

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT COMMENTS  
Comments Published by the Chicago Area Transportation Study  
May 19, 2003

The Center for Neighborhood Technology conducted a limited review of the comments from Volume I of the CATS document “Public Comments on the Draft RTP Recommendations.” The review is not exhaustive and we challenge CATS to do a more comprehensive analysis. We were compelled to conduct a preliminary analysis out of our concern that the RTP Committee would begin to formalize project selection on June 24<sup>th</sup> without such an analysis. The inability or unwillingness of CATS, which has over \$1.4 million for public involvement this year, to analyze their own data raises questions about the seriousness of CATS’ commitment to conduct meaningful public involvement.

Volume I appears formidable – it is three inches thick and the cover page reports that over 500 people responded. Several factors make it appear more intimidating than it really is. A significant proportion of the bulk consists of letters in opposition to the proposed south suburban airport. We do not dismiss the importance of that issue to the authors of those letters; the 136 people who took the time to comment in opposition to the airport represent a significant point of view that deserves to be heard (there are a considerable number of additional comments in opposition to the airport in Volume II). Since the comments were on land use rather than surface transportation, we did not enter them into the database. Other factors making the book appear more formidable than it really is are the inclusion of duplicates, fax cover sheets, 800 line records that contained no comment and comments from 2002.

CNT tabulated the results of 280 unduplicated comments on surface transportation in Volume I. The review below indicates major themes from those comments. Regrettably, because of time constraints, we were not able to tabulate the support or opposition for every project mentioned. We call on CATS to do that. We looked for major themes and tabulated responses on the five major projects that were most frequently mentioned in the comment. Those projects are: the extensions of Route 53 and I-355, the Prairie Parkway, the widening of I-290 and proposals for an east-west transit alternative to I-290 widening.

We also recorded the source of the comment (hotline, meeting, etc.), the community from which the respondent came (when available), and whether the comment was from an official entity or an organization. Comments were coded for expressing support or opposition to road, transit, pedestrian or bicycle projects if a specific or general remark on that mode was mentioned. When a respondent mentioned one of the five controversial projects, that “vote” was tabulated in a separate field.

Although the booklet and meetings only provided information on major capital projects, several other themes were prominent enough to merit tabulation. Those included transit coordination, the lack of project selection criteria, the need for grade separations (rail and pedestrian/bicycle), an emphasis on accommodating “human scale” travel and Pace signal prioritization.

The good news is that there is absolutely no opposition reported to pedestrian or bicycle projects. Thirty-seven people (13%) requested more of one or both of those options in spite of the inference that only major highway and transit projects were under discussion. There was overwhelming support for Pace signal priority and no opposition to it. Eighty-eight people from

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT COMMENTS  
 Comments Published by the Chicago Area Transportation Study  
 May 19, 2003

all parts of the region wrote, called, emailed or mentioned it in meeting comment (34 comments were in the tabulated data; an additional 54 were counted. See below for a full description of the tabulation and counting of those comments). At 26% of the total comment, this represents the most frequently requested specific investment in the region. It was apparent that the requests were not totally spontaneous, but the strength of the response and the demand all over the region requires a response from CATS.

Other themes that received comment include:

Transit coordination	17
Project selection criteria	9
Grade separation (rail, ped/bike)	8
Human scale or Context Sensitive Design	7

There was overwhelming support for transit investment (transit investment includes mentions of specific projects, as well as general expressions of support for either rail or bus). Of the 280 comments tabulated from Volume I, 166 were in support of either general or specific transit improvements. In addition, there were 54 comments in support of Pace signal prioritization that, in the interest of time, were hand counted rather than tabulated. The overall support for transit is shown below:

	Number of comments	Favoring transit	Percent favoring transit
Tabulated	280	166	59%
Pace comments counted	54	54	100%
Total	334	220	66%

There were six comments opposed to specific transit projects and no responses opposed to transit in general. Comment on the Mid-City Transitway was not calculated because it was very modest, but it was apparent from the data available that there is a great deal of confusion about what this project is – whether it is a transit project, a limited access truck route or a “Crosstown Expressway.”

A desire for roadway investment was tabulated for each response that expressed support for a specific project or a generalized support for road improvement. The tabulated responses, as well as the total including the counted responses, are shown below:

	Number of comments	Favoring road investment	Percent favoring road investment
Tabulated	280	81	29%
Pace comments counted	54		
Total	334	81	24%

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT COMMENTS  
 Comments Published by the Chicago Area Transportation Study  
 May 19, 2003

The table below shows the range of opinion among the 280 tabulated responses on the five major projects that were most often mentioned.

	Total*	Rt 53 ext	I-355 ext	Prairie Pkw	I-290 exp	E-W transit
Favor	69	32	16	8	3	15
Oppose	50	22	10	26	17	0

In general it is fair to say that road expansions, extensions and new projects are much more controversial than transit projects and in some cases are overwhelmingly rejected by the public. There is little ambiguity about the taxpayer's desire on the Prairie Parkway and the widening of I-290. The Prairie Parkway case is even more conclusive when one looks closely at the eight favorable responses. Three of the responses coded as in favor of the Parkway were specific in saying that right-of-way should be preserved for a future decision on the need for the road, rather than supporting construction of the road. One other subtlety in the coding of responses is that remarks in opposition to the Route 53 extension were coded as in opposition to new road investment. Several of those comments made specific reference to support for local road improvements.

Some other information may be of interest as the RTP begins its deliberations. Official comment (units of government) represented 27 of the 280 tabulated comments. Sixteen of the comments came from organizations. The number of tabulated comments from individuals is presumed to be 237; in addition it is likely that the 54 counted signal priority comments were from individuals.

The majority of comments (where hometown was indicated) came from the suburbs. Of the 280 tabulated responses, 192 indicated an address or a town. Thirty-two, or 17% of those were from Chicago. It is assumed, but not verified, that the vast majority of the untabulated Pace signal priority comments are also suburban.

The breakdown in the source for the tabulated comments is below:

	Tabulated	Reported (cover sheet)
Fax	24	123
Hotline or 800 number**	29	98
Electronic (email/web page)	123	153
Meetings	69	71
Mailed	35	140
Total	280	585

\* "Total" is less than the sum of the five columns because some people selected more than one project

\*\* There were 33 additional hotline callers who left no message

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT COMMENTS  
Comments Published by the Chicago Area Transportation Study  
May 19, 2003

The discrepancy is partially accounted for by the 54 Pace signal priority comments counted rather than tabulated, the 136 comments on the proposed SSA, the comments from 2002 that were not included in the analysis (10) and an unrecorded number of comments in Volume II. Some of the discrepancy is accounted for by comments that were counted twice.

*One final note:* Time constraints did not allow for database tabulation of Volume II. But the sheer number of signatures on petitions in support of the Red Line extension requires comment. There appear to be close to 1400 signatures supporting this project. If those figures had been tabulated, overall support mass for transit investment would exceed 90%.