

MINUTES  
I-290/Eisenhower Citizens Committee  
Oak Park Village Hall Council Chambers  
February 4, 2003

Present: Lawrence Christmas, chair; members Karen Baldwin, Ron Burke, Kevin Kell, Sandra Kupelian, Peter Morava, and Nancy Rodriguez

Also

Present: Peter Dame, VMO Staff Liaison; Fred Brandstrader, Cap the IKE Working Group;

Absent: Mark Johnson, Marion Kessy, Collette Lueck, Phil Rock and David Sokol

**Call to Order**

Chair Christmas convened the meeting at 7:05 p.m. and declared a quorum present.

**Approval of Minutes**

On a motion made by Nancy Rodriguez and seconded by Ron Burke, the minutes of the December 3, 2002 meeting were approved as recorded.

**Chairperson Comments**

Chair Christmas announced that an introductory meeting has been scheduled with staff from Governor Blagojevich's office. He, President Trapani, Trustee Carpenter, Carl Swenson and Pete Dame will be meeting on February 10, 2003 with Margaret Houlihan, Deputy Chief of Staff, as arranged by the Village's lobbying firm in Springfield. In the future, additional visits will also be made to General Assembly members.

Chair Christmas noted the schedule for the 2030 plan is due to be adopted next autumn, and that we will need to develop our comments. He introduced John Paige from the Northeast Illinois Planning Commission, who indicated a preliminary recommendation will be made during March followed by a public meeting. It is encouraging to note that this is the first time they have identified the I-290 area as a multi-modal corridor for data modeling purposes.

**Business**

## Cap the IKE Working Group Presentation

Chair Christmas introduced Fred Brandstrader, chair of the Cap the IKE Working Group, who has completed its fact-finding study on capping the expressway as requested by the Commission. Copies of the presentation were provided to members. Mr. Brandstrader's presentation is summarized as follows.

Contained in the report is a list of all completed, in-progress and projected capping projects in the country that members of the working group were able to identify. Mr. Brandstrader summarized several project examples in Ohio, Minnesota, Arizona, Boston and Washington, noting that the first deck project in the United States was built in 1969 in Monterey, California. Responding to Mr. Burke's inquiry as to the longevity of these decks, Mr. Brandstrader stated that some had experienced maintenance/drainage problems possibly due to design issues.

There was a brief discussion on the open space the cap would provide, and how best to utilize this space (parks, retail, offices, etc.). All agreed that a cap/deck would become a place of destination.

Regarding funding, Mr. Brandstrader stated that publicly funded cap/deck projects always take longer to complete than privately funded projects. Most projects are federally-funded as a result of environmental EA or EIS. Mr. Brandstrader stated that the capping could occur with both reconstruction of the Eisenhower or widening it, reflecting the independent utility of the project.

The history and the lessons we can learn from the Mercer Island project were discussed. It was noted that several communities were involved in the record of decision that settled that highway project design issues that resulted in the Mercer Island cap. Both Mr. Brandstrader and Mr. Dame agreed that capping is now a main part of highway design concept studies in many urban areas across the country. Mr. Dame noted that no other community along the corridor is impacted by the highway as much as Oak Park – we are the most densely developed to the edge of the highway, already below grade, with the most bridges to be rebuilt, and with divided business districts.

Various funding mechanisms were discussed; the report outlined several funding avenues to explore. Also to be considered are air right privileges. Chair Christmas stated that creating a TIF to develop commercial properties holds promise, as the area above the highway is "blighted" and would not cause the schools any lost revenue. He noted that a ten-year old IDOT study gave cost estimates, and inquired about the cost of this cap/deck project. Mr. Brandstrader responded that the size of the cap would need to be determined for the Oak Park project specifically. Recent studies elsewhere had estimates of cost of \$300 to \$350 per square foot.

Chair Christmas congratulated Mr. Brandstrader and his group on the excellent job they did. In terms of an architectural design, capping would be an architectural statement which Brandstrader believes would certainly qualify as a gateway to the west, as suggested in the Burnham Plan, and could be a perfect project for the upcoming Centennial celebration of that plan.

Mr. Dame stated a draft scope of services between the Village and the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) for the Illinois Tomorrow grant to study the cap concept has been included in the material sent to members. Members were encouraged to review this document before March 1; any comments will be incorporated into draft scope which must be submitted to IDOT in order to prepare a grant agreement.

