

Highway 11 Twinning Functional Planning Study Highway 22 to Township Road 390 (east of Benalto)

What the Study Team Heard Engagement Activities held in June 2022

INTRODUCTION

On Alberta Transportation's behalf, CIMA Canada Inc began the Highway 11 Twinning Functional Planning Study in the spring of 2021. Over the past year CIMA+ completed the initial information gathering work to understand existing conditions and constraints, the initial engagement with potentially impacted landowners along the existing highway and prepared different preliminary concepts for twinning Highway 11. The concepts developed by the study team were influenced by the initial stakeholder engagement. The preliminary concepts were screened, and the results were presented to the potentially impacted landowners and the public in June 2022.

WHAT THE STUDY TEAM DID

To date, with feedback from Alberta Transportation and the four municipalities in the study area (Clearwater County, Lacombe County, Town of Eckville and Red Deer County) the study team:

- A. Gathered Information from potentially impacted property owners (stakeholders) and the public. (Engagement Round One)
- B. Conducted technical research of the bridges, utilities, ground conditions (geotechnical) and environmental resources along the 42 km section of the highway
- C. Developed alternatives based on the technical findings and stakeholder feedback
- D. Reviewed the options with the four municipalities and stakeholders to determine the preferred alternatives. (Engagement Round Two)

Engagement activities were conducted at two study phases, information gathering and development of alternatives.

1) Engagement Round One: Stakeholder Interviews

The first round of stakeholder engagement was conducted during the information gathering phase in July/August 2021. This round reached out to the potentially impacted landowners bordering existing Highway 11. The owners of 240 parcels along the corridor were invited to meet with the project team. A series of one-on-one interviews were conducted virtually with approximately 100 landowners that responded to the invitation. Each interview lasted 30-45 minutes. The landowners urged the project team to explore other options in addition to the originally proposed twinning of Highway 11. Their suggestions included passing lane and couplet options.

2) Engagement Round Two: Small group stakeholder meetings and public open houses

Based on what the study team learned during Round One from the stakeholders along existing Highway 11, options were developed that included a passing lane, a north couplet and a new alignment. The project team understood that potentially impacted landowners required targeted meetings that took their unique interests and concerns into account. Therefore, two streams of engagement were planned in June 2022 to present the alternatives that were developed:

- Small group geographically based meetings of 90 minutes each
- Open houses in Condor and Rocky Mountain House.

The second round of stakeholder and public engagement for the Highway 11 functional planning study was conducted June 21, 22 and 23, 2022.

2.1) Small Group Meetings

The additional options expanded the '*Landowner Contact Area*' to include landowners potentially impacted by the three new concepts that extended beyond existing Highway 11. This round began with letters and emails to all property owners along the original Highway 11 as well as the landowners along the new options that were going to be presented.

Potentially impacted landowners were invited to attend a series of 10 small group, geographically based meetings in the Hamlet of Condor with their neighbours and adjacent landowners. The intent of these ten 90-minute meetings was to present potential options to landowners in a safe, respectful, small group format and understand their perspectives and concerns.

2.2) Two Open Houses

Hard copy and online ads promoting the open houses were placed the Mountaineer, Sylvan Lake News, Eckville Echo and Central Alberta Life. Local community groups also posted ads on their community Facebook pages.

The targeted small group meetings were followed by two open houses, one held in the Condor Community Centre and one at the Pioneer Centre in Rocky Mountain House. Over 150 people attended each open house.

The open houses followed a unique format. The long corridor (42 km) combined with the four different twinning concepts meant that there was a great deal of information to convey to the public. The information was presented in two parts. The study process and four twinning options were shown on boards and roll maps set up around the venue, while the technical process leading to the preliminary concepts and outcomes were presented in a PowerPoint presentation.

The open house hours extended from 4pm to 8pm, with presentations at 5:00pm and 6:30pm. People were invited to review boards and maps and discuss their ideas and perspectives with members of the project team. With ten members of the project team, comprised of both CIMA+ and Alberta Transportation representatives available to answer questions, the project team was able to hold conversations and address questions from

dozens of participants. The project team was thanked and complimented by several participants for the open house format.

WHAT THE STUDY TEAM HEARD

There was a great deal of interest in the twinning options; this led to much discussion and commentary. Themes emerged that were common across all options; participants also shared their thoughts and perspectives on each option.

Themes Common to all Options

Agreement with Twinning

Most participants agreed that Highway 11 needed to be twinned and acknowledged they had witnessed several collisions and near misses while traveling Highway 11. Participants also recognized that twinning the highway would cause great upheaval for residents and landowners adjacent to the highway.

It's a dangerous highway, it should be twinned but there's so many impacts.

This highway is terrible. Something needs to be done

Loss of Farmland

Participants were concerned over the loss of productive agricultural land and suggested that impact on farmland and agricultural operations should be considered as important criteria in any decision-making process.

