



# Illinois Department of Natural Resources

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JB Pritzker, Governor  
Colleen Callahan, Director

## MINUTES

### **Illinois Route 53 Expansion Land Alternative Use Task Force**

**Monday, October 17**

**1:00 PM**

#### **Virtual Meeting**

Dan Lewis, Legislative Liaison at the IL Department of Natural Resources and the point-person for administrative support for this Task Force, began the meeting shortly after 1:00 PM by confirming that there was a quorum present. All but Representative Dan McConchie (who later joined shortly after the meeting began) and Lake County Board Member Marah Altenberg were present.

Co-Chair and Senator Melinda Bush ran the meeting and began by asking if there were edits to the July meeting minutes, which had been posted to the task force's webpage on the IDNR website. Hearing no edits or comments, Long Grove Mayor Bill Jacob motioned to approve of the minutes. The motion was seconded and subsequently approved unanimously.

Jerry Adelman and Matthew Santagata from Openlands presented their guiding principles document and explained the rationale behind each principle (**attached**). Representative Daniel Didech asked what the purpose of the principles were, and Senator Bush explained that the principles would guide the Task Force's resolution and report. Lake County Board Member John Wasik asked that the principles and resolution include mention of sustainable agriculture. IDNR Assistant Director John Rogner praised the principles and spoke to the Department's thoughts on and responsibility for wildlife and biodiversity. After additional discussion, Mundelein Mayor Steve Lentz objected, stating that while he agreed with the context and the desire to create a greenway, he believes that the land should not be transferred to IDNR.

After this discussion, Steven Schilke with Illinois Department of Transportation District 1 presented an update on the parcels in question. This update included new information on drainage and wider buffers. Senator Bush and Dan Lewis reiterated to the group that the Governor stated that the road idea is not moving forward and that this body was tasked to finding alternative uses only.

Senator Bush explained that a resolution based on the guiding principles would be drafted and shared with the task force members prior to the next meeting. Dan Lewis agreed to share it with everyone when it was ready.

After no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned.

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Minutes by Dan Lewis, IDNR  
[dan.p.lewis@illinois.gov](mailto:dan.p.lewis@illinois.gov)

## **PRINCIPLES**

The intent of the following Principles is to illuminate the benefits of creating a greenway and to inspire a conversation about its significant conservation and public values. The Task Force has the opportunity to leverage the transformative power of exceptional planning – to look at the whole as much more than a collection of individual parts. To embrace placemaking that is wholistic and yields multiple benefits to people, to communities, and to nature.

### **1. Connect and Expand**

Connect existing parks and preserves with each other and communities throughout the corridor, inviting people across the region and expand existing public open spaces across the corridor linking wetlands, habitat, and recreational space.

Catalyze opportunities to advance existing plans and policies such as Lake County Forest Preserve's 100-year vision and green infrastructure mapping, the goal set by conservation partners to protect 20% of Lake County by 2030, and America the Beautiful initiative to protect 30% of our nation's lands and waters by 2030.

### **2. Natural Refuge**

Lake County has more threatened and endangered species and biodiversity than any other county in Illinois. Combat the loss of biodiversity and secure habitat for an abundance of wildlife, allowing them to thrive and adapt to a changing climate.

In return, corridor communities and the region benefit from pollinators and increasing their role in securing local and national food security through initiatives like America the Beautiful so our region's food web remains intact. The greenway also offers an oasis of tranquility and beauty, lending to a healthier environment and way of life.

### **3. Increase Community and Regional Resiliency**

As homes and businesses increasingly experience life-changing floods, drought, tornadoes, and other extreme weather, use the corridor to fortify community resiliency in the face of climate change. Protect, restore, and maintain hundreds of acres of open space as a front-line defense against flooding and degrading our lakes and rivers in areas already experiencing record-breaking storm events.

### **4. Multi-modal Transportation Solution**

Non-motorized trails that string together communities and open space like pearls on a necklace for both people and wildlife that will travel within, through and across its length.

Provide clear way finding, pathways, trail connections, pedestrian amenities, and links to public transit. (Examples of pedestrian amenities are water fountains, picnic tables, benches, restrooms, bird nesting boxes, animal crossings, signage for hikers, bikers, equestrians, etc.)

### **5. Impetus for Diverse Public-Private Partnerships**

Build off the success of models like the Liberty Prairie Reserve, municipalities, schools, and business can collaborate with agencies and nonprofits to create and steward a mosaic of parks, trails, and protected natural lands, infusing their identities along the route.

