



CENTRAL TRI-STATE TOLLWAY

# Corridor Planning Council

## Findings and Recommendations

January 2016





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# Council Members

## **Greg Bedalov**

Council Chair  
Executive Director, Illinois Tollway

## **Paul Braun**

Flossmoor Mayor, South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association

## **Benjamin Brockschmidt**

Executive Director Infrastructure Council, Illinois Chamber of Commerce

## **Ray Drake**

Vice President State Government Affairs, UPS, Illinois Freight Advisory Committee

## **John Fortmann**

Deputy Director - District 1, Illinois Department of Transportation

## **Bryan Gay**

Economic Development Director, Choose DuPage

## **Frank Grimaldi**

Assistant Commissioner of Design and Construction, Chicago Department of Aviation

## **Ken Grunke**

Executive Director, West Suburban Chamber of Commerce and Industry

## **Matt Hart/Dave Moss**

Executive Director/Executive Board Member, Illinois Trucking Association

## **Pat Higgins**

Village Manager, Western Springs, West Central Municipal Conference – Central Council

## **Tom Kotarac**

Dep. Executive Director Policy & Programming, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning

## **Gopal Lalmalani**

Oak Brook Village President, DuPage Mayors and Managers Conference

## **Shirlanne Lemm**

President and CEO, GOA Regional Business Association

## **Marty Maloney**

Park Ridge Mayor, Northwest Municipal Conference

## **Sean McDermott**

Countryside Mayor, West Central Municipal Conference – Central Council

## **Steven M. Morley**

Elmhurst Mayor, DuPage Mayors and Managers Conference

## **Paul Nowicki**

Regional Assistant Vice President, State Government Affairs, BNSF Railroad

## **Arnold Randall**

General Superintendent, Forest Preserve District of Cook County

## **Leanne Redden**

Executive Director, Regional Transportation Authority

## **T.J. Ross**

Executive Director, Pace Suburban Bus

## **Don Schaefer**

Executive Vice President, Mid-West Truckers Association Inc.

## **Jeff Sherwin**

Northlake Mayor, West Central Municipal Conference - North Central Council

## **Peter Skosey**

Executive Vice President, Metropolitan Planning Council

## **Chris Snyder**

Director of Transportation, DuPage County

## **David St. Pierre**

Executive Director, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

## **Liisa Stark**

Assistant Vice President, Government Affairs, Union Pacific Railroad

## **Joseph Tamburino**

Hillside Mayor, West Central Municipal Conference - North Central Council

## **Charles Tokar**

Chicago Ridge Mayor, Southwest Conference of Mayors

## **Kris Wasowicz**

Justice Mayor, Southwest Conference of Mayors

## **John Yonan**

Superintendent, Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways

# Preface

The Tollway Board and executive director greatly appreciate the time, effort and thoughtful consideration shared by the Corridor Planning Council members in shaping the Central Tri-State Tollway (I-294) Corridor planning process.

The guiding principles and recommendations included in this report will inform the Central Tri-State Master Plan. The master plan will examine various reconstruction alternatives that incorporate the council's input and will also integrate other considerations such as the condition of existing corridor assets and ongoing corridor maintenance needs.

The Corridor Planning Council Report and the master plan results will be shared with the Tollway Board of Directors to engage in decision-making for future phases of project implementation. Collectively, these documents will aid the Tollway Board in making decisions that balance and prioritize competing demands, while also ensuring compliance with all Tollway, state and federal rules and regulations relating to project delivery and operations.



# Introduction

In 2011, the Illinois Tollway Board of Directors approved a 15-year, \$12 billion capital program, Move Illinois: The Illinois Tollway Driving the Future. As part of that capital program, \$1.694 billion was set aside to reconstruct the Central Tri-State Tollway (I-294) from 95th Street to Balmoral Avenue. The Central Tri-State forms the backbone of the 286-mile Tollway system and of the region's economy. The corridor carries the heaviest amount of passenger and commercial traffic on the Tollway system, with commercial freight accounting for as much as 20 percent of traffic in some sections. Because of this heavy usage, the Central Tri-State also contains the greatest amount of congestion.

