

IDOT Fall Planning Conference 2013

Fairview Heights, Illinois

DMMC staff attended the 2013 IDOT Fall Planning Conference in Fairview Heights, a suburban community outside St. Louis, in late September. This year's focus was *Multimodal: Making Connections*, and featured sessions concerning a variety of topics including freight movement, bike trails, and infrastructure planning. DMMC strives to keep members informed about issues that could affect them or that they may find interesting. Below are highlights of the sessions attended:

Framework for a Regional Agenda to Leverage MAP-21 – Ernie Perry, Mid-America Freight Coalition

Ernie Perry, Facilitator and Associate Researcher at Mid-America Freight Coalition (MAFC), explained that the 10-state region that makes up the Coalition (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin) contains 22% of the nation's population and sees 23% of the nation's total truck tonnage but also sees 63% of its total rail tonnage and contains nearly all of its inland waterways. Of all 50 states, Illinois ranks 3rd in both truck and rail tonnage volume. Because of this, the MAFC is completing the Regional Freight Study, which they hope will help maximize the benefits that quality transportation can provide to the regional economy. The study will focus on regional and national connections and movements, economic advantages that can be found in the MAFC region, and rapidly changing conditions. By focusing on these points, they hope to lay the groundwork for new multimodal systems and innovation.

Freight has recently been incorporated into federal transportation policy and MAP-21, the nation's transportation bill, contains several freight provisions. These include the establishment of a national freight policy, National Freight Network, and a strategic plan. It also requires the collection of data, planning, and the presentation of performance reports.

The National Freight Network (NFN) will be composed of a Primary Freight Network (PFN) containing significant freight corridors. These corridors will include all facets of freight movement including roads, rails, waterways, warehouses, etc. The Regional Freight Study hopes to identify the region's freight system that will become a part of the PFN. The identified regional system will emphasize a multimodal network.

The State of Illinois is putting together a Freight Advisory Council that will be responsible for freight multimodal planning. The Council's goals are to maximize the economic benefits of all transportation modes, improve multimodal connections, and ensure that the state remains a primary freight hub. It will be composed of public and private sector representatives involved with different aspects of freight transportation throughout the State.

The Chicago region is one of the largest hubs for freight movements in North America. It stands to gain significant economic benefits from a properly outlined freight corridor.

The National Freight Network: <http://www.ops.fhwa.dot.gov/freight/infrastructure/nfn/>

The State of Illinois Freight Advisory Council: <http://www.dot.state.il.us/freightcouncil/index.html>

Chicago to St. Louis High-Speed Rail – Bruce Nelson, Parsons Brinckerhoff

Rail travel is becoming an increasingly popular mode of transportation for residents of the Chicago area to reach other parts of the state and region. In 2007 the State of Illinois funded an expansion of Amtrak's service frequency. With no improvements other than more frequent service, ridership increased 225% between Chicago and St. Louis, 139% between Chicago and Carbondale, and 93% between Chicago and Quincy between 2006 and 2012. In addition, with no schedule change at all, ridership between Chicago and Milwaukee increased 50%. Total ridership throughout Illinois increased from 948,000 passengers per year to 1.82 million passengers per year, a 92% increase. Since 2010 consistent work has been underway to establish an increasingly faster rail network between Chicago and St. Louis.

In July 2012, the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) conducted a survey regarding Americans' willingness to use HSR. About 62% said they are very or somewhat likely to use it and 45% believe it's more environmentally friendly than cars. However, cost, travel time reductions, and how to reach their final destination from the station ("the last mile") are major concerns.

IDOT received a \$1.54 billion HSR grant from the federal government to upgrade the 284 mile route between Chicago and St. Louis and by 2017 completed track and equipment upgrades will allow for top speeds of 110 MPH in some areas. This will lead to a 45-minute travel time reduction for regular service and a 1-hour travel time reduction for express service. Service could eventually continue from St. Louis to Kansas City.

In total, the project consists of over 475 miles of new track, 21 new or improved sidings (low-speed track sections distinct from the main line), 270 new or improved grade crossings, 7 new or remodeled stations, 6 new high-speed train sets, an advanced signaling system, and, since the rails are also utilized by freight rail traffic, capacity improvements for reliable freight service. Stops between Chicago and St. Louis will include Dwight, Pontiac, Normal, Lincoln, Springfield, Carlinville, and Alton.

