Southwest Connector PEL Study
Community Advisory Group Meeting #1

Tuesday, June 24, 2025
Carrie Nelsen (IDOT) – Speaker

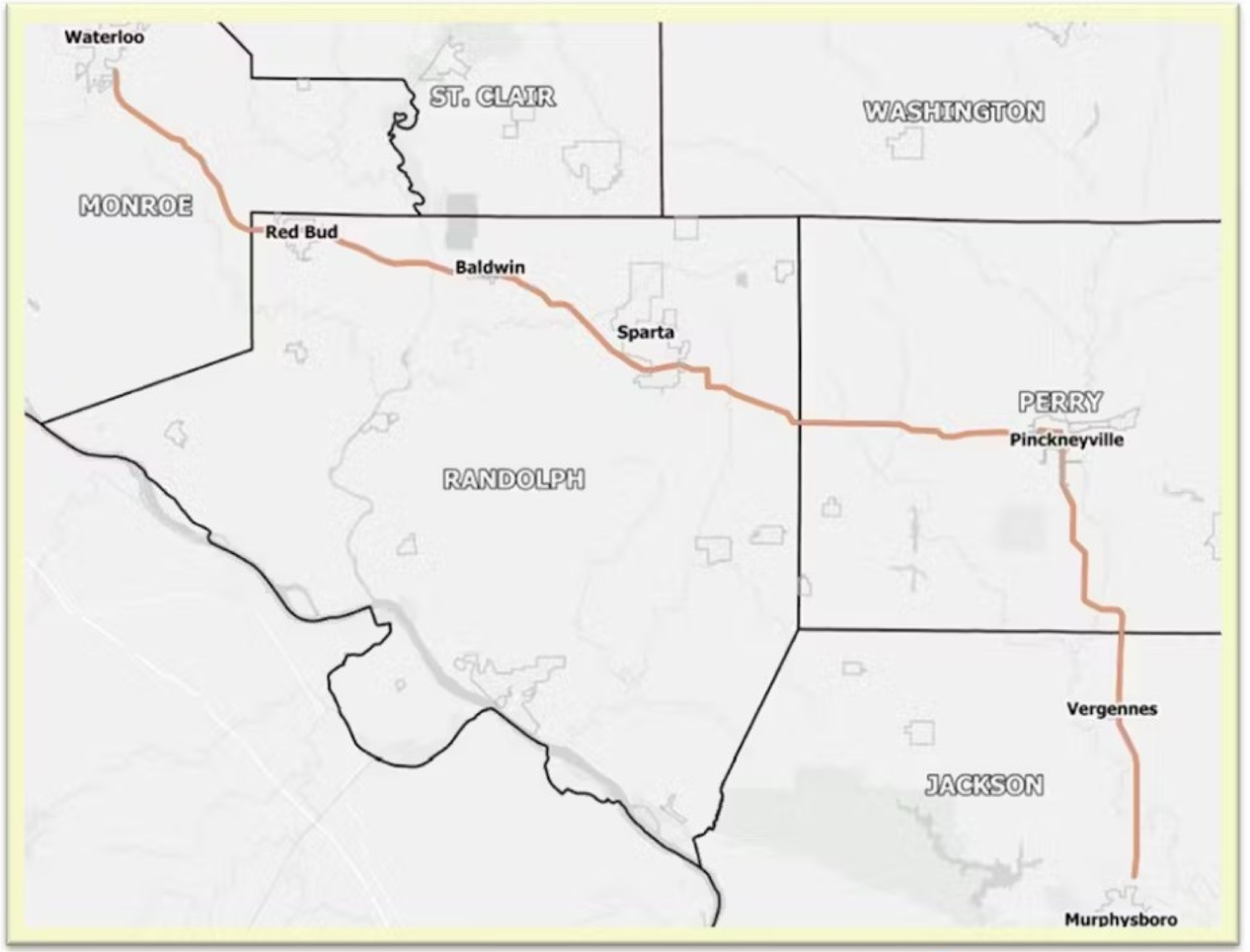
SOUTHWEST CONNECTOR

Welcome & Introductions

Carrie Nelsen (IDOT) – Speaker
Scott Manning (HDR) – Speaker

Study Team

Carrie Nelsen, IDOT District 9
Sean Greenlee, IDOT District 9
Michael Spanberger, IDOT District 8
Scott Manning, HDR
Andrew Potthast, HDR
Jeff Young, HDR
Olivia Smith, HDR
Kelly Sims, HDR
Jamy Lyne, KEG
Tyler Grau, Stanley



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Community Advisory Group (CAG) Role & Expectations

Scott Manning (HDR) – Speaker

Community Advisory Group (CAG) Members

Role:

1. **Provide input** to the study team on behalf of the organization you represent
2. **Serve as a sounding board** for the study information and discussion of topics
3. Function as a **link to the community**, sharing and discussing study information with the organization you represent and bringing feedback to the study team

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Community Advisory Group (CAG) Members

Expectations:

1. **Active participation** throughout the study
2. **Build relationships** and partnerships
3. **Respect and consideration** for all ideas, comments, and concerns shared

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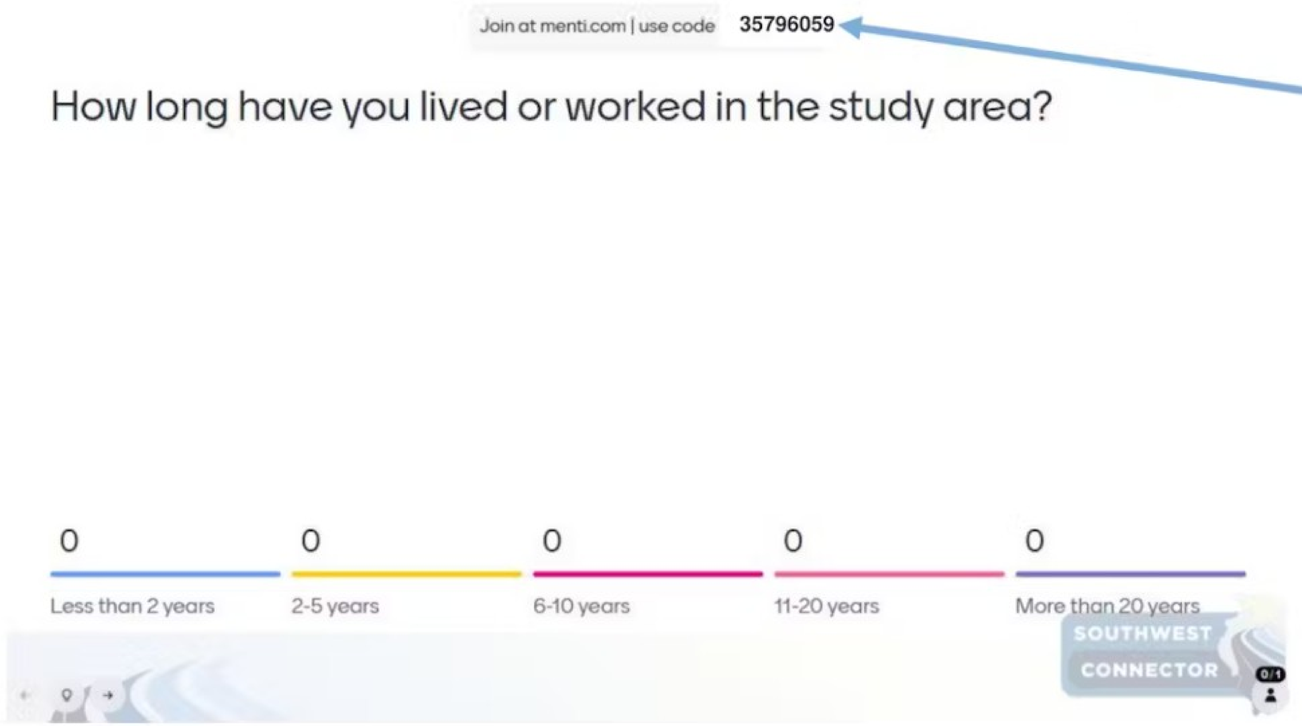
Group Exercise #1

Corridor Familiarity

Olivia Smith (HDR) - Speaker

How To Use Polling - Mentimeter



1. Go to menti.com and type in the code displayed: **35796059**

2. Click “Submit” to get your responses directly to the Study Team!

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Group Exercise #1: Corridor Familiarity

1. How long have you lived or worked in the study area?
2. How often do you use the corridor?
3. Which segment of the corridor do you travel most frequently?
4. What word or phrase best represents your vision for the area for the next 20 years?

