



Frequently Asked Questions about the Prairie Parkway Study

(last updated November 2003)

What is the Northern Illinois University Outer Belt Corridor Study, and how does it affect the Preliminary Engineering Study?

The NIU Corridor Study is a comprehensive look at providing a possible framework for land use planning along a transportation corridor. The NIU Corridor Study is being conducted independently of the Preliminary Engineering Study, and will not influence the selection or location of a "corridor" solution or other possible alternatives if the Preliminary Engineering Study progresses past Part A. However, IDOT supports the concept of combining transportation planning and land use planning as a tool for "smart growth", and will continue to work cooperatively with local communities to integrate the transportation planning process with local and regional land use planning.

What has been accomplished thus far?

Since January, the study team has met with all of the municipalities in the study area – a total of 32 communities. In addition, we've met with all six counties and a number of organizations and associations, including the American Farmland Trust, the Kane, Kendall, DeKalb, and Will County farm bureaus, the Big Rock Watershed Committee, Citizens Against the Sprawlway, the Conservation Foundation, the Oswego, Yorkville and the DeKalb County Economic Development Commissions. We have also established a Technical Advisory Group, with 14 members and have met with the group to review the 2030 population and employment forecasts developed for the study.

In addition to these meetings, we've conducted traffic counts along key roads and intersections in the study area, gathered data on existing and proposed transportation investments and developments, formulated population and employment forecasts and expanded the Chicago Area Transportation Study's computerized travel demand forecasting model to encompass the entire study area.

What else is there to do in Part A?

- The study team, in an effort to identify issues and perceptions about transportation in the region, conducted four focus groups in late September and early October. The analyses of the sessions are due to be announced in November 2003.
- Based on the 2030 population and employment projections, the travel demand model will be used to develop the forecasts of future traffic conditions.
- An analysis of existing and future traffic conditions and the identification of transportation needs will be performed and summarized in a transportation system performance report that is anticipated to be released in early 2004.

How can I keep informed on the study's progress?

IDOT has a number of contact points for information on the study. The best way to keep updated is to check the Prairie Parkway Study website at www.prairie-parkway.com. In addition to the website, you can write to Illinois Department of Transportation-District 3, Attn: Diane O'Keefe, 700 E. Norris Drive, P.O. Box 697, Ottawa, Illinois 61350-0697.

How much input and influence will the general public have on the study process?



Public input is crucial to this study and there will be many opportunities for public comment. IDOT is conducting public surveys, focus groups, and is holding public information meetings during the study to hear what the public has to say about transportation in the region.

IDOT needs to gather the thoughts and opinions of the citizens to understand the needs of the region. Although we may not be able to satisfy everyone, our goal is to look at the needs of the whole region to assess transportation mobility for the future.

How will you measure the impacts on existing roadways?

An analysis of both current and future 2030 traffic will be performed as part of the needs analysis. This will include the development of various measures that could include level of service, volume-to-capacity ratios, travel times, travel speeds, vehicle miles of travel (VMT), vehicle hours of travel (VHT), person miles of travel (PMT), person hours of travel (PHT), travel desire lines, accessibility to jobs, accessibility to major activity centers, and crash rates.

Why was the initial Corridor Protection Study conducted?

The initial corridor protection study gave a broad overview of the region's transportation issues and established a corridor in the event one should ever be needed in this rapidly developing region.

The preliminary engineering study now underway is a more detailed analysis designed to evaluate the potential need for transportation improvements in Kane, Kendall, Grundy, DeKalb, Will and LaSalle counties. If a need is established, the protected corridor may be studied, but so will many other transportation options.

Why was a protected corridor recorded before a formal needs study was performed?

Corridor protection is a common planning tool used in Northeastern Illinois and throughout the country. Much like many communities have some form of a future transportation corridor included in their Community Master Plan; the corridor protection does the same for a regional plan. Such a designation doesn't necessarily indicate a current need for an improvement, but the corridor protection process is used to preserve a possible location for a transportation investment when and if that investment is needed. The current preliminary engineering study will evaluate the ability for the region's transportation systems to handle the future travel demands and identify if improvements may be needed. The preliminary engineering study is not bound by the results of the previous corridor protection study.

Should local developers and officials assume that the corridor will "stay put" in its present location if a need for a new facility is found?

If the study determines that a new regional transportation option is needed, the exact position of a corridor would be re-evaluated to make sure it is in an acceptable location. A recommended location would be decided based on a number of factors, including impact on existing homes and businesses, environmental impact and public input.

Could Route 47 be upgraded to address transportation needs?

Because of its heavy use, some upgrades to Route 47 are already underway. If a need is determined, other upgrades may be required, or another solution may be more effective. The Phase I study will evaluate these options if a need is identified.

Will building a new road encourage sprawl?



