

Peotone airport could break ground as early as 2016

April 25, 2014 6:15 pm • [Keith Benman, keith.benman@nwi.com, \(219\) 933-3326](mailto:keith.benman@nwi.com)



A vandalized sign stands in 2010 on an empty stretch of land where homes were razed to make way for the proposed Peotone airport. Ground could be broken on a south suburban airport at Peotone as early as 2016.

PARK FOREST | Ground could be broken on a south suburban airport at Peotone as early as 2016, with the Illinois Department of Transportation using accelerated procedures first employed on the go-fast schedule for the Illiana Expressway, according to IDOT Secretary Ann Schneider.

That means construction of the 47-mile bistate expressway and airport could be taking place at the same time, with ground slated to be broken on the Illiana Expressway in late 2014 or early 2015.

The state has already bought more than 3,000 acres of the 5,000 that will be needed for the airport, Schneider told more than 200 business and community leaders at the quarterly forum of the Chicago Southland Economic Development Corp., at Park Forest's Freedom Hall.

"I'm very hopeful that sometime in 2016 we will be breaking ground on the inaugural footprint of that airport, which is so important," Schneider said.

The Illinois Department of Transportation intends to develop the airport as a public-private partnership. Procurement of private investment teams could begin even before the environmental impact statement is finalized for the airport, as is being done now for the Illiana Expressway, Schneider said.

Both an airspace study and the environmental impact study will be done in an expedited fashion, cutting down the time needed to complete them by as much as two years, she said.

The accelerated schedule for the south suburban airport comes as Gary/Chicago International Airport struggles to complete its \$166 million runway expansion. State environmental officials were scheduled to tour the airport Friday. The expansion project is being held up until a solution can be found to cleaning up the highly polluted soils there.

Schneider also urged the business and community leaders to support Gov. Pat Quinn's proposed budget, which will be critical to getting the Illiana Expressway underway. Passage of the budget, particularly its tax provisions, will be essential to getting an acceptable credit rating for Illiana Expressway bonds, Schneider said.

"If we don't get an investment grade rating, the Illiana will stall," she said.

The Illiana Expressway would be a toll road running from Interstate 65 just northeast of Lowell to Interstate 55 in Illinois. It has an estimated \$1.5 billion price tag.

Rep. Robin Kelly, D-Illinois, also voiced her support for IDOT's work on the two projects just before Schneider spoke.

"I want to be partners with them on the Illiana and the airport and on all the things I can do in D.C. to make sure that happens," Kelly said.

This is a critical year for transportation project across the nation, as the Federal Highway Trust Fund will again run out of money this summer without congressional action. The current transportation act also expires this fall and will have to be renewed or a new one passed.

Another milestone in the Illiana Expressway's development was reached this week, when the states of Illinois and Indiana finalized an intergovernmental agreement for the bi-state road, Schneider said.

IDOT and the Indiana Department of Transportation will be starting the final bidding process for the expressway once a record of decision is issued by federal agencies. That is expected in late May or early June, Schneider said. That is also when the two states should start buying land for the road.