

# Public Involvement Synopsis

## Virtual Public Meeting

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**ARDOT Job Number 100512  
Walnut Ridge – Missouri State Line (Future I-57)  
Clay, Greene, Lawrence, and Randolph Counties, Arkansas  
August 13 – September 2, 2020**

A Virtual Public Involvement Meeting was held to present the Walnut Ridge – Missouri State Line (Future I-57) project in northeast Arkansas.

The virtual meeting was held at Future57.TransportationPlanRoom.com from Thursday, August 13 through Wednesday, September 2, 2020. In addition, a public officials meeting was held via video conference on Wednesday, August 12, 2020. Special efforts to involve minorities and the local community in the virtual public involvement meeting included the following:

- Display advertisements placed in the following newspapers:
  - *The Times Dispatch* (August 12 and 26, 2020)
  - *Pocahontas Star Herald* (August 13 and 27, 2020)
  - *Clay County Courier* (August 13 and 27, 2020)
  - *Paragould Daily Press* (August 15 and 29, 2020)
  - *Arkansas Democrat Gazette* (August 16 and 30, 2020)
- Postcards (435) mailed to attendees from past public meetings
- Letters mailed to public officials and stakeholders
- Emails sent to public officials, agencies and other stakeholders
- Social media blasts: ARDOT (August 13, 16-18, 20, 21, 23, 24, 26, 28, September 1, 2)
- News release published by ARDOT (August 14)
- Notification posted on ARDOT website

Table 1 describes the results of the public participation at the virtual meeting.

Table 1	
Public Officials Meeting (August 12)	Totals
Public Official Meeting attendees, including staff	21
Virtual Public Involvement Meeting (August 13 – September 2)	
Unique Visitors (New Users)	2,005
Visits to the Website (Sessions)	2,474
Number of Website Pages Viewed (Pageviews)	8,168
Percent of Total Users Interacting with Mobile Devices/Tablets	62%
Comment Forms or Letters Received	126
Comments on Interactive Map	37
Attendees who Signed Electronic Sign-in Sheet	141

# Public Involvement Synopsis

## Virtual Public Meeting

Table 2 identifies the information available on the virtual public meeting website and each page's number of views.

Table 2		
Website Page	Pageviews (8,168)	Excluding Homepage (4,784)
<b>Homepage</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Text: Information on the meeting's purpose, virtual meeting dates, a phone number for anyone with limited internet access or general questions or comments, submitting written comments, and guidance for special accommodations</li> </ul>	41% (3,380)	
<b>The Meeting Starts Here</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electronic sign-in sheet</li> <li>Handouts: Project Map; Summary Sheet; Comment Form</li> </ul>	7% (559)	12%
<b>Meeting Presentation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Video presentation highlighting purpose of virtual meeting, project history, study goals, schedule milestones, an overview of the virtual meeting website, and submitting comments</li> </ul>	6% (524)	11%
<b>Exhibits and Materials</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exhibits: Project Map, Project History; Study Goals; Draft Purpose and Need; Summary Sheet; and Schedule Milestones</li> </ul>	9% (745)	15%
<b>Corridors Interactive Map</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Link: ArcGIS corridor map on Street View showing the three corridors and three Missouri connectors, with the ability to leave comments on the map</li> <li>Text: Instructions to use the interactive map</li> </ul>	24% (1,919)	40%
<b>Environmental Interactive Map</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Link: ArcGIS corridor map on Street View showing the three corridors and three Missouri connectors with environmental layers turned on, with the ability to leave comments on the map</li> <li>Text: Instructions to use the interactive map</li> </ul>	9% (725)	15%
<b>Submit a Comment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Print and electronic versions of the comment form</li> </ul>	4% (315)	7%

# Public Involvement Synopsis

## Virtual Public Meeting

Garver staff reviewed all comments received and evaluated their contents. The summary of comments listed below reflects the personal perception or opinion of the person or organization making the statement. The sequencing of the comments is random and is not intended to reflect importance or numerical values. Some of the comments were combined and/or paraphrased to simplify the synopsis process.