Population growth and new development already exists in the region. The U.S. Census recently estimated that Kendall County's population has grown 12% between 2000 and 2002, leading all counties in Illinois in rate of growth in that period. In September 2003, the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission endorsed forecasts estimated Kane County will add 288,000 residents and Will County will add 605,000 residents in the period between 2000 to 2030.

IDOT is responsible for ensuring that the infrastructure is in place to respond to projected population and development growth. It's important to remember that IDOT does not control land use; local planners do. Local planners are closest to people, needs and issues in each community. Our regional plans are based on the future land uses developed by these local planners.

There have been many studies on the effect of transportation improvements on population growth and development. Access to transportation is one of many factors that can influence growth. Also, the type of transportation facility can be a factor. The I-88 tollway through western Kane and eastern DeKalb counties has very limited access points, and significant development has not occurred between the access points. Other facilities, such as the recently widened U.S. 34 through Oswego, have full access to adjoining properties, which makes the highway attractive to commercial developers as growth occurs.

However, in some cases, population growth and development have occurred without additional transportation options and now these regions are experiencing traffic problems. For example, Route 53 was not extended in Lake County but development continued and traffic congestion is now a problem. The same can be said about the region around the proposed Fox Valley Freeway that was canceled in 1992.

If the Prairie Parkway study proceeds past Part A to study transportation options, these options will be studied to determine the community impacts of any forecasted redistribution of population.

How will potential new roads affect safety?

Unmanaged growth and increasing traffic congestion can create safety issues in a community. For example, the town of Lockport in Will County recently released its accident statistics for November 2002, which showed an 80 percent increase in accidents compared to the same period in 2001. Officials are attributing this dramatic increase in accidents to increased development and road use by a growing population in the area.

As we evaluate the need for a new transportation corridor in this area, one of IDOT's primary concerns is providing safe, accessible transportation.

If the study takes a long time to complete, will it be too late?

Fortunately, the corridor protection was established to avoid this very problem. IDOT believes it is important to conduct a thorough needs evaluation before any long-term solutions are determined. In addition, it is critical to allow the time for public involvement and discussions about possible problems and solutions.

How will the study address impacts to the environment from proposed transportation improvements?

All transportation improvements must be thoroughly studied for their environmental impact and this



analysis will strictly follow the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) process. It is a priority for IDOT that transportation improvements have as little adverse impact on the environment as possible.

How will you consider the proposed Peotone airport in your studies?

The proposed South Suburban (Peotone) Airport will be included in the region's population and employment forecasts developed by the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC). As part of the development of the Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS) 2030 Regional Transportation Plan, NIPC is developing 2030 regional population and employment forecasts that include expansion of existing airport capacity and a new South Suburban Airport.

Will other forms of transportation be considered as a solution?

Yes. If a need exists, the study will examine all types of transportation solutions, including railways, arterial streets, expressways, and other transportation alternatives that could address growing needs within the region.

Where do you get your information for the "needs" portion of the study?

The information for the transportation needs analysis will come from a wide variety of sources. These information sources will include existing traffic and accident data, public transportation and non-motorized data, census data, Illinois Department of Employment Security information, local land use and zoning information, local and regional plans and programs, as well as forecasts of future population and employment from the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC) and national forecasts, such as Woods & Poole, NPA, and WEFA. Future travel demand will be estimated using the Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS) travel demand model. This travel demand model is a state-of-the-practice computerized process that uses relationships between trip making and land use to predict future travel demand. The model is a proven and accepted tool and communities throughout the region utilize these results. The travel demand forecasts will identify trip patterns, traffic levels and transit usage.

How do you know what is needed - and who needs it?

There will be a number of factors involved in determining need. These factors could include, but are not limited to:

- Mobility (congestion, service levels, travel times, travel speeds, reliability, etc.)
- Accessibility (access to jobs, activity centers, inter-modal facilities, etc.)
- System Connectivity (regional facilities, through trips, etc.)
- Safety (crashes, grade crossings, consistency with current highway design standards, etc.)
- Support for Economic Development (mobility and accessibility for passenger and commercial vehicles, etc.)

How soon do you expect to complete the "needs" portion of the study? What are the next steps in the process?

The Transportation System Performance Report that will analyze the current and future performance of the transportation system is expected in the fall of 2003. A draft needs statement is expected in the spring of 2004.

After the needs analysis is completed, a decision will be made whether to continue the study or suspend



it. If a need is demonstrated, further study could occur, including identifying alternatives, selecting a recommended alternative and performing further engineering and environmental analysis. In addition, public involvement will be key component throughout the entire study. The entire study process may take up to five years to complete.

If transportation options are studied, how will you assess the impacts on local services and the accelerated growth stimulated by these options?

