

# TRANSPORTATION FACTS

About the  
northeastern  
Illinois region  
from the  
Chicago Area  
Transportation  
Study

VOLUME 9, NUMBER 2

Summer, 1992

## Urban Area Boundaries

In November 1991, the federal government passed a new transportation bill. On December 18, 1991, President Bush signed the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) into law. This law, known as ISTEA (pronounced Ice-Tea), has promised to establish a new vision for surface transportation in America. It provides the authorizations for highways, highway safety and mass transportation for the next six years. It also provides the means for realizing the transportation policy goals for the region. According to its preamble, the purpose of the Act is:

*"to develop a National Intermodal Transportation System that is economically efficient, environmentally sound, provides the foundation for the nation to compete in the global economy and will move people and goods in an energy efficient manner."*

The full impact of the Act will not be realized for some time. Due to its length and complexity, interpretation and implementation in northeastern Illinois will take several years. Presented as Exhibit 1 is a list of brochures, references and additional information about the ISTEA.

### Exhibit 1 ISTEA Brochures and Reference Materials

#### Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency

**Act of 1991** — A Summary, U.S. Department of Transportation, February 1992. This 42 page "coat pocket" sized booklet presents a concise summary highlighting the 8 titles of the Act. If you are going to read only one thing on ISTEA, this is a must! Copies are available by contacting CATS Public Information Office at 312-793-3460.

**ISTEA of 1991** — A Summary prepared for Illinois, U.S. Department of Transportation, March 6, 1992. This 44 page booklet mirrors the above brochure with additional discussion on how the act affects the State of Illinois. This brochure is a fine primer for those in the transportation community. Similar booklets have been prepared for most states. Contact CATS for availability.

**ISTEA Conference on the FHWA Electronic Bulletin Board System (FEBBS)**. On January 17, 1992, FEBBS was opened to the public as a read only electronic bulletin board allowing users to review FHWA staff dialogue on ISTEA issues. The connection phone number for FEBBS is (202) 366-3764, 8-Full-None-2400-1. CATS staff can provide more information.

**ISTEA Fact Sheets:** This 68 page document, received by CATS on February 8, 1992, provides a detailed description of the many provisions of ISTEA. Limited copies are available.

As part of the procedure to track the developments of ISTEA, the U.S. Department of Transportation has established an ISTEA Tracking Service. For \$200.00, the subscriber receives an expandable set of notebooks containing information from USDOT on ISTEA. Registered owners receive periodic updates. CATS Community Liaison Division (312-793-3470) can provide additional information.

Intermodal Surface Transportation and Efficiency Act of 1991; Public Law 102-240, December 18, 1991.

**Other Items:** CATS houses a variety of memorandums, discussion papers and other materials that relate to specific provisions of ISTEA. These are available for office reviewing. Contact CATS for further information.

With an act as comprehensive as ISTEA, the first order of business is to address the funding and programming issues. This activity has been underway for the last four months and will be reviewed later in other CATS documents. The second order of business is to initiate the technical work required by the Act. As a starting point, CATS has begun a process to establish the "Urban Area boundary" for northeastern Illinois.

In the northeastern Illinois region, urban boundaries are established for purposes of federal funding, reporting statistical data on the urban area and carrying out federal programs. The application of many federal and state laws is based on the urban/rural boundaries. It needs to be noted that in the federal context, urban and rural areas can be defined differently depending on the program in question.

This issue of Transportation Facts will focus on a discussion of the Urban Area boundary, why we need it and how we are going about establishing it. It will cover other relevant urban boundaries in addition to some of the issues that arise in describing the Urban Area boundary in particular.

## Urban Area Defined

Section 101(A) of Title 23 of the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations defines the Urban Area as an urban place of 5,000 or more population including the Urbanized Areas as defined by the Bureau of Census. The Code includes a provision to allow the states in cooperation with local officials, to adjust and develop an Urban Area boundary that encircles the Urbanized Areas in a region.

Prior to the enactment of ISTEA, under the "old" Surface Transportation Assistance Act, the location of the Urban Area boundary had a number of significantly greater implications than it does now in 1992 under ISTEA. Specifically, the "old" boundary defined: the eligibility of routes for Federal Aid-Urban and Secondary system funds; the application of urban transportation planning; and the limits for administering control of outdoor advertising. Though it has implications in Illinois under ISTEA, the importance of where this boundary falls is not as great as it is elsewhere in the country under current conditions. This will be explained shortly. Presented in Exhibit 2 is an outline of the factors involved in fixing the Urban Area boundary.

