

# MOVING WILL COUNTY

## Executive Summary



October 2021

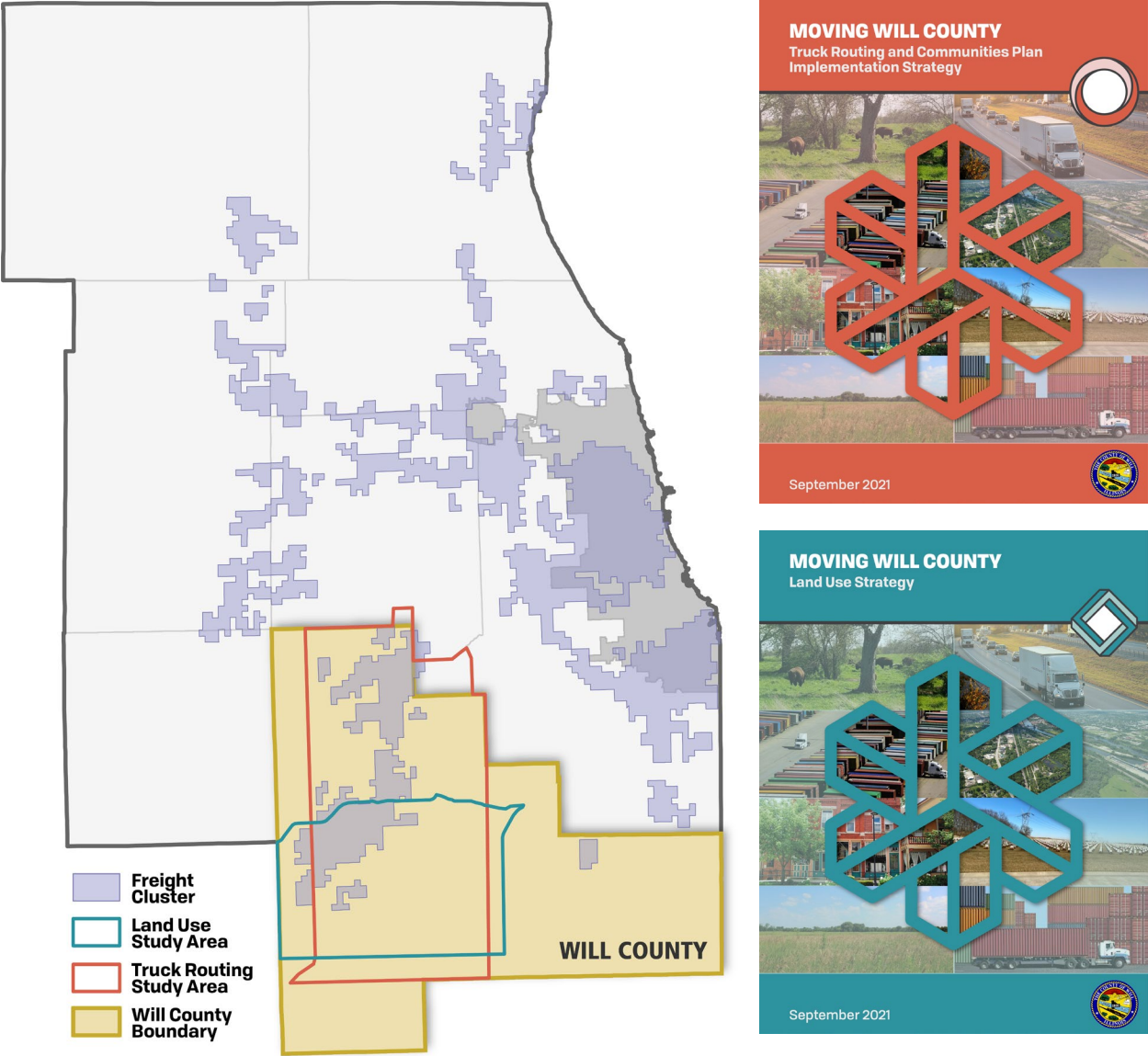


# Executive Summary

## Background

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) ONTO 2050 plan for Northeastern Illinois recommends strategies to maintain the region’s status as North America’s freight hub, while balancing community concerns and the economic benefits of freight. Western Will County is part of one of the six freight land use clusters that CMAP has identified in the region (see **Figure 1**). This rapidly growing cluster has a strong specialization in modern distribution facilities. Recent intermodal and distribution facility growth, as well as other economic development, has brought both benefits and challenges to the area.

