

Focus On...The County Challenge Bond Projects

The “Plan for Using the New Collar County Transportation Empowerment Funds”, endorsed by the County Board at its June 8, 2008 meeting, included an innovative County Challenge Bond Component targeting the 2011 issuance of \$50 million in bonds towards improvements selected from a short list of 4 proposed improvements on the county highway system. The chosen improvements would be done sooner with bond financing than waiting for the elusive pay-go financing. The chosen improvements would be built big enough so the construction could operate on the “get-In, get out and stay-out” strategy rather than the motorist frustrating stage-construction method.

A short description of the candidate improvements are:

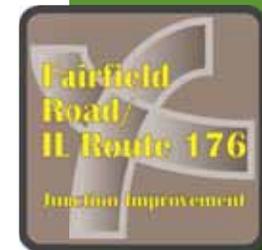
- Rollins Rd Gateway Improvement: Build a RR underpass for Rollins Rd and improve the intersection at the IL 83 bottleneck.
- Fairfield Rd Thruway improvement: Build a major intersection at Fairfield Rd at the Metra RR crossing at IL 134.
- Fairfield Rd at IL Rte 176 Junction Improvement: Build a major intersection or interchange at Fairfield Rd at IL 176 and the FP trail crossings.
- Washington St Thoroughfare Improvement: Add lanes to Washington St (Hainesville Rd to Lake St) and build a CN RR underpass.

What’s so challenging about any of these? Well, just about everything and that they total \$122 million for engineering, land purchases and construction! Exactly what could the improvements be and are they technically and politically feasible?

On complex proposed highway improvement projects such as these, the LCDOT undertakes what is called a “Phase I Study”. The study consists of preliminary engineering to develop a context-sensitive solution for the location (i.e. integrating roadway design with a particular community and environment).

The LCDOT started the Phase I studies for these candidate projects to find out these answers, at a total cost of \$7.2 million in January of 2009 using a cadre of consultants. The Fairfield at 176 junction improvement, provides a good example of the effort going into these Phase I studies. Three hundred and six people attended a public open house on February 25, 2010 to examine and comment on three alternatives resulting from the studies completed to date. The meeting’s objective was to receive public input on what needs further study. A well done public open house meeting is an event that takes much planning on the part of LCDOT and consultant staff—we are happy to share on the following page a few of these comments reflecting our interaction with constituents.

All of the proposed projects are on schedule to have their Phase I studies completed in December 2009/January 2010 with the acceptance of a Project Development Report. The county should have \$78 million of bond funding to apply to its chosen County Challenge Bond projects, up from the Plan’s \$50 million due to good interest rates, federal stimulus assistance with bond funding and the transfer of \$19 million not being used in the Plan’s similar \$50 million State Challenge Bond program.



Copied from hand printed public input comment forms:

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Go with Option 2 - I think this provides the best alternative.

Excellent summary of the study results. I believe option 2 is best for the following reasons:

Option 3 exposes pedestrians and bikers to a tremendous amount of traffic without the benefit of traffic control to offer safe passage, especially important since the trails are used by families with children that should cross at protected intersections. Option 1 will provide good improvements for the next 10 years, but will likely not provide any expansion options beyond that point, whereas Option 2 seems to provide enough room to expand from 1 to 2 lanes in each direction when needed, without impacting the improvements put in place.

Oh, and you guys should consider putting your planners out for consulting with other counties. Most of the other counties in the Chicago area could benefit from the quality of planning and engineering you guys have shown to deliver.

Recommended improvement to Option 2: Can the pedestrian/bike trails be joined in a more direct manner from the turn lanes tunnel straight to the Fairfield overpass? That might be too difficult for horses to navigate, but would be fairly easy for bikers and pedestrians, and eliminate the need to go "around the circle" to get from one level to the other.

Lake DOT did an excellent job at the Fairfield/Gilmer intersection. I would have not considered that option before the project, but am very impressed with the foresight of Lake DOT planners and engineers. I would consider this project to be a showcase of how creative planning can make a huge positive impact to the area and a very large number of drivers from across the region who travel through that intersection.

Great plans, I look forward to seeing this improvement.

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