

Item #9A:
Village President Underwood
IL Route 53 - Update



June 23, 2016

Dear Long Grove Residents,

A joint press release is being issued today by the Village of Long Grove and the Village of Hawthorn Woods regarding the potential Rt. 53 extension into Lake County. Long Grove Village President Angie Underwood and Hawthorn Woods Mayor Joseph Mancino are urging the Illinois Tollway Authority and Governor Bruce Rauner to stop the impending Environmental Impact Study. A copy of this will appear in our next Village newsletter, *The Bridge*, and is attached.

If built, this project will impact our environment, finances, quality of life, personal property values, and the character of our Village forever. As the Village previously informed you, on May 16, 2016, Lake County Chairman Aaron Lawlor made a stunning announcement that he no longer supports the Rt. 53 extension project. Since that time, both opponents and proponents of the project have been actively pursuing their agendas publicly and privately.

The next step in this project is the Environmental Impact Study (EIS). This study was to begin this year at an estimated cost of \$40 to \$50 million dollars, but the Illinois Tollway Authority has taken pause since recent opposition has arisen. To date, we have seen past supporters of the road withdraw their support. Many members of the Blue Ribbon Advisory Council who originally advocated for the project have withdrawn their support, including:

- Lake County Chairman Aaron Lawlor (Chairman of the BRAC Committee)
- Senator Terry Link (member of the BRAC Committee)
- State Representative Rita Mayfield (member of the BRAC Committee)
- Sierra Club (member of the BRAC committee)
- Openlands (member of the BRAC committee)
- Liberty Prairie Foundation (member of the BRAC committee)
- Village of Hawthorn Woods
- Village of Long Grove

Now, over half of the towns in the proposed path of Route 53 do not support an endorsement letter for the EIS being circulated by other Lake County municipalities. In a recent turn of events, on June 13, the Mundelein Village Board of Trustees voted 4 to 1 against sending an EIS letter of support to the Illinois Tollway Authority and Governor Rauner. Mundelein joins Long Grove and Hawthorn Woods in our decisions to not sign this letter of support for the EIS for Rt. 53.

If you would like to get involved, you may write to your legislators individually and urge them to ask Governor Rauner to put a stop to the impending EIS, and to not waste \$50 million dollars on this project. Your voice is important. Please consider contacting the following:

State Elected Officials:

Governor Bruce Rauner Gov.goca@illinois.gov | (312) 814-2121

Senator Dan McConchie, 26th District Dan@danmconchie.com | (847) 796-0395

Representative Ed Sullivan, 51st District ILhouse51@sbcglobal.net | (847) 566-5115

Illinois Tollway Board Members:

Bob Schillerstrom, Chairman of the Board ChairSchillerstrom@getipass.com | (630) 241-6800

James J. Banks JBanks@getipass.com | (630) 241-6800

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Earl Dotson Jr. EDotson@getipass.com | (630) 241-6800

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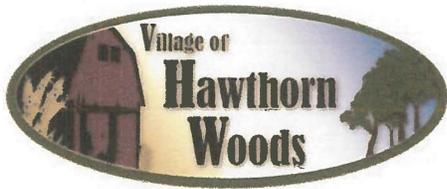
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Sincerely,

Angie

Angela Underwood
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Village of Long Grove



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – June 23, 2016

LONG GROVE AND HAWTHORN WOODS, IL – Mayors of Long Grove and Hawthorn Woods unite; ask Governor and Tollway to stop the \$50 Million Rt. 53 EIS

The consensus in Lake County opposing the Route 53 extension continues to grow among key stakeholders that had originally endorsed the road expansion into Lake County, but now have reversed their support based on financial, environmental, and taxation repercussions. Several members of the Blue Ribbon Advisory group, a consortium assembled to work with the Tollway, have withdrawn their support of the Route 53 extension including:

- Lake County Board Chairman Aaron Lawler who was also the chairman of the BRAC report
- Senator Terry Link who was also a member of the BRAC committee
- State Representative Rita Mayfield, also a member of the BRAC committee
- The Sierra Club, BRAC committee member
- Openlands, BRAC Committee member
- Liberty Prairie Foundation, BRAC committee member
- The Village of Long Grove

