

Illinois Department of Transportation
Elgin O'Hare – West Bypass
Cook and DuPage Counties, Illinois

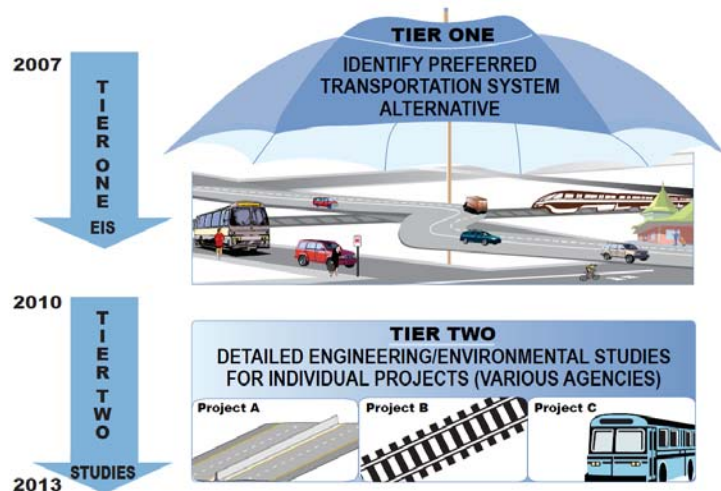
The EO-WB study began with a blank canvas and concluded with stakeholder consensus of a multi-modal transportation plan. The urban study area is immediately west of O'Hare International Airport, covers 27 communities, two counties, and 127 square miles. It is an environment of numerous planning, community, and engineering challenges where no single mode of transportation by itself was going to be the complete solution. What ultimately emerged from the process over 30 miles of freeway type facilities, over 30 miles of arterial improvements, transit elements that range from bus to rail, and completing missing links of bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Although good basic transportation planning principals were established at the onset to guide this process, it was quickly apparent that the study team would be challenged by many changing conditions, requiring swift and flexible management of the process. Among the challenges were:

- An area with a tremendous travel demand – 18 percent of all trips in the region
- An area with dense land use – second largest employment center in the state
- Community tensions attributed to airport expansion at O'Hare Airport
- No identifiable solution at the beginning of the study process
- Multiple transportation providers that could possibly have a stake in the final solution
- Design solutions complicated by major rail facilities, O'Hare Airport, and commercial and industrial development

Ultimately, the project team succeeded in working through these many challenges with an innovative planning process that addressed complex issues, using a context sensitive solutions based public involvement process, and using performance metrics that resonated with stakeholders.

Innovation The type of planning process applied to this study was central to its success. A tiered EIS process (first for a highway project in Illinois) was used for the study with the goal of developing a transportation planning decision for the area that could be supported by the stakeholders in Tier One. This process was well suited to an area anxious for solutions to their problems. Once the type and location of improvements were defined in Tier One, the process could then focus on the details of the Preferred Alternative in Tier Two (see Exhibit 1).

EXHIBIT 1
Elgin O'Hare - West Bypass Planning Process



Context Sensitive Solutions

Consensus was built one block at a time. A variety of forums and techniques were used to gain stakeholder input and consensus. Over the course of Tier One over 130 meetings were held with project stakeholders involving them in every aspect of the process from identifying travel issues and

problems, sensitive community resources that should be avoided, community values, project purpose and need, identification of alternatives, measures to evaluate alternatives, and input to the Preferred Alternative. A disciplined engagement of numerous stakeholder interests is hard work and exemplifies the full intent of Context Sensitive Solutions, because with stakeholder involvement the final solution provided the transportation service and performance that they were seeking while preserving those community values and resources that they prized most. The process worked so well, that one community took on the task of making their opinions known with over 900 people attending Public Meeting #3, and submitting more than 30,000 comments stating a preference for a particular alternative.

Complexity The study area is rich with complex engineering issues including its proximity to O'Hare Airport, major railroad facilities, and regional flood control reservoirs. Extensive coordination was conducted to avoid air space violations at O'Hare, short-term and long-term operational issues for the freight and commuter rail service, and maintenance and operational issues for the flood control reservoirs. Further coordination with O'Hare Airport was also conducted to make certain that the EO-WB project would be compatible with the advancing construction of the O'Hare Modernization Program.

Performance The Preferred Alternative emerging from the process achieves marked increases in travel performance. A measure of regional travel efficiency showed an improvement of 10% where more cars are managed more efficiently on the system. The Preferred Alternative also reduces congestion on the system during peak travel periods by 15% achieving notable reduction in congestion on secondary roads and maintaining longer trips on major roads. The average speed of travel will improve with an overall gain in speed of 8% on principal arterials and travel time improvements from the west to O'Hare of up to 49%. Improvements in accessibility were also measured and more trips (>50%) will be closer to a freeway connection. Lastly, the proposed transit improvements would increase the number of transit trips by 37% or almost 30,000 trips a day. Of equal importance is another measure of performance – job creation. Using an econometric model, the project team estimates that over 20,000 short term jobs will be created by the construction of the project and 60,000 long term jobs will be created by the improved access to the study area.

In summer of 2010, the ROD for Tier One will be complete and preparations are now underway to begin Tier Two. In keeping with the theme of the EO-WB planning process, Tier Two will address the issues that are now ripe for consideration, which include the detailed engineering layout, environmental mitigation requirements, construction sequencing, and financing strategies. Tier Two will be largely completed by the end of 2012 and will set the stage for the preparation of the final design and construction documents. The actual implementation of the project, like the planning process, will likely bring together diverse funding organizations that may further brand the uniqueness of this project.