

Minutes of I-290 Eisenhower Committee  
Thursday, October 3, 2002  
7 p.m.  
Council Chambers of Village Hall

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In attendance: Lawrence Christmas, Chair; Members Mark Johnson, Kevin Kell, Karen Baldwin, David Sokol, Marion Kessy, Ron Burke; President Joanne Trapani, Board Liaison; Pete Dame, Staff Liaison. Absent: Pete Morava, Sandra Kupelian, Collete Lueck and Nancy Rodriguez

- I. The meeting was called to order by Chair Christmas at 7:35 p.m.
- II. Minutes of the August 1, 2002 meeting were approved as prepared unanimously.
- III. Chairperson's Comments. Chair Christmas shared information about plans for the Blue Line improvement from a recent conference he attended. The proposed CTA Circle Line, which – if completed -- would reroute the Douglas Line to the separate line and allow provision of twice the frequency of service on the Forest Park branch. This possibility fortifies the value of the Blue Line. This benefit to the Forest Park Blue Line branch results from phase one in the Circle Line plan which would make a complete circle to Navy Pier and connect all the existing CTA and Metra Lines that feed into the Loop. The plan doesn't require additional right-of-way dollars and could be operational within five years, if funding is secured.

IV. Business

A. Review Draft Detailed Impact Study. Chair Christmas suggested the committee agree to forego line-by-line review tonight, and instead send their editing suggestions to Pete Dame. The focus of tonight's discussion is on the general contents of the report. He noted that the report does not address any alternatives and asked Mr. Dame to explain the reason.

Mr. Dame indicated it was the committee's basic desire to have the report identify impacts of the Eisenhower expansion. At the August meeting, the committee's outside legal consultant provided 16 factors for consideration as possible impacts of the highway project. The report before the committee tonight is the product of that effort. The report includes information from the Oak Park Comprehensive Plan and how that plan would be impacted. The intent of the report is to evaluate the impact on Oak Park.

Mr. Dame stated at the last committee meeting, Kurt Blase, of O'Connor and Hannon, the Village's legal and environmental legal expert, suggested we might put detailed alternatives into the report. However, he modified that suggestion after the Federal Highway Administration letter formally announced that IDOT would undertake an alternatives study. Given that the focus was intended as the impact of the highway project, we will have a full opportunity to discuss alternatives later in the process when the RTA gets that study together.

The draft report has been sent to all Village Board members, Rick Kuner, Co-Chair for Citizens for Appropriate Transportation, and was provided to the public at the last Committee meeting. Mr. Dame suggested that the growth/population section needs expansion and emphasis should be placed on the complication of relocating freight and passenger rails, as well as creating a further divide between north and south Oak Park. It was also brought up that the Illinois Tollway Authority plans to widen I-88 to eight lanes within 8-10 years and this may create a new strangler. There will also be increased roadway salt on trees and vegetation.

Mr. Sokol suggested a point be made about the impact on Oak Park's Home Rule powers: the community has the authority to set its own historic districts as an example. The HOV lane erodes this community's ability to control its own destiny. Increased pollutants will have a negative impact on stucco homes, and increased truck traffic will rattle stain-glass windows.

Mr. Kell suggested more facts be added to the report. He felt there are too many superlatives and some should be removed. How will 300 homes be affected as suggested on page 5? Examples of secondary impacts should be provided. Data back-ups are needed.

Mr. Dame noted there are attachments to the report which were not distributed to the Committee and that these attachments will supply copies of the studies and the missing information. Mr. Sokol suggested the attachments may not be read and should be covered in the report contents.

Chair Christmas said that the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission policies cited in the report would not completely support Oak Park's position since NIPC actually approved of the 2020 CATS RTP. NIPC does have the language about reinforcing older suburbs and conducting full community impact assessments of transportation projects.

Chair Christmas indicated that IDOT has predicted a lessening of traffic volumes is expected on arterial routes. Mr. Dame pointed out that the HOV

studies cited in the draft report indicate that HOV may not necessarily lead to less congestion; it may increase congestion even on arterials. Mr. Dame asked whether the issue should be taken on more directly? Chairman Christmas said yes. Will traffic on Roosevelt Road drop or not? If the HOV lanes don't reduce congestion, why crowd local roads to get to the HOV? Mr. Burke suggested that this be clarified; the answer is not obvious on the surface.

Chair Christmas said "...added congestion on the local roads" is the questionable phrase. Ms. Baldwin reiterated a concern that if exit/entrance ramps were made one direction at each exit, then this would mean that people would exit at Austin and get back on at Harlem. Therefore, if one could only access the HOV lanes from one or the other location, added traffic would use local roads. In addition, cars can't access I-290 from Oak Brook from Roosevelt Road when it's too congested; they close the ramps, which causes local road traffic. Chair Christmas said the back-ups on Austin and Harrison often prevent entry via the Austin ramp. With the HOV lane, will there be more of a back-up?

President Trapani requested a correction to footnoted information concerning Mr. Sokol.

Mr. Burke stated the report is a pretty good job and addresses environmental concerns but thought it could be expanded. For example, air pollution aggravates asthma. Ozone doesn't come out of a smokestack, it's a byproduct of emissions, and is a secondary concern. A lot of new research can be included in the report.

