



Contents

- 1 History of Route 53
- 2 North Section
- 3 Middle Section and South Section
- 4 Meeting Desk
- 6 Not for Profit? Questionnaire
- 7 Time Line

www.cssforum.org/IL53

The history of Route 53 has been a long one and we still have a long way to go. Because you have moved into the neighborhood, you have become part of the history that is the Illinois Route 53 Project.

This project started for the stakeholders in December 1999. A group of citizens caught wind of a widening project by IDOT for Route 53 from North Avenue in Lombard to Osage Drive by the Morton Arboretum. Originally the entire stretch was to be a five lane design with sidewalks three feet or closer to the curb and a Two-Way Left-Turn Lane (TWLTL)

The citizens had other plans for what they wanted. A more moderate three lane design. But they knew that they needed organization in order to succeed in talking with IDOT. They formed themselves under the Banner of Neighbors Influencing 53 Improvement or NIFTI for short. NIFTI was very successful in forming relationships with elected officials and other agencies along the route. NIFTI also sent a letter of intent to IDOT and requested a meeting. IDOT waited 18 months before responding. In the meantime NIFTI forged a formidable coalition and hired their own consulting firm to look at the forecast numbers to see if the five-lane expansion was needed. The outcome was that the traffic volumes did not warrant the five-lane expansion. NIFTI then presented a three-lane alternative. IDOT would not agree to this. Finally with political pressure the project was divided into three parts. North Avenue to Roosevelt Road (North Section), Roosevelt Road to Butterfield Road (the Middle Section) and Butterfield to Osage Drive (the Southern Section).

The North Section went forward to public hearing. It passed the public hearing with changes in the design. The end of phase I studies will be late summer to early fall 2006 and Phase II will begin on the part of the section from North Avenue to Roosevelt for land acquisition and Construction will only be done in 2008 (latest understanding from IDOT depending on funding availability) from North Avenue to St.. Charles Road.

The Middle Section was dropped completely from the project.

The South Section is in Phase I. There are issues with FEMA lands, Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) and restoration funding, as far as the final design outcome.

Continued on Page 3

The North Section

The above picture, though vegetated, Lombard has so far only shown interest in a grass and small trees with very little vegetative variety and though an improved rain absorption, not as good as we could have. To the right is a parking lot vegetated median in Morton Arboretum. This vegetated median is designed to be biologically diverse, incredibly low maintenance, (garbage resistant), perennial planting with the ability to absorb a heavy rain. In fact, curb cuts which you can see half way up the picture, allow water from the parking lot to flow into the median. This could be done at the “mid block” pedestrian crossing areas and other areas where water is a concern. Other concerns however are pedestrian safety issues and car identification. Vegetation must be of appropriate scale.

Lombard is the responsible agency for the maintenance and choosing of vegetation and lights along Route 53 and the multipurpose path. 53 Neighbors United needs to work with Lombard for input on these aspects of the final design.

As far as 53 Neighbors United was able to gather from IDOT consultants who are working this project, the money for North Avenue to St. Charles is in the program. There is, however, a program update coming out and they do not know the contents yet. All consultants are in the same state of awareness as 53 Neighbors United at this time concerning the update.

The project is still in the final part of phase I-design. The only thing left on that is the Section 4(f) statement for Forest Preserve impacts. IDOT’s consultants as of June 2006 recently sent IDOT the latest, and we hope final, version of the document. IDOT wants design approval by this fall.



IDOT cannot do land acquisition or begin preparation of construction plans without design approval. Land acquisition is expected to begin late this year 2006.

Other issues for this section will be truck traffic reduction, noise, flooding in back yards, safety for walkers and cyclists, congestion control, and traffic calming. All these issues will need 53 Neighbors United to re-establish connections to elected officials and municipal and county professionals.

