in the data collection portion of the PEL study is a demographic analysis and identification of minority and low income populations in the Coulee Region. This will aid and help direct communication and meeting activities. A summary of this analysis will also be included in the Study’s Environmental Justice Plan. EJ communication and outreach activities will occur with each public involvement cycle, including Broad Strategies, Concepts, and Refined Concepts.

As mentioned, the location of certain populations, including EJ populations, will be a factor in the selection of public involvement locations for each public involvement cycle. Language translators or translated material will be considered if certain ethnic concentrations exist within the areas affected by alternative strategies being evaluated.

SECTION 5 ENVIRONMENTAL DATA COLLECTION

5.01 LAND USE REVIEW

A. Inventory

In Stage 2, the study team will collect existing land use information and bring it into a geographic information system (GIS) format. Base files from La Crosse County and the La Crosse Area Planning Committee will form the foundation and the PEL study will build on that information. Existing and planned land use GIS information will be collected.

A bulleted list will be compiled that summarizes the main objectives and transportation references of the neighborhood plans in the broad region. The study team will also obtain population projections from the Wisconsin Department of Administration for communities affected by the broad regional strategies.

B. Demographics

In Stage 2, demographic information will be collected for the Coulee Region. This demographic information will identify the following characteristics:

1. Presence and density of minority residents (EJ and Title VI).
2. Presence and density of low income residents (EJ).
3. Travel characteristics.
4. Presence and value of commercial properties.

C. Regional Economics

The study team will review and describe the Coulee Region’s role in the local, regional, and statewide economy.

5.02 CULTURAL RESOURCE REVIEW

A. Archaeological Assessment

At the end of Stage 2, an archive and literature search will be performed to identify known archaeological resources within the broad strategy areas as follows: Search limits will be within 500 feet on either side of each corridor evaluated. These corridors may include the existing north/south corridors of US 53, WIS 35, and WIS 16.

The study team will develop a GIS exhibit that shows the general location of these archaeological resources. Field reconnaissance will not be performed.

B. Historic/Architectural

The study will conduct an archive and literature search to identify historic resources in areas that could be affected by the broad alternative strategies. It is estimated that up to four broad alternative strategy corridors will be developed. Search limits will be within 500 feet on either side of each corridor evaluated. Off-alignment rural corridor roadway strategies will have a wider review corridor because alignment refinements are likely. On-alignment urban roadway strategies will have a narrower review corridor.

Locations of the historic resources will be located in a GIS database. The nature and type of resource will be listed in a tabular format. Limited windshield surveys will be performed to confirm and/or identify historic resource groupings during Stage 4 of the PEL process.

5.03 ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCE REVIEW

A. Environmental GIS Database

The study team will compile a GIS database of natural resource boundaries that will be used in the development and evaluation of alternative strategies. The GIS database will include the following:

1. Wetland files from the Wisconsin Wetland Inventory and the USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) wetland maps.
2. Streams and Floodplains from United States Geological Survey topographic maps, NRCS soil survey maps, and Federal Emergency Management Agency floodplain maps.
3. Woodlands, uplands, and other natural resource boundaries from land use maps and aerial photography.
4. Agricultural lands from land use maps and aerial photography
5. Section 4(f) and 6(f) property boundaries from property records.
6. Locations of Threatened and Endangered species, on a per section (square mile) basis from WDNR and United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) data bases.

B. Resource Inventory

1. Lands with Special Protections – The project will identify environmental properties with special protections, such as Section 4(f), Section 6(f), and lands with stewardship fund restrictions. The following will be obtained for these resources:
 - a. Type of resource
 - b. Owner with jurisdiction over resource
 - c. Type of protection mechanisms that apply to the resource
 - d. Mitigation measures available to offset adverse impacts
2. Storm water Management – The study team will obtain information about major storm water quality and quantity control infrastructure near areas potentially affected by the broad alternative strategies. Local agency storm water control requirements will be compared with WisDOT’s standard practices and statutory requirements.