To ensure the Tollway's near-term investments have long-term relevance, the Tollway created the Central Tri-State Tollway (I-294) Corridor Planning Council to help create a broad regional vision for the future of the roadway. The findings of the council will provide guidance for future corridor capital improvements.

To carry out this effort, the Tollway tapped regional stakeholders to participate on the council including: representatives from the council of mayors, the region's transportation agencies, local business association leaders and representatives from the commercial freight industry. The council worked to form a consensus on the regional vision for the corridor over a period of six months. This report summarizes the council's work, and will inform the Central Tri-State Master Plan.

Figure 1: Central Tri-State Project Boundaries



# Background

Originally constructed in 1958, the Central Tri-State included two lanes in both directions from 95th Street to the Stevenson Expressway (I-55) and three lanes from I-55 to Balmoral Avenue. In 1972, the southern section was widened from two to three lanes in both directions, and in 1992, a fourth lane was added in both directions along the entire stretch from 95th Street to Balmoral Avenue (Figure 2). The result of this construction is a patchwork of pavement types and age in varying need of repair.

The Central Tri-State plays an integral role in the regional economy, as the roadway connects hundreds of thousands of the region's residents to their places of employment. More than 140,000 residents live within a mile radius, and more than 115,000 people work along the corridor.

The corridor also operates as a critical connection in the region's transportation network. Four different interstates converge and connect along this short 22-mile stretch of Tollway and a fifth roadway will connect once the new north-south portion of the Elgin O'Hare Western Access Project is completed. The roadway also joins O'Hare and Midway International Airports, and it serves as a major freight corridor for the region (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Freight Volume and Congestion by Tollway Corridor

