

The first step in the process was to define a project Purpose and Need, which includes the following items:

- Accommodate population and employment growth
- Improve system linkage
- Accommodate projected travel demand
- Optimize modal interrelationships
- Increase travel safety

In 2002 and 2003, the TCC developed 15 preliminary alternatives to address the above needs. Through various evaluations and TCC input, three of these were recommended for detailed study. However, in 2004, based upon the NEPA/404 Merger process and discussions with FHWA, it was necessary to take a step back and look at all potential river crossing locations and not just Caton Farm-Bruce Road. The following crossing locations were considered:

- Theodore/Rosalind
- Caton Farm/Oak
- Caton Farm/Bruce
- Division Street – Dropped from further study due to impacts to nature preserve.
- Renwick/IL Route 7
- Renwick/Thornton
- 151st Street – Dropped. No longer feasible due to Lewis University airport.
- 143rd Street – Dropped from further study due to impacts to nature preserve.
- 135th Street – Dropped from further study due to impacts to nature preserve.

After the river crossings were evaluated, 14 alternatives associated with the five remaining river crossing locations were developed and evaluated:

- Theodore Street - Rosalind Street - Gougar Road
- Theodore Street - Rosalind Street - Wolf Road
- Caton Farm Road - Oak Avenue - Gougar Road
- Caton Farm Road - Oak Avenue - Middle
- Caton Farm Road - Oak Avenue - Cedar Road.
- Caton Farm Road - Oak Avenue - Bruce Road - Gougar Road
- Caton Farm Road - Oak Avenue - Bruce Road - Middle
- Caton Farm Road - Oak Avenue - Bruce Road - Cedar Road
- Caton Farm Road - Bruce Road - Gougar Road
- Caton Farm Road - Bruce Road - Middle
- Caton Farm Road - Bruce Road - Cedar Road
- Caton Farm Road - Weber Road - Renwick Road - IL Route 7
- Caton Farm Road - Weber Road - Renwick Road - Thornton Street
- Caton Farm Road - Rosalind Street - Gougar Avenue

These alternatives were evaluated for impacts to the following:

- Wetlands
- Floodplains
- Section 4(f) Land
- Historic Structures/Properties
- Special Waste Sites
- Environmental Justice
- Threatened and Endangered Species
- Displacements
- Right-of-way Acquisition

Based on the results of these evaluations, the six alternatives with the least impacts were carried forward for further study. These included:

- Caton Farm-Oak-Gougar
- Caton Farm-Oak-Middle
- Caton Farm-Oak-Bruce-Gougar
- Caton Farm-Oak-Bruce-Middle
- Caton Farm-Bruce-Gougar
- Caton Farm-Bruce-Middle

It is important to note that the alignments involving Cedar Road were not carried forward because when comparing the north-south segments, the Cedar Road alternative would have the largest impact to floodplains, eligible historic structures, and displacements. It would also require substantial ROW acquisition from existing residential developments, multiple schools and churches, and the Homer Township Fire Protection Facility, particularly between 163rd and 159th. The TCC felt those impacts were not acceptable in comparison to the other available alternatives, which was discussed at the 2006 TCC meeting.

Each of the six alternatives listed above was presented at public information meetings held on June 5, 2007 and June 7, 2007. The results of the public information meetings indicated that there was no strong public opposition or support for any specific alternative.

Because the Caton Farm-Bruce-Gougar and Caton Farm-Bruce-Middle alternatives passed over the area defined as Critical Habitat for the Hine's Emerald Dragonfly these alternatives were dismissed as not being viable. In addition, both of these alternatives would impact 4.5 acres of Dellwood Park West.

Although each of the remaining four alternatives may have had impacts to a particular resource that was somewhat greater than the other alternatives, overall, all four alternatives would have comparable impacts. Thus, it was necessary to compare the alternatives qualitatively.

The following factors were considered in comparing the Oak Road corridor to the Oak-Bruce Road corridor east of the proposed river crossing:

- Oak Avenue classified as a “Local” street.
- Bruce Road is classified as a “Collector” west of Gougar and “Arterial” east of Gougar.
- Development and right-of-way dedications along each route have been consistent with functional classification.
- Based on functional classification it was desirable to transition the alignment from Oak Avenue to Bruce Road.

Therefore both Caton Farm-Oak Corridor alternatives were dropped.

The following was considered in comparing the north-south link of the Caton Farm-Oak-Bruce corridor:

- Predicted future east-west travel demand is substantial.
- Accommodating this growth on Gougar Road will impact existing land uses not compatible with a major arterial.
- “Double-linking” east-west traffic onto a north-south roadway is operationally undesirable. Intersections where east-west traffic turns to and from the north-south link do not operate efficiently.
- Middle alignment is a rare opportunity to plan future land uses to be compatible with an arterial highway.

It is believed that the Caton Farm-Oak-Bruce-Middle alternative would best satisfy the overall purpose of this project to provide a new river crossing along with satisfying long term population, employment and travel growth in this region of Will County. In May 2009 the Transportation Corridor Committee voted in favor of supporting the Caton Farm-Oak-Bruce-Middle Alternative. In July 2009, the Will County Board endorsed Caton Farm-Oak-Bruce-Middle as the preferred alternative.

In September 2012 the environmental Regulatory & Resource agencies concurred in the selection of the Caton Farm Road-Oak Avenue-Bruce Road-Middle Alternative as the Preferred Alternative.