### **6. Economic Driver**

Studies reveal that for every dollar invested in restoration, eight dollars flow back to the community. Trails and open space within the greenway offers economic development opportunities via ecotourism and increased property values, which are a wealth generator that reduce health costs.

#### **7. Honor Each Community's Sense of Place**

Enable a collaborative community vision and a place for the neighborhoods to engage. Develop healthier, more resilient, and beautiful communities.

## Route 53 Task Force Questions

### 1. Confirmation of Task Force Scope

- a. Does the requested deliverable include the proposed Route 120 bypass or is it limited to the north/south proposed Route 53 portion? My understanding is that the legislation is limited to the later.

- a. Dan Lewis: As I've stated previously and was mentioned at the meeting this week, the purview of the Task Force is only the North-South parcels that were to have been used for Route 53 and therefore this Task Force will not be making recommendations regarding the 120 bypass. That being said, I cannot speak for IDOT or the Governor's Office and their plans for the East-West 120 expansion land. Laura and John with IDOT might have more information about that area.

IDOT Response: IDOT understands corridor review to be north south IL 53 section.

- b. Task Force area defined: I assume we are using the established centerline. What is the width of the right-of-way from this line? Is the centerline in the exact middle?

- a. DL: This is a question that should be answered by IDOT, as they will know more about the details of the parcels better than I. I also recommend you go back to the minutes of the second meeting and look at their presentation about the parcels.

IDOT Response: the parcels acquired by IDOT were whole property acquisitions, so the areas are not quite uniform. These areas are shown on the exhibit provided to the task force.

- c. IDOT may own land adjacent to the defined corridor. Are these areas under our scope?

- a. DL: My understanding is that all state-owned parcels that were purchased for the purpose of expanding/extending Rt 53 are to be considered for this Task Force and our report.

IDOT Response: IDOT understands that the parcels acquired for the IL 53 north/south corridor are within the scope.

- d. What is the deliverable to include?

- Recommended improvements/connections
- Future transportation projects
- General land use plan?
- Wetland delineations?
- Floodplain delineations?
- Wooded area delineations?
- Adjoining land uses?
- Road agency coordination items?
- Municipal/County Comprehensive Plan designations?
- Safety (lighting, etc)
  - DL: The Task Force was created to study “cost, feasibility, and environmental impact of alternative uses of the expansion land, including any potential impact on flooding in the area, the short- and long-term economic impact to the region, and all options for funding alternative uses.”

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- e. The Task Force has not heard from Lake County Partners or other economic development parties. How can this be done in our process? What is the process for gathering formal input from corridor municipalities? Lake County? Municipalities near the corridor?
  - a. DL: The Task Force heard from Municipalities at the last meeting and has previously heard from Visit Lake County (tourism & economic development), Lake County Stormwater Management, and Lake County Forest Preserve District. If you think that additional presentations should be made, I encourage you to contact Chair Senator Bush with your suggestions.

### 2. For the Route 53 Portion Task Force Study Area

- a. Is there a chosen base map for this project? If not how should one be created?
  - a. DL: Both Openlands and Lake County have created GIS maps for us to use. Both are linked to on the Task Force's webpage.

IDOT Response: IDOT provided an exhibit that shows the parcels owned by the State, in pdf format. IDOT received a copy of the Tollway's GIS map and is reviewing. We will report back with an update as soon as verified.

- b. What percentage of the land is owned by IDOT and what percentage is privately held? In which communities are the privately held properties?
  - a. DL: I have not done this research and, if I have the time between my regular work as a Legislative Liaison and my usual work with this Task Force, I will attempt to compile it. However, I recommend looking at the GIS map that Lake County put together (linked on the Task Force webpage) and using the layers to see who the owners of the private parcels are and which municipalities they reside in.

IDOT Response: IDOT provided an exhibit that shows the parcels owned by the State, in pdf format.

- c. For IDOT owned land are there any restrictions on use?
  - a. DL: This is another question for IDOT.

IDOT Response: the property was acquired to be used for a highway purpose under federal and state laws/regs.

- d. While we have seen various maps, has IDOT independently confirmed the private versus public holdings? What mechanism would be used to acquire privately held property?
  - a. DL: It is my understanding that Stacy Meyers was working with or attempting to work with IDOT on ensuring the accuracy of the maps. I'm not sure where those conversations ended. We have had several presentations that includes maps of the parcels, including one from IDOT, and only once was it ever noted that a parcel was mislabeled as state-owned. That was subsequently corrected by IDOT, I believe.

