

Chicago Transit Authority Yellow Line Alternatives Analysis Study

Screen 2 Public Involvement Responses to Public Comments and Questions

August 4, 2009

Written questions and comments regarding the Yellow Line Alternatives Analysis Study were submitted by a variety of individuals and groups from throughout the Chicago region at the study's Screen 2 Public Meeting held on April 30, 2009 at Niles North High School in Skokie. In addition, public comments and questions on Screen 2 were submitted directly to the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) via e-mail and postal mail through May 21, 2009.

All of the questions and comments have been collected and compiled to provide a comprehensive review of the issues raised along with CTA's responses. Every question, comment, and suggestion submitted during the public comment period has been compiled in the "Outreach Comment Database" (see separate document). Each question has been recorded verbatim and assigned a number that corresponds with the answers provided in this document, ensuring every question or comment submitted has been reviewed and answered or acknowledged. Collectively, the public comments and preferences will be considered in the evaluation of alternatives and concepts introduced through the public involvement process and may be evaluated and/or reflected in advancing alternatives as appropriate.

Many of the comments received were very similar in nature. As a result, similar comments and their responses have been grouped by topic and "General Comment" heading below to avoid duplicative responses. Questions or comments requiring individual or specific responses are also included below along with unique responses. In order to understand some terms used in the Comments and Responses, it may be necessary to review the original presentation materials which are posted on CTA's web site www.transitchicago.com.

The list below shows the index of topics covered in the report, along with the number of comments received for each. Most of the comments received were regarding economic and environmental impacts. A number of general questions, and statements of support or opposition to the extension were also submitted. Because comments often refer to more than one topic, the numbers associated with each do not equal the total number of comments received.

Index of Topics

1. Yellow Line Extension Project Timeline (2)
2. Yellow Line Extension Purpose and Need (7)
3. Future Extension of the Yellow Line (6)
4. Alternatives Analyzed and Description of the Recommended Locally Preferred Alternative (19)
5. Evaluation Criteria Used in the Alternatives Analysis Study (6)
6. Proposed Yellow Line Extension Stations (6)
7. Proposed Yellow Line Extension Station Parking (4)
8. Proposed Yellow Line Extension Station Access (21)
9. Alternatives Analysis Public Involvement Process and Format (6)
10. Funding for Yellow Line Extension Construction and Operations (3)
11. Potential Yellow Line Extension Connections with Existing Regional Transit Services (2)
12. Potential Yellow Line Extension Operations (7)
13. Potential Yellow Line Extension and Coordination with Proposed Regional Multi-Use Trail (3)
14. Potential Yellow Line Extension Economic and Environmental Impacts (40)
15. Statements of Support or Opposition to the Extension (34)
16. Other (3)

1. Yellow Line Extension Project Timeline

General Comment:

Why did it take so long to get the line extended? What is the estimated completion year?

Pertains to Specific Comment:

49

Response to Overall Category Comment:

The FTA New Start grant program requires conceptual transit project proposals to proceed through a formal process of planning, design, and construction. Upon completion of this process, the project is ready for operation. The process involves five formal steps: Alternatives Analysis (AA); Environmental Impact Statement (EIS); Preliminary Engineering (PE); Final Design (FD); and Construction. Each of these steps typically takes 2-3 years to complete. Initiation of each step is also contingent upon continued availability of federal and local funding, the timing of which will also affect the overall project schedule. For highly complex projects the Final Design and Construction steps take longer, particularly if construction is implemented in sequential phases rather than all at once.

The current Yellow Line Extension Alternatives Analysis study is being completed in summer 2009, with the adoption of a locally preferred alternative by the Chicago Transit Board. The subsequent project phase, Environmental Impact Study, is projected to begin in fall 2009. A specific completion year depends on factors outside CTA's control, but is expected no earlier than 2016.

Other Specific Comments Noted on this Topic:

Comment:

60. If the Olympics 2016 are approved...does this all get fast tracked? What happens to those 2 year + studies per section?

Response:

CTA is working closely with the Chicago 2016 bid team and believes that the present transit system can handle transit needs for the 2016 Olympics with continued maintenance and modest improvements. The Yellow Line Extension project is not linked with Chicago's bid for the 2016 Olympics. However, any improvements made to the current system could only benefit the Olympic bid application and the City's ability to host the games. It is expected that the Federal Transit Administration would continue to adhere to the same requirements, although prior experience in Atlanta and Salt Lake City suggests federal approvals are more timely in Olympic host cities.

2. Yellow Line Extension Purpose and Need

General Comment:

What are the benefits of this extension and route? What is the purpose and need to be addressed with the Yellow Line Extension?

Pertains to Specific Comments:

37, 39, 51, 63, 64, 66, 88

Response to Overall Category Comment:

In the Alternatives Analysis step, the project's purpose and need is identified, alternatives to address the purpose and need are developed and evaluated, comprehensive and on-going public involvement is initiated, and a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) is determined. The Yellow Line Extension project's "purpose and need" is to improve transportation access to major activity centers and support Skokie's land use plans. In particular, transportation improvements aim to meet the needs of a growing reverse-commute market not well served by the existing network; leverage the existing, underutilized transit system; support Village of Skokie transit-oriented development initiatives; and provide a transit alternative to continued growth in study area arterial street and expressway congestion. Extending Yellow Line transit

service north of the Dempster Street terminal station is intended to improve access to, within, and beyond the study area and reduce transit travel times through faster and more direct transit service.

Additional station area access benefits are noted in Topic Category 8.

