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Village Urges New Governor To Consider Impacts and Alternatives to Ike Expansion

Characterizing the Illinois Department of Transportation's (IDOT) I-290 High Occupancy Vehicle Lane (HOV) expansion plans as experimental, environmentally unfriendly, and inconsistent with land use policies and sound transportation planning, Oak Park is urging the new governor to insist on a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and to fully evaluate alternatives before any plans are allowed to proceed.

In a letter sent to Gov. Rod Blagojevich last week, Village President Joanne E. Trapani cited a just released report by the Oak Park Eisenhower Citizen Advisory Committee outlining a multitude of reasons more investigation is needed before IDOT's plans to add HOV lanes on I-290 from Hillside to Oak Park are approved.

In addition to a litany of legal issues in which the Village documents the requirements under federal law that should trigger an EIS in this case, the two-inch-thick report, compiled by a committee of residents with expertise in transportation, law, historic preservation and the environment, includes nearly 50 pages of specific negative impacts on the community an expansion to the expressway may have.

"The expressway already impacts the lives of Oak Park citizens in so many ways, and we are deeply concerned about how an expansion would further affect our community," Trapani said. "This report captures not only our concern, but our resolve to take whatever steps are necessary to protect the health and property of residents."

Trapani said she hopes appealing directly to the new governor will prevent a repeat of how IDOT handled the I-290's so-called Hillside Strangler, where under former Gov. George Ryan IDOT received an exclusion from the environmental studies Oak Park is seeking.

"One look at this report and it will be clear that Oak Park is not about to stand idly by and let such a significant project proceed without careful public scrutiny and strict compliance with federal environmental law, as was the case with the Strangler project," she said. "We are hopeful that the new administration will take an approach to addressing traffic congestion issues that puts transit on at least an equal footing with highways, and fully assesses environmental impacts of all options."

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In addition to delivering the report to the governor, the Village also sent copies to the U.S. Department of Transportation and Environmental Protection Agency, state and federal historic preservation agencies, and state and Congressional elected officials. The Village also will send copies to neighboring communities along the route to seek their support for an EIS.

The Oak Park Eisenhower Expressway Committee, chaired by former Village President and Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC) Executive Director Lawrence B. Christmas, worked with the legal and technical firms hired by the Village to prepare the impacts report. Committee members reviewed studies on the effectiveness of HOV projects, highway pollution and health effects, and incorporated public comments gathered in response to earlier drafts.

The report divides potential impacts of an Ike expansion into a number of broad categories, including undermining the Village's authority to make decisions affecting its land and quality of life, inconsistency with smart growth and sound land use policies, depletion of natural energy resources by accommodation of cars versus promotion of transit, adverse public health and safety impacts from air pollution caused by vehicle emissions, likely damage to buildings and building materials, and the potential for environmental injustice.

"Our initial assessment of the impact of this project indicates that the proposed expansion for HOV lanes, an untested concept in the Chicago region, would simply lead to more cars, more congestion, more noise and more pollution," Christmas said.

"Given the proximity of numerous parks and public facilities, hospitals and residences, many of which have architectural and historical significance, this project needs detailed scrutiny and serious consideration of transit alternatives that may have less environmental impact as was documented in our report. The best way to ensure that these and other potential impacts detailed in the report are thoroughly analyzed and addressed is through a full Environmental Impact Statement."

Since IDOT has not yet released actual physical locations for the expanded highway from its current ongoing study, the Committee report was based largely on information available to date from a 1998 HOV Feasibility Report compiled by IDOT.

The body of the Ike Committee impact report, and information on other Village actions on the proposed Ike expansion, are available on the Village website at [www.oak-park.us](http://www.oak-park.us). Click on "news" and then the I-290 icon.

For more information, call 358.5770 or email [village@oak-park.us](mailto:village@oak-park.us).

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