

# Lincoln County Crossroads: Equitable Transportation Investments to Promote Intermodal Mobility & Community Connectivity

## Project Description

**Project purpose:** *Coordinate the regional transportation and mobility solutions necessary for highways around North Platte to best support local, regional, and international trade routes through a thriving Lincoln County and State of Nebraska.*

### Lincoln County

Lincoln County is at a crossroads of incredible economic potential and modern transportation innovation. It is the third largest Nebraska county by area and twice the size of 83 counties in the state, while being centrally located between the cities of Omaha, Nebraska and Denver, Colorado. It has a population of approximately 34,000 according to the most recent census data. Historically, Lincoln County became a crucial economic center when Texas Longhorn cattle drivers made their way to North Platte to access Union Pacific Railroad and move livestock to coastal markets. This key location has continued to be relevant for more modern trade routes and is experiencing intense economic growth and development. According to economic impact studies conducted by the North Platte Area Chamber & Development Corporation, Lincoln County has over \$2.3 billion in economic development projects that are emerging or are in the advanced planning stages. This economic development is expected to produce an 18 percent increase in jobs and consequently, increase the median household income of the area.

Two anchors of this development are the Sustainable Beef Plant and the inland port. The Sustainable Beef Plant was identified as a crucial need for the region to process and distribute beef. It is expected to have a \$1.2 billion impact annually and process 1,500 cattle a day coming from a 250-mile radius of North Platte. The inland port, the Nebraska International Port of the Plains, was approved by the Nebraska Legislature in 2023, and will capitalize on the transcontinental interstate, highway access, commercial airport, and well-developed rail access. Lincoln County's rail is based in Bailey Yard which is the world's largest rail classification yard and has just recently become available for the movement of additional freight on its lines within the area. The inland port is also in the process of receiving a foreign-trade zone designation, to further mitigate the nation's import and export challenges within a globalized economy. These developments have made Lincoln County a primary player in regional intermodal transportation, creating environmental, safety, and economic benefits. The projected and existing challenges in transportation are not from a lack of planning but are urgent due to rapid growth from answering regional needs while improving quality of life for residents.

<b>Sustainable Beef Plant</b>	<b>Inland Port</b>	<b>Overall Growth</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>\$1.2 Billion</b> annual impact and 800 direct jobs</li><li>• Fully functional by summer 2025</li><li>• Processing 1500 cattle/day from a 250-mile radius around North Platte, NE</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>\$1.8 Billion</b> in impact and up to 1,000 jobs</li><li>• Created in 2023</li><li>• Anchor business expected to operate by 2027</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>\$2.3 Billion</b> in new projects that are emerging or in final planning stages</li></ul>

# **Lincoln County Crossroads: Equitable Transportation Investments to Promote Intermodal Mobility & Community Connectivity**

## Project Location

All of Lincoln County is designated as a rural area under the RAISE grant standards. Additionally, Census Tract 9599 (2010) is considered disadvantaged by the Climate and Economic Justice and Screening Tool and a HDC due to several factors including income. Although Census Tract 9599 is not the only area this project could impact, it bears severe consequences if alternative truck routes are not considered. US Highways 30 and 83 transect this disadvantaged community and projected additional freight will have no other viable route through North Platte and will limit vital redevelopment needed among these corridors.

## Freight Movement Challenges

For this economic growth and development to promote quality of life and well-being for community members, infrastructure development is vital. Much of this development involves the movement of freight and creating or improving alternate routes for truck traffic. Most of the truck traffic, which is only anticipated to increase as the inland port and other development continues, has three primary options to reach anticipated destinations. The first existing option is to take large freight through downtown North Platte, which is not compatible with the street level development of the area, which includes many stop lights and pedestrians. This causes safety concerns, circulation issues, and damage to downtown roads. Another route to the port is for freight trucks to take the Interstate 80 exit west of North Platte through the Village of Hershey. The village, with a population of approximately 630, would be severely harmed by this amount of freight traversing through. Also, to access the port, trucks must go through Hershey's residential district and near the school zone. This creates valid safety concerns and additional issues regarding noise and emission pollution.

The final existing option for freight traffic to access either industrial parks or the inland port is to take the I-80 exit east of downtown North Platte, which takes trucks onto Newberry Road, which is primarily a two-lane highway that was not built to withstand truck traffic at this level. This problem is heightened with the increase of freight expected with the Sustainable Beef Plant, since even more trucks will be taking Newberry Road to distribution centers. If a truck needs to get to the inland port from Newberry Road Interchange, they must take Highway 30 through North Platte's census tract that has been categorized as a Historically Disadvantaged Community (HDC) and struggles for revitalization. There are immense safety, equity, and environmental justice concerns for truck traffic to move through this residential neighborhood. Additionally, Lincoln County faces weather events that close the interstate. Current infrastructure and truck routes cause these trucks to park in residential neighborhoods or on roads that are not large enough for safe parking. Finally, the existing structure of the county's rail system limits development opportunities, leading to the potential for expansion and improvement of last-mile freight movement.

