

2

Purpose of and Need for Action

3

1.1 US 41 Background

4 United States Highway 41 (US 41) from Milwaukee to Green Bay is a backbone route in Wisconsin's Corridors
5 2030 State Highway Plan and part of the National Highway System. Backbone routes are critical to travel patterns
6 and support the state's economy. US 41 connects two of the largest regional economies in Wisconsin—
7 southeastern Wisconsin and the Fox River Valley—as well as major metropolitan market areas in northern Illinois.
8 The 175-mile corridor carries 27,000 to 150,000 vehicles per day and is a major transportation arterial for eastern
9 Wisconsin. Listed below are indicators of the importance of US 41 to Wisconsin's economy and regional and
10 national freight movements.

- 11 • Census 2010 data show that US 41 travels through 45 communities in 8 counties along the 142-mile route,
12 comprising 22 percent (1.25 million people) of the state's population.
- 13 • The US 41 corridor serves manufacturing areas in the heart of Wisconsin. Manufacturing facilities typically
14 represent significantly higher private investments and higher paying jobs; 1,738 manufacturers employing
15 103,988 persons are located in communities along the corridor, comprising 23 percent of total state
16 manufacturers and 25 percent of total state manufacturing employment.
- 17 • US 41 serves as one of the major highways supporting the regional shopping centers within the 8-county area;
18 1,878 retail establishments employing 29,465 workers were identified in communities along the corridor,
19 comprising 23 percent of all state retail establishments and 28 percent of total employees in retail in
20 Wisconsin.
- 21 • There are 5,785 wholesale and retail trade establishments, employing 111,283 workers,¹ in communities
22 along the corridor, comprising 22 percent and 25 percent of the statewide total, respectively.
- 23 • US 41 runs through 8 counties in the study area. These counties account for more than \$3.6 billion in tourism
24 expenditures from visitors to the region. US 41 therefore contributed to 29 percent of the \$12 billion tourism
25 dollars generated in the state in 2010.
- 26 • Approximately 33 industrial parks are located within 1 mile of the highway, covering more than 6,500 acres.
- 27 • The results of *A Study of New and Expanding Manufacturing Plants in Wisconsin during 1990–1996: Analysis*
28 *of New and Expanding Manufacturing Plants along Wisconsin's Highway Transportation Corridors*, a study to
29 determine location patterns of new and expanding manufacturing plants in the state, revealed that between
30 1990 and 1996, 637 new and expanded manufacturing plants with 19,615 employees were located within
31 5 miles of US 41. This represents 23 percent of the total number of new manufacturing plant locations and
32 employees, and 25 percent of expanded facilities, between 1990 and 1996.
- 33 • According to WisDOT's 2007 commodity flow database, more than 80 million truck tons of freight originated
34 in the 8 counties along US 41. That accounts for nearly 38 percent of Wisconsin's originating truck tonnage.
35 The commodities are valued at more than \$204 billion. The main commodities originating in the corridor are
36 freight bound for warehouse and distribution centers, stone, gravel, sand, grain, and paper.
- 37 • In 2007, more than 75 million truck tons of freight entered the 8 counties along US 41, accounting for
38 44 percent of the state's terminating truck tonnage. The commodities were valued at over \$260 billion. The
39 main commodities terminating along US 41 include freight bound for warehouse and distribution centers,
40 gravel, sand, stone, concrete, forest materials, dairy farm products, and iron/steel products.

¹ Includes the aforementioned retail trade establishments and employees.

1.2 Proposed Action

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT), in consultation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), is studying alternatives to convert US 41 from a non-interstate freeway on the National Highway System to an Interstate Highway between the Zoo Interchange on Interstate 94 (I-94/I-894) in Milwaukee and the US 41/I-43 interchange in Green Bay. The corridor extends through Kenosha, Racine, Milwaukee, Waukesha, Washington, Dodge, Fond du Lac, Winnebago, Outagamie, and Brown counties (Exhibit 1-1). The process of addressing the requirements to convert US 41 to an interstate highway would occur in stages over many years. As a result, WisDOT and FHWA have limited the proposed action in this Tier 1 Draft EIS to the following:

- Consider the broad costs and benefits of interstate conversion.
- Evaluate impacts of signing US 41 and the route designation number.
- Determine the construction impacts of installing interstate signing along the study corridor.

Based on the results of the above evaluation, WisDOT will determine whether to convert US 41 to an interstate highway.

In the current federal transportation program known as *Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users* (SAFETEA-LU), the US 41 corridor is recommended for interstate conversion and is defined as “United States Route 41 corridor between Interstate Route 94 via Interstate 894 and Highway 45 near Milwaukee and Interstate Route 43 near Green Bay in the State of Wisconsin.” For the purposes of this study, the project’s southern terminus is the Russell Road interchange just south of the Wisconsin-Illinois state line where US 41 merges with I-94. Because the route from the Zoo Interchange along I-894 and I-43 to the Russell Road Interchange is already an Interstate Highway, that area is not part of the conversion of US 41. However, it is part of the study area since it would likely be signed consistent with the numbering for the converted section of US 41.

