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Prairie Parkway Study
Planning for the Region's Future

News from the Prairie Parkway Study • Issue 1 • Spring 2003

Start-up Activities Produce a Wave of Public Involvement

More than 230 community members gathered at Sugar Grove and Minooka on January 22-23, 2003 to learn about the Prairie Parkway Preliminary Engineering Study. The meetings were held in an open house format, which gave the public the opportunity to watch a presentation, view exhibits, leave comments and questions, and discuss the study with IDOT representatives.

Open house attendees learned that the preliminary engineering study is much different than the previous corridor protection study. The current study begins with a comprehensive needs assessment of whether the existing transportation system will be able to handle the area's future travel demands. This study will begin with a year of data collecting, forecasting, and evaluating, known as "Part A".

The goal of Part A is to develop forecasts for population, employment, and travel demand, as well as increase public involvement. The result of this work will be published as a report on the performance of the region's transportation system. With this information, IDOT will be able to identify what transportation improvements may be needed in the study area, both locally and regionally.

Right and Below: **Community members in Minooka gather to learn about the study.**

This publication provides a format to keep you informed about the study process.

In This Issue:

Focus Groups to Inform the Study Team

The project study team is currently developing the outline for focus group discussions regarding the Prairie Parkway Study. Participants of these focus groups will represent a diverse cross-section of viewpoints among groups of people sharing common characteristics.

For example, one focus group may be area business representatives, while another may be landowners. Regardless of the type of group, participants will be diverse in age, gender, the location of their home and work, the length of their commute, and the amount of time they have lived in the region.

The primary objective of these focus groups is to identify issues and perceptions about transportation in the region. The focus groups will be confidential and will gather unbiased opinions about transportation conditions in the region. The information gathered from these focus groups may be used in the future to validate or further explore opinions. Future research methods could include random telephone surveys, questionnaires, workshops, or polls.

Study Team Has Already Met with Majority of the Communities in the Study Area

On January 16, 2003, IDOT held a public officials briefing to inform the county and municipal representatives that the Prairie Parkway Preliminary Engineering Study was about to begin. As a part of the Part A public involvement process, meetings with county and municipal elected officials are 95% complete.

(**Study Team**, *continues on page 2)*

A Message from Illinois Department of Transportation

The Preliminary Engineering Study kicked off this year with our public involvement program. We've held public meetings, met with community leaders, and launched a website to communicate the goals and process of the study. These initial activities have given us the opportunity to hear the community's plans and their opinions.

We are very pleased with the public's response. Many of the people we have met with now understand that this study is different than the prior corridor protection work. Communities seem pleased that we are taking an objective look at the future transportation needs of the region. They realize that we are not establishing new land uses, but instead taking the land uses that they have planned and combining them together in the study area. This will enable us to determine where the future congestion may be, and if some type of improvement is needed.

We encourage and look forward to the public's continued involvement, because *communities working together will give us direction for the planning of the regions' future.*

Sincerely,

Diane O'Keefe

Diane O'Keefe
District Engineer

Communities Curious About the Next Steps

Since the January open houses, communities have expressed interest in the next steps of Part A. The focus of Part A is to define existing and future transportation needs in the study area. To get to the needs statement, a series of tasks have been defined.

These tasks include:

- Meeting with the community leaders to determine community goals, growth trends, and future plans for development
- Verifying the existing and future transportation network
- Conducting traffic counts to determine travel patterns
- Collecting available traffic and accident data
- Refining the travel demand model for the study area
- Collecting geographic data, including legislative districts and community boundaries, the transportation network, and environmental issues
- Forecasting the 2030 travel demands and future population and employment plans, trends, and goals
- Developing a transportation system performance report

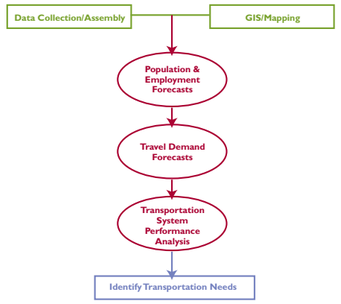

Diagram of the Part A process shows the steps that are used to determine if there is a need in the region.

Taking a Look Ahead

The next steps for the study include continuing to meet with community representatives, incorporating community plans into the population and employment forecasts, developing the forecasts, completing traffic counts of selected roads, and beginning the travel demand analysis. These steps are targeted for completion by Fall 2003.

County and Municipality Data Collection Progresses-Over 75% Complete

Counties and municipalities have been contacted to provide a variety of information, including population, employment and accident data, as well as current and projected 2030 data regarding zoning ordinances, comprehensive land use plans, transportation improvement plans, and other significant development proposals. The transportation plans and capital improvement programs received from these communities are necessary to learn what projects are being planned for the future. This information, along with various types of field observations, will be used to develop forecasts that will help predict the 2030 conditions within the study area. The traffic forecasts for 2030 will be input into a future regional transportation network that is based on input received from the agencies. The future transportation network includes the existing network and other community-planned improvements.