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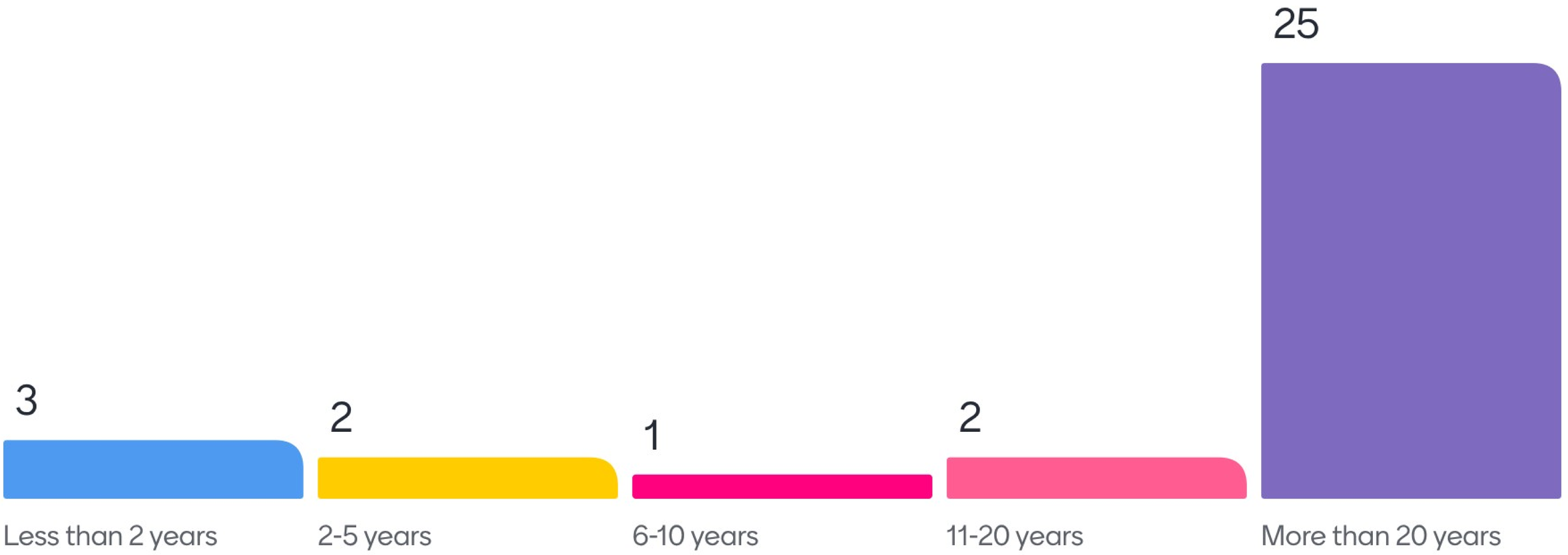
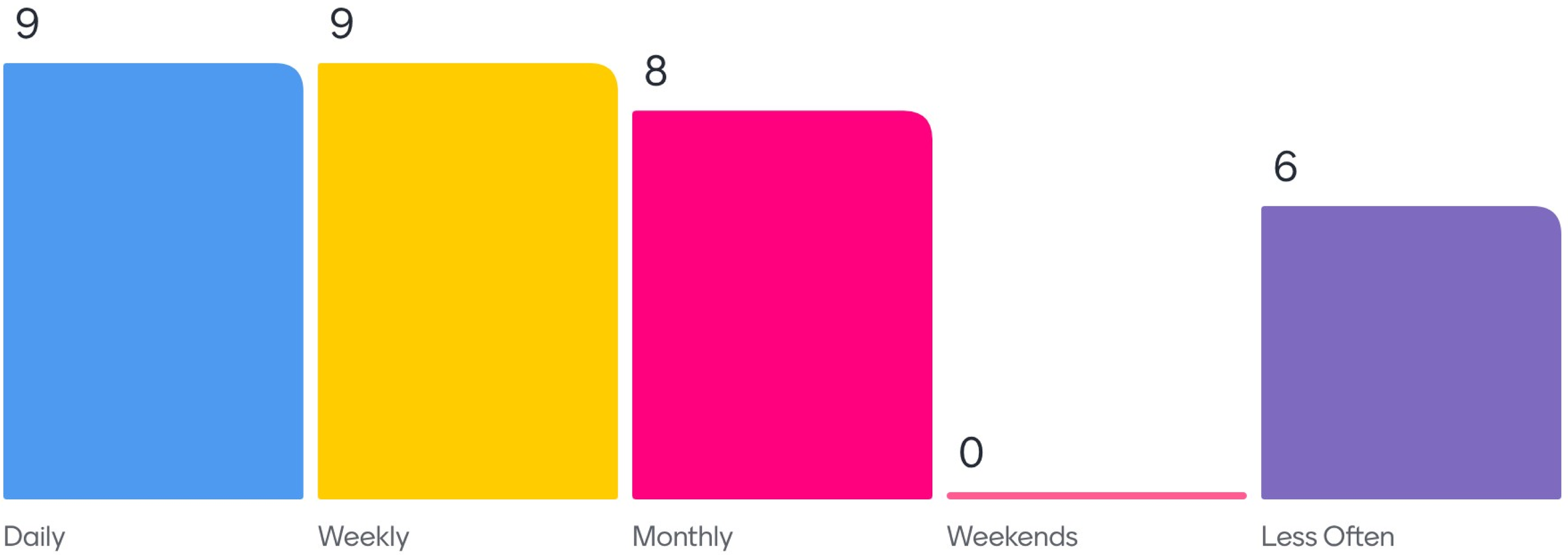
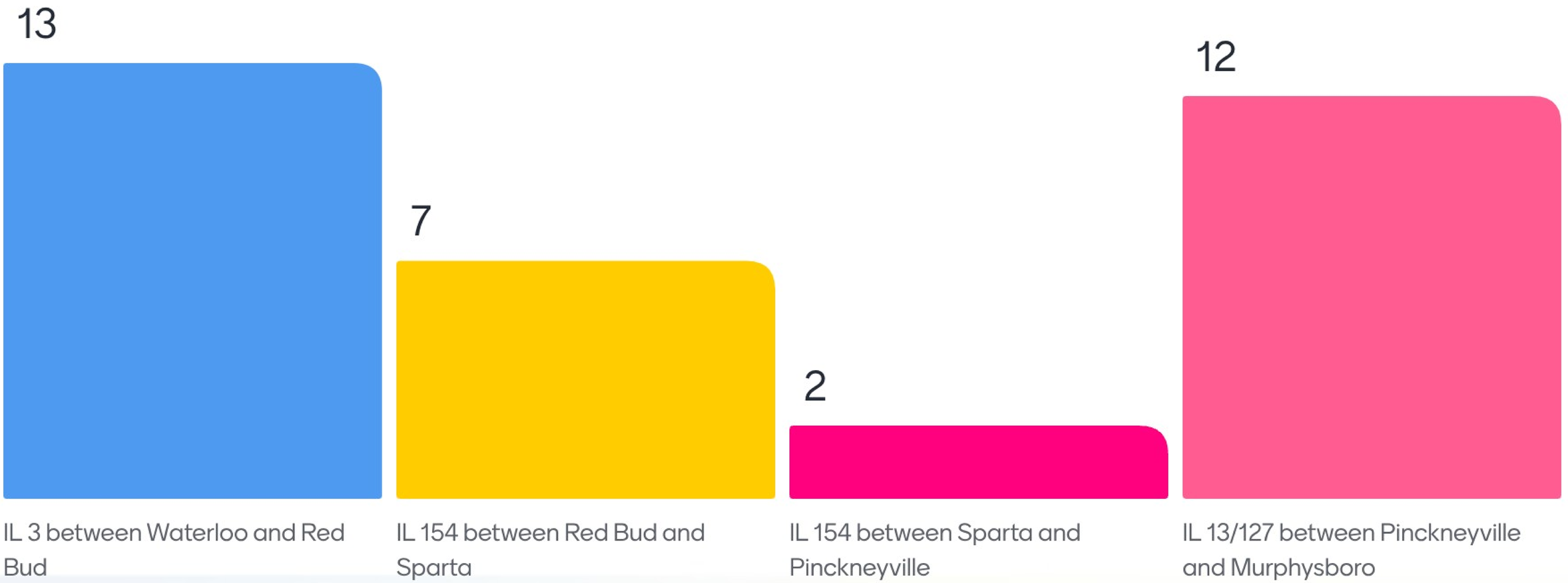
How long have you lived or worked in the study area?



How often do you use the corridor?



Which segment(s) of the corridor do you travel most frequently?



What word or phrase best represents your vision for the area for the next 20 years?

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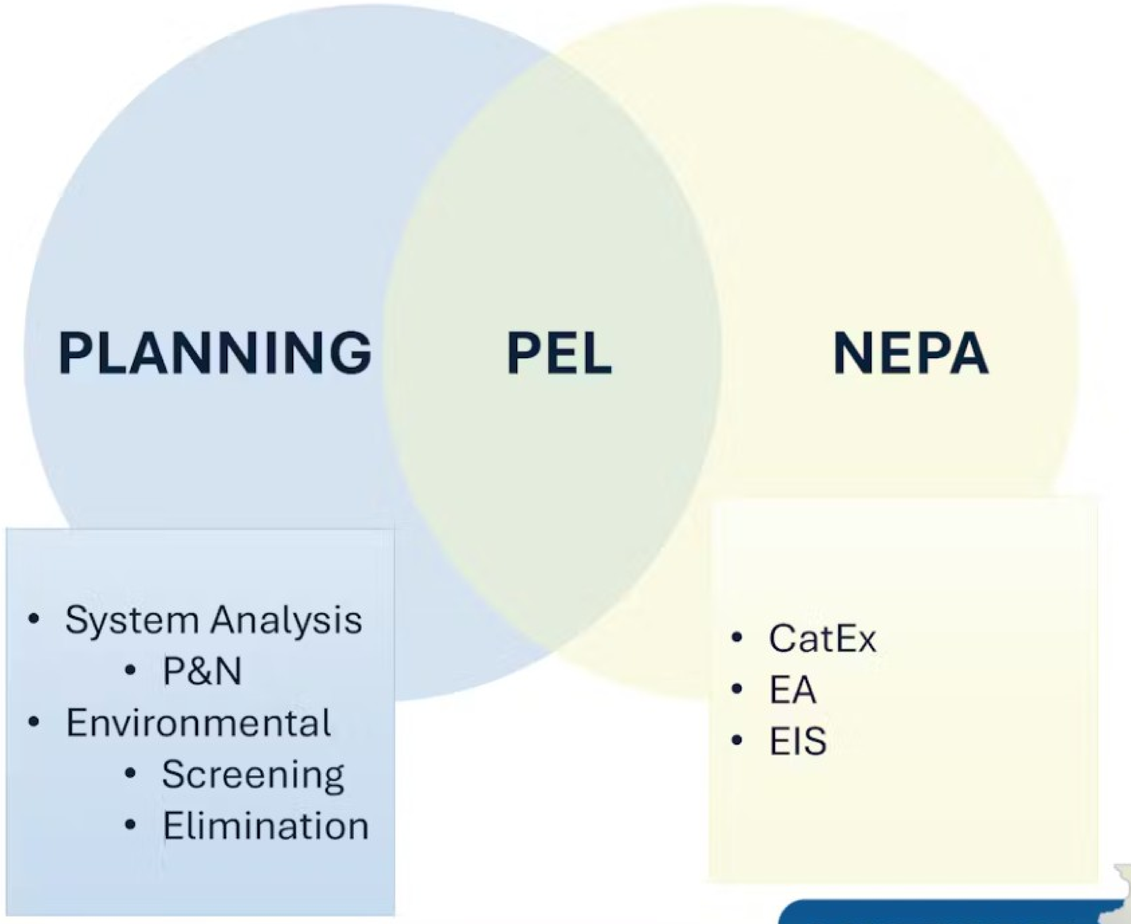
PEL Study Overview

Jamy Lyne (KEG) – Speaker
Jeff Young (HDR) – Speaker

What is a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study?

