

## Avon Interchange: Questions and Answers

NOACA staff has developed answers to some of the most common questions about the proposed interchange at I-90 and Nagel Road in Avon and the NOACA Board requested Impact Analysis study.

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## General Questions

### What is the issue?

The city of Avon, Ohio, has proposed the construction of a new interchange on I-90 at Nagel Road in Lorain County and has hired professional consultants to prepare a Major Investment Study (MIS) for the project. The proposed interchange is to be constructed using local funds; federal funds are not being requested. Since the proposed project is located on the federal highway system, it is subject to the metropolitan transportation planning process. NOACA is the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) serving a five-county region that includes Lorain County. Therefore, the NOACA Governing Board must decide if this project should be added to the region's transportation plan, [Connections 2030](#).

Due to the complexity of this proposal, the NOACA Governing Board, in February 2007, called for a study to determine the proposed project's impact on surrounding communities, Lorain County and Northeast Ohio and, thereby on NOACA's Planning Principles and Transportation Plan Goals. NOACA's Executive Committee was charged with the responsibility of seeking proposals, reviewing responses and selecting a qualified consultant to conduct the study. This process was

completed by May 2007, a consultant is under contract, and the study is currently on schedule for completion in September 2007.

### **Why is NOACA doing this?**

The NOACA Governing Board is undertaking the Impact Analysis because it would like to understand the issues more thoroughly before taking action on the proposal. When studying major project proposals such as this, it's important to consider the impacts on the community (Avon), Lorain County, the area most directly impacted by the proposal (eastern Lorain and western Cuyahoga counties) and the region.

Other major projects, such as the Innerbelt, typically have an economic impact analysis built in, although, as stated previously, this study appears to be unique.

### **What is needed in the case of the Avon interchange?**

In February 2007, the NOACA Governing Board unanimously requested a study that would analyze the impacts of the proposed interchange in relation to NOACA's principles and planning goals. The study will analyze the impact the proposed interchange will have on Avon, Lorain County, the area most directly impacted by the proposal (eastern Lorain and western Cuyahoga counties) and the region and relate that impact to NOACA's Planning Principles and Transportation Plan Goals.

### **Why is this Impact Analysis being undertaken at this time?**

In late 2006, the city of Avon asked NOACA to amend its Transportation Plan to include the Avon interchange project. Most of the information necessary to process the request was received at NOACA on February 8, 2007, after which the NOACA Governing Board requested this study.

Below is a summary of the work NOACA staff has done so far:

- **February 2007:** After the February 9 Governing Board meeting, staff conducted research in several areas by contacting the American Planning Association and other agencies. Staff reviewed materials and conducted conference calls, but was unable to find a study of the impact of a single interchange in relationship to a set of regional principles and/or goals. The staff members' analysis of the situation and the advice they received enabled them to develop a draft scope of services for the study requested by the Governing Board at its February 9 meeting and that would deliver the products that would meet the Governing Board's needs in a timely manner.
- **March 2007:** On March 9 before the Governing Board meeting, NOACA's Executive Committee reviewed a draft resolution requesting authority to oversee the Avon Interchange Impact Analysis Study, the request for proposals (RFP) process, and execute and administer the contract. At the March 9 Governing Board meeting that followed, the Board adopted the resolution proposed by the Executive Committee.

On March 16, 2007, an RFP package was mailed to consultants and posted on NOACA's Web site. Legal notices announcing the RFP were also placed in local newspapers.

NOACA staff also continued to analyze and review the transportation information provided by Avon on February 8, and presented the information to the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) on April 20.

- **April 2007:** At the April 13 Governing Board meeting, NOACA staff reported that RFPs had been received by the April 10 deadline. The Executive Committee reviewed and scored the submissions by its April 27 deadline to report its decision to the Governing Board on May 11.
- **May 2007:** At the May 11 Governing Board meeting, the Executive Committee announced that the consulting firm of D.B. Hartt, Inc., in association with subcontractors Silverlode and

Oxbow Engineering, has been retained to conduct the Avon Interchange Impact Analysis Study.

**Is NOACA treating the Avon Interchange project differently from other projects?**

All proposed projects are processed through NOACA committees, the public and the Governing Board. Simple projects take approximately three months to process, while complex projects can take longer due to the many issues involved. So in this sense, the Avon interchange is not being treated differently.

But, this complex project is in fact different than any project reviewed by NOACA in the past because it proposes to add an interchange to the Interstate highway system using non-federal funds. Other interchanges that have been built using federal funds took more than a dozen years to plan for and construct. This proposed project is also somewhat different because the city of Avon has asked the Governing Board to advance the project as soon as possible.

**Is NOACA's decision the final decision?**

No. An Interchange Justification Study must be approved by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and an Air Quality Conformity Analysis must be approved by FHWA, Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The city of Avon is doing the Justification Study, and NOACA staff will do the Air Quality Conformity Analysis if the Governing Board gives the go-ahead on the proposed project. The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) is assessing the technical analysis related to the Justification Study in preparation for FHWA review. ODOT will most likely need to amend the State Transportation Improvement Program if the NOACA Governing Board approves the project.