If and when the testing of alternatives is performed after the needs analysis, and a new transportation corridor option is analyzed, it is anticipated that a new 2030 regional forecast of population and employment will be developed that will include the new corridor. This new 2030 regional forecast of population and employment will maintain a regional control total for population and employment for the 14 county study travel model study area, but will include a redistribution of population and employment that reflect the changes in mobility and accessibility provided by the new transportation corridor. All alternatives evaluated in the environmental impact statement process will include an analysis of potential impacts on local services. The nature of these local services would be determined by the local jurisdictions. For example, several of the municipalities that are experiencing rapid growth are planning for new schools. In this case, we would work with the municipality and school district to identify the locations of potential new schools (as well as the existing schools) and would then identify and potential impacts. If possible, impacts will be avoided, and if not practical to avoid impacts, then strategies to mitigate the impacts will be developed.

Will local jurisdiction needs and requests be considered in the routing and design - i.e. the location of interchanges near municipalities?

Yes, county and local land use plans are considered in making decisions on major transportation investments. IDOT wants an open dialogue with local officials to dovetail the interests of the counties and municipalities with the interests of the entire region. We know that local officials realize the importance of upgrading transportation options to help meet the needs of their rapidly growing populations. For much of the generalized study area the county and local land use plans are reflected in the estimates of population and employment have been forecasted by the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC). Outside of the NIPC area, local jurisdiction information will also be used to help develop the forecasts. If and when the evaluation of alternatives is performed after the needs analysis, coordination and review by local jurisdictions will be performed.

Where are people currently traveling to and from in the area and what methods do you use to find that out?

To estimate both current and future travel, the Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS) travel demand forecasting model will be used. The CATS model is a computerized that uses statistical relationships between trip making and land use to forecast travel. These statistical relationships were developed from household travel surveys, census data, transit travel surveys, commercial vehicle travel surveys, external travel surveys, and special generator (airport, regional shopping centers, etc.) travel surveys. After the CATS model was estimated based on this data, a model validation was performed to ensure replication of existing travel patterns. This included comparisons of modeled volumes to actual traffic counts. For the Prairie Parkway Study, a further validation will be performed for the general study area that will include a comparison of modeled volumes to new traffic counts and a comparison to the origins and destination from a video license plate survey on IL-47 that will be conducted this spring.

The CATS model will then be used to develop traffic forecasts based on 2030 population and employment estimates. The CATS model is a proven forecasting tool that had been accepted by the



federal government for use in developing the northeastern Illinois region's long range transportation plan, for demonstrating the region's air quality conformity, and for use in major transportation projects.

If the Prairie Parkway is built, how do you plan on preserving our natural resources along the route?

IDOT is committed to helping protect and preserve our state's most threatened natural areas while also assuring that people mobility, safety, access and economic benefit through an effective transportation system. We don't believe one must be sacrificed for the other. In fact, transportation projects provide a major source of funding for enhancements of our natural resources.

This study will look at what transportation needs will emerge in this region in the next 30 years. Any further analysis will look at a variety of factors, including environmental impacts. The state is always working to minimize impact on the environment, while also meeting the needs of the community.

How does the removal of farmland from cultivation, due to the highway and resulting development accounted for in the study?

All transportation improvements must be thoroughly studied for their environmental impact, including impacts to agricultural land, and this analysis will strictly follow the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) process. We care about agricultural land in Illinois. It is a priority for IDOT that transportation improvements have as little adverse impact on the environment as possible. It is far too early to comment on what potential impacts to farmland would occur, since the needs study is just beginning, and no alternatives have been identified to address the needs.

The Prairie Parkway has been identified as one of the state's top three transportation priorities, but the current study is still analyzing existing and future transportation needs in the corridor. How is this possible?

The state (IDOT) has identified several transportation projects for federal funding in the reauthorization of TEA-21, the federal highway and transit-funding bill. Three of the top priorities are a new bridge over the Mississippi River in the St. Louis area, Wacker Drive in Chicago and the Prairie Parkway. All three of these projects will require significant new federal funding.

It is unclear when the federal legislation will be enacted. Because the lead time for preliminary engineering and other pre-construction activities is so long, we are advancing these projects, including the Prairie Parkway, during this reauthorization cycle instead of waiting for the next cycle which is six years away. It should be noted that even if these projects are included in the new bill, no federal construction funds could be spent until the needs are assessed and the environmental studies completed.

If sufficient needs are found in Part A of the current study, IDOT will examine a range of alternatives and, with consideration of public input, select a preferred alternative to address the transportation needs in the study area. That alternative has not yet been selected. If the study continues past Part A, the study team will conduct preliminary engineering and environmental studies independent of these initial steps for obtaining future federal funding. IDOT and the Federal Highway Administration have the responsibility for completing the technical requirements in the prescribed manner under the National Environmental Policy Act.