An analysis of the comment form responses is shown in the below tables:

Do you believe there is a need for an improved connection between Walnut Ridge and the Missouri state line (Future I-57)? Why or why not?	
Yes	122
No	13

### Summarized Comments – Need for an Improved Connection

#### Yes

- Most users believe there is an increase in interstate traffic, particularly on the routes to Pocahontas, Corning, and Walnut Ridge, making this a dangerous stretch of narrow highway. Therefore, an improved connection would not only alleviate said traffic but increase overall safety for route travelers.
- Majority of users believe that better roads would improve economic development and industrial recruitment for the surrounding areas in northeast Arkansas, an overlooked transportation hub, by bringing traffic/business to the area.
- This targeted portion would fill the need to connect the Texas region with the Chicago, Illinois area from a long-distance freight and traveling public corridor perspective and is the last major link in a future interstate.
- Corridors (I-30 and I-57) may necessitate a 6-lane expansion throughout the state, not just in the urban / suburban areas in the future.
- Additionally, it will greatly influence travel from St. Louis to Little Rock in a way that will efficiently improve travel times between Arkansas and Missouri/Upper Midwest.
- This will accomplish the project goal of increased resiliency of the highway system.
- There is a need with the increased poultry industry presence in this area.
- There does need to be an improved connection between Walnut Ridge and the Missouri State line, but Pocahontas and Randolph county cannot be left out when the new highway route is decided.
- It would offer a potential alternate to the highly traveled I55.
- It would provide easier access for commercial vehicles as well as commuters and travelers
- I-57 routes near Pocahontas will finish tying all towns together with the improvements made to 63 and 412. This will take the “bottlenecks” away from Pocahontas and still allow the area to continue to grow. The route through Greene county will cut Pocahontas out of the loop. The route near Delaplaine will also encounter large areas of mucky sticky clay soil that runs 20 feet deep and then turns to white sand hat will hold nothing in much of that area.

#### No

- Small portion of users believe that the current route is now sufficient.
- Believe funding for northeast Arkansas could be better used to improve connectivity in population hubs, primarily Jonesboro and secondarily Paragould. Funding would be better

# Public Involvement Synopsis

## Virtual Public Meeting

to improve US 412 corridor between northeast and northwest Arkansas, two areas of the state with most-recent growth.

- It will take away from the travelers stopping in, and bring problems of pollution, noise, congestion, etc. to the surrounding communities.
- Users believe that the surrounding communities, particularly those of Corning, Delaplaine and Pocahontas, would be impacted negatively due to economic loss and destruction of farmland and wildlife habitats.

### Do you regularly travel within northeast Arkansas? If so, please check the city closest to your home and to your destination and the purpose of your travel.

Closest City	Home	Destination	Work	School	Other
Corning and north	22	22	57	5	58
Datto/Reyno/Biggers	8	4			
Pocahontas	35	26			
Shannon/Manson/Lesterville	0	0			
Walnut Ridge/Hoxie/ College City	13	21			
Knobel/Peach Orchard/ Delaplaine/O’Kean	14	13			
Black Rock/Imboden/Portia/ Ravenden	3	1			
Paragould	11	7			
Jonesboro	5	16			
Other:	9	8			

### Do you believe that the proposed project would have any impacts on your community (economic, environmental, social, etc.)? (Beneficial, Adverse, Both, Neither)

Beneficial	67
Adverse	21
Both	34
Neither	3

### Summarized Comments – Impacts to Community

#### Beneficial

- Corridor 1 would be most beneficial due to an existing connection on US 62 and being closest to Pocahontas. Pocahontas depends on north-south corridor traffic. Many believe it is estimated to be the least expensive with the least environmental impacts on businesses and farmers.