5.04 POTENTIAL IMPACT REVIEW

A. Direct Impact Measurement

The study team will perform a planning level impact analysis using the GIS database. Potential direct impacts to land use types will be measured and used to provide an impact range for evaluation of alternative strategies. Impact ranges will be measured for:

1. Residential lands
2. Commercial lands
3. Wetlands
4. Uplands/woodlots
5. Relocations

Hazardous material screening and scans will not be performed for the CRTS, but instead will occur during the NEPA analysis phase.

For noise impacts, the study team will initially identify broad groupings of receptors during Stages 2 and 3. Once refined concepts have been developed in Stage 4, the type and location of specific receptors will be identified and placed on maps illustrating the refined concepts. Noise modeling will take place during the NEPA phase of the project.

The study team will identify the type of air analysis that may be required under current state and federal regulations for the alternative strategies being considered.

B. Socioeconomic Planning Level Review

The study team will perform a planning level review of potential effects of alternative strategies on neighborhoods, commercial and business centers, and community facilities.

The PEL study will identify potential impacts to EJ populations and describe them in narrative format.

C. Potential Indirect Effects

The PEL study will identify probable land use changes that could occur in association with broad strategies that create new high-mobility corridors. These land use changes will be entered in the demand modeling to estimate their transportation impacts to the transportation network.

The study team will conduct an indirect effects workshop with the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) to review and discuss the potential indirect effects that could occur with the implementation of the broad alternative strategies being reviewed. The results of this analysis will be broad-based and narrative and will not include a quantitative evaluation. The results of this analysis will include possible indirect effects to EJ populations.

D. Potential Cumulative Effects

The Study will identify resources that could be affected by the broad alternative strategies being evaluated. The study team will conduct a workshop to identify the potential cumulative effects that could occur with the implementation of the broad alternative strategies. The cumulative effects analysis will include possible cumulative effects that could impact EJ populations. The analysis will be narrative in nature and not include a quantitative analysis.

As refined concepts are considered in Stage 4, the Study will identify potential land use policies, control, and other measures that could minimize or mitigate potential adverse indirect and cumulative effects.

E. Environmental Justice

The Study will identify potential impacts to EJ populations resulting from each broad alternative strategy that is evaluated.

SECTION 6 TRAFFIC

6.01 GENERAL

The Coulee Region Transportation Study (CRTS) will consider all transportation modes to address the project problem statement and objectives. The alternate mode strategies will be evaluated as both stand-alone and in combination with other strategies being considered.

For motor vehicle traffic and transit, the Study will use an iterative process between demand modeling and operations modeling to determine the traffic and transportation effects of alternative strategies being considered. Generally, demand modeling, which shows traffic volume shifts, will be used in the evaluation of alternative strategies and concepts in Stages 2 and 3. In Stage 4, when refined concepts are being evaluated, both demand modeling and operations modeling may be used to evaluate the transportation effects of alternative strategies.

6.02 TRANSIT

The Study will consider transit strategies and improvements through Stages 2, 3, and 4. In Stage 2, the study team will review transit services that will identify service levels for the Coulee Region. Through the agency and public involvement process, improved transit service could become an objective.

In Stage 2, a mode shift analysis will be conducted to determine how many vehicles would need to be replaced by transit use at key intersections in order to improve intersection operation to levels that meet the study’s problem statement and objectives in the future. It is unlikely that stand-alone transit strategies will be able to meet this requirement. If stand-alone transit strategies are not able to fully address the CRTS PEL objectives, transit service augmentations will be combined with other non-transit-oriented strategies in the Stage 3 and 4 analyses.

6.03 PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE

The Study will consider pedestrian and bicycle routing and accommodations throughout Stages 2, 3, and 4. In Stage 2 east-west and north-south existing conditions routing and routing needs will be identified for the north-south strategy corridors. Stage 2 of the study will include an inventory of bicycle and pedestrian accommodation infrastructure in the Coulee Region.

