



Community Advisory Group Summary of November 15 and November 18, 2011 Kick-Off Meetings

The Grand Crossing Rail Project Team is using the Illinois Department of Transportation's (IDOT) Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) process to develop the project's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). This process engages all project stakeholders, including neighborhood residents, elected officials, community and business leaders, interest groups, government agencies, and anybody who interacts with the railroads and roadways in the project study area. The intent is to identify and have a clear understanding of the community's transportation concerns. Vital input will help shape a solution for the Grand Crossing Rail Project that best balances the transportation needs of this project with the concerns and values of the community.

As part of this CSS process, the Project Team invited area residents and representatives from businesses, police and fire districts, non-profits, churches, and schools to form two Community Advisory Groups. These two groups – one for neighborhoods in the northern part of the study area and one for those in the southern part – will serve as a forum for community leaders and residents to meet periodically to discuss the community's thoughts and ideas about the project. These Community Advisory Groups will be integral to shaping the EIS throughout the life of the project, providing input to the problem statement and purpose and need, the alternatives considered, and selection of the preferred alternative.

On November 15th and 18th, 2011, the first Community Advisory Group meetings were hosted at St. Bernard Hospital and the Greater Grand Crossing Library, respectively. During these meetings, the Project Team provided an overview of the project and asked attendees to share their thoughts about the project. A community survey was conducted to identify the transportation issues most important to Community Advisory Group members and hear from attendees about their neighborhoods' strengths, opportunities, and needs for improvement. In addition, the Project Team presented the Preliminary Problem Statement and obtained consensus on the Problem Statement from the Community Advisory Group.

This memorandum describes the composition of the Community Advisory Groups, the format and content of the November 15 and November 18 kick-off meetings, and the input received during these meetings.

1. CAG Membership

With input from key elected officials, the Project Team conducted research on local community organizations and civic leaders to identify key stakeholders in the project area and invited these

stakeholders to participate in one of two Community Advisory Group kick-off meetings. Starting with the initial stakeholder list included in version 1.0 of the project's Stakeholder Improvement Plan (SIP), the Project Team added individuals and community organizations recommended by aldermen, state senators, and state representatives during a series of elected officials coordination meetings held in spring and summer 2011. In addition to soliciting input on the makeup of the Community Advisory Group, elected officials were asked to identify specific members who might be willing to serve as facilitators during the small group exercise described below, as well as for suggestions on potential Community Advisory Group meeting venues in their wards and districts.

Due to the length of the corridor and the distinct, potential benefits and impacts anticipated in different communities, the Community Advisory Group was split into two geographic subgroups, with Englewood and other neighborhoods in the northern portion of the study area forming the North group, and Grand Crossing and other neighborhoods in the southern portion forming the South group. The current Community Advisory Group membership list is included as Attachment A, with members added subsequent to the kick-off meetings indicated in red.

Once the initial Community Advisory Group membership list was compiled, potential members were contacted by letter and/or email, depending on the contact information available and, if known, their individual preference. A sample invitation letter is included as Attachment B. Elected officials were also notified of the meetings by letter. After the initial contact, the Project Team conducted extensive follow-up by both phone and email to maximize attendance at the meetings.

At the kick-off meetings, attendees were asked if there were others with whom the project study group should meet (either individually or through inclusion on the Community Advisory Group) to help establish the context of the project study area. Suggestions for additional organizations that should be contacted are listed in Section 4 under the responses to Part 3 of the community context survey. In addition, several individuals were recommended and have been added to the Community Advisory Group membership mailing list.

2. Community Advisory Group Kick-Off Meetings

The Community Advisory Group-North Meeting was held on Tuesday, November 15, 2011 from 1:30pm to 4:00pm at St. Bernard Hospital, 326 W. 64th Street, Chicago and was attended by 17 Community Advisory Group members. The Community Advisory Group-South Meeting was held on Friday, November 18, 2011 from 12:30pm to 3:00pm at Greater Grand Crossing Public Library, 1000 E. 73rd Street, Chicago and was attended by two Community Advisory Group members. Project Team staff included Danielle Stewart and Jakita Trotter from IDOT, as well as several members of the consultant team, including Tony Pakeltis¹, Craig Moore, Elizabeth Federico, and Brian McNuckle of Parsons; Nick Busalacchi of HNTB; and Margarite Wypychowski, Ambar Mentor, Josh Druding, and Terri Cornelius² of public outreach subconsultant Carolyn Grisko and Associates. Other attendees included Chuck Allen of Norfolk Southern, and Jeff Sriver³ and Joe Alonzo of the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT). A meeting attendance list is included as Attachment C, and handout materials provided