# Public Involvement Synopsis

## Virtual Public Meeting

- Majority of users ruled the benefits as increased safety measures, improved highway systems, and a route that would lead to economic growth. Users in favor include 6 Walnut Ridge City Council members, including the Mayor of Walnut Ridge, who submitted a supportive resolution in favor of Corridor 2.
- The improvement would also greatly impact the industrial and commercial growth for the area, specifically because of and for PECO.
- Users also believe that moving traffic away from old HWY67 so that the road can be used for local travel will provide a more efficient and cost-effective route for all travel by eliminating big truck congestion between Corning, AR and Walnut Ridge, AR.
- Increased traffic between two economic regions in Chicago and Dallas will be a boom for the region and encourage industry growth in the area, particularly Randolph and Clay Counties.
- Corridors 1 or 2 would have a flood-free highway away from Pocahontas, and short travel distance to I-57 will fuel local area growth.
- Western connection at Pocahontas will save 37 miles by not going to Hoxie/ Walnut Ridge.
- Option 3 has less mileage through 100-year floodplains but would seem to be more beneficial to have an eastern bypass of Corning rather than the indicated western swing to join the other alignments.
- I-57 will intersect west of Corning in between the airport, Clay County Electric, Farm Service, and the fish hatchery.
- Benefits of the project are thought to outweigh the impact on rural structures.
- It will be beneficial if the current HWY 67 is followed, so that established businesses will not be affected and will keep both residents and travelers nearest medical facilities, emergency services, and other types of services
- Following the current HWY67 from Walnut Ridge to the Missouri State Line will be beneficial to both locals and travelers due to the several businesses along HWY 67, which will keep residents and travelers nearest to emergency, medical, food and lodging options.
- It could be beneficial to the Paragould area as it would provide a closer location to access the interstate system.
- It would also be beneficial economically for Corning. Placing I-57 out of the city's path would be detrimental to residents and the city.
- This highway would facilitate the law enforcement academy as well as the rest of the WBU college. Pocahontas is the most viable city north of Searcy along Highway and to maintain its viability the Highway is needed in proximity.
- The addition of a major thoroughfare in our area would boost economic development by increasing access for commercial transportation. Improvements in these areas should also improve the economic welfare of our citizens. A road embankment across the flood plain will effectively act as a levee and may significantly alter the flow of water if adequate flood relief bridges are not included in the design.

### Adverse

- Corridor 3 would be significantly detrimental to economy of Corning/Clay County & Pocahontas/Randolph County due to its distance. Bypassing cities like Corning and Pocahontas will likely result in severe economic loss.
- A better highway would encourage people to travel out of town.
- Corridor 1 would cut off four major access points from Walnut Ridge to the Walnut Ridge airport, industrial park, and Williams Baptist University (Country Club Road, Fulbright

# Public Involvement Synopsis

## Virtual Public Meeting

Avenue, County Road 428, and Highway 67/County Road 429). Would cause substantial economic and social complications for this community.

- If current 67 is followed or the corridor is updated, there are concerns that churches, businesses, farmland, wildlife habitat, and homes will be lost.
- The thought of a 4-lane interstate running through the town of Delaplaine is not good. It would wipe this town off the map and probably Peach Orchard and O'kean as well. The base area from O'Kean to Knobel for the road will be gumbo which will not hold up to large amounts of traffic day in and day out the road will need constant work done to it as it will try to fall through with large amounts of traffic. It would cross numerous ditches and destroy many farmlands and wetlands. It is also more expensive to maintain than other plans.
- This area is close enough to I-55 if people want to travel north on an interstate. The existing highway is sufficient. This project threatens problems of pollution, noise, congestion, etc.
- The highway could devalue much prime farmland adjacent to the interstate.
- There would be an environmental impact if the interstate is close to the Wildlife Management area, particularly south of HWY67. Farmers flood the fields and any major loss of fields could impact the farmers, wildlife, and hunters. We need another bridge other than the bridges at Portia, Pocahontas, and Corning for Black River. This has been an ongoing issue when Black River floods below Poplar Bluff due to Current River and Fourche connecting to Black River. The highway between Pocahontas and Corning is closed when it floods as well as between Pocahontas and Walnut Ridge. If the interstate went close to the current HWY67 or on it, most of the issues stated could be mitigated.
- Too much traffic close to residential areas and a higher chance of criminal activity.
- Travel times will be greatly increased in rural areas where over passes are not created.
- If the current HWY 67 is not followed it will have an adverse impact on businesses, as the other 2 corridors are further from the city of Pocahontas and other small towns along HWY 67. Pocahontas is the largest city between Poplar Bluff, MO and Newport, AR, almost 100 miles, therefore it is vital that any improved highway construction be with Pocahontas as the focal point.
- It will reduce traffic and revenue in Reyno but will be much safer

