

**APA Speech**  
**by Randy Blankenhorn, CMAP Executive Director**  
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**Intro**

I'm Randy Blankenhorn, executive director of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, known as CMAP. Prior to coming to CMAP I had spent the past 22 years with the Illinois Department of Transportation, most recently as its Bureau Chief of Urban Program Planning where one of our key responsibilities was coordinating transportation decisions with other urban issues. Thanks for coming today, and I want to thank APA and the meeting organizers for this chance to describe our new agency's mission and strategic vision.

**The region's challenges**

The Chicago region faces many challenges as the 21<sup>st</sup> Century unfolds. Despite having one of the world's most advanced transportation systems, the metropolitan area experiences the third worst traffic delays in the nation, with congestion projected to worsen as the region adds nearly 2 million people and 1.2 million jobs over the next 25 years. Residents spend 253 million hours and 151 million gallons of fuel sitting in traffic jams, at a cost to the region of \$4 billion annually. Chicago's economy benefits from having the world's third busiest rail hub -- handling 37,500 freight cars per day and moving one-third of the rail freight in the country -- but it is in danger of becoming a bottleneck. The U.S. Department of Transportation has estimated that freight movements will double nationally over the next twenty years, further exacerbating the problem.

Northeastern Illinois possesses the nation's second largest public transit system, but resources are lagging as costs increase for both capital improvements and operations. While over \$60 billion is expected to be available to maintain and improve the region's transportation system over the next 25 years, more than three-quarters of those dollars are needed just to maintain the existing system.

The local economy has also felt the effects -- positive and otherwise -- of soaring home values. Housing prices for owner-occupied units increased 35 percent in the Chicago area from 2000 to 2004. But during the same period, household incomes increased only 5 percent and the percentage of households spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing increased from 29 percent to 38 percent. One result is that people are living farther from where they work, with ever-increasing transportation costs. The shortage of affordable housing near major employment centers contributes to traffic congestion, among other negative economic and social effects.

Natural resources are abundant but under increasing pressure. According to Chicago Wilderness, the rapid development of land for urban uses is the primary threat to the region's unprotected natural lands, and in some cases it is even causing serious degradation of protected lands. Four of our seven counties still have significant percentages of their land in agricultural production. In 2002, the market value of agricultural products from these four counties was well over \$300 million. But increasing development threatens prime farmland and our region's role as a world leader in agricultural production. The region's eastern border is Lake Michigan, one of the world's largest fresh-water resources, serving the majority of the region's water needs. However, our population forecasts indicate as many as 23

townships may suffer water deficits of varying severity over the next two decades; recognition of this growing problem helped prompt a statewide water supply study that was announced in Spring 2006.

As a major center of the global economy, metropolitan Chicago has strengths in technology, freight, manufacturing, and tourism. The region is home to headquarters of 30 Fortune 500 companies and 12 Fortune Global 500 companies. According to World Business Chicago, the region features 98 corporate headquarters, second nationally to New York. Twenty-five percent of the largest 100 employers in the region are in electronics, computers or telecommunications. In 2002, Chicago welcomed 32 million visitors who spent an estimated \$8.5 billion. Yet many business leaders recognize the need for coordination of economic development efforts at the regional level to keep northeastern Illinois globally competitive. More than ever, as communities compete to attract investment in this new economic environment, urban and suburban communities must be on the same team because their futures and fortunes are intertwined.

To address these and other regional challenges, in Spring 2005 local government, business, and community leaders recommended to the Governor and the General Assembly the creation of a new public agency to coordinate comprehensive planning in northeastern Illinois. The General Assembly unanimously approved the Regional Planning Act (House Bill 3121), which Governor Blagojevich signed into law in August 2005. This legislation created the Regional Planning Board -- now known as the Board of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) -- and stated that “a streamlined consolidated planning agency is necessary in order to plan for the most effective public and private investments in the northeastern Illinois region and to

better integrate plans for land use and transportation.” The Board began meeting in October 2005 and has made substantial progress toward consolidating within CMAP the two agencies that had, respectively, been responsible for planning of transportation and land use: The Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS) and the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC).

The region is now at a crossroads, as growth is clearly coming. Yet to be determined is whether that growth will constitute *progress* rather than an erosion of residents' quality of life. Together, through collaborative planning and by understanding our regional interdependence, decision makers must shape these trends regionally instead of passively letting them shape our communities individually. Nor are these challenges confined to the geographic boundaries of the seven counties that comprise CMAP; in fact, they impact the entire state of Illinois and cross state boundaries.

