

MEMORANDUM

TO: Village of Oak Park Board of Trustees
COPIES TO: Cara Pavlicek, Craig Failor, Bill McKenna, John Wielebnicki
FROM: Citizens for Appropriate Transportation Working Group
SUBJECT: Draft Letter of Intent between the Village of Oak Park and the Illinois Department of Transportation
DATE: July 7, 2016

This memo summarizes the concerns of a CAT Working Group on the Draft Letter of Intent for the Eisenhower Corridor. We listed our names at the end of this memo.

1. **Wider Bridges** – The CAT Working Group is pleased with the intention to widen the bridges to accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists, buses, cars, and trucks. Pedestrian and bicycle safety is a primary concern, so we appreciate the Village and IDOT efforts. One idea to better connect both sides of the expressway is student exhibits on the bridges. South Oak Park students who go to Brooks Middle School use the Home Avenue Bridge and those who go to Julian Middle School are encouraged to use the Ridgeland Avenue Bridge. Lincoln, Irving, and Ascension Schools are close to the expressway. The Conservatory is on East Avenue. In addition, having lookouts at Austin, Oak Park, and Harlem would allow children to watch the trains.
2. **Negative Impacts on Property Values during construction and long term**
 - a. Potential negative property value impacts during an eight-year construction period is a major concern, especially for owners who want (or need) to sell. During the six-year Barrie Park Remediation Project, property values dropped, creating a hardship for people wanting to sell. Possible remedies include a Buy Back Program, low interest rehabilitation loans from the Village financed by tax-exempt municipal bonds, and a program analogous to the Equity Assurance Program.
 - b. Long-term property value impacts near the proposed ramps at Austin and Harlem are also a concern. Well- designed corridor edges have a positive impact on the neighborhoods adjacent to the Corridor. For example, the wood fence on Harrison from about Kenilworth to Wenonah was built by neighbors who have maintained and replaced sections for more than 25 years
3. **Traffic Impacts during Construction** – For commuters who work in or near Chicago's downtown, the CTA's Blue Line is a viable option to driving. Coordination between IDOT and the CTA is critical. Commuters who use park-and-ride facilities for CTA and Metra in the western end of the Corridor will reduce the number of vehicles on the expressway. When the CTA reconstructed the Dan Ryan Branch of the Red Line, they reduced the fare; something they should do for their Blue Line project. Adding bike racks at CTA and Metra stations will extend the catchment area for passengers. In 2010, IDOT resurfaced the Eisenhower Expressway and repaired bridges. The increased traffic on Oak Park streets was noticeable. Now we are talking about a much longer period of disruption. The West Cook Municipal Conference Smart Corridors Study identified technologies such as Dynamic

Message Signs, emergency signal preemption, far side bus stops, real time traffic signal timing, CCTV cameras, pedestrian countdown signals, and automated pedestrian crossing detection technologies IDOT is considering implementing before reconstructing the expressway. IDOT estimates it will take about 18 months to rebuild each bridge, so traffic-rerouting plans need to be prepared and well publicized in advance.

4. **Not extending the Blue Line to 1st Avenue is a negative.** Working with other Corridor communities, we need to make the case for extending the Blue Line. Extending it to 1st Avenue is plausible because the CTA already owns the right-of-way from the Forest Park Yards to the east side of the Des Plaines River. The reason the CTA is not extending it is the lack of political will and funding issues.
5. **The Letter of Intent should include contingency clauses because predicting the future is uncertain.**
 - a. **Technology is changing.** Some vehicles have automatic braking, lane centering, and collision avoidance features. Pricing High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes is difficult because the value of time and trip reliability varies among people and their specific circumstances. A scenario where IDOT converts the HOT lanes to lanes for self-driving cars seems plausible based on current knowledge. Drivers now have faster and more reliable information about where congestion exists and what alternative routes are available. People can shop online without make trips to stores. Many companies are working on developing driverless cars.
 - b. **The CSX railroad is not willing to sell their right-of-way through Oak Park.** Freight railroads require higher bridge clearances than interstate highways (23 feet versus 18 feet). Acquiring the CSX tracks would mean lower bridges and ramps at Austin and Harlem with fewer negative impacts on adjacent residential neighborhoods. The Letter of Intent should include a contingency clause that says if the CSX is willing to sell its right-of-way prior to construction, IDOT will revise their interchange designs to lower them, leading to fewer negative impacts on the residential neighborhoods near them.
 - c. **Future studies** on congestion pricing, demand management, equity, new technology, updated standards, new funding sources and federal legislation, should lead to changes in the Corridor. Contingency clauses should require IDOT to change to account for changing conditions.
6. **The CTA, Metra, and PACE play major roles during reconstruction and long-term.** The Letter of Intent should take the role of these agencies into account.
7. **Ground Vibration is a serious concern.** When IDOT rebuilt the Morgan Street Bridge during their Circle Interchange project, the UIC College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs (CUPPA) building was damaged. Structural engineering firms hired by IDOT's contractor and UIC agreed the building settled by 1.8 inches. UIC closed the building for repairs, relocated offices, and provided a bus shuttle service while they repaired the damage. This incident highlights the need to consider

ground vibration. IDOT placed vibration sensors in buildings adjacent to the project and included a clause in the construction contract that said if vibration exceeded an accepted limit, construction would stop until the engineers determined how best to proceed. Despite the sensors and construction clause, damage still happened.