- Collaborative and integrated approach
  - Considers environmental, community, and economic goals early in the process, before NEPA
- Information, analysis, and products during transportation planning
  - Adopted or incorporated by reference into the environmental review process (NEPA)
- Involves FHWA and Other Regulatory Agencies
  - NEPA Merger Meetings
- Apply to federal facilities or projects eligible for federal funding



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To help satisfy latest NEPA requirements

Why Conduct a PEL Study?

- CEQ requirements for NEPA:
  - NOI requirements
  - Time limits – EIS 2 years; EA 1 year
  - Page limits – EIS 150-300; EA 75
  - Single NEPA Document
- Benefits:
  - Develop products for NEPA
  - Uncover issues early
  - Help with funding, implementation planning and early actions
  - Build project support and agency relationships

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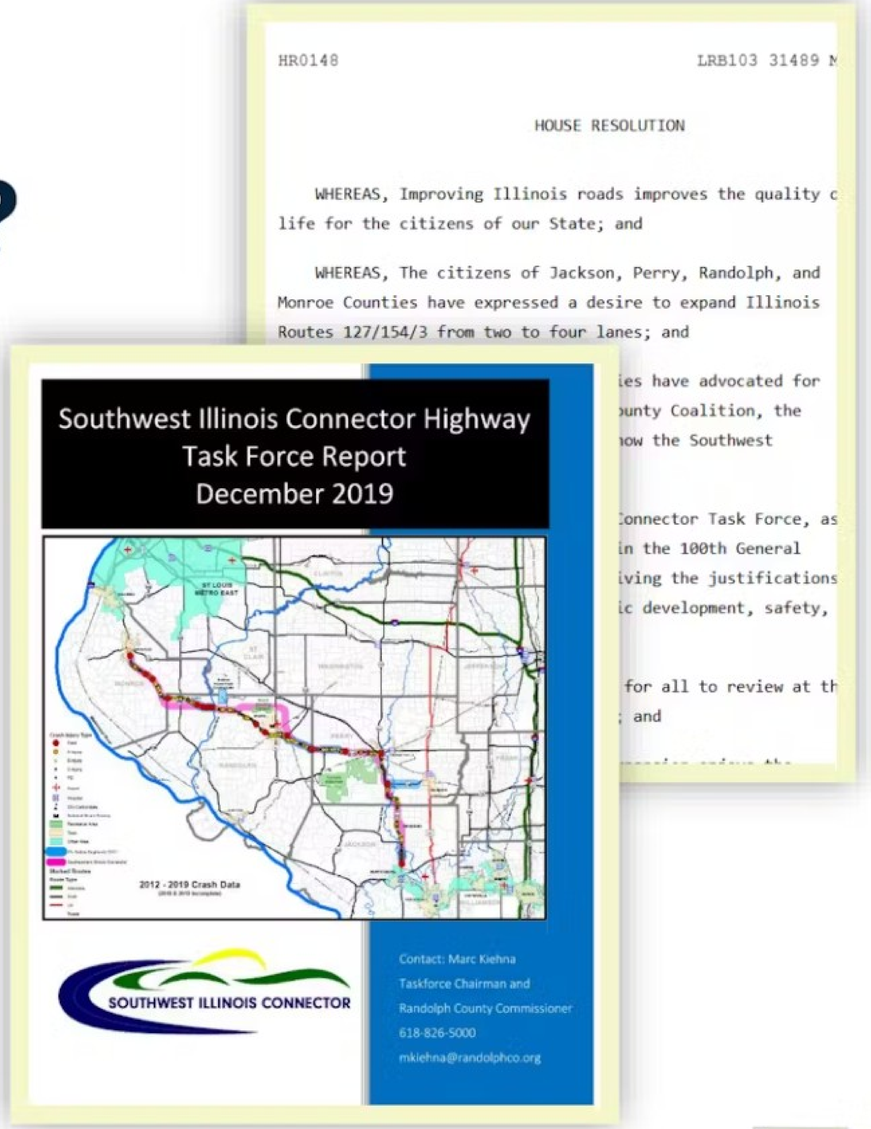
Why is PEL a Good Process for the Southwest Connector?

- Utilizes and draws from previous studies including the Southwest Illinois Connector Highway Task Force Report (2019) and the EA from Pinckneyville to Murphysboro (2007).
- Helps define what the corridor community wants and needs before starting NEPA
- Smaller or discreet projects w/in larger can be broken out and advanced
- Supports development of project definition and stakeholder support, even though construction funds are not yet programmed



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What is the PEL Study Process?

Develop Purpose & Need

- Define project location & goals
- Consistent project vision
- Identify major concerns

Develop & Evaluate Range of Alternatives

- Eliminate unreasonable alternatives
- Identify elements for further study or NEPA evaluation

Alternatives to be Carried Forward

- Evaluate remaining alternatives
- Consistency determination

NEPA

- Subsequent EA/EIS

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Screening Phases

Full Range of Alternatives

Feasibility and Purpose & Need

- Evaluates against needs and fatal flaws
- Assesses environmental constraints
- Eliminates alternatives that do not satisfy Purpose & Need

Initial Alternatives

- Evaluates Traffic and Travel Patterns
- Evaluates against needs and additional considerations

Refined Alternatives

- Analyzes alternatives against potential impacts
- Evaluates performance against detailed criteria

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Project Phases

PEL Study
Planning & Alternatives Identification

Phase I
NEPA & Preliminary Design

Phase II
Detailed Design & Permitting

Phase III
ROW & Construction

ADVOCACY & ENGAGEMENT

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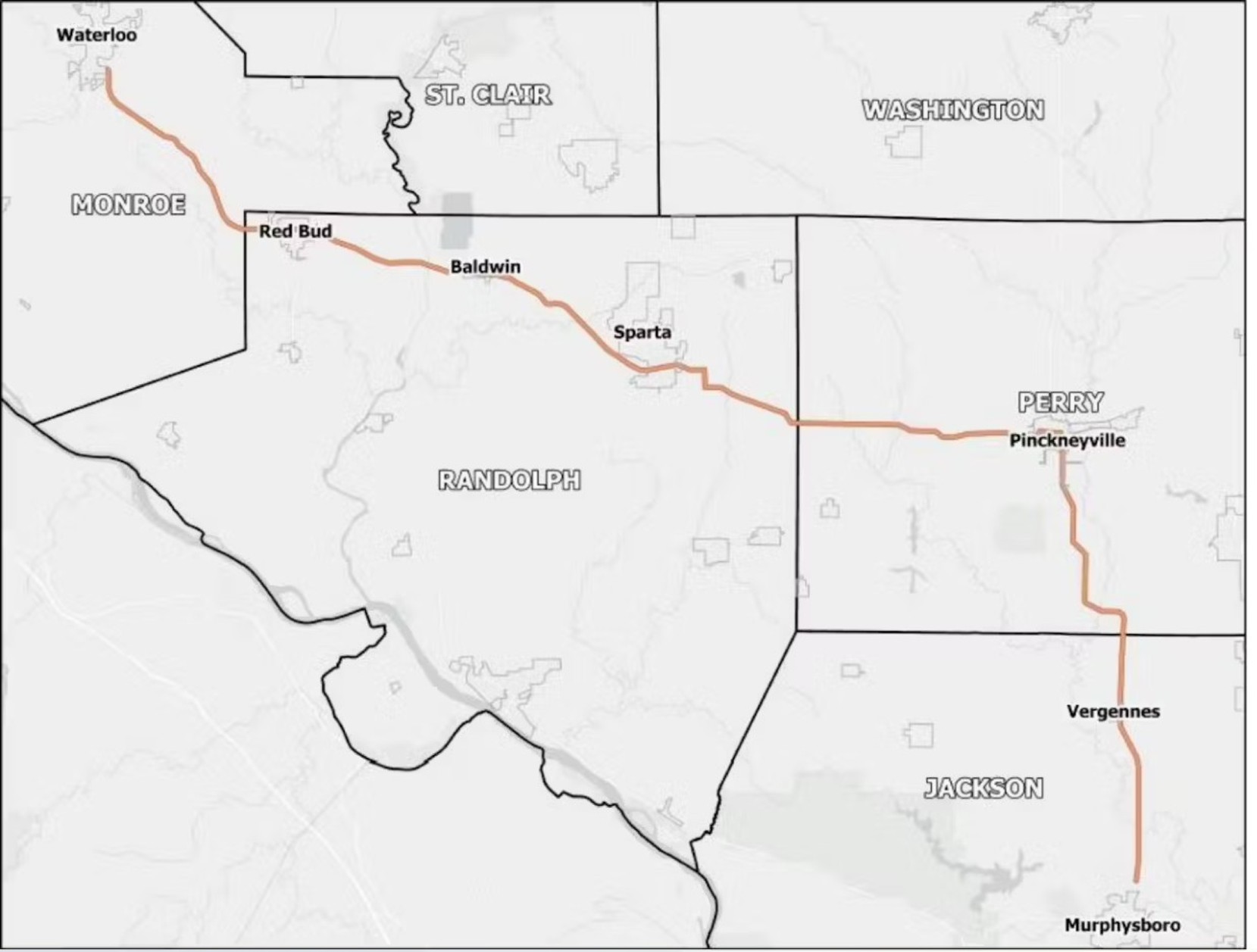

