

**FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS
FOR**

US 61

**From the Muscatine County Line to two (2) miles south of Grandview
Louisa County, Iowa**

NHS-61-3(48) – 19-58

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has determined that this project will have no significant impact on the human and natural environment. This Finding of No Significant Impact is based on the attached Environmental Assessment (EA) which has been independently evaluated by FHWA and determined to adequately and accurately discuss the purpose and need, environmental issues, and impacts of the proposed project and appropriate mitigation measures. It provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. The FHWA takes full responsibility for the accuracy, scope, and content of the attached EA.

7/19/12
Date

Michael Seibert
For FHWA

Description of the Proposed Action

The Federal Highway Administration and the Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT) are proposing to construct improvements to an approximately 6-mile segment of US 61 in Louisa County, Iowa. The proposed project is located in Northern Louisa County, as shown in Figure 1. The project limits extend from the existing US 61 four-lane section beginning at the Muscatine/Louisa County line on the north, to two miles south of the US 61 and Iowa 92 (IA 92) intersection adjacent to Grandview.

The proposed improvements consist of reconstructing the project segment of US 61 from a two-lane to a four-lane rural roadway section. The proposed improvements will include controlled accesses and two new interchanges located near the current intersection of US 61 and IA 92 and at US 61 and 170th Street (Figure 2).

Notice of Environmental Assessment Availability

The EA was signed on October 19, 2011 and was distributed to selected federal, state and local resource/regulatory agencies on October 25, 2011 for review and comment. Copies were also made available for public review at the Louisa County Engineer's Office, the City of Wapello, and at the Keck Public Library in Wapello. A notice of public hearing and EA availability was published in the Muscatine Journal on November 18, 2011; the Columbus Gazette on November 23, 2011; and the Wapello Republican on November 24, 2011. Notice of the public hearing was also included on the Iowa DOT website at www.iowadot.gov/pim.

Review and Comment Period

Following publication and distribution of the EA, a review and comment period was established for receipt of comments on the EA. The review and comment period closed on December 22, 2011.

