

5. Comments, Coordination and Consultation

KDOT provided numerous opportunities for public input and agency coordination during the preparation of this SEIS. This chapter summarizes those activities and discusses public and agency input received throughout this process.

5.1. Public Involvement Process

KDOT's goal was to keep the public and project stakeholders informed about the alternatives being considered and project decision-making as part of the SEIS.

The public involvement process was designed with five key goals in mind:

1. Create a comprehensive and transparent approach to inform and engage project stakeholders and the public in the SEIS process.
2. Enhance the visibility and online presence of the SLT project and ensure key stakeholders and others understand the reasons for each phase, its timing, and its potential impact.
3. Interact with the project team, focus groups, and advisory group to gather input on transportation needs in the community.
4. Identify, address, and mitigate controversial issues early in a collaborative and constructive manner.
5. Ensure the stakeholder involvement process is fair, open, and responsive to input of the public and the public knows where and how to locate project information.

Overall, the communication goals of the SEIS process are:

- Coordinate with stakeholders to set expectations and create a framework to engage and respond to the public.
- Conduct focus group sessions to discuss SEIS alternatives.
- Identify key stakeholders to create an Advisory Group to discuss alternatives and associated impacts and gather feedback prior to presenting information to the public.
- Provide opportunities for the public at large to learn about the project and provide input on alternatives.
- Create and support an online presence for the study on Facebook, KDOT webpage, and other social media.
- Track and document communications.

The Public Involvement Process was designed to share information and gather feedback throughout the project, but specifically at key milestones in order to understand public and stakeholder concern and make any necessary adjustments to information and messages. The Public Involvement Plan outlined an approach for engagement focusing on developing information materials and sharing them through meetings and events, both in person and online to gather feedback. A variety of tools and techniques were used to increase public participation and gather public input. All informational materials can be found in **Appendix B**.

5.1.1. Advisory Group

An Advisory Group was created at the beginning of the SEIS process to build upon the outreach conducted during the K-10 West Leg Concept Study and to engage key community voices in the discussion on the SLT SEIS. The Advisory Group was made up of representatives from businesses and organizations near the corridor and those stakeholders within the community who hold interest in the future of the corridor including:

- KS State Representative and former Mayor of Lawrence
- Lecompton Historical Society
- Standard Beverage
- Lawrence Memorial Hospital Rep. (Mercato Dev.)
- Douglas County
- Douglas County Sheriff
- Lawrence Chamber of Commerce
- Haskell Indian Nations University
- Lawrence/Douglas County MPO
- City of Lawrence
- Perry School District
- Bike and Pedestrian Representative
- Heritage Baptist Church
- Lawrence Parks and Rec
- KU Planning Dept.
- Berry Plastics
- Jefferson County Public Works
- Kanwaka Township Fire Dpt.
- Baker University
- Lecompton City Council
- Regional Travelers (2)

The role of the SLT SEIS Advisory Group focused on providing KDOT with meaningful input as it reviewed solutions for safety, congestion and other issues effecting the SLT. Meetings with identified stakeholders were conducted to present information on alternatives and associated impacts to gather feedback prior to presenting that information to the public at public meetings. Five Advisory Group meeting were held.

- **Meeting 1:** Project Initiation and Purpose and Need—Introduced the SEIS Purpose and Need, reviewed history and alternatives being considered. The first meeting occurred on October 18, 2018, prior to the public information open house #1.
- **Meeting 2:** Reasonable Alternatives—Presented alternatives and discussed potential funding options. The meeting occurred on March 28, 2019, prior to the public information open house #2.
- **Meeting 3:** Review of Reasonable Alternatives and Updates on Tolled Alternative—Presented the reasonable alternatives and updates on the tolled alternative. Discussed access and benefits of the revised tolled alternative since this is a different concept than the tolled concept previously presented. Also presented the three interchange alternatives under consideration at I-70 & SLT. This meeting occurred on February 19, 2020.
- **Meeting 4:** Discuss Screening of Alternatives—showed screening process and how the preferred alternative was selected and discussed public feedback on funding options and alternatives. Shared the identified preferred alternative to be presented in the Draft SEIS for additional comments. This meeting occurred on August 13, 2020, approximately 3 months after public information open house virtual #3.