Study Area

- Two IDOT Districts (8 & 9)
- Four Counties
  (Monroe, Randolph, Perry, Jackson)
- Seven Municipalities
  (Waterloo, Red Bud, Baldwin, Sparta, Pinckneyville, Vergennes, Murphysboro)
- **IL 3, IL 154, IL 13, IL 127**

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Study Timeline

- **March – May:** Data Collection
- **June 2025:** CAG #1 – Problem Statement
- **Summer 2025:** Virtual Public Information Event #1 (On-Demand)
- **Fall 2025:** CAG #2 – Purpose and Need
- **Winter 2025/2026:** CAG #3 – Alternatives
- **Winter/Spring 2026:** Hybrid Public Meeting #2
- **Summer 2026**: IDOT/FHWA NEPA Merger Meeting
- **Fall 2026:** CAG #4 – Alternatives and Screening
- **Winter 2026/2027:** CAG #5 – Results of Level 2 Screening
- **Spring 2027**: Hybrid Public Meeting #3
- **Fall 2027:** IDOT/FHWA NEPA Merger Meeting
- **Fall/Winter 2027:** PEL Report

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Milestones We Are Covering Today

- Problem Statement
  - *Group Exercise #2*
- Purpose & Need
  - *Group Exercise #3*

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Existing Community Conditions

Jeff Young (HDR) – Speaker

Study Data Points

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Deep Diving Into Data

Example of what Study Team will be exploring pertaining to mobility, safety, and access

Travel Times	Congestion	Traffic Volumes	Safety Issues
Crash Severity	Crash Frequency	Economic Opportunity	Access to Employment
Access to Healthcare	Pedestrian/Bicyclist Issues	Transit Issues	Other?

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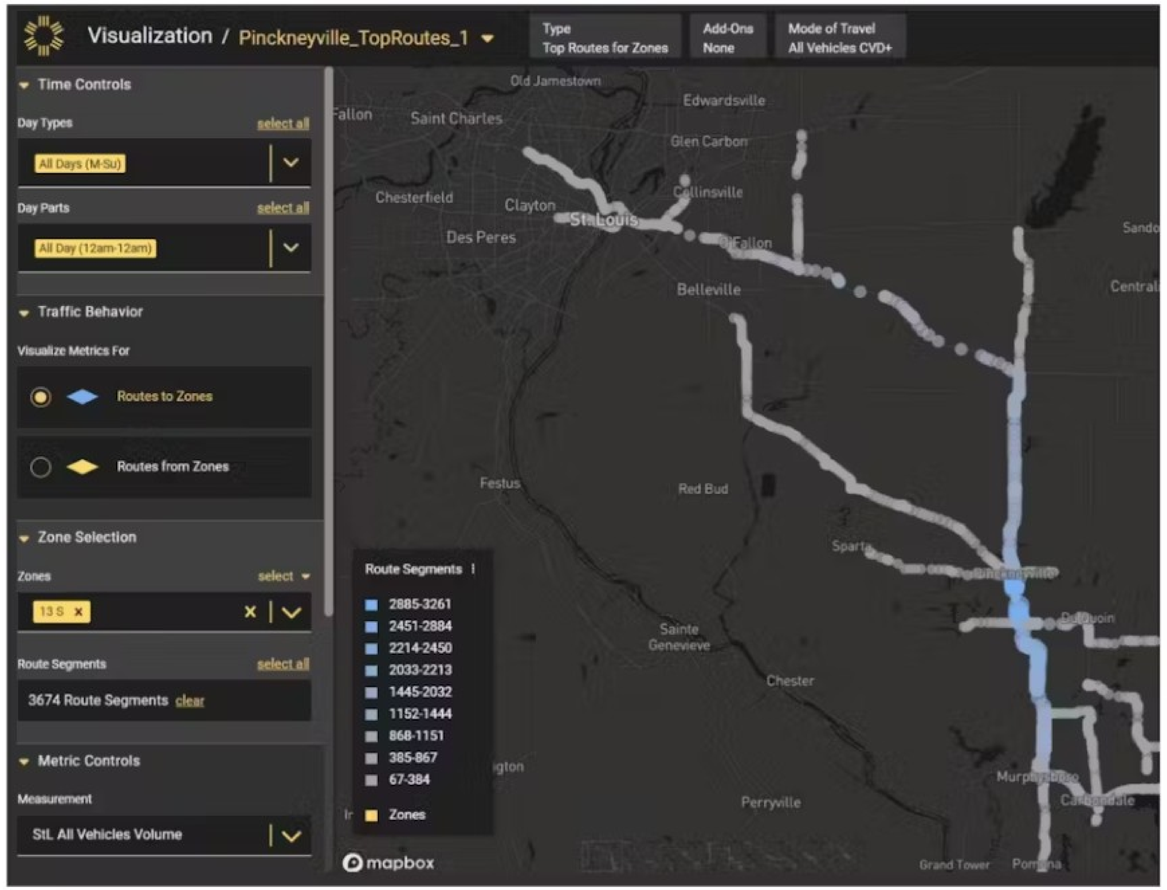
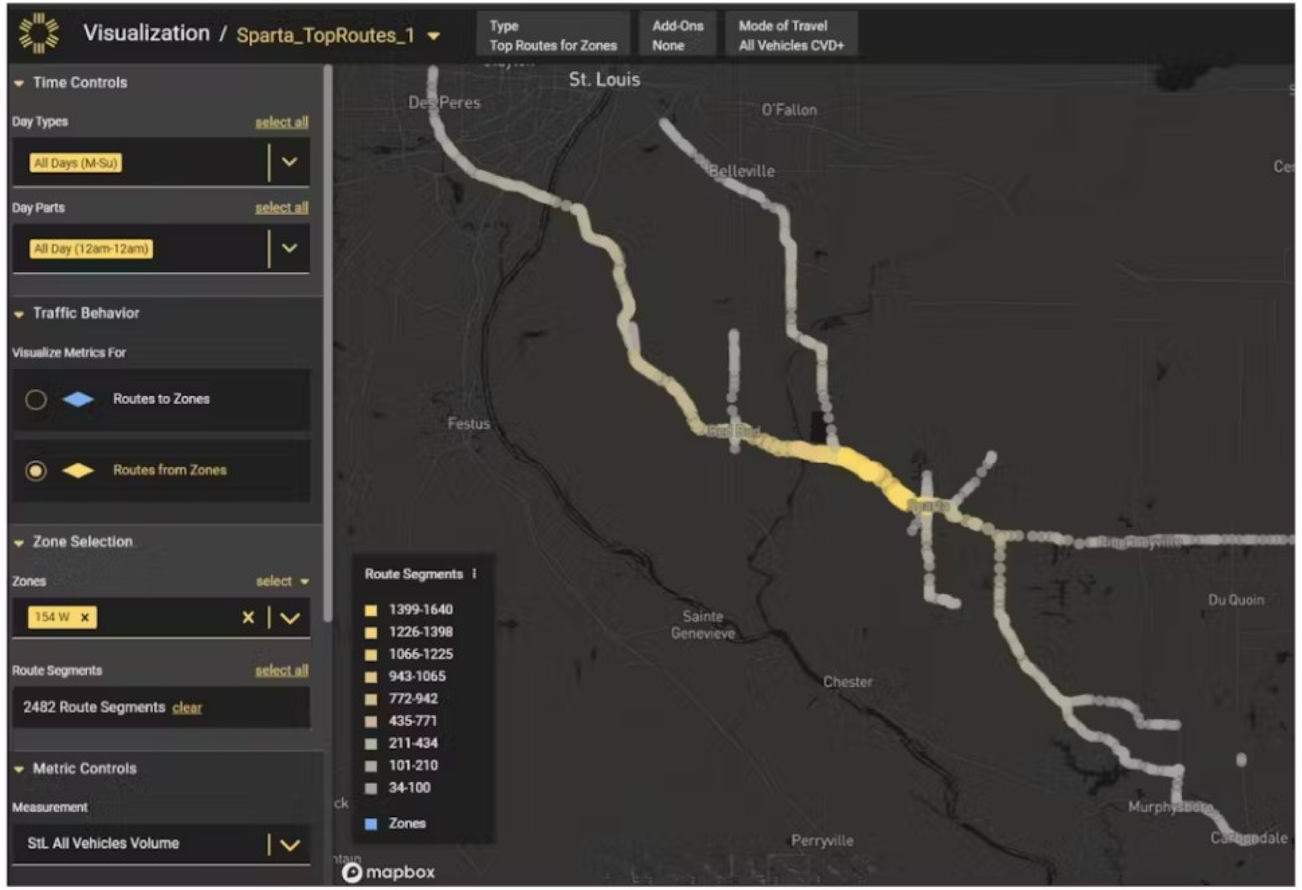
Study Data Example - StreetLight





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Group Exercise #2

Problem Statement Development

Andrew Potthast (HDR) – Speaker

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Group Exercise #2:

Problem Statement Development

- **Rose:** What is working well along the corridor? What are valued areas?
- **Thorn:** What is NOT working well along the corridor that the study team should explore?
- **Bud:** What are the potential opportunities for improvement along the corridor?

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Rose: What is working well along the corridor? What are valued areas?

Provides access to StL & Belleville/Fairview

Unsure?

Valued areas - small towns

Scenic drive

We are able to travel town to town. Old charm feeling. Farms in sight.

Better access to St. Louis

Connection between towns all be it slow.

Valued areas are the communities along the route.

Rose: What is working well along the corridor? What are valued areas?

Employment opportunities

Roads need improvement

Overall traffic levels are not super high

The small cities and farms are valued. Not much is working well. The beauty is positive.

Easy access to local area Valued areas: Downtown Red Bud

Access to charming downtowns

Its a great alternative for me to avoid I-57. From where I live I can go either way to the Metro East.

Maintain Pyramid

Rose: What is working well along the corridor? What are valued areas?

Keeping small towns

The corridor residents seem to have a shared desire for improvement. Valued areas are everywhere...charming towns, historic sites, industry, recreation.

Scenic drive across small towns

Natural environment and scenic drive

Small communities, agricultural areas

Need help

Some of the safety and intersection improvements.