## Safety Challenges

Lincoln County residents recently experienced a disaster that further highlighted the need for infrastructure development. In September of 2023, a railcar carrying over 50 barrels of perchloric acid, a toxic chemical, exploded inside the previously mentioned Bailey Yard. This created the

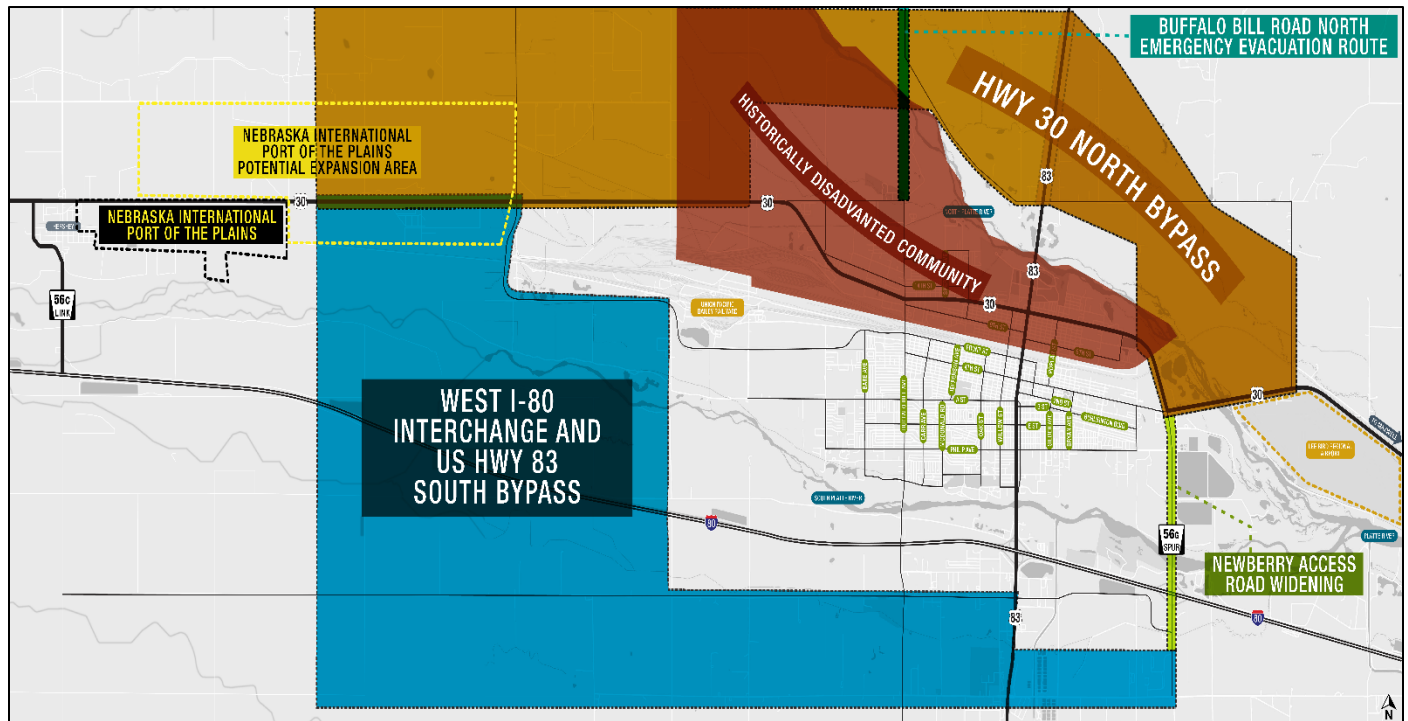
## Lincoln County Crossroads: Equitable Transportation Investments to Promote Intermodal Mobility & Community Connectivity

need for residents in the area to evacuate and exposed the lack of evacuation routes for the north area of the City of North Platte. The explosion closed a portion of Highway 30 and additional nearby roads. Even though approximately one third of the city's population, and the entire HDC population, lives in the north part of town, there is only one route north that includes a bridge over the North Platte River. This is an extremely limited evacuation option in the case of emergency and the recent incident has prompted the desire for improved safety and planning. This has indicated the need for increased bridges over the North Platte River and alternate routes. There is also a lack of active transportation infrastructure on busy roadways, creating safety risks for non-motorized travelers.

### - Summary of Challenges -

- Freight traffic can only access destinations through HDC neighborhood, Village of Hershey, or downtown North Platte
- No existing truck routes combined with projected increase in freight traffic
- Limited evacuation options for the north sector of North Platte
- Lack of community connectivity for multimodal and pedestrian transportation

### Areas of Focus



To address these freight and safety challenges, Lincoln County, in collaboration with a diverse group of stakeholders, has determined that steps must be taken to plan for the community's future and to protect its economic potential. This project seeks to form a shared vision to ready the community's transportation network and support regional intermodal and mobility needs. This will be completed through analyzing the ideal design and feasibility of potential project components that meet Lincoln County's transportation needs. Four areas were determined as

## **Lincoln County Crossroads: Equitable Transportation Investments to Promote Intermodal Mobility & Community Connectivity**

potential options to improve the transportation infrastructure considering economic development needs, a growing community, and to advance equity and environmental justice efforts.

### *Area 1: West I-80 Interchange & Highway 83 Southwest Bypass*

This project seeks to study a new West I-80 interchange and a South Highway 83 bypass. Currently, there are 12.6 miles between interchanges at Highway 83 and Nebraska Highway 56C. With the developments occurring at and around the Nebraska International Port of the Plains, there is an anticipated increase in freight demand on existing roadways. There are also concerns that without a west interchange on I-80, neighborhoods could face unprecedented levels of freight traffic, spurring safety and environmental concerns. There could also be issues regarding the quality of life along major arterial highway routes through the Village of Hershey and the City of North Platte. Additionally, Highway 83 is crucial to consider in the development of improved transportation networks because of its connectivity with I-80 and industrial sites. Existing roadways require improvements to increase safety for all roadway users, especially State Farm Road, which needs modernization. Planning efforts would consider the purpose, need, and potential corridors of a Highway 83 south bypass if one is justified, in addition to the analysis of what improvements are necessary for existing roadways.

### *Area 2: Newberry Access Road Improvements*

Newberry Road is a crucial area for intermodal success because of its connectivity to I-80 and the airport. Currently, the expansion of Newberry Road is part of the Build Nebraska Act, however, it is in the early design phases with actual construction expected to begin far beyond the projected needs of the community. Newberry is expected to see immense levels of freight traffic through the Sustainable Beef Plant and the inland port. Under this grant, determinations regarding the traffic demands and needs for improvements could be determined, potentially expediting the planning process, and aligning it with other aspects of this comprehensive analysis including feasibility planning for pedestrian infrastructure near developments.

