

INTRODUCTION

Kansas Secretary of Transportation Deb Miller directed KDOT staff to take a fresh look at the I-235 and US-54/400 (Kellogg Ave.) interchange and the I-235 and Central Avenue interchange. Secretary Miller established expectations for this study. The design concepts resulting from the study were to be:

1. Technically feasible,
2. Politically acceptable, and
3. Financially realistic.

In order to develop a technically feasible concept for the two interchanges, engineers from KDOT's Bureau of Design and from the City of Wichita participated in two design concept workshops. In order to develop a politically acceptable plan, KDOT established a study team comprised of staff from KDOT, the City of Wichita, Sedgwick County and WAMPO. The study team met monthly with the Consultant team to make decisions throughout the process. These representatives were also responsible for coordinating with other staff and officials in their respective organizations. In order to develop a financially realistic plan, it was determined that a project phasing plan would assist KDOT, the City of Wichita, Sedgwick County and WAMPO with developing their respective capital programs.

History

In the late 1990's, preliminary engineering developed an interchange layout for I-235 and US-54/400 (Kellogg Ave.) – KDOT project numbers 235-87 K-6389-01 and 235-87 K-6389-02. Because of probable project costs, a value engineering study was conducted to identify ways to save money during design and construction. The value engineering recommendations included purchasing a railroad in order to reduce construction costs and that the I-235 and Central Avenue interchange should be designed in conjunction with the I-235 and US-54/400 (Kellogg Ave.) interchange. An interchange layout was started for I-235 and Central Avenue, yet the investigations were never finished due to budget constraints.

In 2005, Congress earmarked \$4.5 million as part of annual appropriations from the Interstate Maintenance – Discretionary and National Corridor Programs. Congress earmarked an additional \$10 million for this project with passage of SAFETEA-LU in August 2005. This earmark is for the expansion of I-235 to a six-lane facility between the US-54/400 interchange and the Central Avenue Interchange. Funds to conduct this study for this study are from the Congressional earmarks.

Study Overview

The study is divided into three basic sequential tasks that include:

- Existing Conditions
- Projected Conditions, and
- Design Concepts,

along with the continuous task of Public Engagement. These tasks filtered information through the various layers of public engagement ultimately resulting in a preferred concept through public input. The preferred concept is not a detailed design. The goal of the concept study is to develop a concept that addresses design issues, provided adequate service for future traffic volumes and is supported by the public. Future stages may advance the concepts when funding is secured to the design and construction stages as illustrated in Exhibit 1.1.

Several Technical Memoranda were prepared as working documentation throughout the course of the study. The Existing and Projected Conditions memoranda serve as the foundation for summary material included in the Purpose and Need Report. By definition, the Purpose and Need Report must focus upon the primary transportation problem(s) and goal for the project. That stand-alone report has been coordinated through active participation by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and by the public engagement process.

The Design Concepts task focuses upon the development of interchange concepts and associated I-235 improvements. Various interchange layouts and their operations, costs and impacts are reviewed.

A design project must pass three tests of feasibility to become a construction project.

1. Is it technically sound?
2. Does it have community support?
3. Is it financially realistic?

The intent of this Concept Report is to answer these questions.

Area Definitions

The physical project boundary for the interchanges begins at the on- and off-ramps' respective acceleration and deceleration tie in points to the main line highway located nearly one-quarter mile south of the US-54/400 (Kellogg Ave.) and north of Central. Along US-54/400 (Kellogg Ave.), the limits on the west are at S. Dugan Road and at West Street on the east. At Central, the limits extend westerly to the bridges over the Wichita Valley Center Floodway (WVCF) (also commonly referred to as the Big Ditch) and easterly approximately 500 feet past the ramp terminal signalized junction.

Interstate 235 is a four-lane divided highway with access limited to interchanges. The length along I-235 is approximately 2.1 miles. US-54/400 (Kellogg Ave.) is a six-lane divided highway with access limited to interchanges. The length along US-54/400 (Kellogg Ave.) is approximately 1.5 miles. Within the study area, Central varies from a five-lane undivided arterial east of the Big Ditch to a seven-lane undivided arterial, west of the Big Ditch. The northbound off- and on-ramp terminal at Central is under traffic signal control while the southbound off-ramp is under STOP control when it intersects N. Gilda Street. The length along Central is approximately one-quarter mile.

The influence boundary for operational analyses of the interchanges essentially extends to the next interchange upstream and downstream of the physical project boundary. For Interstate 235 these points are located at the next interchange south at the junction of K-42 and north at the junction of Zoo Boulevard. Along US-54/400 (Kellogg Ave.), the limits on the west are at Ridge Road and at S. West Street on the east. At Central, the limits on the west are at Ridge Road and at S. West Street on the east. These limits of these two boundaries are graphically shown in Exhibit 1.2.

