

August 26, 2013

Illinois Coalition to Clean Up Diesel Pollution
c/o Respiratory Health Association
1440 W. Washington
Chicago, IL 60607

CMAQ
ATTN: CMAQ Public Comment
233 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 800
Chicago IL 60606.

Dear CMAP Transportation Committee:

We write in support of the diesel emission reduction projects submitted for your approval by Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) staff to the five year FY 2014-18 Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) program. These reflect the list of proposed projects submitted by the CMAQ Project Selection Committee. In our view, the key reason for CMAQ funding is the benefit it provides area residents by preventing death and reducing human sickness and suffering due to air pollution in metropolitan Chicago.

Fine particulate matter found in diesel exhaust is a clear cause of premature death, increased cardiac risk, asthma attacks and breathing difficulties which have all been well documented by peer reviewed scientific analyses. Most recently, federal studies have also tied diesel exhaust inhalation to increased risk lung cancer as well. Over 600,000 people in the Chicago metropolitan area alone already live with lung disease. In fact, diseases like asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are still increasing. COPD recently become the third leading cause of death in America. And the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has said that nationally from 2001 to 2009 the asthma prevalence rate for African-American children increased a heart-wrenching 50 percent. Asthma previously hindered breathing for one in nine African-American children; the number of those afflicted is now one in six.

Clearly the effects of fine particulate matter on human health are well established, and are a prime reason EPA has tightened the allowable level of PM2.5 in the air and why it has set strict emissions limits for new diesel trucks, diesel non-road equipment, locomotives and marine diesel engines. Yet while the health danger is recognized and actions have been taken to ensure that new vehicles and engines do not worsen air quality, the fact remains that diesel engines are extremely durable and the erosion of our local air quality from older diesel engines will continue for decades unless abated by additional action. The diesel emission reduction projects proposed for your approval address the problems caused by older diesel engines in the region that lack appropriate modern pollution controls.

CMAQ projects are evaluated on a cost-effectiveness basis for good reason. We know that CMAQ funds are limited and as a region we need to maximize the effectiveness of the federal dollars we get in the region. It should not matter whether filthy diesel engines being cleaned up or replaced are in privately-owned or publicly-owned vehicles. Whether a garbage truck is owned by a municipal government or a corporation does not matter to the members of the public being forced to breathe the emissions coming from such a machine. That a project is extremely cost effective and therefore a wise use of local federal

funds - maximizing the clean air benefits achieved by those funds - should be sufficient to warrant funding. Funding the most cost-effective projects will reduce the most pollution possible given limited funds, helping the greatest number of people breathe cleaner air and live longer healthier lives.

Some of these projects, such as the Illinois EPA/ Indiana Harbor Belt Railway project, deserve special note for having a higher than the minimum 20 percent match required for CMAQ projects, making it an especially wise use of limited federal funds. This project will help reduce air pollution across a broad swath of the south side of Chicago, an area already facing a higher than average risk of asthma prevalence as well as greater negative outcomes from asthma episodes. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), African-Americans are nearly three times more likely to wind up in the emergency room or to die from asthma compared to Whites. Proportionally more people in this project area have asthma and those people are more likely to suffer more severe asthma episodes. The burden of asthma in these communities is among the highest in the region, if not the country. Consequently, this project should provide significant emissions reductions precisely where they provide the maximum health benefits.

CMAQ projects should be funded on such merits. We urge the transportation committee to approve the CMAQ project selection list as proposed by the CMAQ Project Selection Committee staff and continue to urge the committee to maximize the reduction of air pollution going forward by continuing to fund diesel engine exhaust reduction projects, both through CMAQ and other transportation funding mechanisms.

Sincerely,

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