**Figure 1. Study Area Boundaries and Regional Freight Clusters**

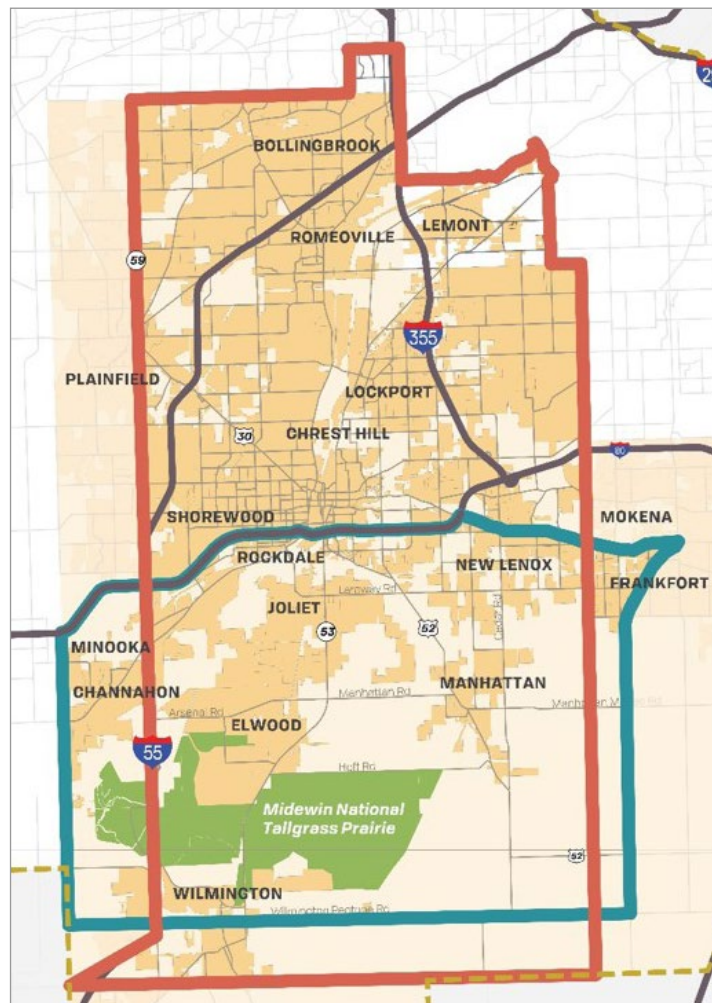


# Overview of the Moving Will County Project

To address challenges regarding livability and freight and build on recommendations of the Will County Community Friendly Freight Mobility Plan, CMAP and Will County took on the Moving Will County project, which included a Truck Routing and Communities Study and a Land Use Strategy. These studies were combined into one project due geographic overlap and the efficiencies that could be achieved by coordinating data collection and analysis, community outreach, and considering the interdependency of transportation and land use objectives. The joint goal of the studies is to achieve balance between truck traffic and routing, existing freight land use clusters and new development, agricultural business, natural and cultural resources, and residential neighborhoods and other sensitive areas. Both studies shared resources to develop appropriate and supportive recommendations to help Will County be competitive and resilient.

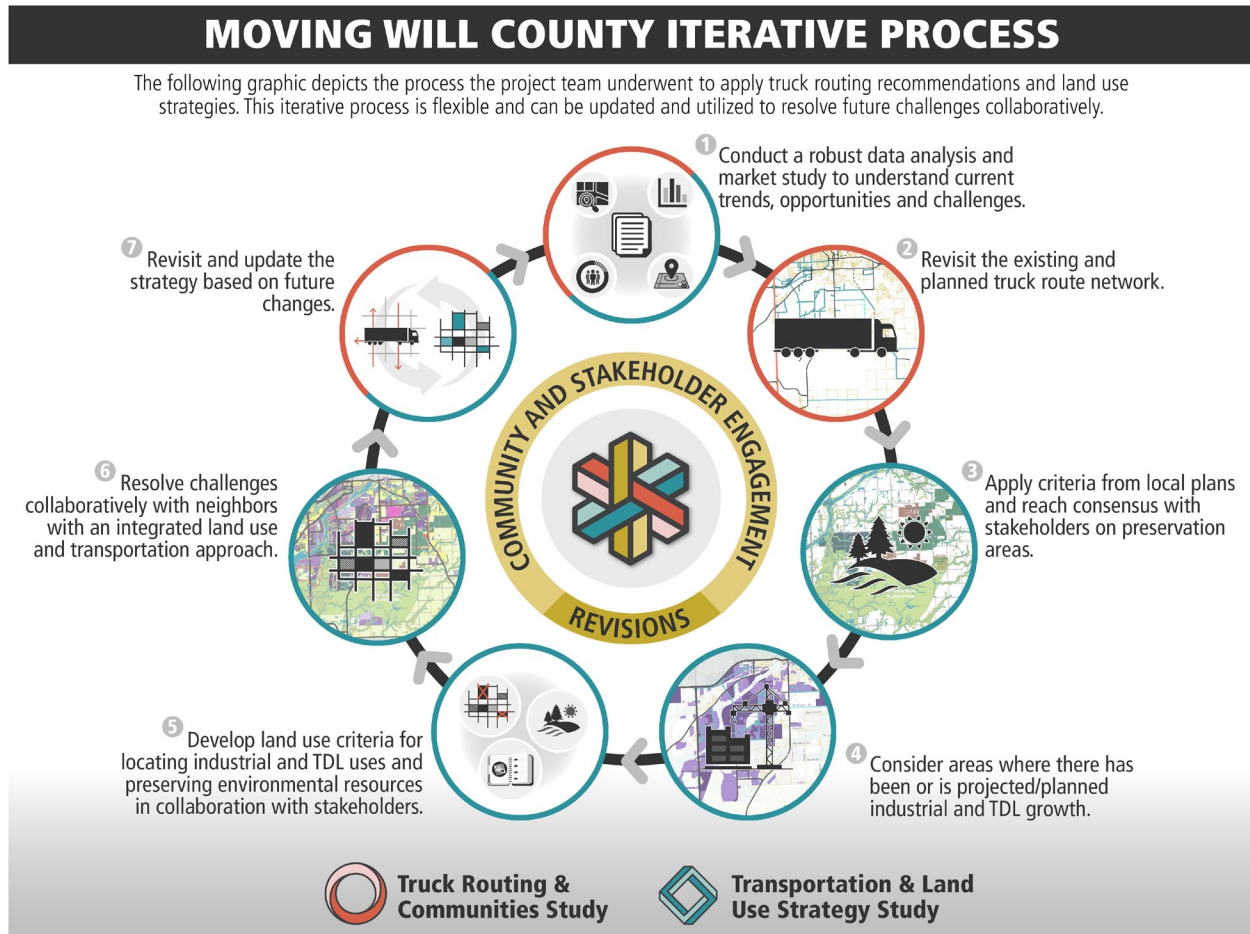
The Moving Will County project is a planning-level study that includes a large, regional area: both study boundaries together include over 311,000 acres (486 square miles), 19 municipalities, and over 2,500 miles of roadway (see **Figure 2**). The deliverables of this project provide guidance for communities on recommended truck routes and strategies for determining if an area is suitable for truck-generating land uses. The study is not an ordinance, policy, or enforceable document.

