



Citizens for Appropriate Transportation (CAT) Issue Brief

Eisenhower Transportation Corridor

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION – LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

All of us will live with the future design of the Eisenhower Transportation Corridor. How much input will we have in the Illinois Department of Transportation's (IDOT) design for the future of the corridor?

The traditional approach to citizen participation in corridor planning has two steps: (1) prepare the plan and (2) seek public acceptance of the plan.

There are flaws in this approach. It assumes presenting the plan to the public is the same as getting the public's consent. It assumes citizens cannot make good decisions because they lack the expertise. It assumes citizens will focus only on their own narrow interests.

PRINCIPLES

A good design for the Eisenhower Corridor must be based on three principles:

1. Address the needs for all transportation modes
2. Add value to the adjacent communities
3. Be compatible with the built and natural environments.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

IDOT's traditional criteria for roadway improvements are safety, roadway capacity, and cost. After IDOT has developed a solution that meets these criteria, they look at how to avoid, mitigate, or minimize negative environmental impacts.

Informed citizens are more inclined to evaluate alternative transportation solutions from a broader set of criteria that include (1) community character, such as impact on property values, amount of property acquisition, disruption to the community, traffic flow on local streets, good design, and (2) environmental concerns, such as air pollution, noise, and vibration.

The broader approach results in better decisions and solutions that are people and community friendly.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

What are good guidelines for a citizen participation process?

- Include a wide variety of people. Citizens possess everyday knowledge that can help ensure that the problems are identified correctly, good solutions are developed, and the final decision reflects all the important factors.
- Let professionals and citizens learn from each other. Sometimes citizens participate, but come away thinking their participation is not valued. Recognize that the process is not just about making a decision on the design of the Ike Corridor, but it is a learning process as well. Recognize that data are not always value-free.
- Present information so that citizens can understand the alternatives and the trade-offs.
- Expect controversy because there are many different views.

PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES

There is no good substitute for face-to-face communication. It builds relationships and leads to a consensus that is constructed one step at a time. Using a wide variety of communication techniques, such as meetings, workshops, open houses, and different media is valuable.

Outreach is essential. A good policy is to meet anytime, anywhere, with anybody.

Computer technology plays an increasing role because graphics software helps people visualize. Photo simulation lets roadway designers add the proposed design to real photographs. Computer animation can give drivers and pedestrians a sense of what it will be like. Maps from a geographic information system can illustrate design features.

Rick Kuner – Revised May 2015 www.CitizensForAppropriateTransportation.org