Additionally, over half of the municipalities along the Route 53 path now oppose endorsing the continuation of the expenditure of \$50 Million dollars, especially with the breaking news that IDOT projects will be suspended as a result of the state budget crisis. The following municipalities have declined to sign a letter of endorsement for the EIS:

- The Village of Long Grove
- The Village of Hawthorn Woods
- The Village of Mundelein

“It has become increasingly clear that the Route 53 project should not proceed now that the major stakeholders who worked to bring the road through our towns, farms, forests, and wetlands now oppose Route 53,” stated Mayor Joseph Mancino of Hawthorn Woods. “They have seen how the road would affect our business districts, what it would cost each taxpayer in Lake County, and the increased tolls that all users would need to pay. The strongest supporters from the BRAC planning group have now reversed their support,” Mancino remarked.

“With a growing lack of support from Lake County leadership, state senators and representatives, statewide environmental groups, and BRAC committee members, this project should not move forward,”

said Village President Angie Underwood of Long Grove. "Local road congestion needs to be addressed, but my board does not support the extension of Route 53 as the solution," she said.

Since the announcement from Lake County Board Chairman Aaron Lawlor that he will be joining other state officials and BRAC committee members in withdrawing support for the Route 53 extension, the State of Illinois is suspending new spending programs for road projects as a part of the state budget crisis fallout.

Village President Angie Underwood of Long Grove stated, "There are five municipalities in the direct path of this new road. With Mundelein's vote on record, we now have a strong consensus of communities against the endorsement of the EIS." President Underwood added, "Route 53 would have detrimental financial impacts for our residents and could result in new taxes and higher tolls for all Lake County residents. Long Grove has grave concerns with the impact of this road on our environment. In light of the growing state financial crisis, we are concerned that the strict environmental standards will be sacrificed," she added.

Mancino added, "The advisory group (BRAC) worked under an assumption that certain environmental standards would be in place to protect Lake County's most sensitive natural areas, and that the design and finances would be subject to local input. Those assumptions have been invalidated, leading to a mass exodus of support for a project that will increase taxes, increase tolls, devastate downtown businesses, and permanently destroy our environment. This project has become too expensive, the BRAC recommendations have been ignored, and the consensus to build the road has eroded," he stated. With Illinois Department of Transportation road projects now suspended because of the State budget crisis, Lake County leaders call upon the Governor and the Tollway Board to suspend the hiring of consultants, scheduled for August, for yet another \$50 Million study.

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Daily Herald

Transportation | updated: 6/21/2016 5:25 PM

Amid protests, tollway leaders say Route 53 study will move ahead



Mark Black/mblack@dailyherald.com Route 53 ends at Lake-Cook Road. Illinois tollway leaders are going ahead with a study of extending it north even though some former Lake County proponents have cooled to the idea.



Marni Pyke

Illinois tollway leaders affirmed they will go ahead with a feasibility study of extending Route 53 Tuesday after some project foes vowed to continue protesting at meetings until a decision was made.

Whether to extend Route 53 north has divided Lake County residents for years on questions of pollution, road design, cost and whether it will fix traffic congestion.

Tollway board directors voted to carry out a \$40 million to \$50 million environmental impact study in December but dissension remained and gained momentum when former Route 53 booster Lake Chairman Aaron Lawlor defected May 16.

"It's \$40 or \$50 million and the public can ill afford it," said Bill Morris of Grayslake, a former tollway director and former state senator. "The plan should just be abandoned. As long as it stays on the table we are not going to solve the congestion problems for our whole county. This only helps one little part and there are serious questions if it will create more congestion."

Tollway Director and Elk Grove Village Mayor Craig Johnson said he wanted the public to be clear the tollway is doing the study.

"It's great people come (to speak) but they may be under the impression we haven't made a decision. We made a decision."

"We have made the decision to proceed," tollway Chairman Bob Schillerstrom said, adding the board will likely choose a study consultant this summer. Proposals from firms are due Aug. 1.

A tollway advisory panel of Lake County officials, environmentalists and businesses reached a consensus on building a four-lane, 45 mph parkway north to Route 120 in 2014.

But a \$2 billion shortfall, 20-cent a mile tolls and the expectation Lake County would subsidize the budget gap with a gas tax and other contributions caused friction.