Figure 1: Project Location

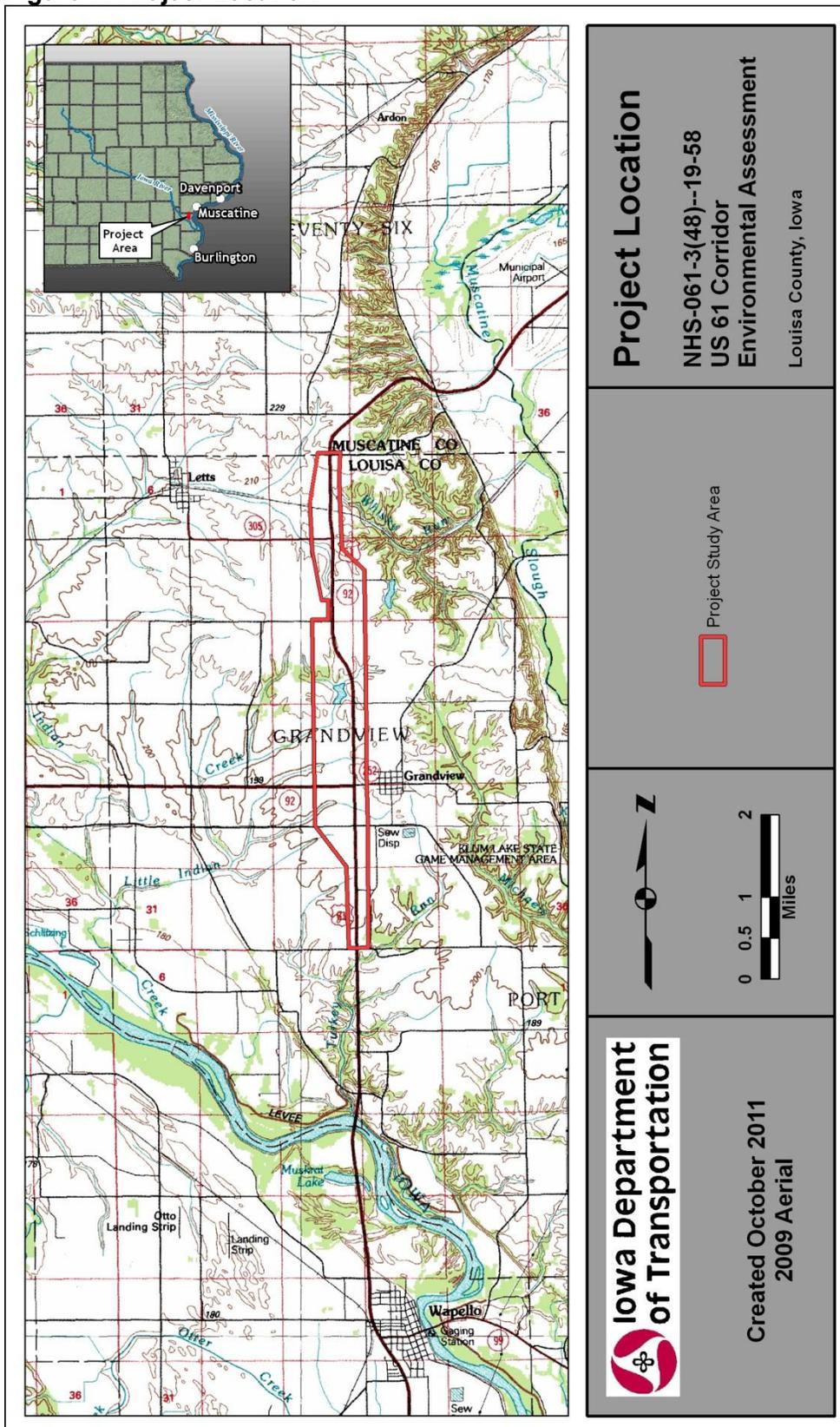
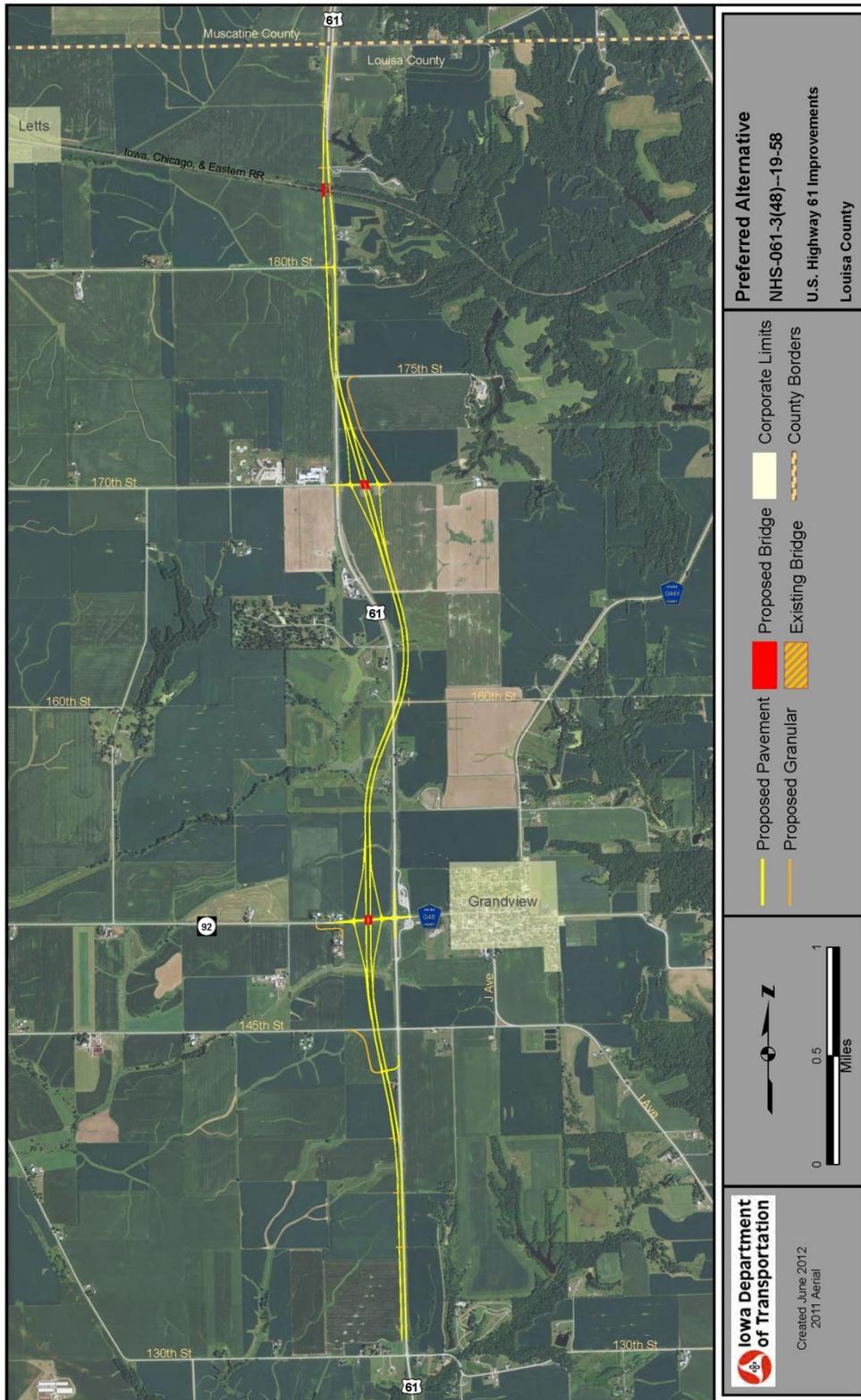