**Figure 2. Study Area with Municipalities**



Both the **Truck Routing and Communities Study** and **Land Use Strategy** documents can be used in conjunction or separately. They offer a snapshot of the planning process and strategy applied to conditions throughout the project’s duration. However, the approach is iterative and since the recommendations are process-based they are flexible and can be adapted and applied to changing conditions. **Figure 3** provides a graphic depicting a high-level overview of the planning process used throughout the duration of the project.

**Figure 3. Moving Will County Project Process**



At the start of the project in September 2019, a major part of the Land Use Strategy study area, located to the east of IL 53 and north of Hoff Road, was unincorporated. County and local future land use plans for this area were generally over ten years old and there was a need for a cohesive approach to guide the future land uses for this area.

In December 2020, significant acreage in this area was incorporated into the City of Joliet and rezoned for industrial uses. As such, the Zoning Ordinance for the City of Joliet now regulates the land use and development of a significant part of this area. However, these incorporated parcels currently are not directly served by a truck route as recommended by the Truck Routing and Communities Study, and as such, the Land Use strategy and criteria cannot be directly applied to these parcels today.

Since this major inconsistency could not be resolved within the scope and timeline of this project, the Land Use Strategy is presented as a companion document to the Truck Routing and

Communities Study. While the Land Use Strategy does not require formal adoption by the County and local municipalities, the extensive stakeholder outreach process and the scenario development tools can continue to be a guide for communities for resolving future challenges collaboratively.

## Community Engagement and Timeline

Community engagement with a goal of reaching consensus was at the heart of the planning process. Due to the large geographic size of the study area, the Steering Committee played a critical role in getting the word out throughout the project process and sharing public involvement opportunities with their community members. The Steering Committee consisted of leaders from local municipalities, agencies, as well as associations and nonprofits representing business, environmental and agricultural interests. They reviewed draft deliverables at key milestones and provided feedback. The goal is that they will be partners and champions in implementing the Moving Will County project. **Figure 4** shows the project’s timeline with various deliverables and key milestones highlighted.

**Figure 4. Moving Will County Project Timeline**



Below is a summary of the other community engagement activities that were conducted as a part of the project:

<p><b>1 Project Website</b></p> <p>Website Contact Email List: <b>750+ Participants</b></p> <p>Website Comments Received: <b>90+ Comments</b></p>	<p><b>18 Stakeholder Interviews/ Focus Groups</b></p>
<p><b>2 Virtual Public Workshops</b></p> <p>First Workshop: <b>127 Participants</b></p> <p>Second Workshop: <b>118 Participants</b></p>	<p><b>4 Online Surveys</b></p> <p>For Community Members/Public</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Online interactive map of Draft Truck Route Network (WikiMap): <b>300+ Comments</b></li> <li>- Online survey of Draft Land Use Strategy (Survey Monkey): <b>255 Responses</b></li> </ul> <hr/> <p>For Steering Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Online survey of project themes/goals/outcomes (Survey Monkey)</li> <li>- Online survey of Land Use Strategy (Survey Monkey)</li> </ul>
<p><b>4 Steering Committee Meetings</b></p>	<p>Non-Internet Access Alternatives: poster-sized maps, printable surveys, and call-in voice mail number</p>

## Guiding Principles

Guiding principles were developed based on goals for the Moving Will County project regarding quality of life and feedback from the Steering Committee. These principles are organized around three aspirational and unifying themes: **Prosper, Nurture, and Balance.**

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### Prosper

- **Pursue Prosperity for All** (County, townships, municipalities and neighborhoods)
- **Prosper in Diverse Economic Opportunities** (freight-related industry, manufacturing, agriculture, tourism, recreation, commerce & housing)



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### Nurture

- **Nurture Nature** (natural resources, open spaces, wildlife habitats, water, pollution, etc.)
- **Nurture Community** (quality of life, mitigating impacts of truck traffic, identity, history, etc.)
- **Nurture Connectivity** (freight, trails, transit, walkability, mobility, etc.)