### **A little bit about CMAP**

In the winter of 2004, Governor Blagojevich and the General Assembly created a task force to examine transportation planning, funding and structural issues. This task force, led by former Congressman Bill Lipinski, recommended seven strategies for the region and the State of Illinois to pursue. One of these was the merger of CATS and NIPC, the only one of the recommendations that has been implemented. Over the summer and fall of 2004, local elected officials, the business community, public interest groups and legislative leaders developed a proposal that led to the creation of the Regional Planning Board, now known as CMAP. This effort was truly a bottom-up effort that identified how northeastern Illinois wanted to plan for its future.

CMAP was created by state law to integrate planning for land use and transportation. Because of its broad local support, the Regional Planning Act passed unanimously in both houses of the General Assembly before being signed by the Governor in August 2005. CMAP is a merger of the Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS) and the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC). The two organizations' personnel have been combined into a single staff with a consolidated, comprehensive vision. The new agency was created by consensus, and CMAP needs to act as a consensus builder across the region by promoting good planning and providing expert data and analysis about growth and how to address it.

The agency has a clear mandate to help the seven-county region set priorities and be a strong advocate for those priorities. We intend to fundamentally change the way planning occurs in Illinois through an integrated, comprehensive and collaborative approach to addressing regional issues. CMAP will work with our partners to establish a vision for northeastern Illinois that will allow us to maintain and improve our position as a world-class region where business wants to locate and where people want to live, work and play.

To accomplish this, the region's decision makers and stakeholders need to think beyond traditional boundaries and parochial interests to achieve a consensus on how to respond to growth and how to make decisions about investment and development.

### **A little bit about CATS and NIPC**

**CATS.** According to retired CATS executive -- and unofficial CATS historian -- Andy Plummer, the CATS Policy Committee held its first meeting on June 10, 1955. CATS was created to

develop the one of the nation's first comprehensive, long-range, regional transportation plans. This was an era in which the Eisenhower Interstate system was being built, and CATS was the basis for transportation planning processes nationally. The first CATS RTP -- Regional Transportation Plan -- was completed in 1962, looking toward a horizon year of 1980.

The CATS Policy Committee is designated by the governor of Illinois and northeastern Illinois local officials as the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The Policy Committee plans, develops and maintains an affordable, safe and efficient transportation system for the region, while providing the forum through which local decision makers develop regional plans and programs.

**NIPC.** In 1957, the Illinois General Assembly created NIPC as an advisory body to conduct research required for planning in the region, including collection of data on population, social, economic, physical, esthetic and governmental factors. The intent was for NIPC to advise units of government regarding the regional impacts of their "plans, projects, proposals, and policies adopted or under consideration." And NIPC was charged with preparing comprehensive regional plans meant to influence -- but not dictate -- the decisions that local officials make about land use and development.

NIPC has been responsible for generating the official forecasts of population, employment, and other socio-economic indicators that are key inputs to the CATS RTP. NIPC has also built strong capabilities in housing, data management and analysis. NIPC has conducted environmental planning and research, including responsibility for reviewing Facility Planning Area (FPA) requests that are important in terms of wastewater management and

annexation of land by municipalities. FPA review is perhaps the one area in which NIPC's role was not so much advisory as regulatory. Even at that, the Illinois EPA had final say over NIPC's recommended approval (or disapproval) of municipalities' FPA requests.

**Current "baseline plans."** The most recent major plans of CATS and NIPC -- the 2030 Regional Transportation Plan and the 2040 Regional Framework Plan -- have been formally adopted by the CMAP Board as our official baseline plans. Implementing those plans makes up a significant part of our current work program, even as we are beginning the effort to create our region's first truly comprehensive plan for land use and transportation, which will be published in 2010.

### **Benefits and drawbacks of the two stand-alone organizations**

The CATS governance system has served its intended function with the Policy Committee as the designated MPO. Relative to other parts of the country, our region has fared well in terms of transportation investments. NIPC has provided important data products and plans, and the Commission's advisory status has honored the long Illinois tradition of giving local communities autonomy over land-use decisions. The two organizations partnered when necessary but operated independently of one another -- critics have said "in isolation from one another."

