



## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Environment and Natural Resources Working Committee

**From:** CMAP Staff

**Date:** September 3, 2014

**Re:** GO TO 2040 Plan Update - Public Comment Period Summary

---

---

### Background

As part of the federally mandated update to metropolitan Chicago's comprehensive regional plan, the public must be afforded an opportunity to provide input on the process and resulting, updated plan documents. Therefore, a public comment period was conducted by CMAP from June 13, 2014 through August 1, 2014. The comment period was designed to gather feedback from stakeholders and the general public on the draft GO TO 2040 plan update as well as the proposed Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2014-19 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

This memo will briefly describe the outreach methods employed and the resulting public participation, the comments received, and CMAP's responses to the public input. A more detailed summary of the public comment period, including tables of CMAP's responses to comments, can be found in the draft [Public Engagement Summary Appendix](#).

### Outreach Process

Prior to the 50-day public comment period commencing on June 13, 2014, numerous outreach techniques were used to alert the public about the plan update and solicit their feedback. The philosophy behind this outreach effort was to engage CMAP's existing network, rather than forging an abundance of new partnerships (as was necessary leading up to GO TO 2040's adoption in 2010). Regional stakeholders and the broader public were engaged and encouraged to participate in the plan update process.

A variety of input methods were made available to the public, including:

- **Public meetings:** A series of public "open house" format meetings were geographically distributed around the Chicago region in order to provide all residents of the seven-county area with adequate and convenient opportunities to participate in the plan update process.

A logical way to organize these meetings for maximum geographic coverage was to work with the subregional councils, which have strong networks to reach leaders and residents in their respective areas. It was determined by geography that a total of 10 public open house meetings, in addition to one formal public hearing, would be held during this public comment period.

At these open house meetings, visual aids and posters were displayed, summarizing the policy recommendations and implementation activities of the four themes in GO TO 2040. Several hard copies of the draft plan update summary and supporting appendices were available for participants to read in more detail and take home. CMAP staff were also available to answer questions, and comment cards were provided for attendees to write and submit formal written comments during the meeting. Approximately 220 people attended these public meetings in total.

- **On-line comment form:** There was an on-line comment form available on the CMAP website, which included links to download and review all the relevant plan update materials. This input format facilitated participation from those people who were interested in the update process but were unable to attend one of the public meetings. Nearly 60 on-line comments were received, ranging from topics across the major themes of GO TO 2040.
- **Form letters and other comment types:** CMAP staff also accepted comments in the form of e-mails, hard copy letters, phone calls, and faxes. One distinct category of comments received was form letters – standardized, project-specific messages from individuals who were galvanized by the advocacy of a nonprofit organization about a given topic. Table 1 summarizes the organizations, issues, and number of form letters received.

**Table 1. Form Letter Comments**

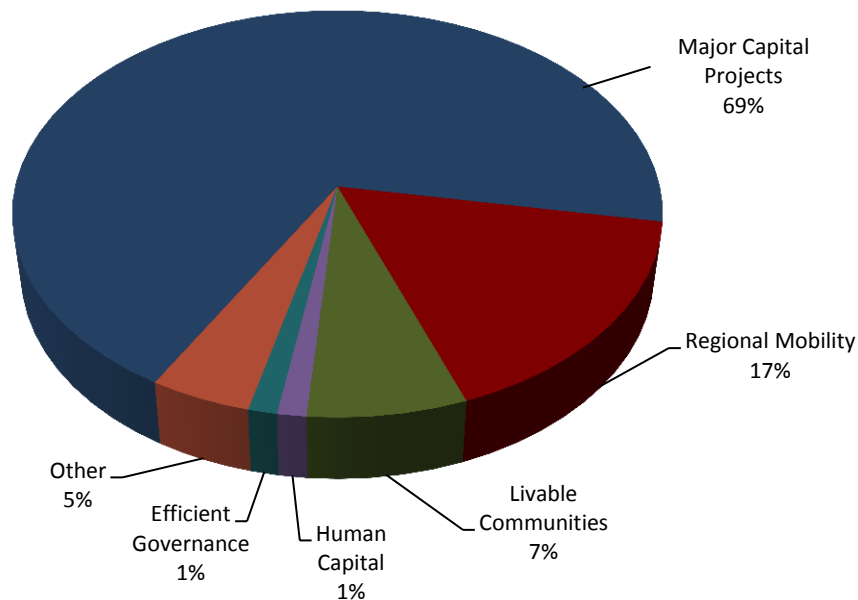
| Organizational Membership           | Issue / Project of Concern             | Number of Standardized Comments |
|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Environmental Law and Policy Center | Opposes the Illiana Expressway         | 221                             |
| Midwest High Speed Rail Association | Supports the CrossRail Chicago project | 660                             |
| Sierra Club – Illinois Chapter      | Opposes the Illiana Expressway         | 401                             |