Figure 2: Preferred Alternative



Agency Comments

Comment letters on the EA were received from the US Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District (USACE), the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Louisa County Board of Supervisors (Board). Copies of these letters are included in Appendix A and the comments are summarized below. Iowa DOT responses are provided in italics following the comments.

The USACE letter was received on November 4, 2011 and states that an Individual Department of Army Section 404 permit will be required for the proposed project. *Iowa DOT will submit an application for a Department of Army Permit.*

The NRCS letter was received on November 17, 2011 and stated that the EA adequately addresses the concerns of the NRCS. *No response is necessary.*

The Board letter, dated December 20, 2011, expressed support for the project but identified several concerns. First, the Board recognized that the proposed interchange and frontage road at 170th Street is the safest design due to the proximity to the Louisa-Muscatine School, but stated concern for the cost and loss of productive farmland for the interchange and frontage road. Second, the Board requested two at-grade intersections at US 61 and 145th Street and US 61 and 160th Street. *Iowa DOT, with input from Louisa County officials, developed a solution that will relocate 145th Street farther south of the proposed interchange ramps to provide the at-grade intersection with US 61 that the Board requested. In correspondence dated January 24, 2012, the Board notified the Iowa DOT that the proposed 170th Street to 175th Street frontage road is preferred by the Board and stated that the relocated 145th Street at-grade intersection is acceptable. The Board also stated that the connection between US 61 and 160th Street does not appear to benefit the County and did not need to be pursued.*

Public Hearing Summary – Environmental Assessment

A public hearing was held on December 8, 2011 from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. at the Louisa-Muscatine Elementary School and Gymnasium. The hearing was conducted using both open forum and formal formats. The hearing began with an open forum session during which attendees could express their views and ask questions in an informal setting. A formal presentation, followed by a question and answer session, was held after the open forum session.

One Hundred Thirty-Nine (139) persons registered their attendance at the public hearing. Displays of EA graphics including the build alternative and proposed project schedule were presented. Opportunities were made available for those in attendance to discuss issues and opportunities with the project staff and to submit both oral and written comments. Six attendees provided comments during the formal hearing. A transcript of the hearing is available upon request. A summary of the verbal comments from the public hearing are summarized below.

Formal Recorded Verbal Comments

- The following is a summary of the written comments received during the formal hearing, followed by Iowa DOT's responses in italics: A commenter expressed concern about the loss of farmland, loss of taxable property, and potential negative impacts to local businesses. *Straightening the proposed roadway curves closer to the current alignment would impact two properties that have elements that are considered historic and remain eligible in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Significant historic sites that*

are eligible for listing on the NRHP are protected under Section 4(f) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). A shifted at-grade intersection at IA 92 to the east of existing businesses would not alleviate high accident rates experienced at the current at-grade intersection and an interchange in this area would not fit between businesses to the west without impacting several homes and a historic property.