The Russell Road interchange at the south end of the project and the US 41/I-43 interchange at the north end are the study termini.² The termini, which have been identified as part of SAFETEA-LU, are logical because they meet the requirements identified in FHWA 23 CFR 771.111(f), which require that an action:

- Be of sufficient length to address environmental matters on a broad scope
- Have independent utility or independent significance; that is, be usable and be a reasonable expenditure, even if no additional transportation improvements in the area are made
- Not restrict consideration of alternatives for other reasonably foreseeable transportation improvements

1.3 Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed action is to enhance economic development by converting US 41 to an interstate highway and signing it as an interstate. The need for the proposed action is based on a combination of “project status and legislation” and economics as discussed below.

1.3.1 Project Status/Legislation³

The federal transportation program SAFETEA-LU, enacted August 10, 2005, identified the US 41 Corridor as High Priority Corridor 57 on the National Highway System (NHS) and designated it a future interstate route.⁴ Congress made the high priority corridor designation based on the importance of the route in serving regional, national, and international freight and vehicle movements. The statistics in Section 1.1 lend credence to the decision by

² The 43 miles between the Zoo Interchange and the Russell Road Interchange already are an interstate.

³ The project status need factor is described in FHWA’s Technical Advisory T 6640.8A *Guidance for Preparing and Processing Environmental and Section 4(f) Documents* (October 30, 1987) as “the project history including actions taken to date, other agencies and governmental units involved, action spending, schedules, etc.” The legislation need factor is described as “is there a Federal, State, or local government mandate for the action?” .

⁴ <http://www.interstate-guide.com/i-041.html>.

1 Congress to designate US 41 a high priority corridor and potential addition to the Interstate Highway system.
 2 Although US 41 extends from Michigan’s Upper Peninsula to Miami, Florida, converting the proposed Wisconsin
 3 segment to an interstate would create a more regionally and nationally recognizable connection between the US
 4 41 corridor in Wisconsin and Chicago. The “interstate brand” would enhance the ability of US 41 to support and
 5 expand business in Wisconsin and increase its importance as a route serving regional and national freight.

6 The significance of the High Priority Corridor designation is that it allows National Corridor Planning and
 7 Development Funds, a discretionary fund administered by the U.S. Secretary of Transportation in cooperation
 8 with Congress, to be spent to plan, construct, or maintain such corridors.

9 With the potential for US 41 to become part of the Interstate Highway System, it would be subject to certain
 10 requirements as set forth by the FHWA. FHWA has set stringent highway design standards for the Interstate
 11 Highway System to ensure high levels of mobility and safety. Conditions along US 41 were examined to identify
 12 deficiencies and to provide a basis for defining future roadway requirements capable of meeting interstate
 13 highway standards. The CD at the back of this document contains the complete deficiency report. To achieve
 14 interstate status, FHWA requires WisDOT to commit to a program that prioritizes and addresses substandard
 15 design elements on US 41. Some of the improvements that will be required due to these substandard design
 16 elements will be addressed through Tier II environmental studies. Section 2, Alternatives, discusses the process
 17 WisDOT will follow to address the US 41 deficiencies.

18 1.3.2 Economics

19 The impetus for including US 41 in SAFETEA-LU has economic underpinnings. Business interests in the Oshkosh,
 20 Neenah, and Appleton area (the Fox Valley) voiced support for converting US 41 to an Interstate Highway to their
 21 congressional representatives because they believed an Interstate would better support and enhance economic
 22 development than a US highway. As a result of this support, US 41 was included in SAFETEA-LU as a candidate for
 23 interstate conversion. To understand the potential differences between a US Highway and an Interstate Highway
 24 on industrial and commercial development along the US 41 corridor, WisDOT surveyed economic and community
 25 development representatives in the US 41 corridor in fall 2011. The following are the key findings and themes
 26 from the survey responses of these experts:

- 27 • **Business Recruitment and Job Creation**—Access and visibility from an Interstate is the primary factor
 28 considered by businesses and developers in the site selection process. Interstate designation will open up new
 29 markets as some companies locate only along interstate highways (rather than US highways). The ability to
 30 attract larger corporations will result in ancillary development of hotels, retail, restaurants, and so on.
- 31 • **Business Retention and Expansion**—Local businesses are more likely to remain or expand in their community
 32 if US 41 is designated an Interstate Highway.
- 33 • **Tourism**—Tourists understand that interstate highways mean faster, safer travel, and increased attention to
 34 maintenance. Interstate designation will direct tourist travel to the route and may mean more customers for
 35 highway-oriented businesses, such as restaurants, gas stations, and hotels. The US 41 corridor might provide
 36 an alternative route to northeast Wisconsin and Door County from Milwaukee and Chicago which avoids
 37 downtown Milwaukee.
- 38 • **Property Values**—More than 70 percent of respondents felt that designation of US 41 as an Interstate
 39 Highway would increase commercial and industrial property values along the corridor.
- 40 • **Extent of Impact**—If converted, the potential economic impacts could extend 10 miles beyond the
 41 interchanges.

