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I-94 East-West Traffic Volumes Return to Pre-COVID Levels

WisDOT Analysis Shows Cost of Six and Eight-Lane Alternatives Roughly the Same

Milwaukee – Tonight, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) will hold the first of two I-94 East-West Corridor Study public involvement meetings to review the latest project data and present alternatives. WisDOT’s updated project analysis shows that traffic volumes have rebounded to near 2019 levels. Among other findings, the cost of the two options – six or eight lanes modernized to current safety and design standards – varies by only three to six percent.

“While some people will show up at the meetings tonight and tomorrow, tens of thousands will be going about their business, relying on this aging, congested corridor to get home,” said Nancy Hernandez, president of the Hispanic Collaborative. “They understand firsthand the corridor’s deficiencies and the need for an upgrade. For motorists who have spent hundreds of hours stuck in traffic on the Interstate between 70th Street and 16th Street over the years, rebuilding the corridor without additional capacity only to have the freeway congested on the day of the ribbon-cutting makes no sense.”

The I-94 East-West Corridor, which runs between the updated Marquette and Zoo interchanges, was originally built in the early 1960s. The corridor’s 1950s design, age, and ongoing deterioration result in congestion, safety, and economic development challenges. The average crash rate is two to three times higher than the statewide average.

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“We appreciate WisDOT’s work to update its analysis using the latest data, the detailed review of the bike and pedestrian facilities planned along the various local roadways as part of the project, and the ongoing outreach to stakeholders,” Corey Zetts, executive director of the Menomonee Valley Partners, said. “We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to rebuild this corridor right – to address the issues known today, including congestion and the resulting safety concerns.”

The latest data shows traffic on the corridor has returned to just shy of 2019 levels. This means the corridor carries approximately 160,000 to 180,000 vehicles a day, markedly more than intended for this Interstate section. According to the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC), the corridor will remain significantly congested even with an extreme decrease in vehicle reliance model (increased transit capacity, no fares, more work-from-home, higher vehicle occupancy) without expansion.

“The I-94 East-West project is about better access to jobs, more mobility options, and safety,” said Near West Side Partners Executive Director Keith Stanley. “Part of that safety is reducing the number of vehicles on local streets as drivers choose the improved and freer-flowing freeway after years of having to count on local streets to get across town.”

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About I-94 East-West Econ Connect

I-94 East-West Econ Connect is a coalition of community development organizations, businesses, institutions, and other entities unified around the need to improve the safety and capacity of the I-94 East-West Corridor to maximize its economic and societal benefits for the region and the state.