

**APPROVED MINUTES - SPECIAL BOARD MEETING
PRESIDENT AND BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE VILLAGE OF OAK PARK
HELD ON MONDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2011 AT 6:30 P.M.
AT THE OAK PARK CONSERVATORY, 615 GARFIELD**

I. CALL TO ORDER

President Pope called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Trustees Brewer, Hedges, Lueck, Salzman and Tucker; President Pope

ABSENT: Trustee Johnson

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

IV. EISENHOWER DISCUSSION

President Pope announced that this meeting was a continuation of discussions of IDOT plans for the I-290 Corridor. Village Manager Tom Barwin explained that this meeting would allow for a more detailed discussion of these issues, and introduced Rick Kuner of Citizens for Appropriate Transportation.

Mr. Kuner noted that the total cost of studies on the corridor since 1993 has been in the range of \$14 million. He explained that he would present two studies, the I-290 Phase 1: Engineering and Environmental Study and a presentation on regional modeling, as it relates to alternative evaluation.

A. I-290 Environmental Impact Statement Study

Mr. Kuner noted that he will cover current and prospective issues related to the corridor. He reviewed the history of studies of the corridor since 1993, including several originating in Oak Park and a corridor study by the RTA. He noted that an HOV (high occupancy vehicle) lane was first proposed in 1993 and determined to be feasible with 3 or more occupants. The current study is in Phase 1, the Engineering and Environmental Study (October 2009 through 2012 or 2013), the first of three phases. He clarified that the RTA study conducted earlier was a different study. Much of the focus of this study so far is on development of the Purpose and Need Statement, which is a key element of the process. The comment period for this statement has been extended to the end of the month. IDOT has started the alternatives development and evaluation phase, but have yet to get to the preferred alternative phase.

Phase 2 is Construction Drawings and Property Acquisition; Phase 3 is Construction.

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Part B of this presentation covers impacts and major categories. The context-sensitive design process has been mandated by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) of the United States Department of Transportation (US DOT) since 2007, and assumes that every roadway has a context.

Of more than 20, seven major impacts affect this corridor. They include roadway below grade, level of service (A-F) to measure congestion and the East Avenue terraces compromise, which Mr. Kuner discussed.

Center ramps at Harlem and Austin are more difficult for trucks, but are a 1950's compromise made with Oak Park. Three modes of transportation include CSX tracks, CTA tracks and I-290.

CTA has extra space for express rails (not used to date) and stations are not ADA compliant, so that this space can accommodate this. CSX tracks formerly used for freight traffic; when Canadian National bought EJE, these trains were routed to other lines; CSX tracks, one of which is now rusted over. IDOT wants to buy this right of way.

The ramps and tapers at exits are too short for current traffic. They were designed for 100,000 vehicles per day but now carry 200,000 per day; IDOT also wants longer ramps.

If the roadway shifts, all bridges would need to be rebuilt, as vertical supports would be in the wrong places. This raises the issue of whether the Village would keep all of these bridges.

Transportation issues include corridor design, transit and traffic. Can IDOT stay within the "ditch"? No response has come from IDOT in many years. Garfield and Harrison are substandard width in some areas. Bridges need wider sidewalks. Four parks border the expressway, Forest Park has others; Oak Park Parks have recently been upgraded. Noise barriers are an issue.

HOV/HOT (high occupancy toll) lanes will increase capacity to eight lanes, but 12 – 14 lanes are needed for the amount of traffic. With more lanes, "if you build it they will come, creating induced demand. At the east end of the corridor, the interchange is the third most congested in the nation; pumping additional traffic to this area won't work.

Trucks and busses represent 1.5 cars, based on the traffic capacity manual. Introducing these into the mix slows traffic.

Blue Line has 3 parts: O'Hare branch, Dearborn subway and Forest Park branch. Ideally O'Hare and Forest Park branch transit use should be equal; several reasons explain lower traffic on the Forest Park branch: O'Hare provides economic engine for jobs, Green Line and Pink Line also serve the west side, employment rate on NW side is higher than west side, four more stations are on the O'Hare branch. Ridership for 2009 shows Red Line has more than the Blue Line; other lines have fewer riders.

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Population density (people/square mile) is also a factor. PACE Development Guidelines are 4,000 people per square mile for high density areas, which all communities in the corridor except Hillside meets, and Hillside is close to it. For these high density communities, PACE policy is to provide a bus stop for each 1/8th mile.

Considering economic impacts, job density is highest in downtown Chicago by a factor of 10; second highest is around O'Hare. Transit is good at serving the home-work trip. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) to replace the Blue Line is opposed by Senator Harmon and many local residents, who realize that this would negatively impact Oak Park. South Oak Park property values would decline, placing more tax burden on the rest of Oak Park. Commuting by auto (average of \$7,500 per year) is much more expensive than by transit.