3. Future Extension of the Yellow Line

General Comment:

Can you extend the Yellow Line further north? Does a single track preclude the ability to extend the line further north?

Pertains to Specific Comments:

20, 32, 43, 61, 78, 80

Response to Overall Category Comment:

At the start of the Alternatives Analysis study, the project team reviewed a previous feasibility study on extending the Yellow Line conducted by the Village of Skokie, a corridor market analysis by Regional Transportation Authority, and the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning Long Range Transportation Plan to determine appropriate project limits for the Alternatives Analysis. Previous analysis suggested Old Orchard Road area is expected to remain the most significant concentration of employment and commercial activity in the corridor for the foreseeable future and as such, the Alternatives Analysis study only considered major capital investments as far as Old Orchard Road.

While the Alternatives Analysis recommends extension of the Yellow Line as far as Old Orchard Road, it is possible to extend the Yellow Line north in the future. This would most likely be accomplished by constructing a new station at Old Orchard Road on the Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way west of the expressway, completing the second track between Dempster Street and Old Orchard Road, and continuing north in the former freight corridor. If this were pursued, the proposed station near Niles North High School could remain in service as a branch of the Yellow Line, or its use could be discontinued and its functions moved to a new station on the Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way.

4. Alternatives Analyzed and Description of the Recommended Locally Preferred Alternative

General Comment:

Describe the alternatives. Explain the analysis made to place the train line on the east side of the expressway.

Pertains to Specific Comments:

12, 13, 14, 57, 78, 103

Response to Overall Category Comment:

Four alternatives were analyzed in Screen 2 of the Yellow Line Extension Alternatives Analysis process, including the No-Build, Transportation System Management (TSM), Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), and Heavy Rail Transit (HRT) Alternatives. The HRT alternative had several components, including profile (trench and elevated) and alignment options (East or West Option terminal locations) that were further evaluated. A summary of these alternatives is provided below.

The No-Build alternative is defined as the existing transportation system, plus any committed transportation improvements, or projects in the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) financially constrained Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The Yellow Line Study Area has several projects included in the 2007 – 2012 TIP, including three intersection improvements along Skokie Boulevard: at the intersections of Dempster Street, Golf Road and Old Orchard Road; road improvements of Old Orchard Road from Harms Road to Skokie Boulevard and expansion of the northbound Edens off ramp lanes (this project is in a preliminary design phase; however, initial plans are incorporated into the no-build and build alternatives); resurfacing of Skokie Boulevard from Dempster to Touhy Avenue and of Skokie Road from Old Orchard north; and the reconstruction and widening of Dempster Road from the west to Central Road. The No-Build Alternative establishes the baseline for comparison of the cost-effectiveness of the TSM Alternative and the financial condition of the transit operator. All elements of the No-Build alternative are included in each of the other alternatives.

The TSM alternative responds to the purpose and need identified in the study area and is the alternative with the most benefits without the cost of a guideway investment. The TSM Alternative evaluated in the Yellow Line Extension Screen 2 analysis is a 2.6 mile Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) enhanced bus route from the existing Yellow Line Dempster terminal to Old Orchard Mall and the Cook County Courthouse. It is proposed as a mixed-traffic operation between the existing Dempster station and Cook County Courthouse, with only one intermediate stop proposed at the on the east side of Old Orchard Mall.

The BRT alternative is 2.0 miles long and is proposed to operate at-grade on exclusive bus lanes in the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) right-of-way (ROW) between the existing Yellow Line Dempster terminal and Old Orchard Road (west of Edens Expressway). After an intermediate stop at Old Orchard Road, the BRT will then continue in mixed traffic to a bus terminal within Old Orchard Mall.

The HRT alternative is 1.6 miles long and is proposed to operate as single-track alignment either on elevated structure or in a trench along the UPRR ROW north from Dempster Street to Old Orchard Road. Terminal options include the East Option that follows the UPRR ROW north from Dempster Street with a turn northeast just north of Golf Road to a terminal on the east of the Edens Expressway and adjacent to Niles North High School south of Old Orchard Road; or the West Option, which would also continue north on the UPRR ROW from Dempster Street, crossing under the expressway and continuing northwest on the ROW to Old Orchard Road. No intermediate stations are planned in this alternative.

All alternatives considered have proposed parking at Old Orchard Road (see Topic Category 7 for additional information).

The recommended Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) is a single-track elevated rail extension following the UPRR ROW over Dempster St, Gross Point Rd, Church St and Golf Rd that veers northeast to terminate at a double-track station between the Edens Expressway and Niles North High School south of Old Orchard Road. (More information about the selection of the East Terminal Option is provided in Topic Category 5 – Evaluation Criteria.) This extension includes 1.6 new route miles of rapid transit to the existing Yellow Line, one additional station at Old Orchard Road (plus the replacement of Dempster Street station as an elevated station), four new railcars, a new bus terminal facility and a parking structure (which includes replacement of existing NNHS parking spaces).

Other Specific Comments Noted on Hybrid Buses/Improved Bus Service/ Bus Rapid Transit:

Comments: Why not use a bus or shuttle service instead of extending the train line?

2, 16, 18, 19, 30, 34, 53, 57, 65, 72

Response:

Bus alternatives were evaluated and advanced from Screen 1 and further evaluated in Screen 2 of the Yellow Line Extension Alternatives Analysis using a variety of screening factors. The bus alternatives evaluated included s BRT option using the UPRR ROW, paved over for bus service and the TSM BRT option that would serve as an enhancement to the existing 97 Skokie bus using Skokie Boulevard.

