

Madigan revives crosstown highway talk

Shelved since 1979, project this time would be toll road

By Jon Hilkevitch, Tribune transportation reporter. Tribune staff reporter Gary Washburn contributed to this report

February 21, 2007

Community opposition stopped former Mayor Richard J. Daley's longtime dream to build the Crosstown Expressway in 1979.

But House Speaker Michael Madigan on Tuesday attempted to resuscitate the project, originally doomed by fears it would displace thousands of residents. He called the 22-mile corridor connecting the Northwest, West and South Sides "a missing link in our transportation system."

Madigan (D-Chicago) would have the Crosstown built and operated as a toll road. Daley had envisioned it as a freeway mostly along the Cicero Avenue corridor.

Madigan would put it under the control of the Illinois State Toll Highway Authority, according to a joint House resolution he introduced Tuesday.

The project hasn't been run past the toll authority, the current mayor of Chicago, Gov. Rod Blagojevich or the Illinois Department of Transportation, a Madigan spokesman acknowledged.

But the speaker wanted to "get the idea into the mix" in anticipation that capital funding for roads and mass transit during the spring legislative session would be a hot topic in Springfield, spokesman Steve Brown said.

"He thinks expanding the tollway system to include the Crosstown is a way for the project to pay for itself," Brown said. If built, it would be the first time an Illinois tollway would run exclusively through Chicago.

Currently, the Northwest Tollway nips a piece of Chicago near O'Hare International Airport.

The Crosstown would be built along railroad right of way east of the Cicero Avenue corridor. It would run from near the junction of the Kennedy and Edens Expressways south to about 75th Street and east to the Dan Ryan Expressway.

"[E]very possible effort (would) be made to use railroad right of way and minimize the disruption of all residential areas," the resolution states.

However, the rail right of way is generally only 50 to 100 feet wide, which would not provide enough room for highway lanes, shoulders and easements.

A spokeswoman for Mayor Richard M. Daley said the mayor believes a new Crosstown "is something to think about."

"He is concerned about truck traffic choking economic development of the region," spokeswoman Jacquelyn Heard added.

Tollway officials said they already have a lot on their construction plate as part of the agency's 10-year, \$5.3 billion capacity-expansion program.

Meanwhile, Brown said Madigan was unaware of an ongoing city feasibility study on building a transit line along much of the proposed Crosstown route.

The proposed Mid-City Transitway would begin near the Jefferson Park station on the CTA's Blue Line, head south paralleling Cicero Avenue past Midway Airport before curving east along 75th Street, ending at 87th Street and the Dan Ryan, according to the Chicago Department of Transportation.

The Mid-City route would intersect with the CTA's Orange and Red Lines, in addition to the Blue Line, serving up a transit connection between the city's two airports. About 20 transit stations would be along the Mid-City route.

Also under consideration as Mid-City alternatives are a bus rapid-transit route and a trucks-only thoroughfare.

Transportation expert Jacquelyne Grimshaw, a supporter of the Mid-City plan, said she was "stunned" by Madigan's Crosstown proposal.

"The public has made it clear that we've had too much upheaval and destruction from the construction of other area expressways," said Grimshaw, vice president for transportation policy at the Center for Neighborhood Technology.

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