



CITIZENS FOR APPROPRIATE TRANSPORTATION (CAT)

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EISENHOWER UPDATE

Rick Kuner – November 3, 2014

The Eisenhower Expressway and CTA Blue Line provide access to jobs, education, and other important destinations. Both are near the end of their useful lives. Neither meets current design standards. The expressway has a high accident rate. Replacing both with something better will be expensive. We will live with what IDOT and the CTA build for the next 50 to 60 years. Good multimodal solutions increase positive impacts, reduce negative ones, and account for land use impacts. This report updates you on the IDOT and CTA studies, identifies major concerns, and recommends better solutions.

EISENHOWER EXPRESSWAY (IDOT)

Getting a good solution for the Eisenhower Transportation Corridor requires resolving a complicated set of issues. IDOT is evaluating the No Build Alternative and four Build Alternatives for the Year 2040 that widen the expressway from six to eight lanes and include improved transit to Mannheim Road. The differences among the Build Alternatives are in how IDOT proposes to manage the lanes.

IDOT’S FOUR BUILD ALTERNATIVES	
GP	Add a General Purpose Lane in each direction.
HOV 2+	Add a High Occupancy Vehicle lane in each direction for vehicles with two or more persons.
HOT 3+	Add a High Occupancy Toll lane in each direction. Allow vehicles with three or more persons to use the HOT 3+ lanes free. Charge a toll for vehicles with less than 3 persons when capacity is available.
TOLL	Add a lane in each direction and toll all lanes.

1. IDOT’s proposed Austin and Harlem Ramps are closer to our neighborhoods.

IDOT believes right side ramps are better than left side ramps. At Austin and Harlem, IDOT’s proposed right side ramps are longer and higher than current left side ramps. They are closer to housing, creating the potential for more air and noise pollution, negative impacts on property values, property tax revenues, views, and social connections across the corridor. IDOT’s Fall 2014 Newsletter says, “*The mainline will also be lowered by up to seven feet, with over 300 feet of expressway entirely covered by the reconfigured ramps.*” IDOT’s proposed ramps are still above grade. Lower ramps are contingent upon resolving CSX Railroad’s desire for 23-foot bridge clearances and our desire to reduce the intrusiveness of the ramps. If IDOT can acquire some or all of the CSX tracks, they would have more flexibility in their design, but the CTA would have to reconstruct the Oak Park - Forest Park part of the Blue Line before IDOT could reconstruct the expressway. IDOT and the CSX are talking, but there is no resolution yet. CSX uses just one of their tracks to serve the Ferrara Pan Candy factory. Meanwhile, IDOT’s Build Alternatives stay within the right-of-way IDOT already owns.

2. IDOT plans to rebuild all seven bridges in Oak Park. The proposed bridges are wider to account for pedestrians, bicycles, buses, Kiss-and-Ride, pedestrian refuge islands, and

the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Wider bridges mean more roadway for pedestrians to cross, so pedestrian safety remains an issue.

3. Adding two more lanes increases capacity, but does not eliminate congestion.

Although the eight lanes IDOT proposes have more capacity than the existing six lanes and managed lanes have more person-carrying capacity than general purpose lanes, IDOT would need 12 to 14 lanes to meet projected demand. That number of lanes is unrealistic. IDOT believes adding two more lanes will not attract more drivers (“induced demand”) because the Corridor communities are “mature.” I think adding lanes will attract more motorists.

4. Computer models make assumptions about the future. IDOT’s planning depends heavily on the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) Travel Demand Models and the Highway Capacity Manual (HCM 2010).

- a. CMAP Travel Demand Models play a critical role in transportation planning. The key question is how well they predict the future (in this case, the Year 2040). We will not know the answer until 2040. Like all such models, they depend on the accuracy of the input data and the assumptions they make about the future. Typical model assumptions are: continue current trends, predictions about the future, or implementation of a long-range plan. Despite flaws, CMAP’s models have two major benefits. They track what happens in a large number of Travel Analysis Zones in the region, and they provide insights into what might happen. For example, the models indicate that tolls would divert drivers onto neighborhood streets, causing more congestion on them and reducing the quality of life.
- b. IDOT wants to make a major investment decision without any scenario planning. The Year 2040 is a long way out. Preparing a range of scenarios of what the future might be and considering what to do if the models are wrong is a better way to plan.
- c. Highway Capacity Manual 2010 (HCM 2010) says, “*The base conditions under which the full capacity of a basic freeway segment is achieved include good weather, good visibility, no incidents or accidents, no work zone activity, and no pavement deterioration serious enough to affect operations.*”¹ When any of the base conditions do not exist (a common occurrence in this climate and on the Eisenhower Expressway), then the speed, Level of Service, and capacity of the expressway will be worse than predicted by the HCM methodology.²

