



August 15, 2002

Mary E. Peters
Administrator
Federal Highway Administration
400 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20590

Re: I-290 HOV Project Through Oak Park, IL

Dear Administrator Peters:

By letter of April 24, 2002, you replied to my March 25 letter to Secretary Mineta expressing our concerns with regard to the proposed reconstruction of I-290 through the Village of Oak Park. Your letter, which was greatly appreciated, assured us that potential alternatives, impacts and mitigation measures would be thoroughly addressed in the NEPA process. I write now to inform you of related developments that have occurred in the wake of your reply.

Alternatives

In my letter to Secretary Mineta, I mentioned public transportation alternatives to the I-290 HOV proposal that we believe deserve serious consideration. I am pleased to report that in July, the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) announced that it intends to conduct a multi-modal study of those and other public transportation alternatives to the HOV proposal. The study will be conducted in conjunction with the NEPA review and IDOT has sought the assistance of the Regional Transportation Authority.

While IDOT has not yet defined the precise scope of the study, we are encouraged at this development and intend to work closely with IDOT, the other agencies and our neighboring communities to ensure that a thorough study is performed. We believe that this study, if conducted properly, could form the basis for the major investment study (MIS) that we believe is required for this project (whether separately or in conjunction with the NEPA analysis). We have communicated our views with respect to the MIS to both IDOT and your staff, but we have received no response yet as to how this issue will be addressed.

As I also mentioned in my initial letter, we have sought CMAQ funding, through CATS, to update a prior IDOT study of the feasibility of capping portions of I-290 in Oak Park as a potential mitigation measure if the HOV project proceeds. As we read the FHWA guidance for CMAQ grants, this type of NEPA-related study is clearly within the universe of projects intended to be eligible, and in such cases the costs and benefits of the project need not be quantified as precisely as for other projects. We are currently working with CATS and FHWA staff to identify reasonable methods for evaluating our CMAQ grant application for the cap feasibility study.

Impacts

Since I received your letter in April, we have attended a series of meetings to discuss the potential impacts of the HOV proposal with representatives of FHWA and IDOT. We have explained to them, both orally and in writing, why we believe that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) must be prepared for this project. Our meetings have been cordial and productive, and we appreciate the willingness of FHWA and IDOT staff to listen to our concerns. We understand that FHWA has made no decision yet as to whether an EIS will be prepared. However, our meetings with IDOT staff have left us with the clear impression that they do not favor preparation of an EIS at this time.

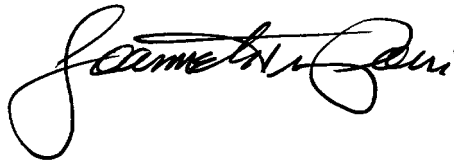
We understand that if an EIS is not prepared initially, an Environmental Assessment (EA) would be performed and could lead to later preparation of an EIS. If that is the current decision, we will do our best to work together with FHWA and IDOT in the EA process. However, it is clear to those of us who live in Oak Park and understand the magnitude of this project that the potential effects will be substantial. We have convened a Citizens Committee composed of Village residents with relevant expertise to study the potential impacts of the proposed I-290 project on the Village. I am attaching for your information a description of the Committee and its members that appears on our Village website. Our Committee is now in the process of conducting its initial study, and preliminary results are expected to be available within a couple of weeks. We will advise FHWA and IDOT of the preliminary results as soon as they are available. We urge FHWA not to decide against an EIS at this juncture until the preliminary results of our initial study have been received and reviewed.

In addition, I invite your attention to the attached notice that appeared in the *Federal Register* on Friday August 9, 2002. The notice announces the intention of FHWA and the Connecticut Department of Transportation to prepare an EIS for a highway project in Middletown, Connecticut. As described in the notice, the Connecticut project would affect approximately 6,000 feet of roadway and consists of building a new interchange and eliminating a traffic signal. In contrast, the proposed I-290 project as described in IDOT's 1998 feasibility study would affect approximately 8 miles of roadway. It would include construction of new HOV lanes, relocation of major freight and passenger rail facilities, potential property purchases, major reconstruction and redesign of two interchanges in Oak Park, construction of a new "flyover" connection at a third interchange and significant revisions to many additional interchanges, in addition to other construction.

