



EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD: Cook County seeks input on transportation plan

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Earlier this year, Cook County President Toni Preckwinkle launched a forward-thinking, comprehensive and long-range transportation planning effort known as “Connecting Cook County.” The plan aims to develop a broader vision and coherent strategy for transportation investments by tying them to greater economic growth and by making communities desirable places to live and work.

In April, I wrote about how Cook County was developing the plan through a collaborative transportation planning process. Over the course of several phases, the process is designed to foster involvement by all users of the transportation system, including residents, workers, business owners, transit users, freight operators, bicyclists and the general public. The county wants to collect input from thousands of respondents within Cook County during each phase of planning, seeking community input during the generation of the plan to help strengthen our region’s multimodal transportation network and economic future.

Phase I of the planning process focused on analyzing the county’s current transportation system to identify issues, deficiencies, gaps and future needs. During a three-month period starting in March, input was collected from residents, businesses and other users of the Cook County transportation system.

Thousands of respondents took the opportunity to weigh in on the plan using MetroQuest, an online community engagement platform. Visiting the project website or kiosks rotating throughout the county, they identified strengths, weaknesses and priorities for the communities where they live and work. Overwhelmingly, participants expressed a top priority for “Connecting Cook County”: developing an integrated network with better connections between transportation modes. Specifically, respondents indicated they want to move beyond planning primarily for the automobile and explore opportunities to reduce congestion and enhance public transportation and bicycling.

This input is shaping the plan, serving to help the county identify ways to strengthen multi-modal connections, eliminate system gaps, enhance safety and leverage investments. The suggestions have led to the development of conceptual projects and policies that support expanded transportation choice throughout Cook County.

Now, as the next phase of the planning process begins, Cook County once again is seeking the public's input. We are invited to visit the project website or one of the many mobile kiosks moving throughout the county this fall. There we'll be able to weigh in on priorities reflecting a range of transportation benefits and provide input on potential long-range scenarios. We will have the opportunity to identify and rank our own priorities and experiment with different types of transportation investments, development patterns, scenarios and other impacts. We will immediately see the impact of our choices via maps, graphs and charts. We will be able to view the outcomes of each decision.

This feedback will continue to shape the development of the plan, helping to refine transportation investment priorities and a broader vision. Let's use this opportunity to ensure "Connecting Cook County" serves as a blueprint for the development of a world-class transportation system that spurs economic growth and enhances quality of life for us all.

To keep informed, follow the project on Twitter or go to www.ConnectingCookCounty.org to weigh in and find kiosk locations near you.