

CHAPTER 6

PUBLIC AND AGENCY COORDINATION

A full discussion of all Public and Agency Coordination which occurred prior to the release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is provided in **Chapter 6** of the **DEIS**. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) are required to solicit ideas and input from people and organizations that may be affected by, or have regulatory authority over, the project. FHWA and MDOT have accomplished this through the use of various tools and methods. These tools and methods will continue to be employed as this project progresses through design and construction.



Public Involvement is an important part of the study

The Study Team utilizing a Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) approach conducted an extensive process of public and stakeholder engagement to obtain input, identify local concerns, revised proposed alternatives and better understand the impact of alternatives to the community and natural environment.

6.1 Overview of Public and Agency Coordination Prior to the Release of the DEIS

Notice of Intent to Prepare an EIS: The federal agency that is preparing an EIS is required to officially notify the public when the study will begin. The FHWA satisfied this requirement by publishing a *Notice of Intent* in the Federal Register. This notice was issued January 12, 2005 and published in the January 27, 2005 issue of the Federal Register (Vol. 70, No. 17, Pg 3974).

Scoping Meetings: Three scoping meetings took place over the course of this study. The scoping meetings focused on identifying key environmental issues to be considered for the project. An initial meeting was held June 19, 2003 to describe the study and conduct a site tour of the plaza and surrounding area. A second meeting to present three alternatives and gain consensus from the group was held July 27, 2004. July 19,

2005, a third meeting was held to discuss study updates, scheduling, and the need to convert the study from an Environmental Assessment to a more detailed EIS.

Federal Agency Meetings: In addition to the scoping meetings, several meetings were held with the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the General Services Administration (GSA) to gain input on plaza operations and receive comments on the proposed alternatives. Details regarding the meetings are listed in **Table 6.1**.

Table 6.1 Federal Agency Meetings

Date	Location	Topic of Discussion
September 16, 2002	Port Huron, MI	Current plaza activities
November 12, 2002	Port Huron, MI	Plaza needs/opportunities
July 17, 2003	Port Huron, MI	Alternatives review
February 10, 2004	Lansing, MI	Alternatives review
April 22, 2004	Port Huron, MI	Alternatives review
September 9, 2004	Washington, DC	Alternatives refinement
December 2, 2004	Detroit, MI	Alternatives and traffic modeling
August 8, 2005	Indianapolis, IN	Security for Practical Alternatives
October 24, 2005	Port Huron, MI	Security for Practical Alternatives
February 13, 2006	Lansing, MI	Project Coordination with MDOT, FHWA, CBP and GSA
June 12, 2006	Detroit, MI	Alternative development
August 24, 2006	Port Huron, MI	Alternative development

Stakeholders Advisory Committee: A Stakeholders Advisory Committee was formed to provide expertise and input on all pertinent issues related to the plaza study. The Advisory

Committee consists of a core group of stakeholders representing plaza inspection agencies, local and state officials, Canadian officials, private firms, and key representatives from the local community. The Advisory Committee held 13 meetings and was instrumental in: (1) defining the purpose and need for the project outlined in **Chapter 1 Why Are Improvements Needed?**, (2) providing input on how best to involve the public in the study process, (3) developing ways to measure the effectiveness of the proposed alternatives, (4) reviewing and refining the proposed alternatives, and (5) sharing specific agency concerns.

Initial Concepts Charrette: April 29, 2003, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) held a charrette with border crossing stakeholders for the Blue Water Bridge Plaza. The purpose of the Initial Concepts Charrette was to encourage communication and understanding between stakeholders, identify concepts that address study objectives, identify potential cost-saving measures, and identify new issues of concern.

Local Agency Coordination: A variety of local agencies participated in the Stakeholders Advisory Committee Meetings. In addition to those meetings, more than 40 individual meetings were held with local agencies to understand agency issues and concerns and review proposed concepts.