Both bus alternatives performed well in the capital cost evaluations; however, since both bus alternatives require a transfer to reach major activity centers in the study area and have longer travel times they perform poorly on the transportation criteria, are estimated to attract fewer riders, and do not fully address the purpose and need of the project. While other design variations exist for BRT alternatives, they were not further evaluated because of poor performance on these transportation criteria.

BRT propulsion systems and other features were not finalized in the Screen 2 analysis of the study, as this type of question is typically addressed in subsequent design phases; for enhanced bus projects such as BRT, preference is often given to environmentally friendly technologies. However, as a design factor, bus propulsion systems have not been shown to influence travel demand and ridership as strongly as other criteria such as frequency and mode, and are not included as a variable in travel demand forecasting exercises.

Other Specific Comments Noted on Elevated/Trench/At-Grade:

Comment:

24. Please clarify the exact areas proposed for elevated vs. grade level vs. trench on the heavy rail extension.

Response:

The proposed heavy rail transit alternative was evaluated for several profile options in the Screen 2 analysis. The at-grade profile option is proposed to operate at-grade from the existing station at Dempster Street to proposed terminal locations south of Old Orchard Road. For the West Terminal Option, the at-grade alternative would remain at-grade; for

the East Terminal Option, the at-grade alternative would rise slightly north of Golf Road to terminate on an embankment. While this profile option is lower cost than other profile options considered, it was not advanced due to community concerns about traffic congestion from at-grade street crossings, especially at Dempster Street, and community concerns about safety as the at-grade rail line would be located in close proximity to local schools, including Jane Stenson Elementary School and Niles North High School.

The heavy rail transit trench alternative is proposed to operate in both trench and at-grade along portions of the alignment. Specifically, all street crossings would be in a trench, starting from south of Dempster Street (requiring the relocation of the existing Dempster Street Station) and continuing until north of Gross Point Road and including the portion of track at Church Street and Golf Road. Between Gross Point Road and Church Street, and between Church Street and Golf Road, the profile would come up slightly to an at-grade profile to minimize land excavation costs. North of Golf Road, the profile would also come out of a trench and transition to an at-grade or embankment profile depending on the West or East Terminal Option, respectively. The trench alignment, even with at-grade portions to minimize land excavation costs is higher cost than the other heavy rail transit alternatives, primarily due to the larger construction footprint required for the trench profile, and the resulting impact on adjacent Commonwealth Edison towers and poles with their high relocation costs.

The recommended heavy rail transit elevated alternative is proposed to operate above the ground level along the entire proposed right-of-way. This would start south of Dempster Street (also requiring the relocation of the existing Dempster Street Station) and continue north to a terminal station south of Old Orchard Road. The elevated heavy rail alternative is recommended over other heavy rail transit profile options because it minimizes at-grade traffic interference and safety concerns from the community, yet is more cost effective than the trench profile option.

Comment:

25. How high is the elevated structure? Height from grade level to top of train?

Response:

If this alternative advances, the preliminary design of the elevated structure will be further developed in both the Preliminary Engineering and Final Design project phases. Current conceptual design used for the alternatives analysis assumes that the elevated structure would be at least 15 feet above ground level to provide sufficient clearance for street crossings. The height of the structure and CTA train car would total approximately 30 feet. As reference, adjacent Commonwealth Edison towers in the same corridor stand at 85 feet.

Comment:

53. \$2m per Comm Ed tower to remove/relocate? Is that for both trench or elevated?

Response:

The preliminary cost assumptions for removing Commonwealth Edison towers are based on past project experience and recent discussions with Commonwealth Edison. These costs are applicable to any tower moved for any alternative, including trench or elevated alternatives, as well as bus or rail alternatives.

5. Evaluation Criteria Used in the Alternatives Analysis Study

General Comment:

Explain your evaluation criteria, including ridership and cost effectiveness ratings. How did you generate ridership numbers?

Pertains to Specific Comments:

16, 21, 42, 82, 103

Response to Overall Category Comment:

To arrive at the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) recommendation, several evaluation criteria are used to assess the performance of the alternatives. These factors included physical constraints, social and economic factors, transportation factors, environmental factors, capital costs, operating and maintenance costs, forecasted ridership, and preliminary cost-effectiveness.

Preliminary ridership forecasts were developed for the Yellow Line Extension alternatives using a computer regional travel demand forecasting model maintained by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP). The CMAP travel demand forecasting model has been updated and modified for use in conducting FTA New Starts Alternatives Analysis studies by the CTA and Metra in the northeastern Illinois region. The model uses projections of population and employment to forecast total travel demand for various trip purposes. This demand is then split between different modes (e.g. bus, rail or auto) and routes based on the relative cost, time, and other factors of competing travel options to arrive at a projection of demand for a facility. Estimates from the model are that the Heavy Rail Transit (HRT) Alternative would attract 2 million riders per year in 2030. For the Transportation System Management/Bus Rapid Transit (TSM/BRT) Alternative, 400,000 riders per year in 2030 are projected.

The cost-effectiveness index (CEI) is an important evaluation factor because it is reported to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and used to compare projects competing for limited funding across the nation. FTA measures cost-effectiveness as the cost per hour of projected user benefits. Cost is a combination of both the annualized capital costs and annual operating and maintenance costs. User benefits, as measured by travel time savings, are generated from the ridership forecasting model described above and are designed to capture all quantifiable benefits to travelers using the transit system.

