

Appendix J

Indirect and Cumulative Effects – Pre-screening Analysis

**Indirect and Cumulative Effects
Prescreening Analysis
US 53 Haugen Interchange Location and Freeway Conversion Study
Barron and Washburn Counties, Wisconsin
WisDOT Project ID 1197-22-00
*Rev 2-10-09***

Project Description

US 53 is classified as a principle arterial highway with the primary purpose of providing interstate and interregional mobility and was designated as a backbone route in the WisDOT Corridors 2020 Plan. This plan included a network of existing and improved roadways that consist of a backbone network and connector highways. The backbone network consisted of divided highways that connect each region of the state and major economic centers. The connector highways tie economic and tourism centers to that backbone. The plan achieves its objectives by striving to ensure that these routes have adequate capacity and provide an adequate Level of Service (LOS).

US 53 functions as the primary north/south route on the western side of the state, connecting the cities in the west and south to northern Wisconsin. US 53 is the only facility on the western side of the state that provides four-lane access to northern Wisconsin and the Great Lakes port city of Superior.

The Proposed Action is a plan for the conversion of the current expressway for US 53 between 26th Avenue and 30th Avenue (Barron and Washburn Counties) to a freeway. The proposed improvements resulting in freeway conversion would be officially mapped under the process established in Wisconsin Statutes, 84.295 to help protect and preserve right of way (ROW) for future transportation needs. This portion of US 53 would officially be designated as a freeway. Thus, the long-term aspect of the Proposed Action is the plan for eventual conversion to a freeway, while the short-term aspect is official mapping and freeway designation.

The Proposed Action and the actual steps of right of way purchase, final design, or construction would result in the ultimate conversion of the existing four-lane divided expressway to a freeway facility by removing existing at-grade public and private intersections from the facility in this section of USH 53. The existing intersections would be reconstructed as cul-de-sacs or grade separations. One interchange would be constructed at County V/28th Avenue. In addition, several segments of the existing local roadway system would be reconstructed or altered to insure internal local road system continuity and access to the freeway system.

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to develop a long-term highway access plan for this portion of US 53, officially map the proposed improvements and officially designate this section of US 53 as a freeway in order to address three needs:

- Long-term highway planning and corridor preservation
- Emerging operational and existing safety concerns
- Land use/transportation planning and coordination

The Proposed Action would not be likely to affect speeds on the highway – its primary operational effect would be to improve safety. Thus, travel times would not be improved for through-travelers. There may be some minimal improvement in travel times for travelers using the new interchange to enter or exit US 53, but this improvement could be offset by the

increased indirection caused by the closure of existing access points.

Community Context

The 4.24 mile section of the USH 53 corridor lies in the Village of Haugen and the Towns of Bear Lake and Oak Grove in Barron County and the Towns of Sarona and Long Lake in Washburn County. According to data from the Wisconsin Department of Administration, the population of Barron County increased from 44,963 in 2000 to 47,727 in 2008 – an annual rate of increase of less than one percent. In Washburn County, the population increased from 16,036 in 2000 to 17,646 in 2008, an annual increase of 1.25 percent.

The table below shows DOA forecasts for the period of 2005 to 2025. The data shows that the annual population increase is expected to be less than 1 percent annually in both counties.

County	2005 Population	2025 Population	% Change	Annual % Change
Barron County	46,915	753,173	13.33%	.66%
Washburn County	17,056	19,950	16.97%	.84%

Source: Wisconsin Department of Administration

The existing land uses surrounding the US 53 corridor include rural wooded uplands and wetlands, agriculture, low density residential, and limited commercial/industrial development. The Village of Haugen has higher density residential and commercial uses in comparison to the other unincorporated communities in the study area.

The majority of residential land uses can be classified as widely distributed, low density uses with on-site septic systems typical of rural, agricultural areas. Higher concentrations of residential development include recreational homes located along shoreland lake areas and higher density suburban style housing in the Village of Haugen.

Commercial activities within the study area include limited services such as a restaurant and a general store, and industrial activities in rural areas primarily consisting of large quarry operations or managed forest lands. Other commercial/industrial activities include a pool cue manufacturing business and a landscaping business.

A significant portion of the land uses in the study area include forested lands. Agricultural activities are also a significant land use activity that occurs within the area. Agricultural activities are located both east and west of US 53.

In Barron County, the Town of Bear Lake has recently completed its comprehensive plan as part of a joint planning effort with the county. Barron County released the multi-jurisdictional Comprehensive Plan in May 2005. The Town of Oak Grove and the Village of Haugen did not participate in the county-sponsored effort and do not currently have local plans. Barron County has a land use ordinance for unincorporated and shoreland areas of the county. Currently the Town of Oak Grove follows county zoning. The Town of Bear Lake does not follow a comprehensive zoning ordinance. The Village of Haugen has adopted its own zoning ordinance.

In Washburn County the Town of Sarona and the Town of Long Lake have completed comprehensive plans with the assistance of Washburn County and North West Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NWRPC). The county zoning ordinance covers the

unincorporated areas of the county. Both the Town of Long Lake and the Town of Sarona follow the county zoning ordinance.

The Proposed Action is not in conflict with any of the community plans.

Indirect Effects

At the present time, the potential exists for development to locate adjacent to any one of the numerous existing at-grade intersections. After the freeway conversion and long-term preservation is completed, the direct access from US 53 would be eliminated at all but one access point (County V/28th Avenue interchange), and any development on the lands near these existing intersections would be accessed via alternative local road connections. Traffic on these local roads would not be enough to alter their current roadway functionality or capacity.

