

SUMMARY

Genesee County Freight and Connectivity Study

Prepared for:

**Genesee County
Metropolitan Planning Commission**

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Summary

Introduction

The concept of a Genesee County Freight and Connectivity Study has evolved from the continuing thrust of the Partners for Progress Program to meet the challenges of economic revitalization. This study is timely, given the recent completion of the Genesee County Regional Transportation Plan and the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. Added to that are the position of the region as the hub of three interstates, an international airport, and a variety of rail lines with an abundance of development/redevelopment opportunities. But, there are a number of connectivity problems that can cause frequent travel delays, confusion for vacationers, and other general economic impacts that lessen the attractiveness of the region.

The Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) has recently been updated to serve as a blueprint for the development of land and transportation infrastructure that can attract to and keep businesses and residents in the county. Managing and maintaining the current infrastructure is high on the priority list, while adding lanes of highway is recognized as a challenge. Nonetheless, an inventory of knowledgeable people in the public and private sectors indicates very few question a core objective of the Freight and Connectivity Study, i.e. to connect I-475 to U.S. 23.

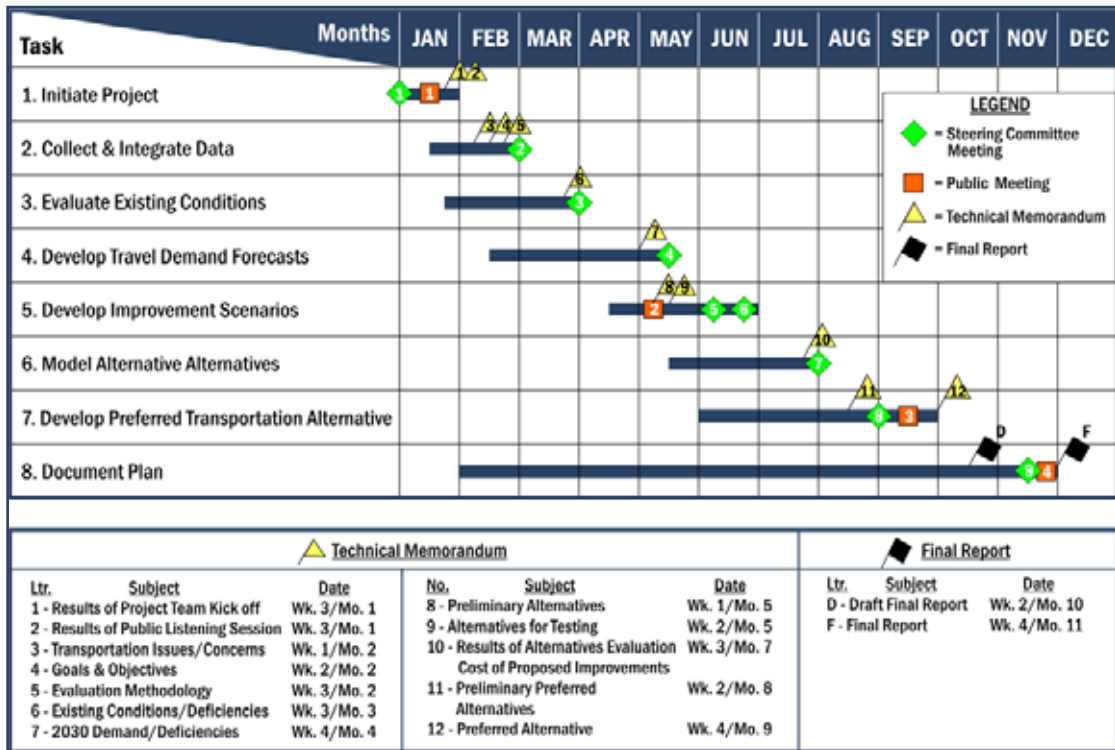


To do so, a broad range of alternatives were evaluated. The planning process engaged the citizens who expressed their views of the relative importance of the critical issues by which the performance of the alternatives was measured. Such a technique has provided an opportunity for the community to help establish the basis of the choice of a preferred alternative if it is to go beyond doing nothing to address the I-475 to U.S. 23 connectivity issue.