- An attorney for property owners in the project area opposed the project as an unnecessary waste of money and requested maintenance of farm field access from the constructed 4-lane highway. *While the US 61 improvements will benefit local traffic, the purpose of major US Highways is to facilitate regional movement of goods and services though Iowa which is broader in scope and significance. Multiple accesses between the interchanges are not advantageous to the safety and mobility of traffic moving through the corridor. The closing of 145th Street was initially proposed, but it will now be located farther south of the proposed interchange ramps to reduce the travel distance for farmers and help them to avoid using IA 92.*
- A neighbor spoke for a property owner that was unable to attend. The neighbor opposed the 170th Street interchange because of impacts to farm and trucking access to the highway and concern that new road surfaces would not be maintained. *A frontage road using the existing highway from the intersection of US 61 and IA 92 was considered but dismissed because of impacts to historic properties, the Veterans' Memorial in Grandview, two active businesses, and substantial impacts to wetlands, streams and regulated materials sites.*
- A property owner in the project area acknowledged that the US 61/IA 92 intersection is a dangerous intersection and that safety improvements are necessary there. The property owner opposed the restricted access to agricultural fields in the project area. *Multiple accesses between the interchanges are not advantageous to the safety and mobility of traffic moving through the corridor. The closing of 145th Street was initially proposed, but it will now be located farther south of the proposed interchange ramps to reduce the travel distance for farmers and help them to avoid using IA 92.*
- A member of the Grandview Fire Department expressed concern that the proposed highway cut off access to Ray's Timber subdivision. *The Iowa DOT appreciates the comment and the comment will be included in the official hearing transcript. Access to Ray's Timber subdivision will be maintained as part of the project.*

Written Comments

Twelve written comments were received after the EA public hearing during the comment period from private citizens. The written public comments received, as well as responses (as needed) are included in the public hearing transcript. The following is a summary of the written comments received, followed by Iowa DOT's responses in italics:

- Several comments opposed expansion of US 61 to four lanes and expressed concern that the project is too expensive for the area. *That might be true if the proposed improvements were going to serve only Grandview or Louisa County. The local arterial street system and county roads exist to satisfy local travel demands. While US 61 will benefit local traffic, the purpose of major US Highways is to facilitate regional movement of goods and services though Iowa which is broader in scope and significance.*
- Cost of 170th Street Interchange exceeds the safety value of the interchange. *The 170th Street Interchange is planned to avoid an increase in potential accidents that may come with the expansion of the highway from two lanes to four lanes and a higher travel speed.*

- Additional access to farm fields is necessary and access closings will cause farmers to travel more distance to fields and cause more wear and tear on equipment. *Multiple accesses between the interchanges are not advantageous to the safety and mobility of traffic moving through the corridor. The closing of 145th Street was initially proposed, but it will now be located farther south of the proposed interchange ramps to reduce the travel distance for farmers and help them to avoid using IA 92.*
- The project should include no interchanges. *A four-lane, no interchange alternative was evaluated but rejected because it does not address the high number of crashes at the intersection of US 61 and IA 92.*
- A frontage road was requested west of US 61 using some of the existing highway. *Several alternatives using the frontage road as an option were considered but dismissed because of impacts to historic properties, the Veterans' Memorial in Grandview, active businesses, wetlands, streams, and regulated materials sites.*
- US 61 access should be eliminated and traffic directed to the west along US 218 because of concentration and speed of the drivers would be eliminated. *The Iowa DOT Transportation Commission identified US 61 as part of the State's Commercial and Industrial Network (CIN) and approved all of US 61 in Iowa as a four-lane highway. As part of the CIN, most other segments of US 61 in Iowa have been developed as four-lane expressway or freeway facilities with posted speed limits of 65 mph in rural areas. The four-lane highway will provide passing opportunities for this segment of US 61 which receives 20 percent of its traffic from sometimes slow moving heavy commercial vehicles.*
- The need for a grade-separated interchange at IA 92 was questioned. *Recent traffic studies have shown that four-way stops or traffic signals on rural high speed highways and expressways can actually raise the crash rate and result in a less safe highway environment.*
- House avoidance will cause more farm impacts. *Alternatives evaluated in the project area actually show additional farm ground would be impacted if the house was taken as part of the project.*
- There were concerns about property values and future opportunity costs to taxable land. Also property owners would like a farmland reimbursement for farm impacts, not money. *Acquisition of any right-of-way for the project will follow the Iowa Code Section 6B process.*
- Farm ground will be landlocked and inaccessible. *Changes in access to farm ground may occur, but access to all parcels will be maintained as part of the project.*
- There are safety concerns for travelling with farm equipment on the new four-lane highway. *The new highway is planned with 8-foot wide outside shoulders to allow faster moving vehicles to pass safely in the passing lane in the same direction.*
- There is concern that the new four-lane facility could affect the Louisa County Trails Master Plan currently in development. The commenter expressed a desire to work with Iowa DOT on implementing the plan as it relates to US 61 and other state roads in Louisa County. *The Iowa DOT appreciates the comments regarding trails and District 5 staff will work with the plan proponents as the plan moves forward.*

New Information

Several changes have occurred since the October 25, 2011 EA was published and are described below.