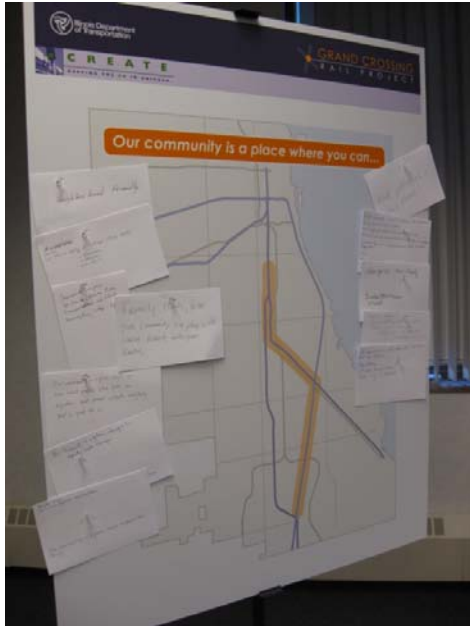
¹ North meeting only

² South meeting only

³ South meeting only

to each attendee can be found in Attachment D. Details on the discussions that took place during these meetings are provided in Sections 3 and 4 below.

The venues for the two CAG kick-off meetings were laid out with tables seating 6 to 8 members each. Seating was not assigned ahead of time; CAG members chose on their own where and with whom to sit.



After welcoming attendees and thanking them for their participation, IDOT’s CREATE Public Outreach Administrator Jakita Trotter began the presentation with a brief overview of the agenda and the goals for the meeting. Ms. Trotter’s welcome was followed by introductions, which included a brief ice breaker activity designed to involve attendees in the meeting discussion right away and find out how the group views the community. This activity also provided the Project Team with the opportunity to collect additional information for the Community Context Audit information in a more open-ended manner than the information gathered through the survey activity described below. Each member was asked to complete the sentence, “Our community is a place where you can...” on an index card, and then read the card aloud as he or she introduced him/herself. The cards were collected and displayed on a board at the front of the room, as shown in the adjacent photo. The following responses were received

at the North meeting; because only two individuals attended the South meeting, the group chose to skip the ice breaker activity in lieu of a more informal discussion.

Table 1: North Meeting Ice Breaker Activity Responses

Response: <i>Our community is a place where you can...</i>
Our community is a place where you can learn from one another.
Where you can...raise a family.
Enjoy yourself. Raise my children. Go to church, library, stores. And if you get sick we have a wonderful hospital.
Find potential in unlikely places.
Family, unity, pride. Our community is a place with warm hearts and open hands.
Our community is a place where neighbors are family.
Our community is a place where you can definitely make changes.
Community is a place to reside, close to public transportation and schools (Kennedy King College, Englewood).

Table 1: North Meeting Ice Breaker Activity Responses

Response: <i>Our community is a place where you can...</i>
Our community is a place where you can meet people who have an agenda that doesn't include anything that is good for us.
Where you can see a variety of Chicago-style architecture: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Graystones• Bungalows• Victorians
Neighborhood friendly.

After the ice breaker activity, Ms. Trotter described the Community Advisory Group's role in the project, then turned the presentation over to IDOT's Acting CREATE Section Chief Danielle Stewart, who provided an overview of the CREATE Program. Ms. Stewart was followed by Parsons' Project Manager Tony Pakeltis⁴, who introduced the Grand Crossing Rail Project, presented the Preliminary Problem Statement, and described the EIS process and timeline. At the North meeting, the Project Team was assisted by Community Advisory Group member Michael Howard, who was invited by the Project Team at the suggestion of Alderman Dowell to serve as a facilitator for the meeting.

The Project Team's presentation was followed by a 45-minute group activity aimed at identifying the community, environmental, and transportation issues most important to Community Advisory Group members. The group activity is described in more detail in Section 3 – Community Context Audit Survey. The meeting concluded with a discussion of next steps and other opportunities for community input, including the December 12-13, 2011 Public Meetings. The Project Team received concurrence on the Problem Statement from attendees at both the North and South meetings.

A copy of the presentation slides is included as one of the handouts in Attachment E.

3. Community Context Audit Survey

As part of the Community Context Audit (CCA) for the project, a group survey was completed to harness the knowledge of our stakeholders to more fully define the context for the project. The survey, which is included as Attachment F, was divided into three sections:

- Part 1: Your Neighborhood
- Part 2: Getting Around (focused on transportation issues)
- Part 3: The Big Picture

At the North meeting, attendees divided themselves into four small groups and worked through the three sections of the survey, with each small group sharing their results with the full room

⁴ Elizabeth Federico handled this portion of the presentation at the South meeting.

after each section. Project Team members were stationed at each table to document the discussion. Each table also had a plot-size study area map and stickers to help the group identify issues visually. Michael Howard served as the overall facilitator for this activity, with individuals at each table helping to facilitate the small group discussions. Results from the North meeting are detailed in the next section.