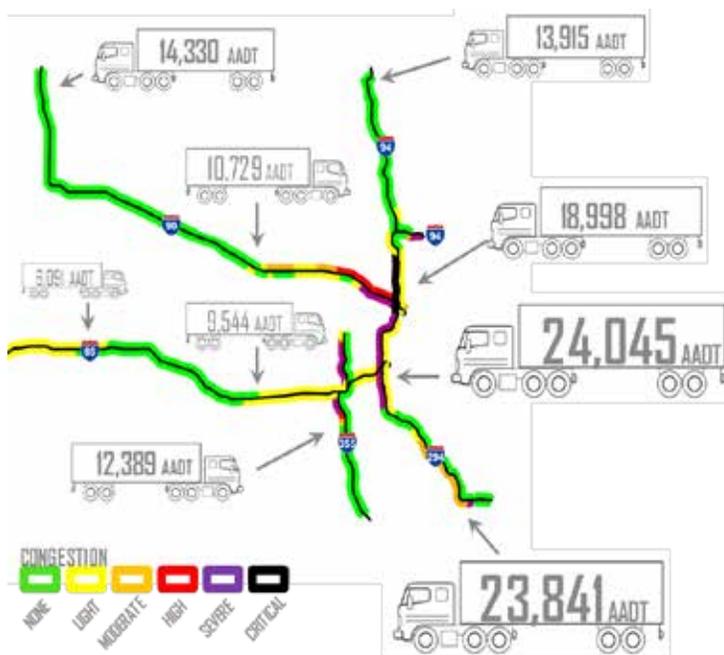


Figure 2: Construction History of Pavement on the Central Tri-State



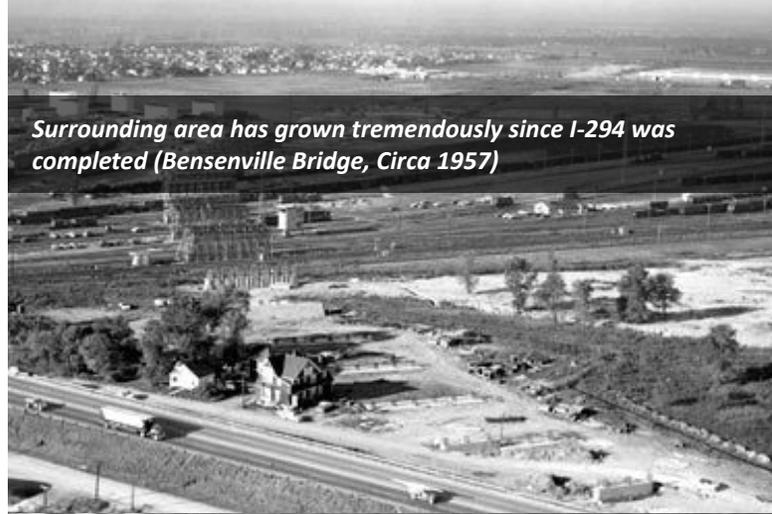
The Central Tri-State experiences a significant amount of congestion. It carries as many as 360,000 vehicle trips per day and on average, 24,045 daily commercial vehicle trips. Both represent the highest of such figures on the Tollway system. The roadway has not been widened in almost 25 years, and much of the pavement and underlying infrastructure has not been updated since originally constructed. In response to these conditions, the Tollway programmed \$1.694 billion in its 15-year capital program, Move Illinois, for the reconstruction of the Central Tri-State.

However, the Central Tri-State contains several unique roadway features, and reconstruction of the roadway will present some difficult challenges. Since the initial completion of the roadway, traffic and the surrounding areas have grown considerably. Regionally, the Chicago metropolitan area has added more than 2 million residents between 1970 and today. The adjacent communities have grown and matured as well over that time. As illustrated by the corridor's current employment and population statistics, the density adjacent to the Central Tri-State creates many right-of-way issues and impediments. Creative and collaborative solutions on several fronts, such as stormwater management and potential capacity improvements, will be required.

Additionally, the many interstate-to-interstate interchanges create congestion points affecting mobility and the reliability of the corridor. Several complex structures are also part of this reconstruction project and as large and unique pieces of infrastructure, they will require a substantial amount of attention and ingenuity. Addressing all of these challenges will require evaluation and coordination with local and regional stakeholders.

In light of these conditions, and in advance of the master planning process, the Tollway established the Central Tri-State Tollway (I-294) Corridor Planning Council. The goal of the council is to develop recommendations for the future of the corridor. The findings of the council are intended to not only influence the master plan, but also guide any future work on the roadway. The Tollway values public participation, and looked to the council to help prioritize its investments and create a corridor that supports and improves the region. After the master planning process is completed in 2017, construction is programmed to begin in 2020.

*Surrounding area has grown tremendously since I-294 was completed (Bensenville Bridge, Circa 1957)*



*Aging infrastructure along the corridor needs to be addressed (Mile Long Bridge, Circa 1960)*



*The Central Tri-State is a major freight corridor in the region (Hinsdale Oasis)*



*I-294 provides connections to regional destinations such as the O'Hare International Airport (Balmoral Avenue Exit)*



# Corridor Planning Council Activities

The Illinois Tollway initiated the council by inviting members from a variety of governmental entities and business sectors to serve as a diverse body representing many perspectives. Representatives include members from government and communities, transportation agencies, advocacy/civic organizations and the freight, economic development and environmental sectors. The Subregional Councils of Government selected mayors and village presidents to represent their jurisdictions. The council was asked to help outline a broad corridor vision and regional role for the Central Tri-State, identify issues and opportunities, build consensus, develop guiding principles for project development and implementation and create long-term corridor recommendations.

