


CMAP plan draws comments on Illiana, Southland roads at New Lenox presentation

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Susan DeMar Lafferty

 Traffic and transportation may have dominated the discussion at a recent open house, but it was not the only issue of concern as the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning presented in New Lenox its updated ON TO 2050 comprehensive plan.

While some voiced views on the shelved Illiana toll road and congested Interstates 80 and 55, others focused on environmental issues and sustainable development.

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The latest comprehensive plan for the seven-county area covered economic development, livable communities, protection of natural resources, traffic improvements, and collaboration of all levels of government.

It also listed \$72.7 billion in regionally significant road projects that could realistically be accomplished in the next 32 years, such as additional lanes on I-80, and new lanes and reconstruction of I-55 south from I-80 to Coal City, and improvements to the Elgin-O'Hare Expressway.

But the shelved Illiana toll did not make that list. One of the biggest changes from CMAP's 2040 plan to its updated 2050 draft was moving the proposed Illiana toll road from the fiscally constrained to the non-constrained list —meaning that it requires more study or there is no funding for it.

"The Illiana makes a lot of sense. I don't know why they're against it," area resident Dennis Dombrowski said last week. "I stay off of I-80 as much as I can."

The 200-plus page plan was developed over a three-year process, and CMAP had to prioritize infrastructure investments "to get the greatest benefit for the greatest number of people," spokesman Tom Garritano said.

"It's great that our roads are on the list of improvements but it means they are so bad they are finally getting noticed in the region," said Elaine Bottomley, director of transportation for the Will County Governmental League.

"It's a good plan for the region and Will County," she said.

Bottomley acknowledged that some are "disappointed" that Illiana was not included, but she said it "makes sense."

"The plan focuses on existing infrastructure, fixing what we have instead of building new," she said.

"We have so much going on here. It is not just about one county, but seven. It drives home the need for collaboration. That is the theme of the plan," Bottomley said.

Elwood resident Michelle Peterson said the road improvements listed in the plan are "not enough to keep up with what is going on let alone with what is going forward."

"It's too little, but it's not too late," she said.

With the RidgePoint and CenterPoint intermodal facilities and other new developments in the area, she wants to see more widening of 80, 55 and Route 53.

"It's a big night mare for anyone who travels. Anytime you step out the door you are in fear for your life – fear that you will become a statistic," Peterson said.

Will County had the most development of natural and agricultural lands of any county in the region, adding more than 45,000 acres of residential, commercial, and industrial development, the plan stated.

Ann Baskerville, a Manhattan resident and Sierra Club representative, said she wants to see a comprehensive land use plan that protects natural resources, such as Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie and the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery, both on Route 53 in the Elwood/Wilmington area.

While she is "happy" to see that limited funds are being spent on existing infrastructure, Baskerville said she does not want Route 53 to become a "thoroughfare."

The Sierra Club has called for a moratorium on warehouse development and she said the club has been monitoring and is concerned about the diesel pollution people are being exposed to.

"People are questioning how we define economic development. We have to consider the environmental cost, the labor cost and protections for workers," said Baskerville.

Regarding natural resources, the ON TO 2050 plan reported that natural areas are being challenged by development and climate change. Since 2001, the region has lost 140,000 acres of farmland and natural areas to development, it said.

Greenhouse gas emissions vary considerably across the region, the plan stated. In 2010, Chicago emitted the fewest emissions per capita; Will County produced the most emissions per capita; and suburban Cook County produced the most emissions overall, according to the document.

The design of the built environment and its impact on housing density and travel behavior accounted for the differences, it said.

Concerns about climate change brought Plainfield resident Joe Ryan to CMAP's open house in New Lenox.

"I am trying to learn what cities like Plainfield and Joliet are doing to plan ahead," he said. "Transportation technology will be the biggest emphasis in the future. We have to design sustainable subdivisions."

Rachel Ventura, Joliet resident and candidate for Will County board, said she is interested in what the future roads will look like, but she is also focused on water shortages.

"Water is also a growing crisis that we will have to address. It's a bit scary," she said, adding that she was glad to see that issue addressed in the plan.

"There's a lot in this plan that will be very helpful in planning future development for our area," Ventura said.

While concerns varied by region, water is a "universal concern," Garritano said.

The New Lenox/Will County open house was the sixth of 10 hosted by CMAP and drew the largest attendance, he said.

"There has been a lot of talk about freight and logistics, workforce development and what makes communities more livable for residents," he said, adding that all comments submitted will become part of the record.

CMAP has scheduled three additional open houses, all from 4 to 7 p.m.: Tuesday at the Palos Hills Village Hall, 10335 Roberts Road; Wednesday at the LaGrange village hall, 53 S. LaGrange Road; and Thursday at Mt. Prospect village hall, 50 S. Emerson St.

CMAP will hold a public hearing at its office, 233 S. Wacker Drive from 3 to 6 p.m., on July 25.

It is accepting comments through Aug. 14 by email to ONTO2050@cmap.illinois.gov, by phone (312-454-0400), or mail to Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), 233 South Wacker Drive, Suite 800, Chicago IL 60606.

The draft plan, which is available at www.cmap.illinois.gov, is expected to be formally adopted at CMAP's Oct. 10 meeting, Garritano said.

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