

DRAFT PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PLAN

DEF-SR15-15.28
PID 120036



*Submitted to:
ODOT District 1
July 2024*

Prepared by:



Lawhon & Associates Inc.



Department of
Transportation

1. Project Overview

1.1. Project Description & Background Summary

The project proposes to construct single-lane roundabouts at the intersections of Ralston Avenue and Anthony Wayne Boulevard and Ralston Avenue and Harding Street. Additionally, sidewalks will be constructed along Ralston Avenue (SR 15) in the City of Defiance.

A feasibility study conducted in 2020 examined Ralston/Sessions Avenue (SR 15) from Anthony Wayne Boulevard to Nicholas Street to assess current conditions, issues, and potential countermeasures. Two build alternatives were identified and considered: Alternative 1 (roundabouts with road diet) and Alternative 2 (signalized improvements with road diet). The study recommended advancing Alternative 1 into the design phase. However, the road diet component is not included in the project scope.

The decision to advance Alternative 1 was based on improved capacity analyses compared to the signals alternative, enhanced predicted crash reductions per ECAT analyses, a better benefit-cost ratio compared to the signals alternative, and input from long-term planning and the local community in the City of Defiance.

1.2. Purpose & Need Summary

Purpose

The purpose of the project is to reduce congestion, improve safety at the intersections, and improve pedestrian facilities.

Primary Needs

The existing roadway experienced 35 crashes in the period of 2016-2018 which yielded a crash rate of 4.46 crashes/MVMT, which is over twice the statewide average of 1.87 crashes/MVMT. Contributing factors are intersections in close proximity with complex geometry in the vicinity of Latchaw Drive and Anthony Wayne Boulevard.

The corridor also experienced types of crashes at or above statewide averages for rear-end; sideswipe passing; left turn; and pedestrian related crashes. The lack of a center left turn lane through much of the corridor appears to be contributing to these types of crashes.

Sidewalks exist in the project area on a section on the north side of Ralston Avenue east of Wemor Avenue; however, sidewalks are not present in a majority of the project area. Several intersections along the corridor also lack ADA curb ramps.

1.3. PI Team: Management & Staffing

The DEF-SR15-15.28 project team is described below. The staff will be updated as needed during the development of the project.

Project Sponsor

The City of Defiance is the project sponsor. Melinda Sprow is the project manager for the City of Defiance.

Sponsor, ODOT, and Consultant Staff

The following have been identified as the sponsor, ODOT, and lead consultant project managers for this project:

- City of Defiance, City Engineer - Melinda Sprow
- ODOT District 1, Project Manager - Kylie Schnipke
- ODOT District 1, Environmental Coordinator - Nate Tessler
- Strand Associates, Project Manager - Jeff Heimann
- Lawhon & Associates, Project Manager - Abby Sarac

Supporting District and Consultant Staff

- ODOT District 1 - Cheri Newton, Rhonda Pees
- Strand Associates - Carl Ruf
- Lawhon & Associates - Sarah Hartman

PI Team Responsibilities

The City of Defiance project manager, Melinda Sprow, is responsible for ensuring that the public involvement activities detailed in this plan are carried out. The ODOT District 1 Environmental Coordinator, Nate Tessler, is responsible for ensuring that ODOT’s public involvement requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) are met for this project.

**All materials below will be reviewed by City of Defiance and ODOT District 1 prior to finalizing.*

PI Task	Responsible Party
Public Engagement Plan	Lawhon
In-Person Public Meeting (Open House Format)	
Meeting Materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Notification Mailing list (including stakeholders)</i> • <i>Notification Area Map</i> • <i>Notification Letter</i> • <i>Press Release</i> • <i>Handout</i> • <i>Comment/demographics form</i> • <i>Sign-in sheet</i> • <i>Wayfinding signage</i> 	Lawhon draft. Lawhon to send notification letters.
Exhibits	Strand

Project webpage/updates	City of Defiance
Publish press release	City of Defiance
Meeting Location Coordination	City of Defiance
Comments and Responses	
Comment Organization	City to send Lawhon all comments received, Lawhon to organize.
Responses to Comments	Lawhon draft with support from Strand and City
Send out Responses to Comments	Lawhon

1.4. Project Issues, Potential Controversy, and/or Risks

No controversy occurred during the feasibility study phase of project development; however, the project may face skepticism about its necessity and concerns over the unfamiliarity of having two roundabouts close together. Additionally, maintenance of traffic, particularly due to nearby businesses and medical facilities, will require careful planning and communication to minimize disruptions and maintain accessibility during construction. Park impacts will also need to be discussed in public notifications and public meeting materials to meet 4(f) requirements and also ensure the public is aware of the impacts and efforts taken to minimize those impacts.

