

MINUTES  
I-290/Eisenhower Citizens Committee  
Oak Park Village Hall Council Chambers  
August 1, 2002

Present: Lawrence Christmas, Chair; Ron Burke, Mark Johnson, Kevin Kell, Marion Kessy, Sandra Kupelian, Collette Lueck, Peter Morava and David Sokol

Also

Present: Joanne E Trapani, Village President; Peter Dame, Assistant to the Village Manager and Liaison to the Committee; Kurt Blase, O'Connor & Hannan

**Call to Order**

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

**Approval of Minutes**

A motion was made by Peter Morava and seconded by Kevin Kell to approve the minutes of the June 6, 2002 meeting. One set of typos was noted for correction. The vote to approve the minutes, as corrected, was unanimous.

**Chairperson Comments**

Chair Christmas stated that he, along with President Trapani, Village Manager Carl Swenson and Mr. Dame, had met with U. S. Senator Peter Fitzgerald last week to persuade Senator Fitzgerald to discuss the Eisenhower projects impact on Oak Park. The group requested he support a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Eisenhower project. The senator stated that he would follow the lead of Congressman Danny Davis of the 7<sup>th</sup> District on issues relating to the Eisenhower. He suggested that we contact both gubernatorial candidates and their staffs to make our position clear to them. Senator Fitzgerald also discussed the O'Hare expansion and the environmental study steps needed to be taken there. He concluded that he is not unaware of what needs to be done on the I-290 project, and that our activity to date is right on target.

President Trapani stated that our concerns about the project were clearly expressed to the senator, and pointed out that other than a town hall meeting sponsored by Cong. Davis, the Oak Park public has had no opportunity for comment with the

Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT). She stated that Oak Park would like to see all options and alternatives to highway expansion explored.

Chair Christmas stated he agreed with Senator Fitzgerald's suggestion to contact both gubernatorial candidates and their staff to make them aware of the concerns about this project and the need for a full environmental impacts and alternatives analysis. Mr. Christmas asked that staff follow up.

President Trapani concurred, and suggested that committee members with ties to other affected organizations urge those memberships to also get involved by means of membership questionnaires, forums and/or interviews.

## **Business**

### **Detailed Impacts for EIS**

Mr. Dame introduced Kurt Blase from O'Connor & Hannon, who is providing legal and technical assistance to the Village for the I-290 project. Mr. Blase referred members to his July 29, 2002 memorandum in which he outlined points under the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) for points of review, and the draft points detailing the major potential impacts foreseen by the Village. After further input on how these NEPA provisions apply to the Village's situation vis a vis the I-290 project, Mr. Blase will draft a letter to IDOT and others. The purpose of this letter would be to convince IDOT that the potential impacts are so significant as to require preparation of an EIS now, rather than first taking the interim step of preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) to determine whether an EIS is necessary. If that did not succeed, the letter would set forth our initial views as to issues to be discussed in an EA.

Mr. Blase continued: this letter will be our first word on these issues, and we will have many other opportunities to express our views about impacts and the need for an EIS as the process unfolds. It is important for the Village to get its initial views on the record soon so that we can continue to influence the process at an early stage. The committee has worked on responding to many of these items already, and they are listed on his memorandum. Mr. Blase stated that he would lead the Committee through a more systematic and thorough evaluation based on the types of impacts listed in the governing federal regulations.

There are sixteen potential NEPA impacts listed that need input from committee members. Members are also urged to respond to Mr. Dame via e-mail with any additional thoughts they may have.

**1. The relationship between short-term uses of the environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity.**

A definition of induced demand was discussed: If more highway capacity is added, it merely means more cars will be attracted and will end up traveling at the same speed as before. Chair Christmas stated that the HOV concept is still experimental, with the outcome uncertain. If built, the HOV lanes might be converted to regular lanes if they were not used. Mr. Kessy stated that he has yet to see any proof that HOV's reduce travel time. Mr. Blase stated that he would research studies that have been made about HOVs' effectiveness.

A comment was made that conventional lanes could be the answer. Chair Christmas responded that this would be hard to do under the Clean Air Act requirements. The establishment of HOV lanes might be an indirect method of IDOT turning the two new HOV lanes into general purpose traffic lanes after an HOV fails. Chair Christmas feels many of these suggestions could fit under different points, and asked members to respond via e-mail to Mr. Dame with any ideas.

**2. Possible conflicts between the proposed action and the objectives of federal, regional, state and local land use plans, policies and controls.**

Chair Christmas noted that when preparing this part of the response, he noted that there is no enforcement mechanism for the regional land use plan, even though it does endorse the revitalization of existing communities and improving areas with existing infrastructure. As to regional growth, Chair Christmas feels we will see more growth in areas further away from us if we make it easier to get there. Staff was asked to provide Mr. Blase with a copy of the Oak Park Comprehensive Plan.