The attached notice does not explain why FHWA decided to prepare an EIS in the Connecticut case. The Connecticut project apparently is near a river, and perhaps that is one reason for the decision. However, the proposed I-290 project runs through the heart of Oak Park and appears to dwarf the Connecticut project in size and scope. According to the 2000 census, nearly 22,000 people -- approximately 41% of the Village population of 52,000 -- live within 4-5 blocks of the I-290 expressway. Surely the health and safety of our citizens deserve the same level of consideration as the protection of the people and the environment that might be affected by the project in Connecticut.

As I stated above, we intend to work together with FHWA, IDOT and others to secure a thorough assessment of the potential alternatives and impacts of the I-290 project regardless of whether the initial decision is to prepare an EA or an EIS. However, it is clear to us that the potential impacts of the proposed project are sufficient to require preparation of an EIS. The recent FHWA decision in the Connecticut case appears to support our view, as does the potential scope of the multi-modal study that IDOT is now planning. We hope this will convince FHWA that an EIS for the proposed I-290 project should be prepared now. If not, we urge FHWA not to decide against an EIS in our case until our Citizens Committee has completed its initial study of the potential impacts and your staff has had an opportunity to review the preliminary results.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joanne E. Trapani". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "T".

Joanne E. Trapani
Village President

Cc: N. Stoner
F. Skaer
K. Brown
E. Gower
A. E. Biciunas
Hon. Richard J. Durbin
Hon. Peter G. Fitzgerald
Hon. Danny K. Davis

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[Notices]
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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Highway Administration

Environmental Impact Statement: Middlesex County, CT

AGENCY: Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Department of Transportation (DOT).

ACTION: Notice of intent.

SUMMARY: The FHWA is issuing this notice to advise the public that an environmental impact statement will be prepared for proposed transportation improvements in Middlesex County, Connecticut.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Bradley D. Keazer, Division Administrator, Federal Highway Administration, 628-2 Hebron Avenue, Suite 303, Glastonbury, Connecticut 06033, telephone (860) 659-6703; or Edgar T. Hurle, Director of Environmental Planning, Connecticut Department of Transportation, 2800 Berlin Turnpike, Newington, CT 06111, telephone: (860) 594-2920.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The FHWA, in cooperation with the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT), will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) on a proposal for transportation improvements in the Route 9 corridor, in the city of Middletown, located between the Washington Street intersection and the bridge over the Mattabeset River for a distance of approximately 6000 feet (1800 meters).

Improvements to the corridor are considered necessary to provide for the existing and projected traffic demand. Alternatives under consideration include: (1) Taking no action; (2) using alternate travel modes; and (3) construction of a new interchange to provide improved access to the Arrigoni Bridge and Main Street (Route 66) and elimination of the existing traffic signals on Route 9 at the Hartford Avenue and Washington Street intersections.

Letters describing the proposed action and soliciting comments will be sent to appropriate Federal, State, and local agencies, the Middletown Route 9 Corridor Advisory Committee, and to private organizations and citizens who have previously expressed or are known to have an interest in this proposal. Public scoping meetings and a public hearing will be held. Public notice will be given of the time and place of the meetings and hearing. The draft EIS will be available for public and agency review and comment prior to the public hearing.

To ensure that the full range of issues related to this proposed action are addressed and all significant issues identified, comments and suggestions are invited from all interested parties. Comments or questions concerning this proposed action and the EIS should be directed to the FHWA at the address provided above.

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Program Number 20.205, Highway Planning and Construction. The regulations implementing Executive Order 12372 regarding intergovernmental consultation on Federal programs and activities apply to this program.)

Authority: 23 CFR Part 771.

Issued on: July 29, 2002.

Bradley D. Keazer,
Division Administrator, Hartford, Connecticut.

[FR Doc. 02-20170 Filed 8-8-8; 8:45 am]

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