



## **Cook County concludes public sessions on its long-term transit plan**

By Susan Denmar Lafferty | December 10, 2014

Cook County on Tuesday night held the last of its four open houses on its 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan, and many of those attending delivered the same message — the regional mass transit system needs to be much better coordinated and its costs kept down.

As the county creates a plan to link transportation to economic development and address infrastructure needs for the next 25 years, it's seeking public input now and again next fall before the plan is finalized.

"We will decide where we want to be in 2040 and what we will need to get there," said Jennifer Killen, the county's assistant superintendent of transportation and highways.

By getting on board with the Regional Transportation Authority and state and federal agencies, the county hopes that such a collaborative effort will result in real progress in improving public transportation in the county and all of the Chicago area.

Between 20 and 40 people attended each of the four open houses, scattered throughout the county, but many more were completing an online survey that's available until Dec. 19 by visiting [www.connectingcookcounty.org](http://www.connectingcookcounty.org).

Those who attended Tuesday's meeting at the Orland Park Civic Center did not hesitate to offer their opinions.

Jim Pawluczyk, of Oak Lawn, said the major need is clear — "more transportation options and better connections." He works in DuPage County and "has no other option" than to drive to work every day.

"My biggest concern is a lack of coordination among the government agencies and a lack of will to coordinate transportation," Pawluczyk said. "This (new plan) may get put on a shelf because of a lack of revenue. That is a big issue."

He said Cook County's commitment to a long-range plan is "going in the right direction. This is a good starting point, but implementation will be a sticking point."

Among the suggestions were a high-speed rail service between Chicago and St. Louis that would serve the South Suburban Airport, more rail crossing grade separations to avoid traffic delays and enhanced Metra commuter service to the southeast and southwest suburbs.

“Metra is raising the (fares) again. Why should commuters (on the limited SouthWest Service Line) pay the same as those who get premium service?” said Orland Park resident Bob Sullivan, who also proposed establishing connections between Metra’s rail lines.

Aside from public transportation, Sullivan suggested developing Bell Road as an arterial road to take pressure off LaGrange Road, saying there are not enough north-south routes in the southwest suburbs.

Lois Arms, of Park Forest, said transportation planners need to move beyond planning for the automobile and should focus more on improving mass transit and bicycle routes. Traffic congestion would be reduced if people did not have to drive “so far for everything,” she said.

Cook County transportation planners outlined four cleverly named transportation options at Tuesday night’s session and asked the public to support one of them.

“Running on Empty” would preserve the existing system, which would not require more state and federal funds but would likely stagnate economic development.

“Stuck in First Gear” would see a small number of key projects done to spur economic growth, financed by existing revenue sources.

“Picking Up Steam” would realize some multi-jurisdictional projects and would require greater funding.

The final option, called “All Aboard,” was favored by 2 to 1 by the public, according to county representatives. It calls for aggressive modernization of all facets of transportation in the county and would require “significant” additional financing through higher taxes.

“If we can show people what the money will buy, that may help,” Killen said, adding that some projects would be more cost-effective if achieved through a collaborative effort.