CDOT's Transportation Plan for the Obama Presidential Center

Jackson Park A Review and Alternative

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Prepared for Jackson Park Watch JacksonParkWatch.org

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raSmith

CDOT's Transportation Plan for the Obama Presidential Center in Jackson Park: A Review and Alternative

raSmith is a national civil engineering and surveying firm with transportation expertise. raSmith has offices in Illinois, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and California. Jackson Park Watch is a community organization whose mission is to preserve Jackson Park as a public space and to ensure any park changes are decided upon with meaningful community input.

The Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) developed a transportation plan for the proposed Obama Presidential Center. Sam Schwartz Transportation Consultants evaluated the CDOT transportation plan and documented their findings in the February 2018 *Jackson Park Revitalization Traffic Impact Study Final Report*. Jackson Park Watch retained raSmith to review the CDOT transportation plan and the Sam Schwartz report. As part of their review, raSmith was asked by Jackson Park Watch to assess the feasibility of alternative transportation plans to meet the following objectives:

- 1. Site the Obama Presidential Center within Jackson Park
- 2. Maintain the integrity of the Olmsted design, including keeping Cornell Drive open
- 3. Maintain vehicular access and parking within Jackson Park
- 4. Ensure the roadway improvements recommended to accommodate the Obama Presidential Center are a cost effective use of taxpayer dollars

This report summarizes the raSmith evaluation.

A Review of CDOT's Transportation Plan for Jackson Park

Sam Schwartz analyzed the traffic impacts of the roadway closures and realignments proposed to accommodate the Obama Presidential Library. As noted in Sam Schwartz's executive summary, their analysis was based on the premise that Cornell Drive and other roadways would be closed. No alternative transportation concepts were discussed in the report.

raSmith questions elements of the report's procedures, findings and recommendations. raSmith requests additional information to address the following comments:

- 1. Provide additional information to validate the traffic and parking numbers used in the analysis:
 - a) Limited information was provided on the CMAP model used to estimate the traffic diversion. Specifically, provide documentation showing how the CMAP model estimated traffic diversions at the local street level.
 - b) The report indicates adjustments were made to the CMAP traffic assignment. Identify the specific adjustments and note whether the adjustments were made by CMAP, CDOT or Sam Schwartz.
 - c) The manually adjusted traffic reassignment assumed some of the diverted traffic would never enter the study area. This assumption relies on the premise there is sufficient capacity to accommodate the diverted traffic outside the study area. Provide documentation showing the intersections outside of the study area were evaluated to ensure they could accommodate the additional traffic.
 - d) The assumptions used to analyze the Obama Presidential Center yield relatively low traffic and parking values, which underestimates the impact of the development. The average auto occupancy appears high considering other multimodal factors (transit, pedestrian/bicycle, taxi/Uber/Lyft, school bus, etc.) were also applied.



Please provide documentation from similar Chicago attractions to support these assumptions.

- e) Special events often have different traffic and parking characteristics than daytime activities, but the report grouped all Obama Presidential Center activities together. Provide additional information on the expected types and sizes of special events to be hosted at the Obama Presidential Center, including documentation from other presidential libraries.
- 2. Similarly, Jackson Park hosts several special events throughout the year, which are not accounted for in the Sam Schwartz report. Summarize the Jackson Park events and document how the Obama Presidential Center traffic and parking will be accommodated on those days.
- 3. Most of the parking eliminated with the CDOT transportation plan is located on the south side of Jackson Park. The replacement parking is located on the north side of the park, and the proposed replacement parking does not replace all of the lost parking. Provide a mitigation plan that equitably distributes parking throughout Jackson Park and fully restores the lost parking.
- 4. The pedestrian, bicycle and parking counts were all collected in the fall when park usage is typically down. Arbitrary adjustments were made to the pedestrian and bicycle volumes but not the parking counts. Provide justification for the pedestrian and bicycle adjustment factors and adjust the parking numbers. Preferably, all data should be counted in the summer on both weekends and weekdays to reflect the park's peak usage times.
- 5. The proposed curb-side drop off and pick up operations at the Obama Presidential Center would likely impact traffic flow and safety, as well as pedestrian and bicycle safety along Stony Island Avenue. Provide off-street accommodations for drop off and pick up.
- 6. Provide a more holistic summary and plan of the improvements recommended along Stony Island, including but not limited to, travel lanes, progression analysis results, bicycle accommodations, pedestrian cross-walk enhancements, on-street parking, and intersection traffic controls.
- 7. The report indicates 67th Street would be unaffected, yet the traffic volumes are anticipated to increase 25-30%. Discuss the impact to traffic operations and pedestrian crossings along the corridor.
- 8. The report indicates Cornell Drive would need to be closed prior to 2020. Please confirm the mitigation improvements will be constructed prior to the closure.

raSmith believes responses to the above comments are needed to better understand the impact of, and to fully evaluate, the CDOT transportation plan.