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### Balance

- **Balance Growth** (strategies that balance needs of a prosperous economy and the transportation and logistics industry with nurturing natural and community resources)
- **Balance and Unify Policies** (the same rules are applied consistently between the County and local municipalities for development features like impervious coverage, landscaping, bufferyards, parking, etc.)
- **Balance Capacity** (policies and guidance that ensure potential new developments are safe, sustainable, and accountable for their impacts on public infrastructure and the critical water supply issues in the region)



# Truck Routing and Communities Study

## What is the purpose of developing a truck route network?

Proactively designating a truck route sends a clear signal to the trucking industry of where a community wants trucks to travel. It ensures lawful access for larger trucks, provides data used by navigation systems to provide directions to truck drivers, and helps agencies to plan future capital investments in order to design and maintain facilities appropriate for truck movements. Designated truck routes are established by local ordinance or resolution only for roadways under the jurisdiction of the local agency. Capital investments are not required to designate a truck route, although additional capital investments may be appropriate in order to better facilitate truck movement. Truck routes officially designated by local agencies are reported to IDOT and included in the statewide truck route map, which in turn is used by navigation systems to provide directions for truckers.

## What is a planning-level truck route network?

The Moving Will County project includes recommendations for truck routes in the study area for which agencies can pursue further study and implementation. This planning exercise allowed local stakeholders to identify roadways where trucks are preferred to travel, as well as roadways where trucks are not preferred to travel. Designating a truck route may not necessarily increase truck traffic on that road. In many cases, trucks already use the roads recommended as truck routes, and may even have lawful access to do so under state law if located near an existing designated truck route or the expressway system. Per state law, designating truck routes provide access for longer trucks – those over 65 feet in length – while shorter trucks are allowed on all roadways unless otherwise prohibited.

## How roads were proposed as truck routes

The proposed truck route network was primarily based on existing truck travel patterns and how to most directly connect industrial areas to interstates while avoiding sensitive areas. In some instances there is no easy solution and tradeoffs were considered to determine east-west and north-south corridor(s) that provide these connections. The goal of the proposed network is to balance tradeoffs, identify corridors where there is community consensus for where trucks should and should not go, and then provide a guide for municipalities and other agencies to direct capital improvements, especially as related to safety (see **Figure 5** for the proposed designated truck route map). The recommendations include:

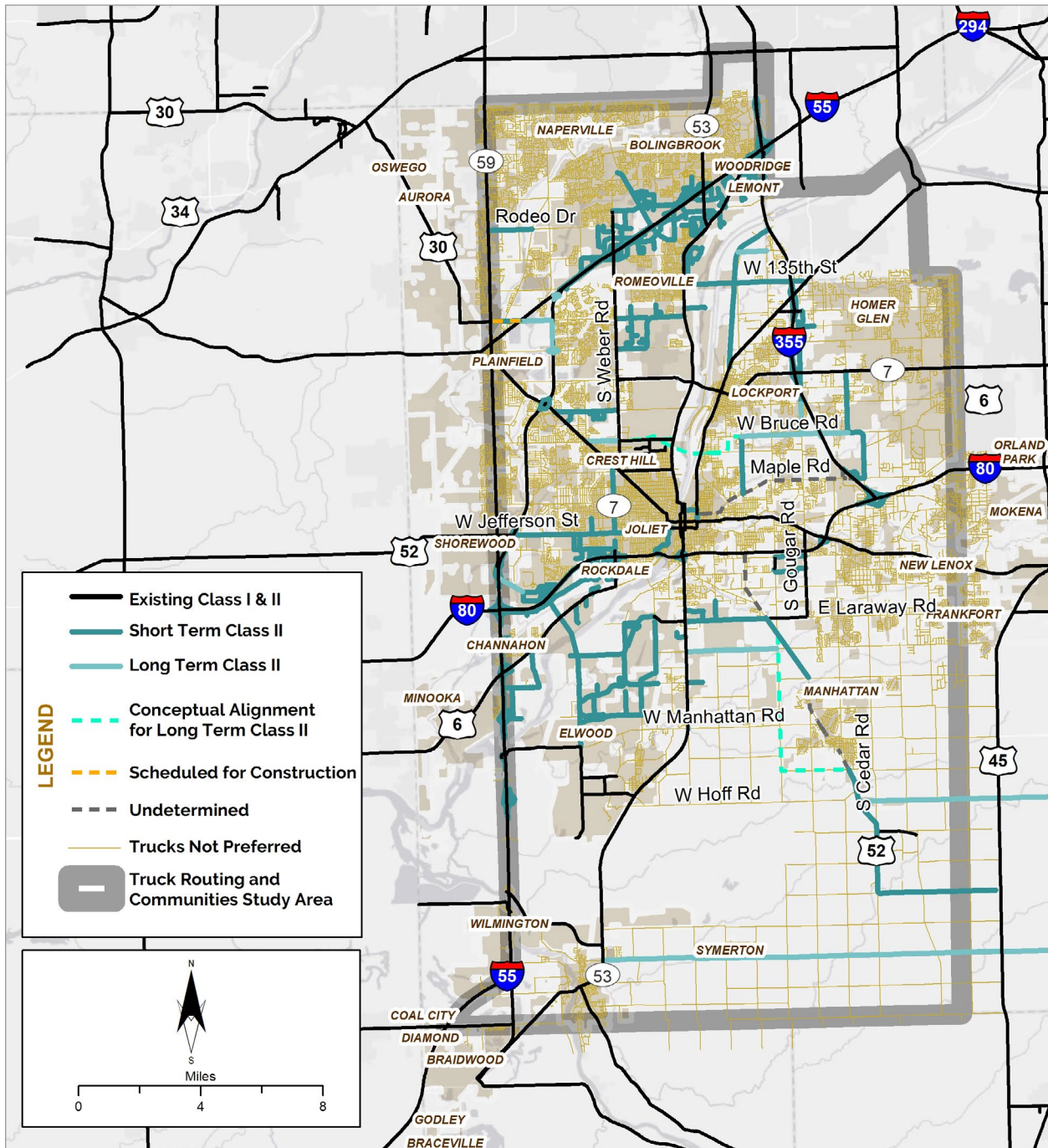
- **Short-term truck routes** can be designated within the next five years without any major design changes anticipated.
- **Long-term truck routes** may need design changes or substantial capital investment to better support future truck traffic.
- **“Conceptual Alignment for Long-Term Class II”** includes major new roadway projects that are in the planning feasibility stage and could have a larger, regional impact on truck travel.
- **“Trucks Not Preferred”** includes roads that would be either undesignated or restricted to trucks under current statutory framework. Most are local roads in residential or agricultural areas.
- **“Undetermined”** includes corridors in which further study is needed to determine if the roadway should be a truck route.

