



## I-290 EISENHOWER EXPRESSWAY PROJECT FACTS

### **What is IDOT doing with the IKE that is causing concern?**

In 2001, the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) launched a multi-year preliminary engineering and environmental study for the improvement of I-290 Eisenhower Expressway between Mannheim Road (U.S. 12/45) and Cicero (Illinois Route 50). The purpose of this so-called "Phase I" study is to develop a formally approved plan for IDOT to rebuild the Eisenhower Expressway corridor. This project is described by IDOT District One (Chicago Region's) as its next big highway reconstruction project to tackle since the Stevenson Expressway project, as well as the so called "Hillside Strangler" congestion mitigation project at the convergence of I-294 and I-88 with the Eisenhower Expressway, are completed. The major focus of this Phase I study is to determine whether I-290 congestion can be mitigated during reconstruction by adding a HOV (High Occupancy Vehicle) lane in each direction between Austin and Mannheim Road or further west. This would increase the highway from six to eight lanes in this stretch. East of Austin and west of Mannheim are already four lanes in each direction.

### **Why is IDOT pursuing studies adding HOV lanes to the Eisenhower?**

According to IDOT, the use of the Eisenhower Expressway has far exceeded the original design capacity for the highway when it was conceived in the 1950's, and is one of the most congested highways in the Chicago area. In July of 1998, IDOT completed a study of the multi-year feasibility of creating High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes on the Eisenhower by expanding the I-290 from three lanes in each direction to four from I-294/I-88 to Austin. According to IDOT, creation of HOV lanes on I-290 had been included in the approved 2020 regional transportation plan finalized by the Chicago Area Transportation Study in 1997 as a means to reduce congestion on I-290 and to test the HOV concept in the Chicago area. During the 1990's IDOT had formed an HOV Task Force with regional planning organizations to study the potential for implementing HOV lanes in the Chicago area to reduce congestion. The main conclusion of this task force was that HOV lanes were worth pursuing if done in conjunction with a highway lane expansion project, rather than converting of existing highway lanes. HOV lanes were considered as a test in several highway reconstruction projects in the Chicago area since then, including the Stevenson, but were rejected. The strip of I-290 identified in the 2020 plan had -- in the 2010 regional transportation plan -- been previously identified as a future transit expansion area, and remains identified as a transit expansion study area in the 2020 plan along with the I-88 corridor to Downers Grove.

### **How would the HOV lanes be added?**

IDOT's HOV feasibility study concluded that the expansion was feasible but significantly more expensive than simply reconstructing the Eisenhower as currently configured. In order to accommodate eight lanes of traffic instead of six, most every bridge and overpass along the route would have to be entirely rebuilt (as well as the links to the CTA platforms serving the Blue Line el situated in the highway right-of-way), the CTA and CSX tracks would have to be moved closer to the south retaining wall through Oak Park, the exit/entrance ramps on the interior of the expressway would have to be moved to the outside (found at Oak Park's two entrances and exit ramps at Harlem and Austin), retaining walls creating the below grade nature of I-290 through Oak Park would have to be added or replaced, one of the two freight rail tracks in the right-of-way would be eliminated, and land that had originally been reserved for a second commuter express CTA track would have to be used to avoid major right-of-way purchases to the north of the existing highway. There are overpasses in Oak Park (from east to west) at Austin, Lombard, Ridgeland, East, Oak Park Ave., Home (pedestrian only), and Harlem. CTA station entrances that would be affected by the plan occur at the Austin, Lombard, East, Oak Park Ave., and Harlem overpasses in Oak Park. The only areas actually noted in the text of the report as requiring the purchase of additional right of way were CTA property at the end of the CTA Blue Line Des Plaines station (in the neighboring Village of Forest Park) and at First Avenue (further west in the Village of Maywood). However, it was noted that there would be an unspecified "impact" on the large City of Chicago park bordering Oak Park on the east (Columbus Park) adjacent to the proposed refashioned ramps at Austin Boulevard in possible combination with the Central Avenue ramps.