Because of the low attendance at the South meeting, attendees chose to complete the survey form on their own after the meeting and submit it to the Project Team. One member indicated he would also share the survey with another 5th Ward resident. To date, no surveys have been received from the South meeting attendees or from other local residents. General comments from the South meeting are summarized below in Section 5 – Other Comments Received.

The survey exercise – along with other comments received at both the North and South meetings – helped the Project Team understand the project study area from the community's perspective. The valuable input shared by these local neighborhood leaders and residents validated the transportation infrastructure problems previously identified and presented by the Project Team (i.e., the Problem Statement), and helped the team better understand how the neighborhoods view these issues. The results of this exercise will provide critical input to the development of the purpose and need and existing conditions sections of the EIS, as well as assure that solutions to the transportation issues that are the focus of the Grand Crossing Rail Project are developed in coordination with the surrounding neighborhoods.

4. Survey Results

The following is a compilation of the survey responses developed by the four small groups at the North meeting, with responses indicated in red, italicized text.

Part 1: Your Neighborhood

- **What features/characteristics of your neighborhood are you most proud of?**
 - *Historic sites:*
 - *Chicago Black Renaissance artist Archibald Motley's home at 60th and Princeton*
 - *Plastic rope was invented at 60th and Princeton*
 - *Chicago's first African-American grocery store was in Englewood*
 - *Good schools, especially Lindblom Math & Science Academy in West Englewood.*
 - *Older housing stock (both a plus and a minus)*
 - *Kennedy King College*
 - *Brownstones and bungalows*
 - *Many transportation options*
- *Neighborhood challenges include:*
 - *Vacant lots*

- *Englewood is one of the most affordable neighborhoods in Chicago, so if residents are displaced, they'll have a hard time finding a similar place elsewhere*
- *Older housing stock (both a plus and a minus)*
- *Grand Boulevard shopping center is a mess*
- **What three words best describe your neighborhood?**
 - *Try, try, try harder*
 - *Historical, challenging, transition*
 - *Transportation junction (rail, highways, airports)*
 - *Community*
 - *Family*
 - *Long-term residents*
 - *Torn down from NS yard expansion*
- **Fill in the blank: My neighborhood would be better if...**
 - *...living conditions were better – for instance, if there were stable commercial development/opportunities for local shopping.*
 - *...there were fewer abandoned homes and vacant lots.*
 - *...there were more retail outlets.*
 - *...there were more businesses in general.*
 - *...there were more parks and playgrounds.*
 - *...the area were served by more than one hospital.*
 - *... everyone had a job.*
 - *...there was job training.*
- **What community resources in your neighborhood are most important to you? Identify these on the map.**
 - *St. Bernard Hospital*
 - *Schools*
 - *Parks*
 - *Kelly Branch Library*
 - *Prentice Place gazebo (Sherwood Park?)*
 - *Embassy Church (used to be St. Martin's Cathedral)*
 - *Antioch Church (unlabeled circle near Kelly Library)*
 - *Kennedy King College and surrounding area (63rd and Halsted)*
 - *Walgreens*

- **What’s missing from your neighborhood?**
 - *Social gathering places...grocery and other stores, and recreational/fun spaces like a bowling alley. We need more commercial development to be a stable community.*
 - *Manufacturing jobs*
 - *Decent restaurants*
 - *Major grocery stores (e.g., Jewel, Dominick’s)*
 - *Social centers for children*
 - *Parks/green space*
 - *Stores*
 - *Neighborhood unity*
 - Short-term: what simple, low-cost changes could be done right now to improve your neighborhood?
 - *Traffic cameras*
 - Long-term: what long-term improvements should be made?
 - *Partner with larger companies to develop parcels and attract businesses/services to the area*
 - *Jobs*
- **On a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent), how would you assess the following features of your neighborhood?** *Note that some groups chose to answer “0” for some features to emphasize the “poor” rating.*

Table 2: Ratings of Neighborhood Features⁵

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Overall visual appeal	2	1	2
Feeling of safety	2	4	1
Cleanliness/quality of maintenance	1	2	1
Comfortable places to sit	0	0	2
Places to socialize	0	0	0
Mix of stores and services	0	0	1
Economic vitality	0	0	1
Transportation facilities, including roads, transit, sidewalks, bike paths	4	1	3
Frequency of community events/ activities	1	1	4
Active social/religious/community groups	3	5	4
Sense of pride and ownership	2	5	4

⁵ Three of the four groups completed this section.