Quality of life impacts local schools. All middle and high school students south of 290 must cross the expressway to get to school.

Environmental justice makes sure that Federal projects don't discriminate against minority and low-income communities.

Environmental impacts include noise barriers (large concrete walls adjacent to residences). At "breaks" where roads come through, noise impact remains. In Oak Park, , wood fence barriers on Harrison put up in the 1990s reduce noise to some degree, but not to IDOT or Federal standards.

Financial impacts include buses (12 year replacement cycle, 60 seats) versus trains (35 year replacement, 340 passengers). A roadway solution alone cannot solve the problems; multimodal has the potential to do so.

The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is one of three kinds of environmental analyses IDOT can conduct; it is the most comprehensive with the most protection. The least significant analysis is a finding of "no significant impact." The next level is an environmental assessment and the most detailed is the EIS.

Five legal protections are available with the EIS.

1. The Purpose and Need (P&N) document, to be approved by IDOT and FHWA, explains the need and purpose. By setting the ground rules, the final result can be determined.
2. All prudent and feasible alternatives must be considered. If it can be shown that such an alternative has not been considered, this can force revision of the EIS. Mr. Kuner summarized the options currently under consideration by IDOT. He noted that a new term, "high capacity transit" had been introduced at the last meeting to refer to both bus rapid transit (BRT) and heavy rail and that this is not a term previously used in the field. IDOT did admit to some possible capacity issues with BRT, however. Rob Cole, Assistant Village Manager, noted that the Village is asking that these two categories be split.

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Mr. Kuner noted that good solutions are multi-modal, and can account for CTA, commuter rail and PACE, pedestrian and bicycle travel. They take into account the relationship of transportation and land use and change over time. They should reduce negative impacts of transportation, including environmental and accident impacts. More transit means fewer accidents. Good solutions should be comprehensive, use good design and engineering, economic incentives and management. IDOT focuses on HOV and toll options to reduce congestion when they could instead be looking at incentives to increase ridership on the Blue Line, such as improved bus service, bike racks and better station amenities.

3. Courts require a rigorous analysis of impact, and there are a number of impacts that do affect this corridor. Choices are to avoid, minimize or mitigate impacts, in that order. This language has been inserted by IDOT at the request of the CAT, then dropped. Air quality is an issue. Mr. Kuner reviewed several relevant impacts for the corridor, and recommended better communication on construction impacts. All impacts must be covered, but equal detail is not needed for each.
4. Evaluation of alternatives has included a number of very similar alternatives and has provided some implausible results, such as reduced ridership with extension of the Blue Line. IDOT has excluded economic development and environmental and social criteria, claiming this is not required now, but will be considered later. NEPA requires a balanced approach with consideration of these criteria. IDOT does not want to deal with these issues at this time. President Pope noted that if these issues are not included, they will not be part of the yardstick for evaluation, and won't have same consideration.
5. Meaningful citizen participation is the final protection. IDOT failed to provide any information in advance for the October 2009 brainstorming session. They asked for goals and objectives without a definition, and provided materials over a holiday with less than a week to review it. No reports are available in advance for any alternatives presented and when issues are raised, they take a long time to respond. Mr. Kuner provided a list of all inquiries with a record of how many days to respond (49 to 128 days) although their policy is to respond in one week.

These are the four steps that occur at the end for resolution of an EIS: A draft EIS of 200 or more pages, a public comment period, final EIS statement responding to public comment, and record of decision (ROD). After this process (the findings of fact) there is a short time period to file a lawsuit.

Mr. Kuner discussed three levels of resolution are available: political, technical and legal and noted that all should be used. Mr. Kuner advised that if we don't operate on all three fronts, we will be in trouble. Mr. Barwin asked about a grace period. Mr. Kuner explained that a clock begins running when the ROD is issued and the grace period is the time when any suit must be filed. Issues are complex; impacts are substantial for the future of Oak Park.

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The EIS provides some legal protection. We need to work with other communities impacted by this project. He proposed that the Blue Line could be extended on an incremental basis, with the first additional stop at First Avenue.

Trustee Hedges asked about an ideal outcome or plan. Mr. Kuner suggested incremental extension of the Blue Line ideally to Oak Brook in the corridor. Metra is already upgrading the UP West Line and should complete that project. Improve amenities at stations, wider bridges and environmental mitigation; in other words, a multi-modal approach. With a highway-focused plan approaching \$1 billion, there would be a suboptimal result.

Trustee Hedges asked about right lane exits. Mr. Kuner discussed the impact of moving the CTA ramps to the right. Moving the CTA stations and tracks would trigger mandated improvements to comply with ADA and fire code requirements. President Pope noted that IDOT had taken care on the Dan Ryan to avoid this and the required improvements involved.

