



Civic Committee
COMMERCIAL CLUB OF CHICAGO

**Civic Committee
Transportation Task Force Update
December 10, 2020**

Transportation Task Force Meetings

The Civic Committee’s Transportation Task Force met on November 6th to discuss the state’s capital program and other Civic Committee priorities with Deputy Governor Christian Mitchell. The meeting was a frank and open exchange about the Administration’s slow progress on many important transportation policies and projects. Further updates from Mitchell on our project and policy priorities can be found below.

Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) Reforms

Promoting performance-based programming -- the use of data-driven, transparent project selection -- is a key policy priority of the task force. We have made positive strides in promoting this policy over the year, with major highlights from the past quarter below.

During our November 6th task force meeting, Deputy Governor Christian Mitchell relayed the Administration’s support for a legislative requirement to implement performance-based programming at IDOT. Mitchell asked us to work with IDOT and his team on legislation we drafted and introduced by Rep. Kam Buckner (D-Chicago). We are organizing a meeting with Mitchell to work through these issues before the end of the year.

The IDOT Secretary has also made verbal and written commitments to make performance-based programming a top priority of the department. In October, IDOT announced the hiring of Holly Bieneman as the Department’s new Director of Policy & Programming, the division in charge of capital project selection and investment strategies. Holly is a strong proponent of performance-based programming, leading successful efforts to reform the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning’s (CMAP) project selection work several years ago.

In the General Assembly, State Senator Ram Villivalam (D-Skokie), the Chairman of the Illinois Senate Transportation Committee, has made performance-based programming and IDOT reform a top priority. Villivalam hosted a subject matter hearing on performance-based programming and equity in transportation in August where Tom Kotarac testified on behalf of the task force. **Villivalam will introduce legislation soon that will require IDOT to implement**

performance-based programming. We are planning to work for passage of this legislation by the Illinois Senate Transportation Committee in early 2021.

We are also working with several partners representing the construction industry, trade unions, environmental groups, and equity-focused transportation organizations to show the diverse base of support for improving the investment strategy for the state's \$35 billion, 5-year transportation capital program. We have been providing technical support and strategic guidance to these groups and expect them to join us in our promotion of performance-based programming legislation in Springfield next year.

Design-Build Authority for IDOT

IDOT lacks many tools other state DOTs use to plan, design, and build projects in the most efficient manner. For example, IDOT is just one of five states without authority to use design-build contracting methods for its projects. Design-build authority allows a state DOT to execute a single contract for both architectural/engineering services and construction. This type of project delivery offers significant time and cost savings over traditional methods that require separate contracting for design and construction.

The Acting IDOT Secretary asked for our assistance in helping his department gain design-build authority when he visited the transportation task force earlier this year. Deputy Governor Christian Mitchell signaled support for the policy, if it were limited in scope. IDOT requires state legislative authority to deliver projects with a design-build approach. We have worked with IDOT and Mayer Brown to draft a bill to grant IDOT design-build procurement authority and address the Administration's interest in improving participation of disadvantaged business enterprises. Promoting this legislation is a task force priority for 2021.

The enormous fiscal pressure the state is facing should make design-build project delivery attractive to IDOT and other agencies because projects can be built more quickly and efficiently than traditional procurement methods.

Mass Transit Reforms

Late last year, we led a successful effort to convince the RTA Board to re-evaluate its static capital allocation methodologies and move toward a more transparent, data-driven, performance-based programming system. The RTA adopted an ordinance to reform their capital allocation and project selection process by the end of 2020.

Our capital allocation reform efforts evolved into a larger initiative to support and realign mass transit service during the COVID-19 pandemic. This broader reform effort has been led by us and several planning, business, environmental, and community-based organizations. This coalition is focused on: improving the communication and transparency of funding and operations changes; promoting the adoption of public health best practices, like full compliance for mask wearing requirements; protecting mass transit service for essential workers; and incentivizing shared services and efficiencies among CTA, Metra, and Pace that will help the system weather the historical fiscal challenges facing mass transit.

This fall, the RTA released a new, three-phased approach to better manage the challenges facing transit over the next two years. This new approach is a major improvement from the RTA's previous efforts which reinforced the status quo and avoided consideration of major reforms. Kirk Dillard, the RTA Chairman, thanked Kelly Welsh during the October RTA Board meeting and thanked our coalition for pushing the RTA to lead with bold recommendations to mitigate the multiple crises facing our transit system.

While the new three-phased approach calls for increased communication and transparency in budgeting, the transit agencies' draft 2021 budgets assume emergency federal appropriations will fill a \$500 million deficit. CTA projects it will need \$372 million in 2021 to maintain current service levels. CTA has said it will not outline the service cuts, staff reductions, or other actions it will take if Congress does not provide emergency funding. We are working with business organizations and transit advocates to encourage the RTA and transit agencies to be upfront and transparent about their scenario planning now.

