

West O'Hare Corridor Economic Development Study
Executive Summary
October 2006

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The West O'Hare Economic Development Study originated in 2004 with an agreement between DuPage County and the City of Chicago to conduct a planning assessment related to the O'Hare Modernization Program (OMP) and western access to the airport.

DuPage County Department of Economic Development and Planning developed a project scope in 2005 and contracted a team of consultants led by TranSystems, Inc. to assist the County with a multi-faceted economic development study. The study focused on identifying impacts to the communities of DuPage County resulting from the City of Chicago's OMP. The following elements comprised the scope of the study:

- Economic Development Impacts
- Transportation Impacts
- Land Use Impacts
- Population and Employment Impacts
- Environmental Impacts
- Quality of Life Impacts
- Community Outreach
- Corridor Visioning

The study was organized into three phases that were designed to maximize information gathering and exchange, community exposure to the study and technical analysis of the situation. The three phases included:

- State of the Area Assessment
- Opportunity Analysis
- Visioning

The State of the Area assessment included an initial stakeholder outreach meeting in December 2005 that was attended by leaders from more than 30 communities in DuPage and Cook Counties as well as the public transportation agencies. The meeting was successful in that it set a very positive tone for community outreach and information exchange. The meeting also established a core set of concerns that the community stakeholders identified and wished to be addressed as part of the project. The meeting was also used to introduce a set of "Opportunity Zones" or areas where economic development, transportation, land use and environmental impact would most likely be high as a result of the OMP and western access to the airport.

The Opportunity Analysis was a very ambitious effort to perform detailed assessments of transportation, economic and land use impact in the west O'Hare corridor and the balance of DuPage County. In this phase, the team undertook rigorous transportation and economic modeling tasks in order to begin to quantify the likely impacts of the OMP program. Additionally, the Opportunity Zones were delineated and draft development concepts were brought forward to the communities, using ideas that were generated through the December meeting and from subsequent interviews with members of

communities in the core impact area. This stage culminated in April with a second stakeholder outreach meeting.

The Visioning Stage was the final stage of the study process and put forth refined Opportunity Zone and Transportation Facility concepts discussed in Stages 1 and 2. The detailed economic impact analysis and a corridor fly through were presented at the final stakeholder outreach meeting in August. Stakeholders felt it important to outline a strategy to continue and build upon this process of outreach; to further investigate impacts to the communities and strengthen the position of the communities and the county regarding transportation system implementation, funding, economic development and corridor planning. To this end, positive feedback was received to a proposal to form an executive level implementation team comprised of community leaders, transportation agency leaders, County Board members, and various at-large interested stakeholders.

Key Findings of the Study

The key findings of the study can be grouped into two distinct categories: technical and policy.

TECHNICAL FINDINGS

1. Transportation Impact

Airport Impact will be measurable and significant

- Currently more than 100,000 daily surface transportation trips are made to the airport based on existing operations and enplanements
- If enplanements and operations increase as suggested in the OMP EIS, surface traffic trips will nearly double with almost 40,000 daily trips being generated by the operations out of the proposed western terminal.
- Traffic generated on the west side of the airport will cause widespread operational instability and failure in 2015 and 2030 under the present roadway and transit system in DuPage County.
- Necessary surface transportation improvements in the DuPage County area, including the Western Bypass and Elgin-O'Hare Expressway will cost more than \$2.5 Billion.
- West O'Hare Bypass and Elgin-O'Hare Express facilities prove to be of medium and long-term benefit to the airport and the existing facilities in the corridor under a limited transit expansion scenario.
- Transit service is not presently geared toward western terminal or corridor service in DuPage County; a more significant effort at planning corridor service must be made in order to mitigate road construction costs and impacts.

