

NEWS

10 Environmental Groups Opposing Prairie Parkway

Contacts:

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Stacy Meyers-Glen – Openlands – 312/863-6265

Shannon Fisk – Environmental Law and Policy Center – 312/795-3731

Jan Strasma – Citizens Against the Sprawlway – 630/863-6669

ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS OPPOSE PRAIRIE PARKWAY, FINDING IMPACTS FAR OUTWEIGH LIMITED BENEFIT

Ten environmental and public interest groups Wednesday announced their united opposition to the Prairie Parkway, citing the state's finding of "quite small" benefits as not warranting the \$1 billion cost and the significant environmental damage resulting from building the highway between I-80 and I-88 in Kane, Kendall, and Grundy counties.

The groups' opposition came in more than 40 pages of comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the 35-mile highway. Joining in the opposition are Center for Neighborhood Technology, Citizens Against the Sprawlway, Environmental Law and Policy Center, Friends of the Fox River, Kendall Citizens for Farmland Protection, Natural Resources Defense Council, Nettle Creek Watershed Conservancy, Openlands, Prairie Rivers Network, and Illinois Chapter of the Sierra Club,

The comments are available online at <http://www.sprawlway.org>.

"IDOT simply has not shown that the limited benefits of building the highway are justified," said Stacy Meyers-Glen, Policy Coordinator with Openlands. "The negative results are too great, including destroying thousands of acres of farmland, damaging high quality river and stream environments, and accelerating sprawl."

The groups support the alternative of upgrading the existing road and transit network in the three counties, focusing on Illinois 47, the main north-south route in the area, as well as planned improvements to other state highways and arterial roads.

"Ironically, many of these planned improvements to existing roads may not be built because construction money would be diverted to the Prairie Parkway," said Jan Strasma of Citizens Against the Sprawlway. "Our tax dollars should pay for road projects throughout the region, instead of focusing on one highway with doubtful benefit and substantial harm."

IDOT considered two routes for the Prairie Parkway, both routes beginning at I-88 at Kaneville. South of Yorkville, one route would angle southeast to I-80 near Minooka and the other proceeds south to I-80 near Morris.

The difference in traffic conditions “appears to be quite small” between building the Prairie Parkway and not building it, according to IDOT in the DEIS for the proposed highway (page 3-33).

According to IDOT’s estimates, the average speed on regional roads in 2030 would be 21.84 miles per hour if the Prairie Parkway is built, just a fraction faster than the average speed of 21.63 mph if the highway is not built. Other measures of traffic conditions revealed a similarly small improvement with the Prairie Parkway over not building the highway.

“Is two-tenths of a mile per hour worth \$1 billion?” asked Strasma of Citizens Against the Sprawlway.

“IDOT’s inadequate review of the impacts that the Prairie Parkway would have on waterways is particularly egregious,” said Meyers-Glen of Openlands. “The agency used outdated and inaccurate information to assess the impacts of the highway on the Fox River, Big Rock Creek, Aux Sable Creek, and other waterways.”

In their analysis of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, the groups found other major deficiencies, including:

- Underestimating or mischaracterizing the impact the Prairie Parkway would have on prime farmland. Alternative B2 (the Morris route) impacts 2,510 acres of farmland and 170 farms. Alternative B5 (Minooka route) affects 2,560 acres of farmland and 189 farms. More than 60 farms would lose some structures, including either 9 or 11 farm residences, depending on the route. Further, the DEIS estimates that 4,800 to 5,400 additional acres of farmland will be lost because of development triggered by construction of the Prairie Parkway.
- Focusing on north-south transportation routes without addressing the east-west transportation needs. In fact, construction of the highway would result in the closing of 13 east-west roads. Many of the transportation needs are for access to jobs in DuPage and Will counties to the east of the Prairie Parkway corridor, needs that would be best served by better east-west access.
- Understating or ignoring the inconsistency of the Prairie Parkway with the efforts of Kane County, Kendall County, Grundy County, and others local entities to limit sprawl and protect agricultural land and open space from development.
- Failing to study the air quality impacts of the Prairie Parkway and the substantial car and truck traffic that it would bring to the project area.

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