A higher CEI value indicates lower projected user benefits and higher capital costs to implement the project, whereas a lower value indicates higher projected user benefits and lower capital cost compared other alternatives. The CEI presented in Screen 2 is preliminary and will continue to be refined with revisions to the capital cost, operating cost and ridership for the alternatives throughout the completion of the alternatives analysis study and in subsequent project phases, such as Preliminary Engineering, when capital costs are further refined.

The relative results of the criteria evaluated for each alternative in the Yellow Line Extension Screen 2 analysis are available in the evaluation matrix presented in the Screen 3 presentation and technical boards available on the CTA website (www.transitchicago.com, click on News and Initiatives, then Alternatives Analysis Studies).

Other Specific Comments Noted on this Topic:

Comment:

97. Are we allowed to see the analysis of the Capital and Economics of the east vs west options for the Yellow line extension? Building and Elevated East route along the school property and expressway compared as cheaper then returning to grade and going under an existing viaduct for the expressway doesn't make sense. But, I'm sure there is more to it.

Response:

A heavy rail transit alternative with two terminal options was evaluated in Screen 2 (see Topic Category 4, Alternatives Analyzed, for more details). The heavy rail transit alternative is proposed from Dempster Street to Golf Road, with a common alignment that does not vary in cost between the terminal options. North of Golf Road, the terminal options evaluated include the West Option, which remains on the UPRR ROW for its entire length from Dempster Street to Old Orchard Road, and an East Option, which veers to the east north of Golf Road to terminate on the east of the Edens Expressway adjacent to Niles North High School and south of Old Orchard Road.

The West Option alignment has a higher capital cost than the East Option due to constraints on the additional acreage required at Old Orchard Road to construct the rail terminal station (double-track with island platform) and the associated facilities (bus terminal, park-and-ride, kiss-and-ride, etc.). While there is existing right-of-way (ROW) to the east of the UPRR track as you approach Old Orchard Road, this area also contains several high-tension towers and utility poles, all of which must be removed and relocated to facilitate construction of the transit facility.

A review of utility data for the area indicates that there are 29 towers and eight poles in the area north of the Edens Expressway. Based on previous area transit projects and discussion with Commonwealth Edison, relocation of utility towers is currently estimated to cost around \$2 million per tower, while each pole relocated is estimated to cost \$10,000. Therefore, for just the tower and pole relocations required between the Edens and Old Orchard Road on the West Option, the capital cost increases by \$58 million.

There is no similar constraint on the East Option alignment – the overhead utility lines do not follow the expressway in this area. And in fact, while the terminal facilities would have the same square-foot area requirements, the East Option

benefits from the fact locating most of the facility on Cook County-owned land adjacent to the Edens Expressway and Old Orchard Road. Costs for relocation or replacement of some Niles North High School facilities are included in current capital cost figures, but these do not total more than the \$58 million in utility relocation costs associated with the West Option.

6. Proposed Yellow Line Extension Stations

General Comment:

Why is only one station being proposed for the heavy rail transit alternative?

Pertains to Specific Comments:

45, 46, 48

Response to Overall Category Comment:

The distance between Dempster Street and Old Orchard Road is 1.6 miles. Rapid transit stations are typically one mile apart to balance access distance with travel speeds, so the extension does not necessarily warrant consideration of an intermediate station. Additionally, the primary purpose and need of the study is to improve travel to the dominant activity center in the region located at Old Orchard Road, served most directly by the proposed terminal station.

A design alternative to the Locally Preferred Alternative would be termination the line at a Golf Road Station. This station would be closer to the Holocaust Museum and Education Center and Optima Old Orchard Woods Condominiums, but further from other activity centers including the Westfield Shoppingtown – Old Orchard Mall, Niles North High School, and the Cook County Courthouse.

Other Specific Comments on Status of Oakton St. Station:

Comments:

50, 88

Response:

The infill station at Oakton Street is being designed and funded by a Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) grant through the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) and the Village of Skokie with the CTA's cooperation as a stakeholder. According to the Village of Skokie, site selection is complete for the Oakton Station and final engineering is underway. Oakton Station final engineering and construction bid packages are expected to be completed by the end of 2009.

Consistent with other planned and committed transportation projects, this station will be assumed to exist when making assessments about future performance of the proposed Yellow Line Extension.

Other Specific Comments on Evanston:

Comments:

47. In Evanston will the train make stops at either Dodge Asbury or Ridge?

Response:

Responsibility for the planning, design and funding for stations on existing rail lines resides with local jurisdictions and are not part of the scope of this study. Evanston has recently initiated a study to determine if an infill station at any of these locations would be appropriate for the City to pursue, and will work with the CTA in the future if it is decided to further pursue and fund any of the station locations, similar to the Village of Skokie's efforts to open an Oakton Street infill station.

7. Proposed Yellow Line Extension Station Parking

General Comment:

How will this affect the Niles North Parking Lot and peak hour traffic flows? Why are you proposing 350 spaces?

Pertains to Specific Comments:

6, 37, 59, 67

Response to Overall Category Comment:

The recommended Locally Preferred Alternative ends at the East Terminal Option adjacent to Niles North High School, with a proposed parking structure and terminal facilities over the current surface parking lot at the high school. Any surface parking spaces removed by the CTA would be replaced with dedicated spaces for the high school in a proposed multi-level parking lot, and costs for this mitigation have been included in preliminary project cost estimates. In addition, there would be separate dedicated parking for the commuters in the same structure, currently estimated at about 350 spaces.

The 350 parking space estimate is an initial assumption for the number of commuter spaces needed at the proposed terminal station. This estimate is developed using projections of likely parking demand derived from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) regional travel demand forecasting model described in Topic Category 5.

