

Stakeholder Meeting: April 3, 2013

ODOT held a Stakeholder Meeting on April 3, 2013 with representatives from the City of Tahlequah, Cherokee County, the Cherokee Nation, the Tahlequah Chamber of Commerce, Northeastern State University, and some local business owners. The purpose of the meeting was to present information about the SH-82 project including why the project is needed, the alternatives under consideration, and the expected impacts to the community and the environment, and to obtain input from the stakeholders. The meeting presented the alternatives under consideration as well as some options for the intersection at SH-82 and Grand Avenue.

The discussion at the stakeholder meeting was focused on the importance of improving safety on SH-82 while minimizing impacts to homes and businesses. Some wanted to keep the new SH-82 alignment close to the existing SH-82 alignment, while others wanted to make the route as straight as possible for safety. All agreed that maintaining the connection at Grand Avenue was important.

1st Public Meeting: July 25, 2013



ODOT held the first public meeting for the SH-82 project on July 25, 2013 in Tahlequah. The meeting included a presentation on the SH-82 project, including why the project is needed, the alternatives under consideration, and the expected impacts to the community and the environment. The public was asked to provide input on the alternatives and any other areas of concern. One

hundred and seventy-two people (172) signed in for the meeting, including representatives from ODOT, the Cherokee Nation, the City of Tahlequah, Cherokee County, Tahlequah Schools, Northeastern State University, and the general public.

In addition to the questions and discussions at the public meeting, ODOT received over 40 written comments as a result of the meeting. The majority of the discussion at the meeting, as well as the written comments, fell into two main categories. One group asked ODOT to consider new alternatives that widen the existing alignment of SH-82 to five lanes (4 driving lanes and a shared center left turn lane), at least in the southern

portion of the project area. These individuals had concerns that the new alignment alternatives would have major impacts to homes, farms, and businesses. Another group expressed a preference for the new alignment alternatives because they would improve safety and have fewer impacts. Several people also asked that the intersection of SH-82 and Grand Avenue include a traffic signal.

2nd Public Meeting: January 27, 2015



ODOT held the second public meeting for the SH-82 project on January 27, 2015 in Tahlequah. The meeting was held in an open house format, where attendees were free to come and go and view project information. The open house included a presentation on the SH-82 project, including why the project is needed, the alternatives under consideration, and the expected

impacts to the community and the environment. This presentation was played on a continuous loop during the entire open house. The public was asked to provide input on the alternatives and any other areas of concern. One hundred and ninety-seven (197) people signed in for the open house including representatives from ODOT, the Cherokee Nation, the City of Tahlequah, Cherokee County, Grandview School, Gideon Fire Department, Northeastern State University, and the general public.

In addition to the presentation, attendees at the open house were able to view display boards on a number of topics, including:

- Purpose of the Meeting
- Purpose and Need for the Project
- Proposed Design Criteria
- General Project Information and Project Area Constraints
- Project Development Process
- Alternatives Overview
 - Initial Four-Lane Alternatives (Alternatives 1, 1A, 3, 5, 7, and 8)
 - First Public Meeting
 - New Five-Lane Alternatives
 - Aerial View of Proposed Alternatives Layout (Four Lane vs. Five Lane)
- Alternatives Comparison

- Relocations
- Socioeconomic and Environmental Impacts
- Next Steps

ODOT received eighty-six (86) written comments as a result of the open house. These included nine (9) comments from agencies, one from an elected official, and seventy-six (76) written comments from the general public. Public comments fell into one of three general categories: those that prefer the Four-Lane Alternatives, those that prefer one of the Five-Lane Alternatives, and other comments. While people had different thoughts on which alternative would be the best solution, most agreed that the improvements to SH-82 are needed to address safety and traffic operations.

People that preferred the Four Lane Alternatives (particularly Alternative 1A) felt that these alternatives were the safest because they removed curves and provided better sight distance. They also preferred these alternatives because they had the fewest impacts to homes and businesses and the environment. The lower cost of these alternatives was also mentioned.

People that preferred the five-lane alternatives felt that these alternatives would have fewer impacts to farmers and farmland, and that people living near the road would be more accepting of a new roadway than people living in the country. Lower cost was also mentioned by some for the five-lane alternatives.

Several people expressed concern for their personal properties and potential impacts. Some people did not think the project is needed. Some made requests to avoid and minimize impacts, especially relocations. Others stated that relocations are not a major impact. A large number of people also requested that the Log Store (at SH-82 and Beaverson Road) be avoided, as it is the closest store and gas station and is important to local residents. A few people also requested that ODOT consider a hybrid alternative, combining one of the five-lane alternatives on the south end with one of the four-lane divided alternatives on the north end.