- **Meeting 5:** Present Preferred Alternative—Share the identified preferred alternative presented at the Public Hearing and what is included as part of the Draft SEIS document and share feedback from the public meeting. This meeting will occur in June 2021.

5.1.2. Elected Officials Coordination

The future of the SLT Corridor is critically important to three jurisdictions surrounding the SLT: The City of Lawrence, Douglas County, and the City of Lecompton. Engaging these three units of government throughout the study kept the elected officials aware of the study process and allowed information to be disseminated throughout the communities.

Five sets of presentations were given to Elected and Public Officials on the status of the project during the study. The project team worked with the City and County staff to discuss concerns related to the SLT SEIS. The presentations served as an opportunity to share study progress and understand the public officials' concerns. Presentations and meetings followed a similar schedule as the Advisory Group, unless circumstances warranted presentations at different intervals.

- **Presentation 1:** Project Initiation and Purpose and Need—Reviewed the project purpose and SEIS process. Presentations occurred: to the City of Lawrence (October 16, 2018), Douglas County (October 24, 2018), and the City of Lecompton (November 5, 2018). The meeting occurred prior to public information open house #1 in the first 90 days of the study.
- **Presentation 2:** Reasonable Alternatives—Presented the proposed alternatives and discussed funding options. Presentations occurred: to the City of Lecompton (April 15, 2019), the City of Lawrence (April 16, 2019), and Douglas County (April 17, 2019). These meetings occurred prior to the public information open house #2.
- **Presentation 3:** Review of Reasonable Alternatives and Updates to Tolled Alternative—Presented the reasonable alternatives and updates on the tolled alternative. Discussed access and benefits of the revised tolled alternative since this is a different concept than the tolled concept previously presented. Also presented the three interchange alternatives under consideration at I-70 & SLT. Presentations occurred for the Douglas County (February 26, 2020), City of Lecompton (March 2, 2020), and City of Lawrence originally scheduled for (March 17, 2020) but due to COVID-19 pandemic and associated closings the meeting was rescheduled to May 12, 2020, and was conducted virtually through a Zoom Presentation.
- **Presentation 4:** Discuss Screening of Alternatives—showed screening process and how the preferred alternative was selected and discussed public feedback on funding options and alternatives. Shared the identified preferred alternative to be presented in the Draft SEIS for additional comments. These meetings occurred on November 10, 2020 (City of Lawrence), November 16, 2020 (City of Lecompton), and November 18, 2020 (Douglas County), approximately four months after virtual public information open house #3. The presentations for the City of Lawrence and Douglas County were held via Zoom and the meeting with the City of Lecompton was in person with a capacity of 10 people due to COVID-19 restrictions.
- **Presentation 5:** Present Preferred Alternative—Shared the identified preferred alternative and presented at the Public Hearing and summary of the Draft SEIS document and public comment. This meeting will occur shortly after the Public Hearing in May or June 2021. These meetings haven't yet been scheduled.

5.1.3. Stakeholder Meetings

Individual meetings were held with stakeholders specifically impacted or concerned about the SEIS process, alignment alternatives, or project impacts to discuss concerns and clarify issues. The SEIS team promoted the opportunity for individual meetings on the project website, at public meetings, and made stakeholders aware of the opportunity for individual meetings anytime there was a presentation to elected officials, the Advisory Group, or a community presentation. As of June 2020, meetings held include:

- April 4, 2019—Paul Bahnmaier, Lecompton Historical Society
- April 4, 2019—Cindy Nau, Lawrence resident and SLT commuter
- February 26, 2020—Paul Bahnmaier, Lecompton Historical Society to discuss routes of sandpit trucks
- TBD, 2021 – Haskell Indian Nations University

