

NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

Thursday, November 21, 2024; 5:30 – 7:30 PM (MT)

Minatare Elementary School Gymnasium

805 7th St, Minatare, NE 69356

The Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) will give a formal presentation starting at 6:00 PM, with an open house to follow until 7:30 PM.

NH-26-1(172) Minatare - US-385; C.N. 51521

The Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) will hold a public hearing regarding the preliminary design and draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for a four-lane expressway along US Highway 26 (US-26) and Nebraska Link 62A (L-62A) in Scotts Bluff and Morrill counties in Nebraska. The public hearing will be held in the Minatare Elementary School Gymnasium at 805 7th St in Minatare, Nebraska, on Thursday, November 21, 2024, from 5:30 – 7:30 PM (MT). A formal presentation will begin at 6:00 PM, with an open house to follow.

A draft EA has been prepared for this project and is available for public review at the following locations:

- NDOT Headquarters (1500 Nebraska Parkway, Lincoln, NE)
- FHWA Nebraska Division (100 Centennial Mall N, Ste 200, Lincoln, NE)
- NDOT District 5 Headquarters (140375 Rundell Rd, Gering, NE)
- Minatare Public Library (309 Main St, Minatare, NE)

An electronic version of the draft EA is available for review on the project website at: ndot.info/51521.

Identified as *Minatare - US-385*, the proposed project would expand the existing two-lane highway to a four-lane expressway, separated by a depressed median. This project is approximately 18.5 miles in length, starting on US-26 just west of Minatare's Main Street and extending east to the junction of US-26 and L-62A. The project would continue east on L-62A to the junction with US Highway 385 (US-385). The intersections would be improved and there would be controlled access throughout the project.

Proposed improvements for the preferred alternative would include paving new lanes, as well as milling and resurfacing the existing lanes. Additional work would include utility relocations, culvert and storm sewer work, new guardrail, removing and replacing existing guardrail, a new bridge, new intersections, improved intersections, access relocations (i.e. new frontage roads) and side road modifications. Grading would be required for the entire length of this project.

The bridge over Ninemile Creek (Structure Number S026 03470) would be used in place and a new bridge would be built with the new set of lanes.

The following bridge-size box culverts would be extended:

- Minatare Drain Canal (Structure Number S026 03505)
- Irrigation Conveyance (S026 03916)
- Wildhorse Creek (S026 04114)
- Wildhorse Canyon (SL62A 00116)
- Tri-State Canal (SL62A 00537, SL62A 00582, SL62A 00613)

The following bridge-size box culverts would be replaced:

- Irrigation Conveyance (SL62A 00152)
- West Water Creek (SL62A 00463)
- Red Willow Creek (SL62A 00595)

- Irrigation Conveyance (SL62A 00648)

The purpose of the proposed project is to develop an improved transportation corridor connecting the junction of US-385 and L-62A, with the city of Minatare.

The improved corridor is intended to address the following transportation related purposes:

- To provide an improved highway on a congressionally designated National Highway System (NHS) High Priority Corridor that increases the efficiency and safety of travel;
- To fulfill federal legislative intent of ISTEA, TEA-21, SAFETEA-LU, and MAP-21;
- To fulfill state legislative intent of the Build Nebraska Act and the Transportation Innovation Act, and
- To address roadway and operational challenges of the existing facility.

This project is needed because Congress has designated this corridor for completion; federal and state government legislative actions have provided ongoing funding and intent to construct it; and there are numerous roadway and operational challenges with the existing facility that reduce its efficiency and safety.

The proposed project would require the acquisition of additional property rights, which could include new right-of-way (ROW), control of access (CA), permanent easements (PE), temporary easements (TE), residential and commercial relocations and/or impacts to existing center pivot irrigation systems. If your property is impacted by this project, you would be contacted by a representative from NDOT's Right of Way Division once the design footprint has been established.

The project would be constructed under traffic, with lane closures controlled by appropriate traffic control devices and practices. Temporary surfacing may be required to accommodate phased construction. Short detours for county roads may be needed to construct intersections but adjacent county roads would not be closed at the same time. Access to adjacent properties would be maintained during construction but may be limited at times due to traffic phasing requirements.

Three canal systems, the Interstate Canal, the Tri-State Canal, and the Minatare Canal, would be impacted in some capacity. A formal agreement between each canal's irrigation district and NDOT would be completed prior to construction.

The preferred alternative would affect one historic property that is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, a sod house (MO00-073) located near County Road 79. The impacts at the sod house would include the removal of a windbreak and acquisition of a small amount of ROW from the parcel. While these impacts would affect the property's integrity of setting and feeling, they do not rise to the level of adverse effect. Additionally, the proposed project would require a temporary easement from within the Harry's Curve Historic District to accommodate consolidation of three access drives into a single access drive. The Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office has concurred with the determinations of eligibility and effects for the two historic properties. This includes a determination of no effect for the Harry's Curve historic district, and no adverse effect for the historic sod house property.

The Preferred Alternative would encroach on five (5) creeks and drains in Scotts Bluff and Morrill counties with associated floodplains either as identified in Scotts Bluff County or assumed within the unmapped areas within Morrill County. All floodplain crossings, identified or assumed, would be certified as meeting local flood plain regulations or state minimum standards as appropriate. Floodplain development permits, where required, would be obtained prior to construction.

NDOT anticipates the Preferred Alternative may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, the swift fox, black footed ferret, northern long eared bat, and tricolored bat. Coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is ongoing to assess these effects. Avoidance and minimization measures for the bat species and conservation conditions for the swift fox to prevent an adverse effect would be utilized during construction. The increased distance for wildlife to cross the expanded highway may pose additional challenges that are currently under review.

Vegetation disturbed during project construction would consist mainly of introduced species found commonly throughout the area. Revegetation in all disturbed areas would use native seed mixes that would improve plant species composition.

The proposed project cost is approximately \$94.7 million and would come from federal and state funding sources. Construction is anticipated to begin as early as spring 2026.

The public hearing is being held in compliance with the environmental review process under the National Environmental Policy Act, to provide information regarding the project and to receive the public's input. All interested persons are invited to attend, provide comments, and ask questions. Project information will be displayed, and personnel from NDOT will be present to answer questions and receive comments. Comments can be provided verbally at the hearing, submitted in writing as a statement, or by filling out a comment form available at the hearing. Comments for the draft EA can also be submitted by emailing, calling, or mailing to the contact listed below by the end of the comment period on December 6, 2024. Design plans and the Environmental Assessment document will be further developed after public input is received following the public hearing and comment period.

NDOT will make every reasonable accommodation to provide an accessible meeting facility for all persons. Alternative formats to provide effective communication, including communications in alternate languages, will be made if NDOT is notified by November 14, 2024.

Information regarding the proposed project will be available on the day of the meeting at ndot.info/51521. For those without internet access, information may be obtained at NDOT Headquarters: 1500 Nebraska Parkway, Lincoln, NE 68502, or by contacting: Doug Hoevet, NDOT District 5 Engineer, at doug.hoevet@nebraska.gov or (308) 436-6587.

Comments will be collected through December 6, 2024, and should be submitted to:

Sierra Luhn
NDOT Public Involvement
P.O. Box 94759
Lincoln, NE 68509-4759
sierra.luhn@nebraska.gov
(402) 479-3103