Public Information Meetings: The Study Team held six public information meetings to provide study information and receive comments from the general public. MDOT notified people by issuing press releases in the local newspaper, conducting interviews with local media, and mailing informational brochures to more than 400 households located in the vicinity of the plaza. Brochures for each meeting were also distributed to key city, township and county offices and to churches in the Study Area. All of the meetings were held at transit and disabled accessible facilities in Port Huron, Michigan. The meetings were held in a large hall using an open forum format. Members of the public could visit stations and discuss different aspects of the proposed project (study process, traffic, environmental constraints, etc.) with project team members. All attendees were encouraged to fill out



Coordination with local agencies



Public Meeting #3

comment forms. **Table 6.2** provides the details of each of the public information meetings.

Table 6.2 Public Meetings Held

Meeting	Date	Location	Number of People Who Signed In	General Purpose
Public Meeting No. 1	March 13, 2003	Port Huron Municipal Office Center	70	Introduce the study and study process
Public Meeting No. 2	September 23, 2003	Michigan Technical Education Center	287	Present Illustrative Alts.
Public Meeting No. 3	May 17, 2004	Michigan Technical Education Center	146	Present Updated Alts.
Public Meeting No. 4	February 9, 2005	St. Clair County Community College	213	Present Refined Alts.
Public Meeting No. 5	September 26, 2006	Girl Scout Building	224	Present new Alt. City West
Public Meeting No. 6	December 7, 2006	Girl Scout Building	118	Present Alts. for I-94/I-69 corridor

Community Involvement Workshops: Three Community Involvement Workshops were held to assist the Study Team in incorporating the values and visions (aesthetics, land use, community, etc.) of Port Huron area residents into the planning process. The purpose of these workshops was to gather information about what characteristics participants valued in their community and neighborhood and how they would like to see the area surrounding the project look and feel. Two workshops focused on the on-site Study Area and

the third workshop focused on the off-site Study Area. Four additional Community Involvement Workshops are planned for the Blue Water Bridge Project.

Meetings with Specific Groups: Informal meetings were held with individuals or local special interest groups that had specific concerns or interests in the study. These meetings allowed for an exchange of ideas and focus on issues of special concern. Meetings were held with:

- U.S. Representative Candice Miller
- State Senator Jud Gilbert
- Staff members for State Representative Steve Ehardt
- Staff members for U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow
- Staff members For U.S. Senator Carl Levin
- Ross Bible Church
- local Chambers of Commerce

Following their election, State Representatives Phil Pavlov and John Espinoza attended several project meetings. The Study Team also met with the several local business owners, and customs brokers.

Local Project Office Hours in Port Huron: Beginning in March 2007 MDOT held regular office hours on the first and third Friday of each month from 10:00 am-2:00 pm. Members of the Study Team were available to answer questions regarding the ROW acquisition process, the NEPA process, and answer other project related questions.



Community Involvement
Workshop



Community Involvement
Workshop

6.2 Overview of the Official Public Hearing

The public hearing for the Blue Water Bridge Plaza Study was held October 9, 2007. The public hearing provided an opportunity for the Study Team to share with the public information about the study and allowed the public to voice concerns and opinions regarding the Blue Water Bridge Plaza Study in Port Huron, Michigan. The hearing also allowed for one-on-one interaction with Study Team members and an explanation of the study for the public through exhibits and presentations. A court reporter was also made available. The public hearing took place during the 120-day public comment period for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

Two formal project presentations were given at the public hearing. Three videos were shown as part of the presentation one at 4:00 pm and another at 6:30 pm. The first was an overview of the DEIS. The second was a video statement by Robert Perez, Michigan Director of Field Operations for U.S. Customs and Border Protection, focusing on CBP's perspective regarding the plaza study and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The final video provided a 3-D simulation and overview of the City West (Preferred) Alternative, identified in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

Upon arrival at the public hearing, attendees were given a general comment form, a public comment form and a speaker identification form to fill out stating their name and contact information. Participants not wishing to speak publicly were encouraged to fill out and submit a general comment form, speak to a court reporter, or comment via email, (or by utilizing) the project hotline. All questions and concerns raised at the public hearing and during the public comment period have been addressed in **Chapter 7 Comments and Responses** section of this Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Formal Public Comment: Upon release of the DEIS the formal comment period commenced. This formal comment period was extended from the typical 45 days to 120 days to allow all parties sufficient time to review the DEIS.