West O'Hare Corridor Roadways are not optimally configured for Western Access and Direct and Indirect Impacts of Added Airport Business

- Significant capacity issues exist on the present arterial and express roadway system.
- The present multi-modal business park layout with direct access to arterials such as Thorndale Avenue, IL 83, IL 19/Irving Park Road and York Road, limits the capacity of the system for transit and typical commuter traffic. Proposed Bensenville and Wood Dale Opportunity Zone concepts suggest significant renovation of intra and inter-community access allowing better circulation of traffic and reducing the need to use principal arterials as collector routes.
- Realignment of IL 19 due to OMP runways, IL 19 at Wood Dale Road, the UP RR and new designs for the Western Bypass and Elgin-O'Hare are likely to influence traffic patterns and some communities fear negative traffic impacts on community quality of life. Interchange location, facility access and conservation of engineering impact will be key components to local support of facility design and location.

2. Economic Impact

Economic Impact Analysis was built on a sophisticated Regional Economic Input model called REMI with a new feature called TranSight. This program calculates the added costs, benefits and multipliers of ports, airports, major capital (transportation) investments, etc. Economic impact results were based on a Build (full OMP build-out) and a No-Build (limited airport side development with an increase in operations and enplanements to the maximum capacity).

Economic Impact is Significant to DuPage County

- With the full OMP build-out, approximately 44,000 new jobs will be created
- With the full OMP build-out, approximately 46,000 new people will choose to reside in DuPage County
- Gross Regional Product will increase by over \$3 Billion per annum by 2015 with the OMP in place and by over \$10 Billion by 2030.
- Local Government Revenues are expected to increase significantly as a result of new business and will outpace expected expenses annually.

POLICY FINDINGS

Policy findings are the result of the team’s extensive interviews with communities and transportation agency executives. The policy findings have been grouped into seven topical threads and may serve as a basis for an Implementation Team agenda:

- 1. Western Access**
- 2. Community Stake and Continued Participation**
- 3. Business Retention and Attraction**
- 4. Airport Transit**
- 5. “Character” of Elgin/O’Hare Corridor and Western Bypass**
- 6. Development Opportunities and Implementation of Development Plans in Short and Medium Term**
- 7. Community “Gateways”**

1. Western Access: Regional and local access to west side of Airport is essential

- DuPage County has had general concurrence with its definition of *Western Access*. That definition includes:
 - i. Utilizing existing agreed right of way inside O’Hare boundaries for a Western Bypass
 - ii. Full access to and from the western terminal from all facilities including the Western Bypass, the Elgin-O’Hare Expressway, York Road and any transit facilities
 - iii. Minimizing local road access impacts relative to Thorndale Avenue and York Road
 - iv. Minimizing property impacts on the west side of York Road due to interchange construction, road widening, etc.
- Community sentiment was that western access not be a “hole in the fence” or an exclusive benefit to the airport. Access without Western Bypass, transit service and regional transportation linkages does not serve the corridor communities nor mitigate other highway transportation problems.

DuPage County and its communities must continue to work with the City of Chicago to not unduly limit options and to work with IDOT and ISTHA to promote full accessibility and creative thinking in terms of access and property impact mitigation.

2. Community Stake and Continued Participation

- Community Stakeholders and the County have emphasized throughout the interview process that they wish to maintain a presence “at the table” in talks

with IDOT, ISTHA, RTA and PACE regarding the design of the Elgin-O'Hare Expressway, Western Bypass, Western Access and transit projects.

- Community stakeholders are content to allow County leadership at the table, but do not wish to have the County represent their interests.
- County encourages this point of view but maintains that the County needs to be involved in the early design and environmental process to represent its interests as well.

It is recommended that an open forum process continue to be embraced, and that the Implementation Team provide such a forum to continue discussion of the findings of this study and the technical processes that accompany the EIS process in order to place concerns in front of the agencies.