**Will everyone abide by the final result?**

With a 38-member Governing Board, there will likely be differing opinions, and this can be beneficial because divergent opinions and perspectives sometimes help the Governing Board reach better conclusions and decisions. The NOACA Governing Board has had to make difficult decisions in the past, and has always reached consensus. These consensus agreements have been complied with, and NOACA fully expects this will occur in this situation.

**Is there an opportunity for compromise?**

Open discussion and compromise have, in the past, been beneficial to reaching many regionally significant decisions. It may be too early in the process to determine if compromise will become necessary for the NOACA Governing Board to reach a decision on this proposal.

**What is the relationship between the NOACA staff and NOACA Governing Board?**

The NOACA Governing Board *is* NOACA. These 38 public officials, most of whom are locally elected, are the decision-makers and policy setters for NOACA. The Governing Board is assisted by technical committees such as the Transportation Advisory Committee. The staff works to provide the Governing Board and technical committees with solid data and analyses to make informed decisions and policies.

Draft plans, reports, technical memos and other technical work prepared by the staff are listed in the Governing Board's annual Overall Work Program, which directs staff work. Developing these documents requires an internal peer review process. Sometimes, documents are distributed outside the agency for peer review. It is important to stress, however, that no document becomes a NOACA product or policy until it is officially approved or adopted by the Governing Board.

**Who is on the Executive Committee?**

The Executive Committee includes:

- Robert N. Brown, Director of Planning for the city of Cleveland and current NOACA Governing Board President;
- Mary E. Samide, President of the Geauga County Board of Commissioners;

- William M. Grace, Mayor of the city of Elyria;
- James R. Gills, P.E., P.S., Lake County Engineer;
- Betty C. Blair, Commissioner on the Lorain County Board of Commissioners;
- Frank Jackson, Mayor of the city of Cleveland;
- Peter Lawson Jones, Commissioner on the Cuyahoga County Board of Commissioners;
- Robert E. Aufuldish, Commissioner on the Lake County Board of Commissioners; and
- Stephen D. Hambley, Commissioner on the Medina County Board of Commissioners.

The makeup of the Executive Committee is based on the Agency's code of regulations. The Executive Committee must include Governing Board officers, the mayor of the largest city in the region and at least one commissioner from each county.

In the regular course of carrying out their duties as public officials, all of these individuals have overseen the development and issuance of RFPs, the selection of consultants and the monitoring of consultants' progress.

#### **What is the timetable?**

The contract and scope of services states that the consultant will complete the impact analysis in time for the September 2007 Governing Board meeting. At the May 2007 Governing Board meeting, the Governing Board President announced that the study was on [schedule](#).

## **Questions Related to the Impact Analysis Study**

#### **Why can't NOACA's Transportation Model be used for the Impact Analysis?**

The model uses population and employment data provided by the state of Ohio, but does not forecast economic conditions. NOACA's travel demand model is a state-of-the-practice tool that is being used to forecast future traffic conditions for this proposed project. For example, NOACA's forecasts are essential to ensure that the traffic on all roads adjacent to the proposed interchange will travel smoothly.

#### **Can't the staff do the Impact Analysis?**

NOACA staff continues to analyze the transportation impacts of the proposed interchange. NOACA staff has analyzed the economic impacts of infrastructure proposals, but based on the complexities of this project, the Governing Board decided it would be best to hire a consultant to do the work, especially given the timeframe requested. Oversight of the study by the Executive Committee will ensure objectivity.

#### **What results can be expected?**

It is impossible to predict the results of a complex technical study, but the contract includes progress updates and presentations so the Governing Board may stay informed. It is also important to keep in mind that the results of any study relying on modeling and forecasting methodologies have limitations. For example, even though the Federal Reserve attempts to forecast the nation's economy, no forecast is perfect.

#### **How do I know the study will be unbiased?**

The study is being overseen by the Governing Board's Executive Committee, which contains representatives of all the five counties. Additionally, the independent consultant hired is expected to abide by standard code of ethics ensuring objectivity.

#### **How much will the study cost?**

The NOACA Governing Board authorized up to \$100,000 for the study.

#### **Could the money spent for the study be better used elsewhere?**

The money spent for the study is federal planning money, and it cannot be spent for any purpose other than planning.

## **Questions Related to the RFP**

### **What is an RFP?**

An RFP is a request for proposals. An RFP is an invitation for private consultants to submit their proposals for work to be done. Generally, when a public agency such as NOACA commissions studies, they must request competitive proposals from qualified consultants. An RFP defines the work that is being requested but allows potential consultants the freedom to specify the approach/methodology they will use to accomplish the work.

### **What is a scope of services?**

A scope of services is a listing of services/products the consultant is to provide. It encourages consultants to be creative and to propose the methodology or approach they think would be the most beneficial.

### **How was the scope of services for the RFP developed?**

NOACA staff first conducted research through the American Planning Association and other agencies and organizations throughout the country. Staff members were unable to find a comparable study on the economic impact of a single interchange in relationship to a set of area/regional principles and goals. Their analysis of the situation and the advice they received, however, enabled them to develop a scope of services that they think will deliver the products the Governing Board requested.