### Exhibit 2 Factors in Fixing the Urban Area Boundary

- Smooth out irregularities
- Maintain continuity of routes for funding
- Encompass fringe areas that are urban in character (commercial, industrial and defense sites)

**Source:** Presentation made to region IV staff by FHWA on 4-1-92 and 4-2-92.

While preparing this T-Facts, it was learned that the Urban Area boundary has several 'slang' names. It is sometimes referred to as the 'Adjusted Urbanized Area', the 'Adjusted Census Urban Area', or the 'Federal-Aid Boundary'. In most cases, these terms are used in reference to the same area.

There are three boundaries that are worth understanding when discussing the Urban Area boundary:

- Census Bureau defined Urbanized Area
- Metropolitan Planning Area
- Non-attainment Area

Exhibit 3 depicts a conceptual map of the four areas presented in this discussion as they are defined in northeastern Illinois.

**Census Defined Urbanized Area (UZA):** Established and defined by the Bureau of Census, the Urbanized Area has the greatest impact on funding. Transportation planning, mass transit and specialized hospitals are funded in this way. According to the census definition, "an Urbanized Area comprises one or more central places/cities, plus the adjacent densely settled surrounding territory (urban fringe) that together have a minimum of 50,000 persons."

The urban fringe consists of a contiguous territory having a population density of at least 1,000 persons per square mile. This boundary is established every 10 years as a result of the decennial census and provides the population totals for transportation related funding formulas that require an urban/rural population number. (However, there are some exceptions under ISTEA which will be explained later.) In northeastern Illinois there are six Urbanized Areas; nationwide there are 396. Refer to Exhibit 4.

### Exhibit 4 Census Defined Urbanized Areas in Northeastern Illinois

Area	1990 Population
Aurora	192,043
Chicago	6,792,087
Crystal Lake	72,498
Elgin	123,899
Joliet	170,717
Round Lake Beach/McHenry	112,693

**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau, Census and your newsletter, Volume 26, Number 9, September 1991.

**Metropolitan Area Boundary:** By definition, the area defined by this boundary must cover at least the existing Urban Area and the contiguous area expected to become urban in the next twenty years. It is this boundary line that establishes the area in which the Section 134 planning requirements apply, including the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). (The 134 planning requirements set forth the guidelines that require a transportation — 3C planning process.) This boundary also establishes the area that is the recipient of the Surface Transportation Program



CHICAGO AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY



INTRA OFFICE MEMORANDUM

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TO: Interested Parties  
FROM: Ed Christopher *ELC*  
SUBJECT: Urban Area Boundary/Billboards  
DATE: September 21, 1992

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One of the issues involving the placement of the Urban Area Boundary (UAB) is its impact upon billboard control along Interstate highways and primary arterials. As noted in Transportation Facts, (Vol. 10, Number 2), the UAB establishes the urban/rural boundary affecting the placement and control of billboards.