The extension will ease chronic traffic jams in Lake County and spur economic development, supporters say.

The tollway has not decided on whether to build the road.

"It's clear Lake County doesn't want this," said Kathy Englund of Hawthorn Woods, one of about 20 opponents at the meeting. "Support is falling away piece by piece. The tollway has always maintained it would not build roads in communities where it isn't wanted."

"I implore you to take a second look at this and have the courage to stop it," Sierra Club attorney Stacy Meyers said.

Later in the meeting, Director Earl Dotson of Rockford suggested the tollway obtain a digital clock to show people addressing the board during public comment when their three minutes of allotted time is up. He also recommended speakers be reminded it is "inappropriate" to address tollway employees and directors by their names.

Schillerstrom said he does time speakers but is sometimes "a little liberal" in granting an extra minute or so. "It's important everyone have an opportunity to speak," he said.

Regarding Dotson's second point, Schillerstrom noted that directors and tollway employees "are all public servants ... and all in the public eye."

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Lake County updated: 6/15/2016 6:54 PM

43 Lake County mayors asked to support Route 53 study



The corridor of the proposed Route 53 extension into Lake County runs through several communities including Mundelein. This is a view looking north from Route 60/83 south of Hawley Street.

Steve Lundy | Staff Photographer, 2014



Mick Zawislak



Lake County mayors are being asked to express their support for a \$40 million to \$50 million environmental impact study for the proposed Route 53 extension.

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Hainesville Mayor Linda Soto has asked mayors of 43 towns to send a letter backing the study to Illinois State Toll Highway Authority Chairman Robert Schillerstrom and the board of directors.

The pitch was sent to communities on the record as supporting the Route 53 extension. Soto said she wants to avoid delay in arriving at a final determination on the project.

"Please let's not find ourselves five to six years out trying to get this very same study going again," she wrote to mayors in the appeal.

In correspondence to mayors, she said the campaign is in response to "shocking recent events" -- a reference to Lake County Board Chairman Aaron Lawlor's withdrawal of support for the \$2.3 billion to \$2.65 billion project. Soto said the resulting "upheaval and drama" caused a glitch in consideration of the study required by federal law for the project to proceed.

Supporters argue the study will answer many questions, such as the road type, alignment and other details of a proposed extension and related improvements along Route 120 from Volo to Waukegan.

"I don't want them to blink. I don't want them to pause," Soto said of tollway officials.

Whether a road should be built at all is another possibility the environmental study, or EIS, would determine. It would take about four years to complete and include a robust public information and engagement program, Soto said.

The form letter reaffirms study support and says, in part, answers are needed on how to reduce traffic congestion and travel time. That's vital to the future and the quality of life in central and western Lake County, the letter states.

"We need to do the EIS and we need to do it now. This is the tool that will give us the answers," Soto said.

As of early Wednesday, Soto said she had received a dozen confirmations of support and one decline from Waukegan, with many municipalities set to poll their boards before responding.

Opponents under the umbrella of Grayslake-based Livable Lake County said they are monitoring agendas and plan to write a letter to appear in the newspaper. The group plans a community forum next month in Mundelein.

"This is too big a deal for mayors to sign off on without a public meeting," said Barbara Klipp, a group leader.

That was the case Monday when the Mundelein village board considered authorizing Mayor Steve Lentz to send the letter.

"I think it would be sending a signal that we support the concept of building 53 and that we want them to take the next step," Lentz said during the discussion. Trustees by a 4-1 vote nixed the idea.

However, Village Administrator John Lobaito on Wednesday said Mundelein has not withdrawn support for a Route 53 extension.

Lawlor had been a strong supporter of the road to relieve traffic congestion and spark development. He co-chaired a blue ribbon committee of diverse interests that in 2012 recommended an environmentally sensitive, four-lane, boulevard-style toll road as the solution.

In a stunning reversal last month, he said the "financial and political realities have become insurmountable," and efforts should be redirected to establish a greenway system and improve existing roads.

The design faced a \$1.9 billion shortfall despite steep tolls, a special taxing district in the corridor and other measures that would require state or local approvals.

According to information provided to Mundelein officials, a liaison for Gov. Bruce Rauner had contacted village staff members "wanting to understand" the village's position on Route 53 and the study.

