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What is an Environmental Review?

Learn more about how transportation projects assess and document environmental impacts.

The Indiana Department of Transportation's (INDOT) planned 52@65 project near Lebanon will provide enhanced mobility and direct access at the I-65 and U.S. 52 interchange. Before the project can move into its final design, there's a team of people tasked with analyzing and documenting the impacts the project will have on the natural and social environment.

This process is a key component and largely goes unnoticed by the general public. The 52@65 project is in the environmental review stage now, and the final environmental document is anticipated to be complete this summer.

Whenever a project has federal funding, it has to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA requires an evaluation of how the proposed project could impact the surrounding environment. This evaluation includes the natural environment, like waterways, wetlands, and endangered species, and the social environment, like historic resources and social and economic factors.

For projects like 52@65 that include new alignments, identification of archaeological resources is an important process, due to the sensitive nature of what may be found and the amount of investigation effort. In general terms, an archaeological site is defined as the physical remains of any area of human activity greater than 50 years of age for which a boundary can be established.

Qualified archaeological professionals will complete field surveys to determine how disturbed an area may be and conduct "shovel test probes" in search of artifacts. In Indiana, "field scatter" is one of the more common artifact types, made up of remnants and pieces of historical items. If an archaeological site is found, it is evaluated to see if the site is significant enough to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Sometimes more investigation is needed to make that determination, which can include additional digging and trenching to find more data. This work is coordinated with the State Historic Preservation Officer with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

As the project wraps up the historical resources documentation, all of the environmental documentation will be compiled into the project's Environmental Assessment and a finding of the impacts of the project will be determined by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and INDOT.

The final environmental document is expected to be completed this summer, with a public hearing following the finalization of the document. The final design is expected to be complete in late 2024.

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52@65 is a state- and federally-funded Indiana Department of Transportation project designed to improve the level of service of the I-65 interchange at US 52 in Lebanon, Indiana. In addition to providing immediate benefits to the community, this project – which is currently in the design phase – will allow the region to handle future connectivity and access requirements.