**3. Energy requirements and the conservation potential of various alternatives and mitigation measures.**

**and**

**4. Natural or depletable resource requirements and conservation potential of various alternatives and mitigation measures.**

Chair Christmas stated that both #3 and #4 are somewhat related to item #1, and that a lot depends on the modeling. There is a possibility that we could end up arguing about the veracity of the model. He concluded by stating both #3 and #4 are provable items.

**5. Urban quality, historic and cultural resources, and the design of the built environment, including re-use and conservation potential of the various alternatives.**

The draft impact response noted on the memorandum was discussed. Mr. Blase noted that there is a more specific question later about the rail line making way for the HOV. It was noted that we would need to wait and see what the rail lines demand. Mr. Dame stated that the IDOT HOV feasibility study does include changes to bridges to allow for double stacking of freight rail cars. Discussion followed on where the passenger rail lines could be placed for extending the CTA Blue Line El and providing express service. Chair Christmas inquired whether there was a map showing possible locations of expanded service on passenger rail lines from downtown Chicago to Oak Brook. Mr. Dame responded that extensions had been discussed including in the median of I-290, but no maps existed, to his knowledge. Mr. Dame suggested that is why it is important that the RTA study is being made now to look at all the alternatives and where they might be located.

#### **6. Effects on public health or safety.**

Chair Christmas stated that an additional lane from Austin to Mannheim would only increase bottlenecks to Chicago starting east of Austin. This traffic congestion would be an obvious indirect effect of this project. The comparison was that the Hillside bottleneck just moved the congestion eastward and did not solve the basic problem.

Mr. Blase stated that a risk assessment should be done on the potential health effects of the additional car traffic projected, and that the concentration of humanity in this area should be brought into play.

There was some discussion as to the safety issue to children, frontage roads and one-way designations. It was agreed that there would be major safety issues during construction.

#### **7. Effects on unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.**

It was felt that most of these items would have no particular effect on Oak Park, which is not located in a floodplain area and has no wetlands or rivers. Mr. Dame stated that he had talked with Bellwood officials who have indicated potential concerns for their homeowners along a floodplain there. Mr. Blase stated that in addition to the run-off problems, there would be a problem with air pollutants contaminating water. Chair Christmas agreed, noting that by adding more vehicles, there would be more contaminants in the Des Plaines River. The massive tonnage of salt used on highways during the winter months is also a factor to be considered as well as the potential damage to neighboring Columbus Park. President Trapani

stated she would discuss the Columbus Park issue with the appropriate Chicago officials.

**8. The degree to which the effects are likely to be highly controversial.**

Mr. Blase stated that this item refers to evidence of controversy, and would include the number of letters received by the Village opposing IDOT's plan, the number of "hits" on the Village's website, the number of persons attending meetings, letters to the editor, and groups formed in response to the proposed IDOT project.

**9. The degree to which the possible effects are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.**

It was noted that gasoline prices and the energy crisis remain an uncertainty. Global warming is also an unknown. As stated earlier, HOVs are untested in Illinois.

**10. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.**

A suggestion was made to include the issue of self-fulfilling prophecy in the converting the two new HOV lanes into lanes with no restrictions after the new lanes are built. The concern is that the HOV concept could ultimately lead to four lanes of general purpose traffic in both directions with no HOV lanes instead of the three general purpose lanes currently.

**11. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.**

One concern expressed by Chair Christmas was that by removing the center ramps, vehicles exiting/entering the HOV lanes would need to weave through traffic to exit/enter the expressway. These series of lane changes may be just as hazardous than our present conditions, just the reverse of the current situation.

Other ideas expressed included:

- ~~///~~Undercutting ridership on the rail lines (Pace, Metra, CTA).
- ~~///~~Would encourage sprawl and property disinvestments.
- ~~///~~Mr. Dame stated that the creation of HOVs from Mannheim to Austin could result in another "strangler" section on the expressway, especially when added lanes on I-88 are built as planned by the tollway.

~~///~~ Where do the 35% additional vehicles park when they get to Chicago? (Mr. Dame referred to the City of Chicago Central Area plan regarding parking and growth in downtown Chicago.)

**12. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic places, or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.**

In addition to the items Mr. Sokol already listed in #12 can be added the creation of the local Gunderson Historic District, which affords a higher degree of protection than the federal designation alone. Chair Christmas feels other historical sites not located in Oak Park but which would be affected should be added. The proximity of the Forest Home Cemetery was also noted.