Current route gets you to designated places.

Rose: What is working well along the corridor? What are valued areas?

Healthcare acces

Thorn: What is NOT working well along the corridor that the study team should explore?

Connectivity

Safety of road

The safety of the roads.

4 way stops

Slow traffic and blind spots make passing unsafe

Area lacks branding

Healthcare access

2 lane undivided highway

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Thorn: What is NOT working well along the corridor that the study team should explore?

Congestion at intersections

Y turns near Sparta

Farm traffic

Ability for traffic to flow, ability to pass. Access to four lanes for commerce.

Many no passing zones. Hard to get around fam machinery and large trucks. Heavy volumes through residential and commercial areas.

Direct access to recreational facilities

No shoulders Two lane

Road conditions storm water flooding

Thorn: What is NOT working well along the corridor that the study team should explore?

Congestion, commute times (small town traffic/farm equipment/school bus), safety

Slow traffic holds everyone up. Hard to get through all the small towns

Limited passing areas, views are obstructed due to hills and turns.

Not enough opportunities to pass slow moving traffic.

Difficult to drive, roads narrow, passing difficult, low speed

Truck trailer traffic

Slowing down through small towns

Relieve the congestion in smaller towns

Thorn: What is NOT working well along the corridor that the study team should explore?

Economic growth will not improve without the corridor. The only grow is happening in Marion on 64. Forecast what kind of growth we could wxpect.

Coal trucking route to and from Knight Hawk Coal facility to Mississippi river

School bus safety

Pedestrian traffic vs commerce traffic. Both sides are frustrating

Farm equipment slows traffic and crosses the centeline. Not enough safe passing opportunities.

Congestion of large trucks and farm equipment

Oversize load routing

4 way stop in Red Bud

Thorn: What is NOT working well along the corridor that the study team should explore?

Safety through areas near towns.

The limited amount of connectivity from one end to the next. The lack of safety improvements, including intersections. Perhaps lack of education and driver safety.

154 & Prairie Rd intersection

Through traffic must traverse & slow down through each town.

154 & Buch rd intersection

balancing economic growth with a desire to maintain rural character

Bud: What are the potential opportunities for improvement along the corridor?

Speed & efficiency

Easier access to medical facilities

New businesses

Housing expansion

Reduce town congestion, quicker commute times, better access to STL and Carbondale

Intersections

Economic growth

Growth and economic development

Bud: What are the potential opportunities for improvement along the corridor?

Intersection and wayfinding improvements.

Multimodal Ease of travel

Controlled access

Manufacturing

This study, improving travel

Better intersection

Ease of getting around

Wider shoulders with safer access

Bud: What are the potential opportunities for improvement along the corridor?

Better Roads , growth, housing

Allow more flow between pedestrian & commerce traffic

Safer roads

Multi lane divided highway

Complete the 4lane project, growth, economic development

Bringing more industry to the area

Improved traffic flow through/around towns along corridor.

Development & growth.

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Bud: What are the potential opportunities for improvement along the corridor?

Better access to STL for healthcare, airports, and recreation.

Increase travel times

The corridor itself the need to create many opportunities. The opps will follow. Improve standard of living.

Econ dev

Increase development, improve safety, eliminating congestion

Better traffic flow to/from St. Louis

Kaskaskia River

What are the specific issues or areas we should focus on when identifying opportunities to improve regional access, travel reliability, safety, etc.?

Waterloo to Red Bud to Sparta

Large trucks and farm equipment

Create a safe rural expressway

Kaskaskia River

Large shoulders

Turn radius at intersections for trucks

Speeding

4 lane roadway, wide shoulders, wide median & safe intersections

What are the specific issues or areas we should focus on when identifying opportunities to improve regional access, travel reliability, safety, etc.?

Small and large business locations

Rail crossings

Trucks, farm equipment

Safety and local accessibility to a 4 lane

Truck access, passing opportunities, safe road conditions

Intersection improvements and reduce sharp curves. Enhance traffic control.

Access to proposed and existing industrial parks

Bypassing around larger towns for large trucks and oversized loads

What are the specific issues or areas we should focus on when identifying opportunities to improve regional access, travel reliability, safety, etc.?

Getting through Sparta with equipment/semi's to Route 4

We need any improvement in infrastructure to create opps. The corridor and energy infrastructure are most important.

Town bypasses

Truck traffic

Shoulders

What improvements or areas are needed for bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit users?

Shoulders/bike paths for safety

Wider shoulders

Sidewalks in town

None

Off road paths away from traffic.

Walking and bike trails possibly connecting town to town

Wider shoulders. Park and ride lots.

Sholders

What improvements or areas are needed for bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit users?

Convenient pu/drop off areas

Many. No safe bike lanes. Almost no transit.

Wider roads with shoulders

Wider shoulders, designated pathways

Separated trail

Wide shoulders

Separate trails other than main roadways for safety.

Bike paths/sidewalks

What improvements or areas are needed for bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit users?

Safer roads, paths, sidewalks

Wide shoulders in the rural areas, and separated multi-use paths in Urban areas.

Bike paths and wider shoulders for safety.

Adequate sidewalks on both sides of the roadway with the Cities. Include share the road and or widened shoulders.

Designed designated areas for bikes and walking.

Incorporate bike lanes for both safety and outdoor economy/tourism advancement

SIDEWALKS WITHIN MUNICIPALITIES

Designated bike paths.

What improvements or areas are needed for bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit users?

Connectors to small communities

What changes or improvements would enhance communities along the corridor?

Wayfinding

Turn lanes

Industry, attractions, shopping

Walking/bike paths

Remove through traffic from communities so can enjoy small town feel.

Access to businesses

Better transportation in and out

Connectivity to a four lane highway to support economic development.

What changes or improvements would enhance communities along the corridor?

Four lane would bring people to our area, better chance to fill empty jobs

Easier Access to the communities. It's not easy to get from STL to the SI wine Trails, shawnee, or SIU

Easier access for trucking to communities could bring more industry

Ease of transportation between communities.

Easier access for local businesses

Community entrance features

Quicker access to amenities/businesses

Wider shoulders, off road paths fir bikes and walkers, truck access to smaller towns

What changes or improvements would enhance communities along the corridor?

Encourage pollinator and tree plantings for eye appeal.

Keeping small towns

Additional opportunities for businesses in the area to bring in additional business.

Manufacturing

Recreation

What industries do you see growing in the region in the next 5, 10, or 20 years?

Tourism.

Tech

Advanced manufacturing

Solar

Tourism in the Shawnee

Logistics

Solar farms, data centers

Recreation

What industries do you see growing in the region in the next 5, 10, or 20 years?

KRPD 2 Terminal

Tech

Port district growth along Kaskaskia River

Energy production, storage & distribution

Medical

Port-related industry

Manufacturing

Recreation

What industries do you see growing in the region in the next 5, 10, or 20 years?

Manufacturing.

Tech industry, alternative power

TMW

Recreation

Manufacturing

Tourism, ag, mfg

Recreation

SIUC

What industries do you see growing in the region in the next 5, 10, or 20 years?

Recreation, tourism and technology

Kaskaskia River travel

Education

Those manufacturing businesses located in Red Bud in Sparta.

Recreational opportunities

Hospitals

Manufacturing. Solar. Transportation hubs

SIU

What industries do you see growing in the region in the next 5, 10, or 20 years?

Make it easy to get to and from

How can this corridor help facilitate that growth?

Access

Access

Easier access to the region

Expand workforce pool

Provide opportunities for expansion and access

Provides major transport mechanism

Bring quicker access to the area.

More inviting, easy access.

How can this corridor help facilitate that growth?

Easy travel is much more attractive than what we have now

traffic flow

4-lane access

4 lane is used by site selectors

Could close a missing link between I-24 and StL

Safe, efficient 4 lane roadway

Employment/housing

Providing reason access from St. Louis to Marion.

How can this corridor help facilitate that growth?

Reduce travel times.

Easier access for commodities to river travel

Provide infrastructure to move product to/from areas

Easy travel

Ease travel and help with commuting between communities.

Transportation is essential to economic development

How do you envision this corridor playing a role in stimulating overall economic development, particularly in untapped areas?

Providing better access to small towns

Great access

Providing regional connectivity

Opens up real estate for easier development

Access

Ease of getting here

Access to a four lane is key to bringing business to our area

Shorter/safer/easier commute times

How do you envision this corridor playing a role in stimulating overall economic development, particularly in untapped areas?

Create Excitement for growth

Tie St Louis area/metro area to the Route 13 corridor

It would provide access to a beautiful area as well as educational opps.

Access

Proving access to interstates for faster transportation of goods and services.

It will provide opportunities not available

Easier access. Not such a chore to get there

Believe this would help the growth over next 10 years.

How do you envision this corridor playing a role in stimulating overall economic development, particularly in untapped areas?