To the extent that there was insufficient coordination between CATS and NIPC, one drawback is that transportation investments have at times failed to reflect truly regional priorities. In some cases, the perception has been that other land-use priorities weren't given sufficient weight in that process. Just as importantly, transportation investments have tended to be made in isolation,

without evaluating related impacts. By the same token, communities often make land-use decisions without fully considering the regional context, or the effects those decisions might have on neighboring communities, infrastructure needs and traffic congestion. The overall result has been a fragmented approach to addressing growth of population and employment, putting strain on infrastructure and natural resources.

But let me be very clear: No one in a position of leadership at CMAP is in favor of "regional government" for northeastern Illinois. The idea of merging CATS and NIPC has been around for decades. In the past, efforts to combine land-use and transportation planning were thwarted by fears that a regional authority would be created to usurp local autonomy over development decisions. But now, increasingly, local officials recognize the need for coordinated, comprehensive planning while maintaining local land-use control. And likewise, they recognize that transportation investments need to be based on a regional context, rather than on "whose turn is next."

All the indicators show that growth will continue, and local leaders recognize *the need for consensus* on how to address growth. The northeastern Illinois region has taken a bold step to merge the previously separate agencies for planning of land use and transportation, both of which had existed for roughly 50 years. Talk of merging them began thirty years ago, if not even sooner. So this consolidation and creation of CMAP is a milestone in itself, but it is only the beginning.

## **The CMAP Board's strategic report**

On September 1, 2006, the CMAP Board issued a strategic report on the agency's vision, governance, and funding. The report is available at [www.chicagoareaplanning.org](http://www.chicagoareaplanning.org). This document is in no sense the final say on CMAP's strategic direction. It provides high-level policy "hooks" that we will use later, with our partners, to hang specific policy and program details upon.

The legislature provided no funding in last year's Regional Planning Act, but it specifically called for us to submit a financial plan that would give the agency a solid foundation. Among our legislative priorities for the spring session will be to identify an adequate, stable source of funding for the new agency.

## **Why CMAP is different**

The composition of our board was very carefully created to give balanced representation -- 5, 5, and 5 -- to the collar counties, suburban Cook, and the City of Chicago. Our authorizing legislation gives us a strong mandate for change. The merger was prompted by a widespread belief that the status quo had ceased to work. Local elected officials, state legislators, business, civic and community organizations all came together to prepare and support the Regional Planning Act. It is nearly unheard-of for a bill to pass unanimously in both houses of the General Assembly.

Put simply, CMAP was created to change the way our region plans. As an agency, our motto is that our work has to be relevant to our communities and stakeholders. CMAP is not a think tank, and it's not an academic institution where purely "curiosity-driven" research can be nurtured. Everything we do must have a practical dimension that relates directly to challenges that communities and their leaders face. We have to provide them with the tools to plan

well and to make sound decisions. If, at all times, our work program pursues that relevance, the products of our work will be meaningful to our partners and supporters. We won't always tell the region what it wants to hear, but we will make every effort to say what the region and its communities *need* to hear.

**In one sense, CMAP has a simple message: "Good planning is important." But it's not just about planning -- it's about results.**

If our leaders felt that the region had already been planning effectively, the formation of CMAP by merging CATS and NIPC never would have occurred. The overriding criticism of those prior organizations was that they had lost their relevance. Local officials haven't been getting sufficient technical assistance and advice to facilitate good decision making about land use and how it relates to transportation. Partly, that was due to a lack of funding for planning at the regional level. But it was also frequently due to a failure to make planning relevant in a pragmatic sense.

Let me be clear: I am not talking about watering down the idealism that is inherent in the planning process. An agency like CMAP exists to set the bar high, to take the long-term view, and to show the region a vision of how things can be if, together, we apply sound principles.

But idealized scenarios become pie in the sky when we fail to acknowledge everyday realities faced by local decision makers, who in most cases are elected -- and therefore accountable -- officials with their communities' best interests at heart. The flip side of this is that, when local interests take precedent above all else, the result is patterns of growth that can have damaging effects

through an increased rate of land consumption and an overburdening of infrastructure.

Many civic organizations who pushed for creation of CMAP say these trends are leading us toward an uncertain future where quality of life is diminished as our residents spend more time than they want commuting, pay more of their income than they want on housing, watch the quality and quantity of their natural resources decrease, and so on.