The Iowa DOT, in response to comments from Louisa County officials and public input modified the project to relocate 145th Street farther south of the proposed interchange ramps and provide an at-grade intersection with US 61. This design change would result in additional impacts to farmland.

Since the publication of the EA, the Iowa DOT implemented a new standard operating procedure in which all alternatives developed during the NEPA process will include a buffer around the estimated construction footprint. The purpose of the buffer is to provide NEPA clearance for an area large enough to accommodate drainage features, minor alignment modifications, and appropriate utility corridors, all of which are designed after NEPA has been completed. Applying a buffer to the alternatives creates a conservative (i.e., worst case) estimate of potential impacts.

Applying the buffer to the project study area results in the following additional impacts:

- An additional 1.8 acres of impact to a parcel containing a historic site (1.8 acres of one parcel total with buffer).
- An additional three (four total with buffer) contaminated and regulated materials sites.
- An additional 652 linear feet of stream (2,216 linear feet total with buffer).
- An additional 0.4 acres (0.8 acres total with buffer) of woodlands.
- An additional 92 acres (365 acres total with buffer) of farmlands.

A field wetland delineation identified fewer wetlands than were reported in the EA. Proposed wetland impacts within the estimated construction footprint plus buffer total 7.7 acres compared with 12.45 acres of wetlands identified in the EA.

A new NRCS Farmland Conversion Impact Rating Form was completed in the spring of 2012 to account for additional impacts associated with the change in project design and use of the buffer (See Appendix B). This form shows an increase in the impact rating from 162 points to 176 points out of the 260 points possible. Because most of the land in the project area is farmed, it was not possible for the project to avoid impacts to farmland. However, impacts to farmland were minimized to the extent practical by using the existing alignment and ROW where possible.

The changes mentioned above have resulted in changes to the overall project impacts shown in Table 7 of the EA. The revised impact table below shows proposed impacts based on the new information available since the EA was published:

Resource	No Build Alternative	Preferred Alternative
Land Use	No Impact	Beneficial Impact
Right-of-Way Acquisition	No Impact	392 acres
Historic Sites or Districts	No Impact	1.8 acres of one parcel
Wetland Impacts	No Impact	7.7 acres
Surface Water Impacts	No Impact	2,216 linear feet
Farmland Impacts	No Impact	365 acres
Woodland	No Impact	0.8 acres
Noise Impacts (Number of Receptors)	No Impact	1
Contaminated and Regulated Material Sites	No Impact	4
Visual	No Impact	Minor Impact
Utilities	No Impact	Adverse Impact

The Iowa DOT fully expects that impacts will be reduced as the project proceeds through final design and that actual impacts at the time of project construction will be less than the estimates in this FONSI.

Basis for Finding of No Significant Impact

The EA evaluated resources present in the project area for effects as they may occur related to the reconstruction of US 61, construction of interchanges at IA 92 and 170th Street, and related improvements. The EA documents the absence of significant impacts associated with the implementation of the proposed project. The following resources were evaluated in detail in for impacts that may result from the proposed project: Land Use, Right-of-Way, Relocation Potential, Historical Sites or Districts, Archaeological Sites, Wetlands, Surface Waters and Water Quality, Woodlands, Farmlands, Noise, Contaminated Sites and Regulated Materials Sites, and Utilities.

This Finding of No Significant Impact documents compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and all other applicable environmental laws, Executive Orders, and related requirements.

Special Conditions for Location Approval

The following will be implemented during the design process, prior to construction:

- Relocations would be conducted in accordance with the Federal Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 and Iowa Code 316, the "Relocation Assistance Law."
- A National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) general stormwater discharge permit for construction will be required and must be obtained from the Iowa DNR.
- A Section 404 permit from USACE will be required for placement of dredged or fill material in wetlands or other waters of the U.S. A permit application including a wetland mitigation plan will be submitted to USACE for approval.
- Section 401 Water Quality Certification from the Iowa DNR will be required concerning the protection of surface water quality.

