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*Meeting Set for May 29 in Oak Park*

Top Regional State Transportation Official to Discuss Proposed Ike Expansion Plan

Recent visits to Springfield and Washington, D.C., by Village officials to discuss plans for expanding the I-290 Eisenhower Expressway have gotten the attention of the Illinois Department of Transportation, which has agreed to send its top regional highway official to participate in an informational meeting next week in Oak Park.

District Engineer John Kos, who heads the six-county Chicago area Division of State Highways, agreed to the meeting at the request of U.S. Rep. Danny Davis (7th District) who had a town hall meeting scheduled next week in Oak Park. After a visit from Oak Park officials, Rep. Davis offered to make a discussion of the proposed addition of high-occupancy vehicle lanes to the Eisenhower a part of the town hall meeting. The meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m., Wed., May 29, at Village Hall, 123 Madison St.

“During our discussions with officials, we noted the lack of public meetings by IDOT regarding the Eisenhower project,” said Village President Joanne E. Trapani. “Congressman Davis was very gracious and enthusiastically expressed his willingness to do whatever he could to protect the interests of his Oak Park constituents. I am hopeful that this will be the first of a regular and meaningful engagement of the public. Citizens must be given ample opportunities to express their concerns.”

Village officials made a trek to Springfield on May 8 and then to Washington, D.C., last week. The purpose of the meetings, Trapani said, was to impress upon elected officials and their key staff members the seriousness of Oak Park’s concerns about the potential impact of the Eisenhower expansion, and the importance of getting IDOT to consider public transit alternatives to expanding the highway.

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Members of the Oak Park contingent focused their efforts on convincing officials to insist that IDOT conduct a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as part of the current preliminary engineering and design study on the Eisenhower corridor, rather than a less comprehensive environmental assessment. An EIS will help ensure consideration of all potential impacts of the proposed highway expansion, a full evaluation of alternatives and continued public participation opportunities.

These recent trips to Springfield and Washington, D.C., are just the latest steps in an aggressive, ongoing effort by Village officials to ensure the interests of Oak Park are protected in any plan to expand the Eisenhower. The Village has hired outside legal and technical assistance and formed a citizens' advisory body to keep residents informed and involved in the process.

In addition, the Village has asked the Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS), the metropolitan planning organization that develops regional transportation plans, to remove the I-290 expansion project from its long-term plan or specify that it cannot be built until all alternatives and their environmental impacts have been studied as required under federal law.

Other requests made to CATS include funds to study "capping" all or a portion of the Eisenhower through Oak Park with green space or recreational areas to help improve air quality and reduce the physical division of the Village created by the original construction of the Expressway.

The Village also has urged CATS and IDOT to specifically examine extending the CTA Blue Line el service and expanding capacity of the Metra Union Pacific west line, both of which run through Oak Park.

"As growth in the western suburbs continues, regional transportation planners will have to think more creatively if they truly hope to reduce highway congestion," Trapani said. "It is incumbent upon us as the local elected officials, as state and federal officials, and as residents, to make sure our voices are heard when transportation decisions of the magnitude of expanding the Eisenhower are in the making."

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