

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

Stakeholder and Public Engagement: What We Heard

SUMMARY

On Alberta Transportation and Economic Corridors' behalf, CIMA Canada Inc. began the Highway 11 Twinning Functional Planning Study in the spring of 2021. Following initial stakeholder meetings and information gathering work to understand current conditions and constraints, CIMA+ prepared preliminary concepts for twinning Highway 11. The concepts developed by the study team were influenced by the initial stakeholder engagement, the results of a preliminary screening were presented to the potentially impacted landowners and the public in June 2022. Following the stakeholder input sessions in June, two additional options were suggested and presented for consideration. Engagement with stakeholders along the two new additional options took place in January 2023.

A Multiple Account Evaluation (MAE) that included all options was conducted following stakeholder engagement in January 2023. The MAE indicated that twinning along the existing Highway 11 was the preferred option. The preferred option was presented to the Technical Review Committee and County Councils in March 2023. An Open House presenting the Preferred Option was held in April 2023.

Following confirmation of Highway 11 as the preferred twinning alignment, the study team is proceeding with developing functional plans. Final meetings with landowners who are impacted by the twinning will be held in summer/fall of 2023. Once finalized, functional plans will be posted on the study website for public information.

WHAT THE STUDY TEAM DID

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

- Gathered Information from potentially impacted property owners (stakeholders) along Highway 11 (Engagement Round One).
- Conducted technical research of the bridges, utilities, ground conditions (geotechnical) and environmental resources along the 42 km section of the highway.
- Developed alternatives based on the technical findings and stakeholder feedback.
- Reviewed the options with the four municipalities and presented to potentially impacted stakeholders and public. (Engagement Round Two).
- Based on feedback from Engagement Round Two, added two additional alignment options (800m south of existing Highway 11, and Township Road 384).

- Engaged stakeholders along the two new options in January of 2023. (Engagement Round Three).
- Conducted a Multiple Account Evaluation (MAE) to determine the preferred alignment option. Reviewed the preferred option and MAE results with administration and councils for the four municipalities.
- Held a final Open House in April 2023 to present the Preferred Option to the public (Engagement Round Four).

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 held in June 2022 to present the alternatives that were developed:

- Small group geographically based meetings of 90 minutes each
- Open houses in the Hamlet of Condor and in 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 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 north alignment option that was going to be presented.

Potentially impacted landowners were invited to attend a series of small group, geographically based meetings in the Hamlet of Condor with their neighbours and adjacent landowners. The intent of these 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) Public 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 June 2022 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 June 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 and Economic Corridors 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.

Following Engagement Round Two, a petition that Township Road 384 be put forward for consideration was presented to Alberta Transportation and Economic Corridors. It was also suggested that a south couplet be considered.

3) Engagement Round Three: Stakeholder Interviews

A third round of stakeholder engagement was conducted following the June 2022 engagement sessions. This round reached out to the potentially impacted landowners along an alignment 800 metres south of Highway 11 as well as those potentially impacted by the Township Road 384 alignment. These meetings took place in January 2023. Potentially impacted landowners were invited to attend a series of small group, geographically based meetings in the Hamlet of Condor with their neighbours and adjacent landowners. The intent of these 90-minute meetings was to present the potential options to landowners in a safe, respectful, small group format and understand their perspectives and concerns. Landowners not living along existing Highway 11 expressed concern and surprise that their property was now considered to be potentially impacted because of the new alignment concepts.

4) Engagement Round Four: Public Open Houses

Following engagement round three, the study team conducted a Multiple Account Evaluation (MAE) to determine the preferred alignment option. The preferred option and MAE results were reviewed with administration and councils for the four municipalities and presented at a Public Open House in April 2023.

Hard copy and online ads promoting the open houses were placed the Mountaineer, Eckville Echo and Central Alberta Life. Local community groups also posted articles and ads in their community newspapers and Facebook pages.

The April Open House was held in Sylvan Lake. The twinning of Highway 11 from Benalto to Highway 22 (Project B) was one of three projects shown to the public. The other two were Project 'C' - Township Road 390 to Sylvan Lake and the Hwy 20/Memorial Trail Roundabout.

The open house was a drop in format with hours extending from 4pm to 8pm. People were invited to review boards and maps and discuss their questions and perspectives with members of the project team. The project team was able to hold conversations and address questions from dozens of participants. Over 250 people attended the Open House, with the majority of whom visited the Highway 11 twinning study team.

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.

These two options completely wipe out my land. And the 800 metres between the couplet and Highway 11 become a dead zone. No one will farm them.

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?

Disruption of farming operations was especially significant for those farming along Township Road 384. It was indicated that this roadway was originally constructed as an agricultural service road in order to keep farm machinery off Highway 11 and facilitate safe movement of machinery and product. In addition, the right-of-way and service road requirements of a couplet along Township Road 384 would result in significant loss of farmland.

We are strongly opposed to the Township Road 384 option! TWP 384 is an essential agricultural service road with significant farm equipment traffic. There is annual flooding at the Medicine River. This has great impacts to agricultural land and would wipe out several parcels. Those remaining parcels would have no way to move their equipment.

Township Road 384 is a terrible idea! Agricultural land surrounding TWP 384 is highly valuable and productive agricultural land. I have concerns with farm equipment on the highway, especially during busy seasons which coincide with several long holidays and increased tourist traffic.

Participants also pointed out that couplets would create dead zones between the existing Highway 11 and the proposed couplet alignments, making farming the land less viable.

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 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. Most 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, many 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 loss 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

South Couplet and Township Road 384

Stakeholders identified significant wildlife corridors and environmentally sensitive areas along the south couplet and Township Road 384. They reported annual migration patterns and watershed activity in the area.

In addition, a one-way couplet that was over a kilometer away from the original Highway 11 was a major safety concern for residents. They worried about emergency access delays

caused by one-way roadways, and people inadvertently going the wrong way along a major highway.

This idea could have life-or-death consequences. Emergency vehicles would need to back track, go miles out of their way to get to a fire or medical emergency.

How would you stop people from getting confused and going the wrong way when there is so much distance separating the east-west configuration—this makes zero sense.

NEXT STEPS FOR THE STUDY TEAM

The study team will develop a functional plan, which will provide greater detail for stakeholders along Highway 11. Once the functional plan is complete, the study team will contact impact stakeholders to discuss specific impacts to their properties and potential mitigation measures. They will also advise the stakeholders of the next steps for any right-of-way acquisition. This is anticipated to take place in the late summer 2023.

A final presentation to County Councils will take place in fall of 2023, followed by the final recommendation to Alberta Transportation and Economic Corridors.