Appendix A

US 61/IA 92 Reconstruction and Interchanges Agency Comments Received



REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
CORPS OF ENGINEERS, ROCK ISLAND DISTRICT
PO BOX 2004 CLOCK TOWER BUILDING
ROCK ISLAND, ILLINOIS 61204-2004

November 2, 2011

SUBJECT: CEMVR-OD-P-2010-1179

Mr. James Rost
Iowa Department of Natural Resources
800 Lincoln Way
Ames, Iowa 50010

RECEIVED

NOV - 4 2011

Office of Location & Environment

Dear Mr. Rost:

Our office reviewed the Environmental Assessment for the Improvement of U.S. Highway 61 in Louisa County from two miles south of Iowa Highway 92 North to the existing four-lane portion at the Muscatine County Line. Our office has assigned the number 2011-1179 to this project during the pre-application review. Please refer to this number in any future correspondence concerning this project.

Our office has determined your project will require an Individual Department of the Army (DA) Section 404 permit. Please submit a complete application for DA authorization at the earliest practicable date. Your complete application must include a comprehensive mitigation plan that adequately compensates for your project's unavoidable adverse impact to Waters of the United States (including wetlands).

Should you have any questions, please contact our Regulatory Branch by letter, or telephone me at 309/794-5367.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael D. Hayes".

Michael D. Hayes
Project Manager
Permit Evaluation Section

United States Department of Agriculture


Natural Resources Conservation Service
210 Walnut Street, Room 693
Des Moines, IA 50309-2180

RECEIVED

NOV 10 2011

Office of Location & Environment

November 8, 2011

Mr. James Rost
Director, Office of Location and Environment
Iowa Department of Transportation
800 Lincoln Way
Ames, IA 50010

RE: U.S. 61 Improvement Project, Louisa County, Iowa

Dear Mr. Rost:

The Environmental Assessment for the U.S. 61 improvement adequately addresses the concerns Iowa Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) expressed in a previous communication. The previous communication was from John Myers to Angela Poole dated November 20, 2009.

Sincerely,

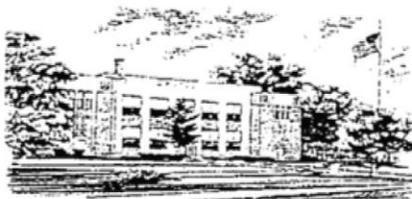


Martin Adkins
State Resource Conservationist

Helping People Help the Land

An Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer

LOUISA COUNTY
SYLVIA BELZER
County Auditor and
Commissioner of Elections



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
Chris Ball
Paula Buckman
Randy Griffin

PO Box 186 Wapello, Iowa 52653 (319) 523-3371 Fax (319) 523-3713 e-mail auditr58@louisacomm.net

December 20th, 2011

Jim Armstrong, PE
District Engineer
District 5 Office
P.O. Box 587
Fairfield, IA 52556

Dear Mr. Armstrong:

The Louisa County Board of Supervisors has reviewed the proposed four-lane improvements to U.S Highway 61 from 130th Street to the north County line and has the following comments:

Within the six miles of highway proposed for improvement Louisa County has only two roads that cross the project area from west to east, these are the gravel road at 145th Street and Highway 92- G48 to Grandview. A third road - 160th Street - will be cut off which will limit access to properties on the east side of Highway 61. The Board has received comments from several local citizens regarding the loss of access to their cropland and their need to bring slow moving agricultural equipment onto Highway 92 should this project be completed as proposed resulting in a more dangerous situation for the travelling public and local farmers. The Board is concerned about the project cost and loss of productive cropland that will be required for the grade separation and frontage road at 170th Street. The Board realizes that this is the safest intersection design due to the proximity to the L & M School but wishes that the Iowa DOT will consider other less costly alternatives for their final design.