2. Public Engagement Plan

2.1. Community Demographics

Identification of Low Income and Minority Populations

Using ODOT’s Transportation Information Mapping System (TIMS), the project area is within the following block groups and has the following minority and low-income population percentages:

Block Group	% Minority	% Low-Income
390399585003	36%	40%
390399585002	22%	18%
390399585004	15%	41%

Identification of Other Traditionally Underrepresented Populations

Using ODOT’s Transportation Information Mapping System (TIMS), the project area is within the following block groups and has the following linguistically isolated and elderly population percentages:

Block Group	% Linguistic Isolation	% Over Age of 64
390399585003	4%	14%
390399585002	0%	26%
390399585004	0%	15%

Environmental Justice Outreach Strategy

The project team will follow ODOT's guidance on Environmental Justice to prepare any necessary documentation required to address the Executive Order on Environmental Justice and similar regulations.

Other Traditionally Underrepresented Populations Outreach Strategy

Consideration for older adult populations will also be considered in the outreach strategy and material creation. Notifications and materials for the public meeting will be in large font and have easily understood graphics and language. The in-person public meeting venue will be ADA compliant and accessible for traditionally underrepresented populations such as older adults and individuals with disabilities. The City of Defiance has a higher portion of Spanish speaking residents than many of the surrounding areas. A sentence will be placed in the notifications that materials can be made available in Spanish upon request.

Stakeholders

A stakeholder list has been developed for the project. The current list includes adjacent residents, businesses, and property owners, County Engineer, township trustees, county commissioners, City Departments/Administration (Parks, Fire and Rescue, Police, Street Division), local emergency response agencies, ProMedica Hospital, and local school district representatives. Any other stakeholder that comes forward will be added to the list as the project progresses. The full stakeholder list (including property owners) and mailing list will be updated and posted to EnviroNet as the project progresses.

Stakeholder Strategy

The stakeholder strategy includes outreach via letters and emails (if possible). A notification letter and/or email will be sent to the stakeholders to provide additional information about the project as well as invite them to submit comments and/or attend the planned open house. A separate meeting with ProMedica Hospital representatives is anticipated to collect input regarding sidewalk connectivity, maintenance of traffic, and other project elements.

2.2. Public Engagement Strategy and Activities

The purpose of the public involvement for this project is to inform the public about the upcoming project and to gather feedback on questions, concerns, the project's purpose, proposed activities, and anticipated impacts.

The following public involvement activities are proposed for the project. The strategy will be updated when additional information is available for future phases of project development.

Survey Letters / Right-of-Entry Letters

Letters will be sent out to property owners and residents in the study area to provide high level information about the proposed project and to inform property owners and residents that staff may be entering their property to collect data in advance of any environmental and/or survey field work.

Public Meeting Notification

Letters will be sent to all residences and properties surrounding the project area. The mailing list will also include the entirety of the Wooded Acres subdivision since Anthony Wayne Boulevard is the only entrance/exit into their neighborhood. The letter will serve as an invitation to submit comments and questions and will also provide information about the proposed project and upcoming public meeting. The mailing packet will likely include the handout, comment form, and necessary 4(f) language describing the impacts (if any) to Diehl Park and measures to minimize harm. The materials will also include a link to information on the City’s website so that those who are not able to attend the in-person meeting can view materials online.

The city will also publish a press release on their website to notify the community of the open house and public comment period.

Public Meeting

At this time, one in-person open house is proposed. The purpose of this meeting will be to provide information about the project including the purpose and need for the project, the improvements being proposed, potential impacts, and next steps with the public. The information will be explained at the open house via handouts, exhibits, and the project team. The open house will be followed by a 30-day public comment period.

At this time, the public meeting open house is planned for September 17, 2024, at a meeting room in ProMedica Hospital (1200 Ralston Ave, Defiance, OH 43512). The open house will begin at 5:30 and conclude at 7:30 P.M.

City Project Webpage

Following the meeting, the City of Defiance will post all materials on their website so that those who are unable to attend in-person can view, download, and comment on the same materials.

Public Comments and Responses

The City of Defiance project manager will send Lawhon & Associates any mailed, emailed or comments otherwise received by them to compile into a tracking sheet to

catalogue the comments and assist in development of the comment response strategy and environmental document. Lawhon, in coordination with the consultant team and City of Defiance, will develop responses to the comments. Depending on the number of comments received, they may either be responded to individually or compiled into a comment response and summary document that may be sent following the conclusion of the public comment period. The comment response and summary letter will be sent to those that received initial invitations to the public open house as well as any new people (or groups) that attended the meeting. These letters will indicate the public comment period has concluded and the project will advance into detailed design. The letters will also provide a general overview of the schedule. Additionally, all original comments received will be posted online with personal information redacted.

3. Implementation and Schedule

Public Involvement Milestone	Date
Public Engagement Plan Submitted	May 21, 2024
Open House Notification Sent	August 16, 2024
Open House & Comment Period	September 17, 2024 - October 17, 2024
Comment Responses Sent	October 2024
Environmental Approval	February 7, 2025

The following section will be updated as various public involvement activities are completed:

A property owner notification letter was sent to property owners and residents in the project area on February 26, 2024, to provide high level information about the proposed project and to inform property owners and residents that staff may be entering their property to collect data in advance of any environmental and/or survey field work. The notification letter also invited comments and questions regarding the project until March 26, 2024.