You never get the agricultural land back. It's gone forever. It's good land, the farming community suffers. It's some of the best agricultural land there is.

Farming Operations

Related to loss of farmland was a significant concern on the impact to farming operations. Crossing a twinned highway with farm equipment was the primary worry. Agricultural businesses wondered about the safety and logistics of crossing four or six (with turning lanes) lanes of traffic with large-scale farm machinery.

I have very serious concerns with crossing the highway with our farm machinery. Some of our equipment is very long and already straddles two lanes. How are we going to cross the twinned highway?

Uncertainty

Landowners who may be impacted by the options expressed frustration and fear from the uncertainty of knowing that a proposed option could impact them. Needing to wait for the preferred option to be presented by Alberta Transportation during the next round of

engagement created anxiety and stress. Many were also eager to speak with a land agent to clarify land acquisition process and were disappointed that those answers were not yet available.

I have concerns with uncertainty; my business has been trying to expand but cannot without confirmation of final plan; this is causing significant financial impacts.

You need to understand the stress and lives put on hold. Do we move to town? The land man needs to understand the changes being forced onto us.

I understand something will happen, it's just the living in limbo and not knowing so we can make plans. Do we plant new trees? It's the uncertainty that hurts.

Twin Existing Highway

While participants appreciated the four options presented by the project team, after reviewing each option, most people thought that twinning the existing highway made the most sense and would cause the least disruption to landowners and agricultural land.

Straight ahead twinning is best option. Make sure there is enough distance for agricultural equipment and school busses.

After looking at these choices the one that makes the most sense is twinning the existing highway. It is tough, but it has the fewest impacts compared to the other plans.

We feel the traditional twin is the best option. We have always felt that the twinning may happen and planned our farm accordingly by not purchasing or renting land that would involve crossing the highway. People who live on the highway had to realize this as well and therefore planned accordingly. Any couplets impact too many farms in very negative ways, and they would drastically decrease property value.

The traditional twin has already been factored into the properties and businesses that are along highway 11, I feel this argument should have been given more consideration. We are now looking at having acres of our land stranded between the couplets, they would have no value as cultivated land, pasture or hay. The acres would have zero resale value as they are not inhabitable or farmable.

Feedback on Additional Options

Some of the newly invited landowners expressed concern and surprise that their property was now considered to be potentially impacted because of the new twinning concepts. Individual letters were sent to each property owner that could be affected; a few did not realize the full meaning of the options and were shocked and dismayed to learn that they

may be impacted. The majority of landowners situated along the routes of the new options attended the small group meetings to discuss the options, The open houses also generated a great deal of discussion about the additional options.

The North Couplet or New Alignment

At first glance, the north couplet and new alignment generated support from some participants.

I love these ideas! There are very few houses along the route.

After more consideration, and discussion with other participants the majority of people strongly opposed the north couplet and new alignment. Objections were:

- The roadway would bisect existing farmland and remove a considerable amount of prime agricultural land.
- The roadway would force farmers to cross the new couplet or twinned highway many times as they farmed the land.

*I have concerns over agricultural/environmental impacts and loses to farmland
This would cut me off from the rest of my land. I'd have to cross that every
day. This cuts the farm in half.*

*This is the worst plan. I farm 5 plots here, how do I cross the highway? This is
why we got this land, so we didn't have to cross the highway. Also, we rent
additional property to farm, and we recently bought 2 additional quarters. I
would need to cross this highway 2400 times a year when farming!*

Other objections included:

- Proximity to the Hamlet of Condor
- Proximity to the new school, potentially impacting school children and families as they commuted to school.

*As a community, we took a big step forward in having a new school, and finally
got the school off the dangerous existing Highway 11. Now you tell us that the
highway will move to where the new school is being constructed.*

*It's a concern to put our children near a 4-lane highway. Disappointed to see
this even considered, need to consider humans/kids value!*

Passing Lanes

Passing lanes were not generally supported. Although a few people thought passing lanes were the most economical and had the least impact on surrounding properties, most participants did not think passing lanes would adequately address the traffic issues along the corridor.

As a firefighter for 25 years: if you want less death/accidents DO NOT pick this, passing lanes = carnage and death

No passing lanes. Get school buses off - loading and unloading - this highway

This is the worst of the choices. This option does not improve safety and will disrupt current traffic

NEXT STEPS FOR THE STUDY TEAM

The concepts are being evaluated in detail, considering the feedback received from stakeholders and the public. The results of the evaluation process will be reviewed with the municipalities. A preferred plan will be presented to stakeholders and the public during a third round of engagement, probably early 2023.

The preferred plan may be modified in response to stakeholder input before the study team seeks municipal support for the plan that is then recommended to Alberta Transportation later in 2023.