Schedule and Public Involvement

This study was guided by a Project Steering Committee, the members are listed on page 8. The Steering Committee met in advance of each round of public meetings and five other times during the year-long study. Each report developed for the project was delivered to the Steering Committee prior to each of its meetings at which the report contents were discussed in detail.

The community was also involved at key milestones, as discussed next and illustrated on the schedule.



Evaluation Factors

Each member of the Steering Committee attending the January meeting and those attending the public meetings on January 19th, 20th, and 21st was invited to indicate his/her personal preference (weight) for the importance of each evaluation factor by ranking and rating them. The evaluations of the Steering Committee, the participants at three public meetings, and the consultant established the importance of these factors. Each of these three independent weightings was used in the evaluation of the alternatives so it is clear how the public, the Steering Committee and the consultant staff view their performance.

Evaluation Factor Weighting

Factor	Steering Committee Order	Citizen Order	Consultant Order
Generate/Retain Jobs	①	②	①
Minimize Neighborhood Disruption	4	5	4
Better Connect Links in the Transit and Road Networks	③	③	③
Maintain Good Air Quality	⑥	⑥	⑧
Minimize Purchase of Private Property to Build Transportation Facilities	⑧	⑧	5
Protect Open Spaces/Parks	⑦	4	⑥
Control Noise at Sensitive Locations (e.g., homes, schools, hospitals, etc.)	5	⑦	⑦
Maximize Safe Travel	②	①	②

Alternatives

Consistent with this information and a series of traffic analyses, alternatives were developed. It should be noted in developing the alternatives, it was important to focus on the projection in the LRTP that the employment gain in all of Genesee County over the next 25+ years is 24,000 jobs. It was also noted that a medical campus is planned at and around the Genesys Regional Medical Center. By 2020, the number of jobs at this location is forecast at 6,000+. The jobs throughout the region that support the direct employment at the campus are projected to be 15,000. So, serving the proposed medical campus through improvements that result from this study has significant jobs potential.

Concept of Medical Campus



A dozen alternatives were developed. Except for Alternative 5, all include proposed connection of I-475 to U.S. 23. All include a number of local road improvements. Some include widening of U.S. 23 and/or M-15.

Makeup of Alternatives

Alternative	Connector	U.S. 23	M-15	Local
1	Yes	No	No	Yes
1A	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
1B	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
2	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
3	Yes	No	No	Yes
3A	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
3B	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
3C	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
3D	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
4	Yes	No	No	Yes
4A	Yes	No	No	Yes
5	No	No	No	Yes

Evaluation of Alternatives

The alternatives were evaluated using the factors shown on page 3. The results indicated that Alternatives 3, 3A and 3B were the best performers. Through collaboration with the project's Steering Committee, the Preferred Alternative was developed and is shown below. Extending Dort Highway over I-75 south to Baldwin Road and improving the Holly Road interchange with I-75 are part of the connector system. Documentation of this work and supporting data can be found in the report entitled "Evaluation of Alternatives" located on the Web site (www.geneseconnect.org).

Preferred Alternative



Localized Road Improvements

Eight localized improvements of the Preferred Alternative are shown on the right.

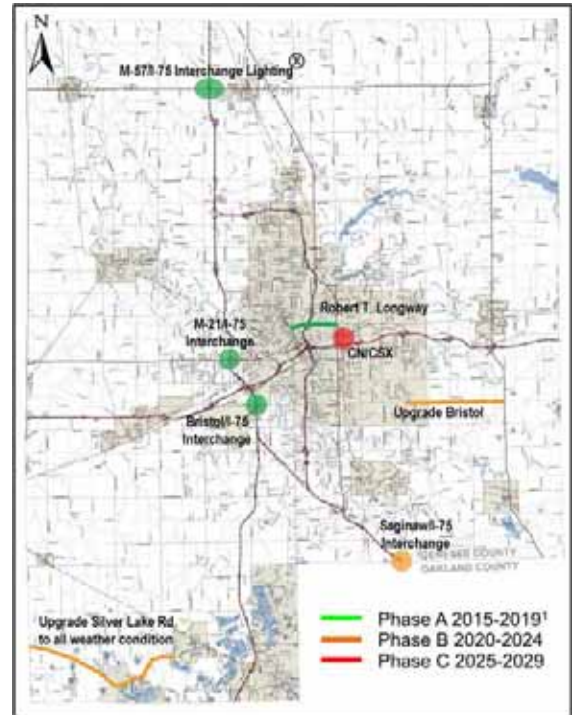
Plan Implementation

All projects have been proposed for implementation to address the practical availability of funding reflecting the pace of the recovery from the "Great Recession." Construction of the first projects is proposed to begin in 2015; design and environmental clearance must precede construction.

