



# **US 151 Freeway Conversion Study**

(Columbus to Waupun, WIS 73 – WIS 49)

WisDOT Project ID: 1110-00-09

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

### **1. Who is conducting the study?**

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) Southwest Region is initiating the study. WisDOT has hired the consulting firm Ayres Associates Inc to assist them with their efforts. The consulting firms of Transmart Technologies and Vandewalle and Associates are working with Ayres Associates to complete the study activities.

### **2. What is the definition of a Freeway?**

A divided highway with access provided only at interchanges.

### **3. What does the US 151 Freeway Conversion Study involve?**

The most important thing to know is that the US 151 Freeway Conversion Study is just that, a study. There is no immediate construction planned on this section of U.S. Highway 151, and no funding allocations have been committed beyond the study phases. The study will consider the feasibility of freeway conversion on this corridor.

The purpose of study is to conceptualize the conversion of US 151 from the City of Columbus to the City of Waupun into a freeway, taking into account impacts on existing and future land uses, and access to the local transportation network. The study will develop strategies and recommendations that integrate land use and transportation systems, so that US 151 operates well into the future. This will allow both WisDOT and the local communities involved to adequately plan for future land use and local transportation network needs. It is important to note that this study is focusing on identifying and planning for long-term access to and from the corridor, not adding additional capacity (travel lanes).

### **4. What are the limits of the study?**

The study limits extend from the WIS 73 interchange on the north side of Columbus to the WIS 49 interchange at Waupun, a distance of approximately 27 miles. The study passes through the Townships of Elba, Calamus, Beaver Dam, Trenton, and Chester in Dodge County. Several other townships that are fairly close to the project corridor have been contacted for their input.

**5. The US 151 corridor appears to be operating well in this area. Why are additional studies necessary?**

As part of the US Highway System, US 151 is an important roadway connecting the central part of the state with the Fox Valley and Green Bay areas. US 151 is identified as a Backbone Route in WisDOT's Corridors 2020 Plan. The plan places high priority in protecting highway investments that connect major economic/population centers and carry long-distance, state-wide traffic. As both traffic and land development pressure increase along US 151, experience around the state has demonstrated that unmanaged and unprotected highways can deteriorate quickly in terms of reduced operations and safety. Of greatest concern to WisDOT are the at-grade intersections along US 151. As traffic increases over time, it will become increasingly difficult to turn on, off, and/or cross the highway in a safe manner, and the potential for crashes could increase.

**6. What types of long-term improvements will the study consider?**

Most of the highway is currently designed as an "expressway". An expressway typically consists of 55-65 mph posted speed limit, a median to separate traffic, and at-grade intersections (meaning you can get directly on/off/across at the intersecting roads). An expressway sometimes has some interchanges and a limited number of private driveways located directly on the highway.

A "freeway" facility is usually a 4-lane facility with a median and has a 65-mph posted speed limit. Unlike expressways, freeways accommodate access on/off the highway only at interchanges. With a freeway facility, there are no at-grade intersections or private driveways directly on the corridor. Good examples of freeway facilities are those highways belonging to the interstate system.

The goal of the study is to plan for the ultimate conversion from an expressway to a freeway. Intersection improvements could include interchanges, grade-separations (overpass or underpass), cul-de-sacs, and/or local road extensions to provide for local circulation.

**7. When might the actual construction improvements be made?**

As indicated earlier, there are no immediate project or construction dollars programmed for this stretch of US 151. The long-term plan will lay out the ultimate highway access conversion scenario, however it would likely be programmed, funded, and constructed over a number of decades. Even though actual improvements may be years away, developing a long-term highway access plan will allow both WisDOT and local communities to collectively plan for transportation and land use systems that are compatible with one another.

**8. How might this study affect emergency services such as police, fire, EMS and other public services such as school bus routes.**

The study team will be in direct contact with all of the local fire, police, and EMS providers in the study area. The final highway access plan will accommodate the delivery of emergency services to the greatest extent possible. Similar to the emergency service providers, the study team will be in direct contact with area school districts and their transportation service coordinators to ensure school bus routes are integrated into the highway access plan.

**9. What about agricultural operations, especially cross-highway farming?**

WisDOT recognizes that agricultural operations are an important part of the local and statewide economy. Many operations currently use US 151 for travel and/or gain access to the opposite side of the highway. A special agricultural survey was sent to adjacent property owners in 2008 to help understand current and future operation needs while attempting to minimize disruption.

**10. Does WisDOT or FHWA have criteria or standards to determine when to convert from an expressway to a freeway?**

Yes, the statewide access management plan (SAMP) is based upon several safety and traffic movement thresholds to help WisDOT determine whether expressway upgrades or freeway conversions are recommended for a highway. Some of the main criteria factored include: existing traffic, forecasted traffic, crash levels and severity, type of facility, and route designation. This US 151 corridor falls within the SAMP tier 1 designation. The long-term goal of access for corridors with tier 1 designations calls for a maximization of interstate/statewide traffic movement and ultimately for interchanges, locked/gated driveways for emergency vehicles, and on an interim basis – isolated field entrances. US 151 is a strong candidate for freeway conversion because it is a high priority multi-lane Backbone facility and has current and long-term safety issues due to several at-grade intersections.

**11. What is the Wisconsin State Statute 84.295?**

The state statute that allows WisDOT to officially map right-of-way widths for future freeways and expressways. The purpose of mapping is to prevent conflicting and costly economic development from happening within the mapped right-of-way and to help local municipalities plan for their future.

**12. How can I get involved in this process and stay informed?**

Meetings for both local officials and the general public will be held during the study period. They will offer opportunities for you to provide early input on the study needs and issues. A link for the project is available on the WisDOT's website that contains project related information available for review. A project mailing database has also been developed. The mailing list is comprised of corridor residents/businesses, local officials, emergency service providers, agricultural operators, school transportation officials, and other interested parties. If you received a mailing, you are already included in our mailing database. ***If you know of others that did not receive a mailing or that wish to be included, please contact one of the individuals listed below and we would be happy to add them to our list.***

**Project website:** <http://www1.wisconsindot.gov/Pages/projects/by-region/sw/151/default.aspx>

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