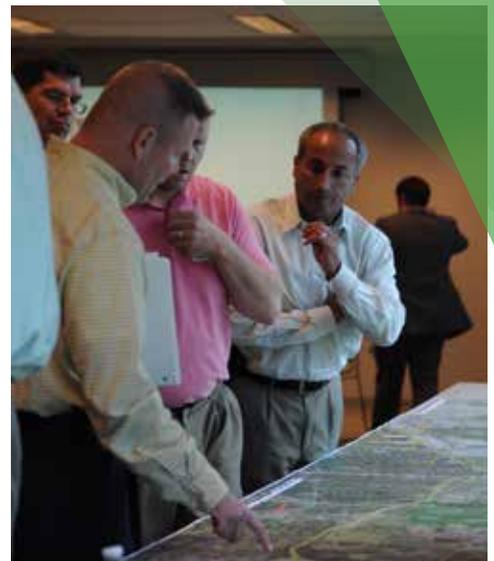
Starting in August 2015, the council convened on five separate occasions over a six-month period. At each meeting, the council worked to develop a consensus on guiding principles, corridor issues and recommendations for the corridor. Led by Tollway staff, the meetings were held on:

- August 14, 2015 – Illinois Tollway headquarters
- September 15, 2015 – Northlake Village Hall
- October 15, 2015 – Oak Brook Village Hall
- November 10, 2015 – Lipinski Community Center in Justice
- January 21, 2016 – Illinois Tollway headquarters

The council meetings promoted collaboration and fostered a healthy and open dialogue about the vision for the corridor. Throughout the process, council members were given the opportunity to develop a set of recommendations that met their goals.

The first task completed by the council was the development and adoption of guiding principles. Next, the council identified key issues along the corridor that should be addressed in the master planning and reconstruction process. During the October and November meetings, the council participated in exercises to prioritize the issues, brainstorm potential solutions and develop recommendations.

As the formal work of the council is finalized, the council encourages members to stay engaged in the project and work with their neighboring municipalities and partner agencies to identify and pursue local priorities. Continued engagement through the master planning and subsequent project phases with and by the Tollway is needed to ensure improvements can be coordinated to maximize all assets.