### **Would IDOT need to purchase property in Oak Park?**

Since the feasibility study did not specify the exact configuration of an eight-lane expressway or what property would be needed, except in the instances noted above, IDOT staff has not been able to say what exact property would or would not be needed in Oak Park. Those determinations would be made during the course of the Phase I study and revealed no later than when the draft plan is publicly released for comment. It should be noted, however, that the preferred HOV plan IDOT selected from the HOV lane feasibility study to pursue in the Phase I study is one that minimized the need for right-of-way purchases. IDOT has stated verbally to the Village that local access roads in Oak Park parallel and adjacent to the Expressway are expected to be retained. Of concern to the Village, is that the slightly wider concept for the reconfigured ramps at Austin and Harlem might require property acquisition on the north side of the Expressway. IDOT has not ruled this possibility out, but has not developed a plan yet that it has shared with the Village. Also of potential concern is the desire of the railroad to have double stack capacity (noted in the feasibility report as important to obtain the support of the freight railroads) might create a desire to significantly raise the height of each of the bridges over the expressway, which could have property acquisition implications at each of the Oak Park overpasses at the immediate intersections connected to the overpasses.

### **When would this project take place?**

It is hard to answer this question because the project is in its very early stages and many factors could affect its progress. While the HOV concept is included in the region's long term transportation plan, this project's inclusion in this plan is just one of many requirements and procedural steps necessary to obtain federal approvals. Many long-term transportation concepts fail to be built as any proposal is given detailed scrutiny and prioritization for funding in the further steps required. This project, if it proceeds, is likely to be at least 5-10 years away. IDOT's Phase I study, currently underway, is one of the first steps in turning a futuristic transportation concept into an actual transportation project. At the end of a Phase I study, a final plan for the transportation corridor under review would be approved, outlining how the project will look and what, if any, property is needed to make it happen. Before any plan can be approved, IDOT must make a draft plan for implementing the project public for comment. By law, IDOT must respond to any comments received. Federal oversight agencies must sign off on IDOT's Phase I plan. If a Phase I plan is adopted, if funding is available, the project would proceed to Phase II, where detailed construction documents are developed, and IDOT would attempt to purchase properties previously identified as necessary for the approved plan. A Phase II study typically is a multi-year process. The next phase would be letting the project for construction. Each of these phases is subject to funding. There is no funding allocated or available in IDOT's Fiscal Year 2002 to 2006 Highway Improvement Program for this project. This project is a very big-ticket item, and is estimated to cost \$600-800 million. However, the Village expects that IDOT would seek to earmark federal funds for this project as part of the next Congressional reauthorization of federal surface transportation programs due to expire in 2003. Very large projects like these are not typically funded through an allocation from the state's formula transportation funds; they usually require funds earmarked by Congress.

### **What is the Village of Oak Park doing?**

Oak Park is the largest suburb along the route of the I-290 HOV lane study with nearly 53,000 people. The Village of Oak Park government and its residents are greatly concerned about the potential impact of this project on the Village, on its residents, and potentially on the two Oak Park business districts that also are adjacent to the Eisenhower. Oak Park is a community built on access to public transit, and strongly supports the use of transit, and opposes poor transportation planning that adds to suburban sprawl that can only hurt the Village's inner ring suburban status. Oak Park residents are drawn to the high quality residential neighborhoods of significant historic and architectural value. As such, the Village does not want any project to impact negatively on the community's character, detract from property values, threaten the environmental or recreational areas, or increase noise and air pollution.

The Village President and Board of Trustees directed staff in June of 2001 to aggressively follow and respond to IDOT's plans. In doing so, the Village will act as an advocate for the needs of the community, and work to keep the residents informed in a timely manner of IDOT developments and opportune points in time to have contact with the appropriate state and federal officials. The Village staff has formed an

interdepartmental working group that met regularly throughout 2001 and continues to organize the Village's response and compile information. The Village has been and is seeking to coordinated with other groups and impacted municipalities, and closely monitoring and investigating the status of the current project as well as I-290 history in Oak Park. The Village has brought on board a firm to provide legal, technical and lobbying assistance to coordinate the Village activities and help the Village protect the Oak Park community's interests in this very important matter at every key decision making level – whether in Chicago, Springfield or Washington, D.C. The Village has urged IDOT to work proactively and immediately begin to work with municipalities and the public regarding plans for the future I-290 project from Mannheim to Cicero to determine potential impacts of the HOV, to study alternatives, and to consider creative approaches to project mitigation beyond the standard mechanisms. The Village President and Board of Trustees will appoint a citizens commission to involve residents in advising the Village on this matter and disseminate information to the community. The Village encourages all Oak Park residents to remain interested and active in asserting the Village's concerns about the project with key transportation policy decision makers stating. Even if a person is not on the committee, everyone's assistance will be desired to be involved in the process - to offer opinions but especially to contact the key decision making officials at the regional, state and federal levels to make sure that Oak Park's interests are fully considered.

