

Purpose of and Need for Improvements

1.1 Introduction

The IDOT and the FHWA are evaluating the transportation system in an area bounded by I-90 on the north, I-294 on the east, I-290/US 20 on the south, and the western terminus of the existing Elgin O'Hare Expressway (see Exhibit 1-1). The area contains critical local, regional and national transportation facilities with more than 18 percent of all trips in the six-county region occurring in the study area. However, mobility is affected by severe congestion on 86 percent of the interstate and primary roads in the study area. The purpose of the EO-WB study is to identify multimodal transportation solutions that will help address major congestion and mobility problems in the study area.

The EO-WB study is being conducted in accordance with NEPA and its associated regulations. The NEPA process will be completed in two parts, or tiers. Tier One is a broad planning process that includes an examination of the transportation needs, transportation system alternatives that would satisfy the needs, and consideration of impacts of the alternatives using a database of existing and available data. Tier One will be developed in conformance with the SAFETEA-LU and IDOT's CSS policy and procedures. CSS is a process that seeks stakeholder input to transportation solutions that fit into and reflect their surroundings. Tier One will disclose the potential beneficial and adverse impacts of proposed system alternatives in a Draft and Final EIS. The Tier One EIS will conclude with a ROD identifying the preferred transportation system alternatives. The ROD will document the following decisions:

- Identification of a conceptual plan for multimodal transportation improvements in the EO-WB study area
- Identification of components of the conceptual plan that have operational independence and may be implemented in a phased manner
- Identification and consideration of funding options

Tier Two studies will commence after the conclusion of Tier One for elements of the conceptual plan that have operational independence. Tier Two studies will be undertaken at a more detailed level of engineering and environmental analysis and result in decisions regarding the following:

- Identification of design details and specific environmental impacts for improvements with operational independence
- Conclusion of the NEPA process for improvements with operational independence
- Identification of project funding strategies