

3.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

3.1 PROJECT LOCATION

The Trunk Highway (TH) 14 West Interregional Corridor is a two-lane roadway approximately 22 miles in length. Located in Nicollet County, the corridor extends from State Highway 15 just east of New Ulm to County Road (CR) 6 near North Mankato. TH 14 is a major east-west highway in southern Minnesota and plays a major role in the movement of people and goods. This roadway serves a variety of travel demands including mobility to serve commuter, commercial, and truck traffic and access to homes, farms, and commercial retail businesses. The Study Area is shown on **Figure 2**.

The project is located just north of the Minnesota River connecting the regional trade centers of New Ulm and Mankato and includes the cities of Courtland and Nicollet. Since Nicollet County has preserved much of its agricultural land through a zoning policy that has been in place since 1981, the majority of the land between the cities is rural. The Swan Lake Wildlife Management Refuge is located in an area just north of TH 14 between Courtland and Nicollet and the corridor drops down into the Minnesota River Valley just west of Courtland.

3.2 ROADWAY HISTORY

For a more in-depth description of the role and importance of TH 14 in the regional roadway system from its beginnings as a fur-trading route to its present day status as a U.S. highway and part of the National Highway System see **Chapter 1.0 in the CMP**.

Early Roads¹ - This segment of TH 14 had its beginnings as a fur trading route along one of the great wilderness trails laid out during the first half of the nineteenth century by the Red River fur traders. The trails followed the valleys of the Red and Minnesota Rivers in western and southern Minnesota to connect with the Mississippi River on the eastern border of Minnesota.

Government Roads - The development of the government roads that formed a network of roads over the whole territory of Minnesota was initiated in 1849. Current day TH 14 was part of the Minnesota Road System of 1860 extending from Winona westward through Rochester, Owatonna, Mankato, New Ulm, and beyond.

The **Minnesota Trunk Highway** system was established by law in November 1920. Existing TH 14 was part of the Trunk Highway system and at that time called Route No. 7 beginning at a point in Winona and extending westerly to the South Dakota border “affording Winona, . . . Rochester, . . . Owatonna, . . . Mankato, . . . New Ulm, . . . Lake Benton, and intervening and adjacent communities a reasonable means of communication, each with the other and other places within the state.”²

¹ *Roads and the Settlement of Minnesota, Arthur J. Larsen, 1940*

² *Constitution of the State of Minnesota, Article XIV, Public Highway System*

National Highway System³ - TH 14 is a part of the US Department of Transportation's National Highway System (NHS) extending from the South Dakota Border to Rochester. The NHS is approximately 160,000 miles of roadway important to the Nation's economy, defense and mobility.

The **Interregional Corridor (IRC) System** adopted by Mn/DOT in January 2000 identifies roadway corridors that tie the state together by connecting people with jobs, distributors with manufacturers, shoppers with retailers, and tourists with recreational opportunities.

TH 14 plays a major role in the movement of goods and people. TH 14 is a primary truck route for heavy commercial vehicles that carry freight to local, regional, intrastate, and interstate destinations. This segment of TH 14 has 10% to 15% heavy commercial vehicles.

Mn/DOT has identified TH 14 as a Medium Priority Interregional Corridor connecting the secondary trade centers of New Ulm and Mankato. The Interregional Corridor System identified the 14 West IRC roadway as one of the high risk corridors for signal proliferation and an increase in traffic.

3.3 FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION

TH 14 is classified as a Principal Arterial, the highest functional class rating. The function of a principal arterial is to connect metropolitan centers to regional business concentrations, with a primary function of mobility.

³ US Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration

4.0 COST AND FUNDING SOURCES

4.1 COSTS

The preliminary estimated costs (as outlined in Chapter 6: Alternatives) include roadway construction and right-of-way acquisition. **Table 6-1** shows the estimated costs to construct the roadway for each of the alternatives recommended for further consideration. The detailed cost estimate is in **Appendix A**.

The estimated roadway construction costs range from \$48.7 million to \$51.3 million, depending on the roadway design, the alignment location of the roadway and anticipated right-of-way impacts. These costs assume all access to TH 14 is via at-grade intersections.

There is the possibility that some intersections have the potential for either interchanges or grade separations since some have a high probability of having traffic volumes exceed the guidelines for signal installation in the near future. Based on recent experience, it is anticipated that an interchange would cost approximately \$5 million and a grade-separation would be approximately \$1 million.

4.2 FUNDING SOURCES

TH 14 is identified for four-lane expansion in the current Minnesota Department of Transportation's Long Range Work Plan [2001-2020] with no specific year given in the 15 to 20 year period. However, the long range work plan will be revised in 2003 and the status of projects may change at that time.

The project is eligible for federal funds. It is anticipated that construction will be staged over a number of years depending on funding availability. A mix of federal and state funds is likely to be used for funding the project.