In Stage 2, a mode shift analysis will be conducted to determine how many vehicles would need to be replaced by bicycle and pedestrian use at key intersections in order to improve intersection operation to levels that meet the study’s problem statement and objectives in the future. It is unlikely that stand-alone bicycle and pedestrian strategies will be able to meet this requirement. If stand-alone bicycle and pedestrian strategies are not able to fully address the Study’s objectives, bicycle and pedestrian service augmentations will be combined with other non-bike/pedestrian-oriented strategies in the Stage 3 and 4 analyses.

6.04 MOTOR VEHICLE AND TRANSIT DATA COLLECTION

The study team will collect and analyze data provided by multiple sources. This data collection will include the following:

A. Turning-Movement Counts

The study team will obtain AM and PM peak-hour turning movement counts for the arterials running through the Coulee Region.

B. Daily Traffic Volumes

The study team will obtain traffic counts for the north-south arterials (US 53, US 14/61, WIS 16, and WIS 35) through the Coulee Region.

C. Crash Data

The study team will obtain all crash data for the city of La Crosse, city of Onalaska, and the village of Holmen. This data will contain reportable crash data from 2009-2013.

D. Origin-Destination (O-D) Study Analysis

The Study will analyze information from a previous O-D study performed on the Coulee Region for use in communicating regional travel patterns to committees and the public. This includes providing exhibits showing the relationships between “external” trips (those that begin or end outside the Coulee Region) and “internal” trips (those that begin and end inside the Coulee Region) The exhibits will summarize external to external, external to internal, internal to external, and internal to internal trips for major roads that feed the Coulee Region. The study will review variations in travel patterns according to the day of week and time of day.

6.05 DEMAND MODELING

Demand modeling will be used to develop 2040 forecast volumes to determine future traffic operations. Demand modeling will also be used to evaluate broad alternative strategies (Stage 2) and strategies (Stage 3). The following paragraphs describe these tasks.

The study team will perform the following demand modeling tasks as part of the demand modeling analysis.

1. In Stage 2, the study team will review the 2010 and 2040 travel demand models. The review will include level of service, speeds, and capacity and adjusting the model to match observed conditions.
2. In Stage 3, the 2010 and 2040 travel demand models will be updated and calibrated with the O-D data.

3. In Stages 2 and 3, the study team will perform select link analyses to understand and illustrate travel patterns in the Coulee Region.
4. In Stage 3, the study team will modify the 2010 and 2040 travel demand models to determine how network modifications associated with the broad alternative strategies and concepts will affect regional and local travel patterns. The transit submodel will also be updated and modified to forecast mode shifts that could occur with broad alternative strategies.
5. The study team will modify Traffic Analysis Zone (TAZ) data within the 2040 travel demand model to reflect different growth patterns that could occur with broad alternative strategies being considered in Stage 2. Revised forecasts will then be provided for these alternative strategies.

6.06 MOTOR VEHICLE OPERATIONS MODELING

A. Existing Operations

In Stage 2, the study team will determine existing levels of service (LOS) on the arterials within the Coulee Region.

In Stage 2, an existing condition AM and PM peak-hour Sychro/Simtraffic model will be developed in the latest version of Synchro software. The model will include the following roadways:

- WIS 16 from County OS in the north to US 53 in the south
- WIS 16 from Losey Blvd. to 7th Street
- Losey Blvd. from La Crosse Street to US 14
- WIS 35 from Main Street in the north to I-90 and from US 53 to US 14
- US 53 from I-90 to US 14
- US 14 from US 53 to WIS 35
- Gillette Street (County B) from WIS 16 to US 53
- Clinton Street from WIS 35 to US 53

Development of these 2013 AM and PM models will include:

- Calibrating and validating the Synchro model using standard practices.
- Collecting Measures of Effectiveness (MOEs) for inclusion in the existing conditions report.
- Providing 3D animations for public outreach and committee presentations.

