

Zoo Interchange

Issues and information
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Introduction to the Zoo Interchange

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) is planning to begin an environmental and engineering analysis of the Zoo Interchange. The Zoo Interchange is the connection between I-94, I-894 and US 45 in western Milwaukee County near the Milwaukee County Zoo.

The Zoo Interchange fully opened to traffic in 1963. It is one of Wisconsin's oldest Interstate interchanges and is currently the busiest interchange in the state. It plays a key role in moving commuters, retail customers, health care patients, freight and other movements to major commercial and institutional sites. WisDOT has maintained and rehabilitated the ramps, bridges, pavements and other structures, but the interchange is nearing the end of its useful life. Now is the time to take the next steps to determine how the interchange should be rebuilt to serve the community and economy for decades to come.

At this point, no decisions have been made for the ultimate design or for property impacts of a Zoo Interchange reconstruction project. These issues will be addressed in the comprehensive environmental and engineering analysis. This process will examine the interchange, determine traffic and infrastructure needs, evaluate alternatives, identify positive and negative impacts of the alternatives, and present a preferred alternative. These analyses will fully evaluate possible impacts to homes, businesses, institutions, recreational centers, public facilities, social organizations and natural resources. While the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) completed a regional freeway plan in 2003 that estimated impacts to 22 properties in the interchange, WisDOT has not yet performed any work to examine these estimates.

Conceptual timeline

The following is a likely timeline for the study, design and construction process for the Zoo Interchange:

- 2007-2008 ... conduct environmental and engineering analyses
- 2009-2011 ... conduct final design and begin to address real estate and utility issues
- 2012-2016 ... reconstruct the interchange

All work and timelines on the Zoo Interchange are dependent on state and federal funding and on all appropriate state and federal review and approval processes. For more information on highway planning and environmental review processes and regulations, visit the Internet at www.dot.wisconsin.gov/projects/env/index.htm.

Traffic and crash facts

The Zoo Interchange is Wisconsin's busiest freeway interchange, handling an average of 324,700 vehicles every day (2005 data).

- The heaviest traffic is on the north leg (US 45) handling an average of 170,800 vehicles each day.
- The most heavily used ramp is westbound I-94 to northbound US 45, carrying about 30,000 vehicles each day.
- Total traffic in the Zoo Interchange increased by about 3.3% between 1995 and 2005.

From 2003 through 2005, there were a total of 2,298 crashes in the Zoo Interchange, including crashes on ramps and at connecting streets. Five crashes resulted in fatalities, while 649 crashes resulted in injuries.

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Zoo Interchange geography

The Zoo Interchange study area will cover about seven miles of freeway corridor leading to and through the actual interchange. The study boundaries are indicated below and on the map:

- East - I-94 at 76th Street
- West - I-94 at 116th Street
- South - I-894/US 45 at the Union Pacific railroad (just south of Greenfield Avenue)
- North - US 45 at Center Street

The Zoo Interchange study area lies entirely within Milwaukee County and touches the cities of Milwaukee, Wauwatosa and West Allis. Traffic from around the region, state and nation passes through the interchange.

There are many major institutions and tourist attractions that are in close proximity to the Zoo Interchange and generate traffic that uses the interchange. This is just a partial list of major institutions in the study area:

- Children's Hospital of Wisconsin
- Froedtert Hospital
- Mayfair Mall
- Medical College of Wisconsin
- Milwaukee County Grounds / Research Park
- Milwaukee County Zoo
- Wisconsin Lutheran College
- Wisconsin Lutheran High School
- Wisconsin State Fair Park

The northern extension of the Zoo Interchange - US 45 - is also part of the larger US 41 / 45 corridor that will be redesignated as an Interstate Highway, a change recently passed by the federal government. The Zoo Interchange study efforts will account for any changes necessary to complete the Interstate redesignation.



How to stay involved

The Zoo Interchange environmental and engineering analysis will include a full and continuous public involvement process to give all stakeholders many opportunities to contribute to the project. The study will begin in mid-2007. To prepare, WisDOT is creating a database to identify affected stakeholders and can meet with groups and constituents to discuss current information about the interchange and describe the future study process. To be included in any future mailings, contact Brian Bliesner, Project Manager, at 262-548-6893 or by e-mail at brian.bliesner@dot.state.wi.us.

Internet users may visit www.seffreeways.org for information and links to all freeway projects in southeast Wisconsin, including the Marquette Interchange Project and the I-94 North-South Corridor study.

WisDOT is also currently working on preliminary analyses in and around the Zoo Interchange area that will help provide base information for the study. These efforts include an analysis of development area borders near the Milwaukee County Grounds, a traffic impact analysis in the Watertown Plank Road area, and a needs assessment and base data collection effort for the entire Zoo Interchange study area. Contact WisDOT for more information about these efforts.