Trustee Hedges asked if eight lanes are possible in the ditch. Mr. Kuner said eight lanes within the ditch are possible if IDOT can acquire the CSX right-of-way, but land acquisition might be required at Austin and Harlem for right-hand ramps. President Pope noted that tradeoffs in requirements would reflect competing interests, such as inclusion of an express line from Oak Brook, but sufficient width would be required. Mr. Kuner noted that skip-stop service might also be an option to increase ridership through faster service, but the options being proposed by IDOT have minimal impact on time and congestion. Mr. Cole noted that all alternatives they propose include eight lanes for traffic.

Trustee Hedges asked what IDOT's ideal proposal would be. Mr. Cole speculated that this would probably include express bus service, HOT, carpools and trucks sharing the road.

Trustee Lueck noted that a striped HOV could easily be changed to general purpose use, if no barrier is included. Mr. Cole noted that without a barrier, throughput of the HOV lane is reduced, especially with congestion in the slow lanes.

President Pope noted that east of Austin, the HOV lane creates a restriction in use and reduces a lane of general purpose traffic. Mr. Cole noted that taking away an existing lane of traffic is not recognized as an adverse impact. Mr. Kuner provided some details about the estimated throughput in each of these situations, with delays creating an "empty lane syndrome" if the HOV lanes have too little traffic, and no real travel time saving if the HOV lanes have too much traffic. Trustee Lueck noted that the gain in time was less than two minutes, and the time to pick up extra passengers took more time than that. President Pope provided examples of these findings.

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Trustee Lueck noted that proposed lanes do not end at a logical transit point. Mr. Kuner and Mr. Cole discussed the impact of dumping additional traffic at the Circle Interchange or the Loop area without a logical way to proceed. Mr. Kuner noted that the termini seem to be motivated more by “old pavement” than any logical transportation consideration.

President Pope added that the real problem has more to do with limitations of effective modeling input, given the number of traffic movements at the logical termini of the model; but the real traffic generators are east and west of the area under consideration. Mr. Cole noted that given regional and national priority placed on making effective use of existing infrastructure, it would be a good idea to extend the Blue Line west in order to create a more logical west terminus that could then attract more riders to use the existing excess capacity. President Pope noted that extending the Blue Line to Oak Brook would address concerns about the current imbalance in Blue Line ridership.

Trustee Lueck asked if there was any analysis regarding the impact on job creation with a Blue Line extension versus road construction. Mr. Cole explained that studies show that transit construction offers more jobs which are longer-lasting and higher quality than road construction. Mr. Kuner added that only eleven metro areas in the United States include heavy rail transit (Chicago and Cleveland in the Midwest) and that most members of Congress represent areas where roads are the only means of transportation. He also noted that some communities, such as Berwyn, are impacted by these plans but are excluded from the Corridor Advisory Committee although many residents use the Blue Line.

Trustee Lueck noted the three-pronged response proposed by Mr. Kuner and suggested that this is the time to take action. Mr. Kuner suggested that an attorney could be an advocate to make our case, and suggested that a Village-based committee should be involved. Trustee Lueck urged that this be a top priority issue for the Village Board and the Village as a whole.

Mr. Kuner explained the current strategy of documentation, education of the public and challenging conclusions of IDOT, but this is not enough. The next step in the process will be the sign-off on the Purpose and Need statement, which has been delayed but will likely be completed around year end.

Village Attorney Simone Boutet noted the need for transit at First Avenue, and Mr. Kuner agreed. He explained the distinction between “captive” riders (without a car) and “choice” riders (who find transit more convenient than their car).

Trustee Tucker noted that many people initially support another lane, but not HOV. HOV is not familiar to local residents. Mr. Kuner noted that IDOT proposes to use data from other regions on HOV lanes, but that not all work. The real question is whether this would work in this corridor. Better alternatives are available, and toll lanes will work better to reduce congestion if there’s an effective transit option.

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President Pope noted that BRT is really intended to bring people from upper income areas in far west suburbs quickly to the Loop. The plan is based on current demand and ignores the needs of residents in the corridor, many of whom do not own cars.

This encourages urban sprawl rather than encouraging better land use and job development through transit access to areas directly east and west of Oak Park. HOV or HOT doesn't help those without a vehicle. Mr. Cole noted that express bus service doesn't work well in the corridor and that PACE has recently cancelled service on I290 due to low demand. Trustee Tucker noted that he had looked at BRT examples at the last IDOT public meeting held at Proviso Match and Science Academy, which provided a completely different approach than this proposal.

Trustee Brewer asked about whether IDOT is considering any alternative without eight lanes, and if additional land would be needed if the proposed additional lanes are built. Mr. Kuner explained that the only option proposed which does not include additional lanes is the "no build" option, and that IDOT may need additional land at the Harlem and Austin interchanges. This does not include all prudent and feasible alternatives as required by law.