## Key Truck Routing Corridors for Future Consideration

- US 52
- Laraway Road
- Jefferson Street
- Maple Road (US 6)
- Schweitzer Road
- Caton Farm Road/Bruce Road
- Joliet-Elwood industrial district
- Bolingbrook-Romeoville industrial district

**Figure 6** displays zoomed-in maps for each of the key corridors listed above depicting the proposed truck route designations.

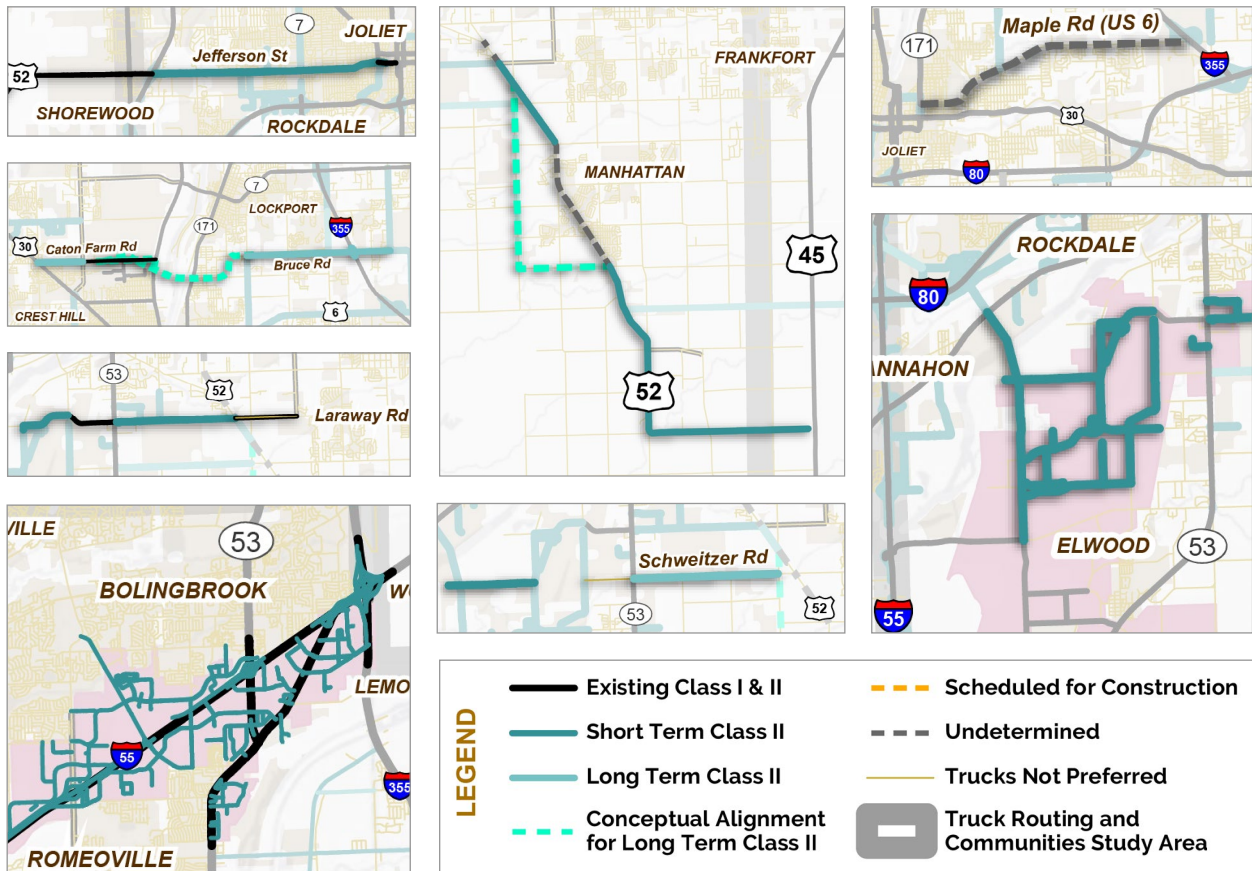
Figure 5. Proposed Designated Truck Routes



