

ILLIANA LESSONS FOR THE EISENHOWER TRANSPORTATION CORRIDOR

On June 16, 2015, federal Judge Jorge L. Alonso ruled the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) approval of the Tier 1 Final Environmental Impact Statement and the Record of Decision for the proposed Illiana Expressway was "arbitrary and capricious" and in violation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). He remanded both documents to the Illinois Department of Transportation, Indiana Department of Transportation, and FHWA.

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) prepared Policy-Based forecasts of population and employment for their GO TO 2040 Plan. IDOT did not use CMAP's forecasts, but prepared Market-Based forecasts instead. The two forecasts have significant differences in the distribution of population, households, and jobs.

CMAP wants existing communities to be more livable with higher densities and mixed uses. IDOT assumes more development in outlying communities. IDOT argued that Market-Based Forecasts are consistent with their approach on major corridor projects over the past 15 years. Judge Alonso responded by saying, "it would seem unwise" for IDOT to reject CMAP's forecasts. Oak Park's economic development initiatives are generally consistent with CMAP's work. Demographics are the foundation for preparing Build Alternatives, analyzing their projected impacts, and evaluating them to arrive at a Preferred Alternative.

Judge Alonso's ruling is specific to the Illiana. However, many of his comments apply to IDOT's Eisenhower Study. The big questions are what revisions will IDOT make to their work and what impact will they have on the Eisenhower Corridor communities?