



EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD: Cook County provides forum for transportation opinions

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Regional needs like transportation funding and other infrastructure investments seem to be getting lots of media attention lately.

On the Illinois side, Gov. Pat Quinn's Northeastern Illinois Public Transit Task Force recently recommended how to improve the region's transit system, and to improve the current state of disrepair of roads and bridges. In Indiana, the stories are similar.

What is missing in this media blitz is the voice and perspective of ordinary people affected by real-life transportation challenges in their daily lives.

Cook County is providing a forum to hear those perspectives. Recently, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle launched an extensive and forward thinking community input program as part of the larger strategic planning initiative known as Connecting Cook County.

This long-overdue plan will assess the transportation network and its impact on economic growth and quality of life over the next 25 years.

At its core, the plan encourages the public to weigh in in an effort to identify those key opportunities that are most likely to shape sustainable investments in transportation and travel options that have the greatest impact on residents' needs.

"This is an opportunity for us to take stock of our transportation system," Preckwinkle said at the program kickoff. "Adding more commuters and traffic to the existing transportation network without anticipating how to improve the system is no way to plan for the future."

To spur economic growth and build sustainable communities, Connecting Cook County will evaluate all modes of transportation (including roads, bridges, rail, bikeways, pedestrian walkways and public transportation) and match system performance against the current and future needs of county residents and business owners.

Feedback is critical during development of the plan, especially from the very people and businesses that use the region's transportation network. With the public's input, the county can comprehensively assess the existing conditions and consider ways to strengthen connections between modes by eliminating system gaps. Investments can be systematically prioritized — with an emphasis on meeting the needs of everyday people and users.

Cook County is asking for the public's help in identifying the strengths, weaknesses and priorities in the communities where we live and work. They've developed a project website, www.ConnectingCookCounty.org, equipped with an interactive online survey tool that provides a forum to weigh in and provide input.

They are also using mobile kiosks rotating throughout the county, taking the online survey to the streets in high-traffic locations to gather community responses.

Over the next few months, Cook County will be collecting input on the relevant issues that impact our transportation system. "Connecting Cook County" presents an opportunity to lend your voice to ensure a plan is developed that prioritizes improvements in areas important to you—be it highways, bridges, public transit, bikeways, pedestrian access, freight movement or more.

Follow the project on Twitter or go to www.ConnectingCookCounty.org to weigh in and find kiosk locations near you.