



Citizens for Appropriate Transportation (CAT) Issue Brief
Eisenhower Transportation Corridor
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE – AN EQUITY ISSUE

In the ideal world, you get what you pay for – no more and no less. In the real world, this does not always happen. Many highway projects benefit suburban commuters more than city residents. If low-income and/or minority populations will be adversely affected by the High-Occupancy (HOV) lanes or other improvements proposed by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), then there are environmental justice issues.

In 1994, President Clinton signed Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice to address disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental impacts on minority and low-income populations.

The U.S. Department of Transportation guidelines on Environmental Justice call for:

1. Involving the public in developing transportation projects that fit harmoniously within their communities without sacrificing safety or mobility
2. Preventing the “denial of, reduction in, or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority and low-income populations.”

So how does environmental justice affect the planning that IDOT is doing for the Eisenhower Corridor? Extending the CTA Blue Line beyond Forest Park communities in West Cook County would provide better access to the largest concentration of jobs in the region – downtown Chicago. A Blue Line extension would also provide better access to the University of Illinois at Chicago, the Near West Side Medical Center, and jobs in DuPage County.

One major reason IDOT wants to widen the Ike is to provide better access to DuPage County residents. But HOV lanes are not the only way to provide such access and IDOT has not demonstrated HOV superiority. The Eisenhower Transportation Corridor now has three modes of transportation – expressway, CTA Blue Line, and the CSX freight railroad. IDOT claims that HOV Lanes will make things better for highway users (there is a legitimate question whether this would in fact occur), but they will make things worse for the other modes. A multi-modal solution that includes the Eisenhower, CTA Blue Line, Metra Union Pacific West Line to Geneva, and the Burlington Line to Aurora would be better. The two Metra Commuter Rail Lines (neither of which uses the Eisenhower Corridor) are included because DuPage County residents do not all use the Ike to get downtown. A multi-modal solution serves people regardless of whether they own a car and provides transportation choices.

For example, the Cook County Court House in Maywood does not have good access by public transportation, yet many people must travel there each day. Extending the CTA Blue Line is a viable option to driving.

Chicago residents will also be affected by improvements to the Eisenhower. A Blue Line Extension would help reverse commuting. We should expect IDOT to analyze environmental justice impacts and consider multi-modal solutions for the Eisenhower Transportation Corridor.

Rick Kuner – August 2011

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