### *Area 3: Highway 30 North Bypass*

Currently, most west-bound freight traffic comes from I-80, through Newberry Road, and then takes Highway 30 across the City of North Platte through an HDC. With the expectation that even more traffic will need to access Highway 30 from I-80 due to the inland port and developments on Newberry Road, alternative routes are necessary. This aspect of the project would identify alternatives that could serve as a US Highway 30 North Bypass, connecting with Highway 83, utilizing section line roads, and minimizing environmental impact to the most possible extent. Thus, preventing excessive freight traffic from taking Highway 30 through the Historically Disadvantaged Community and allowing for much needed revitalization in those neighborhoods.

### *Area 4: Buffalo Bill Road North Emergency Evacuation Route*

Buffalo Bill Road is centrally located within Lincoln County's HDC and provides an arterial alignment through North Platte which is crucial for daily life but also for special events. Emergency action plans at Union Pacific can close portions of existing highways, leaving

## **Lincoln County Crossroads: Equitable Transportation Investments to Promote Intermodal Mobility & Community Connectivity**

Highway 83 as the closest route away from the railyard in the event of evacuation. This has prompted the need to conceptualize other evacuation routes, including new bridge crossings accessible for those living within the northern third of the city. Alternative emergency routes will allow for improved circulation for special tourism events but also prioritize the need for concrete emergency planning efforts in the event of evacuation due to the railyard or other extreme conditions. Pedestrian infrastructure will also be considered in this area to improve safety.

### Project Components

#### *Feasibility Study and Engineering*

This project component will seek to hire a consultant to design and determine the feasibility of solutions for these transportation issues. They will provide alternatives, recommendations, and complete planning of the engineering and construction needed for the project. This consultant will be required to plan in accordance with state and federal policies and procedures. They will also be encouraged to seek plans that are consistent with the principles of Complete Streets and the Safe Systems approach while considering vulnerable road users within Lincoln County. This component will develop solutions that are aligned with community plans and with the Nebraska DOT 2040 Statewide Transportation Plan Performance Measures. This will include metrics like reliability, improved freight movement, and increased safety.

#### *Environmental*

The consultant will determine the Environmental Study Area (ESA) and conduct project environmental evaluations in accordance with state and federal standards and requirements. They will conduct research to determine all potential environmental risks, including those related to river and railroad crossings. This will be vital to the eventual construction of the finalized plan.

#### *Benefit-Cost Analysis*

The consultant will conduct a benefit-cost analysis for various proposed solutions and the finalized plan, to better understand its risks and benefits for the community. This will also support the project in potential future funding opportunities and in determining the best routes and decisions to meet the transportation challenges presented.

#### *Community Engagement*

To center efforts of environmental justice and the perspectives of all people, especially those of marginalized communities, this grant would fund a project component focused on community engagement including town halls, information dissemination regarding the potential project, and ensuring that all engineering plans are created in consideration of community concerns and opinions.

### Summary

Lincoln County is at a literal crossroads of crucial interstate and highway networks, while also being at a crossroads to meet economic potential and create innovative transportation infrastructure. Investment in this project will lead to benefits for those living and working in Lincoln County but also for state, national, and international trade connectivity.

**Lincoln County Crossroads: Equitable Transportation Investments to Promote Intermodal Mobility & Community Connectivity**

**Project Budget**

**Table 1:**

	<b>Feasibility Study &amp; Engineering</b>	<b>Environmental</b>	<b>Cost-Benefit Analysis</b>	<b>Community Engagement</b>	<b>Total</b>
Raise Funds:	\$247,500	\$240,000	\$195,000	\$67,500	\$750,000
Other Federal Funds:	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Non-Federal Funds:	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
<b>Total Project Costs:</b>	<b>\$247,500</b>	<b>\$240,000</b>	<b>\$195,000</b>	<b>\$67,500</b>	<b>\$750,000</b>

**Table 2a:**

<b>2020 Census Tracts</b>	<b>Project Costs per Census Tract</b>
9597	\$93,750
9598	\$93,750
9599	\$93,750
9602	\$93,750
9603	\$93,750
9604	\$93,750
9605	\$93,750
9606	\$93,750
<b>Total Project Costs:</b>	<b>\$750,000</b>

\*Due to the broad-scope planning activities, cost estimates were split evenly between all census tracts within the components' scope

**Lincoln County Crossroads: Equitable Transportation Investments to Promote Intermodal Mobility & Community Connectivity**

**Table 2b:**

<b>2010 Census Tracts</b>	<b>Project Costs per Census Tract</b>
9597	\$93,750
9598	\$93,750
9599	\$93,750
9602	\$93,750
9603	\$93,750
9604	\$93,750
9605	\$93,750
9606	\$93,750
<b>Total Project Costs:</b>	<b>\$750,000</b>

\*Due to the broad-scope planning activities, cost estimates were split evenly between all census tracts within the components' scope

**Table 2c:**

<b>Urban/Rural</b>	<b>Project Costs</b>
Urban	\$0.00
Rural	\$750,000
<b>Total Project Costs:</b>	<b>\$750,000</b>

**Budget Narrative**

Overview

No costs have been previously incurred for this project and it is not expected that any costs will be incurred prior to notice of award obligation. The project budget size is due to the rural location and complexity of the project.

Sources, Uses, and Availability

This project seeks to fund four components of a large planning effort. The feasibility and engineering study, the environmental work, a cost-benefit analysis, and broad intensive community engagement. The purpose of these components is to develop a comprehensive strategy to mitigate transportation issues in the area and meet projected needs spurred from economic development. Since the project is fully funded through RAISE dollars, no funds are restricted during this time, and it is desired that all components are funded through RAISE.

## **Lincoln County Crossroads: Equitable Transportation Investments to Promote Intermodal Mobility & Community Connectivity**

### Contingency Amount

Per the Notice of Funding Opportunity, this planning project does not require a contingency amount included in the budget. In the incidence of exceeding costs, the county plans to secure additional funds from its contingency/emergency fund.

