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Tri-State Tollway (I-294) at Irving Park Interchange Improvement Benefits Report

The Illinois State Toll Highway Authority (Illinois Tollway) has requested an amendment to the 2026 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) to add proposed interchange improvements at I-294 at Irving Park Road as a fiscally constrained Regional Capital Project (RCP).

Adding a new capacity-impacting RCP to the plan is a major amendment to the RTP, including a 30-day public comment period and approval by the MPO Policy Committee. These requirements are outlined in the RTP Amendment Process in the RTP Administrative Policies and Procedures Appendix.

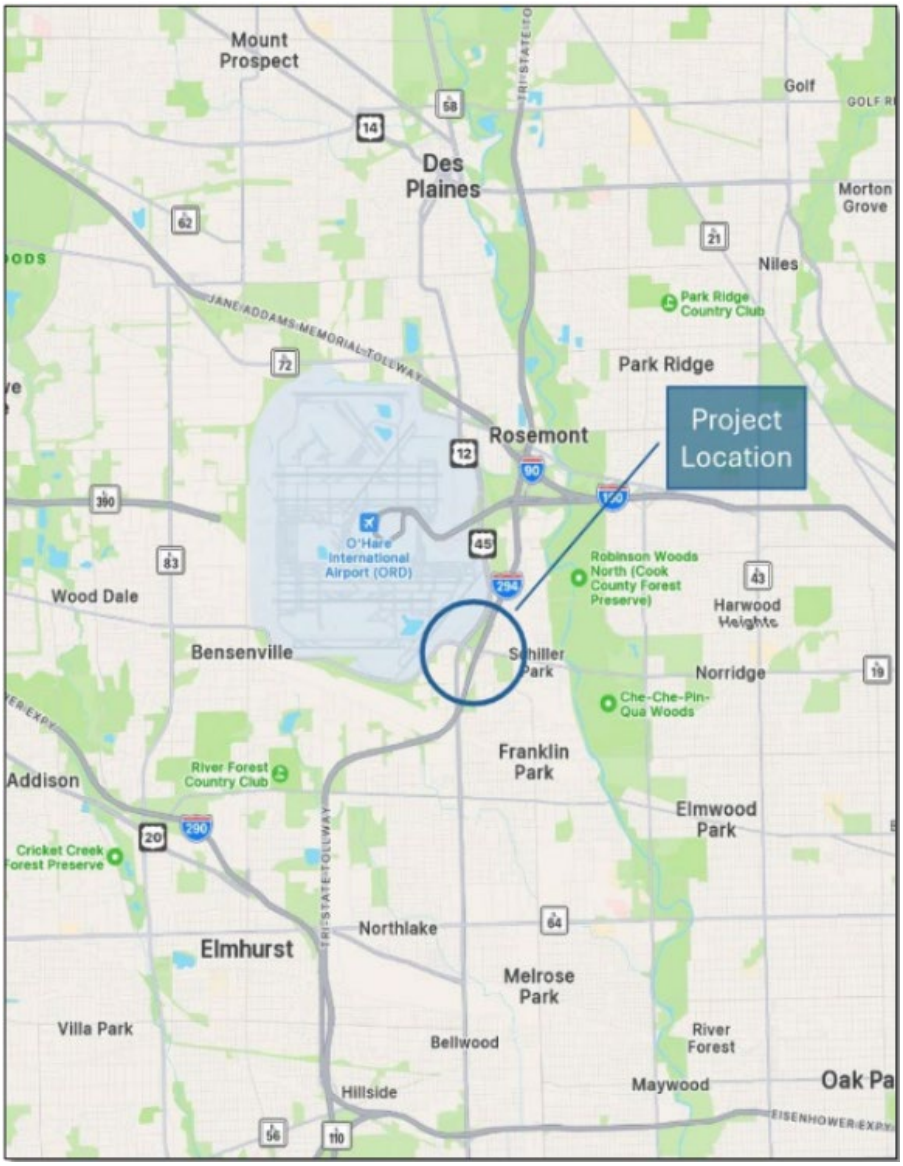
The proposed $77.3 million project would improve connections between I-294 and residential, commercial, and industrial areas southeast of O'Hare International Airport. Project implementation is planned for 2031. The improvements are expected to support the RTP goals of strengthening connections between people and places and supporting economic prosperity and inclusive growth. These new capacity costs will be fully covered by new Tollway revenues resulting from recently adopted toll rate increases. As a result, the RTP will continue to be fiscally constrained with the inclusion of this project. with the inclusion of this project.

This memorandum summarizes the proposed improvement, alignment with RTP goals, and anticipated impact on the Financial Plan for Transportation.

Project description

The existing interchange at I-294 and Irving Park Road provides access to and from the north, with a northbound entrance ramp and southbound exit ramp. Currently, the nearest alternative connections between Irving Park Road and south I-294 are Balmoral Avenue, 1.5 miles to the north of Irving Park Road, and Illinois Route 64, 4.5 miles south.