5. The expressway crash rate is high. In most years, the CTA rail system does not have any crashes, even accounting for the collision at the Harlem Station in September 2013 and the CTA train that jumped the tracks at O’Hare Airport Station in March 2014. The Highway Safety Manual has Crash Modification Factors to predict crash rates for each design element (adding a lane, lane width, and shoulder width for example). IDOT is making trade-offs among expressway design elements that affect crash rates. For

¹ Transportation Research Board, “HCM 2010 – Highway Capacity Manual, Volume 2: Uninterrupted Flow,” Chapter 11: Basic Freeway Segments, Page 11-1. Basic Freeway Segments are the through lanes as opposed to weaving sections or interchanges.

²Level of Service (LOS) summarizes the quality of service provided by a transportation facility. It ranges from A (the best) to F (the worst) from the traveler’s viewpoint. It is analogous to college grades. IDOT’s policy is LOS D or better.

example, the standard lane width on interstates is twelve feet. IDOT is proposing two eleven-foot lanes each way from the Maybrooke Courthouse to Austin Boulevard. Eleven-foot lanes tend to increase the number of sideswipe accidents. If IDOT could use part of the CSX space, they could use 12 feet for all lanes.

6. **There are limits to what IDOT can pay for.** There are extra features Corridor communities might like, such as more landscaping and lighting, but they come with a cost.
7. **HOV / HOT lanes are hard to manage.** Too little traffic wastes capacity. Too much traffic means little or no travel time saved. IDOT's basic choice is to price managed lanes to optimize traffic flow or optimize revenues. The best choice is optimize traffic, but given Illinois' financial condition, the decision may be optimize revenues.
8. **IDOT should explicitly include Transportation Demand Management (TDM).** TDM techniques include car pools, vanpools, staggered work hours, telecommuting, flextime, parking pricing policies, and transit incentives. Individual TDM improvements are unlikely to have much impact, but combinations of TDM improvements can reduce traffic by 8 to 12 percent.
9. **Congestion will still occur.** Congestion on the expressway now occurs about 17 hours on a weekday. Managed lanes in the Build Alternatives will reduce congestion, but none of the general purpose lanes will get much congestion relief. A combination of better transit service by the CTA, Metra, and PACE, as well as Transportation Demand Management would lead to a significant reduction in expressway traffic. When IDOT completes the rebuilding the Circle Interchange and the Eisenhower Expressway, the expressway will still end at the Wells Street traffic light.
10. **Air and Noise Pollution adversely affect our health.** The Chicago Region is a Non-Attainment Region for Ozone and Fine Particulates. Motor vehicle tailpipes plus normal brake and tire wear emit pollution. Cars and trucks make noise. Depending on projected noise levels, we may vote to decide if we want noise barriers. The highway side of a noise barrier has high-speed vehicles and the residential side has slow moving vehicles and pedestrians, so the design and landscaping on each side should be different. IDOT has started the air and noise analyses, but the reports are still in progress.
11. **The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) policy on negative environmental impacts is Avoid, Minimize, and Mitigate.** **Avoid** negative impacts if possible. **Minimize** negative impacts if you cannot avoid them. **Mitigate** negative impacts if you cannot avoid or minimize them. IDOT cannot avoid some negative impacts, so they must try to minimize or mitigate them.
12. **Construction Mitigation Measures are important.** Within Oak Park, the Village, School District 97, the Park District of Oak Park, and the Library have facilities adjacent or close to the expressway. We will be more effective working together. Construction will take about three years. Breaking apart concrete and heavy truck traffic can cause vibrations that will damage houses. If construction occurs at night, it will disrupt sleep. Other issues are keeping transportation options available during construction, air and noise pollution, dust, emergency and regular access across the corridor, and staging and construction parking locations.

CTA BLUE LINE

The CTA is doing good planning, which I can summarize in three steps. Fix the slow zones. Rebuild the Forest Park Branch of the Blue Line. Extend the Blue Line west from Forest Park.