### ***How CMAP will be different***

We are taking a comprehensive approach to planning by integrating seven focus areas:

- Research and Analysis
- Land Use
- Transportation
- Economic and Community Development
- Environment
- Housing
- Human Services

The authorizing legislation called for a deputy executive director for transportation and another for land use, which we believe would only have perpetuated the segregation of those planning functions. Instead, we have flattened the organization to facilitate collaboration across these major focus areas.

CMAP will be an agent for changing the way that the region looks at investment and development decisions. For too long, those decisions have been made in isolation rather than through a comprehensive approach. It is this new way of planning that our

local leaders and the General Assembly are demanding if we are going to strengthen our communities, protect our natural resources, and create and retain jobs in northeastern Illinois.

We need to be accountable to the region. Planning is vitally important, but if those plans do not get implemented or the same old way of doing business remains our *modus operandi*, than CMAP is not doing its job. We have to make change on the ground, in our communities, and we can do that in a number of ways.

First, we need to get back to the CATS/NIPC roots of providing high-quality research and analysis to our local decision makers. This was the strength and backbone of our two predecessor agencies, but somehow we have lost our focus in this area. CATS has done a good job of meeting federal requirements and making sure that the region remains eligible for federal transportation funds. But they have not had the resources to do the type of planning and analysis that the region needs. NIPC has produced award-winning plans but has had little impact in implementing those plans. It all starts with providing local officials with the type of analysis that shows the affects of our investment and development decisions.

Second, CMAP needs to help the region create a vision for its future. With its system of centers, corridors, and green areas, the 2040 Regional Framework Plan is the backbone of that effort, but we need to take the next steps. Many communities said in the Common Ground process that they wanted to be a metropolitan center or a community center, but they never really understood what it took to get there. In this current year ,we will be going back out to communities with a number of tools, including the

Centers Toolkit, to help communities understand the trade-offs and strategies that it needs to pursue to realize its vision.

Note that we talk about the vision "of" the community, not CMAP's vision "for" a community. We respect and encourage the diversity of our communities and their right to pursue the future that they feel best meets the needs of their residents. Part of CMAP's job is to help communities understand their decisions' impact on their neighbors, on our natural resources and on the region as a whole. We will increase our commitment to providing communities with technical assistance and tools to help them make decisions that improve the livability of their community inside of that regional framework.

Third, we must work with our partners, with the State of Illinois, and with other agencies to provide incentives for growing in a sustainable and economically strategic way. Although I have often said that a carrot is just a stick painted orange, relatively small incentives can often make a significant difference in how decisions are made regarding development and infrastructure. As we look around the country, the regions that are putting both capital and planning incentives in place are the regions that are making a real difference, again on the ground in a relevant way, in their communities. We feel very strongly that the Local Planning Assistance Act needs to be funded, and we will make this a priority in the Spring legislative session. But as we look at the potential of a statewide capital program, we must evaluate the effectiveness of capital incentives as well.

Fourth, there needs to be a regional process for evaluating major projects and developments using criteria that identify the benefits and impacts that they have on the region as a whole. This should not entail giving CMAP the authority to approve or reject projects,

but the process should take an analytical approach to identifying projects that have impacts beyond the boundaries of single jurisdictions and to working with communities so they understand the projects' impacts, ensuring the greatest benefit, both locally and regionally. The region needs to determine what scale of project should be subject to this evaluation and what criteria are important to evaluate. CMAP should not be seen as getting in the way of project implementation; this process needs to add value to local and regional decision making. In other parts of the country, like Atlanta, this process has been established in such a way where developers and project managers look upon the regional agencies' support as a "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval." It helps them with communities and opponents because all of the questions and issues are considered up front and have been addressed. We believe that we can develop a similar process where we add value to the development and project planning process for the sponsor, the community, and the region.

Finally, CMAP will provide leadership in identifying and promoting regional priorities. These are generally considered project priorities, but they will need to include policies as well. With declining resources and significant needs, the region needs to have a process where we can identify and prioritize those projects that have truly regional benefits. CMAP needs to be on the front lines with our state and federal officials, ensuring that resources are made available for those projects. Again, we need to create a method for prioritizing projects that is needs-based, transparent, and equitable so everyone buys into it. This will not happen without the support of our local governments and other partners, so we need to continue to work with them to develop a fair and accountable methodology.