Exhibit 1.1 – Study Process Flowchart

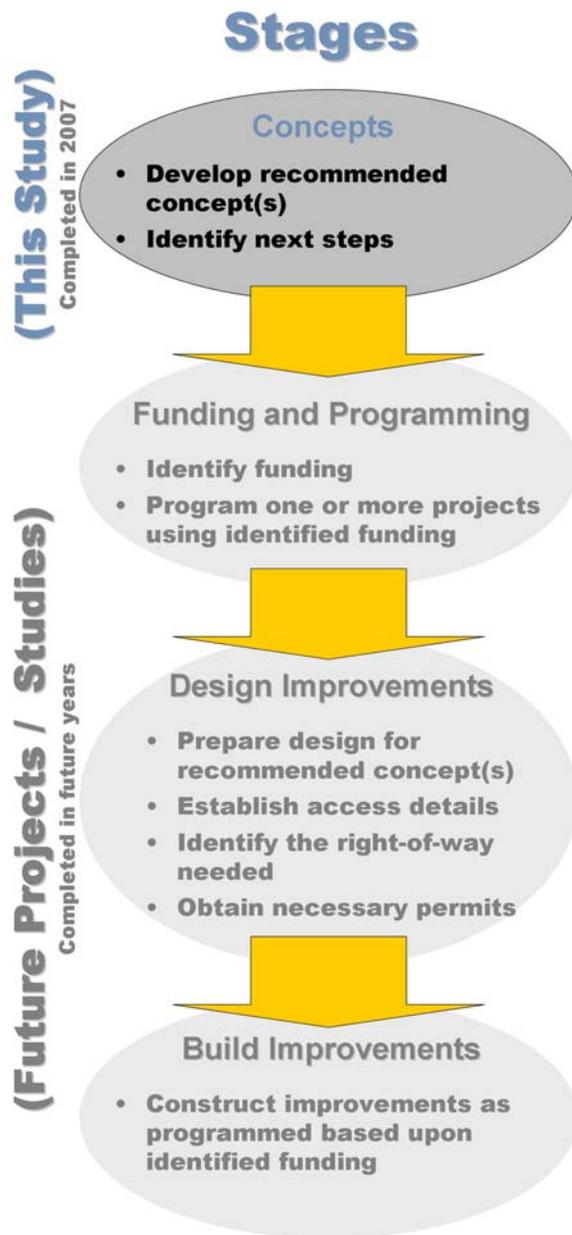
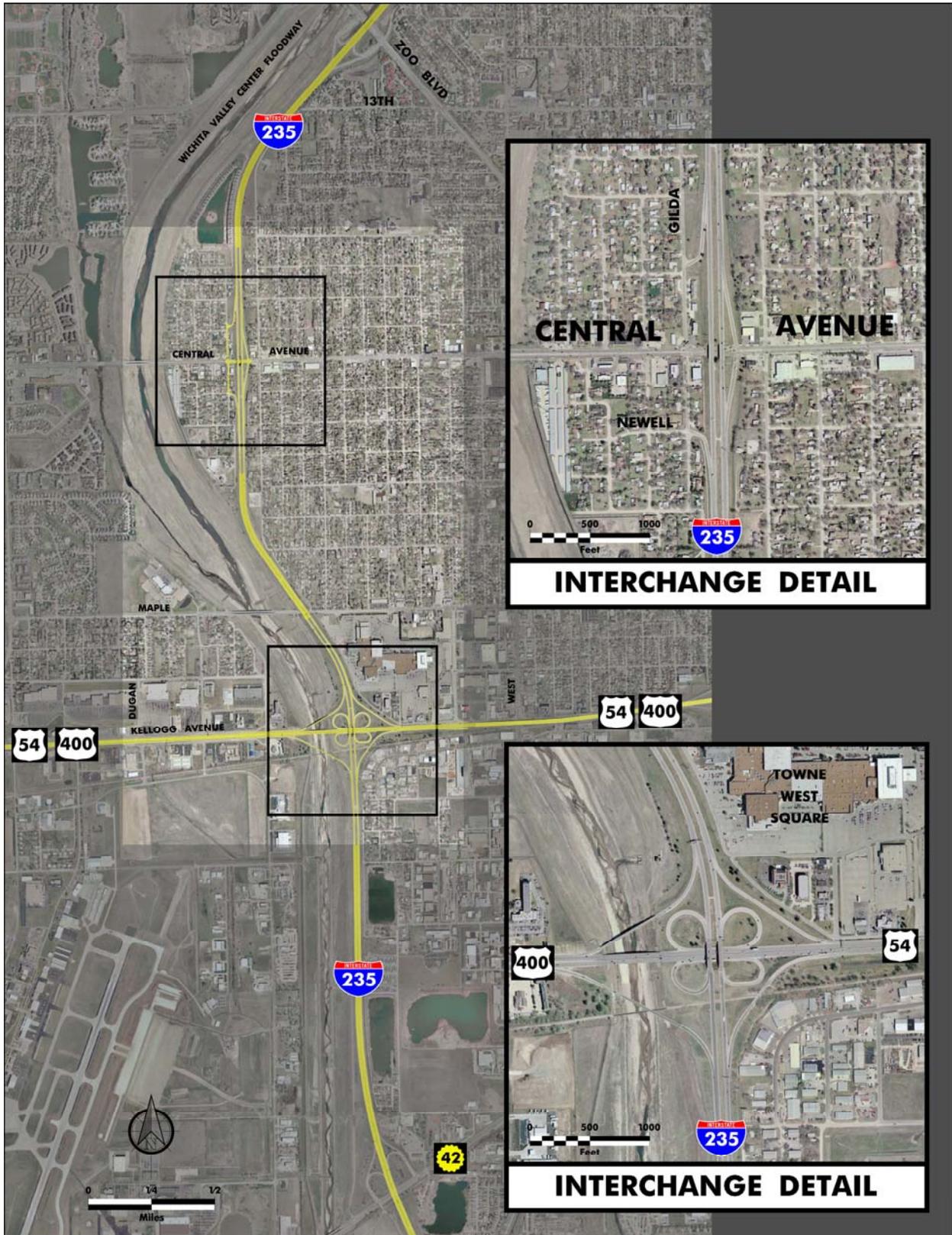