5.1.4. Public Meetings

Four public meetings were conducted during the SEIS process in order to share information and gather public comments. The first two meetings were of an open house format with no formal presentation allowing participants to come to view the information and make comments. The third meeting was a virtual public meeting because of COVID-19 concerns and quarantine orders in the spring of 2020, large gatherings and in-person meetings were not allowed. The last public meeting was a formal public hearing to follow the appropriate process required for comments to the Draft SEIS. Meetings occurred at key project milestones when technical information was available to present and where public input could best be used. All public comments can be found in the Appendix. All meetings were publicized by:

- Sending electronic notices to the mailing list of residents and stakeholders. The mailing list started around 700 and grew to over 900 during the study. Meeting notices were first sent three weeks in advance and followed up with weekly reminders.
- Including information in City and County resident newsletters and electronic updates and social media posts from the City of Lawrence, Douglas County and the City of Lecompton.
- KDOT promoted through media releases and social media posts on Northeast Kansas Facebook and Twitter.
- Project articles discussing the public meetings ran in the Lawrence Journal World newspaper in advance of the public meeting.
- Advisory Group members were asked to send information to their constituents promoting the public meeting.
- KDOT placed a dynamic message sign on the SLT corridor with the date, time, and location of the meeting for in-person meetings.
- Information was posted on the project website two weeks in advance of the meeting.
- Virtual meeting information was available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for a three-week time period.

The four public information meetings included a review of the study status. All participants attending the meetings were asked to sign in through our Public Involvement Management Application (PIMA) system. Each meeting had a specific focus.

- Public Information Open House 1:** Purpose and Need/Initial Alternatives—reviewed purpose and need of the SEIS, identified range of alternatives being considered and any new alternatives for discussion, and introduced funding options for discussion. This meeting was held on November 14, 2018, from 5 pm to 7 pm at the Southwest Middle School in Lawrence, KS. The meeting had 247 members of the public attend with 35 comments submitted.
- Public Information Open House 2:** Reasonable Alternatives—showed screening process and how alternatives were narrowed down to the No Build and proposed Build alternatives. This meeting was held on May 1, 2019, from 5 pm to 7 pm at the Southwest Middle School in Lawrence, KS. The meeting had 142 members of the public attend with 73 comments submitted.
- Public Information Open House 3:** Review of Reasonable Alternatives and Updates on Tolled Alternative— Presented the reasonable alternatives and updates on the tolled alternative. Discussed access and benefits of the revised tolled alternative since this is different concept than the tolled concept previously presented. Also presented the three interchange alternatives under consideration at I-70 & SLT. As a result of COVID-19 and community health concerns, this meeting was held virtually from May 14-June 4. Participants reviewed a Story Map and were able to provide comments to the project team through the PIMA system. 202 people signed into the meeting and submitted 115 comments.
- Public Hearing:** Preferred Alternative—shared the identified preferred alternative and how the alternative was selected. This hearing is for the Draft SEIS document. A formal public hearing transcript will be prepared to document public comments at this meeting. This meeting will be held on May 25 (on-line component) and May 26 (in-person component), 2021. Please note: this meeting has not yet occurred.

5.1.5. Focus Groups

On behalf of KDOT, ETC Institute conducted a set of focus groups in late November and December of 2019 to gather feedback from randomly selected participants from the target ZIP Codes surrounding the project area. Seventeen ZIP Codes were represented by 62 participants in the seven focus groups. Each group was asked the same set of questions and discussed the SEIS alternatives to gauge perceptions of the alternatives, the tolled alternative, knowledge gaps, and messaging opportunities. Information from the focus groups helped inform other aspects of the study.

5.1.5.1. Major Findings of the Focus Groups

Major Topic #1 Interchange Alternatives for the I-70 and SLT Interchange

Focus group participants were given an overview of three design alternatives for the I-70 and SLT interchange. Each alternative was thoroughly described by the moderator, and participants were given the ability to ask questions about each alternative. Below is a summary of the reactions to each of the three alternatives followed by a summary of the discussion on which alternative is the most preferred.

