



Connecting Communities

**Kane County
March 16, 2002**

Kane County's Rich History

The rich, fertile land of Kane County contributes greatly to local economic opportunities. Even before Illinois became the 21st state in 1818, Native American inhabitants were enjoying abundant harvests. Members of the Fox and Sauk tribes were among the first to settle the area and were eventually forced off the rich soil. Soldiers dispatched from Chicago marched through eastern sections of Kane County on their way to battle with the tribes. Economic opportunities sprang up along the Fox River with the construction of mills and factories. These new job centers drew people from Chicago in search of employment and living space, beginning a migration process that continues today. The railroads took the region to new levels of success. Elgin and Geneva became major transportation thoroughfares for the area, linking mines along the Mississippi River to the industries of early Chicago. Agricultural and dairy products from Kane County were shipped via rail to markets in Chicago.

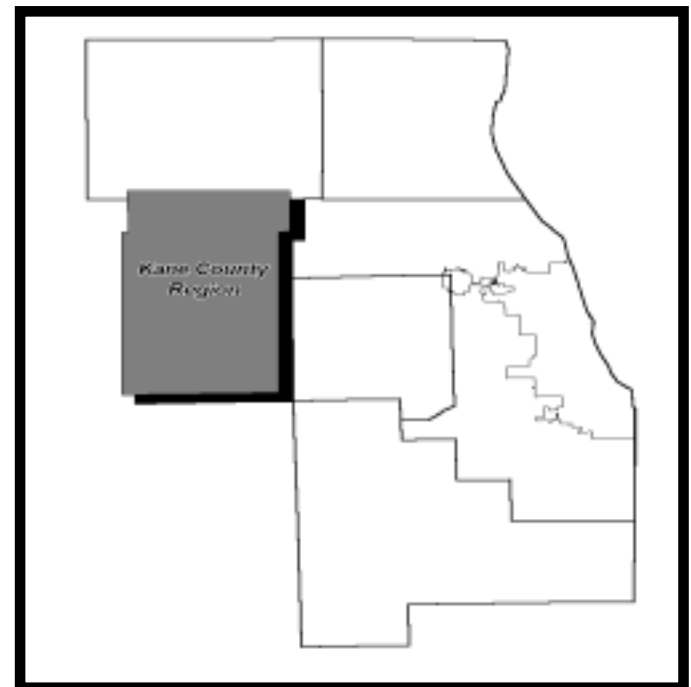
Development Debate Rages

According to the 2000 Census, Kane County is the fifth most populous county in Illinois as well as the fifth fastest growing county. If current trends continue, residents will see a population increase of 182% by the year 2025. Kane County is unique in the six county region for having an extensive growth management plan, the Kane County 2020 Land Resource Management Plan, which was unanimously adopted by the county board. The plan calls for growth to be encouraged in Fox River communities to the east and discouraged in the agricultural areas of the west. Two-thirds of Kane County's population lives near the Fox River in the eastern cities of Aurora, Geneva, Batavia, Elgin, St. Charles and Carpentersville.

Rapid growth fuels a debate over the future of open space and agricultural land in the area. Uncurbed growth threatens the natural assets that make Kane County attractive. The proposal to build a beltway

through western Kane County has intensified the debate. Today the threat to natural assets is clearer than ever.

The white community accounts for 67% of the county's population. There is also a significant Hispanic presence of 23%, mostly clustered in the cities of Elgin and Aurora. African-Americans account for 6% of the population.



Some of the attractions of the area, in addition to the river, include its forest preserves, parks and trail systems. Classic "Main Street" architecture and an emphasis on the arts enhance local communities. Minor league baseball also draws visitors. The Kane County Cougars had record attendance levels in the 2001 season.

Who We Are and How We Get Around

We came together on a Saturday in March, united by our shared interest in enhancing and protecting the best of what Kane County has to offer. Most of us live in the towns on the eastern side of the county, including Aurora, Batavia, Carpentersville, Dundee, Elgin, Geneva and St.

Charles. Our highest priorities are to improve natural assets, including air and water quality, and to make travel safer and more convenient for all. Both those goals would be served by increasing the number of ways we can get around, especially by increasing transit, pedestrian and bicycle options.

Although our goal is to have more travel choices, our current travel is most often limited to auto trips, either alone or with others. Still, about three-quarters of us do errands on foot, averaging four pedestrian trips per week. Our use of transit and bicycles is much more limited. Transit trips were taken by almost 40% of us during the past month, but only an average of five times each. While over 50% of us live near a bus or train station, less than one-quarter of us enjoy service more than twice an hour.

