



I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

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The Northwest Butler Transportation Study (NBTS) is an in-depth study of the transportation needs and possible solutions to transportation-related problems in a 125 square mile area centered on US 27 and SR 73 and spanning eight townships in northwest Butler County, Ohio. The purpose of this study was to determine a recommended long range strategic plan of implementable improvements for future transportation in the NBTS area to forward to OKI for incorporation into the OKI Regional Transportation Plan. Related to that objective, this study was also focused on establishing the purpose and need for the NBTS transportation plan. On September 10, 2003, the Advisory Committee reached a consensus to advance a recommended plan to the OKI Board. The findings of the Northwest Butler Transportation Study, including the Advisory Committee's recommendation of Alternative 5C, were presented to the Ohio Kentucky Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI) Board of Trustees on October 9, 2003. The Board approved Resolution 2003-49 adopting the study findings and recommendation at that meeting.

Project History

This Northwest Butler Transportation Study evolved from a larger, county-wide, east-west transportation study initiated by the Butler County Engineer's Office in the mid-1990's. The original transportation study extended from I-75 west across central and northern Butler County to the Indiana state line, and included three sub-areas: Monroe, Trenton and Oxford (from east to west). The Trenton and Monroe sub-areas developed into the State Route 63 Extension study between SR 63 in Monroe and US 127 near Seven Mile.

In 1999, as studies progressed on the State Route 63 Extension, the Ohio Department of Transportation requested that the Ohio Kentucky Indiana Regional Council of Governments (the local Metropolitan Planning Organization) team with the Butler County Engineer's Office to facilitate the study of the transportation problems in northwest Butler County, in an area generally defined by two major routes: US 27 from the Hamilton / Butler County line north to the Butler / Preble County line, and SR 73 from the Ohio / Indiana state line east to the Village of Seven Mile (which covered the original Oxford subarea, as mentioned above. In 2000, the planning study of transportation problems and possible solutions in this area was renamed the Northwest Butler Transportation Study (NBTS).

The NBTS was sponsored by the Ohio Kentucky Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI), the Butler County Engineer's Office (BCEO), the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). While the

NBTS considers transportation needs in a regional context, is not dependent on the SR 63 Extension study nor any other major projects in Butler County.

OKI, in association with the Butler County Engineer's Office and the Ohio Department of Transportation, has directed this transportation planning study. Balke American (formerly Balke Engineers) was contracted as the Project Planning Consultant to provide the technical planning, environmental and preliminary engineering studies, Advisory Committee workshop direction, public involvement presentations, speaker bureau presentations, and the plan and report preparation. In addition, OKI contracted with the consultant team of ME Companies and HUB Communications, to provide associated services including the coordination and set up of public involvement meetings and speaker bureau presentations, preparation of project fact sheets, tabulation of public input, and media relations for this project.

Project Area

The study area encompasses the incorporated communities of the City of Oxford, and the Villages of Seven Mile, Millville and College Corner, and eight Butler County townships, Oxford Township, Ross Township, Reily Township, Hanover Township, Milford Township, Morgan Township, Wayne Township, and St. Clair Township (see Exhibit 1).

Approximately 80,000 people currently live in this area and the area includes over 150 miles of public roadways, comprised of nearly 80 miles of state or federally maintained roads, including portions of U.S. Routes 27 and 127, and State Routes 73, 129, 130, and 177, with the remainder under local or county maintenance.

The study considered existing and future area conditions with the project's stated purpose to determine a long range plan to provide for Year 2030 needs. With this area's population projected to increase by 50,000 persons (see Exhibit 2) and traffic demands on major routes forecasted to more than double by the year 2030, the need for long range planning in Northwest Butler County now was recognized as a high priority.

The Northwest Butler County area is a predominantly rural area, with active agricultural cropland in abundance interspersed with growing residential development. Commercial land use is concentrated in the incorporated communities in the area. The City of Oxford provides the area's only urban land use mix. The Miami University, with a student enrollment of 16,000, is located in Oxford and is the largest employer in the NBTS area. Important natural features in the area



***Much of the NBTS area is rural like
SR 177 south of Darrtown***

include four major high quality streams, Indian Run, Salmon Run, Four Mile Creek and Seven Mile Creek; the Great Miami / Little Miami River Buried Valley Aquifer System; five State and County parks, natural areas, and preserves, including Hueston Woods State Park and Preserve, Pater Park Wildlife Area, Bunker Hill Universalists Pioneer Cemetery, Butler County Metroparks Wildlife Preserve, and several Miami University property natural areas; and over 20 historic sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Project Scope

The NBTS has been conducted according to ODOT’s Five-Step Planning Process (ODOT, April 2001). The Five-Step Planning Process is designed to provide transportation decision makers with the facts and analysis needed to make intelligent, informed choices for the best use of transportation resources. The process is also designed to merge with and into ODOT’s Transportation Development / National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process as the plan advances towards implementation. The five planning process steps in relation to the 14 step process are illustrated in Figure 1 and further described below.