IDOT Response: IDOT provided an exhibit that shows the parcels owned by the State, in pdf format. This exhibit was reviewed and confirmed by IDOT on the parcels the state owns.

- b. DL: I am not aware of what mechanism would be used for acquisition. I'll remind you that this is a report recommending land usage, so we do not need to figure out exactly how the land will be acquired. However, I think we can certainly state what

## Route 53 Task Force Questions

our preferred methods of land acquisition would be, and I am open to feedback on this.

3. As the IDOT property is owned by the taxpayers of Illinois and was acquired for the purposes of building a road:

- a. Would the General Assembly need to approve any property transfers?

- a. DL: After speaking with IDNR's Acquisition Agent about some of your questions, it is my understanding that the transfer of land between State agencies and departments is a simple process that does not require legislative action. You just need the proper paperwork to be signed by the two directors/secretaries and the governor. The transfer of land between State agencies and departments is a simple process that does not require legislative action. You just need the proper paperwork to be signed by the two directors/secretaries and the governor.

IDOT Response: IDOT may only dispose of state-owned property, per IL State statute 605 ILCS 5/4-508. HB5205 changed the disposal process regarding sale to private entities and local public agencies and is attached. Effective 1/1/23.

- b. The Task Force report?

- i. DL: The report is a recommendation of *alternative* land use. We could get into the weeds of property transfers, but I don't think we would need to.

IDOT Response: IDOT understands a final report is to be submitted by end of the year to the legislature and IDOT.

- b. What are the legal requirements for IDOT to transfer it to another state entity?

- i. Would approval of the General Assembly be required?

- a. DL: See above

IDOT Response: it would depend on the state agency and intended use(s). IDOT may jurisdictionally transfer state owned property to other state agencies if an agreement is reached between IDOT and the interested agency.

- ii. As the land would not be used for its original intention.

- a. DL: I am not a lawyer so I can't say for sure, but I do not think the intention matters here. For example, IDNR has taken land from Corrections and turned them into park land in the past.

- c. If it can be transferred, what state entities would be eligible to receive the land?

- a. DL: I believe any agency could take the land, but I'm not sure. For the purposes of a greenway trail, I'm not sure of any entity other than IDNR that would want the land.

IDOT Response: see above response

- d. Could IDOT owned land be sold to private entities?

- a. DL: This is another question for IDOT. I spoke to this briefly above.

IDOT Response: IDOT may only dispose of state-owned property, per IL State statute 605 ILCS 5/4-508. HB5205 changed the disposal process regarding sale to

## Route 53 Task Force Questions

private entities and local public agencies and is attached. Effective 1/1/23.

- e. What are the legal procedural requirements for IDOT to sell publicly owned property to private purchasers?
  - a. DL: This is another question for IDOT. I spoke to this briefly above.

IDOT Response: please see above, regarding new state law

- f. Can IDOT transfer state owned property to a local entity, such as the County Forest Preserve/municipality? Is compensation required or can the General Assembly decide otherwise?
  - a. DL: This is another question for IDOT. I spoke to this briefly above. You also asked about leasing during the last meeting. I can't speak for IDOT, but IDNR leases land for agricultural and outdoor/recreational uses all the time. A recent example would be Wolf Road Prairie in Westchester, where IDNR leases the management of the nature preserve to the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, and Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge, which IDNR owns and USFWS has a conservation easement on. These sorts of Intergovernmental Agreements happen all the time at IDNR.

IDOT Response: please see above, regarding new state law

- g. Is there a state or local agency that would take the land and implement our plan?
  - a. DL: My understanding is that IDNR would be interested in taking ownership of the land if it came with the appropriate resources and staff for maintenance. I can't think of another state agency that would do this. I won't speak for local agencies.

- 4. What governing bodies of elected officials will be required to approve this before submittal to state?
  - a. DL: If by "this" you are referring to the Task Force's report, then the answer is none. Per the resolution that created the Task Force, there is no method of approving the report. The body is simply directed to meet at least four times, study alternative land uses and their impacts, and make a final report for the General Assembly. This is, in my experience, how most Task Forces operate.
- 5. Is time for public comment on any task force deliverable required? Desirable?
  - a. DL: I'm not sure if I understand the question fully. At public meetings, per the Open Meetings Act, a public comment period is required. This is why it is always on the meeting agenda.
- 6. From email, additional question from Mayor Taylor: I have one additional question for IDOT: Although this is not an agency owner question, for my understanding, if IDOT were to transfer ground to another agency, does any existing ROW dissolve? Or would ROW transfer as well?