### Summarized Comments – Preferred Corridor

Which corridor do you prefer?	
No Build	7
Corridor 1	26
Corridor 2	68
Corridor 3	31

#### Corridor 1

- Corridor 1 would require crossing only Black River and would be closer to the existing route, making it less expensive and able to minimize right of way acquisition with less adverse effects on the environment, wildlife, businesses, and farmers than a completely new route.
- Maximizes the proximity and access to Pocahontas which would lead to economic stability and growth for the area because it is the largest city with that generates the most traffic between Walnut Ridge and Corning.
- Would oppose any route that completely bypasses Pocahontas.

# Public Involvement Synopsis

## Virtual Public Meeting

- Runs through topography with better soil for roadbed and less farm ground destruction.
- Easier connection from the west via Imboden
- Corridor 1 would eliminate the old highway, which is one less to maintain.
- With Corridor 1, there is concern about losing access to the current HWY 67 using 67Y. When trains block the railroad tracks, there needs to be ability to travel to the other side of Walnut Ridge.
- Law officials would have more roadway to patrol.

### Corridor 2

- Cheapest, straightest, shortest corridor with only one major new bridge to build. Corridor 1 too disruptive to current buildings along existing US 67 due to width, and forces Williams Baptist University to require an access road from the interchange at Hwy 980.
- Corridor 2 would provide the most benefit to surrounding economies and will improve shipping for the surrounding areas.
- Gives Pocahontas flood-free, uninterrupted travel in both directions with less interruption to churches, businesses, residential homes, wetlands/wildlife preserve, and farmlands.
- Links Corning to near Pocahontas, while adhering closely to original route. C2 would benefit workers and students travelling daily on a dangerous 2-lane with a high volume of semi-truck traffic, create economic growth and improve shipping for the area.
- It passes reasonably close to the highest populated areas with more nearby amenities than Corridor 3.
- There are concerns that Corridor 2 will demolish personal property and farmland.
- C2 will need to be substantially raised above the 100-year floodplain for a much greater distance than Corridor 3 would be.
- Many users in favor of Corridor 2 emphasized that C2 needs an interchange to allow access to the Walnut Ridge Airport/Industrial Park and Williams Baptist University with an exit provided north of the airport to allow for future expansions. With an interchange exit at the County Line Road, you could eliminate the exit further north to the Pocahontas industrial park, by splitting the County line. Users in favor include 6 Walnut Ridge City Council members, including the Mayor of Walnut Ridge, who submitted a supportive resolution in favor of Corridor 2.
- Few users suggest C2 is preferred until approaching "Skaggs" and then follow Corridor 1.
- Prefer corridor 2 or a combination of corridors 1 & 2. 1 & 2 show the improvements could be implemented incrementally in smaller projects over time that provide independent utility.
- The distance from Pocahontas or Corning is not materially different than Corridor 1.
- Corridor 2 would allow current traffic to flow as "normal" while adhering closely to the original route, until completion. It would also allow alternate means of connection to remain.
- Crosses only the Black River, while also running closer to population centers.
- The City Council of Walnut Ridge and Walnut Ridge Mayor support and suggest this corridor, with an interchange being added to the corridor for access to the Walnut Ridge Airport, Industrial Park and Williams Baptist University.
- Randolph, Clay, and Lawrence County officials, City of Corning in Clay County officials, City officials of the Town of Biggers, the City of Reyno and Randolph County officials, the city of Walnut Ridge and Lawrence County officials, as well as Northeast Arkansas Intermodal Authority board members representing four counties, and Randolph County Chamber of Commerce officials submitted resolutions in favor of this corridor, and are included in this official tally for the support of Corridor 2.

