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## Anti-O'Hare talk doesn't fly for some

By Robert Sanchez Daily Herald Staff Writer

Posted Wednesday, November 24, 2004

The vast majority of their communities won't see the bulldozers.

Scores of their homeowners and businesses won't be displaced.

So why should a room full of DuPage County mayors oppose expansion of O'Hare International Airport?

Jobs.

O'Hare expansion opponents told members of the DuPage Mayors and Managers Conference last week that the only way western access to the airport could happen is if they lose their battle against building new runways at O'Hare.

And if the so-called O'Hare Modernization Program becomes a reality, the challenge of paying for it could lead to a decline in jobs and economic development.

Robert Cohn, one of the attorneys who spoke on behalf of the Suburban O'Hare Commission, said the group is convinced that expanding O'Hare will "wreak havoc" on the region's economy.

He said businesses would be discouraged from locating in the area because the cost of expanding O'Hare would drive up airline ticket prices.

"There will be a dramatic negative impact - loss of business, loss of jobs, loss of economic impact," he said.

Woodridge Mayor William Murphy said the hourlong presentation made a compelling case against O'Hare expansion.

Lombard Village President William Mueller isn't so convinced.

"I didn't talk to anyone after the meeting who changed their position in any way," Mueller said. "They were divided before the meeting. They are still divided."

However, Mueller said, the presentation did raise questions about why the DuPage County Board recently approved several agreements with Chicago, the Illinois Department of Transportation and the Illinois State Toll Highway Authority in support of a western bypass route.

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"We always ask what is the county getting in return for western access," Mueller said. "What are the communities not getting?"

DuPage County leaders say the agreements should help gain federal funding for extending the Elgin-O'Hare Expressway to O'Hare and linking it with the Northwest and Tri-State tollways.

"It's going to happen," said county board member Jim Zay of Carol Stream. "We think the best deal for DuPage County is to be at the table negotiating."

But Suburban O'Hare Commission attorney Joseph Karaganis said the county was sold a bad bill of goods.

"There's been a lot of hype out here about western access," he said. "And I will tell you that No. 1, it's not going to occur. And No. 2, if it did occur, it's basically a one-hour bus ride."

Karaganis was referring to a claim that some passengers parking on the west side of O'Hare would be bused to terminals on a route that would leave the airport and weave around to the east entrance.

Zay, who saw the Suburban O'Hare Commission presentation, said it was one of many "fallacies" told to the mayors.

"They made a lot of assumptions on western access," he said. "Obviously, they haven't read the agreements that we have signed."

Zay also questioned the claim that expanding O'Hare would harm the local economy. In fact, Chicago officials say the expansion would create 195,000 jobs in the region and an additional \$18 billion a year in economic activity.

"They talked about Chicago not backing up its figures, but they didn't back up their figures, either," he said.

County officials now are considering making a presentation of their own to the DuPage Mayors and Managers Conference.

Wheaton Mayor James Carr said hearing the other side of the debate would be beneficial.

While the Suburban O'Hare Commission representatives said building a third airport in the South suburbs is "part of a regional solution to air transportation," Carr said, he would have liked to have heard about more alternatives.

"Don't spend an hour telling why expanding O'Hare won't work," he said. "Tell me what could work. I want to know what's best for this area."

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