

I-290 Eisenhower Citizens Committee

Thursday, June 6, 2002

7 p.m.

Council Chambers/123 Madison Street

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Committee Members Present: Lawrence Christmas, Chair; Karen Baldwin, Mark Johnson, Kevin Kell, Marion Kessy, Sandra Kupelian, Collette Lueck, Peter Morava, Nancy Rodriguez, Phillip Rock, David Sokol

Staff Present: Peter Dame, Assistant to the Village Manager/Liaison to the Committee

Call to Order

Chair Christmas called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

April 25, 2002 Minutes

Approved as submitted by recorder Brenda Fojtik.

Chair Comments

None

CATS Presentation on Highway Traffic Forecasting

Chair Christmas said the committee would take some time tonight to learn how the 2020 Regional Transportation Plan's modeling of the Eisenhower HOV lanes were prepared, and about CATS role in the modeling for IDOT's 1998 HOV Feasibility Study. Presenters were Linda Bolte, Deputy for Planning with the Chicago Area Transportation Study and Oak Park resident, and Kermit Wies, Director of Plan Development. CATS performs traffic modeling and develops projections for the regional transportation plan which is updated every three years.

Bolte addressed the group, calling attention to CATS' Shared Path 2030 brochure which provides an update on the regional transportation plan (RTP) for northeastern Illinois currently under study, as well as a list of 12 public meeting dates for input into the plan. One of the sessions is set for The Living Word Center, 7600 W. Roosevelt in Forest Park, from 7-9:30 p.m. on July 22.

The purpose of the sessions is to identify transportation needs and benefits of the region. The meetings will be open to gather public input but are not intended as official public hearings.

The 2020 RTP produced an estimated number of 71,000 more cars (a 35% increase) to be generated by the HOV lanes on the Eisenhower. CATS separately provided technical assistance to IDOT in preparation of the 1998 feasibility study on the Eisenhower HOV lanes by preparing additional traffic modeling analysis. CATS is not involved in the modeling for the IDOT Phase I study on the Eisenhower that is in process. As part of that Phase I study, IDOT is updating the traffic data and modeling with current information apart from CATS. However, IDOT's engineering firm, Parsons Brinkerhoff, has hired the former CATS staffer who assisted with the feasibility study to conduct the updated modeling so it will likely be updated using the same methodology.

Whether the Eisenhower HOV lanes will remain as part of the RTP will be considered as part of CATS' SharedPath 2030 process when the plan is updated by the fall 2003. Oak Park resident Rick Kuner serves on CATS' highway working group. Chair Christmas indicated that Oak Park sent a letter to CATS suggesting that since this HOV project is still subject to analysis, it should not be part of the RTP. Bolte replied this project's designation in the 2020 plan does not remove any obligation to conduct alternatives analysis. Only one project in past RTPs has been project-specific. An air quality assessment is required on the RTP so the RTP has to list specific projects on which to make air quality impact projections to conform with Clean Air Act requirements. It is not CATS intention to allow shortcuts in the study process for any project.

Chair Christmas asked for clarification and concluded we would have to await the response to the letter to review. Bolte indicated she did not foresee the CATS policy committee removing HOV plan stating they don't have undefined corridors in the plan.

Kermit Wies distributed a "Travel Demand Estimation in a Nutshell" dated 6/2002 as prepared by CATS. The material indicated that over the past 40 years, urban transportation planners have developed a standard approach to quantifying the transportation efforts of urban growth and development. The material outlined typical questions asked by planners and provided a description of the analysis steps, as well as a diagram of the "Modeling Process for Conformity Analysis."

A model was used to develop the 71,000 additional vehicles on the Eisenhower figure taking growth estimates, geography and economics into account and stated that was a maximum expected demand for use of the proposed HOVs. Mr. Wies summarized the four questions and analysis steps from the Nutshell hand-out. Chair Christmas said there is no HOV model for Chicago because no HOV lanes exist here. Wies indicated they look at other parts of the country for a modeling effects of HOV lanes. Household and income averages are considered when estimating public transportation usage and private cars. Chair Christmas said that NIPC forecasts for 2020 show increases for African Americans and Hispanics at income levels lower than what the whites earn. Since most growth occurs in the suburbs, it suggested to him that the model needs to assume race and income levels. Should income stratification be leveled out in the future? There is some risk in assumptions. Are CATS models sensitive to demographics? Mr. Wies said yes, political demands come into the picture, as well.