1. The CTA's Blue Line Vision Study for rebuilding the Forest Park Branch of the Blue Line has reached three major conclusions:
 - a. **Keep two access locations for the Austin, Oak Park, and Harlem Stations.** The CTA rejected the Compact Station Concept, which would have eliminated the station access locations at Lombard, East, and Circle Avenues. They have not decided which Station Concept to recommend from among the other options – center platforms, side platforms, or staggered berthing. Provide access to the Forest Park Station from both sides of Des Plaines Avenue.
 - b. **Construct wider station platforms to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).** Provide more passenger amenities.
 - c. **Do not provide express service by skipping some stations.** Given the one-mile distance between most stations, the CTA believes they will provide good service after repairing the slow zones and rebuilding the Blue Line.
2. **Maintain transit service while IDOT rebuilds the expressway.** The CTA discounted fares for Chicago South Side riders when they rebuilt the Dan Ryan branch of the Red Line. They should do the same during Blue Line reconstruction.
3. **Extending the CTA Blue Line to 1st Avenue would help Maywood, Forest Park, and Broadview as well as generate new riders and revenue.** A 1st Avenue Station would provide an economic development opportunity for Maywood. The CTA owns the right-of-way between the expressway and cemetery from the Forest Park Yard to the east side of the Des Plaines River. They would need to construct a bridge across the river. A 1st Avenue Station would serve the Loyola Medical Center, Hines Veterans Administration Hospital, Madden Mental Health Center, Maybrooke Courthouse, and Proviso Math and Science Academy.

PACE

PACE and IDOT are proposing improved bus service west of Forest Park to run on local streets and be express on the Eisenhower Expressway to the Forest Park Terminal. A 40-foot transit bus has 35-40 seats compared to an eight-car CTA train, which has about 320 seats. Bus service does not have the same person capacity as CTA rail service and has less economic development potential. IDOT views express bus as an interim solution.

METRA UP-W LINE TO GENEVA AND ELBURN

Metra is upgrading their UP-W line to better accommodate both freight and commuter rail trains. A three-track configuration allows freight trains to use the middle track and Metra to use the two outer tracks. CMAP estimates the improvements will allow Metra to increase the number of trains from 59 to 80 trains per day, “*nearly doubling estimated passenger miles traveled on the*

line.”³ This improvement will provide a good rail transit option for DuPage County commuters and divert some drivers from the expressway.

OAK PARK

1. **Keep Harrison and Garfield as two-way streets.** Some people want to make the two streets a one-way pair because of their substandard width in places. However, this would increase round-the-block circulation, hamper emergency vehicles, increase the risk for head-on collisions, and divert traffic to other east-west streets such as Adams and Lexington.
2. **Parks and Historic Properties (Conservatory and Columbus Park) are valuable resources.** Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act of 1966 lists three ways a project can use park or historic property: (1) **Permanently**, (2) **Temporarily** (typically during construction), and (3) **Constructive Use** (land not used by a project, but its value is meaningfully reduced or lost for Section 4(f) purposes). IDOT says there will be no direct impacts to any park or historic property, but says nothing about constructive use.
3. **Livability and Transportation are closely linked.** *“Livability in transportation is about using the quality, location, and type of transportation facilities and services available to help achieve broader community goals such as access to good jobs, affordable housing, quality schools, and safe streets.”*⁴ Four concepts define livability: (1) **Mobility** – ability to get to desirable destinations, (2) **Accessibility** – ability to get to desirable neighborhood destinations, (3) **Walkability** – ability to walk in your neighborhood safely and securely, and (4) **Sustainability** – ability to meet your needs without hurting the quality of life for future generations. IDOT focuses on mobility, but places less emphasis on the other three concepts. Comprehensive Plans, such as Envision Oak Park, address livability issues.
4. **Public health considerations are increasingly important in transportation planning.** For example, walking is good exercise and has economic benefits by reducing injury and mortality rates, medical costs, and workers’ compensation claims.
5. **We have common concerns with other Corridor communities.** Both the Village and CAT have been working with other communities and should continue to do so.
6. **The Village should contract with a NEPA Attorney.** A legal expert in the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) could recommend strategies, identify areas where IDOT is not using best practices, and prepare Village letters to IDOT and other agencies. There is money in the Village’s 2014 Budget for Eisenhower-related consultants.

The IDOT and CTA studies are still in progress, so changes are likely. We will keep you informed.

³ “Go To 2040 Update Major Capital Projects June 2014.” Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, June 2014, Pages 8-9.

⁴ Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration, “Livability in Transportation Guidebook – Planning Approaches that Promote Livability,” Undated, Page 4.