The collection activities continue, and as of the end of May approximately 75% of the information has been received.

Above and Right: Survey crew videotape license plates as part of a study that determines travel patterns.

Traffic Counts and License Plate Surveys Began in Late April

As the region continues to grow, travel patterns will change. Data on existing travel patterns is an important part of determining future transportation facility needs. The data collection of current travel patterns will take place along multiple roads and highways within the study area and will last through the end of May. Some of the types of traffic data that will be collected and used to forecast travel patterns and usage are:

24-hour Counts -Tube counters will be placed at fixed distances to count the number of cars and trucks on the road.

Intersection Counts - Tracking the directional flow of traffic is done with a manual process that counts the number of vehicles moving left, right, or through an intersection every 15 to 30 minutes.

Travel Time Runs - These runs will be conducted to estimate how long it takes to travel between specific points at various times of the day. This process involves a two person team of driver and recorder.

Surveys - The information is gathered by video taping license plate numbers followed by mailing a survey to the vehicle owners. The anonymously returned surveys give IDOT information on specific trips, such as the starting point, the destination, the purpose of the trip, and the number of passengers in the vehicle.

Need is formally evaluated in this Preliminary Engineering Study

(**Study Team**, *continued from page 1)*

These meetings are an important part of the process, as they allow counties and municipal representatives to speak with IDOT officials about the study, ask questions about the forecasting approach, and discuss the land use and improvement plans they have developed for the future. The study team has gained much insight into the problems the communities are facing in addressing growth in the region.

As an example of the challenges, many communities are faced with heavy truck traffic, especially near I-80 and I-88. Others are having trouble meeting their infrastructure needs with a tax base that is too small to fund the facilities their citizens need. Most representatives mention the need for some type of transportation improvement, but look forward to seeing the results of IDOT's regional needs assessment.

As a response to the growth changes, nearly all counties and municipalities are updating their comprehensive plans and are working with adjacent communities to establish community boundaries. These discussions therefore result in current information on existing and intended land uses for the area, which all will affect future transportation demand.

As of May, the following Counties and municipalities had met with IDOT representatives:

Counties	Municipalities	
DeKalb	Aurora	Montgomery
Grundy	Batavia	Morris
Kane	Channahon	Naperville
Kendall	Cortland	Newark
LaSalle	DeKalb	Oswego
Will	Elburn	Ottawa
	Geneva	Plainfield
	Genoa	Plano
	Hinckley	Sandwich
	Joliet	Seneca
	Leland	Shorewood
	Lisbon	Somonauk
	Marseilles	Sugar Grove
	Millington	Sycamore
	Minooka	Yorkville

Community Learns About the Study on New Website

The Preliminary Engineering Study for Prairie Parkway began early this year, with the public involvement program being at the forefront of the project. The website is an important segment of the public involvement strategy. The website is designed to communicate and share information about the study as it becomes available. More importantly, it offers the public an opportunity to comment on the project throughout the study process through a comment page on the website.

The public has the opportunity to learn facts about the study by viewing the website. The website will be maintained throughout the project and will include project information, frequently asked questions with answers, meeting information, project publications and reports, mailing list sign up, and comment forms. This is another avenue that counties, municipalities, special interest groups, and communities can use to keep involved.

Get involved and find out more information, sign up for mailing lists and write your comments to us at **www.prairie-parkway.com**

Frequently Asked Questions About the Prairie Parkway Study

Will safety be addressed in this study?

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.

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.)*

If needs are identified, additional engineering and environmental studies may be performed on a wide range of possible alternatives including upgrading existing facilities, transit options, new facilities, and other solutions.

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 communities have some form of a future transportation corridor in their Community Master Plan; the corridor protection process does the same for the regional plan. Such a designation doesn't necessarily indicate a current need for an improvement, but preserves a possible location for a transportation investment when, and if, it is needed. The current preliminary engineering study will evaluate the ability for the region's transportation system to handle the future travel demands and identify if improvements may be needed. The preliminary study is not bound by the results of the previous corridor protection study.

For additional frequently asked questions, visit our website at www.prairie-parkway.com

Get Involved:

Check out our website for project updates, to sign-up for mailing list, and to send comments to us! Go to www.prairie-parkway.com or write to us at Illinois Department of Transportation Division of Highways-District 3, 700 E. Norris Drive, Ottawa, IL 61350-0697. Telephone: 815-434-6131.

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