### Development of Additional Alternatives to Highway Expansion

Chair Christmas and members reviewed the draft “Preliminary Recommended Alternatives for Analysis” prepared by Mr. Dame for submission to the RTA, IDOT and Illinois Tollway. Chair Christmas stated that there does not appear to be a great deal of detail in the document; many of the suggestions had come from this committee, while there were others that did not. A suggestion was made to amplify our alternatives. Mr. Dame responded that he used the Northwest Corridor report as a model for the descriptions of alternatives in this list. The RTA study for the E-W corridor including I-290 is expected to be similar to that of the Northwest Corridor, which is a broad-based look at transit alternatives along I-90. The draft list are pro-active alternatives for congestion from Chicago all the way to Lisle, an area currently included in the study area by the RTA. Some alternatives came from other sources, and since we are not advocates of all these alternatives, Chair Christmas asked that these sources be identified or that Oak Park not be seen as the sponsor or advocate of them all.

Mr. Burke suggested that our alternatives be prioritized. Mr. Dame stated that these are preliminary recommended alternatives to be reviewed and investigated. It will be made clear in the final document that we are not endorsing all of the alternatives. Mr. Burke questioned whether there is any value in submitting a “laundry list” of recommendations without noting the alternatives that we are recommending. Mr. Dame stated that the 22 alternatives in the Northwest Corridor report were narrowed down by the RTA to seven or nine as part of the study review.

Mr. Kell questioned why Lisle was picked. It was noted that Lisle is the end point of the transit corridor for the future in the 2020 RTP. Mr. Kell also questioned how corridor bicycle and pedestrian improvements can be a solution for someone getting from Lisle to downtown Chicago. He views this as a subset to the commuter. Mr. Burke recommended keeping bike and pedestrian improvements in the list for review. Mr. Dame pointed out that if the Illinois Prairie Path could be connected from where it ends

in Maywood to the path in Columbus Park, there would be a significant east-west bike path route.

Chair Christmas asked that our cover letter emphasize that the alternatives are not being submitted individually, but collectively as a package, with combinations that make sense. Mr. Page suggested that when mentioning management strategies, we use the phrase “context sensitive design” regarding the alternatives, as Mr. Dame has advocated at the CATS RTP meetings. Rick Kuner, a resident in the audience, agreed, stating that while he is not a big fan of marketing phrases, this is a positive concept and a phrase bureaucrats will understand.

It was the consensus of the committee to revise the alternative list according to the changes discussed.

### **Public Comment**

John Neu, 1015 Linden noted that with advancements in concrete treatments, it is very easy to get 50 years out of a bridge or cap deck, and gave Wacker Drive as a recent example. He cited IDOT’s planned renovation of the I-74 through Peoria which should substantially increase their flow. No new lanes were added in the downtown section, and capping was not considered but a substantial amount of work was done with noise walls and other aesthetics. When asked to comment on noise walls in Oak Park, Mr. Neu suggested that innovative noise treatments could overhanging the Eisenhower instead of creating a tall barrier; he does not recommend a four-floor high noise wall as would be needed for multi-family buildings in Oak Park adjacent to the expressway. Mr. Brandstrader stated that a noise wall could be built, but would not entirely eliminate noise.

Rick Kuner, 728 S. Euclid, expressed his thanks to Mr. Brandstrader and his committee for the capping study. Regarding the list of alternatives, he noted the vertical alternatives were not specifically listed (for example, putting the CTA under the roadway). Pushing the road further down below grade is another alternative that helps reduce noise. He cited the freeway in Portland, Oregon, originally called the Foothills Freeway, but now known as the Stadium Freeway. It does not have any kind of cap, but is at least four or five stories below grade. Finally, Mr. Kuner was glad the committee remembered the combination of alternatives, which is something he believes we should push.

Patrick Deady, 617 Park, River Forest stated that he is an attorney with the Village of Hillside and was appearing on behalf of his responsibilities for Hillside. He urged caution in prioritizing the alternatives, as there are many unknown factors. Communities to the west of Oak Park may have different priorities for alternatives. He noted that communities like Hillside and Bellwood have no transit stops, and Maywood has one, and desperately needs transportation choices. When we think about what is important

west of Harlem Avenue, we need to be sensitive to the possibilities for the communities west of us. Some alternatives may be more politically possible, and we should consider making alternatives that are politically, if not theoretically, possible. For example, bus related options may hold more short term promise than the long-term rail options, and therefore communities need to be flexible at this point in the study process.

### **Proposed Next Meeting Date**

After determining that the first Tuesday of the month is not convenient for several members, the next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, April 8, 2003. Dame would solicit other members who were not present to make sure that they could make that meeting. Dame indicated that April 7 was the date the draft RTP recommendations would be formally released by CATS so the meeting would be timely.

### **Adjournment**

Chair Christmas declared the meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brenda K. Fojtik, Recorder