In addition to direct impacts to the high school, all traffic patterns in and around the proposed station location, including peak hour traffic flows, will be studied in more detail during the subsequent Environmental Impact Statement and Preliminary Engineering project phases. The Environmental Impact Statement is a federal process that requires that all positive and negative benefits of the proposed investment are identified and mitigation strategies developed before the project can proceed. (For more information about environmental impacts, see Topic Category 14 below.) CTA will continue to work with Niles North High School and adjacent property owners regarding traffic impacts and development of successful mitigation strategies.

8. Proposed Yellow Line Extension Station Access

General Comment:

How will people access activity centers on west side of highway or other nearby activity centers that are not directly served by the proposed East Terminal Option?

Pertains to Specific Comments:

5, 7, 14, 39, 40, 45, 63, 66

General Comment:

The proposed station will provide rapid transit access to several activity centers in the Old Orchard area, improving quality of life, reducing emissions, or provide other benefits.

Pertains to Specific Comments:

74, 75, 79, 82, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 96, 98, 101

Response to Overall Category Comment:

Typically, activity centers within one-half mile of transit stations are considered candidates for walk-access to a station. The following activity centers are currently within one-half mile of the proposed terminal station of the Heavy Rail Transit (HRT) East Terminal Option Alternative: National Louis University (971 students); Niles North High School (2,195 students); Westfield Shoppingtown – Old Orchard Mall (13,525,000 visitors per year); Life Time Fitness Center (near Old Orchard Road and Woods Drive, 1.1 million client visits per year); The Hampton Inn & Suites Chicago – North Shore (225 rooms); the Extended Stay America – Skokie (140 rooms); and residential communities to the south of Niles North High School. Additionally, employees at these hospitality, educational and retail locations would have improved transit access to their jobs.

Other activity centers within between one-half mile and one mile distance of the proposed station include the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center (which opened on April 19 2009, expected to have 250,000 visitors per year); August 2009

Cook County 2nd District Courthouse (675,000 visitors per year), and the new Optima Old Orchard Woods Condominiums Complex (665 units). Improved pedestrian access to reduce the distance to the Holocaust Museum and Education Center and Optima Old Orchard Woods Condominiums to a proposed East Terminal station location will be considered in future design and engineering phases.

Currently, there is limited infrastructure for pedestrians to cross the Edens Expressway. However, the Village of Skokie has identified this concern and is working in coordination with IDOT and the Cook County Highway Department, on improvements to Old Orchard Road from Harms Road to Skokie Boulevard (including widening and adding pedestrian access) and expansion of the northbound Edens off-ramp lanes. This project is currently in a preliminary design phase; however, initial plans and recommendations are incorporated into the no-build and build alternatives considered in this study.

Finally, in future engineering and design project phases, CTA will continue to pursue, facilitate, and accommodate pedestrian and bicycle access options to a new station.

Furthermore, it is anticipated that the structure of existing Pace and CTA bus routes in the study area may be modified to complement new high capacity transit service. Restructuring bus services in coordination with the introduction of a new high capacity transit line can allow for reduced travel times to activity centers, particularly those beyond the typical one-half-mile walking distance from the proposed terminal. There are also opportunities for privately operated shuttles to connect the station to more remote activity centers.

9. Alternatives Analysis Public Involvement Process and Format

General Comment:

How was the information about the meetings and locally preferred alternative communicated to the public? How will the public's comments be heard?

Pertains to Specific Comments:

8, 31, 36

Response to Overall Category Comment:

CTA announcements were published in the Chicago Jewish News, Skokie/Lincolnwood Review and Evanston Review two weeks prior to the meeting (between April 9 and 17). Cards were placed on CTA and Pace buses, CTA stations and CTA train cars two weeks prior to the meeting. CTA, CMAP, RTA and Metropolitan Planning Council also placed information on their websites and distributed to their listservs. Announcement cards were distributed to the village halls two weeks prior to the meeting. Elected officials and universities received an ad for posting on their website or distribution at their offices. Announcements were also made by direct mail to community residents that had participated in the Screen 1 meetings or asked to be on the project mailing list.

After the Screen 2 meeting, the presentation, technical boards and maps discussing the Screen 2 analysis and recommended locally preferred alternative were posted on the CTA website at www.transitchicago.com (News and Initiatives, Alternatives Analysis Studies, Yellow Line Extension).

Public comments are collected through all of the CTA public outreach for each screen of the Alternatives Analysis Study. CTA participates in individual stakeholder meetings as necessary to discuss options and listen to individual stakeholder concerns. Additionally, CTA hosts community stakeholder meetings with representatives of various community groups throughout the study area. We also have met or offered to meet with local, county, state and federal elected officials in the study area and surrounding communities. Meetings also included community organizations, and city and state agencies such as the Illinois Department of Transportation, Regional Transportation Authority, Metra, and Pace. If your organization would like to be included in the stakeholder's meetings for future project phases, please contact Darud Akbar, CTA Government and Community Relations at dakbar@transitchicago.com.

Public comments are also solicited at the public involvement meetings. The public involvement process for the Yellow Line Extension Alternatives Analysis study included two public involvement meetings, at the conclusion of the Screen 1 and Screen 2/LPA analyses. The Screen 1 meeting was held at National Louis University and Screen 2 at Niles North High School. CTA's goal in emphasizing written questions and comments has been to ensure everyone's thoughts are

collected and reviewed. During the outreach meeting, some of these comments are addressed; however, public comments were accepted for three weeks after the outreach meeting. Written comments received at the public meetings and other subsequently submitted comments are being answered individually for the record in this document, which will be made available publicly on the CTA Web site, by email to public meeting participants, and in hard copy by written request. All of the comment cards and other written communications (primarily emails and letters from elected officials) will collectively become part of the evaluation process and will be submitted to the Federal Transit Administration as a part of the official documentation for the Alternatives Analysis study.