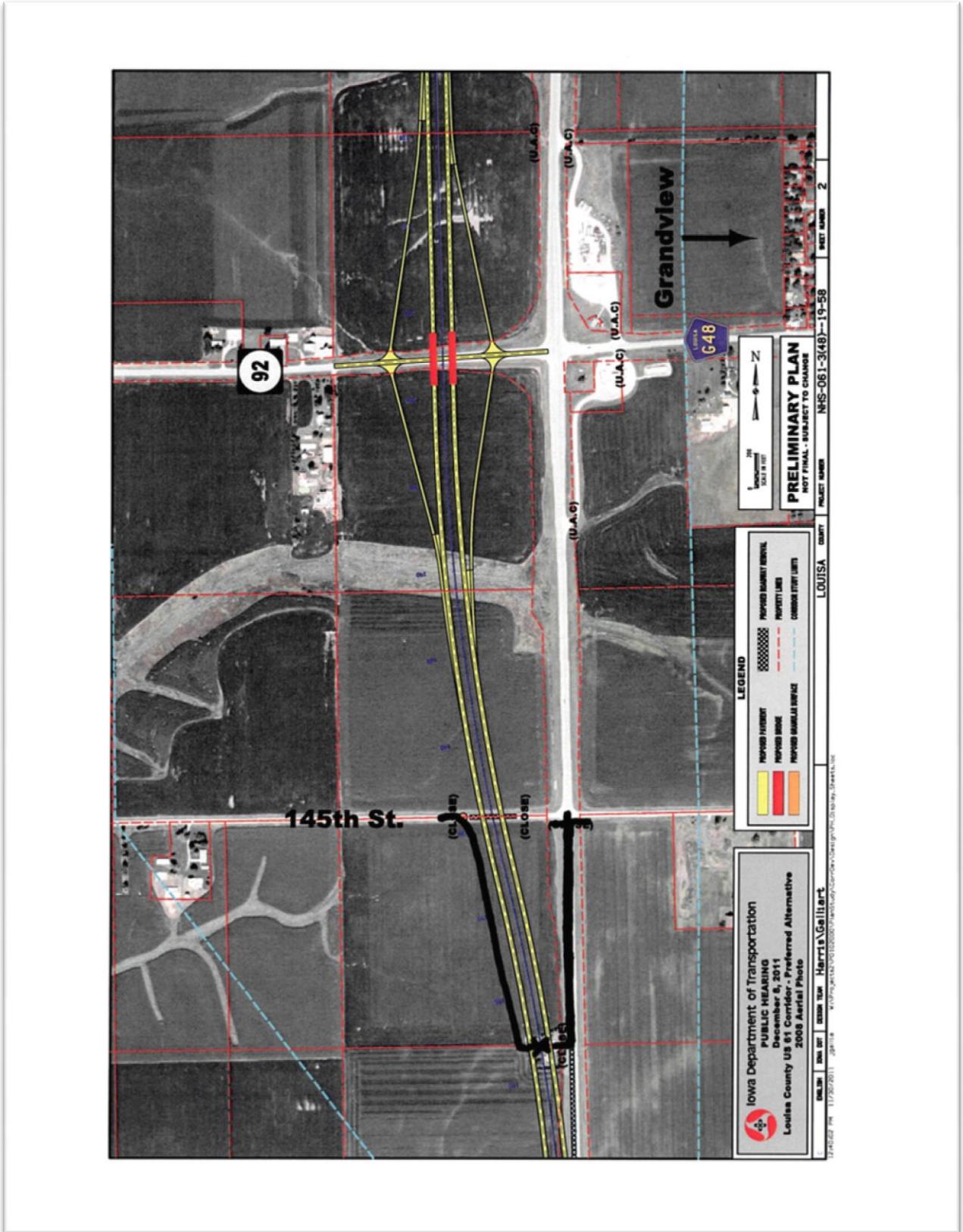
The Board will fully support the four lane improvements with at least the following two items incorporated into the final design. At 145th Street the County proposes that Highway 61 remain open to the south for an additional ¼ mile to an at grade intersection then to a frontage road to be connected to 145th Street per the attached sketch. This should provide a half-mile of separation for level 1 access. Historically this has not been a dangerous intersection. The records for 145th Street and Highway 61 show only two accidents from 2001 to 2010, one was an animal-vehicle crash and the other a broadside. The proposed grading profiles indicate that there will be more than 1,000 feet of sight distance at Highway 61 to provide adequate crossing time for slower moving agricultural equipment.

The Board would also wish to have an at-grade intersection at 160th Street. From Highway 92 to 170th Street is a two mile stretch in the proposed improvement that Proposed plans show no at-grade crossings for local access. Louisa County has proposed to upgrade 160th Street from a dirt road to a graveled road that will accommodate traffic that bypasses Grandview. The City of Grandview has a resolution that limits the weight for non-local traffic on its streets to ten tons which restricts some truck traffic. An at-grade intersection at this point would also allow another access to Ray's Timber subdivision and properties on the west of Highway 61 for emergency service and access to cropland. An at-grade intersection at 160th Street will improve local connectivity for Louisa County citizens. Accident history indicates 10 incidents at the existing intersection. Four are animal related, two crossed centerline, one FTY-rear-end, one Ran off Road-Left, (sideswipe by overtaking vehicle) and two unknown with property damage only. The proposed four lane improvements will aid to correct the crossed centerline and possibly the sideswipe incidents to improve the safety at this location. The proposed grading plan indicates that 1,000 feet of sight distance should be available at the 160th Street intersection.