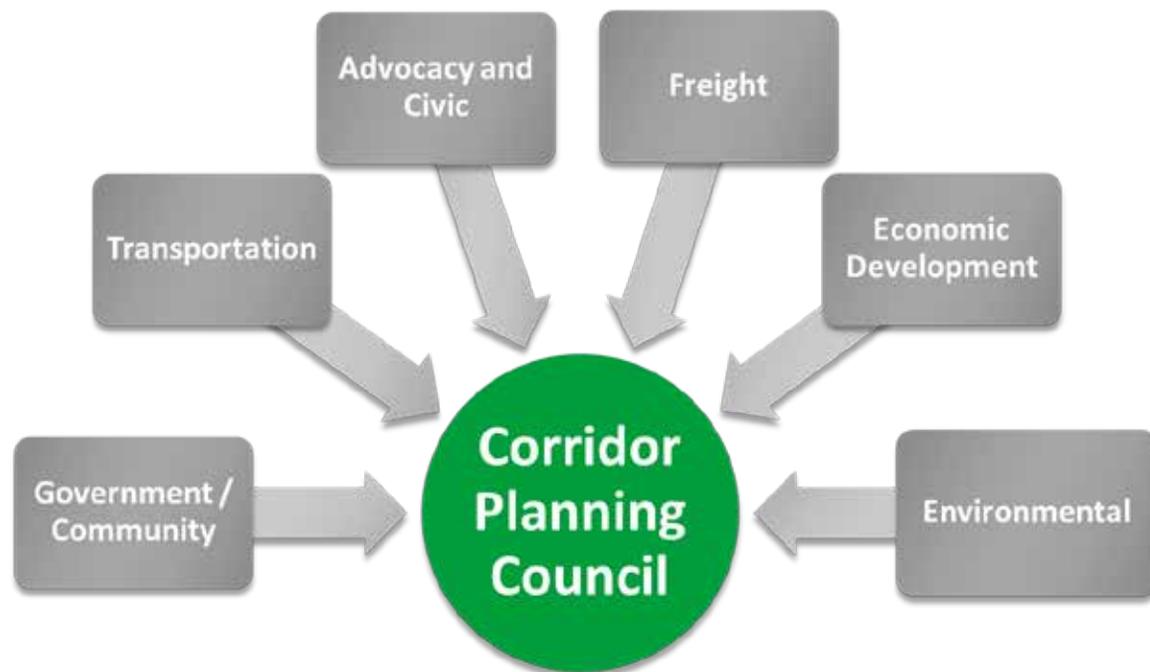


Figure 4: Corridor Planning Council Membership Composition

## Environmental Working Group

The council created the Environmental Working Group (EWG) to help assist it with addressing the key environmental issues in the corridor. The EWG, composed of environmental experts from local and regional governmental agencies and non-profits, met on several occasions during the six month period. Organizations represented on the EWG include: Active Transportation Alliance, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, Chicago Wilderness, DuPage County Stormwater Management, DuPage River Salt Creek Workgroup, Forest Preserves of Cook County, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago and the Respiratory Health Association.

The EWG and the council worked in tandem on environmental issues. An EWG report was given at each council meeting, and the work of the council was presented at each EWG meeting.

The EWG's first task was to develop the scope of its efforts. It identified six topics of concern along the corridor: water quantity, water quality, the natural environment, air quality, aesthetics and bicycle and pedestrian accommodations. Next, aligning with the council, the EWG proposed potential solutions to critical issues and developed draft recommendations. The EWG recommendations were combined with the council's recommendations by staff and were approved by the council as a whole.

# Guiding Principles

The Council adopted the guiding principles at its September meeting.

The intent of these principles is to provide a framework for future decision making regarding the reconstruction of the roadway. These principles, while not exhaustive, do address the major themes and critical areas identified by the council.

Develop and support an inspired vision that accounts for existing and future demand along the Central Tri-State Tollway (I-294) and the Tollway system as a whole; providing safe, efficient and appealing transportation choices for all corridor users including freight, passenger, transit, bicyclists and pedestrians

Improve travel reliability, performance and access of the Central Tri-State Tollway corridor to support economic opportunity, increase mobility and continue growth in the region

Minimize the environmental impacts by promoting collaborative, efficient sustainable practices, including but not limited to stormwater best management practices

Support financially viable solutions, in coordination and collaboration with partners, that address the corridor needs of today and the flexibility to address future regional needs

Encourage an open and collaborative regional planning process among council members to guide the development of a regionally appropriate vision for the corridor

Consider innovative solutions that enable the use of technology to ensure maximum utility of infrastructure along the corridor