It was noted the model contains some big assumptions and that the HOV lanes are intended to drastically change behavior. Mr. Wies said many assumptions included that turn out to be correct but there can be errors. For example, in 1970, they estimated 1990 models for only one car per household.

Mr. Sokol indicated the oil embargo of the 1970's increased gasoline prices and subsequently housing demands in Oak Park. Could it happen again and is that possibility factored into the model? Mr. Wies said in the 2020 plan, we tested what would happen if prices went up. Regional volumes are not going to drop because people will not change their mindset. Only marginal change is expected.

Mr. Kessy was concerned about the level of reliability of the modeling used to justify the HOV lanes on the Ike. The HOV lanes may reduce travel times by 10 minutes, but all savings might be submerged by the increase in cars. Reference was made to the recent Chicago Sun Times article which stated that time savings as a result of the Hillside Strangler improvements did not occur as projected before the construction. If there are variables that determine the outcome more than others, the variables should be changed. Is it really proposed to define high occupancy as two people? If only 10 minutes are saved, should \$800 million be spent? There is no certainty of the numbers.

Mr. Wies continued, under the definition of socioeconomic/land use data, the important word is "scenario." There is an interrelationship between land use and transportation investments which make it hard for NIPC and CATS to make

projections. Under trip-making behavior, data from the long form of the census is used. Taken into consideration was the number of workers living in a household, number of adults over 16, and adults that own cars. The more cars that are owned, the more trips are generated. Under the section origin, destination and travel mode, the origin for economic models are static models. A dynamic model would result from what happens downstream.

Mr. Wies continued, when looking at transportation system demand, the functions of engineering and planning come together. They must look at multiple cities before a margin of error can be established. For 71,000 vehicles a day, 3,500 cars per hour is the most traffic that can be handled.

Attention turned to Table I-1, entitled “Summary of CATS I-290 HOV Lane A.M. Peak Hour Assignments comparing 1996 to 2010” from the 1998 IDOT HOV feasibility report. The comment was made the chart needs to be diagrammed with better headers. It was designed for engineers, not citizens, and is hard to understand. Discussion followed at some length on interpretation of the data.

Chair Christmas said he would like to see the HOV model with and without other factors and hoped all alternatives could be tested. He suggested that if IDOT will listen to Oak Park, at least four scenarios, including a no-build alternative, should be requested. Chair Christmas said the IDOT report has no mention of alternatives. Ms. Bolte agreed, yes, the feasibility report was very limited in scope; Oak Park should insist on being involved. The rail extension to Elburn was cited as a study which contained alternatives. Chair Christmas asked if CATS would review transit alternatives compared to the HOV project in the I-290 corridor as part of the RTP process. Ms. Bolte stated it is not feasible to run a number of alternatives on one local corridor; they take a more regional look at 3-5 major system scenarios and don't have the resources to look at multiple options for single corridors.

Mr. Wies said the process revolves around itself. At a regional level, it's not important that a project saves 10-15 minutes on a given route, but it does reduce congestion and improve air quality that count on a regional basis. We did a regional plan in 2000; now it needs some revisions. He suggested Oak Park be specific with IDOT in its questions and believed Oak Park to be in a good position to influence the IDOT study.

It was asked if IDOT prepares its own modeling based on their assumptions? Mr. Wies said yes, using NIPC data and CATS assumptions. Does the data need to be consistent? Mr. Wies said if there was a radical change from CATS

projections, questions would be raised. One committee member suggested the model itself is not sensitive enough; how can it be determined how much traffic is pulled off North Avenue? Mr. Wies replied that the change would likely be marginal.

### Springfield and DC Report

Pete Dame reported that during May, Oak Park officials visited Springfield and Washington, D.C. to meet with their representatives. President Joanne Trapani, Trustee William Turner, Village Manager Carl Swenson, Committee Chair Lawrence Christmas, and Dame went to Springfield. The same group went to Washington with Trustee Diana Carpenter and without Trustee Turner and Chair Christmas. Chair Christmas said they urged consideration of transit alternatives, the provision of good public information, opportunity for public input, and shared the cap idea for which there is pending a grant application, and urged IDOT to prepare an environmental impact statement.