The Board supports the proposed grade separation at Highways 92 and 61 as this should increase the safety to all who use this roadway and the Board also supports the continuation of a four-lane Highway 61 through Louisa County. The Board is requesting the Iowa DOT consider the addition of the described at-grade intersections as this will improve connectivity for Louisa County citizens; accident history at these locations indicates that there should be a minimal effect on the safety of the roadway.

Sincerely,


Chris Ball, Chairman



Appendix B

US 61/IA 92 Reconstruction and Interchanges Revised Farmland Conversion Impact Rating Form

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
 Natural Resources Conservation Service

NRCS-CPA-106
 (Rev. 1-91)

**FARMLAND CONVERSION IMPACT RATING
 FOR CORRIDOR TYPE PROJECTS**

PART I (To be completed by Federal Agency)		3. Date of Land Evaluation Request 6/7/12	4. Sheet 1 of 1
1. Name of Project US 61		5. Federal Agency Involved Federal Highway Administration	
2. Type of Project Addition of 2 lanes and 2 interchanges		6. County and State Louisa County, Iowa	
PART II (To be completed by NRCS)		1. Date Request Received by NRCS 6/7/12	2. Person Completing Form Julie McMichael
3. Does the corridor contain prime, unique statewide or local important farmland? (If no, the FPPA does not apply - Do not complete additional parts of this form). YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>		4. Acres Irrigated 0	Average Farm Size 333
5. Major Crop(s) Corn	6. Farmable Land in Government Jurisdiction Acres: 225,279 % 84	7. Amount of Farmland As Defined in FPPA Acres: 225,279 % 84	
8. Name Of Land Evaluation System Used None	9. Name of Local Site Assessment System None	10. Date Land Evaluation Returned by NRCS 6/7/12	

PART III (To be completed by Federal Agency)	Alternative Corridor For Segment			
	Corridor A	Corridor B	Corridor C	Corridor D
A. Total Acres To Be Converted Directly	365			
B. Total Acres To Be Converted Indirectly, Or To Receive Services	0			
C. Total Acres in Corridor	497			

PART IV (To be completed by NRCS) Land Evaluation Information				
A. Total Acres Prime And Unique Farmland	313.5			
B. Total Acres Statewide And Local Important Farmland	45.5			
C. Percentage Of Farmland in County Or Local Govt. Unit To Be Converted	0.001			
D. Percentage Of Farmland in Govt. Jurisdiction With Same Or Higher Relative Value	21			

PART V (To be completed by NRCS) Land Evaluation Information Criterion Relative value of Farmland to Be Serviced or Converted (Scale of 0 - 100 Points)	86			
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PART VI (To be completed by Federal Agency) Corridor Assessment Criteria (These criteria are explained in 7 CFR 658.5(c))		Maximum Points			
1. Area in Nonurban Use	15	15			
2. Perimeter in Nonurban Use	10	10			
3. Percent Of Corridor Being Farmed	20	20			
4. Protection Provided By State And Local Government	20	20			
5. Size of Present Farm Unit Compared To Average	10	10			
6. Creation Of Nonfarmable Farmland	25	0			
7. Availability Of Farm Support Services	5	5			
8. On-Farm Investments	20	10			
9. Effects Of Conversion On Farm Support Services	25	0			
10. Compatibility With Existing Agricultural Use	10	0			
TOTAL CORRIDOR ASSESSMENT POINTS	160	90	0	0	0

PART VII (To be completed by Federal Agency)					
Relative Value Of Farmland (From Part V)	100	86	0	0	0
Total Corridor Assessment (From Part VI above or a local site assessment)	160	90	0	0	0
TOTAL POINTS (Total of above 2 lines)	260	176	0	0	0

1. Corridor Selected: Corridor A	2. Total Acres of Farmlands to be Converted by Project: 364.6	3. Date Of Selection: 6/7/12	4. Was A Local Site Assessment Used? YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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5. Reason For Selection:
The corridor meets the project purpose and need and minimizes impacts to agricultural land.

Signature of Person Completing this Part:  DATE: 6/7/12

NOTE: Complete a form for each segment with more than one Alternate Corridor