



For Immediate Release: 08.29.07

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State designation mandates broader view in Eisenhower planning

A state study to investigate future possibilities for the Eisenhower Expressway has received a Context Sensitive Solution (CSS) designation, a label that mandates expanded opportunities for public participation and improved consideration of factors not typically contemplated through a traditional approach to highway planning. Word of the CSS designation came Monday in a letter to the Village from Illinois Department of Transportation Acting Secretary Milton R. Sees.

While the CSS designation does not open project decisions to a public vote, it does mean IDOT has made a commitment to a strong public participation process. The designation also requires consideration of the local context through which I-290 passes and development of a project that respects the needs and concerns of Oak Park and adjacent communities.

IDOT defines CSS as an interdisciplinary approach that seeks effective, multimodal solutions by working with stakeholders to develop, build and maintain cost-effective transportation facilities that fit into and reflect the project's surroundings. The traditional method for designing a highway project is for transportation officials to identify a problem, design a solution and then offer the solution to the public for approval, a process some have characterized the "DAD" approach – decide, announce and defend.

This traditional approach, local officials say, yielded IDOT's current proposal to expand the stretch of I-290 through Oak Park to accommodate two new high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, commonly referred to as carpool lanes.

The Village has actively opposed expansion of I-290 and has been critical of the traditional planning process used by IDOT to arrive at its recommendation. Among the concerns about the process articulated by the Village are impacts to public health, potential land acquisition in neighborhoods with historic, cultural or recreational value, inadequate consideration of multi-modal solutions and lack of public participation. The Village also has questioned the effectiveness of the proposed HOV solution.

Village officials applauded the CSS designation, which they say affirms the value of applying non-traditional planning methods to identifying the best possible solutions to meet mobility needs in the I-290 corridor.

For more information on Village efforts to ensure Eisenhower planning addresses community needs and concerns, call 708.358.5770 or e-mail village@oak-park.us.

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Illinois Department of Transportation

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August 27, 2007

Honorable David Pope
Village President
123 Madison Street
Oak Park, Illinois 60302-4272

Dear Village President Pope:

Thank you for your recent letter requesting a Context Sensitive Solution (CSS) designation for the reconstruction and/or expansion of Interstate 290 (Eisenhower Expressway) from Mannheim Road to Cicero Avenue. The department appreciates your desire for this designation.

As you indicated, the department is preparing to reinitiate the planning process for the Eisenhower Phase I study. As part of our renewed study efforts, an expanded public involvement process will be implemented, and will be modeled after our CSS policy. Therefore, given our intended format and your request, the department will formally designate the Eisenhower Phase I study as a CSS project.

The Eisenhower corridor is adjacent to many sensitive areas and is also one of the most congested roadways on our system. The challenge for the department and project stakeholders will be to develop a proposal that addresses basic safety capacity and operational needs, addresses environmental issues and satisfies community concerns.

Again, thank you for your interest in Illinois' transportation system, and we look forward to working with you on this important project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Milton R. Sees', written over a horizontal line.

Milton R. Sees, P.E.
Acting Secretary