

ALIGNING INTERSTATE ROAD INTERESTS

EWCRPC LINKS TOGETHER ILLINOIS AND INDIANA COMMUNITIES FOR JOINT TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

by

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BACKGROUND

President Paul Lohmann of Beecher, Illinois summarizes the transportation conditions in one simple sentence, “it’s bad and getting worse.” What he describes is the increasing amount of cars and trucks using local east-west roads in their journey into or through Chicago. “This Indiana car and truck traffic is seeking faster and less congested alternatives to the I-65 and I-80/94 route from northern Indiana to downtown Chicago or the suburban interstate routes around Chicago,” according to Lohmann.

INVOLVEMENT OF EWCRPC

In 1994, nine Villages, Cities and Townships formed the Eastern Will County Regional Planning Council to address issues affecting member communities cooperatively. While the initial focus was on understanding the impact of the proposed new regional airport, these communities also identified several current non-airport problems needing intergovernmental solutions. Aligning streets and roads between Illinois and Indiana was an obvious top priority.

Initial research quickly identified several important findings:

1. There was little, if any, productive discussions between the two State Transportation Departments on this matter,
2. The respective local transportation planning agencies while recognizing the problem and promoting long range plans that include routes that would alleviate the problems, little or no short-term planning

was underway which would alleviate the current problems.

3. Local officials on both sides of the state line were expressing similar concern for action.

4. No organization for elected officials existed within the current transportation planning process that could coordinate solutions to transportation or other issues of concern between the two states.

The EWCRPC stepped into this void for its members' filling the role of a facilitator for drawing together local officials along the 20-mile state line corridor from Lake Michigan south the Kankakee County. This 20-mile corridor has only six continuous "on-alignment" roads connecting the two states and approximately twenty local roads between the two states with "offset" alignments.

The objective of the EWCRPC study was simple, gain consensus for realignment of selected roads to serve as local road connectors between the two states. The EWCRPC believes a consensus between local government officials will show sufficient concern to prompt favorable actions by metropolitan transportation planning agencies and federal funding agencies.

Ken Kramer, Chair of the EWCRPC notes, "we have organized a local grass root's effort to solve a serious traffic safety and congestion problem. Our goal of aligned interest of local governments from both states in our area is a first. We believe we have started a process that will grow beyond this immediate issue and serve as an action body to address other issues of mutual concern in the future."

For now Paul Lohmann waits, concerned about the traffic impact on Beecher since recently completed traffic count studies reported Route 1 traffic through the business district is greater than the traffic counts on

divided four lane commercial roads serving other surrounding communities. Notes Lohmann, “besides our concern for safety, we worry that increased traffic will limit new commercial growth and seriously harm local business.”

About the authors

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