

# MEETING NOTES

## Meeting #3 of the Ring-Around-the-Collar (RAC) Counties

**DATE, TIME, LOCATION:** September 16, 2008, 1:00PM, County Administration Building,  
189 East Court Street, Kankakee, Illinois

**ATTENDEES:**

Name	Agency/Firm	Phone	e-mail
Brian Dickson	DeKalb-Sycamore Area Transportation Study	815-748-2367	brian.dickson@cityofdekalb.com
Stephen Ernst	City of Rockford/ Rockford MPO	815-967-6734	steve.ernst@ci.rockford.il.us
Gary Foyle	Earth Tech   AECOM (ET)	312-777-5570	gary.foyle@aecom.com
Dennis Gary	Earth Tech   AECOM (ET)	312-777-5572	dennis.gary@aecom.com
Jim Haller	City of Joliet	815-724-4040	jhaller@jolietcity.org
Paul LaLonde	DeKalb-Sycamore Area Transportation Study	815-748-2366	paul.lalonde@cityofdekalb.com
Michael Lammey	Kankakee County	815-937-2940	mlammey@k3county.net
Holly Smith	Kane/Kendall Council of Mayors	630-444-3143	smithholly@co.kane.il.us
Mike Sullivan	Kane/Kendall Council of Mayors	630-444-3142	sullivanmike@co.kane.il.us
Sid Weseman	RTA	312-913-3247	wesemans@rtachicago.org
Jeff Wilkins	Kendall County	630-553-4142	jwilkins@co.kendall.il.us

**MINUTES:**

Meeting Opening - Mike Lammey called the meeting to order, and asked for self-introductions of attendees.

Public Comment – there was no public comment.

Minutes – there were no comments on the minutes of the September 14, 2007 meeting.

Meeting Background and Purpose – Mr. Lammey provided a short overview of the purpose of the Ring Around the Collar meetings. He noted that the meetings have served as an information exchange on commuter rail initiatives that fall outside of the 6-county NE IL area.

City of Rockford Project Presentation - Mr. Lammey introduced Steve Ernst who is the project manager for the Northern Illinois Commuter Transportation Initiative (NICTI) Rockford/Belvidere Alternatives Analysis study. The AA, which is nearly complete, evaluated a commuter rail connection between Rockford and Metra service in Elgin. Steve's talk followed a Power Point presentation.

Planning for the project started with their long range plan, and principally addressed quality of life issues. Boone County has substantial numbers of residents commuting to NE IL; Winnebago County has comparatively fewer. The corridor is not currently experiencing much traffic congestion, but is anticipated to worsen over time. Mr. Ernst noted that the largest US trading partner is Canada, and significant goods movement flow in the I-39/I-90 corridor. Counties and communities have adopted smart growth principles, which tie land use and transportation planning. There has also been increased interest in preserving agricultural lands, and concentrating development in urban areas of the corridor, including around prospective station locations. Growth in the Chicago metro area has been moving outward. The combined Winnebago and Boone area population is forecasted to grow 34% between 2000 and 2035 and similarly employment is forecasted to grow 43%.

Mr. Ernst explained that they received a federal earmark to fund the AA. The AA approach included land use coordination, public participation, and evaluation of 14 alternatives. Environmental studies remain to be done. They have been frustrated that the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) will not provide them guidance on the required level of environmental study. They are assuming that an Environmental Assessment will be needed. Local developers are embracing TOD. Smaller communities are having difficulties with transit oriented development (TOD) because of inadequate infrastructure to support higher density development. Boone County has been proactive in promoting TOD, including development of a neighborhood plan surrounding a station near the Tollway.

There is strong competition for discretionary FTA New Starts funding nationally, as indicated by the number of Chicago area projects. Being successful in this competition is based heavily on ridership, and specifically work travel ridership. The AA ridership forecasts involved merging the Rockford MPO model with the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) model. This was a significant effort. Ultimately, they concluded that there was an insufficient level of ridership for the project to qualify for FTA New Starts funding.

Mr. Ernst explained that a two-step screening process was used to narrow alternatives to the one alternative declared the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). The LPA involved commuter rail service between Rockford and the Metra Big Timber Station in Elgin using the UP Belvidere Subdivision. Three trains per peak period would be provided, one of which would extend to the Metra Bensenville Station. Capital costs to implement the project were estimated at \$247 million.

Alternative governance arrangements were evaluated to oversee operations and to finance the project. Joining the NE IL RTA was an identified option but was not given serious consideration. Amtrak would be a likely operator. The Union Pacific is agreeable to either an Amtrak or Metra operation. He noted that the UP recently lost the line's major freight customer – the Chrysler plant in Belvidere. One funding option is the Winnebago County Rail Authority, which was created to finance area freight rail improvements. The Greater Rockford Airport Authority has bonding capabilities which could also be used to finance the project. Annual operations and maintenance costs were estimated at \$10 million. Proceeds from alternative taxes were estimated, including property, sales, vehicle registration and gas. Mr. Ernst hopes to have the question included on the April 2009 ballot. They plan to hire NIU to poll voters.

Mr. Ernst explained that they have researched ways to trim capital costs. They also want to explore the possibility of combining the proposed Amtrak Chicago-Dubuque service with the NICTI proposal. This would involve modifying the Amtrak route between Chicago and Rockford to operate via the Milwaukee West/UP-Belvidere instead of by Amtrak's current planned route: the CN. The State has \$30 million to invest in the proposed intercity service. Refurbished Amtrak rolling stock is anticipated to be used for the service, although the ultimate operator of the service may choose to use other equipment, including diesel multiple units (DMUs).

Mr. Ernst handed out the Executive Summary of the Second Level Screening Report, a primer on FTA New Starts and Alternative Analyses, and a map of the NICTI LPA and proposed Amtrak alternative alignments.

Kankakee Project Update – Mike Lammey said that they have completed Phase 1 and 2 feasibility studies. A brochure prepared as part of the Phase 2 project was distributed. The County understands that Metra has plans to extend the Metra Electric District from University Park to Peotone, which could improve service for Kankakee County commuters. He also noted that their local bus operator provides scheduled service to the Metra station at University Park. Kankakee does not plan to pursue a commuter rail project in the near term.

DeKalb – Brian Dickson said that the Union Pacific alignment is well south of the NIU campus. He noted that the Huskie Bus Line provides connecting bus service to the Metra UP-West at Elburn.

Joliet – Jim Haller related an experience with FTA funding of a commuter parking facility. The \$6 million earmarked project was reduced to \$2.4 million. Funding for the project dribbled in over 4 years. The land acquisition element proved especially problematic.

## **DISTRIBUTION:**

All Attendees

ATTACHMENT: Meeting Agenda; Prepared by G. Foyle, Earth Tech | AECOM

## MEETING AGENDA

### Illinois Ring-Around-the-Collar (RAC) Counties Commuter Transit Common Issues

Tuesday, September 16, 2008, 1:00PM  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Conference Room – County Administration Building  
189 E. Court Street, Kankakee

#### Agenda:

1. Open Meeting at 1:00PM – Mike Lamme
2. Public Comment Period
3. Review of Minutes, September 14, 2007 Meeting
4. Meeting background and purpose
5. Project Presentation – City of Rockford – Steve Ernst
6. Project Updates (all representatives)
7. Status of Amtrak Intrastate Initiatives
8. Discussion of Funding Scenarios
  - a. Federal – new transportation bill in 2009
  - b. Illinois – status & current form of Capital Bill
  - c. Wisconsin - Proposed enabling legislation to create RTAs
  - d. Local- ??
9. Benefits from Sharing Activities
7. Open Discussion
8. Future Meetings?