Metra Electric Line Pilot

The task force has been a leading advocate for the proposed pilot project to improve Metra service on the south side and south suburbs. The project is led by Cook County and will increase frequencies of Metra trains along the Metra Electric and Rock Island lines and reduce fares, so they are equal to the cost of a CTA ride within the City of Chicago. Free or reduced transfers to CTA and Pace would also be available under the pilot. This pilot, if successful, will be the most significant attempt to coordinate service between CTA, Metra, and Pace since the late 1970s.

Our task force has taken a leadership role in developing this pilot project and implementing it. Last year, we jumpstarted a new 30-plus member coalition in support of the pilot program. We also helped recruit former IDOT Secretary and CMAP Executive Director Randy Blankenhorn to act as project manager for this pilot program. Lastly, we helped organize local business and Illinois Congressional Delegation support for a \$330,000 U.S. DOT federal grant for the pilot program.

On October 15th, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle announced the pilot program will launch in January of 2021, a significant achievement for one of our top project priorities. Kelly Welsh joined several other local South Side and Suburban officials in announcing the launch of the pilot via press release.

The pilot program will include Metra and Pace, but not the CTA. The task force is working with our coalition to encourage all transit agencies to participate in the pilot, thereby increasing access to transportation for customers and businesses and growing the impact of the pilot.

Transit agencies in Chicago will need to operate in a coordinated and nimble fashion as this current health crisis subsides. The pilot program's innovative approach to goals like coordinated service among all providers, unified fare media, and access to jobs for vulnerable populations

will help build skills our transit agencies can use to adapt to the changing transportation environment in a post-COVID world.

Federal Transportation Agenda – COVID 19 Relief Bills

Metropolitan Civic Leadership Alliance Work

We helped establish the Metropolitan Civic Leadership Alliance, a new coalition composed of leading business-focused civic groups from major metropolitan areas, to work on federal transportation and COVID-19 recovery legislation in Washington.

The Alliance was launched in March and includes the following groups: Greater Houston Partnership; Massachusetts Competitive Partnership; Atlanta Metro Chamber; Silicon Valley Leadership Group; The Washington Roundtable; Columbus Partnership; The Greater Washington Partnership; Partnership for New York City; and the Bay Area Council. The Alliance has benefited from the counsel and public support of former U.S. DOT Secretaries Sam Skinner and Ray LaHood.

The group is updating its 2021 federal agenda and will send it to the Biden transition team. The group is also planning a virtual-day-on-Capitol Hill with CEOs from each organization in February.

O’Hare Airport

The most recent new runway built as part of the O’Hare Modernization Program (OMP) opened on November 5th. The runway, known as 9C/27C, is an 11,000 feet long runway capable of handling the largest commercial aircraft. The final runway project of the OMP is an extension of the 9R/27L runway to 11,200 feet and will be completed by the end of 2021. Task force members saw both runway projects during their site visit to the O’Hare airfield in August of 2019.

The Chicago Department of Aviation (CDA) informed us negotiations with the Illinois Tollway over the new Elgin-O’Hare Western Access road are going well. The Tollway’s original design and placement of the roadway would interfere with operations of the southern runway at O’Hare. CDA Commissioner Jamie Rhee requested our help with this dispute last year. We have held briefings with both parties and others to better understand the issues and encourage a resolution that ensures full operation of the runways at O’Hare. This is a positive development that we will continue to monitor.

South Suburban/Peotone Airport

Local supporters of a new airport shared a draft proposal calling for a cargo-focused airport near Peotone in Will County. The proposal names several potential funders for the project, but few details and no firm commitments were available from any of organizations named in

the proposal. We are reviewing the proponents' new proposal and will have more information for our task force to consider at its next meeting.

There is little objective analysis or justification for a new South Suburban airport: no major air carriers are interested; air cargo demand will be sufficiently met with new capacity at O'Hare and Rockford (Airports Council International named Rockford the fastest growing cargo airport in the world in 2018); and Gary airport has untapped capacity for both passenger and freight traffic. The current shock the aviation industry is going through makes building a new airport even harder to justify.

The task force has mobilized a coalition to monitor efforts to develop a new major airport near Peotone. The coalition includes representatives from the airlines, environmental groups, the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce, the Chicago Department of Aviation, Rockford Airport, and Gary Airport. We are collectively drafting a report outlining the risks in building a new major airport in the south suburbs. The report will also include alternative economic development projects that could be considered instead of investing in a new airport.