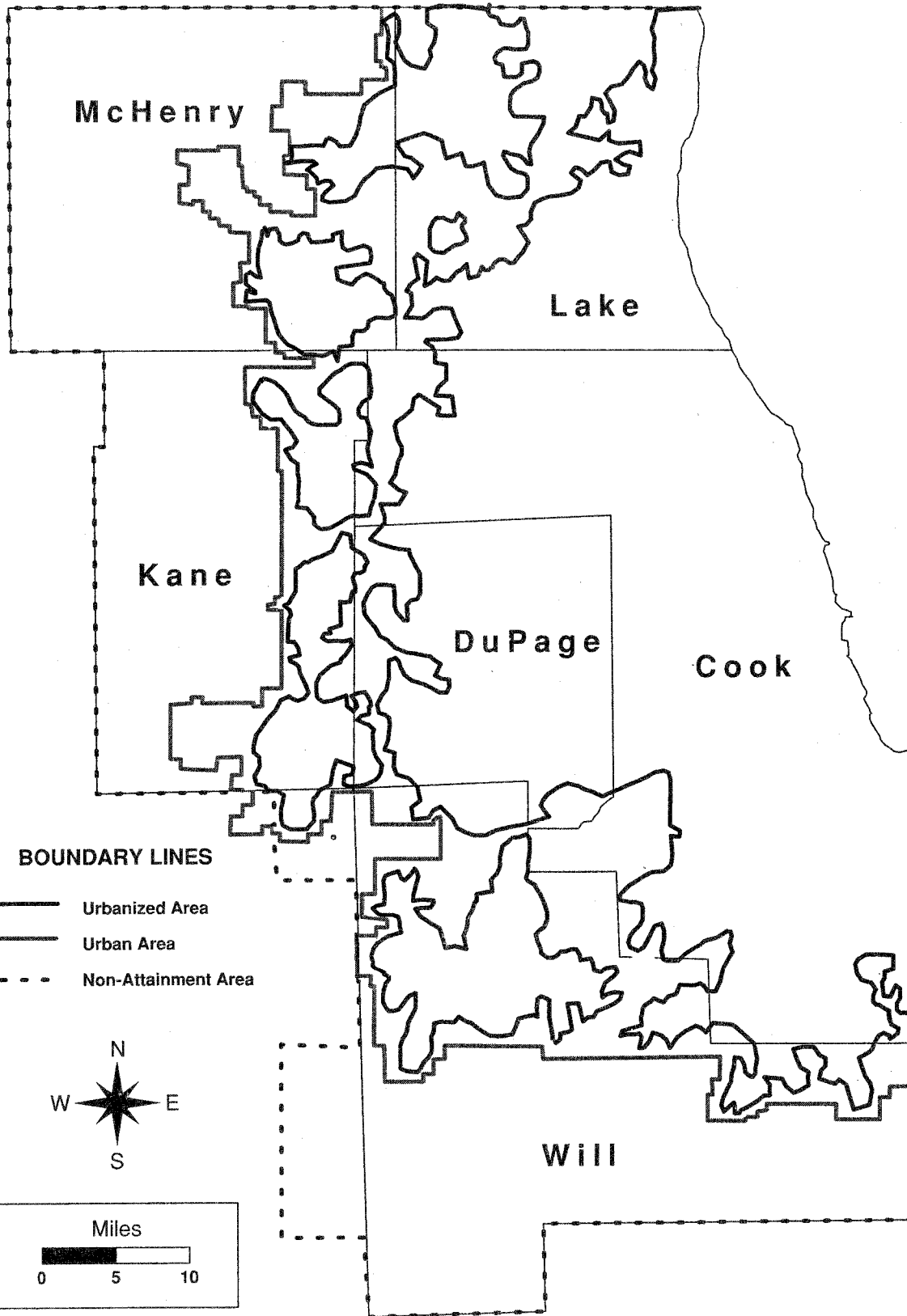
Under the current laws and regulations, billboards built within 660 feet of a Federal Aid Primary or Interstate highway inside the Urban Area are controlled by State Law. Outside the Urban Area this control extends to signs visible from any place on the main-traveled way of any portion of such highway and erected with the purpose of its message being read from such main-traveled way.

Within Urban Areas beyond the 660 feet mark the State cannot control billboard placement and has no jurisdiction. Any regulation, policing or oversight falls to the local units of government and their laws and policies. As a result, some suggest it may become easier to erect and maintain signs beyond 660 feet in urban areas. This is an issue that local units of government within the Urban Area should be aware of and recognize.

For questions about the UAB contact Ed Christopher of CATS at 312-793-3467. For billboard specific questions, direct your calls to Mr. Andrew Bono of IDOT's Land Acquisition Bureau at 217-782-2822.

BILLBDS:

**Exhibit 3**  
**Generalized Boundary Lines**  
**for the Northeastern Illinois Region**



(STP) funds under ISTEA. In 1980 and until the Clean Air Act Amendments (CAAA) of 1990 took effect, the six counties of Cook, Dupage, Kane, Lake, McHenry and Will made up the Metropolitan Area. The exact new boundary is still being discussed within the planning process and will be decided upon later this year. However, this area will still encompass at least the six counties.

**Non-Attainment Area:** Section 1024 of the ISTEA specifies that for areas designated as non-attainment areas for ozone or carbon monoxide (northeastern Illinois is one) the Non-Attainment Area boundary was identified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on November 6, 1991 in the Federal Register, page 56751. The Non-Attainment Area was identified as the six northeastern Illinois counties plus the township of Oswego in Kendall County and two townships in Grundy County, Goose Lake and Aux Sable.

## The Issues

There are four issues to understand with regard to the Urban Area boundary. Exhibit 5 contains an outline of these issues. The reader is cautioned, however, to review the exceptions and explanations in the text for a more complete discussion.

Presented below is a discussion of the issues, impacts and uses of the Urban Area boundary. In the final analysis, most of these have little relevance for the northeastern Illinois region. The issues will be referred to by their number as shown in Exhibit 5.

Issue 1 is no longer relevant to the effort of establishing the Urban Area boundary line. ISTEA changed the funding procedure to phase out the FAUS and most of the available FAUS money due to the region is already programmed (i.e. allocated to specific projects). Even though the Urban Area will in most cases be larger than under the old surface transportation law, money is no longer available from this program. For a discussion of the ISTEA/STP funding, consult specific ISTEA documents and future issues of T-Facts.

