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Editorial board knocks Kennedy construction traffic delays, but infrastructure upgrades save lives

BY KEVIN ARTL

The editorial "Kennedy Expressway mess demands approval for the O'Hare Flyer" (Oct. 28) draws the wrong lesson from a necessary investment in our region's infrastructure.

Road construction causes traffic delays. That is hardly news. What is news is that a major rehabilitation of one of the nation's busiest expressways was completed more than a month ahead of schedule in 2025. It is disappointing that the editorial misses that achievement.

The Kennedy rehabilitation included repair to 36 bridges. Critical to keeping drivers safe were the replacement of deteriorating pavement and modernization of the reversible lane controls. Prior to the project, drivers dealt with safety hazards from failing pavement and numerous forced lane closures, which disrupt traffic. Postponing this work would have only extended the unpredictability drivers faced as they navigated aging bridges and pavement, which would have ultimately led to longer delays and commutes.

Funded through Gov. JB Pritzker's bipartisan Rebuild Illinois program, this investment addressed long-standing infrastructure needs. Credit is due to the Illinois Department of Transportation and the engineers and constructions teams that carried out the innovative designs and construction approaches, which led to the completion of the project ahead of schedule.

Of course, improving our roads is only part of the answer to the region's congestion challenges. The same commitment to investment, planning and innovation must extend to public transportation.

Our region must embrace the challenge facing the new Northern Illinois Transit Authority: funding and developing a world-class public transportation system that gives people reliable alternatives to driving and further reduces congestion on our roads. NITA's holistic approach to the entire region creates an opportunity to coordinate investments around how people actually travel — including access to O'Hare International Airport. The O'Hare Flyer may be one component of that strategy, but it is no substitute for an efficient, fast and modern Blue Line.

When looking forward to further development of public transit, decisions should be grounded in mobility studies and existing transportation. We need to look closely at anticipated demand and not focus solely on snap judgments centered on temporary construction delays.

We miss the point entirely when we treat the disruption of rebuilding as an argument against infrastructure investment. Illinois drivers deserve safe roads and better public transportation.

— Kevin Artl, president and CEO, American Council of Engineering Companies of Illinois

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