



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Highway
Administration**

Wisconsin Division Office

July 18, 2014

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In Reply Refer To:
HDA-WI

Mr. Brett Wallace, Director
Wisconsin Department of Transportation
141 NW Barstow Street
P.O. Box 798
Waukesha, WI 53187-0798

Dear Mr. Wallace:

We are writing in response to your June 23, 2014 Technical Memorandum that requested Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) approval of an option for phased construction of a full interchange at I-43 and County Line Road as part of the I-43 North-South project. With this approach, a partial interchange with access to and from the south, would be constructed as part of the I-43 reconstruction project and ramps to and from the north would be added in 2040, or as otherwise needed, as outlined in the Technical Memorandum.

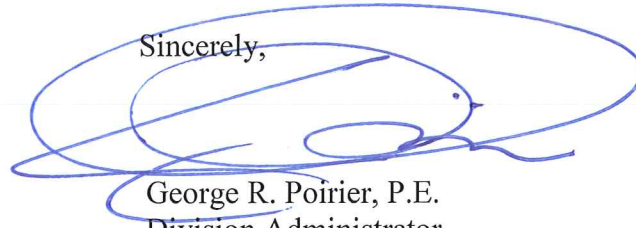
We have thoroughly reviewed the proposal and justification provided in the Technical Memorandum and cannot provide approval to move forward with the option for the phased construction of a full interchange at County Line Road. Per our April 21, 2014 letter, we have approved the full interchange and no access alternatives for engineering and operational acceptability.

The phased construction option, which would allow for a partial interchange to be in place until 2040, or as otherwise needed, is not consistent with FHWA policy and guidance, current design standards, or the purpose and operations of the Interstate system. While FHWA policy and guidance allows consideration of phased construction, there has to be a strong basis that warrants the need for a phased approach, along with a firm commitment and defined timeframe for the second phase of the construction.

We fully understand and appreciate the concerns of the locals and the position taken by the City of Mequon. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) and FHWA have responded to many of the concerns through the development and preliminary acceptance of a revised design in order to address specific concerns brought forward by the City and the residents in the nearby neighborhoods.

To aid in follow up discussions with the City and local residents who oppose a full interchange, we have enclosed a summary of the basis of FHWA's position. If you have any questions about the actions we have taken concerning the I- 43/County Line Road interchange please contact Mr. Wesley Shemwell.

Sincerely,



George R. Poirier, P.E.
Division Administrator

Enclosure

ecc:

Sheri Schmit, Brian Bliesner, Manojoy Nag, Steve Hoff – WisDOT SE Region

Don Greuel, Will Anderson – WisDOT BPD

Dan Grasser, Don Miller, Rory Rhinesmith – WisDOT DTSD

The FHWA Wisconsin Division Office, who has responsibility for Interstate access modification approval, has taken the position that the phased construction of a full interchange at County Line Road or retaining a partial interchange alternative are not an acceptable alternatives for this interchange. This position is based on the following:

- 23 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) §625.4 specifically lists “A Policy on Design Standards Interstate System, AASHTO, January 2005” as an applicable standard.
- These Interstate Design Standards specifically state (on Page 1) that “All interstate highways **shall** meet the following minimum standards for segments constructed on new right-of-way and segments undergoing complete reconstruction along existing right-of-way”. Specifically in regard to interchanges, the standards state (on Page 4) that “Each interchange **shall** provide for all traffic movements”.
- The regulation and standards requires that since this interchange is being fully reconstructed and relocated, full standards must be met and the interchange must provide for all traffic movements.
- FHWA does offer some flexibility to justify not meeting standards if there are no prudent alternatives to meeting the standards. Extensive environmental impacts and/or extreme costs are often factors that are taken into consideration when looking at prudent alternatives. For this particular interchange, a design has been developed for a reconstructed full interchange that has very minimal environmental impacts (the same impacts as the partial interchange) and only moderately higher construction costs than a partial interchange.
- FHWA’s “Interstate System Access Information Guide” specifies that all interchanges need to provide for each of the eight basic movements, except in the most extreme circumstances. Partial interchanges usually have undesirable operational characteristics. If circumstances exist where a partial interchange is considered appropriate as an interim improvement, then commitments need to be included in the request to accommodate the ultimate design. These commitments may include purchasing the right-of-way required during the interim improvements. While the commitment for accommodating the full interchange would be provided, there are not extreme circumstances. In addition, it is the extreme circumstances that generally provide for a logical, well-defined point at which the second phase would occur, as issues surrounding the extreme circumstances are resolved. This does not exist with the County Line Road Interchange.
- Understanding the stakeholder interests and concern is an important aspect of developing an informed decision about the merits of a change in access. The primary opposition to the full interchange comes from the City of Mequon where the interchange is located. The opposition is based on local concerns that a full interchange will increase traffic in this primarily residential area. While FHWA does give appropriate consideration to local concerns, it is imperative that primary consideration is placed on the function of the overall Interstate facility and the importance in serving broader regional and interstate traffic needs. Interstate drivers expect that interchanges provide for all movements and

that if they exit at an interchange that they will be able to return to the Interstate in the same direction from the same interchange. There should be compelling reasons to justify a partial interchange based on local needs or concerns. Those compelling reasons do not appear to exist with this particular interchange. While there is certainly vocal opposition to the full interchange, the opposition does not appear to be extreme in terms of the number of persons opposing the full interchange and there is also a fair amount of support for the full interchange. In addition, there has not been anything to show that there would be any significant changes in travel patterns through the nearby neighborhoods or otherwise negative impacts.

- FHWA's "Interstate System Access Information Guide" specifies that when partial interchanges (either system or service interchanges that do not provide for all possible interchanging movements between intersecting routes) are being considered as an alternative for a change in access, it is essential that coordination and development of alternatives begin during the early phases of the planning process. Not providing for all movements violates driver expectation and may lead to "wrong-way" movements on ramps. Therefore, alternatives for the construction of partial interchanges should generally be avoided. If partial interchanges are being considered, clear and detailed analysis must be conducted and documented as justification for their construction or retention. In the extreme and extraordinary circumstances where a partial interchange is being considered, a full interchange must be included as an alternative for comparison in the decision-making process. This allows for full consideration of impacts associated with a full interchange. As indicated above, because there are very few impacts associated with a full interchange, the basis for the need for a partial or phased full interchange has not been justified.
- Drivers have the expectation that when they exit the Interstate, they will be able to enter again, either to continue their journey in the same direction or make the return trip. Partial system interchanges affect regional travel by forcing drivers who remain on the Interstate System to follow other corridors on the return journey and may take them many miles off course. Partial system interchanges also eliminate the opportunity to use alternate freeway corridors to maintain traffic operations during construction, traffic incidents, special events, or emergencies.
- This interchange is within the Southeast Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) area. The 2035 Regional Transportation Plan for this area shows growth and development to the north of the existing interchange. As growth and development to the north occurs, access to and from the north is likely to become much more strongly needed and desired.