### Level of Design

Per the Notice of Funding Opportunity, this is not applicable for the planning project.

### Cost Estimates

Project component elements were first composed through a Request for Proposal draft. Cost estimates aligned with this RFP draft were then developed by Lincoln County's Planning Administrator in November of 2023 through cost comparisons of similar projects.

### Cost Share or Non-Federal Funding Match

This project is 100 percent located within a rural area; therefore, it is permitted to request more than 80 percent in federal funds per the Notice of Funding Opportunity.



## **Lincoln County Crossroads: Equitable Transportation Investments to Promote Intermodal Mobility & Community Connectivity**

### **Funding Commitment Documentation**

This project is 100 percent within a rural area under the RAISE classification. Full project costs are being sought through the RAISE grant program and therefore, no funding commitment documentation from Lincoln County is required.

# Lincoln County Crossroads: Equitable Transportation Investments to Promote Intermodal Mobility & Community Connectivity

## Merit Criteria

### - Safety -

- Decrease freight traffic in residential areas
- Expand pedestrian infrastructure and Complete Streets
- Improve evacuation routes
- Eliminate fatalities and injuries

#### Safety Overview

A primary purpose of this planning project is to best design multimodal and intermodal transportation improvements that protect non-motorized travelers from safety risks. Although the design of many of the roadways researched in this project have historically prioritized motorized travelers, this project is a chance to present new opportunities for safe, non-motorized travel while decreasing risks in existing areas of concern. The City of North Platte currently lacks designated truck routes, leading to the majority of truck traffic to travel directly through downtown or residential neighborhoods. The most recent crash data from the Nebraska Department of Transportation indicates 689 traffic accidents occurred in Lincoln County in 2020. With several of these crashes involving non-motorized travelers, it is more important than ever to seek transportation alternatives before freight traffic increases, due to expected developments like the inland port facility. According to the DOT's *National Roadway Safety Strategy's Safe Systems Approach*, Lincoln County is embracing the principles of shared responsibility in seeking this RAISE planning grant and is also practicing proactive safety by seeking solutions to anticipated problems, like increased freight traffic. Unfortunately, as of January 18, 2024, a motorist has already been killed by a traffic accident with a semitruck on Newberry Road, an area of concern in this planning grant, indicating the urgency and need for this project.

#### Protecting Non-Motorized Travelers from Safety Risks

This application will present several improvements leading to the protection of non-motorized travelers. First, it will determine a functional alternative route to divert freight traffic heading to or from the inland port and other industrial areas away from residential neighborhoods and the downtown district. Both the residential neighborhoods and downtown area have a great amount of pedestrian traffic, increasing the risk of tragedy with increased traffic, especially freight traffic. By investing in the study and design of strong alternative routes, both of these areas within town will be made safer and potentially increase the ability of residents to use non-motorized travel options and feel protected. The residential area protected by this proposed alternative route is also a Historical Disadvantaged Community, increasing the importance of improved conditions and safety protections.

The alternate route also protects the residents of the Village of Hershey who will be subject to all east-bound inland port traffic. Without the improvements sought through this application, this traffic will go directly through the village and near its school zone. By creating an additional

## **Lincoln County Crossroads: Equitable Transportation Investments to Promote Intermodal Mobility & Community Connectivity**

interstate interchange and a connecting route to the highway, the village will not have increased pedestrian safety risks of truck traffic going through their neighborhoods and school zone.

Additionally, this planning effort seeks to understand the development of several pedestrian crossings near workplaces and residential developments. One example of this is a large packing plant that is across the street from a new 51-lot mixed-use affordable housing development. Developers have an expectation that many employees may find affordable high-quality housing at the nearby housing development but would have to cross Newberry Road, a busy two-lane road connecting the interstate and Highway 30, to take non-motorized travel to work. The design of pedestrian crossings and additional lanes, sidewalks, and protections will protect these residents from safety risks and be a long-term investment into active transportation infrastructure.

### Evacuation Safety

In September, Secretary Buttigieg met with local leaders from Lincoln County to discuss safety concerns around the area after an explosion of perchloric acid at Bailey Yard in North Platte. This explosion at the world's largest railyard presented not only concerns of safety at the site but also for surrounding residents. After the explosion, 25 homes were evacuated but that number could have been much higher if the wind direction shifted. This event highlighted the reality that there is only one bridge over the river north of the city and if a large evacuation was necessary, it would prove incredibly difficult and unsafe. This project seeks to study additional evacuation routes while also improving the intermodal and multimodal transportation health of the area.

## **- Environmental Sustainability -**

- Reduce emissions and noise pollution
- Shift freight to lower-carbon options
- Add EV investments
- Create Climate-Resilient Infrastructure

### Reduce Transportation-Related Air Pollution and Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Disadvantaged Communities & Address the Disproportionately Negative Environmental Aspects of Transportation

The safety concerns this project seeks to mitigate work in tandem with the environmental justice needs of the HDC previously discussed. Due to the lack of alternative routes for freight traffic, the community faces an increased amount of air and noise pollution. Additionally, the routes through these communities include many stop lights and stalling traffic, creating more time for trucks to idle in neighborhoods. According to the EPA's Office of Transportation and Air Quality's report titled "Near Roadway Air Pollution and Health", those who live near major roads are more likely to face exposure to pollutants and suffer health consequences; stop and go

## **Lincoln County Crossroads: Equitable Transportation Investments to Promote Intermodal Mobility & Community Connectivity**

traffic increases this pollution. When focusing on the area's most vulnerable census tract that faces immense levels of traffic, the consequences of the current design are clear. Data from the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool indicates that this area is in the 88<sup>th</sup> percentile for low-life expectancy and in the 73<sup>rd</sup> percentile for low-income. This is a dire environmental justice concern that is only expected to worsen in the coming years. This project seeks to find environmentally considerate ways to bypass truck traffic to protect these populations and all residents. Alternative routes will also include fewer stops, reducing emissions in general for the area.