The category “Conceptual Alignment for Long Term Class II” includes major new arterials or corridors that are under consideration for development, and could have a larger, regional impact on truck travel, but additional study is required to confirm alignment and design. More details on truck routes and recommendations can be found in the Moving Will County companion document: Truck Routing and Communities Plan and Implementation Strategy.



**Figure 6. Key Truck Routing Corridor Maps**



### Other Truck Routing and Communities Study Guidance

The following guidance is also included in the Truck Routing and Communities Study document:

- More details on key corridors and initial conceptual designs for priority projects
- Design considerations toolkit
- Challenges to truck routing through downtown areas
- Jurisdictional changes for roadways
- Guidance on IDOT Process for Reporting Designated Truck Routes
- Investment Plan to Support Truck Routes and funding opportunities
- Truck-related policy issues
- Mitigation strategies, national best practices and livability recommendations

### Benefits of Utilizing the Truck Routing and Communities Study

- Truck routes can identify freight corridors best suited for travel by trucks and ensure that trucks travel where local communities want them to travel, including away from schools, residential areas, and other sensitive land uses.
- Because of the greater highway design criteria for trucks, understanding designated truck routes will also give communities a better understanding of investment needs.
- Truck routes connect major truck trip generators, such as intermodal yards and major industrial facilities, to the arterial network and Interstate system. This provides clear and direct access for larger trucks that are critical to economic activity.
- They establish a framework consistent with recent changes in Illinois state law.

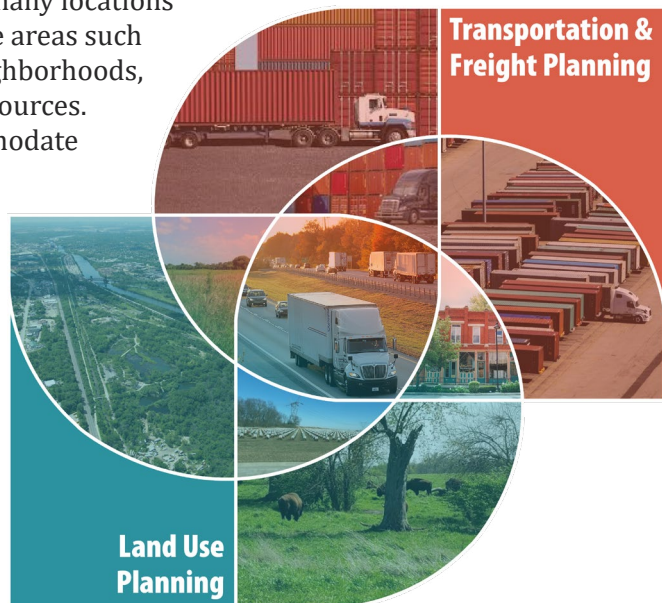
# Land Use Strategy

## What is the purpose of a Land Use Strategy that is coordinated with the truck route network?

Will County has experienced tremendous growth in Industrial and TDL (Transportation, Distribution and Logistics) facilities in recent years, and truck traffic has expanded substantially with this development. This rapidly growing cluster has a strong specialization in modern distribution facilities and is home to a couple large and growing intermodal centers.

While improvements have been made and more are planned, the roadway network has not kept pace with the rapid growth of development. High volumes of truck traffic have led to safety and congestion concerns at many locations throughout the County, particularly in sensitive areas such as historic downtown districts, residential neighborhoods, and critical environmental and agricultural resources. These locations were never planned to accommodate high volumes of truck traffic, leading to a substantial impact on quality of life for local residents and businesses.

Western Will County is also home to significant regional natural and cultural assets. Midwin National Tallgrass Prairie, Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery, Des Plaines Conservation Area, Jackson Creek, the Kankakee River, and other important natural areas are regional amenities that could be negatively affected by new development and traffic.



## Changing Conditions and Contributions

The Land Use Strategy for the Moving Will County project was initiated in September 2019 with the goal to help the County and local municipalities develop a common strategy for locating new industrial and TDL uses, primarily in unincorporated areas in western Will County. At the start of the project, a major part of the Study Area, located to the east of IL 53 and north of Hoff Road, was unincorporated. County and local future land use plans for this area were generally over ten years old and there was a need for a cohesive approach to guide the future land uses for this area.