42 Although the footprint of US 41 would be essentially the same as the footprint of an Interstate, the economic
 43 development experts have identified the advantages of interstate conversion on maintaining and expanding
 44 industrial and commercial development and tourism in the US 41 corridor. The conclusion to be drawn from the
 45 input of the economic development representatives is that, without conversion, US 41 will maintain its current
 46 importance to commerce and tourism, but the study corridor will not reach its full development potential.

1 The economic and community development representatives interviewed by WisDOT may have been reacting to
2 the fact that cities in the Fox Valley stand out among peer communities in the upper Midwest and nationally as
3 being underserved by the interstate system. Among cities with a population over 40,000, Appleton, Oshkosh, and
4 Fond du Lac constitute one of the only three-city clusters in this population range that are not within 25 miles of
5 an Interstate Highway, except for comparable clusters in California and Texas (Exhibit 1-2). Exhibit 1-2 also shows
6 that Appleton, Oshkosh, and Fond du Lac are the only cities in Wisconsin with a population above 40,000 not
7 served by an interstate highway. If metropolitan statistical areas⁵ (MSAs) with populations between 100,000 and
8 250,000 are compared, the Appleton MSA is the second most populous (225,666) without an interstate within
9 6 miles, exceeded only by College Station-Bryan, Texas MSA (Exhibit 1-3). The combined population of the Fox
10 Valley MSA cluster is 494,293. Only one other MSA in the country (Santa Rosa-Petaluma, CA) with a comparable
11 population (483,878) is not served by an Interstate Highway (Exhibit 1-3).

12 Because the manufacturing sector is a key employer in the study area, it was not surprising that two of the key
13 categories mentioned by economic development experts in the fall 2011 survey were business recruitment/job
14 creation and business retention and expansion. As noted in Section 1.1, WisDOT's 2007 commodity flow database
15 indicated that more than 80 million truck tons of freight originated in the 8 counties along US 41 and more than
16 75 million truck tons of freight entered the 8 counties along US 41. The volume of freight moving into and out of
17 the study area is clear evidence that manufacturers and raw products suppliers along the US 41 corridor are part
18 of a larger regional economy, and US 41 serves as a critical link in several Midwest industry supply chains. The
19 manufacturing sectors in the US 41 study area that are also found throughout the upper Midwest include wood
20 products, metal production, machinery manufacturing, electric equipment manufacturing, and agribusiness and
21 food processing.

22 The study area's approximate center point, Fond du Lac, is within hours of Chicago, one of America's largest global
23 trade hubs, ranking 7th in *Foreign Policy* magazine's "Global Cities Index for 2012." The study area is within a day's
24 drive of all other major Midwestern and Central U.S. metropolitan areas, most of which share one or more of the
25 major industries found within the corridor (Exhibit 1-4). It is because of the connections that US 41 provides to
26 suppliers, complementary industries, and markets throughout the Midwest that its conversion to an interstate
27 highway has been recognized by economic development representatives as critical to maintaining and expanding
28 the industrial base in the study area. Failure to convert US 41 would place study area manufacturers at a
29 competitive disadvantage in the competitive national and international arena in which these industries operate.

30 As noted in Section 1.1, the 8 study area counties accounted for more than \$3.6 billion in tourism expenditures in
31 2010 or nearly 30 percent of the \$12 billion spent statewide. The failure to convert US 41 to an Interstate Highway
32 could have ramifications for the tourism sector as it does for the manufacturing sector. In 2010, tourists from
33 Illinois accounted for 6.3 million leisure overnight trips to Wisconsin. These trips amount to 18.8 percent of the
34 total leisure overnight trips in Wisconsin. The majority of the Illinois tourists are from the Chicago metro area,
35 and they are bound for destinations in Door, Vilas, and Oneida counties (Midwest Travel Facts + Figures,
36 Wisconsin Department of Tourism, September 2011). Without interstate status, US 41 would provide a less well-
37 recognized alternate corridor to Door County and northern Wisconsin that avoids downtown Milwaukee not only
38 for Chicago metro area tourists, but also to other Illinois tourists who would view the interstate designation as a
39 direct and reliable connection to tourism destinations in the eastern half of the state. Like in the manufacturing
40 sector where the lack of interstate status can adversely affect corporate decisions to relocate or expand, if in- and
41 out-of-state tourist avoid US 41 in favor of the Interstate Highways serving Door County and northern Wisconsin,
42 it would be expected that the highway-services industry along the US 41 corridor will be disadvantaged.

⁵ A metropolitan statistical area is a geographical region with a high population density at its core and close economic ties throughout the area.