

47+ ...sensible highway solutions

PO Box 334, Big Rock IL 60511 – <http://47plus.org>

*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

*Illinois Chapter of the Sierra
Club*

August 7, 2007

Mr. Milton R. Sees
Acting Secretary
Illinois Department of Transportation
2300 S. Dirksen Parkway
Springfield, IL 62764

SUBJECT: Request to reopen and supplement the Prairie Parkway
Environmental Impact Process to include improvements to Illinois
47 from I-80 to I-88

Dear Mr. Sees,

The 47+ coalition is a new organization of environmental, agricultural, and public interest groups which has been formed to promote improvement of Illinois 47 and other existing highways in Kane, Kendall, and Grundy counties.

We see prompt funding and construction of these improvements as a more effective solution to the area's transportation needs than a truncated 5-mile section of the proposed Prairie Parkway, which is included in IDOT's 2008-2013 highway program.

This need was acknowledged in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Prairie Parkway:

Since there is a general lack of through, south to north multi-lane roads in the study area between I-80 and I-88, the study area's travel needs may not be best resolved by a single solution. (Page 3-21)

We see that the immediate priority is for improvements to existing roads, principally Illinois 47, as well as extension and connection of the arterial roads making up the Wikaduke Trail on the east edge of Kendall County and the Eldamain corridor connecting to the east-west Galena Road.

IDOT has been preoccupied with north-south routes throughout the Prairie Parkway study. The solutions to the area's traffic needs, however, need to address east-west travel as well, since most jobs are located to the east of Kendall County.

IDOT's analysis of alternatives suggests that improving Illinois 47 and the other arterial routes would produce a benefit at least comparable to a freeway solution for local travel, i.e. better serving the current residents of the three-county area.

You also describe as a freeway benefit better access to regional jobs. This, in fact, may be a liability. You view this criteria as putting more jobs within a given travel time. The reverse of that is also true and, perhaps, more important. A freeway would put more undeveloped farmland within range of existing jobs. In short, it's a recipe for sprawl.

The freeway option also has vastly greater detrimental impacts. The Prairie Parkway route would take over 2,500 acres of farmland for the highway and sacrifice another 5,000 acres of farmland for induced development. It would degrade the Fox River and such pristine streams as Big Rock Creek and Aux Sable Creek

The Prairie Parkway route would affect 54 acres of forested habitat and 2.6 acres of scarce prairie remnant, harm threatened and endangered species, and damage 57 jurisdictional wetlands.

By comparison, improving Illinois 47 and the existing highway network would have minimal effect on agricultural and natural resources.

Remarkably, in the six years since the Prairie Parkway was proposed, there has been little progress in improving the area's main north-south route, Illinois 47. The centerpiece of the improvements, adding lanes through Yorkville, is not even in IDOT's 2008-2013 Highway Program.

Congress earmarked \$4 million for the Yorkville project in 2005, but IDOT has yet to tap those funds to at least launch the improvements.

We urge that greater priority be given to prompt funding and expansion of Illinois 47 which would immediately address the traffic needs, particularly through Yorkville and north to I-88. This should be supplemented by working with Kendall County to accelerate the Eldamain road corridor with a Fox River bridge and connection to Galena Road. As planned by the county, Galena Road should be expanded to provide east-west travel to Illinois 47 and Orchard Road.

To accomplish the prompt Illinois 47 work, we request that IDOT reopen and supplement the DEIS to include improvements to the entire length of Illinois 47 from I-80 to I-88. The current draft of the EIS includes only the section of Illinois 47 from I-80 to Caton Farm Road.

Reopening the EIS process to expand the consideration of Illinois 47 should not significantly affect the schedule for work, given current budgetary restraints for the state portion of funding for any work.

It is our understanding that this step is a necessary one to tap the funds earmarked by in the 2005 federal transportation bill for "the north-south connector between I-80 and I-88." Clearly, Illinois 47 meets this functional project definition, and we urge IDOT to move quickly to access these funds for improvements.

We strongly believe that the Prairie Parkway is an ill advised project because of the serious impacts and substantial cost. IDOT, however, is proceeding with the corridor protection process that will insure that the corridor would be available in the future for an appropriate highway project if warranted.

The priority, however, should be Illinois 47, supplemented by the Eldamain Road corridor and the Wikaduke trail as well as the connecting grid of east-west routes. The area has diverse traffic needs and those needs are best met by a diversity of solutions.

On behalf of the Coalition,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jan Strasma', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jan Strasma
Chairman
Citizens Against the Sprawlway