

**DRAFT article for submission to Illinois Issues (projected for the February 2007 edition)**

## **CMAP Makes the Case for Collaborative Planning**

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### ***New agency consolidates land-use and transportation planning to meet the challenges of growth in metropolitan Chicago***

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In existence for just over a year now, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) has made major strides toward integrating land-use and transportation planning for the seven-county region. The CMAP Board and staff are dedicated to transforming how planning is conducted and investment decisions are made in northeastern Illinois, both at the regional and local levels. That is an ambitious objective, but what's at stake is the continuing livability of our communities. To meet the many inter-related challenges posed by the region's anticipated rapid growth, nothing less than a bold strategy will suffice.

A consensus among mayors, county chairs, other local officials, business leaders, and public interest groups prompted Governor Blagojevich and the Illinois General Assembly to form the new agency by merging the Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS) and the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC). CMAP was created as an agent of change, to fundamentally alter how the region and its communities formulate and implement plans. Just as the agency was created by consensus, it needs to act as a consensus builder by working with our partners to promote good planning and implementation. The challenge for our region and its leaders is to pursue lofty ideals while keeping everyday realities firmly in mind.

Both regionally and locally, those realities are increasingly stark. The seven counties served by CMAP -- Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will -- face an additional 2 million residents and 1.2 million more jobs by 2030. The metropolitan area has the nation's third-worst traffic delays, which will likely worsen unless Illinois stops tapping into capital funds to cover the costs of operating our world-class transportation system. Natural resources are abundant but under increasing pressure due to the rate of land development. The agricultural character in parts of northeastern Illinois is eroding. The region's eastern border is Lake Michigan, one of the world's largest fresh-water resources, but shortages of drinking water are projected in coming years. All of these challenges require a comprehensive approach that builds connections across topic areas and geographical boundaries.

Some observers mistakenly regard many such "traditional" planning issues as being in conflict with the need for economic development and the long Illinois tradition of local

autonomy. CMAP believes emphatically that this represents a false choice. Instead, our view is that jobs and prosperity will literally depend on our success at guiding growth in ways that preserve overall quality of life. If that sounds simple, it really is not. Getting there requires a collaborative effort in which communities focus on the long-term goals that they have in common rather than on the short-term factors that might separate them.

The November 2006 edition of *Illinois Issues* contained a guest essay, "The Hitch in the Plan," which raises an important question: Without regulatory authority, how does a regional agency shape local decisions? The CMAP Board feels strongly that establishing intergovernmental cooperation with a strong local commitment to planning is critical to creating and implementing a vision for the future of northeastern Illinois. Good planning without implementation is better than no planning at all -- but not much. The metropolitan region has traditionally suffered from a disconnect between high-minded plans and what actually happens on the ground with decisions regarding land use and transportation.

Such a lack of follow-through is what prompts some to advocate a top-down regulatory approach. That is not CMAP's preferred strategy because, among other drawbacks, it can be counter-productive for a region striving to improve its position in the global economy. But there is much that can be done to build intergovernmental cooperation, in part by providing better information and tools to clarify the consequences of decisions. For example, despite years of investment in roads, congestion has been getting worse. CMAP has the data and analytical expertise to explain just why traffic problems are accelerating, and we want to use those insights to help the region chart a new course in how transportation infrastructure investments are made.

The region faces a shortage of funds for transportation, but the solution is not to spend our way out of these problems. In December, the CMAP Board passed an aggressive statement of principles on the need for a statewide capital funding program. The statement says that capital projects must be selected based on regionally approved evaluation criteria that produce agreed-upon results. We can no longer afford to select projects that do not meet the region's basic need to improve transportation and other infrastructure systems in ways that strengthen our communities.

By making that case for fiscal responsibility and strategic investment, CMAP wants to help convince the public, the General Assembly, and our governor that the continued economic success of the Chicago region depends on a new capital program to maintain and expand the region's road, transit, and freight rail systems, while also building and maintaining water-treatment facilities, schools, open space, and other necessary infrastructure. Without new investment dollars, we risk losing our competitive advantage.

Bringing the business community to the planning table is an important CMAP innovation. Like others in the region, business leaders are frustrated by traffic snarls, the lack of affordable housing, and other factors that erode our economic competitiveness. Too often, those voices have not been heard in the debate over how to shape growth via planning of land use and transportation. By the same token, planners' concerns often

have been disregarded when decisions get made over how land will be developed. Neighbors often compete to attract investment in the global economy, but urban and suburban communities must act as members of the same team, because their futures and fortunes are intertwined.

Growth is clearly coming to northeastern Illinois. Working together as a region, we can shape these trends instead of passively letting them shape our communities. That's how growth can become real *progress* rather than something that erodes quality of life. To that end, CMAP will provide leadership by giving decision makers a new regional context for their choices regarding land use and transportation. Collaborating with our partners and deploying advanced tools for data research and analysis, CMAP will evaluate the potential impacts of those decisions, which influence our communities' character and our quality of life. Land use and transportation are deeply intertwined, and they also affect housing, natural resources, and economic development, among other regional priorities.

This approach is detailed in the CMAP Board's report -- available at <http://www.chicagoareapanning.org> -- to Governor Blagojevich and the Illinois General Assembly. It describes the Board's vision for the agency and the region it serves. The report also includes strategic guidance on governance and funding, which will be an important part of CMAP's legislative agenda for the General Assembly's session in Spring 2007.

The report is in no sense the final say on CMAP's strategic direction; it establishes high-level policy "hooks" that we will use later, with our partners, to hang specific program details upon. For example, our subcommittees' structure is still being finalized, to ensure broad representation. And the CMAP Board is working with the region's federally designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) on a joint memorandum of understanding to formalize a shared process for transportation decision making. Above all, CMAP is striving to ensure that the agency's work is relevant to our constituents across the metropolitan region. That means building programs and capacities that potential sponsors want to fund and that facilitate good decision making at the local and regional levels.

Undeniably, people are talking about CMAP. Some say we're going too far, too fast, and others say the changes aren't fast enough. At the end of its first year, CMAP is not a blank slate. In fact, it never was, due to the legacies of NIPC and CATS. Taking a fresh start yet building on good work by our many partners, the new agency is working hard to make effective planning increasingly relevant to communities across the region. As residents of the region, we may have very different backgrounds, and we may have occasional differences of opinion. But we share a common goal -- for our communities to prosper, in every sense.