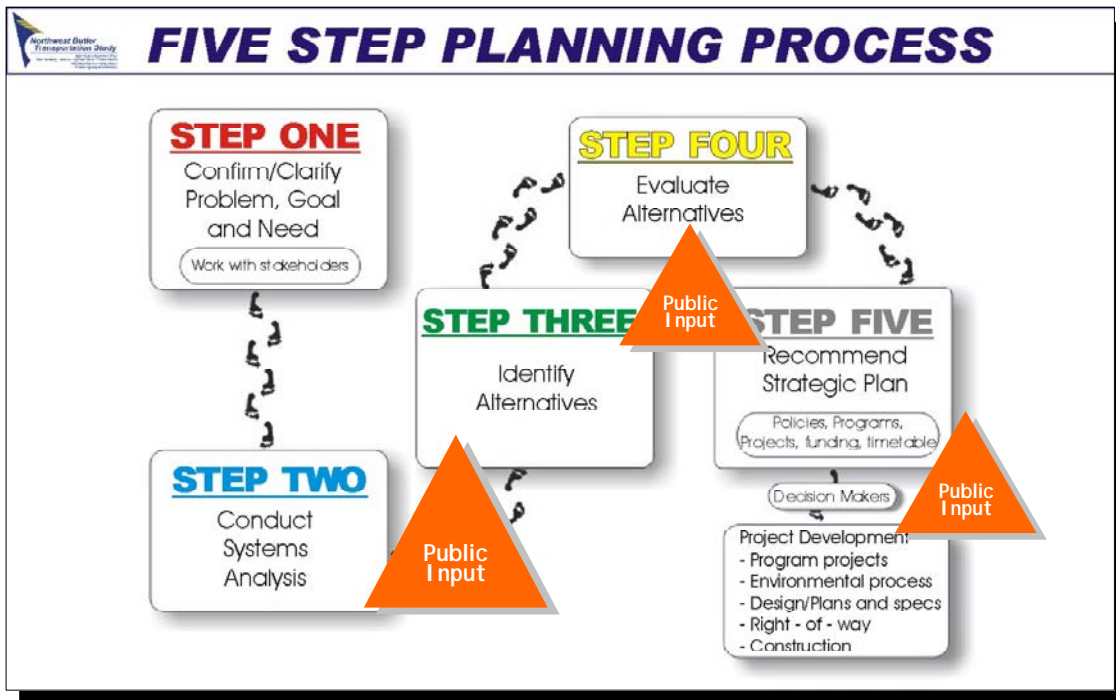


Figure 1: The Planning Process

The Five-Step Planning Process is described below.

Step 1: Confirm and Clarify the Issues, Goals, Problem and Need - During this step, a Public Involvement Plan (PIP) is developed and area stakeholders and the

general public are engaged to help define transportation problems and needs and goals.

Step 2: Conduct Appropriate Transportation, Technical, and Other System Analysis - In Step 2, surveys and analyses are conducted to determine transportation, social, growth, land use, economic, environmental and other needs and issues to understand existing conditions, causes, trends, and scope of problems and needs.

Step 3: Identify Alternatives - The goal of Step 3 is to identify reasonable and realistic alternative solutions to address the problems, issues, goals, and needs identified in Steps 1 and 2.

Step 4: Evaluate Alternatives - In Step 4, feasible alternatives identified in Step 3 are qualitatively and quantitatively evaluated based on a variety of reasonable comparative measures, including technical criteria and the objectives identified by stakeholders and others impacted by the project or study.

Step 5: Recommend an Alternative and Strategic Plan - Step 5 involves the selection of an alternative solution and the completion of a Strategic Plan through reaching a consensus among the Advisory Committee membership and the general public. In Step 5, prioritization of plan components is explored, and a recommendation for plan implementation is developed.

As mentioned above, the Five-Step Planning Process was designed to merge with ODOT's Transportation Development / National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. Specifically, the Five-Step Planning Process leads directly into the final stages of Step 4 (Present Recommendations / Conceptual Plan) and the initial stages of Step 5 (Develop Preliminary Corridors / Alignments) in ODOT's new 14-Step Project Development Process (PDP) for Major Projects. The remainder of the 14-Step PDP will include the completion of the Project Development / NEPA process (for environmental clearance) and will culminate with project design and construction. [Exhibit 3](#) depicts the ODOT 14 Step Major Project Development Process.