All seven of Oak Park's Springfield representatives agreed to send letters to IDOT requesting an environmental impact statement. Chair Christmas added that they focused on meeting personally with Oak Park's current and likely future representatives after the election. Dame stated that in D.C., a lot of time was spent with Representatives Lipinski, Davis and the staff of Speaker Hastert, and met with all Illinois transportation committee members in Washington. They said it was early in the process but they were pleased to be informed about Oak Park's concerns. No one in Washington had been contacted by IDOT and everyone was surprised that IDOT had not conducted public meetings. As a result, Cong. Danny Davis invited IDOT to his town meeting last week. A senior member of Senator Durbin's staff was very responsive. Although Senator Fitzgerald missed our appointment, the staff member indicated they will try to have him visit Oak Park, and also seem sympathetic to the Village's concerns.

Chair Christmas said the Federal Highway administrator in Springfield pointed out that he had only 10 months on the job and deferred to his assistant on many issues, and said he had no role in the Hillside Strangler approval process. FHWA indicated they had concurred with IDOT on the preliminary environmental assessment level of environmental review based on IDOT's report of minimal right-of-way purchases for the HOV project. In an April 24 letter from the Federal Highway Administration to President Trapani, the FHWA

administrator indicated the FHWA will subject the Eisenhower HOV lanes proposal to a NEPA Act (National Environmental Policy Act of 1969) review and make sure other Federal requirements are met, but it doesn't promise an environmental impact statement.

Karen Baldwin said she wrote all representatives and got answers from two: Lightford and Fitzgerald, and their answers concurred with Pete Dame's report.

### IDOT Town Meeting Recap

A brief recap was made of Congressman Danny Davis's town meeting in Oak Park. The agenda addressed a mix of topics and the Eisenhower was only one of them. Dame said the residents asked the right questions and suggested the answer indicate some headway is being made. IDOT won't agree yet to an environmental impact statement or a major investment study, but Oak Park has their attention, given the presence of the District Engineer. There is more emphasis now on transit alternatives as IDOT indicates it is working with the CTA and RTA.

### Detailed Impacts for EIS Follow-Up

Copies of a letter were distributed as sent May 13 to Kirk Brown, Illinois Department of Transportation Secretary, setting forth Oak Park's request that IDOT comply with all applicable federal regulatory requirements, including the requirements for (1) major investment studies, (2) congestion management studies, and (3) environmental studies under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Mr. Sokol suggested that future correspondence reference the creation of the Gunderson Historic District and indicate that several addresses along the Eisenhower have been identified for possible landmark status.

Mr. Dame advised that the Village's outside counsel for the matter, Attorney Kurt Blasé, suggested that we obtain a response to the May 13 letter from Kirk Brown and then respond with a detailed EIS justification based on specific impacts on the corridor and community. A response from Brown by the middle of June is not expected.

### Other Updates

Mr. Dame indicated he has contacted IDOT about alternatives and the RTA for analysis as planned. IDOT confirmed it has written to the RTA to request assistance in alternatives analysis and the RTA indicates it will help. President Trapani has suggested that suburban mayors play a role in this analysis through the Council of Mayors and municipal conferences. Dame indicates he is working on securing grant funds to study the proposal to cap the Eisenhower. Mr. Dame indicated that the Village, with the concurrence of the Historic Preservation Commission, would be contacting several property owners along the Eisenhower that may be eligible for landmark status to consider applying.

A public meeting will be conducted June 19 in Forest Park at 7 p.m. at the Howard Mohr Community Center to discuss the Eisenhower expansion. Presentations by IDOT, CATS, and NIPC are planned.

#### Next Meeting

After some discussion, the committee decided to meet next on Thursday, July 11.

#### Public Comment

Rick Kuner, 728 S. Euclid, indicated the RTA is considering a corridor study and the northwest corridor study would be a good model to follow. IDOT is not committed to an environmental impact study per IDOT's statements at the town meeting. The pressure must continue. He suggested that Oak Park should get on the FHWA record in case of court suit. There are different levels of planning; this is what needs to be done. He also indicated Metra or Pace people he talks to know of no corridor study by the RTA.

Mr. Sokol believed that federal law requires an environmental impact study if any historic districts are impacted. He asked that this matter be double-checked with legal staff. Mr. Kuner said he understood Mr. Sokol's point but the attorneys keep finding wiggle room.

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Submitted by:

Johan Walsh

Recorder