The comments received during the public outreach process can and do shape the development of project alternatives. For example, after Screen 1 CTA incorporated comments requesting evaluation of the performance of an express bus alternative and concerns related to at-grade street crossings and the safety of community school students into the Screen 2 analysis.

Other Specific Comments on this Topic:

Comments:

4. Have there been any discussions on the matter with ComEd?

Response:

CTA has had preliminary meetings with Commonwealth Edison (Com Ed). They are aware of the proposed elevated heavy rail extension and CTA will continue to meet with them as the project advances into subsequent phases.

Comments:

33 & 53. Has Dist 219/Niles North agreed to this? 100%-50%- How can you plan for this if they aren't on board?

Response:

CTA held meetings with District 219 and Niles North High School in advance of the public meeting and will continue to meet with them as the project advances into subsequent phases. District 219 and Niles North High School are important partners to help ensure that the Yellow Line Extension is a success for transit customers and well as a good neighbor for Niles North. This will be a continuous and collaborative process and we will continue to work closely with them as we move forward.

10. Funding for Yellow Line Extension Construction and Operations

General Comment:

How will the construction and operation of the Yellow Line Extension be funded, in light of today's economy and CTA's current budget issues?

Pertains to Specific Comments:

35, 62

Response to Overall Category Comment:

Two types of funding are needed for the extension – operating funds and capital funds.

CTA's operating budget supports day-to-day service delivery on its bus and rail system and determines the frequency and hours of service offered. Approximately half of CTA's operating budget comes from customer fares and revenue generated from advertising, concessions and other sources. The other half comes from regional sales taxes, real estate transfer taxes, and matching funds from the State of Illinois. Once the Yellow Line Extension is built and operational, funds to operate the system are anticipated to be consistent with funding mechanisms that support CTA's other bus and rail transit services.

Meanwhile, CTA has initiated this Alternatives Analysis study for the Yellow Line Extension as a first step towards obtaining capital funding for the project through the Federal Transit Administration's "New Starts" grant program.¹ This program provides funding for major public transit infrastructure projects throughout the U.S. through a highly competitive

¹ CTA is also conducting concurrent Alternatives Analysis studies for other candidate New Starts expansion projects that have been authorized by the U.S. Congress—including extending the Orange Line to Ford City, extending the Red Line south from 95th Street, and constructing the Circle Line.
August 2009

process. These are discretionary funds that are only available for system expansions and do not compete with federal funds that CTA receives for capital maintenance (or state of good repair) needs.

Upon successfully advancing through Alternatives Analysis, Environmental Impact Statement, and Preliminary Engineering, a project may receive a Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA) from the federal government. The FFGA can provide federal funds for up to 80 percent of a project's capital cost including Final Design, although typically project sponsors request 50 percent or less to increase the competitiveness of their projects. Other non-federal funds (in Illinois, these have traditionally been state funds) will comprise the remainder of capital funding. It is possible to seek alternative sources of federal and non-federal funding for the project, but the federal New Starts grant program is specifically intended to support transit projects of this nature and is the public funding mechanism generally most capable of doing so.

CTA is simultaneously pursuing solutions to its overall operating and capital funding challenges while also positioning itself through Alternatives Analysis studies such as this one to secure capital funding to meet the region's future transit infrastructure needs. For example, many of today's key transit links—including the Blue Line to O'Hare and the Orange Line to Midway—were made possible by past generations who understood the need to invest in transit's future even as they addressed significant day-to-day financial pressures.

Other Specific Comments on this Topic:

Comments:

58. Do we as taxpayers get taxed by RTA?

Response:

The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) is authorized by Illinois state statute to impose a sales tax in the six-county region of northeastern Illinois. This tax is the primary source of public revenue to support operations of RTA, CTA, Metra and Pace. Additional revenues to support operations include State Public Transportation Funds, and a Real Estate Transfer Tax collected in the City of Chicago. For more information on the collection and distribution of RTA revenues refer to the budget documents on the RTA website: www.rtachicago.com.

Comment:

58. Will we be asked at any time to fund this?

Response:

As described in the general response to comments in Topic Category 10, funds for construction of the Yellow Line extension will be shared between federal and non-federal state or local sources. Elected officials in the various levels of government have the responsibility for allocating funds to the project.

11. Potential Yellow Line Extension Connections with Existing Regional Transit Services

General Comment:

Are you working with Pace regarding their bus connections?

Pertains to Specific Comments:

1, 41

Response to Overall Category Comment:

A key goal of the Yellow Line Extension is to utilize and integrate existing regional transit services to the greatest extent possible. The Yellow Line Extension will be designed to make convenient connections between transit services with which it intersects. In the Alternatives Analysis study, opportunities for connections between the CTA Yellow Line Extension and Pace bus services have been identified and conceptual designs include space for Pace buses to serve the terminal station.

As a part of the Alternatives Analysis process, CTA meets regularly with representatives of Metra, Pace, the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), the Chicago Department of Transportation, the Illinois Department of Transportation, the Village of Skokie and adjacent municipalities, Cook County, and the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) to promote coordination within the region's transportation network.

12. Potential Yellow Line Extension Operations

General Comment:

What are the benefits and limitations of a single track? Would a single track affect a future extension?