Bringing new jobs & families to the area

Levels playing field

It will help with transportation of goods and products to the area

Adds to the Variety of transport methods

Access to natural areas in Jackson county

Lower property costs to investors

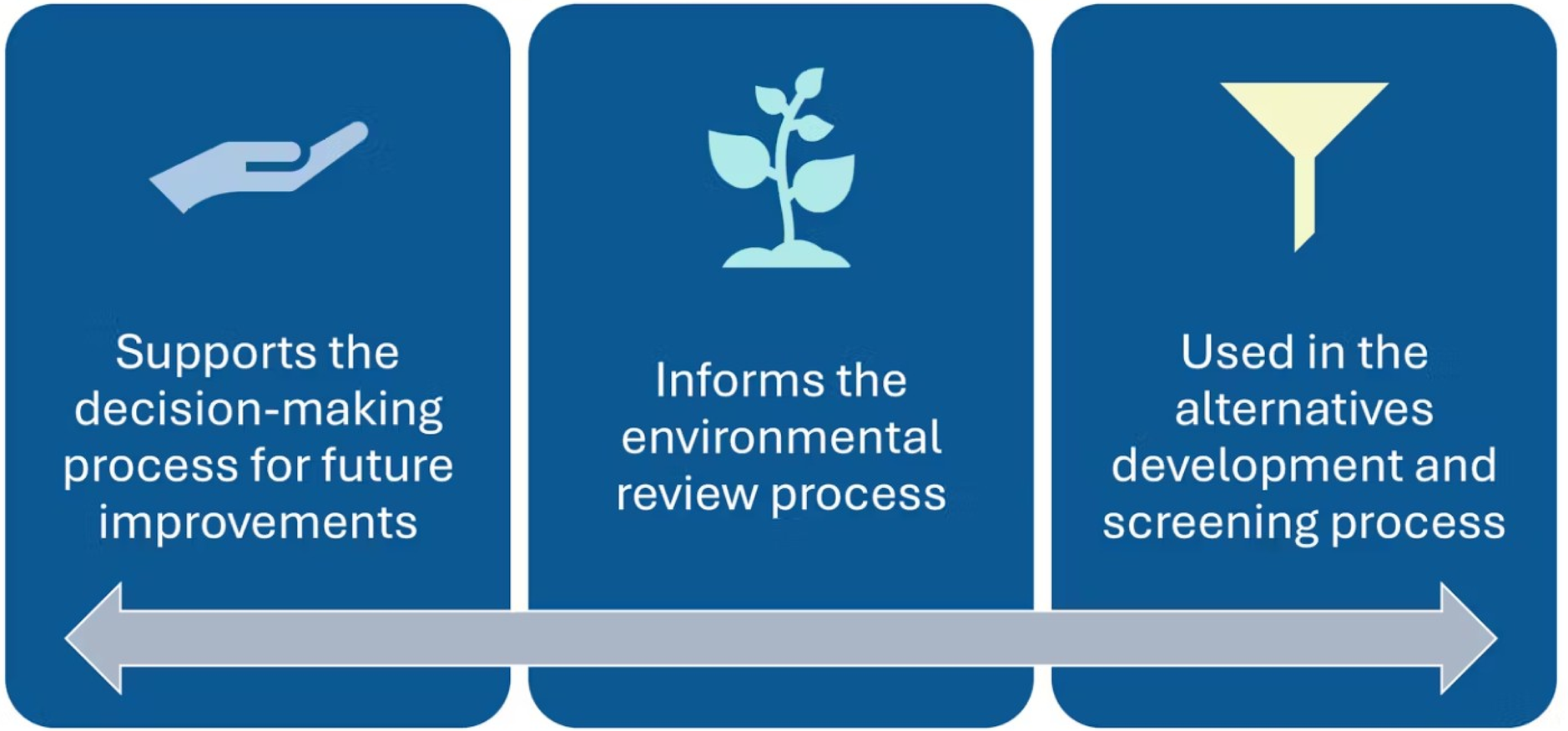
If you build it, they will come

Group Exercise #3

Purpose and Need Development

Kelly Sims (HDR) – Speaker

Purpose and Need Statement



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Group Exercise #3:

Purpose & Need Workshop

1. What ideas do you have for the purpose of the study?
   (the "why")

2. What ideas do you have for the need for the study?
   (the problems we're trying to solve)

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What ideas do you have for the purpose of the study?

Population growth We can't keep losing people

Solidify the need for the corridor with data and feedback.

Access and development

Expand use of shooting complex

Reduce travel times and accidents.

Improve access, economic dev & safety of transportation to SolL/from

Hasn't this been identified in previous studies and is this to just validate that purpose?

Identify Corridor

What ideas do you have for the purpose of the study?

Increase access, provide transit users better access to stl & carbondale, medical access, employment access, commuter access

Provide a safe and accessable route for employers and commuters .

Major route through and to southern Illinois

Review current problems with road issues for all traffic for hopes of future development in the area.

Matching people to jobs

Bring southern Illinois into the 21st century

Provide greater access opportunities, eliminate congestion, increase safety, promote economic development

Provide a safe, efficient way for all road users to get from one point to another.

What ideas do you have for the purpose of the study?

Regional connectivity in the 4 county region and STL. Better acces to healthcare providers. Quicker to access to airports.

Multi modal

More local input is needed along the corridor.

Expand access to the region but also maintain safety for the traveling public and locals

Population stabilization and improved quality of life

Indentify the need for the project

Connectivity, economic growth, community growth

Help food deserts with access to fresh food

What ideas do you have for the purpose of the study?

Determining if a four lane highway is feasible through the entire corridor, or segments of the corridor, given the existing and projected traffic volumes.

Identify each communities needs

The purpose/need this project is to improve transportation safety, mobility, and regional access along a 70-mile corridor connecting the Greater St. Louis area to communities in Southern Illinois.

Environmental protection. Community no severance.

Provide safe movements for large darm equipment

Economic growth

What ideas do you have for needs in the corridor?

4 way stop in Red Bud

Trucking, farm equipment

Y intersection in eden

Improved intersections

Avoid the 4 way intersection in Red Bud

Sparta 154 to Rt. 4

Stop signs, y curves, trucking/farm/amish transportation

Energy infrastructure
Healthcare access

What ideas do you have for needs in the corridor?

Divided highway

Access to the port

Bridge crossings

Intersection improvements, such as roundabouts.

Remove main through traffic through Pinckneyville.

More opportunities to safely pass slow moving traffic.

Il 154 and Conant Rd

Improved intersections

What ideas do you have for needs in the corridor?

Turn radius at intersections not wide enough

Bypass Sparta, Red Bud for faster travel

4 lane access from C'dale to I-64

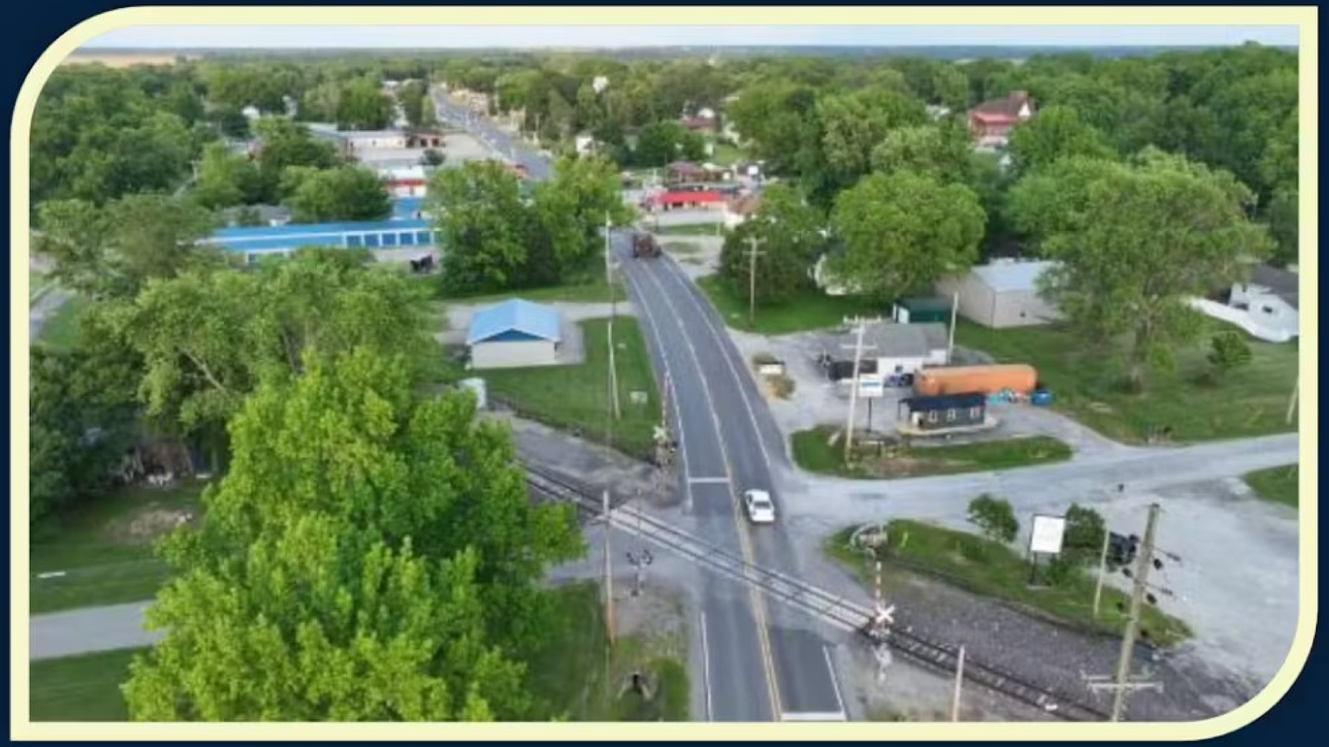
Address any sharp curves or high accident locations.

Enhance vehicle and farm equipment conflicts.

