

## WHAT WE'RE HEARING FROM YOU

NDOR is providing daily updates as we travel the state discussing regional priorities. More detailed meeting summaries will be developed and posted after the comment period ends on July 29. Please be sure to share your thoughts with us at [www.roads.nebraska.gov/projects/grow-ne/cap-improve/](http://www.roads.nebraska.gov/projects/grow-ne/cap-improve/).

### Wednesday, July 13<sup>th</sup> – the first day on the east side of the state

Beatrice – We had about 30 participants at the Southeast regional morning meeting held in Beatrice, including city and county representatives, economic development professionals and state patrol officers. All breakout groups were practical and budget-conscious with initial project packages reported out within the investment range. A few new projects were added to the list, and a few participants suggested removing projects.

Recognizing that the purpose of these meetings is to better understand regional priorities, facilitators worked with each group to identify how projects could address regional concerns and trends. Key issues in the Southeast include:

- Safety
- Increased traffic
- Growth in communities and the need to link communities in the region

Participants said they very much appreciated the data the Department provided on safety, engineering, economic impacts and project costs to support the tradeoff discussions.

LaVista – In the afternoon Southeast regional meeting, more than 80 participants discussed regional priorities and projects that support those priorities. Traffic and economic development were key issues. In what might be a trend, groups continued to be budget-conscious with five out a six groups reporting out packages of project priorities that met or were below the investment range limit. Like Beatrice, a few new projects and scope options were suggested; however, no one suggested removing projects.

A quote from one participant was particularly memorable and represents much of today's vibe. He said, *"While I represent a city, I'm a citizen first and I understand projects need to be built in lots of cities. I appreciate understanding how much work NDOR does when spending money and I'm glad to know they really think about my tax dollars."* He went on to remark that NDOR sharing that much data for the tradeoff discussion was very impressive.

### Thursday, July 14 – Northeast and South

Norfolk - With more than 120 participants, breakout group facilitators worked extra hard this morning trying to make sure everyone had a chance to offer comments on projects and scope options. Breakout groups had robust discussions about the economic and travel time tradeoffs of bypasses versus highways continuing to go through towns. Generally breakout groups reported out packages of projects that exceeded their spending range.

Completing corridors, economic development, truck traffic and safety are primary concern in the Northeast region. Many participants expressed appreciation to the Department for being so transparent and interested in dialogue.

Grand Island – In a smaller setting with about 30 participants, the flexibility and regional nature of these prioritization meetings was demonstrated. Breakout groups added a few projects to the lists from outside the region and talked about building shorter segments than NDOR had identified for some highways on the project list. Breakout groups prioritized Super 2 options frequently, noting that Super 2s can provide a ‘big bang for your buck’ and also discussed the pros and cons of bypassing communities or going through town. Breakout groups reported out project lists that exceeded the spending ranges.

Issues and concerns in the South region included the need for better north/south connections (even to Canada and Mexico), safety, economic development and completing corridors. Again, participants were pleased with the amount of data that was shared, and as one person remarked, “I feel like I actually have a voice in the process.”

### **Friday, July 15 – South region**

North Platte – Participants braved the rain and strong winds Friday morning to discuss project priorities in the South region. The breakout groups identified a couple of consistent project priorities and both reported out project lists within the spending range. There was quite a bit of discussion around the need for NDOR to reengage communities to discuss projects which have been on the books for a while before launching into design. Participants pointed out community conditions can change and there may be ways to find savings through engineering by adjusting where and how projects are built. There was good discussion about constructing corridors as Super 2s and only building segments of those corridors as 4-lanes where traffic conditions require that kind of investment now.

McCook – In our last stop this week, breakout groups identified the same priority project, and although there was room in their spending ranges, they recommended the lower cost Super 2 option because they’d like to see their priority improvement made sooner rather than later. Participants cited economic development, access to health care and education, and truck and recreational vehicle traffic as top concerns.

One of the values of these prioritization meetings is that participants have the opportunity to hear diverse opinions about other priorities in their region. Because feedback was consistent in the McCook meeting, NDOR staff took time to provide the results of the Grand Island and North Platte project prioritization meetings.

### **By the numbers this week**

- 773 – number of miles traveled round trip
- 6 – meeting locations
- Approximately 300 – stakeholders have participated in discussions
- Over 75 – projects presented for discussion

### **Monday, July 18 – North Region**

Valentine – In a late afternoon meeting covering the largest geographic region, participants were ready to discuss the importance of the highway system for moving freight and equipment which is important to the Nebraska economy. Examples of wind farm equipment and oil drilling machinery were cited as the kind of heavy loads that sometimes have to take long and windy routes because small bridges cannot accommodate the weight.

This group was quick to recognize one of the most important benefits of these discussions. As one man noted, *“Sometimes people live all their lives using only a few routes and so they only know about those routes. I bet you’re hearing about all kinds of different roads that matter to people across the state.”* To help illustrate his point, NDOR staff took a few moments at the end of the meeting to recap the dialogue that’s occurring across the state.

We’re on to our last meeting – to be held Tuesday morning in Gering. Please don’t forget to submit any additional comments by July 29 via a comment card or the website.

### **Tuesday, July 19 – West Region**

Gering – Completing corridors was the prominent theme for the more than 25 participants at the final project prioritization process meeting. During breakout group discussions, participants indicated that while building some segments of corridors using a 2 + 2 or Super 2 option might not be their first choice, they could understand those scope options as a first step. Participants also encouraged NDOR to explore other scope options or ways to phase projects.

In wrap up comments, NDOR staff reflected on the high quality of input received over the eight meetings and we noted that we’re returning with ‘homework’ to look more closely at some options based that input. In concluding the statewide tour, Khalil Jaber, Deputy Director for Engineering, who attended all meetings, pointed out how much he appreciated stakeholders making time to offer their thoughts. He said that the Department had learned a lot from stakeholders which will improve NDOR’s decision-making and help fine tune options.