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If you wish to volunteer or attend a meeting watch the 53 Neighbors United website at

www.cssforum.org/IL53

Background continued

Now there were twice the number of active projects to watch. NIFTI after three years of hard work, went after certain agreements from the Secretary of Transportation Kirk Brown in December 2003. Behind closed doors, Senator Cronin, Bob Gans of NIFTI and Kirk Brown struck an agreement where construction would only take place from North Avenue to St. Charles Road between the funding years 2003 to 2008. After the five year funding plan was over, then the rest of the project south of St. Charles could be funded on the following five year plan for construction to Roosevelt. With Phase I completed for the entire stretch, and activity in the public hearing corridor, it is possible that building per agreement could resume south of St. Charles as early as 2009. However, that entirely depends on future funding availability.

That was the last major act of NIFTI. The group's website (www.nifti.net) went down and they gave the left over donated money to a food pantry as they originally stated they would when they felt their mission was finished.

Lombard was not represented well in these negotiations and so another group arose, 53 Neighbors United. 53 Neighbors United realized that they were in a much later phase of the project design. The group first beseeched the new Governor Blagojevich, asking the village of Lombard and Glen Ellyn to support them in the request for a three-lane road. The request was denied from the Governor's office. 53 Neighbors United then sought to bring a collaborative push so that the road would NOT be a five lane cross section like shown in picture A but a more contextually sensitive road that had a more residential appeal like in figure B.



Figure A: IDOT's original plan for Lombard. Five-lane road design with sidewalks 3 feet or less from the curb.

Figure B: A better contextual design for Lombard. Glen Ellyn has a n all concrete raised median which is not the best for Glen Ellyn near the park district. Throughout the Lombard corridor starting at Surrey Drive toward the north, four-lane divided, narrower through lanes, with sidewalks 3 to 5 feet and a multipurpose path on the right connected to the Prairie Path and the Northwestern Trail. 12-foot median, with U-turn capability for driveway access, adjusted intersection design for U-turns.



Meeting Desk

CSS Meeting Summary of May 17, 2006 for the Valley View and 53 Neighbors United (Excerpt)

Paul Schneider P.E. IDOT

The purpose of the project is to improve the safety of this section of Illinois Route 53 by improving the roadway geometry, raising the roadway out of the floodway, and by providing adequate capacity.

To meet this purpose, two alignment alternatives have been developed. Each alternate extends the existing four-lane section north of Park Boulevard to meet the existing four-lane section south of the Butterfield Road intersection. This will provide a roadway with a continuous cross section consisting of two lanes in each direction, separated by a curbed barrier median. In order to better manage access to Illinois Route 53, a traffic signal is proposed at Ironwood Drive and a median break with left turn lane is proposed for Osage Drive. Tamarack Drive and Arboretum Drive will be closed via cul-de-sacs at Illinois Route 53.

Alternate 1 would raise the roadway above the 100-year flood stage, but maintains the existing Illinois Route 53 alignment within the floodway of the East Branch of the DuPage River. Due to significant changes in grade, this alternative would likely require 9 residential relocations. This alternate could not be constructed under traffic and would require a full detour of traffic for at least one (1) construction season.

Alternate 2 would raise the roadway and shift the Illinois Route 53 alignment to the west, away from the East Branch of the DuPage River and partially out of its floodway. The proposed minimum parkway width adjacent to Valley View would be approximately 60' minimum.

Alternate 2 will likely require 13 residential relocations. Because of the shifted alignment, this alternate could be constructed under traffic, making a detour unnecessary.

The residents raised some questions regarding the need for a four-lane section. They asked whether a less intrusive improvement such as cul-de-sac's and intersection improvements could be considered. The ADT from Park Boulevard to the south Wal-Mart entrance was discussed and the residents speculated that the ADT remained 17,000 until the south Wal-Mart entrance and then increases dramatically to the north due to all the Wal-Mart traffic. IDOT stated that this project is using 2030 traffic projections and that four traffic lanes are required.

You can read the whole letter in it's entirety including the participants www.cssforum.org/IL53/IDOT_520News.htm

Ray Ribich to IDOT

The importance of that meeting can't be overstated from the standpoint of the need to bring in many groups and diverse expertise if a true restoration of the area is to be realized. Without some kind of significant restoration commitment (well beyond just the removal of the old highway), I could not personally support the building of a new highway within the current open space areas, however desirable, efficient, and cost-effective that alternative is. I believe that position is consistent with FEMA's, that major additional benefits need to be realized (beyond safe movement of additional traffic) if they were to take the unprecedented step of cancelling the present open space in perpetuity agreements and switching them to the east.