In December 2020, significant acreage in this area was incorporated into the City of Joliet and rezoned for industrial uses. As such, the Zoning Ordinance for the City of Joliet now regulates the land use and development of a significant part of this area. However, these incorporated parcels currently are not directly served by a truck route as recommended by the Moving Will County Truck Routing and Communities Study, and as such, the Land Use strategy and criteria cannot be directly applied to these parcels today.

Since this major inconsistency could not be resolved within the scope and timeline of this project, the Land Use Strategy is presented as a companion document to the Truck Routing and Community Plan and Implementation Strategy. While the Land Use Strategy does not require formal adoption

by the County and local municipalities, the extensive stakeholder outreach process and the scenario development tools can continue to be a guide for communities for resolving future challenges collaboratively.

The two most significant contributions of the Land Use Strategy, as showcased in the document, are:

- Creating consensus on the fundamental approach that the location of new Industrial and TDL Land Uses should be tied to designated truck routes.
- Creating consensus on major preservation areas and the criteria for future preservation.


While specific criteria might evolve with changing market trends and community preferences, these two major consensus elements

### Recommended Land Use Strategy for Industrial and TDL Uses

The Land Use Strategy provides a simple tool that can be used by the County, local municipalities, agencies, community stakeholders, and developers to determine where future Industrial and TDL uses can be directed. The tool can be particularly useful to apply to unincorporated areas, where existing plans may be dated or lack clear direction regarding these uses.

The strategy offers a single criteria and four exceptions to help determine if a parcel is suitable for future Industrial and TDL uses. If the criteria is met, and the site is not encumbered by any of the exceptions, it can be considered appropriate for these uses.

**The Strategy: One Criteria + Four Exceptions**



**One Criteria**

“New Industrial & TDL uses are allowed on parcels with frontage along Existing Class I and Class II truck routes, and short-term Class II truck routes, as designated by the companion document, the Moving Will County Truck Routing and Communities Plan and Implementation Strategy (pictured left). This criteria would also apply to future truck routes that are designated in the Study Area.”

**Four Exceptions**

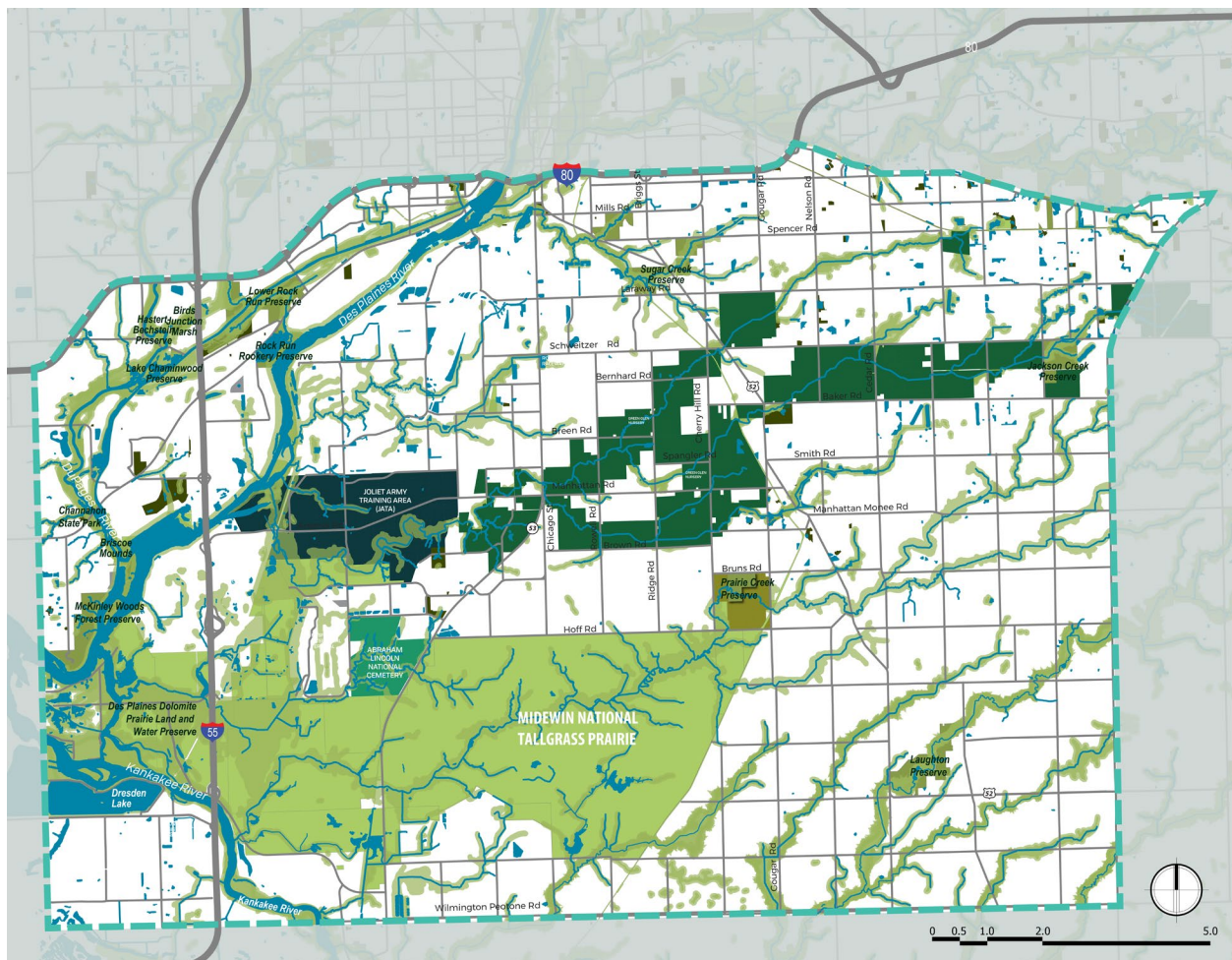
1. Parcels with frontage only along IL 53/Historic Route 66.
2. Parcels within a ½ mile or a 10 min walk of existing residential areas, schools, places of worship, and civic and institutional uses.
3. Parcels designated for other uses in local comprehensive plans.
4. Parcels required for preservation of natural resources.