Klipp said 1,000 people in Mundelein are among those who have signed a petition asking Rauner to stop the extension.

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Daily Herald

Lake County | updated: 5/17/2016 6:43 PM

Alternative vision for Route 53 extension nets enthusiastic support



Video: Shared vision to end extension



Mick Zawislak

Opponents of the proposed Route 53 north extension have enthusiastically endorsed what was described as a "bold and courageous" stance by Lake County Board Chairman Aaron Lawlor to close the books on the plan and transform the corridor into a nonmotorized greenway.

Activists were joined Tuesday by Lawlor and several Lake County Board members and other elected officials near Lake Leopold in the Prairie Crossing conservation community in Grayslake to support Lawlor's surprising announcement Monday to scrap the controversial plan because of cost and other factors.

"The reality is the Route 53 extension is never going to happen. The support for this project is collapsing like a house of cards," said Barbara Klipp, co-chairwoman of Livable Lake County, a grass-roots group with connections to the Sierra

Club and other organizations.

Several speakers shared that view during a news conference near where the proposed extension would connect with Route 120.

Klipp said opponents always have maintained the proposed Route 53 extension, estimated to cost \$2.3 billion to \$2.65 billion, was "unneeded, unaffordable and unfair" and would create irreversible sprawl and destroy open space. She said environmental organizations were unified in opposition.

"We are for investments in projects that will reduce traffic, are affordable and can be done quickly," she said.

Klipp said supporters want the state-owned Route 53 corridor decommissioned and high-quality natural resources protected in perpetuity.

Tony Dean, a former Long Grove mayor and one-time chief of what is now the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, said the proposal has always been environmentally damaging.

"For more than 40 years, it has been a block on any real transportation improvements in Lake County," he said.

In his announcement, Lawlor suggested a "new course" for the corridor include a trail system and the opportunity for "balanced" economic developments.

Lawlor co-chaired a diverse blue-ribbon panel that in 2012 recommended proceeding with an environmentally sensitive road design envisioned as a national model. He had been a staunch supporter of a four-lane, 45 mph tollway to relieve traffic congestion and spark economic development. Extending Route 53 has been a controversial idea for more than 50 years.

"We always said this was our last, best chance," Lawlor said. "The key all along was the tollway stressed to me personally this project needed a consensus of community leaders."

Hawthorn Woods Mayor Joe Mancino said he told state and tollway officials the village was not going to drop its opposition.

"There truly is no consensus in the region, and this is something the tollway has always asked for," he said.

Lawlor said there was no specific action that caused the change of heart, but that it came after a series of recent conversations with Illinois State Toll Highway Authority officials and others. Lawlor said he thought the project would be delayed by legal action and other factors, causing the already daunting \$1.9 billion deficit for the project to increase.

Fearing environmental safeguards would be cut to save money and that political gridlock would handcuff needed state involvement in certain aspects of the project, Lawlor said he concluded the financial and political realities have become insurmountable. He has asked that the tollway not proceed with an environmental impact study that would take four years and cost \$40 million to \$50 million.

Tollway board Chairman Bob Schillerstrom said Monday he planned to proceed with the study. Lawlor said Tuesday he has not spoken with tollway officials but is going directly to Gov. Bruce Rauner's office to intervene by not allowing contracts to be finalized.

Rauner, who appointed a new tollway administration last year, has declined to comment.

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Lake County updated: 5/16/2016 6:41 PM

Lake County's Lawlor pulls Route 53 support; study still on?



Route 53 looking north at Lake-Cook Road. Lake County Board Chairman Aaron Lawlor says the proposed extension should be reassessed

Steve Lundy | Staff Photographer



Mick Zawislak



Marni Pyke

Monday's stunning announcement by Lake County Board Chairman Aaron Lawlor that he's withdrawing support for the Route 53 extension and suggesting instead officials concentrate on a "greenway" corridor leaves the Illinois tollway in the odd spot of championing a project dropped by a prime backer.

But despite the loss of Lawlor's support, the agency intends to proceed with a \$40 million to \$50 million feasibility study of extending Route 53 north to Route 120.

Reactions were mixed as opponents applauded the change of heart

but transportation advocates said it was premature.

