

In October DMMC staff attended the annual IDOT Fall Planning Conference held in St. Charles, Illinois. This year's theme was "Change. Challenge. Innovate." and featured a variety of sessions catering to the development and implementation of innovative transportation planning practices.

## Keynote

Randy Blankenhorn, Illinois Secretary of Transportation, kicked the Conference off by providing the keynote speech. It began with a brief overview of the feedback received during the 39-city IDOT Listening Tour that took place earlier this year – feedback that will be utilized to establish priorities for future investment in Illinois's transportation systems. Blankenhorn was quick to recognize that one of the more common issues heard during the tour was the need for more reliable transportation funding streams. He said the state needs to take a long-term approach to infrastructure investment and Public Private Partnerships should play a substantial role - government can't be solely relied on.

He also stated that the way the State currently views transportation needs to be updated; IDOT's tools are behind the times and current planning efforts commonly consider issues for the present while ignoring the future. He vowed to ensure the organization's perspective going forward will be more long-term and innovation-focused in order to remain competitive with other states. With self-driving cars becoming a reality and a millennial population that prefers transportation options, he believes the Department needs to rethink transportation priorities and be more proactive in policy planning for evolving trends. He admitted that in doing so, the Department should not be afraid to occasionally fail – a necessity for regaining the prowess the Department once had. Recent innovations in gathering and distributing information should be utilized in this effort. While paper maps are still popular, travel applications for electronic devices and dynamic highway information boards are the new norm.

Furthermore, he stated that the Department is examining ways to make the State's transportation system more comprehensive. Being a national transportation hub, he believes it is crucial that multiple modes are able to function efficiently and complement one another.

To conclude, he recognized that it has been readily apparent that getting project plans through the IDOT approval process has been unnecessarily time consuming and inefficient. Through lean training, the Department is reducing various review times by upwards of several months.

## IDOT Update

An update on current IDOT business was given that included an overview of work/upcoming work on various projects, plans, and studies including the Statewide Congestion Analysis Study, the All-Hazards Assessment, the Statewide Public Transit Plan, and the next Long Range Transportation Plan.

The current Long Range Transportation Plan, implemented in 2012, includes a policy to address congestion. As a product of this policy, IDOT is currently completing a plan for a Statewide Congestion Analysis Study. The study will examine all modes and intermodal connections in the state and how they can operate more cohesively, efficiently, and effectively. As part of the study, IDOT is requesting input

from system users. This input is being gathered through an online survey that can be completed here: <http://illinoiscongestionstudy.com/survey/>.

IDOT continues work on its All-Hazards Assessment. This assessment, when completed, will help IDOT design projects with consideration for both natural and manmade disasters. The final report is expected to be released in fall of 2016.

IDOT's Statewide Public Transportation Plan is currently being developed for fiscal years 2017 to 2022. The plan, set to be released sometime in 2016, is approximately 50% complete.

The next Long Range State Transportation Plan is due to be completed in 2017. Its completion is part of both state and federal statutes that require IDOT publish a new long range plan every five years. The plan will largely be an update of the current plan, continuing focus on providing IDOT with a long-term vision toward development and implementation of an integrated transportation system. The plan is being completed in-house. Previously developed action items are currently being narrowed to achieve greater focus. In March 2016, IDOT will reach out to statewide MPOs and other stakeholders for further input.

## **FHWA Update**

An update on current Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) business was given that included information on the successor to MAP-21 and the Administration's increased focus on freight movements.

Both the House and Senate have proposed separate but similar federal transportation bills to succeed MAP-21, the DRIVE Act and STRR, respectively. Both are six-year bills with only three years of funding currently allocated. The reason for the longer-term bill is to allow for a greater amount of time until a successor must be implemented and so state officials who depend on federal funding for multi-year projects can feel more confident in its availability. It has not yet been determined where the funding for the latter half of either bill would come from, but could include revenues from tax reform, corporate tax reform, or increases in the gas tax. Both bills look to continue a majority of MAP-21's provisions as well as build on current programs. Increases in STP funds are possible under both, however proposed transit funding would be greater than MAP-21 under DRIVE and less under STRR.

