

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The scoping process occurred through the online scoping meeting, in-person meetings, and teleconferences, as well as through other media. The process was conducted to ensure that key issues of concern by resource agencies, the public (which included businesses, non-governmental organizations, and other parties), and Native American groups, including tribes, were captured and addressed in conducting the Study, as been documented in the previous chapters. This chapter briefly summarizes the key findings from the scoping process.

5.1 SUMMARY OF KEY COMMENTS

Resource agencies' input focused on the issues of concern relevant to the respective agency as well as the overall Study process. For example, comments from USFWS were primarily on threatened and endangered species and their habitats as well as potential impacts on wetlands and migratory birds. The resource agencies understand the tiered NEPA process, whereby the first tier addresses an overall program and the key decisions to be made in that program, while the second tier addresses specific details of a project and the potential impacts in particular areas, with known parameters of a project to guide the evaluation of the impacts. Coordination with resource agencies would occur throughout Tier 1 and Tier 2.

Public input was minimal regarding natural and physical environment issues and focused primarily on economic and human environment impacts. Most of the commenters supported the Study and Project, with Route Alternative 4 garnering the most support because of its inclusion of the Iowa state capital (Des Moines), other major population centers (Iowa City and Quad Cities area), proximity to I-80 for ready access, and its potential to decrease highway congestion. Some commenters proposed different route options than presented for initial review. Most of those not in favor of the Study and Project indicated that it was not affordable because of the budget deficits in the federal and state governments, and that bus service was an affordable and non-subsidized alternative transportation option.

Support for the Project was noted for several key reasons, including the improvement of air quality; emissions reduction; economic and job benefits through construction funding and subsequent development and stimulation of the economy; opportunities to retain young Iowa professionals due to improved regional interconnectivity; an efficient transportation system for retirees, college students, and people who do not drive and reduced highway congestion.

Public concerns with the Project include the potential to increase crime and drug use at stations and along the route; use of tax dollars for construction and operation; noise and air pollution; the potential to negatively affect existing California Zephyr service between Chicago and Omaha; use of funds for other purposes; and potential safety issues for passenger and freight trains sharing the same system.

Native American group and tribal input indicated that the Native American groups, including tribes, should be contacted regarding potential TCP issues and should be notified if construction uncovers tribal burial grounds or other tribal resources.

5.2 USE OF SCOPING INPUT

The input received during scoping was first used in the development of the Environmental Resource Impact Analysis Methodology Technical Memorandum (Iowa DOT, March 30, 2012); this memorandum addresses how the environmental resources will be described for the affected environment and evaluated for potential impacts in the Tier 1 Service Level EIS. Input from scoping was also used in the development of the Draft Alternatives Analysis Report (Iowa DOT, April 27, 2012); this report reviewed the reasonable range of alternatives compared to several criteria (purpose and need, technical feasibility, economic feasibility, and environmental issues) and documented the screening process to carry forward alternatives for analysis in the Tier 1 Service Level EIS.