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Residents get say on new roadway

Plans to link I-90, I-294 are scrutinized

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Hundreds of residents turned out Wednesday night in Addison, their first opportunity to directly ask state transportation officials about the long-delayed plans to extend the Elgin-O'Hare Expressway.

Talks between the Illinois Department of Transportation and two dozen municipalities began in October, but Wednesday's meeting at the Oak Meadows Golf Course was the first chance for the public to offer comment.

The proposed expressway extension and a "ring road" that would provide a western route bypassing O'Hare International Airport, linking Interstate Highway 90 with Interstate Highway 294, likely will be needed to reduce traffic congestion for potential airport expansion.

IDOT officials said they have a two-tier preliminary plan to study the 25 communities in DuPage and Cook Counties that could be affected by the proposed expansion of the Elgin-O'Hare, which opened in 1993. The first would include evaluating transportation problems in the areas as well as goals and objectives of the project.

The route most often mentioned is to extend the Elgin-O'Hare via a corridor aligned with Thorndale Avenue, where it intersects Interstate 290 in Itasca.

IDOT officials said they hope to complete the first tier of their plan by 2010. The second phase would involve preliminary engineering and environmental studies and is scheduled for completion by 2013. No timeline has been set for any construction, IDOT officials have said. Also, preliminary cost estimates have not been developed.

Officials in Itasca kicked off their own version of the study Tuesday night by identifying eight areas that officials believe are significant to the village. Those areas included future transit considerations, access at various main streets and arteries and enhancing the village's economic corridor.

David Williams, Itasca's village administrator, said the proposed development "has tremendous potential if done correctly."



A DuPage County study commissioned last year stated western access would add \$10 billion annually from businesses along the corridor and 44,000 jobs in the county by 2030.

"We want to make sure economic growth and access to things in Itasca continues. We don't want to have an expressway just blowing right past us," Williams said.

The Wednesday IDOT meeting featured a continuously running 10-minute video presentation with an overview of several projects and display boards highlighting various timelines and elements of the project. Two full-scale maps of the development area were on tables where the public could post notes about potential problem areas.

Al Hutchison, who owns Hutchison Tool Sales in Bensenville, expressed concerns Wednesday about a possible road extension that could run right by his home.

"I'm concerned as I don't know where and if this road will go through," he said. "I personally hope we never see it at all."

Another Bensenville resident, Ron Granger, said he had lived in the village for 30 years and thinks that even though IDOT says there have been no decisions, changes in the area are inevitable.

"There are rumors about the ring road, and we don't know yet what IDOT wants to do," Granger said. "I think this open meeting is a good start to keep us informed, but no one is really telling you anything as yet."

Peter Harmet, project manager for IDOT, said the goal of the first meeting was to receive input from as many sources as possible.

"Our first tier of the project is to identify needs in the overall transportation system including roads, bus, rail, bicycle, and pedestrian needs," Harmet said. "The goal is to complete a needs assessment by 2010 or before, and move into the second tier."

The IDOT corridor planning group, which includes Cook and DuPage Counties and 24 municipalities, held a meeting in Wood Dale in early October, but although the public was invited, participation wasn't allowed until Wednesday's meeting in Addison.

Harmet said three task forces focusing on environment, land use, and transportation issues would be formed after Wednesday night's meeting and would report their findings Dec. 13 at the same location.

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