5.0 SCHEDULE AND PROJECT MANAGER

5.1 PROJECT SCHEDULE

The Scoping process for the 14 West IRC overlaps the finalization of the Corridor Management Plan for the project. In essence, this project culminates with the completion of the Scoping Decision Document, so that the RGU will be prepared to move forward with the Environmental Impact Statement as soon as funding is available. Therefore, the dates for the Environmental Impact Statement process are tentative at this time. The schedule for the Scoping process is identified below.

Activity	Date
Notice of Availability of Scoping Document and Scoping Meetings in <i>EQB Monitor</i>	March 31, 2003
Interagency Scoping Meeting	April 23, 2003
Public Scoping Meeting	April 23, 2003
Scoping Comment Period Closes	May 2, 2003
Scoping Decision Document	June 2003
Notice of Intent to Prepare EIS in Federal Register	TBD (June 2003)
State EIS preparation Notice	TBD (December 2003)
Draft EIS Distribution/Notice of Availability	TBD (Fall 2004)
Public Hearing on Draft EIS	TBD (Fall 2004)
Final EIS Review Period	TBD (Winter 2005)
FHWA Record of Decision	TBD (Winter (March) 2005)
Adequacy Decision	TBD (Winter (March) 2005)
Study Report	TBD (Spring/Summer 2006)
Detail Design	TBD (Winter/Spring 2007)
Right-of-Way Acquisition	TBD (Fall 2008-09)
Contract Letting – Roadway and Bridge	TBD (Approximately 2010)