Our backgrounds are more homogeneous than the county. Ninety-two percent of summit attendees are white, two-thirds are female and we are somewhat more mature than the general population. Almost 90% of our group is over 30 years of age. One-fifth of us have children under 14 at home. Our children all use two or more modes of transportation to get to school, with their trips evenly divided between walking, taking a bus and being driven.

Challenges and Solutions

It Takes More Than Good Intentions to Make Transit Work

We clearly understand that the environment we cherish is at risk because of excessive driving. We would like to minimize our own impact on air-borne emissions, on roadway run-off into our waterways, on wildlife habitat and migration, and on the precious farmland and open space that is being covered by pavement. But we can't transport ourselves in an environmentally responsible manner with the existing service and infrastructure of our region.

Kane County needs a variety of transit solutions, especially in the eastern third of the county. We would focus heavily on the Fox River corridor. We all see the need for north-south transit on Randall Road. Radiating off of the Randall Road main line there should be trolley, van or shuttle service in mid-sized communities like Batavia, Geneva and St. Charles. The larger cities, Elgin and Aurora, need more standard sized buses; these should be energy-efficient, clean fuel buses. Better use of existing transit assets, including more service and better integration of services, would encourage more use.

We feel that transit needs for seniors and the disabled are especially critical. We would create a more affordable fare structure for special needs riders and create more specialized services to meet their needs, at least until sufficient main-line service is available to all.

Policy and Education are Linked

Many of our challenges require more thoughtful and informed decision-making, rather than building new projects. We are often left in the dark when public officials make transportation and land use decisions. We believe strongly that the public should be involved in local and regional planning. We believe that funding for public education on policies related to transportation and development would be money well spent. Our informed involvement in planning would help yield policies and projects that provide a more balanced approach to our community's design and infrastructure. For three generations we have been car-dependent. We are just beginning to get the message that good health requires a different lifestyle. Bringing that message to the people who decide our future travel options is a top priority.

Other policy shifts are needed as well. Providing equitable funding between various transportation modes would improve mode choice. Development policies should include agricultural and open space protection zones. Air and water quality are a central concern in our area. We should encourage a local mix of housing, jobs and services near transit stations to improve economic efficiency and create environmental benefits. Incentives should be offered to encourage transit-oriented development. "Corner markets" should be encouraged, especially in housing developments that don't adjoin commercial areas, to reduce the need for driving trips.

Safe Sidewalks are Fundamental

Pedestrians are overlooked in some of our communities, while the design of other communities encourages walking. Grid street patterns, sidewalk networks and historic downtowns create a safe and hospitable pedestrian atmosphere. We are encouraged to do many of our shorter trips on foot when we feel safe on our streets. Some communities (St. Charles is one example) need to improve their pedestrian crossings and build or connect sidewalks where there are gaps. Industrial parks and crossings at major roadways are in particular need of better pedestrian facilities.



Benches, kiosks, lighting and crosswalk definition create a safe and pleasant pedestrian atmosphere near the county Courthouse in Geneva.

Safe and pleasant pedestrian facilities would increase the use of transit. Smoother and more continuous sidewalks would benefit people who cope with visual or motor challenges, increasing their opportunity to use main-line transit, or to walk to do errands.

Bicycle Travel is an Inexpensive and Healthful Alternative.

Some of the existing bicycle facilities have become extremely congested, testifying to the popularity of bicycling in our communities. Kane County would benefit from more bike lanes, bike paths and bike/transit connections. Individuals would benefit from having additional opportunities for safe physical activity. Bicycling is a way to enjoy the the Fox River without adverse environmental impacts.

Bicycles should be safely accommodated on all local streets. Separate bike lanes should be provided on major roadways. Maintenance and connectivity of bike paths are important to maximize the efficiency of biking as an option.

Respect Our County Land Management Plan

We are proud that our county leaders had the foresight to create a comprehensive land use plan, a model for the rest of the region. We believe a balanced transportation system can reduce natural resource consumption and support a responsible land use plan. The plan for an outer belt highway is not a “balanced” approach. It is a continuation of the failed policies of the past, policies that have forced us to drive where we would prefer to walk, bike or take transit. Our county has made a local commitment to cluster development near existing population centers and to preserve

farmland to the west; state and municipal leaders must respect the plan. We gained valuable information about the relative cost of roads versus other infrastructure at this summit. It is clear to us that the outer beltway is an overly expensive, environmentally destructive “solution” based on out-dated planning concepts. The highway cannot be justified on the basis of need. Money would be better spent resolving unmet transportation needs in population centers.