- Alternative 1 (2 interchanges with NO access to Farmers Turnpike from SLT)
- Alternative 2 (2 interchanges WITH access to Farmers Turnpike from SLT)
- Alternative 3 (single, but large interchange)

Preferred Design Alternatives for the Interchange with I-70

After the three alternatives were discussed and participants felt comfortable with each concept the participants were then asked to indicate which alternative they most preferred. Respondents were informed that Alternative 3 would cost approximately 20 percent more than Alternatives 1 and 2. Out of the 62 participants, 59 participants selected Alternative 3 as their preferred alternative. A majority of participants indicated that they preferred Alternative 3 when thinking of four distinct topics: safety, managing truck traffic, local users, and regional users.

Major Topic #2: Reactions to the Interchange for SLT and Wakarusa Drive

The next major topic involved reactions to a proposal for a new interchange at SLT and Wakarusa Drive. Focus group participants were shown a diagram of the interchange and the moderator provided additional details about the design and function of the proposed facility. There were mixed reactions to the proposed improvements at Wakarusa Drive. There were some who liked the location further away from the existing location, while others did not like it for varying reasons, such as the distance to travel back to local streets or the impacts to the open ground in the area.

Major Topic #3: Funding and Tolling Options

Focus group participants were read a list of five different funding sources that could be used to fund the proposed improvements to the South Lawrence Trafficway. Respondents were then asked to indicate if they supported each of the five funding alternatives. Below is a summary of their responses.

- State Gas Tax-- Less than 40 percent of participants supported a state gas tax as a means of funding improvements to the South Lawrence Trafficway.
- Dedicated Sales Tax-- Less than 25 percent of participants supported a dedicated sales tax to fund proposed improvements to the South Lawrence Trafficway.
- Transportation Improvement Surcharges to Vehicle Registrations--More than 50 percent of the participants supported a “transportation improvement” surcharge to help fund improvements to the South Lawrence Trafficway and believed this was one of the fairer funding options.
- Community Partnership with the City of Lawrence and Douglas County--Less than 40 percent of participants supported a community partnership with the City of Lawrence and Douglas County to fund improvements to the South Lawrence Trafficway.

Follow-up Discussion on Tolling

Although focus group participants initially did not like the use of tolls to fund improvements to the SLT, opinions changed when they were given more information about how a tolling option could be implemented. Focus group participants were informed that KDOT was considering an Express Toll Lane option to fund the improvements to the SLT because the use of tolls could potentially allow the improvements to be completed sooner. Participants were also informed that the Express Toll Lane solution would provide options for both a non-tolled lane and a tolled lane. Participants were also shown diagrams of what an Express Toll Lane facility might look like and how it would

operate. Support for the Express Toll Lane option improved from 33 percent supporting tolling, to 66 percent once participants understood there would be a choice to use the tolled lane or the non-tolled lane.

5.1.6. Community Presentations

Presentations and listening sessions on the status of the project were conducted with civic and community groups as requested. Community organizations such as Rotary Clubs, Kiwanis, Chamber of Commerce, Homeowners Associations, Business Groups, and Churches were invited to schedule presentations on the project from the study team. Presentations were done over the course of the study to provide information on the progression of the study. These presentations served as an opportunity to reach a broader spectrum of people to gather input and allow the project team to hear various points of view throughout the study. Presentations include:

- Lawrence Chamber of Commerce—November 14, 2018
- Lawrence Kiwanis—April 4, 2019
- Lawrence Chamber of Commerce—October 14, 2020

5.1.7. Virtual Opportunities

A live virtual component will be conducted in supplement to the in-person Public Hearing to allow a large number of participants to listen and ask questions. The event will be geared towards commuters and regional stakeholders that might find it challenging to attend in-person meetings and events, but still had an interest in the project. This meeting will be held on May 25, 2021.

An additional opportunity, a Virtual Open House, will be available for the public to view materials online at their convenience during the entirety of the comment period. Participants may submit comments through an electronic comment form.

5.1.8. Drop-In Centers

Kiosks and community display boards will be deployed at community locations and events to build awareness of the SEIS and the draft preferred alternative so the public could provide input. They will be deployed at the Youth Sports Complex, Aquatics Center and other community centers in Lawrence. Displays and flyers will be posted in early May to focus on the in-person and virtual live-event Public Hearings.