Trustee Brewer asked about alternatives, including "No Build." Mr. Kuner said that the corridor does need to be improved. Trustee Brewer asked about a possible "cafeteria plan" for each scenario. Mr. Kuner explained that most elements work better in combination than alone; if more traffic goes downtown, they will need a place to park cars there, and noted current consideration of a congestion tax in Chicago to discourage more cars. President Pope added that making some choices may preclude other choices.

Trustee Brewer observed that we may need to assume more lanes, and that IDOT won't see Blue Line extension as the only option in the corridor. He suggested that we might propose other plans. Mr. Kuner suggested that we need to work this through and consider Plans A and B, along with the various impacts of each option. President Pope added that the eight communities in the corridor must agree to any proposal, including no changes and will have a say in this.

Trustee Brewer asked what the other seven communities are thinking, and what their vision is. President Pope noted that we have discussed options with them, and the West Central Municipal Conference will have a voice, as well as the DuPage Mayors and Managers, for land use through the extended corridor.

Trustee Lueck suggested that there should be a coordinated effort with the other communities. Once the Purpose and Need statement is finalized, there's not an opportunity to change it. President Pope explained that challenges must be made during the process to address deficiencies, and this has been done. How can we assure that models include measures and elements and support of those making decisions.

President Pope noted that the our preferred plan include consideration of land use, that throughout the corridor congestion mitigation be accomplished through

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extension of the Blue Line, that transit investment advance economic development and land use opportunities through the corridor, and that ramps do not turn adjacent side roads into racetracks, reducing safety and housing values. He mentioned a potential option with a right-hand intersection with a central exit point instead of side roads, and suggested that other exits consider this alternative.

Mr. Barwin suggested resolutions on proposals Oak Park favors and regarding other communities. Mr. Kuner noted that he and Mr. Cole will be making submissions. President Pope urged that the process be collaborative with other communities.

Trustee Hedges noted that residents who spoke to him asked about capping the Ike, but had no information about the issues at stake here. Mr. Kuner noted that issues are being addressed; RTA officials were impressed with the knowledge shown by Oak Parkers at a public meeting and noted the importance of education. The CAT has over 600 members; 60-70% are Oak Parkers.

Trustee Salzman noted that CAT has provided important groundwork for any challenge to findings, and suggested that now was the time to provide a challenge on environmental impact issues. He emphasized the importance of education in Oak Park and other communities so that people are aware of the issues.

Mr. Kuner noted that when the Purpose and Need statement has been signed, it will be harder to challenge this, but it is a long process.

B. Regional Modeling, as it relates to alternative evaluation

Mr. Kuner said the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), which combined land use planning that was done by NIPC and transportation planning that was done by CATS. He said there are three parts to this presentation: Pre-model work tasks, CMAP travel models, and air quality conformity analysis.

He explained the pre-model work tasks, CMAP travel models and explained the details of the process. He then reviewed the air quality conformity analysis and noted that the Chicago area is not compliant with ground level ozone and fine particulate matter; these will need to be addressed in the IDOT study to show that these will not be worsened by the solution chosen and should stay below designated levels. Ozone is mostly a summer problem worsened by heat and impacts a wide area (40% of Oak Park's population). Particulates come from tailpipes and automobile breaks and are limited to a half block from the expressway. This area includes libraries, schools and the south fire station. Mr. Kuner noted that it's important to run emissions models due to impact on the health of local residents, especially children and senior citizens.

He explained the calibration and validation of models through collection of samples. However, early models have not worked well when compared with actual results. Models can provide valuable insights, track enormous amounts of data, complete tedious tasks, and show what can happen prior to building.

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President Pope noted that such models don't take a long term view and anticipate changes in human behavior, such as induced demand of additional lanes increasing congestion again. A policy subsidizing roads promotes further out-migration and will fill roadways, promoting sprawl. Mr. Kuner noted that increases in gas prices and congestion mitigation in the city can have the opposite effect.

Trustee Lueck asked about a shared resolution with other communities. President Pope noted that this would be a longer-term process, and that efforts by other communities are important to this process.

Mr. Kuner provided an example in the current process in which the Prairie Path option for the Blue Line has been removed from current models due to concerns by Hillside and others. President Pope noted that this was politically untenable, which led to the change.

President Pope and Mr. Barwin expressed their thanks to Mr. Kuner for his presentation and his ongoing work on this issue.

ADJOURN

It was moved and seconded to adjourn. A voice vote was taken and the motion was approved. The meeting adjourned at 10:57 P.M. on Monday November 14, 2011.

SUBMITTED AND RECORDED IN THE OFFICE OF:

Teresa Powell, Village Clerk