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How Can the Route 53 Extension be Funded?

On the books for decades, could the Route 53 extension be any closer to reality? How do you propose it is paid for?

By [Angela Morrey](#)

[Email the author](#) July 12, 2012

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Talk about the Route 53 extension has extended into decades.

The plan, which will extend Route 53 from Lake Cook Road to Highway 120 in Lake County, has the support of local governments, transportation agencies and the general public.

However, opponents continue to question how it will be funded.

[Many Grayslake officials say they are ready to move forward with the project.](#) The [Blue Ribbon Advisory Council](#) recently presented a report to the [Illinois Tollway Authority Board](#) which included comments on behalf of Grayslake Mayor Rhett Taylor and from the Village of Grayslake and the Grayslake Trustees.

[In May the Advisory Council approved a final report recommending the Illinois Tollway move forward with the corridor.](#) The council stated that a four-lane, limited access, tolled parkway should be built. [With a price tag estimated at \\$1.9 billion to \\$2.5 billion as reported by the Chicago Tribune,](#) the Council said the extension would be paid for through tolls, local revenue sources and other options. It would be developed in coordination with local governments.

"The funding will be a challenge," said Pat Carey of the Lake County Board. "It's not completely impossible if all the sources aligned, but it's going to be tough."

"All of the players - the Tollway Authority, the Pace and Metra systems, the counties and all the local governments have to be together on this from the beginning or the funding won't be there," agreed Greg Koeppen, Director of the [Lake County Farm Bureau](#) who was recently appointed Vice Chairman to the [Regional Citizens Advisory Board for the Regional Transportation Authority](#).

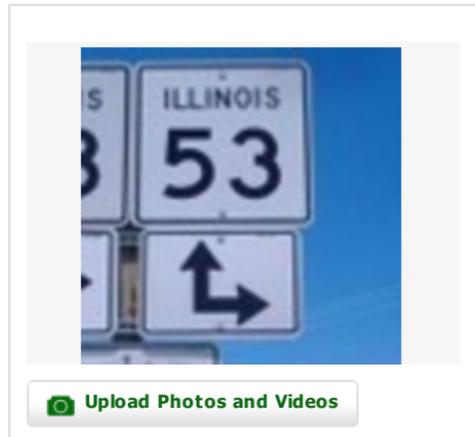
Koeppen believes Route 53 would have to be a user-fee based system to actually work. "There has to be that understanding that residents who use the road may have to pay for it," he said.

"The bulk of the money could come from the Tollway Authority through tolls, but not necessarily just from the new portion," said Carey. "I think it's reasonable to add tolls to the existing Route 53 also."

This is where the opposition lies. Bill Morris, a resident of Grayslake and a former member of the [Illinois Tollway Authority Board](#), said having a suggested 20 cent toll wouldn't be fair.

"The working class who live in Lake County would have to pay more just to get to work everyday," Morris said. "I can't imagine families able to pay \$5 a day on tolls. It's not right."

"No one likes traffic but it costs money to fix that," said Morris, a former State Senator and former Mayor of Waukegan. "There is limited money available, the state is broke, and we need a solution. It's just



reality that the solution is not Route 53."

Morris said instead of spending more time planning the Route 53 extension, local officials should consider other ways to alleviate the traffic demands in and out of Lake County. He suggests making the section of Highway 120 from Wildwood to Route 45 a four lane road, widening Route 45 up to Grand Avenue and beyond, and a Route 45 bypass in the Millburn.

"If we don't build it you can see the businesses leaving the area," Koeppen said. "Who wants to have their employees be stuck in such traffic all the time. And if the businesses leave, it will ultimately raise property taxes."

"I think it's important for the people to be able to say whether its going to happen or not going to happen." Carey said, "We need to make a decsion in the next five years, or sooner, one way or the other."

Lake County and 12 villages and city councils have passed resolutions of support. And, in a 2009 county-wide referendum, 76 percent of voters favored extending Illinois Route 53. The project is also included in Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's GO TO 2040 comprehensive regional plan.