B. Future Operations

In Stage 3, the study team will develop 2040 existing plus committed AM and PM Synchro peak-hour models. Development of these models will include:

- Modifying geometry to account for any known projects
- Modifying the 2010 and 2040 demand models to develop 2010 and 2040 AM and PM peak-hour models. Then 2040 forecasts for Synchro will be developed from the 2040 travel demand model.
- Collecting MOEs for inclusion in future documentation.
- Providing 3D animations for public outreach and committee presentations.

In Stage 4, the Synchro model will be used to test the effectiveness of strategies and options.

Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL)
WisDOT Equivalent Approach Process
Beltline Corridor and WisDOT Statewide model
Draft 4:

Introduction

Planning and Environment Linkages & Every Day Counts (EDC)

PEL is one of ten EDC initiatives FHWA has included in a toolkit focused on shortening project delivery time. The EDC aspect of the PEL initiative focuses on the part of PEL that encourages the use of information developed in planning to inform the NEPA process. This can lead to less duplication of effort and more informed project-level decisions.

A PEL study is any type of transportation planning study conducted at the corridor or subarea level that links planning information directly or by reference into NEPA. These studies could include the feasibility of projects, tiered environmental studies, refinement of a project's scope or design, the development of compatible land use, demand management or management and operational strategies that can make a project serve the project's need longer or have less impact.

To be viable in NEPA, a PEL study must involve interested State, local, Tribal, and Federal agencies as well as the public. It must document relevant decisions in a form that is identifiable and available for review during the NEPA scoping process, can be appended to or referenced in the NEPA document, and be accepted by the NEPA lead agencies. The regulatory authority to use planning information in NEPA was explicitly clarified in SAFETEA-LU, including the flexibility of funding that agencies can use.

Congestion related studies, operation and maintenance projects, demand management projects, land use strategies related to reducing travel impacts, especially where a corridor capacity expansion is being considered, should be included in PEL studies. Analysis from scenario planning efforts (safety, congestion, air quality, etc) should be considered during the development of the purpose and need statements if resource agencies have been involved.

WisDOT expects corridor and subarea planning efforts that link Statewide Long Range Planning with the NEPA/WEPA process to be of value in certain complex settings. These would involve unusually high and diverse stakeholder interest, multiple possible solutions to existing problems, potentially high impacts and costs and the likelihood of controversy and/or extensive outreach efforts. The Beltline is such a situation and therefore a logical candidate to be WisDOT's first PEL or PEL Equivalent Approach corridor study. FHWA and WisDOT agree this PEL study will serve as the WisDOT pilot project. WisDOT in turn will use it as the foundation of a formal statewide PEL process and further develop it as the Beltline PEL progresses.

The pilot addresses everything FHWA expects for this type of study, per 2.1.1 of “Guidance on Using Corridor and Subarea Planning to Inform NEPA Federal Highway Administration April 5, 2011”:

http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/integ/corridor_nepa_guidance.asp

2.1.1 Typical Elements of a Corridor Study

- A corridor study is a targeted analytical study that addresses specific needs of a corridor or particular geographic area. Corridor studies are used to achieve various goals. The content of a corridor study will vary based on the actual corridor itself and the study’s purpose, but generally, a corridor study would include:
- A reason for conducting the study, including the main issues affecting system performance.
- A clear definition and justification for the study area boundaries, including a description of corridor resources and potentially affected stakeholders.
- A budget, schedule, and list of expected products arising from the study. Products that may come out of the study include:
 - goals, objectives, and evaluation measures for the corridor
 - alternative strategies to address identified problems
 - an analysis of forecasted impacts of these alternative strategies in terms of environmental, transportation, and financial issues
 - an evaluation of how each alternative strategy addresses (or does not address) the specified problems of, and goals and objectives for the corridor

WisDOT has recently conducted a 3-Phase Beltline Safety and Operational Study covering the same corridor limits as the PEL study. The Phase 1 Report, completed in January 2008, catalogues existing physical and operational conditions and predicts future volumes and roadway performance. It will be a primary source of reasons to conduct the Beltline Corridor Study. WisDOT’s Connections 2030, the Madison area MPO, local governments and users in general will also be valuable sources of this information.