Exhibit 1.2 – Study Area Boundaries



Public Engagement Process

The public engagement process involves the public and local officials in an effective manner to provide information, obtain input, and to develop plans for implementation in the future. To encourage widespread community involvement several different techniques were employed to identify key audiences and to foster the participation of those interested. Through Community Advisory Committee workshops, open house public meetings, public opinion surveys, and a comprehensive website, the community, constituent groups, and local governmental agencies were afforded several opportunities to learn about and participate in the study process. The information shared during the activities is provided in an Appendix.

Exhibit 1.3a – Photograph from Public Meeting



Public participation and communication are integral to any successful planning process. As the people in the study area became an informed public, a change in perspective of the majority of project participants was observed, with the result being an invested and educated public. The goals for this public engagement phase included:

- Providing an adequate and equal opportunity for citizens of the Wichita area to learn about and participate in the planning process.
- Collecting input from the public, including both drivers that travel through the area and the community in general, to learn more about individual needs, expectations, impressions and observations.
- Generating the informed consent for the preferred concepts as documented through countywide opinion surveys and observed through public meetings.
- Gathering support for future implementation plans.

The public engagement process set forth addressed these goals. Several different venues were utilized to accomplish this involvement. Exhibit 1.3a through e shows photos and screen captures of the various engagement venues.

Coordination with Local Governments

En Banc Meetings

The City of Wichita and Sedgwick County routinely use En Banc Meetings to discuss matters of mutual concern. For the purpose of informing the City and County about this study, the project team participated in three En Banc meetings. The first meeting provided an overview of the study process and schedule, the second meeting presented the concepts developed and reviewed, while the third meeting discussed how to advance the concept to implementation. As such, the En Banc meetings allowed for progress reports to elected officials.

Wichita Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (WAMPO) Meetings

The study team also presented information at WAMPO meetings including progress report to the WAMPO Board and staff. Information regarding key milestones throughout the study was presented at these regularly scheduled meetings. During the course of the study, WAMPO was reorganized and its governing board now includes primarily elected officials from the City and County.

Reaching Out to the Public

District Advisory Boards (DABs)

Members of the team from TranSystems, Gould Evans, and KDOT presented information to introduce the study process to area residents and notify the public of future public meetings. The study area lies among DAB 4, 5, and 6. Introductory information included the study limits and a review of the project history.

Community Advisory Committee (CAC)

The CAC assembled for this study was comprised of citizen volunteers who provided input and feedback to the consultant team and KDOT at milestones throughout the study process. The committee was

comprised of neighborhood leaders, business leaders, property owners, and residents of the study area. At key milestones, typically prior to an upcoming public meeting, the study team met with the CAC to present information regarding progress and preview information that would be shared with the public at the next open-house public meeting. The CAC provided input, asked pertinent questions, and shared feedback with the study team. The CAC met four times during the 18-month study.

