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CMAP GO TO 2040 looks to communities for advice



Jennifer Rice photo

Stephanie Todd, left, member of Yorkville's Citizens Advisory Committee, talks with Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) Associate Planner Russell Pietrowiak. Todd had several questions for Pietrowiak in regards to transit planning for Yorkville.

By Jennifer Rice
Staff Writer

After three years of research and thousands of ideas from the public, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) GO TO 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan is ready for public comment regarding how to move the region into the future—to 2040.

CMAP is the official regional planning organization for seven counties in northeastern Illinois: Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry and Will. By state and federal law, CMAP is responsible for developing GO TO 2040. Planning began in 2007 with a regional vision that set the stage for the planning process, describing how the region should look in 2040. At public hearings last summer, residents across the seven-county region told CMAP what trade-offs they would be willing to make to support a better 2040. Their input led to the comprehensive regional plan, which is currently being presented at public hearings.

The seven counties included in CMAP's draft plan encompass 284 municipalities and nearly 1,400 units of local government. CMAP was created to coordinate among these different entities and to address land use and transportation issues, as well as quality of life issues like economic development, housing, health care and social services.

"Quality of life is really the underlying concept for the regional vision, along with sustainability, innovation and equity," said CMAP Associate Planner Andrew Williams-Clark. "They all wove the vision together. We need a higher quality of life in 2040 than there is now."

The public now needs to voice its comments and give input on the draft of the comprehensive plan, which can be done by attending an open house or visiting GO TO 2040's website at www.goto2040.org. Public comment runs through Aug. 6.

Through August 3, representatives from CMAP will present the GO TO 2040 draft plan at public meetings throughout the seven counties it represents. Citizens are encouraged to attend so they can hear the major policy recommendations, take a critical look at the plan and provide input. GO TO 2040's most recent meeting was June 29 in Yorkville. The next meeting will be July 13 in McHenry County. (See sidebar for complete schedule of upcoming public meetings).

"The presentations really are meant to be a 10,000-foot view. We're showing [the public] the way [the draft plan] is organized and giving them some high-

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level bullets. We really encourage [the public] to focus on key issues that interest [them] the most, dig into them and tell us exactly what you think," Williams-Clark said.

During the Kendall County public meeting, Williams-Clark said there were three important challenges CMAP wanted to bring to the public's attention. The first is the increase in the 65 and older population, which is expected to double by 2040.

"That is a huge demographic shift and it is something that we are going to have to plan for, as a regional planning agency, to make sure those individuals continue to age in a place the way they want to and also so they can get from point A to point B the way they need to. It is something that is really underlying the plan," Williams-Clark explained.

The second challenge is the projection of an 80-percent increase in freight rail traffic within the next two decades. On the one hand, freight rail traffic is what makes the seven-county region economically competitive, yet, it will lead to traffic congestions, Williams-Clark said.

The third challenge is traffic congestion. CMAP estimates drivers in the seven-county region spend 253 million hours a year in traffic delays, which leads to 151 million gallons of fuel lost, sitting in traffic jams.

"These are serious problems that not only impact our quality of life, but also our economy," Williams-Clark said.

CMAP used these three challenges as its underlying driving force in devising the comprehensive regional plan and came up with four main themes: Livable communities, regional mobility, human capital and efficient governance. Each theme was broken down into 12 high-priority recommendations. (See sidebar for a complete list).

During Yorkville's public meeting, those who attended were interested in CMAP's plan regarding regional mobility, which recommends transportation finance, public transit and freight. To support the plan, it calls for national and local governments to develop innovative financing.

CMAP'S Associate Planner, Russell Pietrowiak explained there are two lists for transit projects. The first, a fiscally constrained list, is an extremely short list of projects that have already secured funding for engineering design.

The second list is much larger and contains projects that, though they may be vital to the region, have not secured funding and therefore, are at a standstill. Kendall County Board member Jeff Wehrli voiced his frustration after viewing a map depicting transportation infrastructure within the seven-county CMAP region when he noticed that Kendall County has little, if any, transportation infrastructure.

"It's sad to see the fastest growing county [Kendall County] is a big blank right there. We are completely short-changed," Wehrli said. "There is no rail, there is no major road improvements. I see Kane County has stuff, but what about Kendall? I see nothing when I look at that map. This is robbery," Wehrli added. Yorkville Mayor Valerie Burd said she knows there has been support for the proposed Oswego train station and also that money has been earmarked for the proposed Prairie Parkway, which would connect Interstates 88 and 80, but knows plans have, "hit a speed bump."

"Isn't the funding there, for the engineering of the train station in Oswego?" Burd asked the CMAP representatives.

"There is; for engineering and design," Pietrowiak said. "They just don't have the additional funding to build it," he explained.

If funding does become available for projects on the larger list, it can be moved onto the smaller, fiscally constrained list, but another project would have to drop out.

"It's a zero sum game on some level," Pietrowiak said. "And that's why it's a constraint list. There is only so much money. If something else goes in, something else has to come out."

He also explained that only 5-to-10 percent of funding money coming to the seven-county region is for new projects. "The rest goes to maintaining the system. There is very little money for new stuff, so we have to prioritize what we can do with that very small pot of money. Once you build something, you increase the maintenance fund," Pietrowiak said.

Yorkville's Citizens Advisory Committee member, Stephanie Todd, added that, "There is so much money that goes into planning, but it always seems something else better comes along and the money goes to that instead, and I just don't understand that."

Both Williams-Clark and Pietrowiak agreed these comments and concerns were legitimate and fair criticisms. They stressed to Wehrli, Burd and Todd to visit GO TO 2040's website and make their concerns known.

"This is why we have these public hearings. The Prairie Parkway is not listed as one of the major capital projects. If you think it should be, this is your opportunity to voice that. Right now, we need to hear those types of comments, so if need be, we can make alterations to the project," Williams-Clark said.

At the conclusion of the public comment period, which ends Aug. 6, CMAP will incorporate that feedback as needed before presenting the revised plan to the CMAP Board and Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Policy Committee for approval in October. At that point, the agency's full attention and energy will shift to the task of leading the regional effort to implement GO TO 2040's recommendations.

There are several ways you can submit comments regarding GO TO 2040's Comprehensive Regional Draft Plan: By visiting www.goto2040.org; by email at info@cmmap.illinois.gov; by calling CMAP at (312) 454-0400; by mail at CMAP, ATTN: GO TO 2040 Comments: 233 S. Wacker Drive, Suite 800 Chicago, IL 60606.

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