# Prioritization of Issues

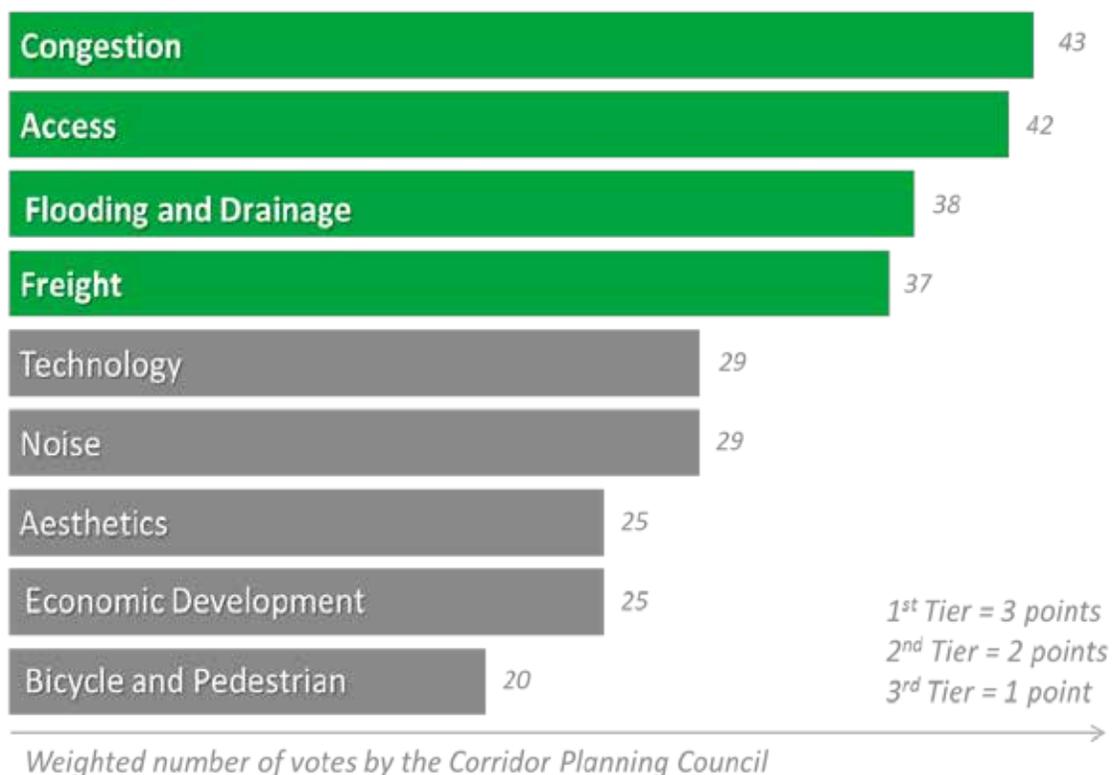
During the October meeting, Tollway staff led the council through an exercise that prioritized the nine identified issue areas. This process helped the council identify the issues most critical for a successful reconstruction.

Through a small group exercise, the council was asked to prioritize issues into three tiers of varying significance: high, medium, and low. Council members were then asked to repeat the prioritization process four different times assuming a different role each time – representing themselves, representing a Tollway customer, representing someone acting in the interest of the Tollway and representing a prospective neighbor of the Tollway. These roles represent the various stakeholders and groups affected by any Tollway construction, and through this role-playing exercise, the council was able to prioritize issues from all relevant perspectives.

The findings from this exercise show a clear consensus about what the top priorities are for this corridor (Figure 5). Congestion and access are the only issues that appear three times in the highest priority tier, and during the resulting discussion, the council made it clear that these issues need attention. Closely behind the top two issues are flooding and drainage and freight, with each issue making two appearances in the highest priority tier.

Overall, these four issues represent a clear consensus from the council and help to establish future priorities for the corridor.

Figure 5: Weighted Number of Votes by the Council



# Recommendations

Over the course of several meetings, the council went through a collaborative and open process to develop a set of recommendations. For each of the nine issue areas, the council brainstormed innovative ideas and solutions to address the critical issues. Next, the council discussed each solution to assess its merits as a formal recommendation.

Moving forward, these recommendations will be used to inform the ongoing planning for the corridor and will provide guidance for future corridor improvements.

## To improve current and future *reliability, mobility* and *performance* of the Central Tri-State

- ▶ Explore opportunities to add capacity in conjunction with technology-driven demand management strategies, such as managed lanes, congestion pricing, reversible lanes, etc. to optimize current and future roadway performance while considering the environmental and cost tradeoffs.
- ▶ Seek partnered solutions to improve the performance of major interchanges, such as I-290 and I-55.
- ▶ Consider improving locally desired access to the corridor while evaluating the impact to the overall performance of the roadway.
- ▶ Evaluate viable integration of public transit accommodations in the same spirit as the I-90 corridor.
- ▶ Examine the feasibility of additional truck parking or other freight-specific opportunities to support safe and reliable travel for commercial vehicles.

