

JOINT LEGISLATIVE TRANSPORTATION VISION TASK FORCE

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Written Testimony
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K-96 Highway – Hutchinson, Kansas to Sterling, Kansas **Talking Points – History, description, current status**

THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE

The history of what is often referred to as the NorthWest Passage, a proposed diagonal corridor from Wichita, Kansas proceeding northwest to the cities of Hutchinson, Great Bend, and Hays was considered by the Kansas Legislature in 1986 through Senate Bill 693. The legislation authorized and directed the Kansas Turnpike Authority to study the feasibility of constructing turnpike projects or freeways on three major corridors including the NorthWest Passage. An engineering study was completed by the Howard, Needles, Tammen and Bergendoff firm to determine comparative costs and traffic usage for 2-lane and 4-lane alternates on both existing and new locations.

COMPREHENSIVE HIGHWAY PROGRAM

In 1989, the Kansas Legislature approved a Comprehensive Highway Program that set into motion the selection of preservation, modernization and System Enhancement corridor highway projects. Fortunately, the first leg of the NW Passage, K-96 from Wichita to Hutchinson was a Selected Enhancement project. This completed four-lane expressway now provides that important regional link in SouthCentral Kansas. According to the K-DOT traffic flow map, average traffic counts at the midway point of this highway carried 7,450 in 1990 and by July 2017 carried 11,300 vehicles.

T-WORKS PROGRAM

In September 2012, K-DOT identified priority projects in the South Central District for the T-WORKS TRANSPORTATION program. This 10-year, \$7.8 billion transportation program was passed by the Kansas Legislature in 2010. Based on community input throughout South Central Kansas, combined with engineering data and economic impact analysis – The K-96 (NorthWest Passage new diagonal corridor in Reno and Rice Counties) was identified as a **1st Tier priority project**, selected for construction with a planned let date of October 2016.

K-96 Highway – Hutchinson, Kansas to Sterling, Kansas
Talking Points (*continued*)

SCOPE OF PROJECT

Build a new Super 2 K-96 alignment on four-land right of way from Hutchinson to north of Sterling, bypassing Nickerson and Sterling. During the community consult meeting in 2012, seven cities and three counties officially endorsed this as a Tier 1 project. **K-DOT District 5 adopted this section of K-96 as its top priority and invested extensive route analysis and planning.** This project is the next logical extension of K-DOT’s major corridor modernization effort which has seen the construction of

US 400/K-96 in Southeast Kansas

The K-96 expressway from Wichita to Hutchinson

The K-96 bypass around Wichita

K-96 Bob Dole Bypass around Hutchinson

In anticipation of the October 2016 construction letting, K-DOT has completed the following:

Alignment Study

Right of Way Acquisition

Engineering and Design

Because the project was delayed, K-DOT will need to complete the Utility Relocation. K-DOT has confirmed the utility relocation will NOT impede construction, as this is a new alignment that will be fully access controlled.

SAFETY AND SYSTEM CONDITION

The existing roadway’s right angle turns, steep side slopes and very narrow pavement, shoulders and right-of-way make it extremely dangerous. Area K-DOT engineers state that the roadway has outlived its useful life. The condition of the roadway warrants complete replacement. **The project referenced above addresses what is currently the worst stretch of K-96.** The proposed new alignment will save an estimated 15 minutes for emergency vehicles traveling to the Regional Medical Center in Hutchinson or to Wichita trauma centers. The existing circuitous route through Nickerson and Sterling’s Main Street dramatically slows traffic. Truck and travelers presently use several alternative routes, mostly county roads, which are not built to accommodate this kind of traffic.

REGIONAL SUPPORT

Upgrades to this stretch of highway will further the long term goal of connecting Wichita to the northwest and I-70. There is strong regional support from Reno, Rice, and Barton Counties as well as the cities along the corridor. The region has unanimously endorsed a Super 2 configuration on four-lane right-of-ways with by-passes at Nickerson and Sterling.

PROJECT BENEFITS

Improve safety and efficient regional travel and mobility

Accommodate local and regional growth

Accommodate oversized freight on state highway

Reduce regional and freight traffic flows/demands on locally owned and maintained roadways

Provide predictable travel times for facility users

Improve emergency vehicle response time

Maintain freeway level access control (*highway access is provided only at selected interchange locations*)

As a region we supported the 2010 T-WORKS program and we compliment the Legislature for creating this Transportation Task Force, to begin the process of resolving the dilemma that has occurred with the ongoing transfers from the highway fund to other areas of state government, thus leaving much of the 2010 programs unfinished.

This task force sets into motion a statewide initiative to identify current and future transportation needs throughout Kansas. There is a great deal at stake here for our region with the K-96/Sterling project along with the hundreds of other previously approved projects that Kansas cities and counties have been promised through the T-Works program.

In 2016, 25 modernization projects were delayed due to the pressures on the State General Fund that caused a shift of funding from the Kansas Department of Transportation, thus delaying scheduled projects.