As mentioned, truck traffic also goes through the downtown corridor leading to negative impacts for the heart of the city and its businesses through noise and emission pollution. This project will decrease the level of pollution and decrease the negative impact of transportation on the community.

### Reduce Emissions Specifically by Shifting Freight to Lower-Carbon Travel Models

This planning project seeks to not only decrease freight traffic within residential and downtown corridors but also works to shift more freight movement to rail, a lower emitter than trucks, by improving accessibility to existing rail and potentially expanding rail near the rail yard and inland port. Research conducted by Façanha and Ang-Olson on behalf of the Federal Highway Administration states that shifting to rail for freight movement can be more fuel-efficient, cleaner, and is associated with lower emissions. Additional data from the Association of American Railroads indicates up to a 75 percent decrease in GHG emissions when freight is moved by rail. By improving alternative truck routes and existing roadways, access to the inland port and railroad spur will be improved, which will encourage rail freight movement and reduce emissions. One example of this comes from the *Hershey, Nebraska Industrial Development: Updated Economic Impact Evaluation* which states that North Platte is the home to an 880,000 square foot distribution center for a popular grocery chain. Currently, all products are shipped by trucks, however, at other sites this chain ships by rail. By improving access to rail and investing in connectivity to the transload facility all of these trucks could be taken off the road for longer journeys, therefore lowering emissions.

### Incorporate Energy Efficient Investments

According to the Department of Energy's EV Charging Station Locations map, Lincoln County only has two EV charging stations and both are located on the south side of the City of North Platte. These stations are inconvenient for trucks and not near the inland port. Project feasibility studies would determine the best location for additional EV charging stations, while also thinking innovatively about how to incorporate EV charging for inland port activities. This will ensure that this economic hotspot will be ready for climate resilient technologies of the present and future.

## **Lincoln County Crossroads: Equitable Transportation Investments to Promote Intermodal Mobility & Community Connectivity**

### Improve the Resilience of At-Risk Infrastructure to be Resilient to Extreme Weather Events and Natural Disasters Caused by Climate Change

Recently extreme weather events, including far below zero temperatures and blizzard conditions, have closed Interstate 80 within Lincoln County. When this occurs, many trucks come into town and park on two-lane roads (primarily State Farm Road) or within residential areas. These already dangerous conditions are then made worse by unsafe truck parking and bottlenecks. By expanding and paving these roads, Lincoln County will prove more climate resilient as unprecedented weather conditions close the interstate and other roadways. This will also have positive safety benefits for truck drivers and residents.

<b>- Quality of Life -</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Walkability to employers and affordable housing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Connect surrounding towns and villages</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improve equity and access to daily destinations</li></ul>

### Coordinate Land Use, Affordable Housing, and Transportation Planning to Create More Livable Communities and Expand Travel Choices

Another motivator to research and plan this alternative route loop is due to additional housing development and workplaces being added to the area. In the last five years, North Platte has increased its affordable housing options by 15 percent, indicating about 2,000 new units that have been built or are obligated at this time. Near Newberry Road, which is currently just a two-lane road, a large housing development is being constructed to include mixed-use affordable housing. Newberry Road separates this development from many workplaces. Although this is great planning for walkability, the road is currently dangerous and lacks any active transportation infrastructure. To make the neighborhood a more livable and safer place, while encouraging active transportation to work, the feasibility planning and engineering will include pedestrian crossings and active transportation infrastructure in this area.

Additionally, the county has struggled to build housing developments north of the city, primarily due to a lack of transportation infrastructure and only one bridge over the river. However, with the inclusion of new access interchanges to the highway system and the four-lane bypass included in this preliminary project outline, more affordable housing developments and other necessities could be developed in this area. North Platte Area Chamber and Development Corporation is a key player in this planning process and will continue to connect various efforts to improve quality of life to this transportation endeavor. Their recent development project, District 177, which created a multi-use apartment and retail space in an underutilized area, will benefit from this project due to a decrease in freight traffic that currently can make the site difficult to access. All of these projects, stakeholders, and plans are being finalized through a

## **Lincoln County Crossroads: Equitable Transportation Investments to Promote Intermodal Mobility & Community Connectivity**

county-wide comprehensive planning effort that shows the cooperation and coordination of development and infrastructure improvements.

### Improve Access to Daily Destinations

As mentioned above, this project seeks to improve access to jobs and affordable housing through collaboration with development projects, however, there are other aspects of this project that will improve access to daily destinations for residents. By creating an alternative route for truck traffic, those who depend on existing roadways to get to work, school, or other functions of life will no longer be subject to high levels of truck traffic. This will include employees of Bailey Yard, Lincoln County's largest employer. The alternative route also creates better access to the city, allowing those in nearby villages to access high-quality job opportunities, health care, and resources safely and with fewer trips.

### Proactively Address Equity

This project is a direct response to equity concerns in the areas of racial justice, environmental justice, and economic justice. As stated, due to the lack of alternative routes, a large amount of truck traffic (that is projected to increase) goes directly through the area's Historically Disadvantaged Community. This project seeks to improve the conditions of this community while creating alternative routes that will in turn increase access to improved jobs and quality of life. Additionally, by increasing access to active transportation infrastructure, this project will also plan to improve conditions for those who cannot access a personal vehicle. According to the Nebraska State Data Center, Lincoln County maintains a higher poverty rate than the Nebraska state average. This infrastructure investment is a key piece of the area's effort to meet economic potential and improve the quality of life for all residents.

