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New tollway head reaches out to community to set agenda

By Marni Pyke | Daily Herald Staff Contact writer

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The Illinois State Toll Highway Authority's new chief is bringing in some outside consultants to assist in developing a plan for the agency's future. But these consultants won't be paid and they range from heads of transit agencies to labor experts to taxpayer watchdogs.

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Tollway Executive Director Kristi LaFleur, whose first day was Monday, announced Tuesday she is creating a transition team of volunteers representing "all walks of life, business and industry" to examine the agency's present status and set long-term goals.

"I wanted to make sure we look outside the agency and be as creative as possible in this new stage of development," LaFleur said. There are about 26 team members so far who will start in May with the aim of producing a report by the fall.

The list includes officials from transportation and planning organizations such as the Metropolitan Planning Council, Chicago Metropolis 2020, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and Regional Transportation Authority.

The team also includes environmental organizations like the Environmental Law and Policy Center and Openlands Trust, and drivers' advocates such as the AAA Chicago and Midwest Truckers Association. Business and labor is also represented with such diverse groups as the Illinois Chamber of Commerce, the Illinois Road and Transportation Builders Association, the Chicago Chamber of Commerce, the Chicago Federation of Labor and the Taxpayers Federation of Illinois.

Other interests include the Illinois Restaurant Association and Illinois Bureau of Tourism. Minority organizations invited include the Black Contractors United, Federation of Women Contractors and Hispanic American Construction Industry Association.

The group also reflects a regional mix from the 12 counties the tollway serves, LaFleur said. It will be led by Museum of Science and Industry President Dave Mosena.

The agency has been marred by the corruption arrest of former Gov. Rod Blagojevich, who is accused of arm-twisting contractors for contributions in connection with tollway projects, major snafus involving late notices for toll violations and legal proceedings against its former oases operator.

LaFleur said she received the blessing of tollway board members to recruit outsiders with a fresh perspective to develop a new vision. Topics will include regional economic development, environmental responsibility, increasing accountability and customer service.

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