The two project impacting Hutchinson/Reno County were:

- K-14 (Reno County) – construction of a new diagonal 2-lane on 4-lane Right-of-ways from Southwest of Nickerson, northwest to the Reno/Rice County line (11.84 miles)
- K-14 (Rice County) construction of a new diagonal 2-lane on 4-lane Right-of-way form the Reno/Rice County line northwest to north of Sterling (6.023 mile)

TOTAL miles 17.86

Project let dates – scheduled for October 2016

Construction - was to begin January 2017.

Construction end date - June 2018.

Project Construction cost estimates - \$92,900,000

Project Status – *as of June 2018*

Alignment Diagonal alignment as shown on attached map is recommended route. There were three new interchanges with fully controlled access. Same engineering design as The Bob Dole By-Pass.

ROW Acquisition As of October 2017, there are three tracts to be purchased in Rice County and two tracts to be purchased in Reno County.

Engineering Design Has been taken to the ROW. Project is to a point that K-DOT knows what tracts need to be acquired.

Utility Relocation Utility re-locations were halted. K-DOT does not anticipate the utility relocations to impede construction as this is a new alignment that will be fully access controlled.

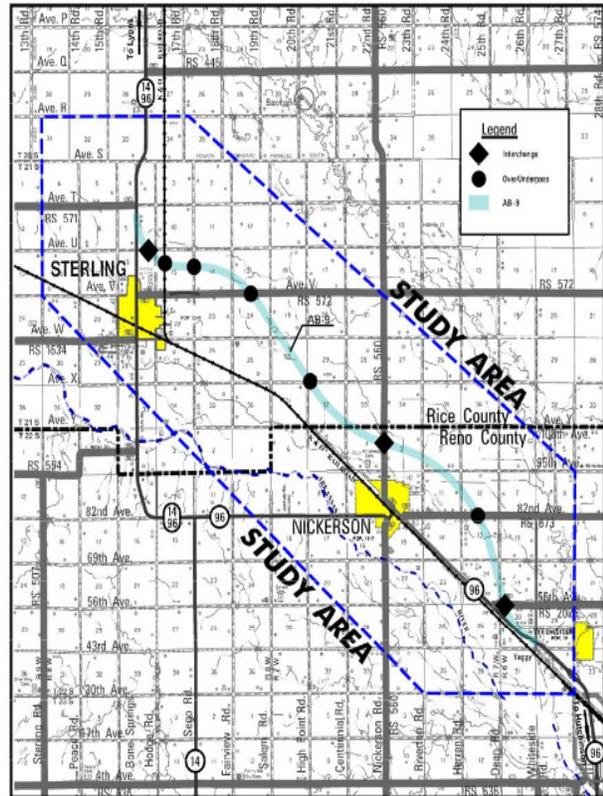
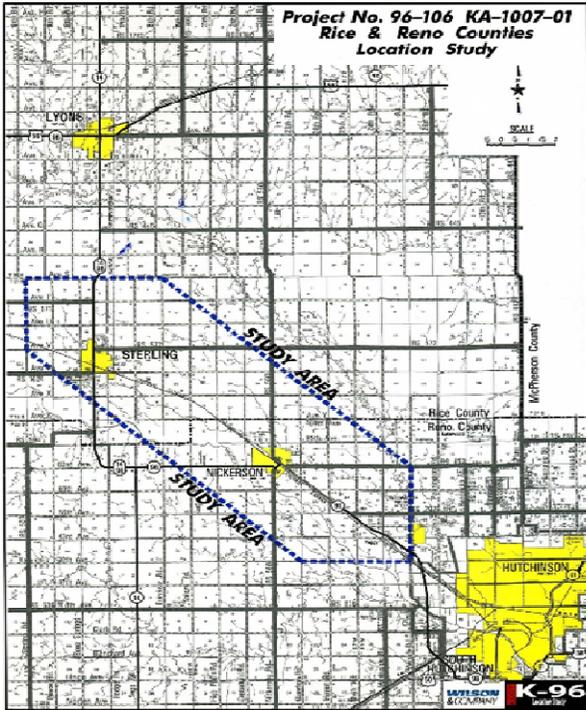
Turn back of lane miles Because of the new diagonal, K-DOT will request that some of the existing highway be removed from the State system and turned over to the local public authorities – Rice, Reno, Sterling, Nickerson, who will be responsible for future maintenance on that stretch of roadway. K-DOT will work with these LPAs to mutually agree on a scope of work to address the existing roadway condition prior to transfer. There are two bridges over the Arkansas Rive along the existing corridor. 11.84 mile in Reno County and 6.023 in Rice County. Based on earlier discussions between K-DOT and Dave McComb – Public Works Director, Reno County, his preference is to have K-DOT do the necessary upgrades (mill and overlay/bridge repairs) once the new project is built rather than take the funds directly.

Next Phase Lyons, Ellinwood, Great Bend

Once Phase I is approved, regional communities would want to have a conversation on best options for the alignment on to Great Bend and ultimately I-70. K-DOT recommends that a study be done to assess the options for an acceptable alignment.

Recommended Corridor Location and Key Features

Map of K-96 Study Area



23.2: K-96 from Sterling to Hutchinson