Mr. Blase feels the last four items (13. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species; 14. Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment; 15. Whether the action would cause economic or social effects that are related to the environmental impacts; and 16. Whether the action raises environmental justice concerns.) are somewhat redundant from what has already been discussed. Chairman Christmas asked that members who have any thoughts on these issues respond to Mr. Dame. Mr. Dame noted that there is a significant minority population located adjacent to the proposed project area that would be impacted compared to the population in DuPage County that would largely benefit from it. This could be reflected in item #16, and can be documented with census data.

Development of Question List for IDOT

Members feel modeling issues are a key to the proposed project. Questions to be directed to IDOT include:

- ~~///~~ Will IDOT be undertaking an O & D study?
- ~~///~~ What alternatives are IDOT willing to look at?
- ~~///~~ Traffic projections with and without HOV lanes.

Mr. Dame stated that the RTA has been authorized by IDOT to prepare a multi-modal transit study. The full scope of this study is still unknown as the details have not as yet been ironed out. The mayors of the “corridor communities” are seeking input in the scope of the study through the submission of a request for technical assistance to the RTA’s RTAP program submitted by the North Central Council of Mayors. Mr. Dame indicated that we would insist to be part of the consultation for

the final study. Mr. Dame stated that the RTA wishes to develop an integrated approach with IDOT's Phase I study, and they do understand what Oak Park wants.

### CATS 2030 Plan Development

Sandra Kupelian stated that she attended the CATS public meeting last week regarding the 2030 Regional Transportation Plan where CATS staff person Linda Bolte gave basically the same presentation she had offered to our committee last month. Ms. Bolte also distributed questionnaires and urged members to complete and forward them to CATS. Mr. Dame stated that CATS is taking public input very seriously and distributed comment forms. Chair Christmas inquired whether we should respond individually or collectively. Mr. Dame feels the Village should respond collectively to the draft 2030 plan whenever it is submitted by CATS for comment, but that members should send in their thoughts now individually.

Chair Christmas questioned whether we had identified all the alternatives. He commented that the feasibility study dismissed the use of a single-lane HOV. He feels this reverse commuting approach could have merit (westbound in the morning, eastbound in the evening). Promotion of a rapid rail extension would be another alternative. Although a single lane approach could pose some problems as a way to move people, we might want to consider this option. Mr. Burke suggested the combination of a dedicated bus rapid transit lane, along with land-use changes, would be a flexible combination. Mr. Sokol feels it would be worthwhile to consider the alternatives suggested by Mr. Christmas. Mr. Dame concluded that if the RTA conducts their study as they have other studies in the past, we should have the opportunity for input into alternatives.

### Other Updates

Chair Christmas announced that Fred Brandstrater has volunteered to assist the committee by focusing on the issue of capping the Eisenhower expressway. Mr. Brandstrater will work with the Village on developing a group to research the capping issue and report back to the committee. Mr. Brandstrater spoke briefly to the committee on the possible benefits of capping, noting that he has communicated with other communities in the U.S. who have experienced the capping process. Mr. Dame indicated that he has applied for federal grant funds to explore capping; should we pursue this idea, the working group's work could be structured to lay the research groundwork for the grant work to be done if the Village is awarded the funds. Members support this idea, and several volunteers were solicited to the working group from the committee. Staff will work on the scope.

### Public Comment

Julie Samuels, 613 S. Lombard stated that she had attended the first citizen's meeting held at Ascension Church back in March, and offered the following comments:

- ~~///~~ The expansion at the "Hillside strangler" has not been an improvement.
- ~~///~~ Web-sites should be utilized for information.
- ~~///~~ Freight trains in the corridor have not been addressed, and could be fuel efficient.
- ~~///~~ Focus on the CTA's blue and green lines and expand them to 12 cars, running more frequently. Improving public transportation would reduce auto traffic.
- ~~///~~ The Chicago Park District will not want to lose Columbus Park; their superintendent is intending to apply for historic site status.
- ~~///~~ The Dan Ryan is an example of a potential consequence—16 lanes wide and always bumper-to-bumper.

Ms. Samuels concluded that reducing automobile usage will have a global impact, and thanked the committee for their efforts.

Mr. Dame invited comments and suggestions from the public on the impact points outlined tonight.

John New, 1015 Linden stated that he is a structural engineer, interested in the capping process. He stated that lowering the railroad tracks would be an extremely expensive process and would be difficult to accomplish. He questioned whether Oak Park has communicated with the City of Chicago about their feelings on HOVs. President Trapani stated she would be meeting soon with the mayor's staff in the future.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 5, 2002.

### **Adjournment**

There being no additional business, the meeting adjourned at 9:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brenda K. Fojtik, Recorder