

All Roads Lead to Will County

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Transportation is Will County's past, present, and future. From the early days of the French explorers to the opening of the largest inland container port in North America, transportation has always been the primary driver of the

Will County economy. Today the county is on the verge of a transportation explosion:

- Later this year, the I-355 Extension will connect I-55 and I-80 through the heart of Will County, creating a new "Golden Corridor" of economic activity involving over 20,000 acres of undeveloped land. This highway will change the face of Will County forever;
- In addition to the CenterPoint Intermodal Center in Elwood, truck-rail intermodal facilities are being developed in Crete along I-394 and in Wilmington at I-55 and Lorenzo Road. These projects alone will bring over 30 million square feet of new industrial development and thousands of jobs to Will County south of Interstate 80;
- Renewed progress has been made in the development of the Illiana Expressway connecting I-65 in Indiana with I-57 in Will County. Discussions to extend this further west to I-55 and connecting to the planned Prairie Parkway linking I-80 with I-88 would create the new "Outerbelt" of the Chicago region and set the development pattern for the metro area for the next 100 years;
- The State of Illinois continues to acquire land for the South Suburban Airport in eastern Will County. Legislation creating a Will County Airport Authority and a Regional Development District around the airport are pending in the Illinois General Assembly.

The need for a third airport in the Chicago area has already been documented and the FAA has chosen Will County for its location.

The new global economy favors world ports as the sustainable economic centers of today and tomorrow. Will County has quickly emerged as one of the most important *Global Trans Centers* of North America. A *Global Trans Center* is an area that provides multiple transportation services for the movement of goods from their manufacturing/assembly source to the market for sale and distribution.

With the off-shoring of American industry, communities at the critical junctures of global supply chains are growing much more rapidly and creating more jobs than any other locations. Will County is at the primary distribution point for this supply chain in the largest market in the world, the United States. Will County has two of the most important elements necessary to sustain World Port status for many years to come: critical transportation services and available land for development. Exceptional highway, rail, water and air transportation services are readily available and easily accessible throughout Will County. Over 300,000 acres of land, roughly two-thirds of the land in Will County, are available for long term development.

This position in the world economy presents Will County with tremendous opportunities and challenges. The most important of these is the preservation of the high quality of life that has made Will County the fastest growing county in Illinois. Regional planners predict that the Will County population will balloon to well over a million residents by the year 2030, making it the second largest county in Illinois behind Cook. This growth presents the leaders in Will County their biggest challenge. The pressure on schools, open space, public safety, transportation, etc. will continue to mount and will require leadership with great vision.

To this end, the Will County Center for Economic Development (CED) has produced the **Will County Transportation Blueprint** providing a guide to preserving the transportation advantages the county has enjoyed for the last millennium. The CED is a private not-for-profit development foundation devoted to the creation of jobs and the improvement of the quality life for residents of the county. The CED's purpose in developing this **Transportation Blueprint** is to:

- Raise the awareness among Will County residents and leaders regarding the significance of an adequately and properly funded regional transportation system;
- Insist on a higher state and federal priority for transportation projects in Will County;
- Maximize business-community involvement in Will County transportation planning;
- Develop local funding mechanisms to assist in the completion of the transportation improvements presented in the Blueprint;
- Prioritize the development of all current and future transportation projects to ensure the safety of those who live and travel through Will County.

The **Blueprint** calls for specific transportation improvements including air, water, rail and highways. It also identifies the need to find new and innovative revenue sources to help pay for these improvements, including a Will County gas tax and new user fees. While never popular, new revenue sources, including taxes and fees, must be implemented to fund our expanding transportation services. Will County leaders today are committed to maintaining a high quality business and living environment including making some hard choices when it comes to funding needed transportation improvements. After all, they want to make sure all roads continue to lead to Will County.