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2030 Regional Transportation Plan Projects Submitted
Officials Press for Study of Transit Alternatives to IKE Expansion

OAK PARK, IL, April 12 – Local government officials here are urging regional transportation planners to ease travel congestion between the western suburbs and Chicago by looking beyond merely creating more automobile capacity with the proposed expansion of the Eisenhower Expressway.

In documents filed Tuesday with the Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS), the organization that develops long-term transportation plans for the Chicago area, Oak Park officials outlined three specific alternatives, including designating the entire area from central Cook County into DuPage County as a “multi-modal study corridor” where *all* options to improve travel would be studied as part of the region’s long-term transportation plan (RTP) now being updated. Specific options outlined by the Village for CATS would increase Metropolitan Rail (Metra) commuter capacity and extend the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) Blue Line elevated train system further west.

“The impact of massive highway expansion projects on neighborhoods along their routes and the environmental consequences of putting more cars into an area already on the federal government’s pollution watch list requires transportation planners to be more visionary and creative in developing their long-range plans,” said Oak Park Village President Joanne E. Trapani.

“As a community which has greatly benefited from the existing transit network, Oak Park knows that CATS and other transportation decision makers should look beyond adding lanes to an already crowded expressway and develop a more comprehensive plan for addressing transportation mobility issues in our area.”

Designating the entire region of central Cook into DuPage County as a corridor for an analysis of all transportation modes and available options would provide the factual basis for a truly comprehensive plan for improving travel to and from Chicago and the western suburbs, Village officials suggested.

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The study corridor, as proposed by Oak Park officials, would run west from Cicero Avenue in Chicago along the proposed Interstate 290 high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) expansion route and Interstate 88 to Lisle in central DuPage County, south to the Burlington Northern Metra Line and north to the Union Pacific-West Metra Line. Planners could use these boundaries to take a comprehensive look at the travel needs and possible alternatives to highway expansion, including the specific transportation project proposals submitted to CATS by the Village such as extending the CTA Blue line to Lisle and improving the existing Metra lines.

In addition, the study could assess other potential transit alternatives including light rail, or bus options such as the rapid transit concept recently announced by the suburban PACE bus system to provide service between the end of the Blue Line Douglas branch to Oak Brook and Downers Grove.

Pointing to a 1992 Metra report, Oak Park officials told CATS the capacity of the Union Pacific West Line that carries 14,500 passengers every day through Oak Park from Chicago to several DuPage County communities, could be more than doubled with service upgrades such as improving stations, creating new park-and-ride facilities along the route, and using advanced signaling systems and track improvements to eliminate bottlenecks with freight trains and at grade crossings.

The Village, in conjunction with the other members of the North Central Council of Mayors representing communities along the I-290 expansion route, also submitted for CATS consideration a proposal to extend the CTA Blue Line to Lisle. The Blue Line elevated train service runs through Oak Park adjacent to I-290, but terminates in Forest Park.

As in previous correspondence with CATS, the Village's multi-modal corridor proposal asked that the proposed I-290 HOV expansion project be removed from the 2030 Regional Transportation Plan, or have a no-build condition pending completion of required federal studies. Citing federal regulations, the Village contends that specific environmental impact and alternatives studies must be completed before any expansion plans for the Eisenhower can be finalized.

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“The Village of Oak Park and its residents are extremely concerned that the I-290 HOV project may be allowed to proceed without the detailed studies of alternatives and impacts required by the federal highway funding regulations,” Village President Trapani said in the March 15 letter to CATS.

A draft 2030 RTP is expected to be released by CATS for public comment at the beginning of next year, and finalized by October 2003.

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