## **- Mobility and Community Connectivity -**

- |                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improve &amp; increase multimodal and intermodal connectivity across rail, air, and road</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use community participation to identify gaps</li></ul> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### Directly Increasing Intermodal and Multimodal Freight Movement & Consider Last-Mile Freight Plans in a Complete Streets and Multimodal Approach

Freight traffic in the focus area of this project is currently dividing neighborhoods and communities, putting residents at risk and decreasing the functionality of the location as an economic hub for the region. The Nebraska International Port of the Plains was approved in 2023, leading to exciting plans for economic development and high-quality jobs. The freight traffic expected by the port and several other industrial developments presented the opportunity to overhaul the current options for freight infrastructure in the area. Through the planning of an

## **Lincoln County Crossroads: Equitable Transportation Investments to Promote Intermodal Mobility & Community Connectivity**

alternative route and improvements of existing infrastructure, this project seeks to directly increase intermodal freight movement with the inland port, highway system, Interstate 80, North Platte’s commercial airport, and the world’s largest rail yard. Throughout this planning process, the last-mile freight plans will be made more efficient and capitalize on all of the multimodal opportunities this community has, while considering a Complete Streets approach to further promote connectivity to workplaces and housing. The alternative route and improvements will lead to a more cohesive and productive intermodal system for freight and ensure that communities like the Village of Hershey or North Platte’s HDC are not faced with constant freight traffic. Additionally, connectivity to rail will be more efficient and accessible through the various rail connectivity and updates included in this planning effort. This will lead to improved intermodal opportunities and movement in this area but also across the region.

### Implement Plans, Based on Community Participation that Identify Gaps

A benefit of using the RAISE planning grant opportunity for this project is that it will allow for a comprehensive community engagement pillar of the planning process and eventual finalized objectives. At different phases of the planning process, participation from the public will be included to guide the best strategies to meet the project goals. These opportunities will also allow community participation to present missing factors of the plan or highlight gaps in the strategies of the project. Community participation will be conducted in consideration of the Department of Transportation’s “Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making”. Various tactics will be used to get broad representation including in-person meetings for public comment and information sharing, as well as virtual and written opportunities to provide accessible engagement opportunities for residents. Public perspective will then be considered throughout the planning process and final plans will have the opportunity for additional amendments from public comments and concerns to ensure all potential gaps are addressed.

## **- Economic Competitiveness and Opportunity -**

- |                                                                                     |                                                                                                     |                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased intermodal connectivity</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• High-quality jobs through multimodal partnerships</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improved tourism access</li></ul> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### Improve Intermodal and/or Multimodal Freight Mobility

North Platte and Lincoln County are becoming an even more vital area for freight mobility across Nebraska and a multi-state region. This is primarily due to the development of The Nebraska International Port of the Plains, which allows the community to capitalize on its unique location which includes the world’s largest rail yard, a commercial airport, and connections to Interstate 80 and various highways. The inland port itself is expected to create an annual

## **Lincoln County Crossroads: Equitable Transportation Investments to Promote Intermodal Mobility & Community Connectivity**

economic operation output of over \$2.4 billion and promote the development of 5,200 new jobs. The Sustainable Beef plant will also promote economic benefits, with over 1,500 cattle from a 250-mile radius being processed each day and transferred to a distribution warehouse. They also will have a starting wage of around \$50,000, a much higher salary than the county's median income. However, it is important that this economic success does not come at the expense of residents that currently live in the path of freight traffic from key exit and entry points.

Additionally, the existing infrastructure is not equipped to withstand the projected freight traffic, which could lead to freight bottlenecks and other challenges. In order to meet the potential of these activities, improvements are needed. This project seeks to study and design potential alternate routes that will improve the movement of freight traffic while diverting it from the Village of Hershey, downtown North Platte, and a Historically Disadvantaged Community. It also seeks to improve existing infrastructure to allow for easier freight connectivity across industrial sites, and intermodal transportation sites. Potential examples include planning for the expansion of an existing road to allow for safer and faster freight movement and incorporating a new I-80 interchange to simplify freight accessibility to the port and other industrial sites.

### Promote Long-term Economic Growth

By implementing the changes mentioned above, Lincoln County will be able to bring consistent and sustainable economic growth and prosperity to its residents and those of surrounding communities. Not only will proper infrastructure investment create a thriving port and benefit other industries, at its operational capacity it is expected to produce an annual state present-value tax revenue of \$18.9 million and a local and county present-value tax revenue of over \$23 million annually. Again, this potential cannot be achieved without proper infrastructure investment that will bear significant state and national benefits. The inland port property allows for 339 acres to be developed in the future, enabling continued growth but also necessitating the need for the proper and well-designed infrastructure sought after through this grant. The area is also looking forward to accessing more-affordable freight movement of building materials, as that is a current struggle in the development of affordable housing, which promotes long-term equitable growth.

### Facilitate Tourism Opportunities

A tourism study completed in 2021 indicated that Lincoln County is home to many unique tourism attractions that bring over 568,300 visitors and \$125.7 million to the community each year. Many of these attractions and tourists would benefit from this comprehensive transportation project. The Golden Spike Tower allows visitors to watch the 10,000 daily railcars travel through Bailey Yard, while also learning about the railroad's history and viewing various railcar exhibits. This attraction also hosts Rail Days each year, which attracts many train and rail enthusiasts. This project likely includes a new Interstate interchange and a connecting road that would enable direct access to the tower. Lincoln County is also a key migration site for 400,000 Sandhill Cranes. Outdoor conservation specialists lead tours to help hundreds of visitors see the magnificent site of the cranes gathered near the North Platte River. This project would improve access to this area and expand potential active infrastructure in the area through a nature-focused



## **Lincoln County Crossroads: Equitable Transportation Investments to Promote Intermodal Mobility & Community Connectivity**

approach. These needs were identified by Nebraska Game and Parks, who note the area as a key outdoor experience in the state. North Platte is also home to Buffalo Bill State Historical Park, the ranch of Buffalo Bill. This site hosts several events throughout the year and through the included project expansion of Buffalo Bill Road, access to this site will be increased. This road expansion also benefits Nebraskaland Days, which is a large festival each year. These attractions are important to the heart of Lincoln County, but also bring educational and recreational options to both rural visitors and out-of-state tourists. All the events and sites will benefit from excess freight traffic having an established alternate route, to decrease main roadway traffic and increase pedestrian safety. Improving access to these sites and events through these infrastructure improvements is crucial for the economic health of the county and region.