Round abouts to help ease with accidents at stop light or stop sign intersections

Minimize intersections

Engagement Overview

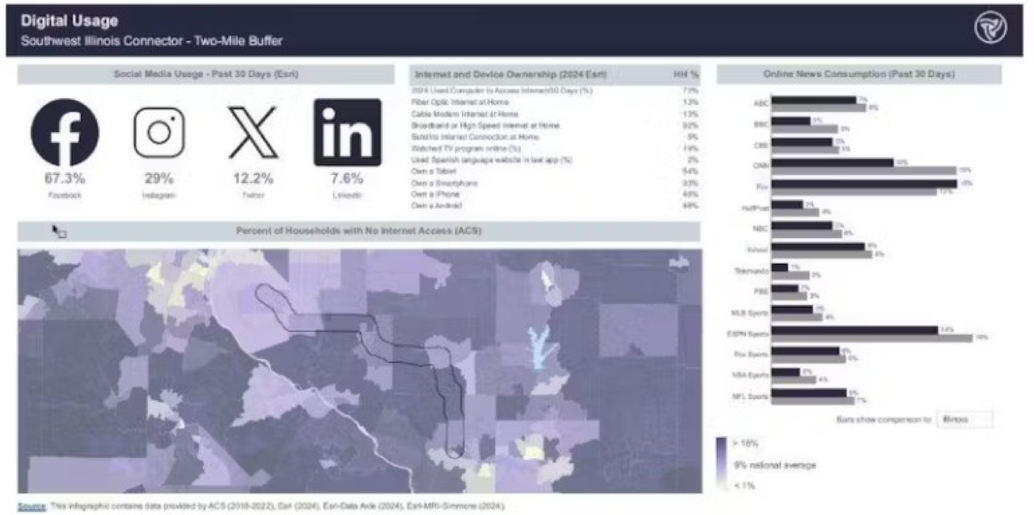


Scott Manning (HDR) – Speaker

Public Engagement

Keys to Success

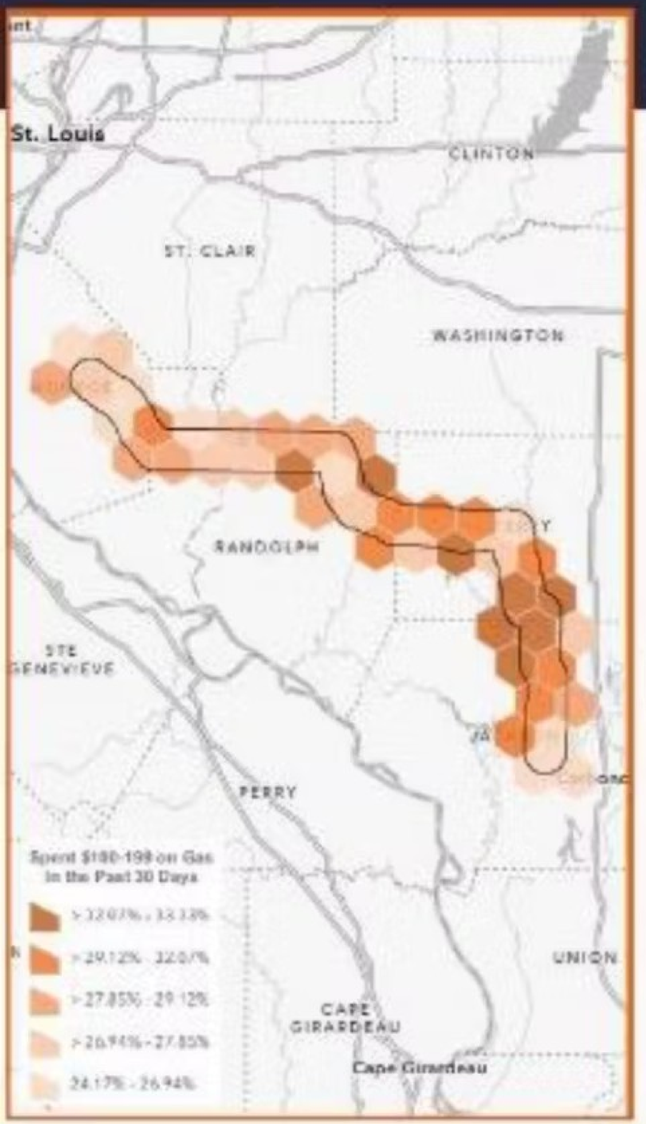
- Extensive Stakeholder Engagement
  - Institutions | Partner Agencies
- Equitable Engagement
  - Many platforms | Advisory Groups
  - Meet people where they live/where they are online
- Project Identity
  - Messaging benefits



SOUTHWEST CONNECTOR

Community Profile

Southwest Illinois Connector - Two-Mile Buffer



Population and Households (ACS)

28,476	12,316
Total Population	Total Households
$57,559	13%
Median Household Income	Below the Poverty Level
14%	4%
No Internet Access	Pop 65+ Without A Computer

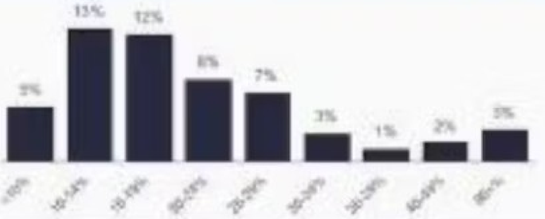
Employment (ACS)

4%	1,251	12,571
Unemployed Age 16+ (Esri)	Businesses	Employees
18.9%	29.5%	51.6%
Services	Blue Collar	White Collar

Race/Ethnicity (ACS)

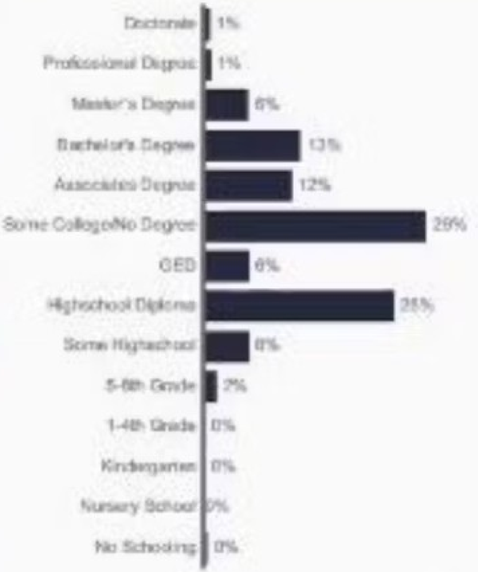
Percentages should add up to 100% without including Hispanic or Latino. People of Hispanic or Latino origin may be of any race group(s).

Mortgage as Percent of Salary (ACS)

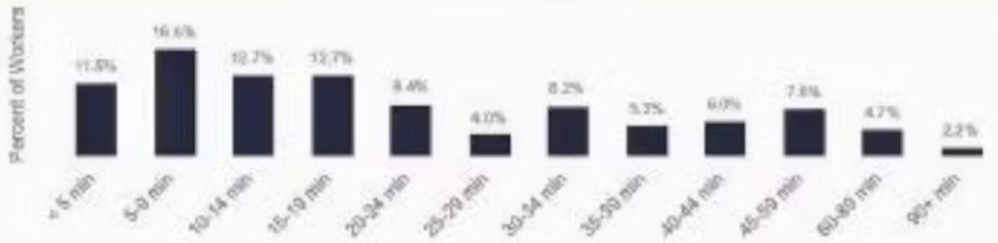


Educational Attainment (ACS)

Population Age 25+



Travel Time to Work (ACS)



Source: This infographic contains data provided by ACS (2018-2022), Esri (2024), Esri-Data Axle (2024), Esri-MRI-Simmons (2024).

SOUTHWEST CONNECTOR

Digital Usage

Southwest Illinois Connector - Two-Mile Buffer

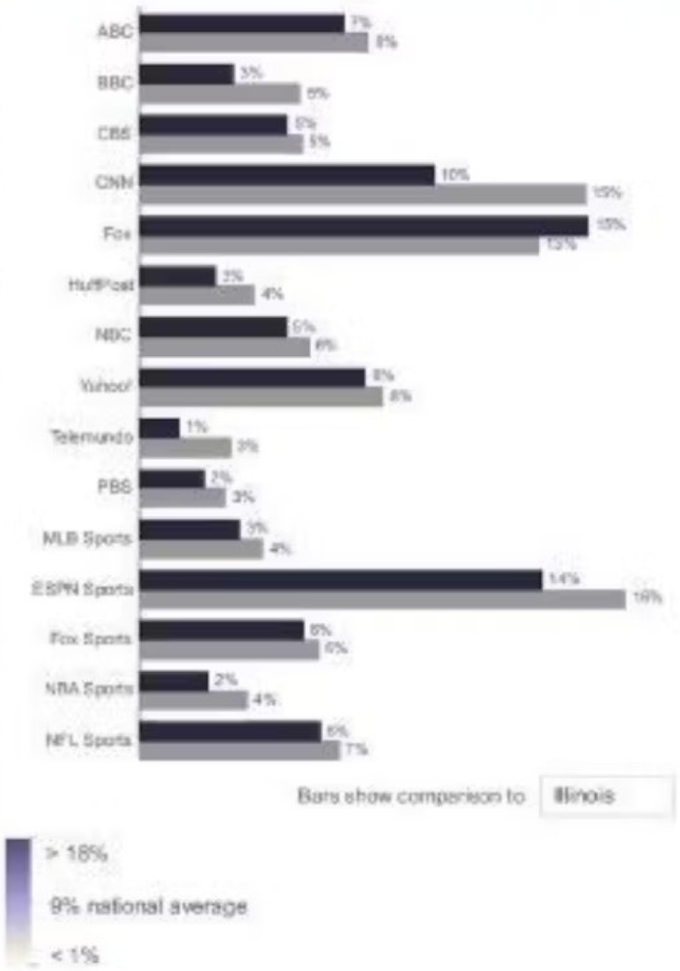
Social Media Usage - Past 30 Days (Esri)

Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	LinkedIn
67.3%	29%	12.2%	7.6%

Internet and Device Ownership (2024 Esri)

	HH %
2024 Used Computer to Access Internet(30 Days (%)	72%
Fiber Optic Internet at Home	13%
Cable Modem Internet at Home	13%
Broadband or High Speed Internet at Home	92%
Satellite Internet Connection at Home	5%
Watched TV program online (%)	19%
Used Spanish language website in last app (%)	2%
Own a Tablet	54%
Own a Smartphone	93%
Own a iPhone	48%
Own a Android	46%

Online News Consumption (Past 30 Days)



Percent of Households with No Internet Access (ACS)

Source: This infographic contains data provided by ACS (2018-2022), Esri (2024), Esri-Data Axle (2024), Esri-MRI-Simmons (2024).