Pertains to Specific Comments:

32, 44, 61, 73, 80

Response to Overall Category Comment:

A single-track alignment is recommended as the locally preferred alternative because it offers reduced cost of track, signal systems, power distribution and structure and minimizes relocation cost of adjacent utility poles and towers compared to a double track extension. In addition, the single-track alignment allows the CTA to operate within available Union Pacific Rail Road (UPRR) right of way (ROW), which narrows to as little as 25 feet in some locations, compared to the 50-feet required for a double-track elevated structure. Operating within the UPRR ROW avoids acquiring substantial Commonwealth Edison property and minimizes relocation of utility poles and high tension towers on the adjacent Commonwealth Edison property.

Based on rail vehicle performance characteristics, a travel time between Dempster and Old Orchard stations is estimated at 3.0 minutes. Yellow Line minimum headways under a single-track scenario between Dempster and Old Orchard could be approximately 7.5 minutes assuming sufficient vehicles were available for service. Current headways on the Yellow Line are 10 minutes during peak periods.

Disadvantages associated with single-track operations include limits on the minimum frequency of service that can be offered on the Yellow Line and less operational flexibility to respond to delayed trains on the single track segment. Planning for future extension of the line would also have to consider the frequency limitations of the single-track segment, although a headway of 7.5 minutes could be maintained assuming any extension beyond Old Orchard includes passing tracks. These disadvantages could be overcome by constructing a second parallel track in the future.

Other Specific Comments:

Comments:

11 & 44. Is it possible to run the elevated structure on the southbound right-of-way (ROW) UP tracks with the northbound & southbound stacked one on top of each other?

Response:

Stacking northbound and southbound tracks on top of each other would be challenging because grades necessary to reach the top-most track level would require track construction to extend south of single-level structure more than four hundred feet. A stacked structure would not be able to cross under transmission lines in the corridor and would therefore make the East Terminal Option infeasible. A stacked structure would not have sufficient clearance from utility towers to allow for normal sway in the transmission lines in segments parallel to the Commonwealth Edison right-of-way. Visual and noise impacts of a very tall structure would be more adverse than a single-level elevated structure. Capital costs would increase considerably for marginal benefits in travel times or frequency of service.

Comment:

17. Would the extension improve the hours of service so that the yellow line would run later at night?

Response:

For the Alternatives Analysis, the hours of service on the Yellow Line extension are assumed to be similar to current hours of service. Service levels on all CTA rail lines are determined by the level of passenger demand and the resources available for operations. Hours of service are evaluated and can be adjusted if passenger demand in the last half hour of service suggests additional trips are needed and resources are available.

13. Potential Yellow Line Extension and Coordination with Proposed Regional Multi-Use Trail

General Comment:

How will this impact the Skokie Valley Trail?

Pertains to Specific Comments:

3, 38, 52

Response to Overall Category Comment:

Early in the Alternatives Analysis, the study team was made aware of plans for a multi-use Skokie Valley Train in the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) corridor extending through and beyond the study area. The conceptual designs for the Yellow Line extension have identified sufficient space for this trail within the Commonwealth Edison right of way adjacent to the extension.

Other Specific Comment:

Comment:

52. The Skokie Valley bike trail is going to be running along side and then under the elevation of a train route, how peaceful and safe is that going to be? What will prevent cyclists from danger? Since this area is one of the only ways to connect the bicycle paths north and south...seems like the train is just steamrolling in. And it was mentioned that this trail will not be funded by the CTA, so how is that being paid for? And again, I ask you to consider the safety of putting a bike trail between electric lines?

Response:

Conceptual designs for the Yellow Line extension have identified sufficient space for this trail within the Commonwealth Edison right of way adjacent to the rail extension. Subsequent detailed design for the trail and the rail extension will consider safety and aesthetics. Successful examples of multi-use trails parallel to or under elevated rapid transit lines include the Ohlone Trail and Greenway along the BART system in the California Bay Area and along the SkyTrain Expo Line in Vancouver, British Columbia. The construction cost for the trail is not included in the Yellow Line extension cost estimate and the Village of Skokie has responsibility for identifying funding for its portion of the trail.

14. Potential Yellow Line Extension Economic and Environmental Impacts

General Comment:

What will be the economic and environmental impact of the Yellow Line Extension? The Yellow Line Extension will negatively impact the community; the Yellow Line Extension will positively impact the community.

Pertains to Specific Comments:

4, 9, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28, 29, 37, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 59, 62, 64, 67, 68, 69, 72, 74, 75, 76, 77, 82, 83, 84, 85, 87, 88, 89, 91, 92, 93, 96, 98, 99, 100, 102

Response to Overall Category Comment:

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will analyze in detail the social, economic, and environmental consequences and benefits of the proposed Yellow Line Extension. The environmental review process required by the *National Environmental Policy Act* of 1969 (NEPA) and related laws include environmental impact analyses and the preparation of documentation for public review. Per Federal Transit Administration (FTA) guidance, the environmental evaluation begins upon completion of the Alternatives Analysis study, and it will result in a detailed written statement on the anticipated environmental impacts of the Yellow Line Extension improvements and the steps that will be taken to address impacts to the community and the natural environment.

Typically, environmental reviews for proposed transit projects address the potential impact areas of air and water quality, noise and vibration, historic and cultural properties, parklands, contaminated lands, displacement of residences and businesses, and community preservation. During the federal environmental review process, the CTA will work

concurrently with state and other local agencies to also comply with state and local environmental laws. The environmental review process includes opportunities for public review and comment.