# Public Involvement Synopsis

## Virtual Public Meeting

### Corridor 3

- Appears to be a shorter route with straighter alignment/most direct route. Least impact on critical environment and farm areas, residential homes, with less impact on already heavily populated roads and existing physical structures.
- Would create an improved flood-free connection from Highway 67 south of Pocahontas to I-57 due to location outside the levee area and would benefit the local area.
- Corridor 3 is preferred but is suggested to move east of Corning, not going by the airport.
- Features only one major crossing of a body of water.
- Users chose this corridor because they prefer the route to not follow the existing highway.
- C3 is not located directly in the middle of the Black River flood plain, as is C2, which in recent years has experienced multiple record high flood levels. It seems that building that length of interstate above historic flood levels in that low area would come at a much greater expense. Earlier meetings and packages presented in 2002 and 2014 suggested that C3 was the least expensive of the routes.
- There are concerns that this corridor would severely impact farmland and residential homes.
- The easternmost alignment would have the greatest impact on the large number of industries in Paragould by having a better and faster route to ship and receive goods.
- The corridor from Stateline through Knobel / O’Kean to Walnut Ridge is the only viable option.
- Access to I-57 via C3 is not that much farther for Pocahontas than C2.

Which connection with Missouri do you prefer?	
Missouri Connector A	37
Missouri Connector B	46
Missouri Connector C	20

### **Summarized Comments – Preferred Missouri Connector**

#### Connector A

- Need to evaluate taking highway north from airport and then turning to the northeast and entering Ripley County. Missouri should take it from there and angle to US 160 to avoid structures and utilities.
- Connector A is preferred because Missouri is planning to build their new 4 lane alignment to the west of the existing US 67 alignment.
- Seems to have the least impacts, specifically noted with less impact on homes.

#### Connector B

- Users believe this connector utilizes the existing road with a better route to the highway at the state line. This would make conditions better for surrounding businesses with an easily accessible rest area and Welcome Center.
- Best choice of connection if using corridor 1.
- Since Missouri has left 2 miles to allow Arkansas flexibility, utilizing as much of US-67 as possible would be beneficial financially if it doesn’t cause trans-border area access issues.
- The road needs to miss the congestion at the stoplight on HWY67 in Corning.

#### Connector C





# Public Involvement Synopsis

## Virtual Public Meeting

- Hopefully will avoid the need for another overpass above the existing two-lane highway, keeping costs down.
- This connection will be as close to avoiding nearby buildings and act as the new entrance/exit to AR/MO, providing a straighter drive with less obstruction into Missouri.
- Appears to have the least impact on houses on current HWY 67 and state line businesses.

Are you aware of any environmental constraints or historic sites within the study area?	
Yes	30
No	85

### Summarized Comments – Environmental Constraints or Historic Sites

- Many users have concerns about disrupting marshes and wetlands, the WMA distance from Corridors 2 and 3, and the expense to build across a large wetland area.
- 100-year floodplain constraints are the main environmental constraints. There will need to be great emphasis placed on raising the roadbed above US-67 measure.
- On Clay CR 129 lies Richwoods cemetery and Shiloh Baptist Church. It was a reconstruction era town made before Clay County existed. North and South of AR-328 there are several century farms settled by German immigrants in the early 1900s.
- There are reports of several Indian Burial grounds in the Delaplaine area.
- There is also a German Prison camp to the West of Knobel, closer to the existing highway.

Are you aware of any land development plans within the study area?	
Yes	6
No	109

### Summarized Comments – Land Development

#### Yes

- Several appear to be in the study area, but anticipated routes seem to deal well with them.
- A newly surveyed a lot to the north of Knobel that will potentially be a duck hunters cabin.

#### No

- Corridor 1 would have an adverse effect on Williams Baptist University.