Phase 2 of the Safety and Operational Study analyzed short and mid-term improvements to the Beltline that did not add through lane capacity. The Phase 2 report was also completed in 2008. A number of the alternatives recommended in the report have been constructed and several more are underway. Phase 3 analyzed possible new grade separated crossings of the Beltline. The 2012 report recommends up to 5 locations for additional study.

A safe and efficiently functioning Beltline corridor is important to the Madison- area transportation network. It serves local and regional traffic and is fed by and links to nearly every major route in Dane County. Improvement alternatives beyond the immediate corridor may be key components of an overall solution that balances impacts and accommodates past and future growth in the area with the costs and impacts of major roadway improvements. This will likely increase the level of effort to identify and describe corridor resources but will ensure that stakeholder involvement and alternatives identified and vetted is maximized.

PEL Corridor and Sub-Area Planning DRAFT Process – Madison Beltline

FHWA developed a questionnaire that summarizes and guides organizations through the PEL process. It ensures a consistent and appropriate level of detail is used and the documentation produced can be incorporated in NEPA environmental documents. Like many other states, WisDOT has chosen to use a PEL - Equivalent approach instead. This is a process and/or consultation technique that fulfills a similar purpose as FHWA's PEL Questionnaire, which explains the outcomes transportation planning efforts must achieve to be incorporated into the NEPA process. To be considered an equivalent approach, the process and/or tool must satisfy specific criteria.

FHWA PEL Equivalent Approach Criteria

1. The equivalent should be institutionalized within the department (i.e. it is a formal process or tool available statewide).
2. The equivalent must provide information on how to consider and document the following:
 1. The early and continuous coordination with Federal, Tribal, State, and local transportation, environmental, regulatory, and resource agencies.
 2. Coordination efforts with the public and stakeholders
 3. Description of planning scope, vision statement, and steps needed to scale the vision statement to a project-level purpose and need statement.
 4. Documentation of alternatives that were considered, selected and rejected; criteria and process used for selecting and rejecting alternatives will be prepared.
 5. It should also include an explanation of planning assumptions, including forecast year, traffic volumes, policy, and data as well as consistency of those planning assumptions with the long-range transportation plan.
3. The equivalent may also provide information on how to consider and document the following:
 1. Analysis of the affected environment and environmental consequences. Document those resources reviewed and not reviewed, and the level of detail.
 2. Potential strategies for broad-scale mitigation.
 3. Description and/or analysis of potential cumulative effects.
 4. A method of documenting FHWA's acknowledgement, in order to support the use of planning information in NEPA, that indicates that PEL principles were applied to FHWA's satisfaction

Linkages between PEL and NEPA/WEPA

http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/integ/pel_quest_equiv_nc.asp

The WisDOT process should identify and address linkages between long range planning and project development. Products from WisDOT's Long-Range Transportation Planning process in general and Long Range Corridor Planning specifically would ideally inform NEPA/WEPA studies or serve as the starting point. This will help maximize time and cost efficiency for WisDOT, FHWA, agencies and the public. Identified linkages include:

Long Range Planning/PEL Equivalent Approach	Project Development (NEPA/WEPA)
Problem Statement	Purpose and Need
Alternative Strategies Development	Alternatives considered for study
Alternative Strategies that do not address screening criteria	Alternatives that are not selected for detailed study
Alternative Strategies that address screening criteria	Alternatives selected for detailed study
Multi-modal analysis	Multi-modal alternatives
Environmental Resource Impacts Review	Environmental Impacts Analysis
Corridor land use affects assessment	Indirect and cumulative effects
Stakeholder Coordination and Involvement	Public involvement and agency coordination
Mitigation opportunities	Mitigation needs and opportunities