#### **What are the environmental concerns?**

The existing configuration of the Eisenhower with six lanes of traffic already is an environmental burden on the Village of Oak Park. The American Lung Association has ranked Oak Park as one of the largest diesel "hot spots" due to its proximity to truck traffic along the Eisenhower, which splits the Village of Oak Park in two from east to west. At least two studies dating back to the 1980's have shown that the existing noise from the Expressway exceeds federal standards. Repeated requests for mitigation at that time revealed IDOT's policy to not undertake noise mitigation efforts except in new construction or major reconstruction projects. Freight trains stopping for extended periods of time with engines running have caused both Oak Park and neighboring Forest Park significant complaints about noise and pollution. The original design of the Eisenhower did minimize the noise impact on the residential areas adjacent to the Eisenhower by constructing it below grade level for its entire length through Oak Park and into Forest Park for a short stretch to the west. The entrance/exit ramps at Harlem and Austin into Oak Park also keep traffic as far away as possible from residential areas by their placement in the center rather than at the outside of the expressway. These two conditions only exist in the Oak Park stretch of the Eisenhower from Chicago to Hillside. Also of environmental note is that immediately adjacent to the proposed expansion project on the north side of the expressway for four blocks is a pending national historic district, and to the south two public parks. Further to the west a Cook County Forest Preserve and the Des Plaines River must be bridged.

In the fall of 1998, the Oak Park Village Board approved a policy position that has guided Oak Park's position on this project ever since that called for IDOT to conduct an environmental impact analysis as part of any further study on the proposal to add two lanes to I-290 through Oak Park. A thorough environmental analysis would ensure that IDOT actually reviews and consider any alternatives to address Eisenhower congestion, from options ranging from the null option to extending the Blue Line CTA el line to Oak Brook or Downers Grove. The Village is concerned that, notwithstanding the comments recorded in the HOV lane feasibility study indicating the many parties involved in the preparation of that study (such as IDOT's public transit division and the Regional Transportation Authority), that IDOT is basing its Phase I study on the HOV lane approach without first undertaking a "major investment analysis" of all the transportation options before pursuing the HOV lane concept further. A full environmental analysis would also document what the anticipated impacts on the communities along the highway would be, including noise and increased air pollution. During the two public hearings held on the Phase One study for the proposed improvements to I-290 from I-88/I-294 to Mannheim Road (the so-called "Hillside Strangler" Project) during 1999, the Village submitted testimony stating the above Village's position on the Eisenhower Expansion project urging that immediate steps to reach out to municipalities on the expansion project be undertaken and creative mitigation methods be considered. The Village's comments suggested that the typical noise mitigation measures for highway projects would not be well suited for the situation in Oak Park, and would further exacerbate the divide in the community created by the original project. One example of a creative mitigation measure is the IDOT study from 1987 the Village sought that investigated the feasibility of "capping" the Expressway through Oak Park. This report was commissioned with the support of then State Senate Majority Leader Phil Rock, an Oak Park resident. The idea was deemed feasible but costly if done on its own. The implications of the report that "capping" the expressway entirely through Oak Park or in parts would be more cost effective if done in conjunction with a bridge replacement or retaining wall construction (as would be necessary in IDOT's HOV plan). Parkland or public transit hubs and parking with public purposes were the most reasonable and doable items identified for placing above the highway, rather than buildings for private development. Examples of similar success stories in reuniting communities divided by highways exist elsewhere in the country (e.g. Mercer Island, WA & Oak Park, MI).

***As the Village's efforts proceed and more information is available, please check the Special Reports section of the Village web site for IKE Updates and related documents at [http://www.vil.oak-park.il.us/News/Special\\_Reports.html](http://www.vil.oak-park.il.us/News/Special_Reports.html)***

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