Alternative Transportation Concept Plan

raSmith determined other transportation plans are feasible that warrant further consideration and evaluation. Exhibit 1 presents an alternative concept plan created to address the previously outlined objectives. The conceptual plan was developed based on the traffic volumes and capacity assumptions found in Sam Schwartz's February 2018 report. The following plan elements are shown schematically in Exhibit 1:



- Keep Cornell Drive open and operate it as a four-lane roadway throughout the full length of Jackson Park. The proposed reduction to four travel lanes provides additional land to allow greater site flexibility for the Obama Presidential Center, as well as potential pedestrian safety amenities. The four-lane roadway could also result in reduced taxpayer costs compared to removing the roadway.
- 2. Locate the Obama Presidential Center south of the Midway Plaisance, as originally proposed. The Midway Plaisance and the eastbound Midway Plaisance roadway provide critical and historic linkages within the Olmsted design.
- 3. Provide off-street drop-off and pick-up areas for the Obama Presidential Center to enhance safety and minimize operational impacts along Stony Island Avenue.
- 4. Enhance the pedestrian accommodations along Stony Island Avenue between the Midway Plaisance and Hayes Drive to accommodate the increased pedestrian activity in the area.
- 5. Construct a third southbound travel lane along Lake Shore Drive as proposed in the February 2018 report. The Alternative plan differs from the February 2018 design by continuing the southbound lane to Marquette Drive. The additional travel lane will help offset the loss of capacity along Cornell Drive.
- 6. Utilize the existing pavement along Marquette Drive, west of Jeffery Avenue/Lake Shore Drive, to provide on-street parking and one travel lane in each direction.
- 7. Maintain Hayes Drive as is with on-street parking and one travel lane in each direction.
- 8. Maintain the existing number of travel lanes along Stony Island Avenue and do not widen into Jackson Park to add vehicular capacity.

This recommended alternative concept plan does not preclude the incorporation of additional improvements not directly tied to the Obama Presidential Center, such as the reconfiguration of the Richards Drive intersections with Hayes Drive and Marquette Drive to eliminate the three-legged intersections, enhancement of pedestrian and bicycle accommodations along Stony Island Avenue, enhancement of pedestrian accommodations within the park, and realignment of the southbound Cornell Drive intersection with Stony Island Avenue to eliminate the skew.

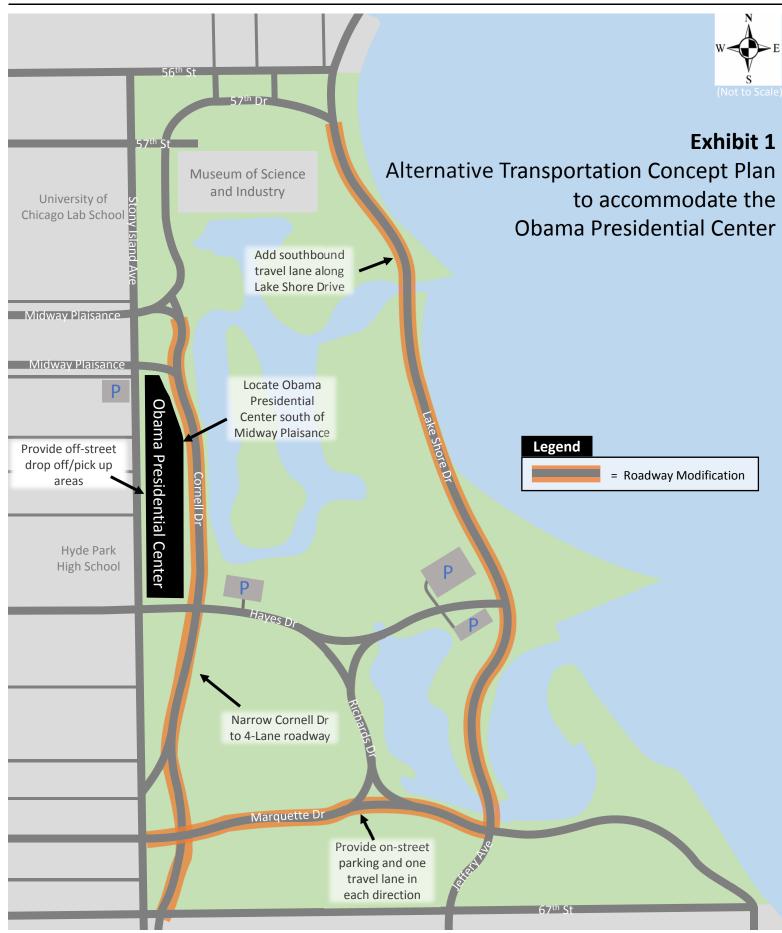
raSmith acknowledges other alternative plans are feasible that would accommodate the Obama Presidential Center in Jackson Park and not require the road closures proposed in the CDOT transportation plan.

Conclusions

raSmith's review identified several questions and concerns with the proposed CDOT transportation plan and corresponding Sam Schwartz report. raSmith concludes the closure of Cornell Drive and the eastbound Midway Plaisance roadway are not needed to accommodate the siting of the Obama Presidential Center in Jackson Park. raSmith believes the alternative transportation concept plan outlined above and shown in Exhibit 1 can accommodate the proposed Obama Presidential Center while addressing the concerns noted above for the proposed CDOT transportation plan. The alternative transportation concept plan will safely and efficiently address increased traffic flows, multi-modal access to Jackson Park and parking demands.



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