*Since the Conference, the United States House and Senate have negotiated a deal on a \$305 billion, five year transportation bill. Called Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, the bill raises funding at both the highway and transit levels. National highway funding will increase from \$40.3 billion in 2015 to \$42.4 billion in 2016 and \$46.4 billion by 2020. National transit funding will increase from \$10.7 in 2015 to \$11.8 billion in 2016 and \$12.6 billion by 2020. IDOT estimates that the bill will provide approximately \$1.5 billion for Illinois highways per year, \$134 million more per year than currently. CMAP estimates that under the bill, Illinois will receive an 11% increase in federal funding for transit, from \$540 million in 2015 to \$600 million. Also under the bill, the Surface Transportation Program (STP) will be converted to a block grant program to allow for greater flexibility of STP for state and local governments. Over its five year period, the bill will increase the amount of STP funding that is distributed*

*to local governments from 50% to 55%. It also facilitates freight movement by refocusing funding for a National Highway Freight Program and a Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Projects Program as well as increases funding available for bridges off the National Highway System. Additional information can be found here: [http://transportation.house.gov/uploadedfiles/joint\\_explanatory\\_statement.pdf](http://transportation.house.gov/uploadedfiles/joint_explanatory_statement.pdf).*

MAP-21 has maintained a strong emphasis on freight and encourages each state to establish a Freight Advisory Committee. As of June, 2015, 30 states had followed suit and 38 are currently developing freight plans. With the next federal transportation bill, it is expected that MAP-21's highway focused freight network would be replaced with a new multimodal network. Multimodal freight elements will then need to be included as part of state freight plans and an established freight advisory committee must expand representation to multimodal stakeholders in order to receive federal freight network funding.

## **Utilizing INVEST for Plans and Projects**

The desire for local governments and transportation agencies to develop sustainable transportation services has prompted the FHWA to develop a new tool to assist in implementing sustainability best practices. The Infrastructure Voluntary Evaluation Sustainability Tool (INVEST) is a web-based collection of voluntary best practices designed to help these governments and agencies implement a Triple Bottom Line based sustainability approach throughout the lifecycle of their projects and programs (Triple Bottom Line being a balance of social, economic, and environmental benefits). The INVEST tool is composed of four modules, each catering to a different circumstance for when INVEST can be implemented: System Planning for States (SPS), System Planning for Regions (SPR), Project Development (PD) and Operation and Maintenance (OM). Each of these modules has individual criteria that describe a particular sustainability best practice and assigns a point value according to impact on transportation sustainability. Total points can be compared to a number of sustainability "achievement level" benchmarks. There are four achievement levels: Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum. All projects can be tracked and updated at [www.sustainablehighways.org](http://www.sustainablehighways.org) and all tracking and project information input is conducted by the project sponsor. The evaluation criteria is periodically updated so it is helpful to continue active project management.

## **The Need to Invest in Transportation**

Representatives from the Illinois Chamber of Commerce and the Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) presented reasons it is important to embrace investment in transportation.

With an emphasis on freight movement, the Chamber feels that funding for transportation is not keeping up with demand. While funding continues to become more challenging to acquire, a growing number of exports and goods movement will lead to increases of freight tonnage of tens of millions on Illinois's rail and waterways and of hundreds of millions on Illinois's roadways. Increasing investment in Illinois's transportation networks is an effort that requires both state and federal support, quick action, and substantial education.

MPC focused on explaining the economic benefits of transportation investment. Several examples from around the Country were examined, including the City of Chicago's new Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Ordinance. Through implementation of this ordinance, which encourages new construction near transportation, it is expected that 50% more people will be able to live near transit than otherwise, that local retail sales will increase by about \$450 million, and that local tax revenues will increase by about \$200 million.