## Summary of Comments

In total, over 1,400 comments were received during the public comment period, the majority of which were form letters (see Table 1). The approximately 150 non-standardized comments spanned submission formats, as well as levels of detail and analysis. They were submitted by a range of commenters – from private citizens to nonprofit organizations to various governmental entities – and comments were received from all across the region. Of all comments received, nearly one third were submitted from outside of the CMAP region, most of which were form letters. Excluding form letters and just examining the geographic origin of the 150 non-standardized comments, 60 percent originated in Cook County, followed by 18 percent submitted from Will County and 12 percent submitted from the remaining collar counties.

Many comments expressed an interest in principles already embedded into GO TO 2040, which reinforces the need for continued commitment to those issues. While comments were received across all four themes of GO TO 2040, the majority pertained to transportation-related issues. Figure 1 displays the distribution of comments by plan theme, with a separate category for comments about major capital projects. This chart excludes the more than 1,200 form letters in order to present a more balanced representation of the breadth of topics that were covered during the public comment period.

**Figure 1. Comments by GO TO 2040 plan theme, excluding form letters**



In total, the high volume of form letters focusing on two specific transportation projects shifted the overarching theme of public input toward a concern for major capital projects. Even excluding the form letters, this category of specific transportation projects – both on CMAP’s list of major capital projects as well as other roadway and transit projects – still comprised around two thirds (or, approximately 100 comments) of the input received. Generally, people commented on the transportation projects located near where they live or work, which have the potential to directly influence their quality of life and mobility options.

## Responses to Input

The plan update continues the same priorities of GO TO 2040, and as such no major policy changes are recommended. The following describes the areas where clarification and further detail was called for by partners and stakeholders, or where the volume of comments warrants further discussion:

- ***Discussion of Bus and Arterial Rapid Transit:*** Discussion occurred during the development of the plan update about the best way to treat Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Arterial Rapid Transit (ART) projects in the update. The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) offered guidance on this matter during the public comment period, suggesting text revisions that have since been made in the Plan Update Summary. These changes aim to appropriately frame BRT and ART options in the context of improving the overall transit system's operations and fiscal health, echoing the RTA's Transit Strategic Plan.
- ***Support for CrossRail Chicago:*** Hundreds of form letters were submitted asking CMAP to prioritize the CrossRail Chicago project. Given its very early planning phase, this project will remain where it was listed in the draft Major Capital Projects Appendix. Language was added to the project description in the Major Capital Projects Appendix to encourage supporters to continue to study the project, identify funding sources, and identify a project implementer. As details are solidified in future years, this project can be reevaluated for consideration in the universe of major capital projects.
- ***Opposition to Illiana Expressway:*** The Illiana Expressway was amended into the plan by vote of the MPO Policy Committee in 2013 and is included on the fiscally constrained major capital projects list. It received significant debate during this plan update public comment period. The most common arguments enumerated against this project included concerns that the roadway would cause environmental degradation, loss of prime farmland, and a large financial burden on the taxpayers of Illinois. Additionally, many comments questioned the project's consistency with the principles of sustainable growth for the region at the core of GO TO 2040.

No major changes are intended for the GO TO 2040 plan during this update process, given the amount of consensus-building and research that informed the development of the original plan. There is a process that has been established to amend the major capital projects list between plan updates, and the outcomes of those processes are being preserved for this plan update. Text has been added to the Illiana Expressway project description in the Major Capital Projects Appendix to reflect the volume of comments received and the need to protect the region's open and green space during project implementation. It will be important to consider the environmental and local community impacts, as well as to protect the public interest in the Public Private Partnership funding structure, as much as possible.

- ***Implementation of Reasonably Expected Revenues:*** Several comments were submitted regarding the plan update's prioritization of advancing new sources of reasonably expected revenues to invest in our region's transportation system. While acknowledging the necessity of these new revenues, many asked questions about the potential time frame and political

support needed to implement them, or wanted assurance that local and regional stakeholders would be involved in decision-making and implementation. CMAP understands the concerns about political feasibility and agrees that implementation of these revenues will need to be driven by a strong regional coalition of CMAP and its partners.

**ACTION REQUESTED: Information and discussion.**