Issues 2 and 3, because they have been with us for some time, are somewhat more perfunctory. They concern matters of data reporting and road classification. Road classification will become a topic of discussion shortly as ISTEA calls for functional reclassification to take place. Both issues support the recommendation that the Urban Area boundary not be arbitrarily expanded out too far. First, by definition alone, the area should be urban. Second, concerning the issue of highway data collection, the smaller the area the less costly the data collection effort. Third, when summarizing data that compares urban to rural areas, we would be compromising accuracy if we included rural areas in urban, and vice versa. According to IDOT personnel, the location of this boundary does not affect the design criteria of urban and rural roads. A written understanding of this will be pursued.

Issue 4 concerns the location of outside advertising and billboards along major routes. Urban and rural guidelines differ regarding outside advertising. Under the ISTEA the states will be allowed the discretion to use their regular highway funds for removal of any legally placed non-conforming outdoor advertising sign, display or device.

### Exhibit 5 Issues Surrounding the Urban Area Boundary

- ① Fixes the area for the distribution of Federal Aid Urban Systems (FAUS) funds under the old highway authorization bill of 1984 that have yet to be spent.
- ② Identifies the area for reporting statistical data on accidents, mileage and other highway performance monitoring system (HPMS) programs.
- ③ Defines the line of demarcation for urban/rural functional classification of highway links.
- ④ Sets the limits of urban control of billboards and outdoor advertising.

**Source:** Presentation made to FHWA Region IV staff on 4-1-92 and 4-2-92.

To help define the Urban Area boundary, the IDOT has put forth a set of guidelines outlined in Exhibit 6.

**Exhibit 6  
Criteria for Establishing the  
Urban Area Boundary**

- Area should be generally urban, and possess urban character and features
- Boundary should follow a continuous line and follow physical features
- Boundary must include census Urbanized Area
- There must be agreement on boundary and exceptions
- Boundary should include all incorporated areas of 5,000 population
- Area should contain all special trip generators such as airports, stadiums and employment sites

**Source:** Illinois Department of Transportation, Memorandum to Metropolitan Planning Organization Executive Directors, Carla Berroyer, April, 13 1992

commenced a three-phase approach. First, CATS technical staff reviewed the 1990 census data, old maps and boundaries, current development patterns, 1990 aerial photos and planning documents for relevant data. Five guidelines emerged from this review to assist CATS staff in identifying the Urban Area boundary. They are highlighted in Exhibit 7.

**Exhibit 7  
Urban Area Guidelines**

- Respect Federal and State Guidelines
- Attempt to represent what is characteristically urban
- Respect planning geography (quarter-section lines) where feasible
- Conduct an ongoing review of federal, state and local needs and regulations
- Consider the agricultural protection area as defined by NIPC's Draft Strategic Plan for Land Resource Management

**Source:** CATS Staff, May 1992.

The second phase of CATS' strategy called for the issues surrounding boundary identification to come before the Council of Mayors through their planning liaisons and to the CATS Work Program and Policy Committees. The Policy Committee approved a motion endorsing the Urban Area boundary at its June 11, 1992 meeting.

This T-Facts was prepared during the third phase of CATS approach. As a draft it was used to solicit public input and foster the necessary debate while the approval process was underway. Although the placement of the boundary line has a limited impact in the region, it was necessary to initiate an open discussion of the issues.

**Establishing the Urban Area**

On April 20, 1992, the Illinois Department of Transportation notified CATS that it must have an approved boundary line submitted by May 30, 1992. To meet this deadline, CATS staff initiated a review of the issues and criteria and

**Build Your Acronym Library**

US DOT	U.S. Department of Transportation	FTA	Federal Transit Administration (formally UMTA)
IDOT	Illinois Department of Transportation	ISTEA	Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991
CATS	Chicago Area Transportation Study	STP	Surface Transportation Program
NIPC	Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission	CAAA	Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990
MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization	TIP	Transportation Improvement Program
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration	UZA	Urbanized Area (Census defined)

## Special Notices

**Disclaimer** — This issue of Transportation Facts has been prepared to help with the dissemination of information relevant to the MPO's implementation of the ISTEA. It is meant to stimulate discussion, answer specific questions and advance the spirit of ISTEA. The reader is cautioned that these issues change rapidly and those with continuing interest should not rely solely on T-Facts. It does not represent the policy views of the MPO or any of its member agencies.

**NOTE:** Some have inappropriately applied the 55 mph speed limit area to the Urban Area boundary. This is incorrect. Based on discussions with FHWA officials and a review of Chapter 23, Section 659.7 of the Code of Federal Regulations, the Census-defined Urbanized Area boundary line is the boundary line used for the 55 mile limit.