### **- State of Good Repair -**

- |                                                                                    |                                                                                                 |                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop new rural infrastructure</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establish modern and responsible improvements</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Protect vulnerable communities</li></ul> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

#### Restore and Modernize Existing Core & Prioritize Improvement of the Condition and Safety of Existing Transportation Infrastructure within the Existing Footprint

This project was designed to utilize existing infrastructure wherever possible, to work within the existing footprint of transportation, and to promote responsible usage. Existing infrastructure presents several problems including unpaved roads, old bridges, and two-lane roads. These problems create additional challenges in safety, freight movement, and overall connectivity. Existing bridges have met their useful life and the demands of past needs; however, it is time to modernize and improve these elements. To address these issues, this planning grant would enable the design and feasibility of replacing existing bridges, paving gravel roads facing a high-level of freight traffic, responsibly expanding roadways within the existing right of way, and modernizing infrastructure to include a Complete Streets approach and road diets when appropriate. A guiding principle of the project is to update existing infrastructure to meet the projected needs of the community while integrating modern engineering concepts.

#### Create New Infrastructure in Remote Communities that will be Maintained in a State of Good Repair

While this project seeks to improve existing infrastructure, it also analyzes opportunities for new infrastructure to improve community and multimodal connectivity. New infrastructure proposed to be researched through this planning project includes a new I-80 interchange, the development of additional access interchanges on several vital highways, and new roadways to divert freight traffic away from the Village of Hershey and a Historically Disadvantaged Community. The engineering and feasibility studies for these roads and bridges will include preservation

## **Lincoln County Crossroads: Equitable Transportation Investments to Promote Intermodal Mobility & Community Connectivity**

requirements and prioritize a design and materials that enable a state of good repair and are manageable for responsible parties.

### Address Current or Projected Transportation System Vulnerabilities for Underserved Communities

It is projected that Lincoln County, and the project focus area specifically, will see an increase in freight traffic. Without the design of alternative routes and improvement determined by this planning grant, a Historically Disadvantaged Community and a rural village are at a risk of high levels of noise and air pollution and safety hazards when using active and motorized transportation in their neighborhoods. This project seeks to address this projected and occurring issue through the design of alternative truck routes, active transportation infrastructure, and the modernization of roads to make them safer for all residents and motorists.

## **- Partnership and Collaboration -**

- |                                                                                 |                                                                        |                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meaningful public involvement</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Comprehensive vision</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Project collaboration</li></ul> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### Community Engagement

This planning project plans to invest in high-quality community engagement efforts that promote equitable and impactful opportunities for residents to share their experiences and perspectives through various phases of development. With the intense level of economic change and development that is occurring in the area, it is important to elevate the voices of residents to best understand which transportation improvements could improve their daily lives. This includes meaningful conversations with the agricultural community. In accordance with the Department of Transportation's "Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making" the conductor of community engagement efforts will be directed to follow the features of meaningful public involvement. There will be a focus on involving a broad representation of the community, understanding their wants and needs, and building durable community relationships. Since this is a planning project, it will be vital that the finalized vision meets the desires of the community, and that they are properly updated and consulted with throughout the process. Output and outcome metrics included in the DOT report will be monitored throughout the planning grant to measure success of the community engagement efforts.

### Coordinate with Other Types of Projects

As outlined throughout this application, this transportation initiative is working in collaboration with economic development activities, affordable housing projects, and large regional endeavors

## Lincoln County Crossroads: Equitable Transportation Investments to Promote Intermodal Mobility & Community Connectivity

including the inland port. This planning grant seeks comprehensive reform of many aspects of life in Lincoln County. The Village of Hershey, the Nebraska International Port of the Plains Port Authority, the City of North Platte, The North Platte Area Chamber and Development Organization, West Central Nebraska Development District, manufacturers, agriculturists, and surrounding communities see the importance of improving this infrastructure to support a high quality of life and prosperity for the region. With the struggles facing rural Nebraska including population decline and agricultural hardships worsened by climate change, sustainable development depends on cooperative projects that strengthen the resiliency of local infrastructure. Potential examples of this within the project include the planning of an alternate route to improve connectivity from major roadways to the inland port, while protecting the Village of Hershey and residential communities. This also includes the development of active transportation infrastructure in areas of affordable housing development and large employers. Additionally, Lincoln County has invested in a county-wide comprehensive planning effort which should conclude in 2024. This effort has guided the county towards a cohesive vision of project collaboration and responsible and equitable development.

<b>- Innovation -</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Modern Technologies for Traffic Management</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Accelerated Project Delivery</li></ul>

### Innovative Technologies: Using Sensors to Monitor Real-Time Conditions & Use Active Grade Crossing Detection Systems to Enable Responsive Traffic Management

Due to the complexity of this planning project, the use of innovative technology when conducting the feasibility and engineering analysis will be crucial to the eventual success of the infrastructure improvements and alternative routes. This will include sensors to help monitor real-time conditions of signage to improve response time to crashes, weather conditions, or special events. Additionally, in the pedestrian crossings discussed throughout the application, the use of active grade crossing detection systems will allow for roads to respond to various use cycles during the day and night to promote effective traffic flow. Consultants procured for the various elements of the project will also be encouraged to *use practices that facilitate accelerated project delivery* including Accelerated Bridge Construction in the planning process to create a blueprint for efficient project delivery.