See specific comment sections below for more details on particular impacts.

Other Specific Comments on Noise and Vibration Impacts:

Comments:

22, 23, 26, 27, 29, 54, 55, 69, 72

Response:

Noise and vibration impacts will be measured according to FTA guidance described in the document "Transit Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment" (FTA-VA-90-1003-06). This assessment includes monitoring existing noise levels along the corridor and using computer models to predict the change in noise levels associated with the extension for residents and other sensitive noise receptors along the corridor. Where noise impacts are predicted to exceed certain thresholds, mitigation strategies will be developed.

Other Specific Comments on Impacts to Niles North High School:

Comments:

9, 37, 53, 67, 68, 72

Response:

CTA has initiated discussions with Niles North High School and District 219 to establish a relationship and understand the concerns that the school and school district may have about the proposed extension. CTA, Niles North High School, and District 219 have identified many issues to address throughout the upcoming Environmental Impact Statement and Preliminary Engineering project phases, including potential property impacts (parking, maintenance buildings, tennis courts, ball fields), security arrangements, aesthetics of the structure, vibration and noise impacts, traffic management of adjacent roadways and access to the school and proposed CTA facilities, construction impacts, and current-day issues such as people seeking the County Court House and mistakenly entering the school

CTA has included the cost of replacing displaced parking and school facilities into current capital cost estimates and will continue to work with Niles North High School and District 219 during the design phase of the project as more specific project details are developed in response to school concerns. Additionally, CTA will continue to encourage participation from Niles North High School and District 219 to ensure that all possible concerns are understood and addressed during the upcoming Environmental Impact Statement project phase.

Other Specific Comments on Homes and Property Value:

Comments:

28, 55, 56, 62, 72

Response:

There has been extensive investigation into the impact of rail transit investments on land values. A recent summary of the literature in this field cited work as early as 1972. In general, these studies find that the primary influence of rail transit on property values is the improvement in regional accessibility that rail transit brings and, secondarily, enhanced likelihood of property redevelopment to a more valuable and intense use. As such, most studies have found proximity to rail transit stations increases property values.

A number of commentors raised concerns about the impact to property values for homes along the transit guideway and not necessarily in the vicinity of a station. These concerns are related to the impact on property values of potentially adverse impacts such as noise, vibration, or visual obstruction caused by the facility. Several studies suggest that such nuisances can lessen the amount of property value benefit associated with proximity to stations and these finding reinforce to the importance of developing appropriate mitigation strategies through the design and engineering process.

Other Specific Comments on Community Safety:

Comments:

9, 52, 59, 67

Response:

Safety and security are a top priority at the CTA. The CTA works with the City of Chicago and other municipalities served by the CTA to provide plain-clothed and uniformed patrols of system property, in addition to hired private security guards at stations and onboard transit vehicles.

During subsequent detailed design phases, particular attention will be devoted to physical security measures than can be incorporated into the design including CCTV monitoring, lighting, vandal-resistant materials, and clear sightlines. The CTA has initiated coordination with representatives of Niles North High School and will continue to collaborate on the development of a design that offers a secure environment for students, faculty and users of the transit facility.

Other Specific Comments on Traffic and Congestion:

Comments:

74, 75, 76, 77, 82, 87, 89, 91, 92, 93, 96, 99

Response:

The Yellow Line Extension project's purpose is to improve transportation access to major activity centers. The Edens Expressway and arterial streets in the study area are projected to experience increased congestion as development continues in Skokie and surrounding municipalities. The extension would provide an alternative to travel on streets under congested conditions for trips originating near or destined to Old Orchard Road.

An important consideration in subsequent environmental assessments and design phases will be strategies to mitigate increased traffic congestion associated with people accessing the transit facility. This may include improvements to the street and sidewalk network beyond what is already contemplated by IDOT and the Village of Skokie. The existing conceptual design anticipates improvements to the Edens Expressway interchange, Old Orchard Road, and Skokie Boulevard – as described in Topic Category 4.

Other Specific Comments on Jobs:

Comments:

84, 88, 89, 91, 92, 93, 96, 98, 100

Response:

An anticipated benefit of the Yellow Line extension is an increase in the accessibility of workers to jobs in the vicinity of Old Orchard Road. The computer model used to forecast ridership on the extension estimates more than three-quarters of the trips projected to use the extension will be made by workers traveling to, or from, the area to, or from, other rail stations in Skokie, Evanston, and Chicago. This increase in accessibility may make it easier for business in proximity to the proposed station to attract workers.

Jobs will also be associated with the construction of the facility. While no specific estimates of the number of construction and other jobs associated with the Yellow Line extension have been developed, the American Public Transit Association estimates that across the nation between 24 and 41 jobs are created for every million dollars spent on public transportation.

15. Statements of Support or Opposition to the Extension

General Comment:

Statements of support or opposition to the extension and the locally preferred alternative presented were provided on the question/comment cards submitted by the public. CTA staff will review statements of support or opposition to the extension; other suggestions will be considered for incorporation into the analysis as appropriate.

In Support:

13, 15, 74, 75, 76, 77, 79, 81-85, 86, 87-88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 98-101, 102

In Opposition:

14, 64, 66-70, 71, 72, 103

Support for Other Alternatives:

45, 57, 62, 65, 78

16. Other

General Comment:

This section includes general comments and viewpoints that can be characterized as public input into the study process.

Pertains to specific comments:

10, 42, 70

Response to Overall Category Comment:

These comments do not ask a question or refer to a specific issue, but rather point out general views on the subject, which have been noted. Thank you for your feedback.