The WisDOT PEL Equivalent Approach consists of Seven Steps:

The Beltline is the first corridor study WisDOT has undertaken under the PEL initiative. FHWA and WisDOT agree this is a pilot project and will be the foundation of a formal statewide PEL process for WisDOT. Development of this process will begin while the Beltline PEL is ongoing. This satisfies FHWA PEL Equivalent Approach Criteria 1.

Step 1: Develop corridor study work plan — The corridor planning team’s first action is to develop a corridor study work plan, which includes a corridor study framework, corridor setting document, draft Public Involvement Plan, scope of work summary, expertise needs and a budget. Stakeholders should help develop the study setting, Scope of Work and Public Involvement Plan during one or more formal scoping meetings.

Create a study coordination plan that defines the amount and timing of agency and stakeholder involvement and participation opportunities. The SAFTEA-LU Coordination Plan shell will serve as the starting point but the PEL version will be informal and have fewer steps. This satisfies Criteria 2.1 and 2.2. Agency Comment and Response point #1

Components of the coordination plan may include:

- Stakeholder Identification
- Local official and agency meeting list
- Open House-style public information meetings
- Special interest outreach meetings, workshops, etc (multi-modal, neighborhood, environmental, businesses and developer reps, etc)
- Facebook and interactive website. Targeted mailings
- Report commenting process
- MOA/MOU needs
- Summary results of significant contact points and meetings held

Step 2: Develop existing and projected conditions report — The team will conduct a review of existing conditions, identify deficiencies and key resources and assess the potential to be affected by changes to the corridor. The review should identify corridor deficiencies; stakeholder-defined vision, goals and objectives for the future; key environmental resources and potential to impact; and potential mitigation strategies. The results should be summarized in a report that integrates feedback gained through resource agency consultation and public involvement, as well as input from their review and comment on a draft. This will satisfy Criteria 2.5.

The Beltline and I-94 reports from recent studies, MPO, regional plans and the 2010 census will be primary sources for planning-level information and analyses that can be useful for this step. Step 2 report content includes but is not limited to:

- Origin-Destination study results including comparison of current and projected traffic volumes and distribution trends;
- Demographic trends and forecasts, including population and employment projections;
- Regional development and growth analyses, including a comparison of current and projected local land use, growth management and development plans and natural resource protection and enhancement practices within growth areas;
- GIS overlays showing past, current, or predicted future conditions of the natural and built environments;
- Environmental scans that identify resources and sensitive areas;
- Descriptions of air sheds and watersheds;
- Natural resource planning efforts, such as wildlife and habitat conservation plans, watershed plans, special management areas, etc

Step 3: Identify needs, issues, goals, and screening criteria — The corridor planning team will identify specific needs, issues and problems of the transportation system. Corridor-level goals, objectives and vision statements are also identified. Statements summarizing these topics should be similar to but less detailed than NEPA purpose and need statements. These summary statements will be used to develop alternative strategies screening criteria (used in Step 4). The screening criteria should be written such that relatively limited analysis is needed to reveal most fatal flaws This step will satisfy Criteria 2.3. Agency Comment and Response Point #2

The needs, issues and problems statements:

- Should not describe solutions;
- Should be based on articulated long-range planning factors and developed through an inclusive stakeholder/agency outreach process;
- Should be specific enough so that the range of alternative strategies developed will offer real potential for solutions to the transportation problem;
- Must not be so specific as to —~~averse engineer~~” a solution; and
- May reflect other priorities and limitations in the area, such as environmental resources, growth management, land use planning, and economic development.