5.1.9. Surveys

Two online surveys with approximately 10-15 questions each were conducted to gather additional feedback on project alternatives and funding options at key project milestones. The first online survey was conducted following the Public Open House #3 in the summer of 2020. The second online survey will be conducted in conjunction with the Public Hearing and has yet to be scheduled.

Online surveys provided the opportunity to gauge public response and reaction on specific issues or concerns. Surveys specifically focused on topics including potential project-specific funding options, as well as other issues/interest areas such as access. The online survey link was sent out electronically to our database, sent out through social media by our partners and made available through the project website.

Online surveys were conducted following Public Open House #3 to gather feedback on the virtual public meeting and to gather additional input on the reasonable alternatives leading to a draft preferred alternative.

The online surveys are not statistically valid but provided a flavor for opinion and concern in the area.

5.1.9.1. Major Findings of the Surveys

Survey 1 was conducted June 23 through July 3, 2020 and focused on the information presented at the virtual meeting and the virtual meeting user experience. A total of 560 people responded to the online survey. Highlights include:

- Nearly 83 percent of respondents preferred the reasonable alternative 2 –add capacity freeway option.
- The top three priorities for improvements in the corridor are: Upgrading SLT from two lanes to four lanes at 54 percent, improvements at Wakarusa Drive/27th Street Intersection at 32 percent, and improvements at the I-70 and SLT interchange at six percent.
- Approximately 86 percent of respondents did not attend the virtual public meeting available in May 14-June 4. With 79 percent indicating they were not aware of the opportunity.
- Of those that attended, 56 percent found the information provided to be good or excellent and 39 percent rated it neutral. The same percentages found the meeting experience favorable. Over 90 percent indicated they would attend another virtual meeting.
- When asked about preference for KDOT public meetings, nearly 70 percent indicated they prefer the virtual meeting, while 24 percent prefer an in-person meeting and seven percent would like both.

Survey 2 will be conducted in early June 2021. Result from Survey 2 will be included in subsequent updates to the SEIS document.

5.1.10. Media

KDOT distributed media releases to announce any public meetings or other significant project events. The Lawrence Journal World is the area newspaper and provided coverage of project meetings and events through articles and updates. Links to articles can be found in **Appendix B**.

5.1.11. Social Media

KDOT distributed meeting information and links to project information through official KDOT social media platforms of Facebook and Twitter throughout the course of the project. KDOT used their Northeast Kansas Facebook page and their Northeast Kansas Twitter account to target people in the area.

5.1.12. Project Website

The South Lawrence Trafficway website (www.slt-ks.org) was maintained during the project to inform and educate stakeholders and the public about the project. The site provided a location to share project documents and allow interaction and dialogue to occur between the public and the project team. This allowed for transparency in the project and NEPA process while creating more opportunities for public interaction with a wider, more diverse audience.

5.1.13. PIMA Implementation

The PIMA system was used to track and manage stakeholder engagement utilizing GIS elements. The application was linked to the project website for integration and used to interact with the public and stakeholders. Public comments were documented and tracked using the application.

5.1.14. Dedicated Email Address

A dedicated email address (info@slt-ks.org) was created for public use throughout the project. It allowed stakeholder questions to be gathered and responded to as needed throughout the SEIS process.

5.2. Agency Coordination

Early in the environmental review process, KDOT and FHWA, acting as lead agencies, developed and adopted an agency coordination plan as required by Section 139(g) of Title 23, U.S. Code. This plan was used to guide agency coordination throughout the preparation of the SEIS.

FHWA with the assistance of KDOT prepared a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an SEIS, as required by the Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations 40 CFR 1501.7. The NOI was published in the *Federal Register* on September 6, 2018.

An agency scoping meeting was held on October 4, 2018, with all Lead, Cooperating, and Participating agencies invited to participate. Agency coordination responsibilities and acceptance of invitation to participate is summarized in **Table 5-1**.