Figure 1. Project Location



Map source: Illinois Tollway and IDOT. *Tri-State Tollway (I0294) at Irving Park Road (IL Route 19) Interchange Improvement Project. Statement of: Project Purpose and Need*. Version 1: December 2024.

The proposed project adds three ramps between I-294 south of Irving Park Road and the industrial areas south of O'Hare Airport along Mannheim Road:

- A southbound entrance ramp and northbound exit ramp connecting with Mannheim Road at Seymour Avenue, approximately 0.5 miles south of Irving Park Road.
- A southbound entrance ramp from Mannheim Road at Montrose Avenue, approximately 0.3 miles north of Irving Park Road.

The project would also relocate the existing southbound exit ramp serving westbound Irving Park Road approximately 0.3 miles north, to a new connection at Mannheim Road and Montrose Avenue. This change is expected to reduce traffic through the heavily congested intersection of Irving Park Road and Mannheim Road.

Alignment with RTP goals

The proposed improvements aim to strengthen transportation connections, reduce congestion, and improve travel time reliability between I-294 and surrounding commercial, industrial, and residential areas in Schiller Park, Franklin Park, and nearby Chicago neighborhoods.

The project's Phase I engineering study found that the lack of direct access to I-294 south of Irving Park Road contributes to indirect travel patterns, which increases vehicle miles traveled and congestion affecting local and regional traffic. Without improvements, high traffic volumes and continued demand are expected to exacerbate existing congestion.

This project supports two RTP goals:

- Strengthen connections between people and places.
- Support economic prosperity and inclusive growth.

The project improves the efficiency and reliability of connections between the interstate system and the land uses along Irving Park Road and Mannheim Road, ultimately mitigating congestion and improving operations.

CMAP evaluated the proposed improvements using the same metrics applied to RCPs during development of the RTP, to the extent possible. The full list of RCP metrics with data sources and approach can be viewed in the RCP Benefits Report.

Table 1 presents the findings for this project under the cost and impact evaluation metrics. Because the project is new infrastructure, the need-based metrics, which focus on existing conditions of assets that will be improved, do not apply.

In summary, the project is expected to provide a moderate reduction in regional travel delays and support for infill development, with minimal impact on regional emissions. Its estimated capital cost of $77.3 million represents approximately 0.3 percent of total capacity costs for evaluated RCPs.

Table 1: I-294 at Irving Park Road evaluation metrics

Performance category	Evaluation findings
Roadway network mobility	Moderate impact. Regional travel delays would decrease by 0.2 percent for passenger vehicle trips and trips to or from economically disconnected areas (EDAs), equivalent to average weekday reductions of 1,400 and 200 hours, respectively. The project ranks in the top third of evaluated RCPs for both measures. Minimal impact. Truck travel delays would decrease by 0.1 percent, or approximately 100 hours on an average weekday.
Transit network mobility	Not applicable.
Emissions impact	Minimal impact, less than 0.01 percent.
Infill development support	Above-average support. Approximately 77 percent of trips would begin or end in an area supportive of infill development, compared with an average of 69 percent for evaluated RCPs.
Capital cost (year of expenditure $)	$77.3 million, approximately 0.3 percent of total evaluated RCP capacity costs.
% cost for new capacity	100%
Annual maintenance and operation cost (2026 $)	Estimated increase of $11,000 annually.

Conformity determination

Because the project adds new interchange movements, it is not exempt from inclusion in the region's air quality conformity determination.

Conformity determinations assess whether proposed transportation plans and Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) are consistent with applicable air quality requirements. The analysis must demonstrate that planned transportation investments will not cause new violations of the National Ambient Air Quality Standard, worsen existing violations, or delay attainment of those standards.

The regional air quality conformity analysis of 2026 RTP Major Amendment 1 indicates that including the proposed interchange improvement would not cause the region to exceed its allowable emissions budgets for ozone precursors. Additional information from the conformity determination is presented with the TIP Plan Revision the Conformity Determination Plan Revision memo.

Fiscal constraint impact

Illinois Tollway capital projects are funded through tolls and other agency revenues, which in turn are revenues that can only be used for eligible purposes. As a result, the fiscal constraint analysis includes revenues and costs anticipated by Illinois Tollway based on the information available during the development of the RTP.

Since the adoption of the RTP, amendments are needed to recognize that the Illinois Tollway Board of Directors approved updated toll rates — including increases in passenger and commercial vehicle tolls and future inflation-based adjustments along with a new capital program, *Driving Connections*. Respective toll increases are expected to go into effect in early 2027.

The Illinois Tollway estimates that construction on the proposed I-294 and Irving Park Road interchange improvements will cost $77.3 million in year-of-expenditure dollars. As part of the *Driving Connections* capital program, these costs and future ongoing maintenance needs associated with the addition of new infrastructure will be fully covered by the incremental Tollway revenues.

As a result, the RTP will continue to be fiscally constrained with the inclusion of this project.