Step 4: Develop range of alternative strategies and determine which to advance and not advance — The team, in collaboration with stakeholders and agencies, will develop a full range of alternative strategies that might address the identified problems and goals. The team will conduct a planning-level analysis for each alternative using the Step 3 screening criteria, determine the extent to which they meet them and reject those with fatal flaws. The alternatives considered, the

criteria and process used to evaluate them and the outcome for each will be documented. This step will satisfy Criteria 2.4 and Criteria 3.1. Agency Comment and Response Point #3

Step 5: Recommend Alternative Strategies — The team will conduct additional analysis of the package of alternatives and/or options that are recommended in Step #4 as possible solutions to the corridor problems and objectives. The initial avoidance areas, mitigation needs, and opportunities associated with the recommended package of alternatives will be identified at a broad level through collaboration with agencies, the public and other appropriate stakeholders. This step includes further analysis of the potential impacts to environmental (natural, social, and cultural) resources; bicycle and pedestrian issues; conceptual engineering; tribal and public participation; additional coordination activities with the public, agencies and all other interested stakeholders; and concept-level preliminary cost estimates. This step will satisfy Criteria 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3.

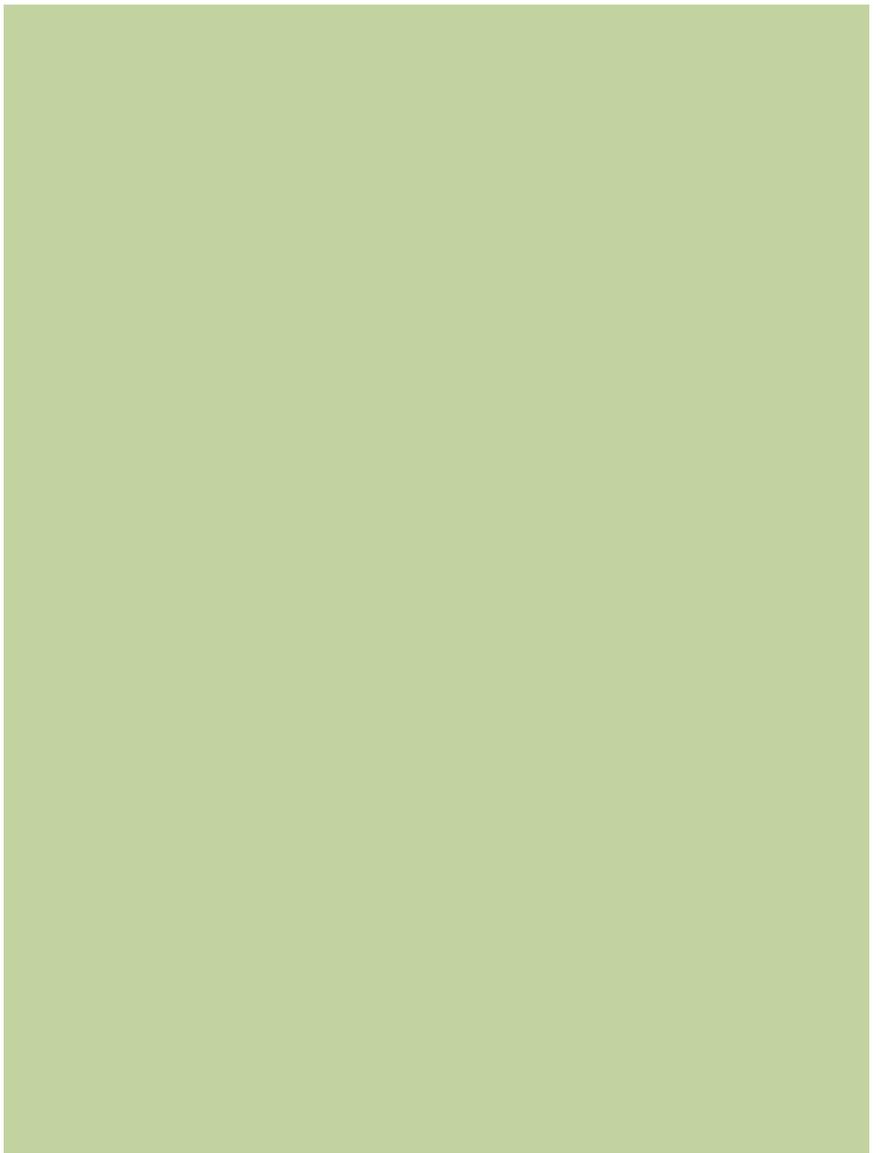
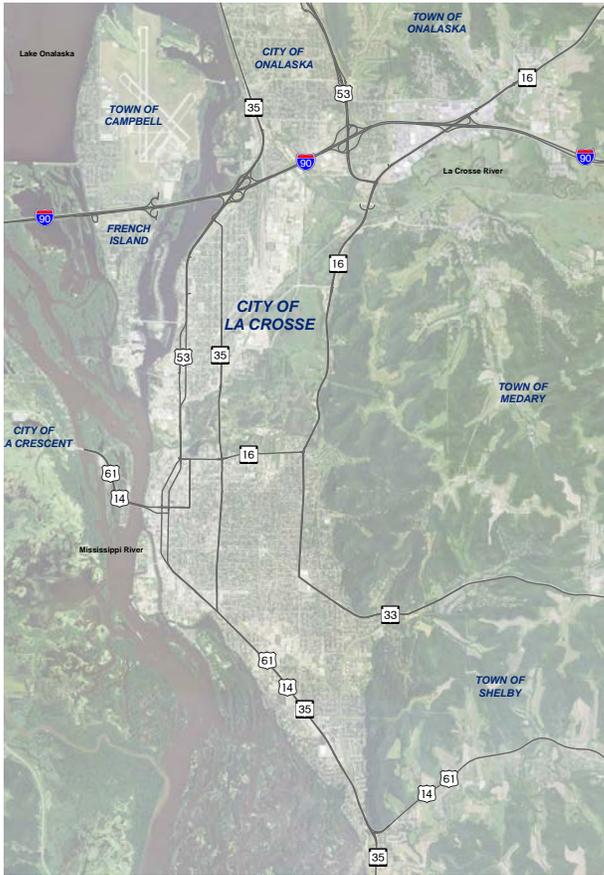