Table 5-1: List of Lead, Cooperating and Participating Agencies

Agency	Role	Accepted Invitation	Responsibility
Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)	Federal Lead Agency	NA	Manage environmental review process; prepare and approve SEIS; provide opportunities for public and agency involvement
Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT)	State Lead Agency	NA	Manage environmental review process; prepare and approve SEIS; provide opportunities for public and agency involvement
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (USACE)	Cooperating Agency	Yes	Assist with the preparation, coordination and review of the SEIS where necessary. In addition, cooperating agency for original 1990 EIS, provide continuity through the supplemental.
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)	Cooperating Agency	Yes	Assist with the preparation, coordination and review of the SEIS

Agency	Role	Accepted Invitation	Responsibility
			where necessary; manage potential impacts to endangered species, including Mead's Milkweed.
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	Cooperating Agency	Yes	Assist with the preparation, coordination and review of the SEIS where necessary.
U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance	Participating Agency		Consultation
U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)	Participating Agency	No	Consultation
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)	Participating Agency		Consultation
Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)	Participating Agency		Consultation
Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Region 7	Participating Agency	Yes	Consultation
U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Midwest Region	Participating Agency	Yes	Consultation
Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP)	Participating Agency	Yes	Consultation
U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Education	Participating Agency		Consultation
U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs	Participating Agency		Consultation
U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of the Regional Solicitor	Participating Agency		Consultation
U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)	Participating Agency		Consultation
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)	Participating Agency		Consultation
U.S. Department of Commerce, Denver Regional Office	Participating Agency		Consultation
U.S. Department of Energy, Office of NEPA Policy and Compliance	Participating Agency		Consultation
Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE)	Participating Agency	Yes	Consultation
Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism (KDWPT)	Participating Agency	Yes	Consultation

Agency	Role	Accepted Invitation	Responsibility
Kansas State Historical Society (KSHS)	Participating Agency	Yes	Consultation
Kansas Water Office	Participating Agency	Yes	Consultation
Kansas Biological Survey (KBS)	Participating Agency	Yes	Consultation
Kansas Turnpike Authority (KTA)	Participating Agency	Yes	Consultation
Kansas Geological Survey	Participating Agency	Yes	Consultation
Kansas Forest Service	Participating Agency		Consultation
Kansas Department of Agriculture	Participating Agency	Yes	Consultation
Kansas Department of Commerce	Participating Agency	Yes	Consultation
Kansas Corporation Commission (KCC)	Participating Agency		Consultation
Douglas County Metropolitan Planning Organization	Participating Agency		Consultation
Douglas County Commission	Participating Agency		Consultation
Douglas County Appraiser	Participating Agency		Consultation
City of Lawrence	Participating Agency		Consultation
City of Lawrence Chamber of Commerce	Participating Agency		Consultation
City of Lecompton	Participating Agency		Consultation
Douglas County Public Works	Participating Agency	Yes	Consultation
City of Lawrence Public Works	Participating Agency		Consultation
City of Lawrence Parks & Recreation Department	Participating Agency		Consultation
Douglas County Administrator	Participating Agency		Consultation
Lawrence Public Schools	Participating Agency		Consultation
Perry-Lecompton School District	Participating Agency		Consultation
Haskell Indian Nations University	Participating Agency		Consultation
University of Kansas (KU)	Participating Agency	Yes	Consultation
Wakarusa Township	Participating Agency	Yes	Consultation

5.3. Public and Agency Review of the Draft SEIS

The Draft SEIS was made available for public review and comment during a 50-day review period between May 3 and June 14, 2021. A Notice of Availability of the Draft SEIS was published in the Federal Register April 29, 2021. Notices of availability of the Draft SEIS were also sent to agencies and interested stakeholders. A complete circulation list is provided in **Chapter 7** of the Draft SEIS.

5.3.1. Public Hearing

The public hearing will be held over two days, on May 25 and May 26, 2021. The May 25 component will be a live online virtual meeting from 5:30-7:30 p.m. where information will be presented and interested members of the public will have the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed action and information contained in the Draft SEIS. The in-person public hearing component will be held May 26 at the Baker Wetlands Discovery Center in Lawrence, Kansas from 3:00 – 7:00 p.m. Interested members of the public can provide oral or written comments concerning the proposed action and information contained in the Draft SEIS.

5.3.2. Summary of Public Comments on the Draft SEIS

Summary of comments will be included once the DSEIS is circulated and there are comments to include.