Lawlor acknowledged the "time and energy" spent on the project. But a likely increase in a \$1.9 billion funding gap and ongoing political gridlock means the county's vision of a four-lane, 45 mph parkway north to near Grayslake would never materialize, he said.

Instead, Lawlor advocated investing in existing roads and creating a trail corridor through the center of the county.

"The financial and political realities have become insurmountable," he said.

Illinois State Toll Highway Authority board Chairman Bob Schillerstrom was undeterred, saying he expects to hire a firm to conduct an environmental impact study this year. The tollway has already allocated \$4 million for planning consultants since it began studying the extension in 2011.

"I am surprised by this (Lawlor's statement)," Schillerstrom said. "But many of the questions that Chairman Lawlor raised would be answered by an EIS. An EIS will take a look at everything. ... It will cast a wide net and take into consideration all the factors and opinions. To prejudge it runs counter to what an EIS is."

Long history

The project was intended to reduce traffic in Lake County and spur economic development, but it has been dogged by financing problems since its inception.

Under previous tollway leaders, a "blue-ribbon" panel of Lake County representatives took months to find consensus in 2012 on an environmentally sensitive road with features to prevent road salt, noise and lighting from disturbing wetlands and preserves along the route.

The design was estimated to cost \$2.3 billion to \$2.65 billion and faced a \$1.9 billion shortfall despite tolls of 20 cents a mile compared to the average 6 cents elsewhere. Likely litigation and "ongoing legislative gridlock in Springfield" would extend the four-year study timetable and increase the cost, Lawlor said.

Higher tolls, a new gas tax and a special taxing district in Lake County were supposed to subsidize the construction, but they have been politically unpopular. Tolling parts of Route 53 near Schaumburg was floated, but the idea was quickly dropped.

A new tollway administration was chosen by Gov. Bruce Rauner in 2015. Recently, leaders have said all options should be considered for the road, not just the parkway design. Rauner's office did not comment.

Lawlor said he didn't believe there was a chance for the project to move forward "when you layer in the need for the enhanced environmental standards, the schedule and the cost.

"As we evaluate all the work that needs to be done on transportation and all of the effort that has been put into the Route 53/120 project, it is difficult to take a step back and reassess the changing dynamics that we are faced with, including project timeline, increasing gridlock in Springfield and cost escalation," Lawlor said in a lengthy statement. While difficult, it is critical to make the decision before \$40 million to \$50 million is spent on environmental studies, he said.

Lawlor said he was speaking on his own behalf. However, Lawlor co-chaired the blue ribbon group and his opinion carries considerable weight as tollway officials always have maintained that a consensus among the many communities and interests involved was needed before the project would advance. Opponents, including the villages of Hawthorn Woods and Long Grove, long have contended the road wasn't worth the price and potential environmental harm.

Not a 'waste of money'

Schillerstrom said the tollway board had independently evaluated the value of an environmental impact study before voting on it last fall.

"I wouldn't have voted 'yes' if I thought it was a waste of money," he said.

Such a study would determine if the road is or isn't needed and could also recommend the best type of road to be built, Schillerstrom said.

Lawlor said he expected the situation to evolve in the next few days and "my position is to work with the governor's office to stop the EIS process."

Steve Park, executive director of the Lake County Transportation Alliance, whose membership includes several businesses and communities, said Lawlor's change was "very disheartening and a big surprise."

Park, a former Gurnee village trustee, was the village representative in detailed discussions regarding finances and land use of the proposed road. He said an environmental study should proceed.

"The EIS is all about getting the best and most current information we can get," he said.

"You can't have a good quality of life in Lake County with the transportation congestion we have," Park said. "To think otherwise is to put your head in the sand."

Livable Lake County, a grass-roots group founded by the Sierra Club, supported Lawlor's stance.

"We are never going to get the affordable traffic solutions that Lake County needs as long as the tollway is bent on pursuing this boondoggle that will never be built. We are ready to stop fighting and unite behind solutions that strengthen our communities rather than divide them," the group said in a statement.

Former Waukegan mayor and tollway Director Bill Morris called Lawlor's move a "common-sense decision," adding that to pursue the environmental study would "be a terrible waste of public money and tolls to engage consultants to do study for a road that will not be built."

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