## To address *environmental impacts* and support *sustainability* within the Central Tri-State Corridor

- ▶ Consider collaborative ways to address existing drainage needs through innovative green infrastructure techniques that include the expansion of existing ponds and basins, reestablishment of wetlands and utilization of regional detention.
- ▶ Provide stormwater storage for all new impervious areas and strive to achieve local goals.
- ▶ Future improvements should not further degrade the water quality of adjacent waterways and a corridor water quality volume goal should be evaluated to capture the first flush of rain events.
- ▶ Strive to maintain the natural environment within the corridor by avoiding and minimizing impacts and improving connectivity between natural resources and communities.
- ▶ Strive to maintain the natural environment within the corridor by avoiding and minimizing impacts and improving connectivity between natural resources and communities.
- ▶ Improve existing sustainability measures, such as air quality throughout the construction, operations and maintenance of the corridor.
- ▶ Aspire to improve pedestrian and bicycle accommodations in concert with existing and proposed local and regional plans where appropriate.

## To promote *innovation* and *economic opportunity* within the Central Tri-State Corridor

- ▶ Collaboratively develop a consistent corridor wide aesthetic that incorporates economic development, wayfinding and natural features while balancing the function of the roadway and maintenance.
- ▶ Explore partnerships between local municipalities and economic development organizations.
- ▶ Explore the use of technology to improve traffic operations, the customer experience and supply chain logistics.
- ▶ The corridor should aim to be a model for national best practices and should provide technology infrastructure that complements local and state investments.

# Conclusion

Throughout the meetings, the council worked in a collaborative fashion to identify critical issues and provide sound recommendations. The Central Tri-State Tollway currently suffers from congestion and limited local access, which has an impact on both the region's residents and commercial freight carriers. Future improvements need to address these issues, but it should be done in a way that considers future demands and impacts. Additionally, the Central Tri-State is a roadway that serves many different types of users and plays a large role in the region's economy and transportation network. As such, the council repeatedly emphasized the need for collaborative partnerships. Working in concert with local and regional partners to leverage assets will help create a roadway that strives to meet the needs and desires of everyone.

The guiding principles and recommendations from this report reflect a clear path forward. These are tools that will not only guide the master plan process but will also serve as a starting point and framework for any future construction of the roadway. The Central Tri-State Tollway plays a critical role in the Chicago region, and by following the guiding principles and recommendations outlined by the Council, the successful reconstruction of the roadway will reduce congestion, increase mobility and greatly enhance the region's economy to improve quality of life for the region's residents.

On January 21, 2016, the Corridor Planning Council voted to approve the report and to advance the report to the Tollway Board of Directors for consideration. The following Council Members voted in support of this motion.

Burlington Northern Sante Fe\*  
Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning  
Choose DuPage  
Cook County Department of Transportation  
DuPage County  
DuPage Mayors and Managers Conference (Elmhurst)  
DuPage Mayors and Managers Conference (Oak Brook)  
Forest Preserves of Cook County  
GOA Regional Business Association\*  
Illinois Chamber of Commerce  
Illinois Department of Transportation  
Illinois Freight Advisory Committee  
Illinois Tollway  
Illinois Trucking Association  
Metropolitan Planning Council  
Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago  
Mid-West Truckers Association Inc.  
Northwest Municipal Conference (Park Ridge)\*  
Pace Suburban Bus\*  
Regional Transportation Association  
South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association (Flossmoor)  
Southwest Conference of Mayors (Chicago Ridge)  
Southwest Conference of Mayors (Justice)  
Union Pacific Railroad\*  
West Central Municipal Conference - Central (Countryside)\*  
West Central Municipal Conference - Central (Western Springs)\*  
West Central Municipal Conference - North Central (Northlake)  
West Suburban Chamber of Commerce and Industry\*

\*Did not attend meeting, voted in absentia