The extension of Dort Highway over I-75 to Baldwin Road is contemplated to begin in 2015. This will support the medical campus plan from the outset. The property on which the Dort extension is to be built may be dedicated at no cost by the Genesys Health System.

To add further support to the proposed medical campus development, Baldwin Road would be widened from the Dort Highway extension to Holly Road. Baldwin would become a boulevard. The concept in this study is for a "wide" boulevard with a right-of-way of 180 feet which can handle turns by the largest trucks. A narrow boulevard with a 120-foot right-of-way is an option to consider as the study's recommendations are implemented. Another project to support medical campus development is improving the Holly Road/I-75 interchange to eliminate congestion caused by turning vehicles that cannot be accommodated by the interchange's current configuration.

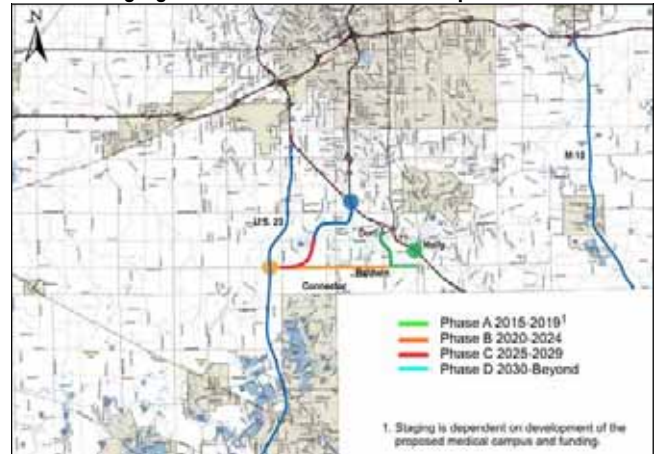
Localized Improvements in the Preferred Alternative



Concept of Baldwin Boulevard



Staging of Connector and Related Improvements



Assuming the medical campus gets off to a successful start, then Baldwin Road would be improved to a boulevard from the Dort Extension to the east. A new interchange would be built to connect Baldwin to U.S. 23. This connection is expected to be made in the 2020 to 2024 timeframe. By completing this much of the Preferred Plan, the most cost-effective core element of any alternative analyzed in this study would be in place.

Because future funding for transportation is expected to be limited for some time, the section of the U.S. 23-to-I-475 connector from Baldwin Road to Cook Road is proposed to occur in the 2025-2029 timeframe. The last section of the connector, from Cook Road to I-475, including a significantly modified interchange, would then follow in the period between 2030 and 2035. Without doubt, additional analyses, including updates, of the Genesee County Long Range Transportation Plan will be completed before the Connector begins to reconfirm its need. Likewise the need to widen U.S. 23 and M-15 should be re-examined.

Costs, Funding and Proposed Implementation

The overall cost of the Preferred Alternative (in 2010 dollars) is \$272.5 million (refer to Table 7-1). (Detailed cost estimates are included in Appendix D.) The cost by phase is:

■ Phase A/2015 through 2019	\$61.5 million
■ Phase B/2020 through 2024	\$37.0 million
■ Phase C/2025 through 2029	\$68.0 million
■ Phase D/2030 and beyond	<u>\$106.0 million</u>
Total	\$272.5 million

The localized improvements are projected to cost \$27.5 million (refer to Table 7-1).