## Preservation Areas

The Land Use Strategy also includes criteria to assist communities in identifying areas to preserve (see **Figure 7**). The criteria was determined and compiled from local agencies and past plans . The following four preservation areas were identified based on application of the checklist and feedback from stakeholders and the Steering Committee members:

1. Joliet Army Training Area (JATA)
2. Jackson Creek Greenway
3. Prairie Creek Area
4. Floodplain Buffers

**Figure 7. Recommended Preservation Areas**



Data sources: CMAP Land Use, 2015; Satellite Imagery, 2017; FPDWC GIS, 2019; Will County GIS, 2019, Openlands, Midwin National Tallgrass Prairie, FPDWC, Jackson Township

## **Other Land Use Strategy Guidance**

The following guidance is also included in the Land Use Strategy document:

- Market study
- Existing Land Use context and conditions
- Analysis of existing land use regulations for unincorporated areas
- Study of all municipal comprehensive and land use plans
- Checklist for applying the Land Use Strategy criteria and exceptions
- Process for how the Land Use Strategy was developed
- Approach to developing criteria for preservation of natural resources
- Checklist to determine if a parcel meets the criteria for preservation
- More details and strategies for recommended preservation areas
- Natural Areas Benefit Assessment
- Best practice strategies for industrial and TDL land uses

## **Benefits of using the Land Use Strategy**

- Concentrates Industrial and TDL uses around existing intermodals and already developed areas with similar uses.
- Supports continued investment in designated Truck Routes as recommended by the Truck Routing and Communities Plan Implementation Strategy.
- Avoids the costs of installation and maintenance of new infrastructure needed to access and serve undeveloped areas.
- Maintains opportunities for prosperity for all by providing Industrial and TDL development potential in all municipalities in the Study Area.
- Positions the Des Plaines River at the center of the Industrial and TDL uses and strengthens its role as a mode of freight access.
- Protects major natural resources and preservation areas.
- Protects existing and planned bike trail corridors in the area.
- Protects the character and tourism potential of Historic Route 66/IL 53.
- Prevents new Industrial and TDL uses from locating too close to existing residential areas, schools, places of worship, and civic and institutional uses.
- Allows flexibility in responding to changes in Zoning Ordinances and Comprehensive Plans as these are updated.
- Provides a tool that can be applied to other parts of Will County.

# Implementation

It is the choice and responsibility of the municipalities and Will County to implement the recommendations of the Moving Will County project. In cases where a new truck route is recommended, further study, and in some instances coordination with the Illinois Department of Transportation and other agencies, would be necessary. The Moving Will County project provides guidance for prioritizing where trucks should travel and industrial and TDL (Transportation Distribution and Logistics) land uses could be located in the future to minimize impacts. However, the project does not preclude roads from becoming truck routes or land from being developed for industrial uses. For most recommendations, further study would be needed. The purpose for both of these studies is to provide a framework that communities can build on, to target further study and investments in terms of land use and truck routing issues within their municipality. The objective of this regional collaborative effort was to reach consensus among study area municipalities to achieve prosperity not at the expense of a neighbor.

- **Truck Routing and Communities Plan:** Incorporate truck routing network into roadways plans, implement near-term routes and restrictions, and seek funding for priority corridor improvements
  - *Responsible Parties:* Local municipalities and Will County
  - *Partners:* IDOT and CMAP
  - *Champions:* IL Soybean Association, IL Trucking Association, Midwest Truckers, Openlands, Midewin
  
- **Land Use Strategy:** Incorporate strategy into future land use plans/zoning and utilize design guidelines in future projects
  - *Responsible Parties:* Local municipalities and Will County
  - *Partners:* Will County Governmental League, FPDWC, Will County Center for Economic Development, and CMAP
  - *Champions:* IL Soybean Association, IL Trucking Association, Midwest Truckers, Openlands, Midewin