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Panel recommends mass transit for rebuilt Addams tollway

Special 'managed' lanes urged for cars, express buses

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The Illinois Tollway's widening and reconstruction project on Interstate 90 gives the region "a real opportunity to implement managed lanes that also accommodate transit," said the co-chair of an advisory council. (Stacey Wescott, ChicagoTribune / September 20, 2011)

Maps

Rockford, IL, USA

N Randall Rd & Interstate 90, Elgin, IL 60123, USA

Rosemont, IL, USA

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By Richard Wronski, Chicago Tribune reporter

May 25, 2012

The **Illinois Tollway** should include congestion-priced, "managed" lanes and mass-transit options such as express buses as part of its plan to rebuild the **Jane Addams** Memorial Tollway, an advisory council recommended Thursday.

The group also urged the **Illinois Department of Transportation** to consider continuing those special lanes and transit options on the Kennedy Expressway all the way to downtown Chicago.

The recommendations were reached after nine months of study by an advisory panel of planning experts, transportation officials, state and local officials and business groups along the Interstate Highway 90 corridor from Chicago to Rockford.

The council's co-chairs, Don Kopec and Stephen Ernst, officials with the Chicago and Rockford metropolitan planning councils respectively, presented the findings Thursday to the Illinois Tollway's board of directors.

The tollway's widening and reconstruction project on the Addams provides the region with "a real opportunity to implement managed lanes that also accommodate transit," Kopec said. These special lanes could be used for vehicles that pay premium tolls during congested periods, or for express buses.

As part of its \$12.1 billion, 15-year reconstruction program, the tollway plans to rebuild and widen the Addams from the Kennedy Expressway to Interstate 39 in Rockford.

The Addams work is estimated to cost \$2.2 billion and is scheduled for 2013 to 2016. The Addams will be eight lanes from the Kennedy to Randall Road in Elgin and six lanes from Randall to I-39.

Initially, plans call for the inside lane in each direction to be separated from other lanes with a painted buffer. These managed lanes would be congestion-priced, that is, vehicles could pay a premium toll depending on the level of traffic and time of day.

Later, the inside shoulder could be converted into an express bus lane. Longer term, the council suggests using the inside median for an unspecified rail option.

Previously, planners hoped that I-90 could accommodate a leg of the once-hoped-for STAR Line, a **Metra** line running through the north and west suburbs linking existing commuter rail lines.

That plan has been virtually discarded due to lack of funding, but express buses operated by Pace have emerged as a more cost-effective and practical alternative.

"There's been talk of transit (on I-90) for years — now it's time to deliver," said Rocco Zucchero, the tollway's deputy chief of engineering.

The proposals offered Thursday didn't spell out the rail option, but one possibility could be extending the **CTA's Blue Line** beyond its current end point at **O'Hare International Airport**.

The council also recommended that local governments along I-90 should plan for station areas, park-and-ride lots and other amenities to support transit options.

Tollway officials said they would work with transit and transportation agencies to evaluate the recommendations.