The Dort Highway extension is expected to cost \$24 million, if land for it is not provided, cost-free, by Genesys. Widening Baldwin from the Dort Highway extension to Holly Road is estimated to cost \$9 million. The Holly Road/I-75 interchange is projected to cost \$13 million. The cost of the Baldwin Boulevard and interchange with U.S. 23 is estimated at \$29 million. The connector from Baldwin to I-475 would cost \$170 million. It is noteworthy that widening Baldwin Road and improvements to the Holly Road/I-75 interchange are already part of the county’s Long Range Transportation Plan. (So are the Bristol Road (EB)/I-75 (NB) interchange and the M-21/I-75 interchange improvements). Therefore, the cost of these improvements (\$64 million calculated for this study) is not an addition to the commitments already made and approved by local and federal authorities. Possible funding sources are:

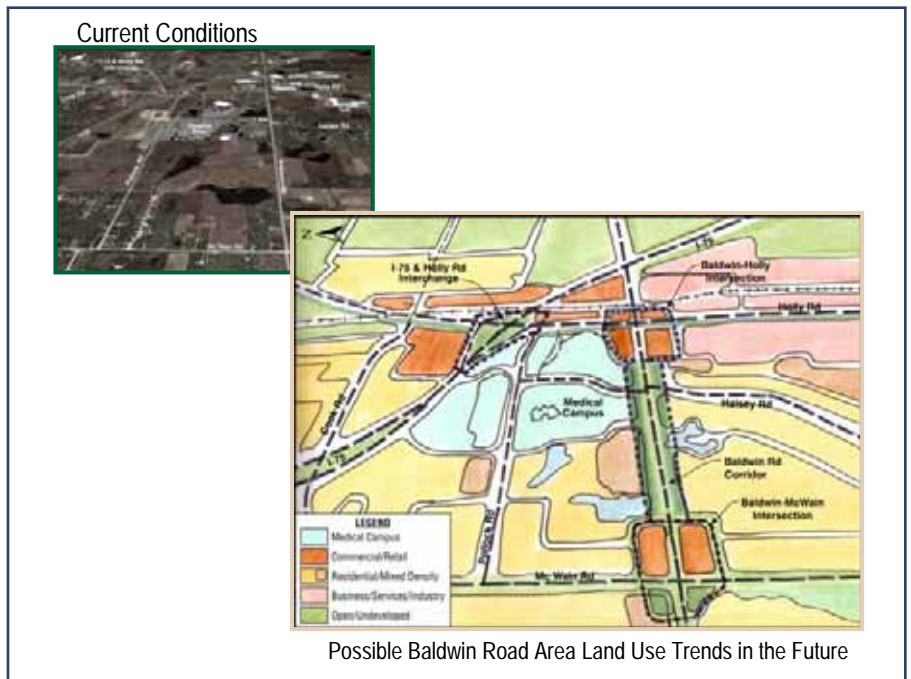
- Private sources (railroads, investors in proposed medical campus)
- Genesee County Road Commission

- Federal Highway Administration
- Michigan Department of Transportation
- Michigan Economic Development Corporation
- City of Flint
- Townships

Efforts will be made to secure the needed financial resources from these and other sources as they may develop.

Other Steps

It is important to recognize that steps should be taken to ensure land use and zoning decisions in proximity to the I-475-to-U.S. 23 connector maintain the quality of life of the area. Currently, much of the vacant property along the proposed path of the connector is in agricultural use. To ensure this property is not permitted to be used in manners that would block the connector physically or financially, proper land use/zoning controls are needed. The character along Baldwin Road should be protected by maintaining the large-lot residential pattern while being cognizant of the nearby development of the medical campus.



Conclusion

The results of the Genesee County Freight and Connectivity Study complement the work documented in the Long Range Transportation Plan and the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. The Genesys Health System was part of the community leadership that produced all three projects. Now, Genesys has proposed developing a medical campus at and around its regional medical center. This proposal has significant merit. It is forecast that by 2020 this project would create more than 6,000 jobs directly on site and another 15,000 support jobs throughout the region, mostly in Genesee County. The medical campus is in the study “subarea” served by the proposed I-475-to-U.S. 23 connector, which has elements to tie into the medical campus area. Additionally, construction of this study’s recommendations is expected to create 600 to 700 jobs each year for as many as 15 years. And, this doesn’t include the construction jobs associated with the medical campus.

As noted earlier, construction of the Freight and Connectivity Study recommendations are projected to begin in 2015 (advance environmental and design work would precede this) recognizing that the funding sources to embark on the program at the federal, state and local levels will not be adequate until the current recession is over. The staging of all projects in the plan covers 20 years. But, the work beyond the first phase (2015 to 2019) will depend on the medical campus demonstrating that its full potential will be met.