Comment forms received by those representing:	
Self / Did Not Specify	88
Agency/Organization: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Believes there is a need: Randolph County Officials, Clay County Officials, Lawrence County Officials, City of Pocahontas, City of Marmaduke, City of Corning, City of Reyno, the Town of Biggers, Francis Fish Co LLC, City of Walnut Ridge, Capital Paving &amp; Construction, Natural Flyaway Farm LLC, Running Lake Farms, Clay County Courier, Lesmeister Guesthouse, BRTC, Nathan Compton Farms, NEA Intermodal Authority Board Members, Arkansas Department of Health, Paragould Regional Chamber of Commerce, Clark General Contractors, Lawrence County Chamber, Randolph County Chamber of Commerce</li> </ul>	24



# Public Involvement Synopsis

## Virtual Public Meeting

### Summarized Comments – Additional comments

- Following HWY67 roadway is not worth spending significantly more money than other corridors. HWY67 has multiple places that suffer from flooding, which will take aggressive construction to overcome.
- Users say the current HWY67 is the most beneficial due to its proximity to utilize businesses and nearby medical and emergent amenities.
- The highway should pass on the west side of Corning, as the east side is mostly low ground and unsuitable for development.
- Walnut Ridge Mayor comments that the width of Corridor 1 would eliminate several new businesses established in Walnut Ridge and would make WBU access difficult. Corridor 3 presents a greater problem for accessibility to the Airport/Industrial Park & WBU (strongly opposed).
- Corridor 1 is risky in terms of widening and locations of buildings and having to modify the existing interchange and existing road intersections. Corridor 3 has a bit of loss in terms of farmland and bypasses the wildlife preserve.
- There is a concern that Corridor 1 will be detrimental to the Pocahontas/Walnut Ridge economy and remove many houses and businesses due to the implementation of many necessary service roads.
- Corridor 1 is a poor option as the upgrade of the existing roadbed of HWY67 through the floodplain will be a major undertaking and have significant travel impacts for years. Going through the Delaplaine route will devastate farmland and waterfowl habitat with no economic benefit. The ground between O'kean and Knobel is a terrible gumbo foundation.
- The Black River levee has been breached twice within to past ten years which is a risk to take for Corridor 1 and 2.
- Corridor 2 & Corridor 3 will be better for the area, save tax dollars, and create shorter travel distance.
- Walnut Ridge Mayor comments that Corridor 2 does seem like the most affordable and logical selection, but there is no exit Interchange for Airport/Industrial Park & Williams Baptist University. From the University's perspective, a suitable entrance would still be an issue, unless an alternate interchange was placed on Corridor 2 allowing easier access just north of the airport. Mayor applied for a re-classification request to the FAA, asking that the WR Airport be moved up to a 139 classification to allow for charter collegiate flights and non-scheduled airfreight service. Such actions, if allowed by the FAA, when combined to existing job base and the University's growth would warrant more direct access to traffic from the north. An additional option would be connecting to Lawrence County Road 408 with an interchange. Corridor 2 would have no economic impact on retail/wholesale businesses, but as with all corridors' area farmland would be impacted.
- Many comments on which connector would be best for the project said it truly depended on Missouri's choice of what they intended to do. Many also hoped the project plans would be to invest in the corridor and connection with MO with the lowest build/maintenance cost.
- Corridor 3 is opposed by the farming communities not interested in development, and it appears that that route would have the least economic benefit.
- If Corridor 3 is built on the east side of the railroad system, this creates major construction cost and delayed access for everyone dodging the stopped trains.
- Following the current HWY67 route will allow Pocahontas and Corning and other towns along the way to thrive and become more prosperous. Corridor 3 would totally shut off Pocahontas/Randolph County, & be devastating to their economy.

# Public Involvement Synopsis

## Virtual Public Meeting

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- Users believe the best route is Knobel /Deleplain/ Okean due to less interstate traffic in a more rural area which will be safer for workers.
- A staff review has been made of the information received on the referenced project. The Engineering Section notes this project should be constructed in accordance with the ARDOT Special Provision for Wellhead Protection. ADH also notes the proposed project lies within several sources of the Source Water Protection Areas for Pocahontas Waterworks. If you have any questions or comments, please coordinate them through Kyle Johnson at (501) 661-2067.
- Connector A is preferred since Missouri is planning to build their new 4 lane alignment to the west of the existing US 67 alignment.

### Attachments:

- Screenshots of virtual public meeting site
- Presentation Transcript
- Small-scale display maps and exhibits
- Website analytics report
- Copies of sign-in sheets and submitted comment forms
- Outreach documents