IDOT website for HSR between Chicago and St. Louis: <http://www.idothsr.org/>

Making Trails Count in Illinois: The Case for Prioritizing Trails in the Prairie State – Steve Buchtel, Trails for Illinois

Cycling is becoming an increasingly valid means of transportation in the state of Illinois. Before the 1960s, cycling was considered a hobby. People considered anyone who thought of it as a means from getting from point A to point B as crazy. However, in 1963, following the construction of the Lakefront Trail, people started to reconsider their earlier opinions about cycling. By 1970, there were 1.2 million cyclists traversing 200 miles of on-street trails even though gas was at its cheapest. However it wasn't until the late '90s that bike culture found its way onto the radar of planners.

The presenter recently conducted a survey that found that many people in the suburbs love riding their bikes on trails but hate having to load their bikes into/onto their vehicles and drive to them. Bike lanes are an excellent way to solve this problem as they take the vehicle out of the equation.

Trails are most successful when they integrate "the triple bottom line": people, profit, and planet. The "people" aspect involves marketing the trail through trail head signs and directional signs. Many underutilized trails are simply unknown due to a lack of signage. The "profit" aspect involves using the trail as a traffic generator for businesses. People who use trails often like having a clear destination to go

to and/or a place to pick up snacks or gear along the way. Businesses located along trails that cater to trail users through signage and inviting entry points stand to gain economically. The “planet” aspect involves using the trails as a means for environmental stewardship.

Some of Illinois’ neighboring states have studied how much of an impact their trails have on their state’s economy. Iowa, for example, found that its trails annually contribute \$400 million to the state economy; Wisconsin found that its trails contribute \$1.5 billion. Illinois doesn’t know what its figures are and currently there are no plans to find out. Illinois could do a much better job at utilizing trails as a means for economic benefit. Even safety and security are subpar on most trails around the state due to deterioration and/or poor planning.

Trails for Illinois conducted a survey of trail users on several different trails located throughout the state. The survey, titled Make Trails Count, included 27 questions concerning a variety of aspects about trail use and had 680 respondents. Below are some of the highlights:

- 43% of respondents used the trail for health reasons
- 32% had spent or will spend over 150 minutes on the trail
- 30% use the trails 21 or more days in the fall
- 33% spent money during their trail use
 - 35% of the above 33% who spent money did so at restaurants/bars
- Most purchases made during trail use were for less than \$15, however the average amount spent was \$30.40 (some users had bought bikes or other expensive gear)
- 17% were visiting from out of state
- 5% spent the night during their trail journey

The full results of the Make Trails Count survey: <http://trailsforillinois.tumblr.com/maketrailscount>
The Trails for Illinois website: <http://trailsforillinois.tumblr.com/>

Changing Cultures at State DOTs – Eric Sundquist, State Smart Transportation Initiative

As the nation’s mobility habits change, so should the culture at State DOTs. IDOT is one of 19 DOTs that make up the State Smart Transportation Initiative, a network of state DOTs aimed at reforming themselves to “promote transportation practices that advance environmental sustainability and equitable economic development while maintaining high standards of governmental efficiency and transparency.” Through their membership with the network, IDOT has access to a wide range of technical assistance. The initiative promotes a change in culture due to recent, significant shifts in both mobility and transportation funding. Some of these shifts include a consistent drop in national vehicle miles traveled since 2003, Highway Trust Fund costs exceeding revenues since 2008 (and are projected to continue doing so), the share of highway funds becoming less user funded and more non-user funded, walkable neighborhoods having become more desirable places to live and work than non-walkable ones, and high population and job growth in cities (particularly downtown areas) with fewer vehicles entering the city.

The presentation outlined seven catalysts for change: budget, legislation, leadership, staff and internal process, technology, game-changing events, and information/data/research. The initiative is assisting IDOT in utilizing these catalysts with its own cultural change.

The State Smart Transportation Initiative website: <http://www.ssti.us/>