- a. **Ground Vibration Risk in Oak Park** - We have many buildings adjacent to the Corridor including fragile structures such as the Conservatory, the 2.5-million gallon Water Reservoir under Barrie Center Tennis Courts, the two pools at Rehm Park, and many homes. IDOT should require the use of best practices to avoid ground vibration, detect events quickly, and remedy any damages fairly and quickly.
 - b. **Video / Photograph Documentation** - Building owners can take videos and photographs of foundations, walls, ceilings, doorways, windows, etc. shortly before the start of construction to document any damage. The Village could facilitate this by negotiating a group price for videotapes and photographs, giving building owners the option to participate or not, using a procedure similar to the electricity aggregation program. Alternatively, IDOT or their contractor could prepare the documentation.
 - c. **Insurance** - Adding an insurance rider to a homeowner's policy is another possibility. Including a ten-year tail-coverage makes sense because there are cases where foundation / structural movement damage does not occur until well after the construction work is complete.
 - d. **Dispute Resolution** - Because lawsuits and hiring expert witnesses are expensive, time consuming, and the cause of ground vibration can be hard to prove, a contract provision requiring binding arbitration is another option. The intent is a claims process in place prior to construction. Litigation should be a last resort.
 - e. **Retainage** - Many construction contracts have a retainage clause, which says the client will withhold five or ten percent of each bill until the contractor completes all work satisfactorily. IDOT could withhold funds from the general contractor and use this money to settle damage claims with any remaining money going to the contractor.
8. **We think the Village's view that IDOT can do what it wants within the ditch without any Village involvement leaves residents exposed to potential negative impacts.**
- a. **Ramp Heights** – IDOT's proposed interchanges at Austin and Harlem move ramps closer to neighborhoods on the north side of the expressway than current ramps. There are negative air and noise pollution impacts from higher ramps and long-term impacts on property values.
 - b. **Shoulder Widths** – IDOT's proposed shoulders are substandard. During congested hours, emergency vehicles use the shoulders. Narrow shoulders put emergency personnel and motorists at risk.
9. **Coordination with the CTA is essential during reconstruction and in the long-term.**

- a. **Reconstruction** – When IDOT reconstructs the CTA Bridge over the expressway west of Circle Avenue, the CTA will need to provide shuttle bus service from Forest Park to the Harlem Station. The CTA has the opportunity to generate more ridership, which would reduce expressway congestion.
 - b. **Long-Term** – The further west the CTA can intercept drivers via a Park-and-Ride option, the better the expressway will function.
10. **Sustainability** – For the Eisenhower program, IDOT is using INVEST (**I**nfrastructure **V**oluntary **E**valuation **S**ustainability **T**ool) developed by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to evaluate sustainability features. INVEST is based on social, economic, and environmental goals and objectives. INVEST assigns points to criteria such as resource consumption, storm water quality, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, High Occupancy Vehicle facilities, and using recycled materials. This results in a Sustainability Scorecard. Because IDOT is using INVEST as an experiment, asking them to provide copies of the INVEST scorecard to the Village and others is reasonable. The INVEST web site is www.sustainablehighways.org.

11. Other Items

- a. **IDOT's Traffic Surveillance Building on Harrison** - At a West Cook Municipal Conference (WCMC) Smart Corridors Meeting, IDOT said they have two traffic control centers – one with modern technology at their headquarters in Schaumburg and the other an “antiquated” one on Harrison Avenue in Oak Park. This raises the question of whether IDOT needs their Harrison Avenue building and what their plans are for its future. It is likely they will want to use the building and its parking area as a staging area during construction. If this is true, then the Library Board should plan for how their Maze Branch will function during construction. If IDOT does not see a future for their building, then it could become a development site.
- b. **Harrison and Garfield widths** - IDOT's plans suggest that Harrison and Garfield will stay at their current substandard width. What can we do to deal with this issue? How will the right turn in / right turn out at Garfield and Austin work? Emergency vehicles, especially from our South Fire Station must have quick access to the Austin ramps. Safe crossings at Austin must accommodate pedestrians using the Austin CTA station. The intersection at Lombard and Garfield has blind spots and a limited sight triangle. Blue Line riders use Lombard to access the Austin Station. Irving School students and Barrie Park users use Lombard. Parents drop-off children at Barrie Center. The Village should critically evaluate pedestrian safety issues.
- c. **Construction Staging Plan** - IDOT has developed a conceptual Staging Plan. They should coordinate with the Village for a complete Construction Mitigation and Staging Plan during Phase 2 of their study.

Thank you for your attention to these concerns, which are vital to mitigating issues during the construction period and long-term.

CAT WORKING GROUP

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