Our Vision

We need better transportation for all groups of people and all ages. To assure a broad range of transportation choices, we need to have more of the public involved in local and regional planning. We envision transportation that is less motorized, based on cleaner energy sources, and which is pedestrian accessible. Walkable neighborhoods are highly desirable to us. It is important to us to invest in the eastern corridor of our region, where most of the population resides, rather than disturbing the agricultural economy in the western corridor. Our transportation infrastructure should be based on where the people in our region now live. Agricultural preservation in our western corridor is a significant concern for all of us. There should be much more emphasis on making transit more viable in all forms, on increasing economic activity near stations and on improving amenities to make transit comfortable and enjoyable.

Recommendations

Invest Heavily in Transit in the Fox River Corridor.

Provide ample transit service on north-south routes in the eastern corridor, with high frequency service between Aurora and Elgin. Convert existing transit buses to cleaner fuel vehicles; purchase alternative fuel vehicles when replacing fleet. Use vanpools and shuttle buses to link train stations and employment centers. Provide comprehensive bus service within Aurora and Elgin. Shuttle buses and trolleys should provide service in Batavia, Geneva, St. Charles, including afterschool and weekend service. Future development should rely on a grid pattern to facilitate transit.

Enhance existing train stations, and plan for nearby markets, childcare and health facilities at system hubs. Ensure that transit is accessible for differently-abled patrons. Increase the amount of train service and coordinate with bus schedules. New north-south light rail service, with major stations in Carpentersville, Elgin, the Tri-Village area and Aurora, as well as stops at employment centers, should be studied for feasibility.

Recommendations (continued)

Commuter parking structures should be built off-site and consume as little land as possible. Land immediately adjacent to train stations should be zoned for mixed-use, transit-oriented development. Trolley service between parking structures and train stations should be provided. Parking should not be cheaper than feeder bus service. Facilitate connections to transit (and general mobility) by improving or constructing sidewalks and bikeways, especially on existing bridges.

Increase Public Participation in Planning. Develop reciprocal planning processes where we are well informed about future transportation and development plans and where the public has a meaningful say on proposed plans. Fund public education on transportation decision-making. Increased participation should lead to increased choice in transportation mode, if public sentiment is heeded. We would increase marketing of and access to transit information for the general public. Members of the public, who care deeply about greenway corridors, open space, wildlife habitat, clean air and clean water, are able and willing to help make choices about how to maximize mobility at the least possible cost to our natural assets.

Make Those Small Bicycle and Pedestrian Investments Now. Maximize use of our tax dollars; make the modest improvements that will improve our quality of life immediately! Make train stations pedestrian-friendly. Provide sidewalks generally throughout the built-up areas of the county, and provide ADA-compatible soft-surface pedestrian paths that are separate from bicycle paths. The bicycle network should be comprehensive throughout the region. Provide intensive bicycle infrastructure in Batavia, Geneva, St. Charles, and on the full length of Randall Road, Roosevelt Road, Dean Street (St. Charles), Kirk/Farnsworth Road, Route 31, Route 25 and Route 72. Connect new and existing bikeways to long-distance trails, especially the Fox River Trail. Provide bicycle parking at train stations. Plow bikeways to facilitate year-round use. Ensure that all bridges provide access across the Fox River for cyclists and pedestrians.

Respect Our County Land Management Plan. The Kane County 2020 Land Resource Management Plan is the product of decades of work and consensus-building in the county. Institutional attempts to create an outer belt highway should be suspended indefinitely. All major transportation projects must have a well documented need established by broad public/institutional input before being approved. Transportation projects must support, rather than run counter to, the Kane County 2020 Land Resource Management Plan. A thorough study of alternatives, including high-speed rail options, should be initiated.

The Kane County *Connecting Communities* summit participants came as individuals and as members of groups. Some of the groups that helped plan the summit include:

Community Energy Cooperative-Elgin
The Conservation Foundation
Dundee Township

Illinois Public Interest Research Group
Kane-DuPage Soil & Water Conservation District

Connecting Communities Regional Partners

Business and Professional People for the Public Interest
Chicago Design Consortium
Chicago Metropolis 2020
Chicago Rehab Network
Chicagoland Bicycle Federation
Citizen Action-Illinois
Council for Disability Rights
Environmental Law and Policy and Policy Center of the Midwest
Friends of the Chicago River

Independent Voters of Illinois-Independent Precinct Organization
Interreligious Sustainability Project
League of Women Voters of Illinois
Metro Seniors in Action
Metropolitan Planning Council
Mid America Institute on Poverty
Sierra Club
Sustain



The Citizen Transportation Plan is a project of the Chicagoland Transportation and Air Quality Commission, part of the Center for Neighborhood Technology, 2125 W. North Ave., Chicago, IL 60647, 773-278-4800, ext. 2030. Visit us on the web at www.cnt.org/2030.