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Municipalities Cite Concerns About Elgin-O'Hare Corridor

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At the first meeting of a "fresh start" about the possible extension of the Elgin-O'Hare expressway to the east, local government representatives raised questions and cited concerns about the economic effects, both positive and negative, of what would be a major source of jobs and economic development.

For example, auto dealers in Elmhurst could be negatively impacted if York Road were altered and the number of car buyers coming from the north decreased, said Mayor Thomas Marcucci. Much of his city's revenue comes from a sales tax on dealerships located on York Road, Grand Avenue and Lake Street.

Marcucci said that suburban officials now are trying to correct an error made many years ago when a connecting road to O'Hare International Airport was designed for the economic benefit of the city of Chicago rather than for that of the region.

The issues in a corridor roughly bounded by I-90, I-290 and I-294 west of O'Hare include not only existing and new roadways but also bus and rail concepts as well as accommodations for bicycle riders and pedestrians. The area covers 50 square miles.

"This is not a single solution system. This is not a single corridor. We will not be able to build everything at one time. We are making a fresh start," said Peter E. Harmet, bureau chief of programming for the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT).

"While prior studies and findings will factor into this process, the main goal is to start anew to consider project alternatives and corridor locations."

The IDOT executive indicated that the new planning group effort is completely separate from the O'Hare Modernization Program. He noted that Program did set aside a 300-foot-wide corridor that will be considered for a future roadway.

IDOT has included 24 communities and two counties in a new planning group, but an attorney who works with Bensenville and Elk Grove Village asked if the interests of a half dozen municipalities most affected by any possible corridor plans could be voted against by the rest of the members.

Joe Karaganis of Karaganis, White & Magel in Chicago asked for a definition of consensus for the planning group.

"Consensus is when a majority of the stakeholders agree on a particular issue, while the dissenting remainder of stakeholders agrees its input has been heard and duly considered and that the process as a whole was fair," answered IDOT's Harmet at an Oct. 3 meeting in Wood Dale. "Decisions will not be made by a show of hands from local government officials."

Using federal government funding, IDOT said it was embarking on a major study in the Elgin-O'Hare corridor to identify specific transportation needs and potential solutions to the area's traffic congestion.

The initial contract for the planning work is \$5.4 million of \$140 million in federal funds for the corridor. Actual construction costs will be determined once a preferred alternative is developed.

The Elgin O'Hare-West Bypass study will explore options to extend the Elgin-O'Hare Expressway to the east and create a road allowing motorists to bypass O'Hare International Airport to the west.

Currently, the Elgin-O'Hare Expressway connects U.S. Rt. 20 (Lake Street) in Hanover Park to Ill. Rte. 53 (Rohlwing Road) in Itasca. Since it opened in 1993, it's been known locally as the "Itasca-Hanover Park Expressway" as people have noted that it goes neither to Elgin nor to O'Hare.

In approving the funding, Congress designated this project as having "national and regional significance." Only 25 projects nationwide received this designation, according to IDOT.



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"In making the designation, Congress recognizes how important transportation is in contributing to the ongoing economic health and quality of life for everyone in the area," said Milt Sees, the state's secretary of transportation. "Now, it's our job to perform a thorough analysis and reach out to the public to identify problems and come up with solutions."

The first of a series of public meetings to solicit input from the general public will take place from 4-7 p.m., Nov. 14 at the Oak Meadows Golf Course, 900 N. Wood Dale Road in Addison.

The IDOT team will offer speakers' bureau events and small group meetings, distribute newsletters and launch a Web site (www.elginohare-westbypass.org) in attempt to discuss preliminary study findings and solicit feedback.

The meeting on Oct. 3 was the first of what IDOT said will be regular meetings to provide ongoing insight and feedback for plans the state agency plans to make by the end of 2010. The first meeting was held in the DoubleTree Hotel facing Thorndale Road, which is located in the corridor where the expressway extension would go.

A second meeting of the Corridor Planning Group will be held during the winter of 2007-08. IDOT gave local government officials a homework assignment on Oct. 3 of 16 questions about transportation issues in their respective communities. Municipal officials were also asked to identify local business organizations and community groups which might want to comment on proposals made by the IDOT group.

The study area, which IDOT said has become the second largest employment center in the Chicago area, is roughly bounded by three interstate highways—I-90, I-290 and I-294—west of O'Hare.

"We are taking a fresh look at remedies and will consider every possibility, including brand new roadways, improvements to existing roadways, bus, rail, mass transit and accommodations for bicycle rider and pedestrians," said IDOT's Sees.

Not everyone will agree about the proposed changes, according to Pat Pechnick, a principal of Smith Engineering, one of the consultants for IDOT. Speaking to local government officials at the Oct. 3 meeting, he said, "We want you to be candid and treat each other with respect."

Elmhurst's Marcucci said that it was essential for IDOT to "have a commitment to effective conflict resolution in areas where we will not always agree."

He also mentioned one potential area of conflict, a tentative corridor map which had been produced by DuPage County, and inquired whether it would be considered in IDOT's plans.

"Chairman Robert Schillerstrom has been showing around this map to local officials," the Mayor said.

Harmet repeated his comment about making a fresh start and considering prior studies.

Mark Avery, planning development manager for the Economic Development and Planning Department for DuPage County, said the corridor map and other information would be discussed at future meetings of County officials and municipal officials.

"I hope there will be overlap," he told Marcucci.

Municipalities & counties in the Corridor Planning Area

Addison

Arlington Heights

Berkeley

Bensenville

Bloomington

Chicago

Des Plaines

Elk Grove Village

Elmhurst

Franklin Park



- Hillside
- Itasca
- Melrose Park
- Mount Prospect
- Norridge
- Northlake
- Park Ridge
- Rolling Meadows
- Roselle
- Rosemont
- Schaumburg
- Schiller Park
- Villa Park
- Wood Dale
- Cook County
- DuPage County

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