One of the factors is environmental justice. The Commission discussed whether the HOV lane be disadvantageous to any minority group? Mr. Johnson said he was at a loss to understand how any claim could be made that this road would have an effect any different from the Stevenson or Northwest Tollway or Dan Ryan. Chairman Christmas noted the Ryan, with 16 lanes, still has congestion. The population along the Eisenhower from the loop to Hillside represents primarily minorities. Would this expansion be suggested if it were located in Oak Brook or Highland Park?

#### V. Public Comment

Rick Kuner asked that the Oak Park based organization he Co-Chairs, Citizens for Appropriate Transportation (CAT), be identified in the report as a citizen group very concerned about the effects of the HOV lane. More than 500 individuals have received the CAT newsletter and they have lobbied Federal and State officials. The possibility of neighborhood disinvestment is a real issue, Mr. Kuner stated. Some residents may be foregoing home additions and

other improvements. There are also modeling issues with traffic projections. Whether traffic increases on Roosevelt is a modeling issue. Make sure model issues are understood. Columbus Park may be a Section 4(f) issue.

It was suggested that Oak Park talk to Maywood about access to the Maybrook Court House. There is no public transit access to this facility. An extension of the Blue Line is needed. Mr. Kuner submitted a written list of comments for consideration of inclusion in the report.

Chairman Christmas thought Mr. Kuner's modeling observations were good. CATS models do have flaws.

Mr. Sokol indicated he had spoken with a historian of the Chicago Park District. Columbus Park was designed by architect Jens Jensen and a Federal landmark designation is being pursued by the City, which is the highest level of protection afforded to any property.

President Trapani asked that all information added to the report be checked for factualness, particularly regarding disinvestment issue. President Trapani suggested that a check of building permits be conducted. Mr. Burke believed it may be hard to statistically prove that any lessening of permits, if it exists, could be tracked to any single issue.

Mr. Burke had seen the last CAT newsletter and thought that Kevin Brubaker, the author, hit the nail on the head regarding messages. He felt that the arguments in that letter, particularly about induced demand, would help stop the project. Even IDOT knows that the Hillside Strangler remedy really didn't work. The State is struggling to make ends meet.

Chairman Christmas noted the report does not credit the Eisenhower Expressway with being an asset for Oak Park. The HOV proposal reads to be all pain, no gain and a very negative event in Oak Park's life. The report should acknowledge the existing benefits of the Eisenhower Expressway early in the report. President Trapani wondered how many Oak Park residents daily drive the Eisenhower. Mr. Sokol remarked when there is more Eisenhower leading into Downtown, Chicago will have more parking problems as the additional vehicles cannot be accommodated. Chairman Christmas said Oak Park also has the benefit of the Blue Line el as part of the Eisenhower corridor. Mr. Kell noted that Oak Park still wants to promote tourism and draw shoppers and the Eisenhower helps do that.

After some discussion, it was determined that Mr. Dame would email only the changes to the report to the committee members, and that the committee would likely not meet in November.

#### IV. B. Other Updates

Mr. Dame said the Village's lobbying firm has been in contact with the State gubernatorial candidates. Next Tuesday, we will see Jim Ryan's staff. We didn't meet with Rod Blagojevich, but with phone and written communication he understands Oak Park's position but this is crunch time for their schedule.

Concerning the environment impact study, Mr. Dame said IDOT and FHWA's position is unchanged that they will start with an environmental assessment but not initially start with an EIS. Dame reported recent hearings where Congress is pushing the administration to streamline reviews, not lengthen them. President Bush issued an executive order streamlining environmental reviews of transportation projects. Some environmental groups support it as a way to avoid even more damaging legislation, some don't. Federal officials are under a lot of pressure not to conduct EIS studies or to perform them quicker, as required by the last surface transportation act.

Chair Christmas reported that Fred Brandstrader wants to help with the capping the Expressway study. Three people from the committee said they also wanted to help.

#### V. Public Comment

Fred Brandstrader, 840 Clinton, indicated that the CTA has three or four projects on the boards including improvements to the Blue and Brown Lines. The questions are, when will the projects be undertaken and how much money will they need? He lives three houses north of the Eisenhower and there are two quarter-million dollar renovations in process in his neighborhood. Noise and grime are bigger problems on the north side of the Eisenhower, than on the south.

Questions were raised regarding the State proposal to raise the gas tax, when to expect IDOT's review, the timetable for drafting alternatives, and the schedule for future committee meetings. Mr. Dame suggested the next meeting could be 6-8 weeks from now. He noted CATS hasn't yet settled on its 2030 RTP proposed projects.

Mr. Johnson stated the Eisenhower's subsurface is shot and IDOT will need to resurface within 10 years. Mr. Dame said IDOT is looking for big dollars next

year in federal legislation for a suspension bridge down south and that will likely be funded first and a couple other big projects, and that the IKE project might have to wait until the next highway bill. Chairman Christmas suggested that the committee definitely would need to meet again when it gets a draft document from IDOT.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, December 3. All were in favor. Two committee members were absent.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Johan Walsh  
Recorder