6.3 Public and Agency Coordination following the Public Hearing

Project Enhancement and Mitigation Meetings: As result of the comments received from the release of the DEIS, the Study Team formed a Project Enhancement and Mitigation (PEM) group with officials from the city of Port Huron, St. Clair County, Port Huron Township, the Federal Highway Administration, the General Services Administration (representing U.S. Customs and Border Protection), and MDOT. Also included were representatives from Senator Carl Levin's office, Senator Debbie Stabenow's office, U.S. Representative Candice Miller's office, and State Representative Phil Pavlov's office. This group was formed to assist in identifying mutually agreeable solutions to

anticipated project impacts associated with the proposed Blue Water Bridge plaza expansion. A full discussion of the Project Enhancement and Mitigation process and outcomes can be found in **Section 5.0** of this **FEIS**. **Table 6.3** provides the topics of each of the PEM meetings.

Agency Meetings: December 2007 thru June 2008 a series of meetings were held with CBP staff in Port Huron, Detroit, and Indianapolis, and included GSA staff from their Chicago office. MDOT project staff and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) staff also participated in these meetings. The purpose of these meetings was to verify the Program of Requirements and look for ways to reduce the overall plaza size, if possible.

Local Meetings: The Study Team, including FHWA and GSA, attended the June 23, 2008 Port Huron City Council meeting. This was a meeting of the Port Huron City Council, St. Clair County Board of Commissioners, and Charter Township of Port Huron Board. This meeting provided the Study Team an opportunity to present the draft Recommended Alternative, provide an update on the project and allow the City Council, Board of Commissioners and Township Board an opportunity to ask questions. The public was allowed to attend the meeting. The meeting was also broadcast on the community's local cable network.



Charting the Vision: Port Huron

- What kind of economic future does Port Huron want?
- Begin with a desire to forge a positive outcome for the future
- Build a realistic plan considering advantages, challenges, trends and conditions

Table 6.3 Project Enhancement and Mitigation Meetings Held

Meeting	Date	Location	General Purpose
Meeting No. 1	February 2, 2008	City of Port Huron Office Building	Organizational and Orientation
Meeting No. 2	March 3, 2008	City of Port Huron Office Building	Economic and Community Development
Meeting No. 3	April 17, 2008	City of Port Huron Office Building	Local Access and Circulation Meeting
Meeting No. 4	June 12, 2008	City of Port Huron Office Building	Maintenance of Traffic and Presentation of Recommended Alternative
Meeting No. 5	July 17, 2008	City of Port Huron Office Building	Context Sensitive Solutions, Aesthetics and Misc. Mitigation Items
Meeting No. 6	August 21, 2008	City of Port Huron Office Building	ROW Impacts, Payment in Lieu of Taxes, Misc. Mitigation Items
Meeting No. 7	September 25, 2008	City of Port Huron Office Building	Delay Analysis
Meeting No. 8	October 16, 2008	City of Port Huron Office Building	Study Update
Meeting No. 9	November 20, 2008	City of Port Huron Office Building	Study Update

At the request of the Port Huron Chamber of Commerce, the St. Clair County Economic Development Alliance and Fort Gratiot Business Associations, project updates were given to both groups and an opportunity for questions and comments was also provided at these meetings.

As the project moves forward into the design and construction phases, MDOT will continue to provide updates to its local stakeholders.

Local Project Office Hours in Port Huron: Office hours were continued following the release of the DEIS. MDOT staff are available every first and third Friday of each month from 10:00 am - 2:00 pm at the Port Huron TSC. These office hours have been ongoing since March 2007 and provide the public with the opportunity to get answers to project related questions from Study Team members. Since the release of the DEIS, 114 visitors have attended office hours to discuss the project or their specific concerns with MDOT staff.

6.4 Agency Comments on the DEIS and Practical Alternatives to be Carried Forward

A complete listing of all comments received and responses to the comments is located in **Chapter 7.0**.