

## Questions and Answers about Iowa's Statewide Rest Area Plan

### Why are we doing this planning process?

Our mission is to provide a transportation system that gets people there safely, conveniently, and efficiently. To assure we remain able to meet that mission over time, we continually evaluate assets within the system to see if they still meet that need or if we need to make changes to better meet that need. We also want to make sure that the funds we are allocating for the transportation system are put to their best use and are not spent on assets that are underused or no longer necessary.

This process is being completed in three phases. We have already conducted Phase 1 and 2. Phase 3 includes a draft Implementation Plan which makes suggestions on our approach to rest areas in the future. It includes a public comment period that will gather feedback on the draft Implementation Plan.

### How long are you accepting comments?

We anticipate keeping the comment period open through September of 2019, which is longer than usual. This will allow us to better evaluate the success of the Dynamic Truck Parking Availability System, which we are also involved with. The management of truck parking is a major component of the rest area network and the Dynamic Truck Parking Availability System is being implemented to help better manage that parking. Success of the system could have an impact on the recommendations laid out in the draft Implementation Plan. Therefore, we must consider both initiatives together to make the best possible recommendations for implementation with regards to the rest area network.

### What will you do with the comments once you have them?

We expect to evaluate each comment to gather any information we don't already have that could be used to better inform future decisions and to identify concerns that we are not aware of. We will take all comments into consideration to determine if there are ways to address concerns within the context of a final Implementation Plan.

## How many rest areas does Iowa currently have?

There are currently 37 full service rest areas and 16 parking only sites located throughout the state as well as one full service rest area (a scenic site) that is open seasonally located near Council Bluffs.

## Why do we have so many?

Regular access to rest areas along the interstate system is required under federal regulations. These rest areas were built to fulfill this regulation and meant for safety in an era when vehicles didn't travel as fast, therefore taking longer to get where you're going. During this time there were not as many other private gas stations and truck stops along the way. The existing rest areas were built to safely allow motorists to take a rest from driving and avoid driver fatigue....hence the term rest areas.

## How much does Iowa's rest area system cost?

The cost of the rest area system varies from year to year, but they currently cost approximately \$3.7M per year for operations. The current five-year program includes another \$7.4M for improvements to be made to individual facilities. This cost fluctuates from year to year and has occasionally been as high as \$10-15M in past programs. It currently costs approximately \$3.5M to upgrade one aging full service rest area site.

## Where does the money for rest areas come from?

The funding is programmed within our five-year program as both a maintenance line item, but also individually for larger facility improvements. This five-year program is reviewed and adopted by the Transportation Commission on an annual basis. Rest area operations and maintenance are funded by state funds from the primary road fund, and rest area construction or reconstruction is funded from a mixture of federal and state highway funds.

## Why would we want to consider closing rest areas?

The need for rest areas has changed. Many other private areas that allow drivers to take a break have been built along the interstate system. In addition, vehicles now drive further and faster than was the case when the original rest areas were built.

Also, we expect that as autonomous vehicle technology becomes more mainstream, it will further reduce the frequency at which a rest area is needed. The recommended closures outlined in the plan are in response to data showing how people currently use the rest areas along with our prediction of how they will use them in the future.

## How many are we suggesting for closure and when?

As part of the draft Implementation Plan, we are suggesting closing 11 of the least used rest areas and adding improvements at the remaining 26 locations. We are also suggesting closure of all parking only sites. Parking spaces will be consolidated at more controlled and safer full service rest areas in the vicinity of the parking only sites. Remember, this is only a draft plan and we are seeking input from the public before making any final recommendations or completing closures.

## How were the rest areas that we are suggesting for closure chosen?

As part of this planning study each rest area was ranked based on the following weighted criteria:

- 20% for truck parking availability and demand
- 30% for spacing
- 25% based on usage
- 7.5% for facility age
- 7.5% based on private facilities located within the same area
- 5% for services provided
- 5% for uniqueness

Once we completed the ranking, we compared the lowest ranking facilities within the system against spacing of rest areas throughout the state. This helped us identify which facilities to suggest for closure while still providing adequate opportunities for rest.

## If implemented, what impacts do we see these closures having on travelers?

### Commercial traffic?

We don't expect significant impacts to most travelers, as the recommendations are in response to data we've collected on how travelers actually use the existing rest areas. However, if the plan is implemented, we do expect to see some impacts to the freight industry due to limited truck parking availability throughout the interstate system. In the draft plan, we are making recommendations to address this impact in several ways by:

1. Increasing truck parking at the remaining full service rest area sites.
2. Providing cameras to monitor parking opportunities.
3. Implementing a Real-time Truck Parking Availability System which informs interested parties of parking availability at rest areas as well as private truck stops.

## How much would we save by closing rest areas?

Assuming the plan is implemented as currently drafted, we expect the savings to the Iowa taxpayers to be as much as \$30 million over the next 20 years depending on the improvements made to adjacent rest areas. Savings in operational and capital costs associated with retired rest areas would be reinvested in the highway program for other projects.

## Where would those savings come from?

Those savings are costs we would have made to improve the noncritical, aging rest areas. It includes the cost of closing them as well as the savings that come from not improving them.

## Why do some rest areas have art? Will that continue?

Some of our rest areas have aesthetic treatments, sometimes referred to as art, that showcase our state's heritage and the heritage of the local area for travelers. We developed these treatments in conjunction with the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs to help promote the state and surrounding area to people traveling through the state. Although the cost of these treatments is a relatively minimal part of the improvement costs for these rest areas, we continue to be mindful of the best use of the funds allocated to us for transportation improvements, and no longer include these aesthetic treatments in our improvement plans. We won't remove treatments that are already installed at rest areas that are retained under the plan, but we also are not recommending that a rest area be retained to keep aesthetic treatments that were installed. Decisions under the plan will be driven by the criteria listed above, which is again focused on how the rest area is being used.