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# Tollway board agrees to help fund study of Highway 53 corridor

Amount would be part of estimated \$1 million cost

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(Tribune illustration / March 26, 2012)

By **Richard Wronski, Chicago Tribune reporter**

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The Illinois Tollway on Wednesday took a small step toward possibly making the long-sought Illinois Highway 53 extension a reality by committing more resources toward studying the project.

The tollway board approved spending an unspecified amount to help pay for a land-use plan for the path the proposed Highway 53 extension would take through Lake County.

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and Lake County would conduct the land-use study, which would involve all municipalities along the proposed corridor, officials said.

The goal would be to "produce a single vision for development within the corridor," said Rocco Zucchero, the tollway's deputy chief of engineering.

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"I see this as being a very small portion of the (total) cost to get all these communities on the same page," tollway Executive Director Kristi Lafleur said.

The tollway board is still a year or two away from agreeing to take on the project, Lafleur said.

The tollway also plans to develop a detailed design concept, refine cost estimates and survey customers' opinions.

An advisory council in June recommended a four-lane "parkway" extending Highway 53 north 12.5 miles from Lake-Cook Road. It would form a "T" with a 14-mile corridor along east-west Highway 120 (Belvidere Road) near Grayslake.

The council urged that the project be built as a toll road. Cost estimates range from \$2.2 billion to \$2.7 billion.

But even if built with toll revenue, the project has a funding gap of between \$1.9 billion and \$2.3 billion, depending on its design and exact route, Zuccherro said. Tollway officials would continue to seek ways to close that gap, he said.

The advisory council report noted that the improved access brought by the proposed highway would stimulate economic and residential development. Without careful planning, however, it cautioned that a new road could spur rapid and unplanned development, congestion and damage sensitive ecological areas.

The report estimated that the land-use plan could cost \$1 million.

Matt Maloney, CMAP's deputy chief of staff, said the funding could come from a variety of state and federal sources, which have not been identified.