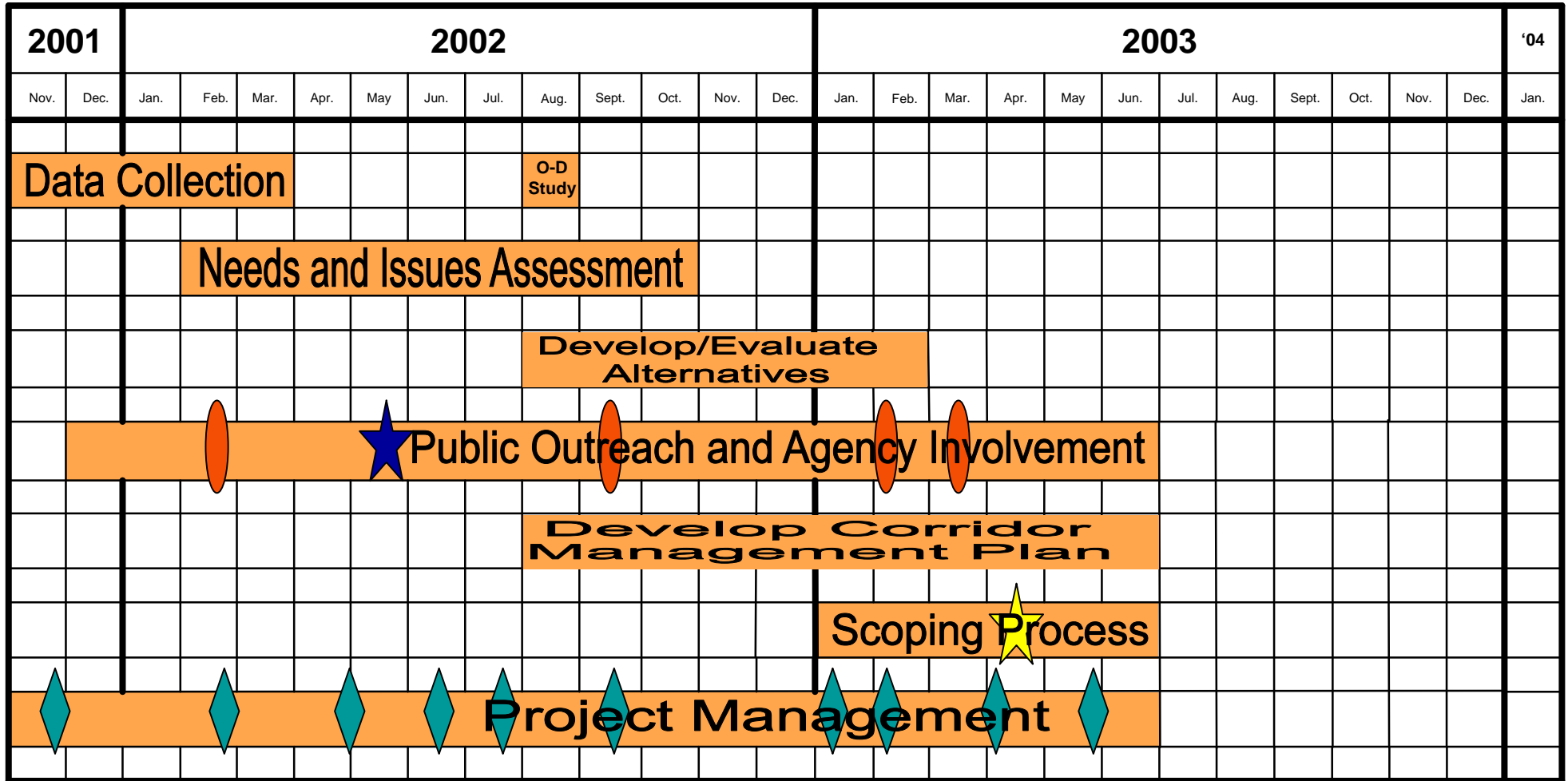
5.2 PROJECT MANAGER


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SCHEDULE



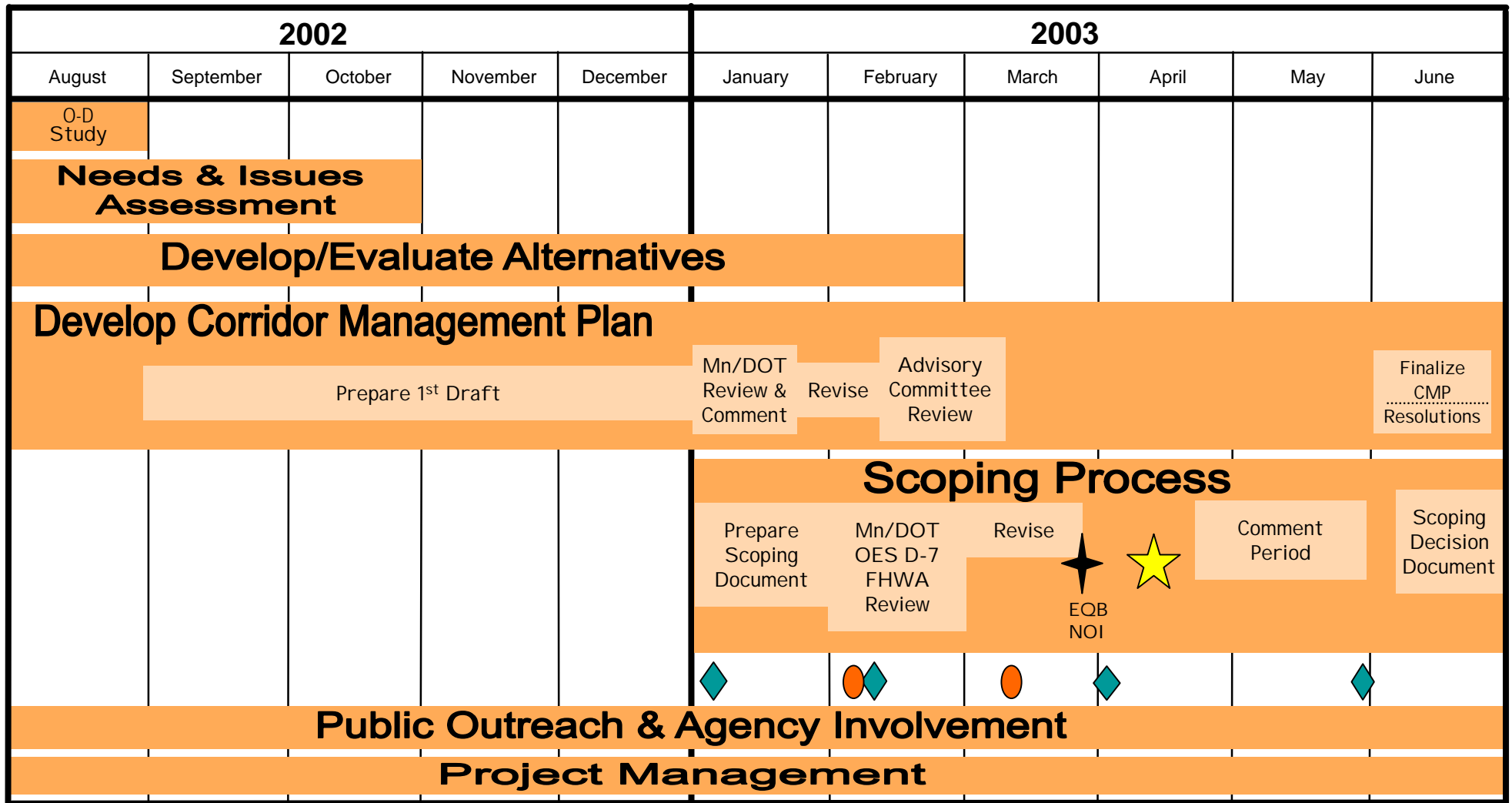
-  Public Information Open House
-  Scoping Hearing
-  Advisory Committee Meeting
-  Project Management Team Meeting



14 West Interregional Corridor:
North Mankato to New Ulm

Figure 5-1
Project Schedule

SCHEDULE



- ◆ Project Management Team Meeting
- ★ Public Information Open House
- ★ Scoping Hearing
- Advisory Committee Meeting
- ★ Notice of Intent (NOI)
- EQB Environmental Quality Board
- CMP Corridor Management Plan



14 West Interregional Corridor:
North Mankato to New Ulm