Step 6: Prepare draft corridor study report — The report documents the entire corridor planning process, key findings, and outcomes of the previous six steps. The report should include a description of the alternatives considered, selection criteria, potential impacts and mitigation opportunities, as well as the recommended package of alternatives and its associated next steps. Agency Comment and Response Point #4

A Draft CSR will summarize Steps 1 – 5 and include:

- Problems and objectives statements
- Study Area Description – current and future
- Alternatives Screening Criteria
- Design Criteria
- Possible problem solutions
- Environmental Analysis process and scope
- Explanation of alternatives rejection process
- Recommended Solutions and their impacts, mitigations and opportunities
- Concept-level Cost Estimates
- Projected EIS Schedule through ROD
- Public and Agency Involvement Summary

A checklist of information from the PEL study that could be used in the NEPA process may be developed and utilized with the CSR. An example checklist developed by Montana is found at: http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/integ/corridor_nepa_guidance.asp#toc432

Step 7: Make recommendations —The team incorporates feedback from the resource agencies and the public to develop the Final CSR. A data base documenting all draft report comments received and WisDOT's responses will be attached to the final report. The final report details specific action items, responsible parties, and suggested transition steps from planning to project development and environmental review. A concurrence or agreement mechanism that documents FHWA's support of the use of the PEL Study information in NEPA and that PEL principles were applied to FHWA's satisfaction will be created and incorporated into the Final CSR. Steps 6 and 7 will satisfy Criteria 3.5. Agency Concurrence/Agreement Point.



Building a Better World
for All of Us®

sehinc.com