Community Advisory Committee #1 (March 30, 2006) – The intent of this meeting was two-fold; first it was to introduce the project and define the roles and responsibilities of the CAC; and second, to identify guiding principles. A group discussion was facilitated, in part based upon response to a questionnaire provided to the CAC members prior to the meeting.

Community Advisory Committee #2 (June 22, 2006) – The purpose of the second meeting was to present the findings of the existing conditions, including: regional context, existing traffic information, and environmental conditions. The projected traffic conditions were also presented and summarized in a Purpose and Need Report by the consultant team. The CAC further discussed the guiding principles as part of the evaluation methodology for the design concepts and responded to the information presented regarding the existing conditions. This meeting engaged the CAC members to focus on initial design concepts and the potential impacts of those designs based on their understanding.

Community Advisory Committee #3 (November 16, 2006) – This meeting was conducted as a workshop and focused upon review and examination of preliminary design concepts. This included a thorough examination by the CAC to evaluate the design and potential impacts with regards to the guiding principles. The cost of such design concepts was not available at this time. However, the overall budget and funding needs for the project were of particular concern to the CAC at this point.

Community Advisory Committee #4 (April 23, 2007) – The final CAC meeting focused on refinement of the preferred final design concepts and suggestions for a funding and a phased project implementation plan. Together, the CAC and the study team discussed details of the refined concepts and how best to approach a phased implementation plan.

Public Meetings

Three public meetings were held throughout the course of the study at key milestones during the process. Attendees generally included area residents and business owners; officials from the City and County; media representatives; and other interested parties. The meetings were held at the Sedgwick County Extension Building near 21st and Ridge, not far from the project site. The following is a summary of the material presented at each meeting. The material was also made available via the project website.

Public Meeting #1 (July 20, 2006) – The intent of this meeting was to identify issues and gather input from the public regarding the existing conditions. Open-house style meetings were designed to present information to the various constituent groups and receive feedback and comments regarding that information. This format allowed interaction and individual attention to interested parties regarding the information presented. More than 100 people were in attendance, including residents, business owners, local officials, and several media outlets from within the City of Wichita.

Exhibit 1.3b – Photograph from Community Advisory Committee Meeting



Exhibit 1.3c – Photograph from Public Meeting



Public Meeting #2 (October 24, 2006) – A second public meeting was held as an opportunity for the public to review and comment on the preliminary design concepts and perceived impacts on the concept design plans. The format of the meeting was an open house in which the design concepts were presented for public review. Comments received were compiled and incorporated in the development of a preferred concept, and ultimately into recommendations for improvements to the I-235 interchanges.

Public Meeting #3 (May 17, 2007) – The third public meeting was the forum for presenting the recommended improvements to I-235/Kellogg/Central based on a preferred design concept. Working within the parameters of current and future funding opportunities community involvement was monitored to gauge the level of support for the preparation of a phased implementation plan for recommended short-term and long-term improvements.

Public Opinion Surveys

Two county-wide public opinion surveys were conducted during the study process. Overall, the public showed support for future improvements and the sample included a diverse population of those living within the corridor, in other areas of the City, and within the outlying County area. The data collected and summaries of the public opinion surveys are available in an Appendix.

Interacting with the Media

Tom Hein, the KDOT Wichita Metro Office Public Affairs Manager, notified the media of upcoming events and answered questions from the general public. The following is a list of announcement methods utilized to reach targeted populations:

- Media notices and on-site interviews with television and newspaper representatives at the public meetings.
- Flyers distributed to nearby property owners that may be affected by the construction of future improvements.

Exhibit 1.3d – Photograph from Public Meeting



Utilizing a Project Website

Due to the amount of information and the desire to access information on the internet, a public website was created for this study. The site was updated on a regular basis to include an overview of the process, details regarding public engagement activities and the opportunity to engage in the process, as well as answers to frequently asked questions and the ability to provide feedback via an email to the project team.

Activity on the website continued throughout the study and generally peaked at the time of public open house meetings and the availability of new information regarding the study process and recommendations.

Exhibit 1.3e – Screen Capture of Website



The public engagement task concluded with an En Banc meeting on July 17, 2007. Present at this meeting were officials from KDOT, including: Jerry Younger and Thomas Dow; staff from the City of Wichita; the Wichita Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (WAMPO); officials from Sedgwick County; as well as members of the TranSystems design team. The topic of discussion centered on potential funding alternatives and forming partnerships among local agencies and KDOT to see this project forward through implementation. Early discussions regarding a preliminary engineering design phase also occurred.