

**SYNOPSIS OF THE TESTIMONY OF GEORGE A. RANNEY, JR.**  
**REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION TASK FORCE**  
**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2004**

Over the next several decades, the Chicago region will gain two million new residents and one million new cars. Many of us will be making more and longer trips and living in places with fewer transit options. The way the region makes transportation and land use decisions must be transformed to avoid regional gridlock on a scale that will starve our economy and compromise our quality of life.

A comprehensive analysis by Chicago Metropolis 2020 has identified the following key transportation facts:

**Traffic congestion is already bad.** Chicago area residents spend more time commuting to their jobs than the residents of any other region in the country except New York.

**The way the region is developing will exacerbate traffic congestion.** Our population and job centers continue to spread throughout the region, leading to travel patterns, particularly suburb-to-suburb and reverse commuting trips, that are not well served by our existing transportation infrastructure. Our region has built a system that is among the best in the nation at moving people from A to B and back again; the regional reality is that more and more people are now trying to go from A to C or E to F or A to G. The most serious traffic congestion in coming decades will be in the suburbs.

**A “business as usual” approach to land use and transportation for the next 30 years will result in each one of us spending 80 additional hours a year in our cars – that’s two work weeks.** How should we explain these traffic projections to the 82% of our region’s residents who already believe that our area roadways are “very” or “moderately” congested?

**Time is money, and we’re wasting a lot of it.** The Texas Transportation Institute has estimated that the economic cost of congestion in our region – longer commutes, wasted fuel, freight stuck in traffic, and so on – is \$4 billion a year. This cost of congestion has been growing 13% a year for nearly two decades, and it shows no sign of abating. A 10% reduction in congestion in the Chicago region would have an annual value of \$1.3 billion for Chicago area businesses.

**Transportation funding is not keeping up with the region’s needs, or even with inflation.** The CTA has just raised fares and warns that more increases are underway without alternative sources of money or service cuts that will put it into the classic transit death spiral. PACE has capital but too little operating revenue. The Toll Highway Authority does not have enough money to repair and replace its existing system. Illinois FIRST funds will soon be depleted, and no replacement funding has been identified.

**The way we make transportation decisions is not adequate to deal with any of these challenges.** Our transportation planning and budgeting functions are scattered among the Chicago Area Transportation Study, the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission, the Regional Transportation Authority, the Illinois Department of Transportation, the three individual service boards, the Toll Highway Authority, and hundreds of local and county governments. It is alarmingly difficult to determine how much money we are spending on transportation, where it is spent, where it comes from, why it is being spent, and where it should be spent to best effect. We have no agency that is accountable for looking at the entire six county region and making decisions based on the most efficient way to get our residents where they are trying to go, regardless of what political boundaries they are crossing or what mode of transit they are using. When it comes to regional transportation, the buck stops nowhere.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Recommendation # 1: Create a Regional Planning Organization (RPO) to unify and improve transportation, land use, and financial planning.**

The region must forge a regional organization that combines and improves upon the current work of CATS and NIPC, the planning activities of the RTA and the Illinois Toll Highway Authority, as well as essential new responsibilities that none of them is doing. This new agency should be responsible for regional strategic financial planning. It would not merge operating agencies; getting the planning function right is far more important to reducing traffic congestion. The new agency should establish goals and clear, measurable objectives for transportation and development in the region. It should also prepare and maintain a regional plan that effectively integrates transportation and development objectives.

### **Recommendation # 2: Create County Planning Organizations jointly led by municipal and county elected officials.**

County Planning Organizations (CPOs) would provide a locally controlled framework for drafting and implementing transportation plans that are consistent with local plans for land use, housing, and development. Modeled after the countywide institutions created by the Stormwater Management Act, the CPOs would give local and county officials a tool for dealing with the biggest transportation challenge: mobility in the collar counties, where auto travel will continue to grow exponentially and development patterns are not likely to support significant transit use.

### **Recommendation # 3: PACE should be eliminated and its functions transferred to the County Planning Organizations.**

In the collar counties local officials are in the best position to design appropriate and specialized local services: van pooling to help local employers, paratransit, transit-on-demand, shuttle connections to Metra stations, or the comprehensive services called for in the DuPage County transit plan. In Cook County, the CTA, which already serves 38 suburban communities, could assume responsibility for the services now provided by PACE. Approximately half of all PACE's current routes are in Cook.

### **Recommendation # 4: Expand Metra operations to make better use of its capital assets. Providing service for reverse commuters and promoting transit-oriented development should be priorities.**

The Metra funding formula and governance structure should be changed to give it more incentive to meet the needs of city workers commuting to suburban jobs. Metra should also have more authority and responsibility for promoting transit-oriented development – taking a valuable asset like a transit station and planning an attractive mix of retail, commercial, and residential development around it.

### **Recommendations #5: The Toll Highway Authority should continue to expand the use of I-Pass, consider toll increases and congestion pricing, and bring its current assets into a state of good repair.**

The Authority should focus on operating its current system. Expansions of the system should not be considered without the approval of the Regional Planning Organization. Current initiatives to promote electronic toll collection and to introduce variable pricing techniques should be accelerated. Pricing is one of the most effective forms of traffic management and the easiest way to maximize the efficiency of our existing transportation capacity.