3. Business Retention and Attraction

- Communities are concerned that the loss of some businesses would result in loss of higher paying jobs and that businesses might choose not to relocate in the community or even in DuPage County.
- Stakeholders were concerned about loss of businesses and jobs in the Southwest Acquisition Area of Bensenville, areas along Thorndale Avenue and the Western Bypass Alignments and along York Road.
- Business attraction has been hampered, in the opinion of the participating communities, by the air of uncertainty over airport build-out timelines, the type of facilities, access style and interchange locations related to the Elgin-O'Hare Expressway and redevelopment programs or packages in the communities.
- Without defined roadway plans, redevelopment locations outside of the corridor, the County or the region may be viewed more favorably.
- On the positive side, a strengthened Addison Township business climate should emerge with the infrastructure improvements and attract businesses.

A quick resolution to the alignment and facility design issues is urged, and the Implementation Team must work with transportation agencies to present a unified message to developers and those looking to redevelop in the corridor.

4. Airport Transit

- All communities at the Visioning Sessions supported transit options that are integrated into the Western Access design.
- No specific transit style or option was endorsed by all. Options ranging from CTA Blue Line rail to METRA STAR Line Light Rail, PACE Express Bus and Arterial Bus Rapid Transit have all been suggested.
- Transit Hub concepts were supported outside of the airport in conjunction with the Bensenville, WoodDale and Itasca Opportunity Zones.

- Community stakeholders appreciated and supported in general the concept of transit stops at regular intervals (in each community) as part of a line running from O'Hare to Schaumburg along the Elgin-O'Hare and I-290 expressways. Support was given on the basis that transit stops might encourage more transit oriented development and business density.

Staff recommends that members of the CTA, METRA, PACE and RTA meet with or be included on the Implementation Team and that community stakeholders, the County and the service providers develop a program to leverage serious consideration of transit in the corridor. A short to medium term solution that does not require New Starts funding or paperwork and that may involve the existing METRA services on the Milwaukee West Line or PACE programs should be developed simultaneously with the Elgin-O'Hare Expressway EIS.

5. Character of Elgin-O'Hare Corridor and Western Bypass

- Three communities in Addison Township felt very strongly about the design and character of the Elgin-O'Hare Expressway and the Western Bypass.
- Comments were directed at staff and IDOT that elevated expressways that bisect their communities and present a less than aesthetic look and feel were not welcome. All three communities emphasized location of interchanges and the need for full access to the Elgin-O'Hare.
- Bensenville argued that the Western Bypass alignment was not viewed favorably if it followed the East County Line/Mt. Prospect Road right of way to and from I-294. It was agreed that that particular alignment would further damage Bensenville's commercial tax base and a rail corridor alignment further east was supported.

Innovative design considerations should be employed and community cohesion, business impact mitigation and access questions should be fully explored.

6. Development Opportunities and Implementation of Development Plans in Short and Medium Term

- Communities all stated that, while a valuable industry, they did not want to perpetuate the notion of solely being the warehousing and distribution capital of DuPage County. They see the OMP and the various road and transit programs as a means to diversify their local economy.
- Hotel and retail opportunities are not likely to materialize until transportation and airport programs are closer to implementation.
- Many communities felt that obsolete properties or properties not fully utilizing the potential of the land might be redeveloped in favor of newer, more efficient businesses.

- Staff presented communities with a picture of allowable building heights according to O'Hare and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Modifications to local zoning regulations and densities would most likely need to occur in the short term to set the tone for redevelopment options.
- Communities felt that real world demands of investors and developers and the short-term need of the community is hard to reconcile against the long-term plan presented in the Opportunity Zone scenarios.

Strategies must be explored to balance short and long term goals, and encourage or entice developers to follow a broader corridor or community plan. Measures or corridor programs may need to be put into place to assist communities to overcome competitive disadvantages. This is a question that the Implementation Team should consider in the near term.

7. Community Gateways

- Municipalities stated unequivocally that gateways are marketing tools and important to their community as a means to help them announce the quality and character of their communities.
- Development of regional transportation corridors and ensuring appropriate access to expressways is perceived to help the communities develop less congested and more aesthetically pleasing gateways.

The gateway concept is a critical economic development tool for business attraction and retention.