Mary Kaufman to IDOT

53 Neighbors United at this time is not voicing an opinion on IDOT's alternative until Valley View residents and Board give a clear indication which they prefer and how they would like us to represent them. We wish to get input from as many residents as possible.

Middle Section

From Roosevelt Road to Butterfield Road, no studies are being conducted at this time. However, once the construction is finished in the North Section, and South Section it is reasonable to assume that new studies will take place, if for no other reason than for IDOT to assess the impacts of the new road design to the north and south of the middle section.

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South Section

The south section became funded under the IL 56/Butterfield widening and intersection upgrade project. Thus IDOT has it listed as a separate project from the north section. Resident's primary concerns are the possible of additional home acquisitions; watershed pollution, noise pollution and flooding; as well as the possibility of watershed restoration. After the April 2004 meeting, not much progress has been made on these concerns.

Permits and agreements with the Federal Emergency Management Agency seriously limited the degree to which Route 53 can be expanded. FEMA agreements in this section have provided flood relief by removing homes to restore the open space. These agreements dictate that the land be kept in open space "in perpetuity" and that "no impermeable surfaces" (such as concrete) be constructed on the land thus restored.

Given the original five lane design (now a four lane divided design) massive land acquisition is needed to maintain the vegetated swales that currently filter rain run off in the Corridor.

Things remained at a bureaucratic standstill. 53 Neighbors United and Valley View residents were then called to IDOT in May 2006 to look at two alternatives. We were told that the county and FEMA demanded of IDOT public involvement before any further movement would be done from FEMA's end. IDOT told those residents in attendance that they would be leasing land from FEMA for the road, and that as a consequence of this, IDOT would never be able to expand Route 53 beyond the four-lane undivided design. A future late summer meeting will be held in open house format for residents and interested parties to view. A Public Hearing is scheduled for later this Fall.

53 Neighbors United plans to hold a meeting in the Valley or at the Board meeting to get input from the residents.



Updates and Information Page

53 Neighbors United is talking about incorporation because of the following serious issues:

- *Length of time that Route 53 is taking in order to go through planning to construction*
- *The possibility of further studies showing something unpleasant” in the middle corridor;*
- *Flooding issues in the north and south*
- *Nonpoint specific water pollution issues*
- *Land and home acquisition process*
- *Sidewalk and bike path funding outside of municipality boundaries*
- *Safe Routes to school issues*
- *Trucking issues*
- *Landscaping issues*
- *Noise*
- *Lighting*
- *Flood plain, River bed and habitat restoration*
- *A high percentage of turnover in IDOT, elected officials, redistricting that does not benefit the Valley View corridor;*

Fifty-Three Neighbors United has discussed the possibility of becoming a professional not-for-profit organization dedicated to serving the residents in and along the corridor in regard to these concerns.

Current estimates are that membership would cost \$10 dollars a year. For that you would get a biannual newsletter like this one. An Annual Meeting where updates, contact information, agency presentations and voting on future agendas can take place, plus a way to voice concerns that have not been forwarded.

The Board would be a representative where every section would have two members from the residential area sitting on the board. The rest of the board would be appointed positions who could serve to help keep 53 Neighbors United well connected and professional. 53 Neighbors United would try to run on membership dues and grants in order to cover the printing costs, web upgrades and hosting, meeting costs, educational programs and client hours provided.

Currently a survey is located on the 53 Neighbors United Website. www.cssforum.org/IL53 Meetings and events will also be on the website with location and contact information plus agenda. We thank you for reading this brochure, and hope you found it informative.

Sincerely,

Mary Ann Kaufman
53 Neighbors United



Timeline for Illinois Route 53

December 1999 to Spring 2000- The early meetings (following Illinois First funding announcements), formulations of direction & strategy.

Spring 2000-Initial letters of support; development of in-depth power point presentation on the NIFTI vision for Route 53 and our communities.

Spring-Summer 2000-Initial fund raising efforts; presentations to community groups of the power point.

June 3, 2000-Letter to John Kos with copies of letters of support.

Summer-Fall 2000-Further seeking of support and efforts with local County Board members.