Public Hearing: August 24, 2017

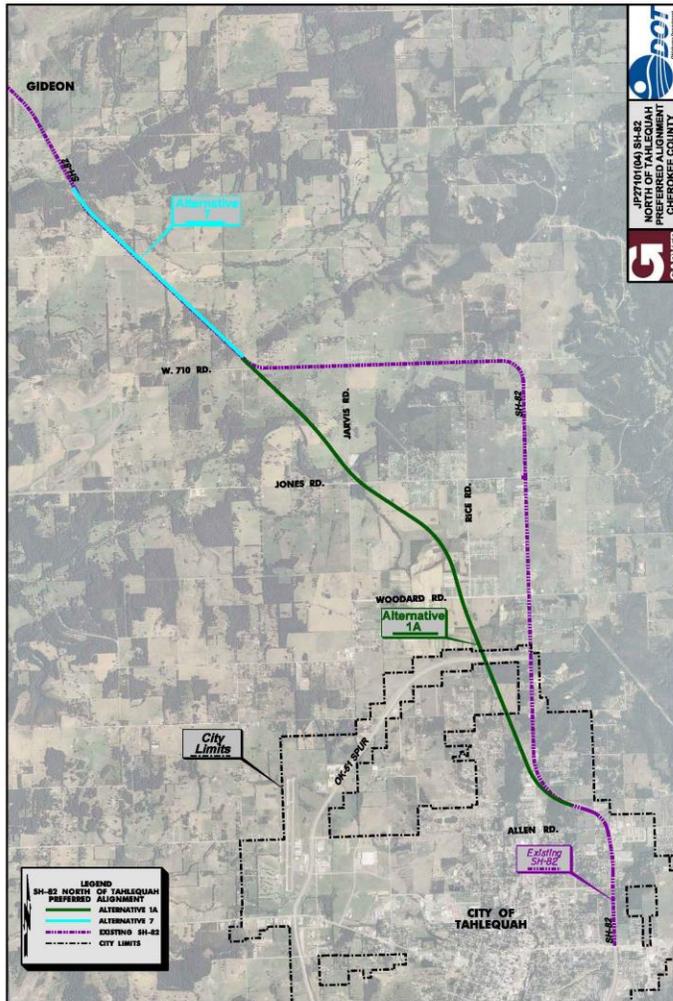


Copies of the Environmental Assessment (EA) document were made available for a seven-week public review period from August 4 to September 23, 2017. The public review copies were placed at the Tahlequah Public Library, the ODOT Division 1 Office in Muskogee, and at the ODOT Central Office in Oklahoma City. An electronic copy of the EA document was also made available on the ODOT website at the same time. The legal notice of the Public Hearing was published in the Tahlequah Daily News on August 6, 2017. The public hearing was held at 6:00 PM on August 24, 2017 at the University Center Ballroom at Northeastern State University, 612 N. Grand Avenue, Tahlequah, Oklahoma. The purpose of the hearing was to present the project purpose and need, the range of alternatives considered, a summary of agency and prior public involvement which resulted in the Preferred Alternatives, and the anticipated social, economic, and environmental impacts associated with construction of the Preferred Alternatives. The hearing was also held to give the public an opportunity to make written and/or verbal comments on the proposed alternatives and the contents of the EA.

The public hearing roster was signed by 230 people. During and immediately following the public hearing, 20 verbal statements were provided and included in the official transcript. During the public comment period, which ended September 23, 2017, 195 written comments were received, including 63 individual comment forms and one petition with 132 signatures. In addition to inviting all of the property owners by mail within the study footprint of the two proposed alternatives, ODOT delivered the public notice door to door to all properties within each footprint in order to ensure notification of all owners including renters.

The majority of the comments expressed a preference for one of the two proposed alternatives presented at the hearing, either the four-lane new alignment Alternative 1A, or the five-lane existing alignment Alternative 9-5.

Alternative Selection



Both Alternatives 1A and Alternative 9-5 received support from the public. Alternative 9-5 was developed in response to public comment and while was not previously presented to the public as a separate alternative, it does represent the request of several individuals who requested a “hybrid” 5-lane/4-lane alternative. While more people supported the five-lane alternatives early on, after these alternatives were developed and presented to the public, more people expressed preference for the four-lane alternatives, particularly Alternative 1A. The City of Tahlequah, Northeastern State University, and local elected officials supported a hybrid alternative (like Alternative 9-5). Public comments indicate a strong interest in improving safety as well as economic development. The alternatives respond to these concerns in

different ways.

Public comment and support for both alternatives was received during and after the public hearing. Those in favor of Alternative 1A were primarily concerned about safety and believed Alternative 1A provided the safest alternative. Other reasons given for support of Alternative 1A include fewer impacts to homes, better for traffic flow, less costly, and fewer construction impacts. Many felt the impacts to businesses were overstated and that Alternative 1A would not affect as many employees, and that Alternative 1A would provide opportunity for new businesses to develop. Several

people were personally affected by Alternative 9-5 and were concerned for their property and livelihoods. Several people also felt that Alternative 9-5 was a response to political pressure.

Those in favor of Alternative 9-5 were primarily concerned with impacts to businesses and economic growth in Tahlequah. Many supporters of Alternative 9-5 were personally affected by Alternative 1A and were concerned for their property and livelihoods. Other reasons given for supporting Alternative 9-5 included fewer impacts to farmlands and fewer noise impacts. Some felt that access to the new highway under Alternative 1A would be indirect or out of direction for some people. Many of the comments supporting Alternative 9-5 came in the form a petition circulated by a local resident, stating Alternative 9-5 was the better choice because it did not waste a section of the SH-51 Spur, would allow for growth and economic development, has fewer impacts to the environment, less right-of-way acquisition, and does not create additional intersections (the concern was with the new skewed intersections on Alternative 1A being unsafe).

Based on the analysis of traffic and safety performance, completion of the divided 4-lane loop around Tahlequah, impacts to homes, businesses, and the environment, and public and agency input, ODOT selected Alternative 1A for the South Project and Alternative 7 for the North Project. These alternatives are anticipated to have the most safety benefit, have fewer impacts to homes, and provide corridor continuity of the divided 4-lane loop around Tahlequah. In addition, Alternative 1A provides more opportunity for Division 1 to program construction projects within existing budget constraints. Alternative 9-5 did not provide enhanced performance or overall reduced impacts. The Federal Highway approved the EA with a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) on April 11, 2018. Notice of the selected alternative was sent to all property owners and those that submitted comments by mail on June 22, 2018.