

BUILD NEBRASKA ACT

THE NEXT 10 YEARS

#Next10



Outreach Summary

The Nebraska Department of Roads (NDOR) is updating its capital improvement project prioritization process to better reflect the connection between transportation and the economy prior to selecting the next round of Build Nebraska Act (BNA) projects.

In January 2016, NDOR began a series of outreach efforts to gather input from people across the state regarding economic impacts and including more stakeholder input in the prioritization process. NDOR also presented a list of BNA candidate projects and asked if additional projects should be considered.

The agency's outreach efforts included a series of regional meetings as well as opportunities for the public to share input via paper or online comment cards.

NDOR staff is now working to update the agency's project prioritization process based on the input received as well as reviewing the additional projects suggested for the candidate project list. The next step for NDOR staff is to evaluate the candidate project list using the new process. Originally, NDOR had planned to hold a second round of regional meetings and online outreach this spring; however, after hearing from so many people and receiving many more projects for consideration than originally expected, it will likely be summer before the next round of outreach is held. At that time, NDOR staff will share the results of the project prioritization process and gather public feedback.

// **On behalf of the Cass County Nebraska Economic Development Council, thank you... we certainly understand that your organization has a tough job ahead as you try to prioritize these projects. We appreciate being able to provide input...will help any way we can.**

Following is a summary of the overarching themes heard through the in-person meetings and comment cards that were submitted. Attached to this overall summary are individual summaries from each of the regional meetings as well as the comment cards received.



What We Heard: Consistent Feedback

Across meetings and comment cards, the following consistent themes emerged:

- Stakeholders overwhelmingly support expanding the prioritization process
- Safety remains a top priority
- The prioritization process must consider the diverse needs of Nebraska
- NDOR should continue with transparent analysis
- NDOR should seek outside expertise where needed

More specific, overarching feedback also included:

Consider differences in urban and rural needs. For example, population may be shifting to cities, but agriculture remains a top industry for the state.

Look at community and regional impacts. Participants encouraged NDOR to consider how a project may impact both a specific community as well as the surrounding region. Some projects may result in impacts that extend far beyond the location of the project.

Safety is the top concern. Participants agree, safety should be the top priority. Some suggested creating a three-part prioritization approach with safety, engineering and economic performance as the three primary categories for scoring.

// **Economic performance is a no brainer. The economic impact could greatly assist with paying for the project over time. Stakeholder input is important, but just because they are the loudest doesn't mean their project is the most important to the state. Economic performance should trump this.**

// **Including economic factors is important because if the money invested in a road project improves the state's economy that likely means additional money available for future road projects through increased tax revenues. Likewise, improved local economy helps local governments fund more local projects. In the end improved economics will improve any engineering safety concerns because more road projects are completed.**

difference in economic impact between how a community that has been historically distressed responds to a project compared to one that has recently become distressed as a result of an industry leaving?

Long-term sustainability is important. Transportation projects have costs that extend beyond initial construction costs. NDOR should consider how sustainable improvements are over the long term for operations and maintenance.

North and south corridors are important. Traditionally, commerce has flowed east and west, so Nebraska has major east-west corridors. The state doesn't have as many well developed north/south corridors.

Consider more project scope options. More than just 4-lane improvements could be beneficial. Other options include adding passing lanes or other kinds of improvements to provide valuable incremental benefits.

Strategic competitiveness with surrounding states. Transportation can be a key ingredient in business attraction and retention. Transportation investments should help make sure Nebraska is competitive with surrounding states.

// **The one stretch of highway I have the most complaint about is...nothing but hills...and is full of semis...It is also packed with campers and boats. I did see something about passing lanes being a possibility. That would help...4 lanes would be ideal but am sure that will not happen in my lifetime. I would recommend the passing lanes every 5 miles or so.**

in the 40%-70% range of the prioritization process and economic impacts should be weighted in the 30%-60% range.

Transportation connects people to goods and services.

Highways provide access to goods and services, healthcare, and recreation, not just job centers. There are many people who have to travel significant distances to goods and services, in addition to commuters traveling to and from work. The need to move people and freight should be balanced.

Relationship of transportation to development. People recognize transportation investments contribute to the economy in many ways. NDOR heard lots of different perspectives on how these contributions should be accounted for in the prioritization process.

Economic distress may be important and should be considered with transparency and caution. Economic distress requires significant consideration. For example, how close does an economically distressed region need to be to a project for that region to benefit? Is there a

// **It is very difficult for the NDOR officials to know everything there is to know about Nebraska's roads, and allowing for stakeholder input as well as taking into account economic performance should assist in more accurately assessing the prioritization of projects.**

Not all economic growth is equal. NDOR heard in every region that not all economic growth is equal. While the State Highway System serves all Nebraskans, it serves different communities in different ways. For example, creating 10 jobs in a rural area may have a larger impact than 100 jobs created in an urban area. Similarly, the agriculture industry may require fewer workers but is a primary economic driver for the state. Localized community impacts may not be felt statewide, but certainly matter to the community in which they occur.

A balance is needed between economic and engineering factors. While stakeholders overwhelmingly support the consideration of economic impact, they also said that engineering factors are still very important. Participants indicated the engineering factors should be weighted

For more information, visit:

www.roads.nebraska.gov/projects/bna/next10/