IDOT Response: IDOT may jurisdictionally transfer any of the parcels to another state agency if both agencies agree; IDOT can transfer with land rights, and without land rights.



## Route 53 Task Force Questions

DL: The last note that our acquisitions expert gave me was that, in his experience, he wasn't sure that IDOT would be willing to lease land for the purpose of building something other than roads. Laura and John B might be able to speak to this more.

Additionally, one would question why IDNR, municipalities, or the county would want to put extensive resources and funds into building a greenway trail if those municipalities or IDOT has any desire to then bulldoze that trail and turn it into a road years or decades later.

IDOT Response: If agreed upon by task force, stakeholders, and public agencies a possible solution may be to utilize a right of way use agreement via intergovernmental agreement (all affected municipalities and/or state agencies). The terms of the agreement may allow for replacement of any trail affected by any future improvement.



YOUR VOICE FOR LAKE COUNTY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES

August 12, 2022

To: Route 53 Land Use Task Force Members

The Lake County Transportation Alliance (LCTA) recognizes and supports this group's environmental concerns with these land parcels. As you are moving into starting a draft recommendation report our organization would like to again stress a holistic approach on this project which should include consideration for supporting a Lake County multi-modal transportation system. Multi-modal for this area should include: sidewalks, bike paths, trails, park and ride, managed lanes, bus lanes, enhancements to existing roads, roundabouts, turn lanes, traffic signal management (Lake County Passage) and locations for transportation hubs for buses, Uber, Lyft and taxis. These could be accommodated around the perimeter of the corridor. Please note there are some portions of the ROW that warrant new roadways, which are within the LCDOT master plans to alleviate traffic congestion.

There is a strong need to determine alternative road improvements and mass transit development opportunities. Central and western Lake County roads and transit do not adequately serve employment and educational destinations. If IDOT does not keep this land how will future road and transit improvements be funded? Would the County have to foot the entire bill?

These areas are still challenged with:

1. Traffic congestion
2. Travel-time reliability and the need to Improve Incident response.
3. Lack of access to major roadways
4. Limited bus/transit services or even mass transit deserts
5. Lack of sidewalks, trails, and bike lanes which support connectivity to mass transit with bus shelters or transportation hubs.

Corridor business districts have been waiting a long time for numerous transportation improvements which are key in preserving their viability and enhancing future economic development opportunities. This should not be ignored.

LCTA looks forward to having IDOT do their presentation that was tabled at the May Task Force meeting and would like to see LCDOT included as well.

Respectfully,

*Pete Manhard*

Peter Manhard P.E.  
Board President  
Lake County Transportation Alliance (LCTA)

August 12, 2022

To: Route 53 Task Force members

As a former corridor Mayor from Hainesville I wish to express my personal views and concerns on how the Rt. 53 Land Use Task Force is proceeding at this time. I would like to preface my comments by first listing these two observations.

1. The Task Force decided early on that “guiding principles” should be established for the members to operate within. This was never done and yet there is no record of this being deemed as unnecessary.
2. There was discussion of sub-committees being created that led to a few small group discussions on how these sub-committees would be organized and their specific purpose. Concern was expressed for not allowing “silo committees” to be created and that each committee should have diversified representation. In the last small group discussion it was decided that these committees were not warranted yet there has been no further discussion or dismissal of this idea at the Task Force level.

At the last Task Force meeting the Task Force member mayors were given an opportunity to speak on their municipal views. There was a strong negative reaction to the views of Mayor Rhett Taylor of Grayslake and Mayor Steve Lentz of Mundelein.

A letter to Governor Pritzker dated September 27, 2019 that included these two mayor’s signatures was brought up in response to their presentations and comments as if it proved a conflict in what they were now saying. I disagree. It clearly states in the letter’s second paragraph “to discuss a proposal to transform this land into a greenway trail and environmental sanctuary **as well as other Village specific uses for this land.**”

I now would like to reference an article *By Frank Abderholden, Daily Herald, July 12, 2019*

<https://www.sandyhart13.com/article/effectively-dead-illinois-tollway-puts-brakes-route-53-extension-study-through-lake-county>

It includes quotes from various area mayors and county officials. I highlight former Hawthorn Woods Mayor Joe Mancino’s quotes.