# Lincoln County Crossroads: Equitable Transportation Investments to Promote Intermodal Mobility & Community Connectivity

## References

Association of American Railroads. 2023. “Freight Railroads are Part of the Solution to Climate Change”. <https://www.aar.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/AAR-Climate-Change-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

Façanha & Ang-Olson, Federal Highway Administration. n.d. “Policies to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions Associated with Freight Movements”. <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policy/otps/innovation/issue1/policies.cfm#:~:text=Encouraging%20mode%20shifts%20to%20more%20fuel%2Defficient%20modes,-Environmental%20benefits%20can&text=In%20general%2C%20rail%20and%20water,trucks%20to%20access%20intermodal%20facilities.>

Nebraska Department of Transportation. 2020. “Standard Summary of Nebraska Motor Vehicle Traffic Accidents”. <https://dot.nebraska.gov/media/wkrm3ods/2020-county.pdf>

United States Department of Energy. *Alternative Fuels Data Center*. [https://afdc.energy.gov/fuels/electricity\\_locations.html#/find/nearest?fuel=ELEC](https://afdc.energy.gov/fuels/electricity_locations.html#/find/nearest?fuel=ELEC)

United States Department of Transportation. November 2023. “Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making”. [https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2023-11/Promising%20Practices%20for%20Meaningful%20Public%20Involvement\\_2023Update\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2023-11/Promising%20Practices%20for%20Meaningful%20Public%20Involvement_2023Update_FINAL.pdf)

United States Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Transportation and Air Quality. 2014. “Near Roadway Air Pollution and Health: Frequency Asked Questions”. [https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2015-11/documents/420f14044\\_0.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2015-11/documents/420f14044_0.pdf)

University of Nebraska at Omaha Center for Public Affairs Research. “Essential Data for Nebraska Counties”. <https://www.unomaha.edu/college-of-public-affairs-and-community-service/center-for-public-affairs-research/programs/nebraska-state-data-center.php>

# **Lincoln County Crossroads: Equitable Transportation Investments to Promote Intermodal Mobility & Community Connectivity**

## **Project Readiness**

### **Project Schedule**

#### Phase 00 (July-December 2024):

- USDOT Grant Award and Coordination with Local Projects Division of NDOT to update scope of work and finalize grant agreement
- NDOT Request for Qualifications and Consultant Selection

#### Phase 01 (August-September 2024):

- Organize Project Advisory Team led by Joe Hewgley and Chris Bruns (Lincoln County), Judy Clark (City of North Platte/Lincoln County), and Gary Person (North Platte Area Chamber & Development)
- Draft Public Engagement and Education Plan Requirements and Stakeholder List

#### Phase 02: (January 2025-May 2025)

- Project Kickoff, Project Management Plan
- Travel Demand Model Update and Baseline Conditions
- Environmental Screening, Environmental Justice, and Equity Analysis
- Community Listening and Issues Inventory

#### Phase 03: (May 2025-December 2025)

- Development Scenarios and Interchange Alternatives Planning
- Bypass Corridor Concept Plans and Cost Estimates
- Community Engagement and Education

#### Phase 04: (July 2025-June 2026)

- Interchange Justification Study
- Draft Benefit Cost Analysis and Economic Impact Summary
- Community Engagement and Education

#### Phase 05: (July 2026-October 2026)

- Draft and Final Feasibility Study

## **Technical Capacity Assessment**

### **Federal Funding & Federal Regulations**

Lincoln County is forward-thinking and innovative in their efforts to manage grant programs and use funds responsibly. A current example of this is that the county was a recipient of American Rescue Plan Act funds amounting to over six million dollars. These funds have been used to run

## **Lincoln County Crossroads: Equitable Transportation Investments to Promote Intermodal Mobility & Community Connectivity**

a local grant program for nonprofits and were also used to purchase the core site of the Nebraska International Port of the Plains. The county has followed all requirements associated with expenditures and reporting for this funding and is well versed in federal funding requirements and expectations.

### Project Planning

Integrated planning is a tenet of Lincoln County's approach to high-quality government and innovative development. This was on display when the county was awarded inland port designation from the Nebraska Department of Economic Development. This project shows the county's ability to bring together key stakeholders, prioritize public engagement, and lead a crucial project to successful results. Additionally, the county is currently engaged in an intensive comprehensive planning process, which also indicates their ability to design and lead large-scale efforts through partnerships and effective leadership. Judy Clark, the planning administrator for Lincoln County, also works for the City of North Platte and is currently leading their Safe Streets for All planning process. Judy would be a key administrator of this project for the county and would bring her skills from Safe Streets for All to the RAISE project administration. She, and other key administrators including county commissioners, support staff, and economic development leaders (Gary Person), regularly work in collaboration on housing and business initiatives and other community development efforts. That same approach would be taken with this project.

### Project Delivery

Lincoln County was one of three parties involved in a Railroad Hazard Elimination (RRZ) Fund project, under the Federal Highway Administration. While working with the Nebraska DOT and Union Pacific Railroad, Lincoln County was able to successfully complete the RRZ project by following federal requirements and working cohesively with all entities involved. The project was added to the county's 1- & 6-Year Road Plan in 2006 and came to fruition in 2012. The contract bid price for the project was \$8,294,936.45. This indicates the county's specific capacity in following federal requirements in the planning, implementation, and reporting processes.

Recently, Lincoln County was a recipient of the Nebraska Department of Transportation's County Bridge Match Program to demolish and replace the Sutherland State Aid Bridge (Birdwood Bridge). This project was intensely complicated due to the historic nature of the bridge. The State Historic Preservation Office and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers determined that demolishing the bridge would have adverse historical effects. Unfortunately, safety requirements forced the county to move forward with the demolition and therefore, the county must follow intensive guidelines from both the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the State Historic Preservation Office. The total project cost was \$5,240,480.49, with the state contributing \$3,949,555.10 and the county covering the remaining total. This project displays Lincoln County's ability to work with multiple entities collaboratively and cohesively. It also indicates the county's ability to follow strict requirements, gain necessary approvals, and move projects forward in accordance with guidelines and external recommendations.