

## **APPENDIX B: CASE STUDIES**



# **WAHNETA SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

A community impact assessment was conducted to address the potential social impacts associated with the planning, construction, and operation of a portion of the proposed East-West Expressway designed to go through the unincorporated community of Wahneta in Polk County, Florida. The proposed East-West Expressway would be a four-lane limited-access highway located in Central Polk County.

The corridor analysis conducted as part of the PD&E study resulted in six viable alternative corridors for the Expressway. One of these alternatives, referred to as the Wahneta link, would pass directly through the community of Wahneta. This alternative had been dropped from consideration early in the PD&E study process after initial analysis showed that the severity of its negative impacts would be greater than the impacts associated with other alternative locations. However, the “Wahneta link” was reintroduced when it became clear that its location would allow for other future viable corridor locations in the study area.

The community profile identified the following characteristics. Wahneta is a primarily residential community in an area traditionally oriented towards agricultural production. In recent years, there has been a shift in the economic activities to include more light-industrial manufacturing and service-oriented economic enterprises. The community also houses several small businesses that serve the local population including a supermarket, convenience stores, and a few restaurants. There are also several churches in the community, as well as an elementary school and a day care center.

The average income of Wahneta residents is significantly lower than those for the project study area as a whole, with nearly 25 percent of residents in Wahneta below the poverty line, compared to less than 13 percent for the county overall. The socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the population suggested that residents of Wahneta would experience particularly adverse impacts for some of the alternatives being considered. Therefore, due to the potential for disproportionate impacts to a low-income population, a separate community impact assessment was conducted specifically for the Wahneta link. The primary analysis techniques to determine the social impacts of the Wahneta link included secondary data review and a literature search; face-to-face interviews; participant-observation; a mailed survey; and one public meeting.

## **Secondary Data Review & Literature Search**

Census data were gathered for the Wahneta area, for Polk County as a whole, and for the State of Florida. An attempt was made to locate other relevant data sources, such as planning agency reports. However, no additional pertinent data were located. A literature search was also conducted to find information about the nature of the social impacts of highway projects.

## **Face-to-Face Interviews**

Personal interviews were conducted with community leaders in Wahneta. Community leaders for this project included pastors and members of the local

churches, the director of the community day care center, the community's elementary school assistant principal, community activists, a migrant workers outreach representative, and county planning officials. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain data related to community lifestyles, social interaction, relative quality of life, direction of perceived social change, and community goals. A standardized interview guide containing open-ended questions was used to interview community leaders.

### **Participant Observation**

Participant observation techniques for the Wahneta SIA included attendance at a meeting of the community's neighborhood association as an observer, rather than as a project representative. Observation of community life also took place during several visits to the community on different days of the week and different times of day.

### **Mailed Survey**

A mail-out survey was developed and administered to residents to gather baseline data, to determine assessment variables, and to help predict impacts. All residents, businesses and individuals owning property in Wahneta were included in the survey sample. The survey instrument was relatively short (15 questions) and contained objective, simple questions. The instrument was sent out in both English and Spanish and consisted of four parts:

Introductory information, including an explanation of how to complete the survey and a map of the project, as it would be located in Wahneta;

1. Questions designed to determine how respondents felt about living in Wahneta;
2. Questions about how respondents felt about the proposed project and how it would impact them personally and the community in general; and,
3. Classification questions to gather basic socioeconomic and demographic information about the respondents.

### **Public Meeting**

One public information meeting for the Wahneta link was held at a community church. Notification of the meeting was made through direct delivery of fliers announcing the meeting to all mailboxes in the community. Notices were also distributed to local businesses and neighborhood associations and a display advertisement was placed in the local paper. All notices were prepared both in English and Spanish.

Approximately 10 percent of the total community population attended the meeting (300 people). The meeting included an informal open house period during which time attendees could review maps and other displays of the proposed project and ask questions of FDOT representatives. The formal portion of the meeting included comments and questions from the attendees.

## Findings

### Negative Impacts:

- The high percentage of low-income households and elderly residents in the community, as well as the scarcity of locally available replacement housing and the magnitude of residential relocations, would constitute a significant negative social impact.
- Several small businesses and two community churches would be displaced by the Wahneta link. One of the affected churches also serves as a community center and is a focal point for the community's neighborhood association. The displacement of the businesses and churches was concluded to be a negative social impact due to the need for economic opportunity in the community and the relative lack of available social resources.
- The Wahneta link would result in the development of several psychological barriers that would likely produce major changes in the social interaction patterns of the community.
- A high level of pedestrian activity characterizes Wahneta, including many school children riding their bikes to and from school. The placement of the Wahneta link would cause a barrier effect between a large proportion of residents and the elementary school and several businesses. The impact on the safety of school children and mobility of those who rely on walking or biking to access local businesses and services was determined to be a significant negative impact.

### Positive Impacts:

- An increase in economic activity could be an expected result from the project.
- Residential properties that would otherwise be difficult to sell would likely be purchased.
- The visibility of Wahneta to the external political arena would be increased.

Based upon analysis of the negative and positive social impacts of the Wahneta link, the analyst determined that the positive impacts would not outweigh the varied and potentially severe negative impacts to the social fabric of the community. This decision required that if the Wahneta link was chosen as the best viable alternative for the East-West Expressway corridor, mitigation strategies for the Wahneta project would need to be identified in collaboration with the community. Based, in part, on the results of the social impact assessment, the Wahneta Link was not implemented.



## THE LAKE WORTH STORY

Source: FDOT Office of Policy Planning, "The Lake Worth Story." By Gene Nowak and Ray Smith. Transportation Policy Forum 5.2 (Tallahassee: Florida Department of Transportation, Spring/Summer 1999): 4-5



# **COMMUNITY MITIGATION AND ENHANCEMENT**

## **DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA**

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Source: U.S. Department of Transportation. Federal Highway Administration, Office of Environment and Planning. "Community Impact Mitigation: Case Studies." Publication No. FHWA-PD-98-024 HEP-30/5-98 (30M)P. Washington: GPO, May 1998



**COMMUNITY PRESERVATION**  
**PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA**

Source: U.S. Department of Transportation. Federal Highway Administration, Office of Environment and Planning. "Community Impact Mitigation: Case Studies." Publication No. FHWA-PD-98-024 HEP-30/5-98 (30M)P. Washington: GPO, May 1998