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## Elgin-O'Hare gets a highway number, picks up funding

By Richard Wronski, Chicago Tribune reporter

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Its days as a free ride are numbered, and so, finally, is the Elgin-O'Hare Expressway.

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Gov. Pat Quinn on Tuesday bestowed a numerical designation, Illinois Highway 390, on the 20-year-old route.

Quinn addressed hundreds of state and local officials, union members and others at a groundbreaking in Itasca that marked the ceremonial transformation of the expressway into part of the Illinois Tollway system.

Hailing several Republican officials, including potential gubernatorial foe state Sen. Kirk Dillard, the Democrat Quinn cited the project as a sterling example of bipartisanship, and contrasted it with the gridlock in Washington.

"We don't want politics (in Illinois), we want good policy," Quinn said

Officials also announced that they had narrowed a \$300 million funding gap in the \$3.4 billion project to widen and extend the highway east to reach one of its namesakes, O'Hare International Airport.

The highway still won't go to Elgin, however. The western terminus will remain at Lake Street (U.S. 20) in Hanover Park.

The Illinois State Toll Highway Authority board last week awarded the first major construction contract for roadway and bridge work at Thorndale Avenue and Interstate 290 in Itasca.

The \$36.7 million contract calls for building two new "flyover" ramps at the intersection.

As part of the overall project, the rebuilt Elgin-O'Hare will connect to a new tollway skirting the airport's western edge. That tollway will, in turn, be linked to the Tri-State Tollway (I-294) in Bensenville and the Jane Addams Memorial Tollway (I-90) in Des Plaines.

The project will take until 2025.

Although \$3.1 billion will come from tolls, the source of most of the \$300 million gap is unclear.

DuPage County Chairman Dan Cronin said \$69 million would come from a federal congestion-mitigation and air-quality improvement grant. The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning approved that funding earlier this month.

Another \$25 million would come from county funds, Cronin said.

It's unclear why the Elgin-O'Hare never had a numerical designation like most major thoroughfares. Spokesmen for the Tollway and the Illinois Department of Transportation could provide no explanation Tuesday.

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