## **An example of CMAP's role**

Governor Blagojevich signed an executive order earlier this year requiring a comprehensive program for state and regional water-supply planning and management. The General Assembly provided pilot funding for two areas, including northern Illinois, to develop regional water supply plans. CMAP was selected by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to lead this effort in our expanded region. This is an opportunity for CMAP to utilize all of its resources as convener, analyst, communicator and advocate to work with communities and other stakeholders in developing strategies for an issue that I believe is one that will have significant impacts on the health and viability of our region. It is an opportunity for all of us to look at an issue that will impact every aspect of our communities from a truly comprehensive regional approach. I appreciate the confidence that our partners have in us in our ability to lead this effort.

**The State needs a capital plan.** As another example of how CMAP can make a difference, let's talk about the need for a capital plan in Illinois. There are few issues as pressing in terms of their potential impact on the state's economy and overall prosperity. In the case of metropolitan Chicago, we have the nation's second largest public transit system, but resources are lagging as costs increase for both capital improvements and operations. We are currently the third most congested region in the country while at the same time the quality of our roads and bridges are deteriorating and congestion continues to worsen. It's bad for our economy and bad for our communities' livability.

CMAP can't solve this on its own. What we can do, however, is to make the strongest possible case that our state needs a capital plan, not just for roads and transit, but also for water treatment, school construction, and other necessary infrastructure.

In that context, our new agency is positioned to help jump-start the capital planning process by creating a broader consensus than has been possible in the past. On one level, that means being a cheerleader, but there are already many cheerleaders advocating for a capital plan. What makes CMAP different is that it is uniquely positioned to act as a convener of those groups and to then say, "Here are our priorities as a region." That's something neither CATS nor NIPC could really do, and it's at the core of what our new organization is striving to become. CMAP was created to build a regional consensus and, very importantly, to strongly advocate for the region and state to act on that consensus.

In the near term, the transportation community, business organizations and many local governments have already built a consensus on the need for capital improvements. So why hasn't the plan moved forward since Illinois FIRST ended? We may think it's a no-brainer, but obviously it is not -- otherwise the plan would have been funded. Preaching to the converted has not succeeded. We need to bring others into the tent.

**Advocating for a capital plan.** We need to explain why maintaining our infrastructure is important and describe what transportation means to our economic viability. And we need to ensure that the region is making the most cost-effective investments possible. We need to talk less about projects and bring the message back to how it affects our residents. We need to talk about how I have to leave work at 3:30 to make it to my daughter's 5:30 soccer game and that is unacceptable. We have to talk about how an employee has to change busses three times and spend more than 90 minutes to get to a job in DuPage County from the south side of Chicago or the south suburbs. We need to talk about the real economic losses to business when their workers and

goods sit in congestion and what it means in jobs to our residents. We need to talk about a multi-billion dollar investment in all of our infrastructure, not just transportation, and the dramatic affects it has on our quality of life if we don't maintain it, or if we continue to divert capital improvement funds to cover day to day operating expenses. We need to sell the "Why", and we have not yet been successful in doing so.

By helping the public understand why investing in transportation infrastructure is important, we can begin to persuade the General Assembly to act. That requires strong support in the region and across the state from:

- Local officials
- Business leaders
- General public
- Advocacy groups

Now is our best chance to get a capital plan passed. By early 2007, metropolitan Chicago as a region should have specifics of what the capital plan needs to include. In its Spring 2007 session, the General Assembly must consider the capital plan. That gives us little time to make our best possible case. "Making the case" should include identifying all possible options for funding the capital plan.

CMAP alone can't solve the whole problem, but we will evaluate investment choices to ensure they make sense in terms of expert analysis and regional priorities. While NIPC and CATS were not in a strong position to promote capital investment, CMAP certainly is. We will:

- Help define criteria and set priorities

- Help convince stakeholders (local, regional, and state)
- Work with our partners to create and sell a legislative package for the General Assembly

### **In conclusion**

Finally, I want to say that CMAP's success is something that should matter to everyone in the region -- in the entire state, for that matter. Good planning is what the APA is all about, and we value your partnership as we seek to secure the continued prosperity of Illinois and metropolitan Chicago. That vision of the future depends on good planning, and especially on the successful implementation of those plans. I thank you for your interest in CMAP and its role in planning for the future of northeastern Illinois.