By removing direct access to nearly all of US 53, it would minimize the potential for indirect and cumulative development at these locations, especially from a highway-dependent development perspective.

Access to US 53 from lands adjacent to the County V/28th Avenue would be via the future interchange that would be constructed in that location. Development potential at this location would likely remain unchanged with or without implementation of the Proposed Action as access would be provided under either the build or no-build scenarios.

Officially mapping the proposed improvements may affect the level of interest in the commercial development of properties that currently have nearby access to US 53, and would not have such access after the freeway conversion is complete. Potential developers may decide to not make investments in these locations, knowing that eventually access would be changed. However, it should be noted that these areas currently have not been a focus of development interest.

In general, the communities in the vicinity of the Proposed Action support the changes because of safety concerns related to the existing at-grade access points on the highway. No concerns were expressed during the public outreach process that the project would have unwanted effects on land use in the area. There is no expectation that the Proposed Action would attract development at any different rate, pace, or location than what current markets and conditions already allow.

Conclusion Regarding Indirect Effects

Through screening analysis using WisDOT's pre-screening for indirect effects procedure and FDM guidance on indirect effects, it is concluded that the factors of the project, its location and other conditions do not warrant further detailed analysis of the potential for indirect effects.

The project would not have the likelihood to result in *significant* indirect effects as defined by the National Environmental Policy Act. This conclusion was based on the evaluation for 10 pre-screening factors including: project design concepts and scope; project purpose and need; project type; facility function (current and planned); project location; improved travel times to an area; local land use and planning considerations; population and demographic considerations; rate of urbanization; and public/agency concerns. The data and evaluation supporting this conclusion are presented above. Therefore, further detailed evaluation of indirect effects in a detailed analysis is not warranted. If changes are made to the project design or alternatives, this screening will be re-examined for sufficiency.

Cumulative Effects

The conversion of US 53 to a freeway by removal of direct access is one of several actions or forces that could cumulatively affect the resources that would be affected by the Proposed Action – that is, wetlands and agricultural lands. Other past, present, and future actions/forces and their potential effects are described below.

Conversion of US 53 to a Four-lane Highway

The conversion of the US 53 corridor between Eau Claire and Superior from a two-lane to a four-lane highway began in the late 1960s. In 1976, US 53 was expanded from US 8 at Cameron to just south of Haugen, where it merged back into the existing two-lane highway. In 1988, the US 53 corridor from the northern end of the existing freeway near Haugen northerly to Trego was converted to expressway, partially on new alignment and partially on existing alignment. The Haugen and Spooner bypasses were built at that time. By 1999 the four-lane expansion between Eau Claire and Superior was completed, with some portions of the highway constructed as freeways and some as expressways.

The expansion of US 53 to four lanes likely did have some effects on land conversions in northern Wisconsin. The improved travel conditions may have had the effect of encouraging additional tourists to visit the northern part of the state, thus leading to new or expanded businesses to serve those travelers. The improved access to the interstate highway system may have made some other non-tourist businesses in the northern part of the state more viable or successful. Some of these effects may have been experienced in the Haugen area, in the vicinity of the Proposed Action.

Economic Conditions and Energy Prices

Conditions in the US economy fluctuate from year to year. These fluctuations affect the economic activities that, in turn, affect land resources. Economic conditions that favor business development or home building can result in greater land conversions to these uses. Tourist promotional activities likely have the effect of leading to land conversions for tourist-related businesses. Similarly, a downturn in economic conditions could slow the pace of land conversions.

The recent increases in energy costs are likely to affect the choices of individuals regarding travel and vacations plans; these choices in turn could affect land conversions for development in the tourist sector. It is difficult to predict the effects of high energy costs that result in less disposable income for vacationing. There are two plausible scenarios: because of having less disposable income and the high cost of gasoline, individuals could decide to forego vacationing in northern Wisconsin and stay home. Others may forego vacations in more distant locations and decide to take more economical vacations closer to their homes.

The effects of the economy and energy prices on the tourist trade would be more pronounced in the areas of Wisconsin north of the Haugen area that attract larger numbers of tourists compared to the Haugen area itself. The Haugen area could experience effects to the extent the conditions result in the expansion or contraction of businesses, which in turn affects the number of individuals/families that seek to live in the area.

Other Highway Studies and Projects

WisDOT is currently carrying out the following studies on highways that serve some of the travelers that use the portion of US 53 under study:

- Freeway conversion of US 53 between Trego and Spooner
- Freeway conversion of US 53 between Trego and Wascott

- Detailed studies for long-term expansion of US 8 between Barron and St. Croix Falls

The conversion of US 53 to a freeway makes travel on the highway safer but is not likely to significantly affect the amount of traffic on US 53 itself.

The expansion of US 8 to four lanes is proposed to accommodate expected increases in travel, and address safety issues; it is not expected to result in a significant increase in traffic. Additionally, timeframes for both US 8 and US 53 improvements (construction) would not likely be realized for decades to come.

Conclusion Regarding Cumulative Effects

The above activities and forces can have some effects on the conversion on wetlands or agricultural lands to other uses. The greatest effects are due to economic conditions and energy prices, over which the state has limited control. For this reason, further cumulative effects analysis is not warranted.