November, 2000 -League of Women Voters public forum- First open interchange with IDOT; first presentation to a large audience of our power point presentation; follow up news articles, and fund raising calls.

February, 2001- CEMCON (independent Warrenville engineering firm) report analyzing CATS (Chicago Area Transportation Study) traffic data; press conference; major follow-up.

April 23, 2001- First (and thus far only) full, formal meeting with IDOT, at IDOT offices, Schaumburg. IDOT essentially rejects 3-lane as an option; does not offer to set up working groups with NIFTI to reach compromises or alternatives to the 5-lane.

May, 2001-Meeting and presentation to Representative Judy Biggert, and DuPage County Board Chairman Schillerstrom.

June, 2001-Major rally at Glenbard South; major public comment presentation to the full County Board; 2nd presentation in July; each followed with good press coverage; Increasing public support.

June--July 2001--Demonstrations at IDOT and Senator Philip's offices; letter writing and phone call campaigns; (all done only after IDOT failed to genuinely engage or work with the citizens group, but once done, greatly increased public awareness, sympathy, and support); signs along the highway campaign.

July- August, 2001--Independence Day parades in Glen Ellyn and Wheaton; ribbon campaign to highlight our trees and shrubs.

Throughout 2001-Ongoing behind the scenes support and advocacy by our representatives; ongoing research on traffic and safety studies and 3-lane feasibility; discovery of Context Sensitive Design paradigm in highway building; ongoing contact with public officials. Completion of concise 4-minute video of the NIFTI vision.

October 3, 2001-Roskam press conference announcing Illinois Secretary of Transportation Kirk Brown's letter (9/28/01) (which cancelled any improvement for a 2.6 mile stretch and furthered IDOT's 5-lane plan for north of Roosevelt and south of Butterfield).

October 17, 2001-Meeting with FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) Region V staff (relative to IDOT's request to build a new section of road in the Valley outside the floodway of the East Branch and in the open space covenant lands).

October 25, 2001-Meeting with Spring Avenue area and other residents; charting the course for greater involvement of all.

November, 2001-Meetings with State Senator Dan Cronin; drafting of model legislation for citizen participation in decisions and recognition of context sensitive design.

January 7, 2002-Showing of the NIFTI video to the DuPage County Environmental Committee.



Early artist's depiction of what a 3-lane road would look like on Route 53 with sidewalks

January 14, 2002-NIFTI makes formal reply to Kirk Brown's letter to Pate Philip of 9/28/01, rejecting IDOT's no-improvement for one section, and five lanes for another.

January 21, 2002-Press Conference- Model Legislation initiative. Senator Cronin presents initiative for an amendment to mandate context sensitive design issues and proper acknowledgement of community concerns in highway building.

February, 2002-DuPage Co. Chairman Schillerstrom appoints Ad-Hoc Committee on Route 53.

February 17, 2002-Senator Cronin and a NIFTI rep meet with Transportation Secretary Kirk Brown in Springfield to negotiate on NIFTI's moderate proposals for Route 53.

April 12, 2002-IDOT responds, rejecting 3-lane option entirely, rejecting no-build option north of Roosevelt, and placing responsibility for requesting turn lane improvements on local municipalities, including their bearing 50% of the cost of such improvements.

April 22, 2002-Village Board of Glen Ellyn unanimously reaffirms its opposition to a five lane cross section through their village.

May, 2002-Traffic and accident studies done by Glen Ellyn and Lombard show significantly lower volume and accident rates than figures quoted by IDOT.

May 14, 2002-NIFTI makes its case before the Ad Hoc Committee. Mary Kaufman's papers on Context Sensitive Design and Conversion of Route 53 to a 3-lane are presented for review. IDOT makes its case on May 28.

June 6, 2002-The Village of Lombard Board reverses its previous position in support of a 4-lane design through Lombard, and supports either a three-lane design, or working with Glen Ellyn for turn lane and intersection improvements to the existing 2 lane

As of the Spring of 2006, NIFTI donated the rest of the donated monies to a food pantry. NIFTI's website has gone down. For all their hard work, the three lane vision was not realized for Illinois Route 53.