

I-80 improvements deemed 'critical' in regional transportation plan

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Improvements to Interstate 80 were deemed “critical” in a regional transportation proposal by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.

The agency’s “On to 2050 Transportation Plan” also placed the proposed Illiana toll road on the back burner.

ADVERTISING

The draft plan, which details needed transportation work over the next 32 years, will be on display for public comment from 4 to 7 p.m. July 11 in the community room of the New Lenox village hall, 1 Veterans Parkway and July 17 at the Palos Hills city hall, 10335 Roberts Road.

Residents also can view a draft of the plan, and offer comments at www.cmap.illinois.gov/onto2050.

Will County Executive Larry Walsh urged residents to voice their concerns about I-80 and other critical projects in the region.

“It is important to see Will County as an integral part of the entire Chicagoland region. As home to the world’s largest inland port, Will County plays a significant role in the region’s transportation network and is a major economic development engine for the state of Illinois. We need to remain actively involved in changes and improvements that will affect our county, our residents, and our business partners,” he said in a news statement.

The updated plan calls for \$72.7 billion in regionally significant projects — \$18.7 billion for new capacity, \$50.3 billion for reconstruction and \$3.7 billion for operating costs — ranging from improvements to the Elgin-O’Hare Expressway, to additional lanes on I-80, and new lanes and reconstruction of I-55 south from I-80 to Coal City.

Nearly one-fourth of the highways in the seven-county region are in “unacceptable condition” and 9.4 percent of bridges are “structurally deficient,” while 21.7 percent of rail cars and 8.4 percent of buses have exceeded their useful life, it stated.

In Will County, one of the biggest changes from CMAP’s 2040 plan to its updated 2050 draft was moving the proposed Illiana toll road off the fiscally constrained to the non-constrained list — meaning that it requires more study or there is no funding for it.

Projects can’t be eligible for federal dollars without being listed as “fiscally constrained” — expected to have funds to be built, operated and maintained, according to CMAP.

Illiana was proposed to connect I-55 in Wilmington with I-65 in Indiana.

It was noted that improvements to I-80 and I-55 would address the need for the Illiana to alleviate truck traffic on rural roads and fix infrastructure in disrepair.

Also on the unconstrained list is the Caton Farm-Bruce Road extension, which includes a new bridge over the Des Plaines River and I & M Canal. The final alignment and a financing plan have yet to be finalized.

On To 2050 also addressed the need for additional revenues and tolling, relieving congestion from growing truck traffic, collaboration on new freight developments, and improvements to public transit in the six-county area.

The region's transit is "facing significant challenges" because of decades of underinvestment and lack of state and federal revenue, it said. To maintain and improve the system, there must be new revenues, it said.

The plan recommends that the Illinois Department of Transportation implement tolls on existing expressways after they are reconstructed to help pay for the projects.

It also said the state should increase its 19-cent motor fuel tax by 15 cents, and the federal government should up its 18.4 cent gas tax per gallon.

In the long run, given that there are more fuel efficient and electric vehicles, state and federal authorities should replace the MFTs with a fee for vehicle miles traveled, of 2 cents per mile and priced parking should be expanded to help reduce vehicle emissions and congestion, it said.

By making truck operations more efficient, it can ease local congestion and wear and tear on the roads, address quality of life issues for residents and reduce costs for shippers, the plan stated.

Among the constrained regionally significant expressway projects are:

- Expansion of I-80 east of U.S. 30 to include managed lanes, consideration of truck only lanes, tolling, and other options due to the high volume of trucks and safety concerns.
- Development of managed lanes, truck-only lanes, and tolling on I-80 from Ridge Road to U.S. 30 in Will County, which is in "critical need" of improvement, it said. IDOT will soon seek design approval, and do a full study of the I-80 corridor.
- I-55, adding managed lanes from I-355 to the Dan Ryan, with tolling on all lanes. This is one of the most congested segments in the Chicago area, according to CMAP.
- The Elgin O'Hare Western Access project where construction is underway to widen the existing expressway, extend it east to O'Hare, and add an expressway around the western side of the airport from I-90 to 294. All three components will be tolled.
- The Jane Byrne Interchange — an additional lane is currently under construction on the east-north and northwest ramps, as well as three new flyovers. A new through-lane will also be added on I-90/94, so drivers will no longer have to switch lanes when entering

the interchange.

- I-55 Barack Obama Presidential Expressway – lanes are being added and pavement reconstructed from I-80 south to Coal City Road, which includes a 1,400-foot bridge over the Des Plaines River. With three large logistics parks, this roadway serves a high volume of trucks.
- Reconfiguring arterial access to I-190 and O'Hare I Airport to improve mobility and reconstructing and adding capacity to mainline I-190, which has significant congestion and unreliable travel times.
- I-294 – improvements from 95th Street to Balmoral Avenue, the oldest and most heavily used segment of the tollway system with an added flex lane and express bus facilities.
- The final phase of the I-294/57 interchange, planned for completion in 2024.
- I-290/IL 53/I-90 Interchange improvement.

The On To 2050 draft plan also listed expressway projects that need reconstruction in the longer term:

- I-57 from 94 to 80, from 80 to Will/Kankakee border.
- I-94 Bishop Ford reconstruction.
- I-90/94 Kennedy and Dan Ryan Expressway reconstruction from Hubbard to 31st Street.
- I-55 Stevenson/Barack Obama expressway reconstruction.
- Reconstruction of the Kennedy, Edens and 290/Route 53.

On To 2050 calls for improvements to the CTA lines as well as Metra.

On the Rock Island Line, it suggested coordination between freight and Metra trains, and the eventual connection of the SouthWest Service with the LaSalle Street Station.

The plan also considered extensions to Metra lines, such as the Electric Line to a future South Suburban Airport, the Rock Island to Minooka, and the Heritage Corridor line to Wilmington.

Investment also should be made for safe bike and pedestrian pathways to desired destinations, it stated.

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