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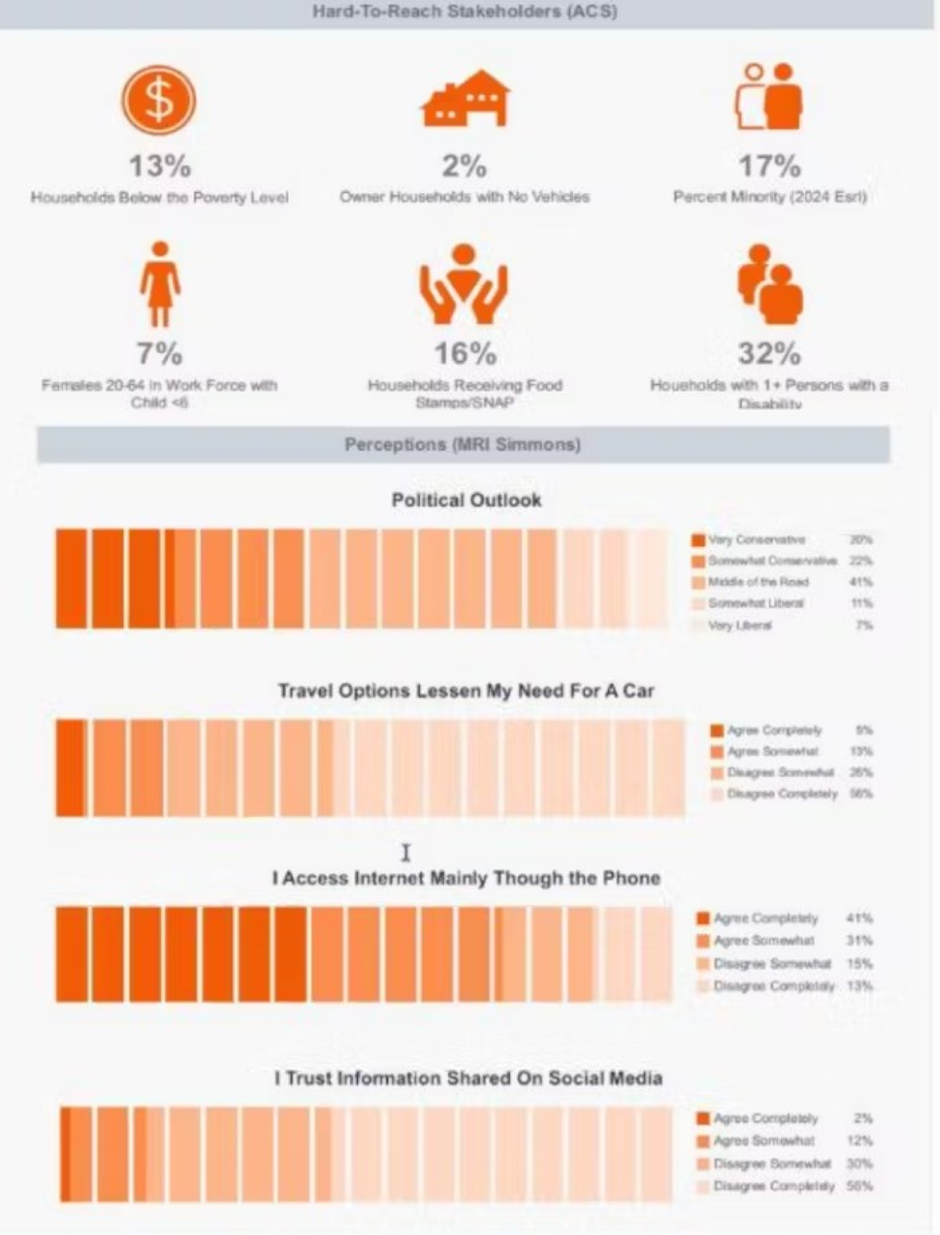

Public Engagement

Tools

- Project website with visual identity
- Social Media
- Online surveys
- Community Advisory Groups (CAG)
- Project Working Groups (PWG)
- Public Meetings and Self-Paced Virtual Meetings
- One-on-one meetings
- Pop-up Events
- Mail and e-mail
- Handouts

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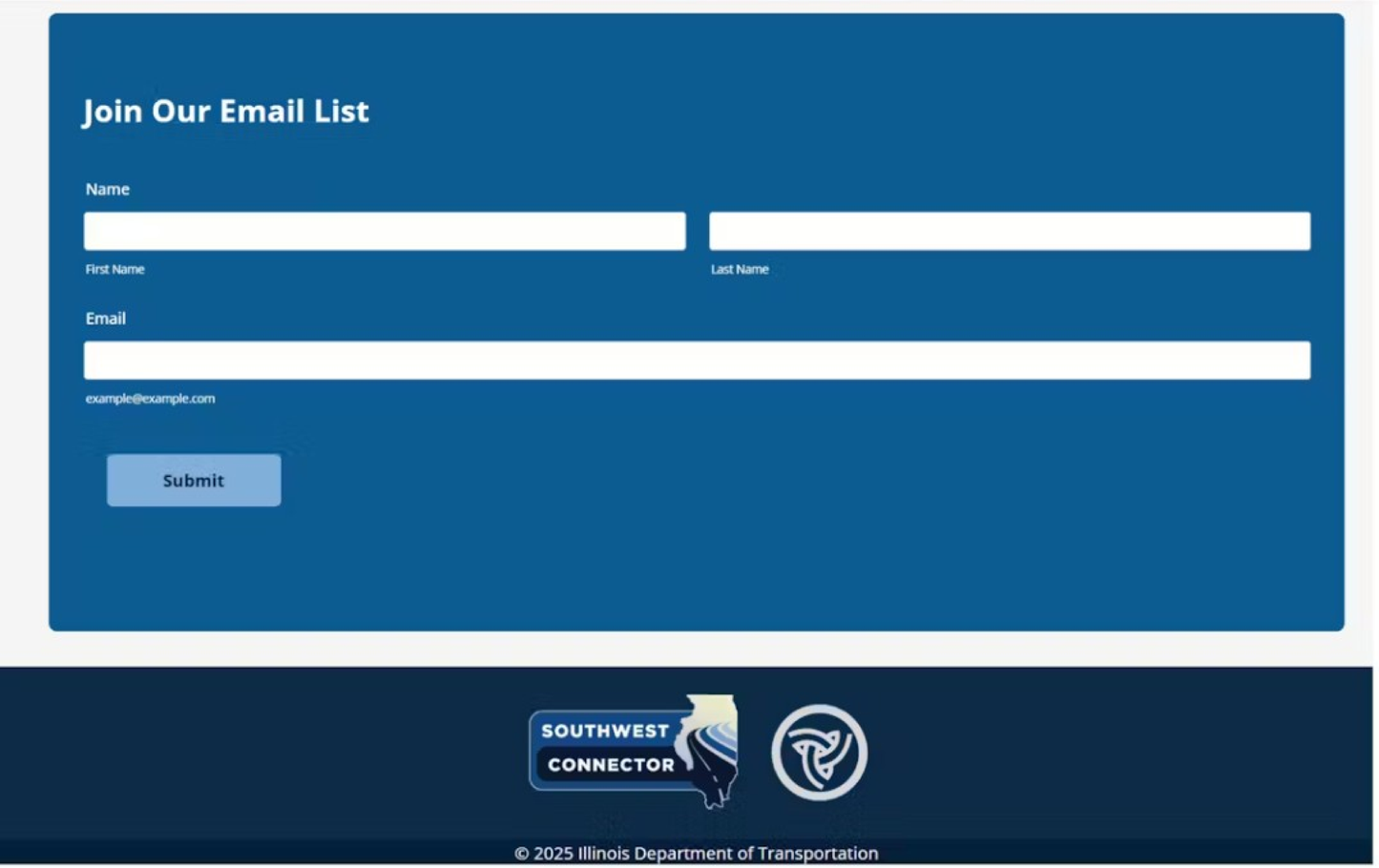
Public Engagement - Study Website



https://southwestconnector.com/

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Next Steps

Jeff Young (HDR) – Speaker

Next Steps:

- CAG – **Spread The Word!**
- Study Team – Continue Data Collection; Prepare for On-Demand Public Event; Prepare for CAG Meeting #2

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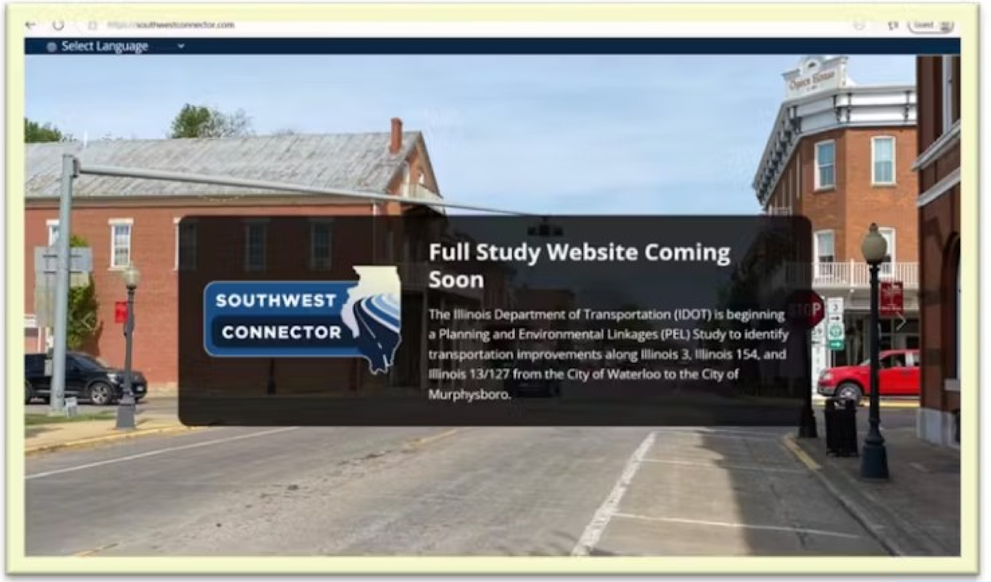
How to Reach Us

- southwestconnector.com
- contact@southwestconnector.com



SOUTHWEST CONNECTOR

Glossary

- CAG – Community Advisory Group
- CEQ – Council of Environmental Quality
- FHWA – Federal Highway Administration
- NEPA – National Environmental Policy Act
- NOI – Notice of Intent
- PEL – Planning and Environmental Linkages
- PWG – Project Working Group
- P&N – Purpose and Need

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