“In the wake of this decision, we call on the Tollway, the Illinois Department of Transportation, and the Federal Highway Administration to decommission the Route 53 corridor and work with relevant state and local agencies to convert it into a permanent greenway for public recreational use and environmental stewardship,” Mancino said. **He added that local, state and federal agencies should study concepts that include arterial lane widenings, grade separations where roads cross railroads, and enhanced commuter rail service.**

I also draw your attention to the comments from Senator Bush in the article:

State Sen. Melinda Bush, D-Grayslake, responded to the tollway’s decision in a little more guarded fashion in a statement, pointing to at least one glaring commuter nightmare that needs attention.

“The future of the Route 53 project may be uncertain, but **it doesn’t change the fact that Lake County residents need transportation solutions that improve public safety, and provide congestion relief while protecting our environment,**” said Bush. **“It’s time we fixed the existing Route 120. It’s a feasible, cost-effective solution that will provide tangible benefits to Lake County commuters.**

**“The State of Illinois needs to build on the work of our local mayors and implement the 120 Corridor Capacity Plan, including the grade level separation at 120 and the 83 railroad crossing.”**

I now express concerns that the Task Force member majority has become “silo” in their thinking that takes a 25 mile swath of land, just over 1000 acres, and will stick to an “all or nothing stance” when other considerations such as mass transit, alternative local road improvements and economic development including the corridor business districts should and need to be taken into consideration.

In closing, my final and strongest observation is that there has not been adequate professional consultation and presentation on all of the topics at hand. I respectfully request that you:

- ✓ Adopt guiding principles,
- ✓ Have IDOT and LCDOT working together to give a presentation on some possible road improvement projects around the perimeter of the corridor that would alleviate the transportation problems we still have today.
- ✓ Have Lake County Partners give a presentation on Economic Development supporting the corridor and existing business districts.

One additional observation, I recently became aware of is a petition being circulated online by a Task Force member for signatures to make the corridor land a State Park. Is a State Park an option and if so when will the Task Force be discussing this option with its pros and cons?

[https://www.thepetitionsite.com/907/608/322/protect-lake-countys-greenway-corridor/?fbclid=IwAR100BEsXhPrUS\\_iH3rzIFBGKACmDdiZd\\_qCbmJ1xKXBWEcvZyu569vGnuk](https://www.thepetitionsite.com/907/608/322/protect-lake-countys-greenway-corridor/?fbclid=IwAR100BEsXhPrUS_iH3rzIFBGKACmDdiZd_qCbmJ1xKXBWEcvZyu569vGnuk)

Respectfully submitted,

*Linda Soto*

Linda Soto

Former Mayor  
Village of Hainesville, 1997-2001, 2009-2017  
307 Buck Drive  
Hainesville, IL 60030

10-17-22

Dan,

I am writing to you requesting that you pass my comments on to the members of the Rt. 53 Task Force.

As one who has been involved with the issue of extending Rt. 53 into Lake County since the inception of the idea, I would urge you and members of the task force to develop a recommendation asking the Governor and Legislature to turn over the purchased right-of-way to the Department of Natural Resources. It is no longer feasible financially nor environmentally to build a highway/expressway/tollway on the right-of-way. However, the already purchased land lends itself to a wonderful nature corridor/State Park which would benefit generations of humans, animals and plants.

Retaining the right-of-way as a potential roadway will continue to create havoc with common sense municipal/county/state planning for much of south-central Lake County. Common sense and affordable solutions to traffic issues are being delayed and, in some cases, blocked as officials continue more than 50-year wait for a highway that has not been build and now will not be build both for cost and environmental issues. Further delay in turning the tax payer purchased right-of-way over to the Department of Natural Resources will simply impede the quality of life in Lake County.

Allowing DNR to collaborate with conservation groups, municipal officials and the Lake County Forest Preserve to restore the natural corridor would not only improve the quality of life in Lake County and Northern Illinois, it will also create significant eco-tourism opportunities.

I served as a State Senator and Vice Chair of the Senate Transportation Committee in the 1970's, Mayor of Waukegan in the late 1970's and early 1980's, as a Commissioner for the then Northeast Illinois Regional Plan Commission and later as a member of the Tollway Board and therefore have an intimate history with Rt. 53. Continuing this project simply makes no sense. There are numerous projects such as creating rail underpasses, adding passing and turning lanes, etc. that could be implemented for a fraction of the cost of the proposed Rt. 53 project that will greatly improve traffic flow, reduce pollution and improve the economic situation for Lake County. These will continue to be delayed as long as the Rt. 53 project remains as a potential road project. We can begin to move forward quickly as soon as the State of the Illinois turns the right-of-way over to DNR.

Feel free to call if you have any questions.

Thank you.

Bill Morris  
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