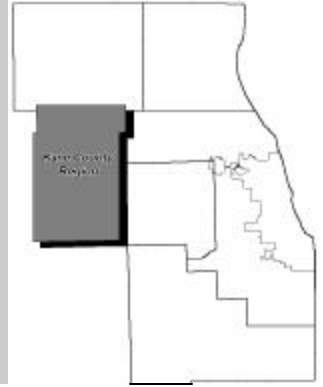




Connecting Communities Kane County Caucus December 3, 2003

A Chicagoland Transportation and Air Quality Commission project in partnership with:
Dundee Township



Over a year and a half ago, a group of residents from Kane County gathered at a *Connecting Communities* summit to discuss potential transportation and land use improvements. Their vision for a better Kane County included a larger investment in transit, more public participation, immediate attention to bicycle and pedestrian improvements, and adherence to the Kane County Land Management Plan. While many of these projects are large and progress on them may not be evident for five to ten years, residents at a recent community meeting made an attempt to measure progress and recommend improvements.

Invest Heavily in Transit in the Fox River Corridor

Caucus participants recognized that two years was too short a time to implement their recommendation for comprehensive north-south transit service in the Fox River Corridor. However, there were questions surrounding proposed extensions and expansions by Metra in recent years. While the proposed Star Line¹ would offer a much needed north-south connection for Kane County residents, there is concern that the extension to the less developed western portion of the county (Elburn) fuels sprawl.

Several improvements that facilitate existing or future transit were noted. Several participants said they had noticed more sidewalks and bike trails that help residents reach transit service. The link between transit use and access to transit by pedestrians and cyclists was a strong recurring theme. Awareness of new transit access routes was high, but the demand for more pedestrian and bicycle access was higher. Participants would like to see more bike parking at Metra stations, as well as bicycle lanes and sidewalks included in all roadway projects.

Mixed feelings were expressed about Pace's visibility in the County. Some felt Pace was more visible than in the past; others were concerned about service reductions. To improve service, one participant suggested a more efficient way to purchase Pace bus passes. Another suggested exploration of light rail opportunities, an idea that received wide support from the group.

Increase Public Participation in Planning

There appears to have been great strides made towards

Connecting Communities caucuses are a public involvement follow-up to the *Connecting Communities* summits that involved over 500 people from throughout northeastern Illinois. The caucuses are designed to take a "snapshot" of a community's views on progress toward their summit recommendations. Some recommendations were major projects that could only be accomplished over a long time period. Others were practical, short term, and inexpensive solutions to community mobility deficits.

Excerpt from Kane County *Connecting Communities* Summit of March 16, 2002:

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.

improved public participation in Kane County. Participants cited the fact that meetings had been held in the County regarding the Kane County 2030 land use plan. Additionally the protests and public outcry from citizen groups about the proposed outer beltway has led the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) to restudy the proposal, and one participant noted IDOT's acceptance of a suggestion that web-based public input be accepted during the early stage of a project.

Despite a new willingness to hear the public's comments, participants felt that there was room for improvement. Participants noted that there is a great disconnect between the County land use plan and the transportation plan. While the land use plan proposes continued growth in areas where growth has already occurred, the transportation plan shows plans for

extensive road building into less occupied areas. Several participants noted that typically it wasn't until the Transportation Improvement Plan² (TIP) was released that residents had any idea of what projects were going to be built. This group wanted to see a more accessible method of providing feedback to the public on project selection. One participant suggested that this feedback system possibly be web-based to ease access of information and ideas.

Make Small Bicycle and Pedestrian Investments Now

In general, participants noted that attempts to accommodate bikes and pedestrians in "piece-meal" projects. There was strong support for bike planning initiatives in Elgin, Aurora, St. Charles, N. Aurora, and for the County's hiring of a bike coordinator. Geneva and Elgin are among the places that have noticeably improved their pedestrian environments.

Many participants voiced frustration that state, municipal and county plans still fail to routinely accommodate bicycles and pedestrians in roadway projects. IDOT policies that offer municipalities a 50 percent "match" for pedestrian improvements rather than the 80 percent match offered for road improvements is a disincentive to invest in sidewalks. More of an effort needs to be made to educate decision-makers that bike paths are "job paths" and important means of transport to work. Many local officials wrongly perceive trails and paths as unaffordable "extras." There was also concern that IDOT is not serious enough about implementing Context Sensitive Solutions and that bicycle and pedestrian accommodations would continued to be ignored.

Respect Our County Land Management Plan

Caucus participants generally supported county land use and transportation plans. There is concern that Kane County plans are jeopardized by unchecked development in adjacent counties or by political agendas that are pursued "behind closed doors," particularly the outer beltway proposal. In particular this group was adamant that the outer beltway project be abandoned. It is a project that does not reflect the interests of the residents of the region, but rather the interests of developers and elected officials.

This group would like to see more connection between regional planning agencies like the Chicago Area Transportation Study and NIPC. They would like to see a longer planning horizon used by municipalities, preferably to the year 2030. This group would also like to "ask county and state candidates for their position on a transportation agenda based on *Connecting Communities* recommendations."

In general, this group would like for elected officials in Kane County's municipalities to respect and listen to the public's voice. All too often, ideas and innovative solutions to transportation that have the public's support have not been reflected in the final plan or projects. The public wants roads that are safe for all types of travelers; this should include special attention to vulnerable travelers like pedestrians and bicyclists. Additionally, more attention and consideration needs to be given to estimates and impact studies of environmentally insensitive projects like the proposed outer beltway road project. If a project demonstrates significant negative impacts on the environment, it should not be pursued. More attention needs to be paid to the question of who projects benefit and how transportation in Kane County fits into a regional vision.

¹The Star Line is a \$1.1 billion proposal that would link Metra Stations in Northwestern Cook County, the western portion of northeastern Illinois, South to Joliet.

² The TIP is the short-term (five-year) plan for implementing future projects.



*Caucus participants consider changes in Kane County...
..then share their ideas with the group.*



Fox River Trail in Kane Country.