Part 2: Getting Around

A. Mapping Your Daily Journey:

- What combination of transportation modes do you take to get there?
 - *Walk, bike, bus, el, and car were mentioned. Most people said they drive. Neither Amtrak nor Metra is a good option, although one person mentioned using the Metra station at 35th St occasionally.*
 - *Buses along Halsted and 63^d are well-used, as are the CTA green and red lines.*
 - *Individuals mentioned:*
 - *“90% of the time in the car, and 10% on the green line (to go downtown)”*
 - *“Mostly car”*
 - *“Mix of car, bus, and el”*
 - *“All modes including trains” (specifically mentioned 63^d St bus to State St bus)*
 - *“Red line el to 63^d St bus”*
 - *“Red or green line el to downtown for work each day”*
- Do you feel you have reasonable options to travel a different way if conditions change (for instance, if the weather is bad, or if there are transit delays or unusual traffic)?

Most said yes, there are good alternate routes in all directions. A few said that there are not many options, and that bus service is limited.

B. Your Experience with the Existing Rail System

- Are you a rail passenger? How frequently do you ride Metra? Amtrak?

Just green and red line el. Members use Metra and Amtrak very rarely (Metra 3-4 times per month or less; Amtrak almost never).
- Do your usual driving, biking, and/or walking routes involve crossing over or under railroad tracks at one or more locations?

Yes, and some are in really bad shape. Especially 63^d and State, which is a little better now that the lighting has been improved, but still scary, even in a car. If you get stuck in there, you can't turn around. 87th and Ashland was also mentioned.
- Can you see railroad infrastructure (tracks, viaducts, etc.) from your home or work?

Yes (some can see from home, some from work).
- Can you hear trains from your home or work?

Yes (some can hear from home, some from work).

Noise and vibration are an issue; trains often shake nearby properties and contractors have had to be brought in to seal cracks in homes. (The intersection of 83rd and Parnell was identified as a specific example.)

- Do you interact with the existing rail system in some other way?

Many said no. Someone mentioned that the red line el is slow at night, due to nighttime track work.

- In general, what are the benefits of rail to your community?
 - *No personal benefits...it's basically just passing through.*
 - *Possible job benefits.*
 - *It's a benefit for commuters, but most commuters who use it are not from this community.*
- In general, what are the drawbacks of rail to your community?
 - *Eyesore*
 - *You can't really put residential or commercial development near the rail infrastructure (meaning viaducts, etc., not stations)...”who wants to live/work near that?”*
 - *May affect quality of life (noise, vibration, aesthetics)*
 - *Road traffic delays at the intersection of 95th and Vincennes due to freight trains*
 - *Trains idling next to Fuller Park*
 - *Pollution*

C. The Big Picture

- What are the main transportation issues in your neighborhood? Think about all modes – walking, biking, driving, bus, rail.
 - There is encouragement for biking and walking, but you still don't see lots of people doing it, for the following reasons:
 - Safety
 - Sidewalk design
 - Speeding vehicles
 - Debris
 - Potholes
 - Broken concrete
 - Poor aesthetics
 - Poor lighting
 - Pollution from the Dan Ryan

- Viaducts – none of them seem to have the “last painted on...” dates like you see in other areas, because it’s been so long that they’ve all worn off.
 - Long wait times for transit
 - Rail is necessary for community and to transport goods
 - Overall roadway traffic (driving is the main mode of transport for many participants)
 - Limited bus service
 - No bike lanes
- What one change would most improve your travel experience in your neighborhood?
Improve safety.
 - On a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent), how would you rate the condition of other rail transportation facilities in your neighborhood? (rail viaducts, conditions along tracks)
Two of the four groups said 1, especially on side streets. Walls are falling apart on most of the viaducts. Another group said 3.

Part 3: Summary

- Review your group’s answers to the previous two exercises and pick the three most revealing points you discussed. Prepare to share with the larger group.
 - Safety
 - Jobs/economic development/job training
 - Poor condition of viaducts – the viaducts don’t add anything to the community and are a potential hazard (due to their condition)
 - Community involvement in the process
 - Specific impact that the Grand Crossing Rail Project would have on the community. Beyond improving Amtrak service, what, if any, specific contributions would the project make towards community improvement efforts? A suggestion was made to look at the issue of vacant buildings and whether or not any of these would be rehabbed as part of the project a way to help spur economic development.
 - Need for a train station
- What other groups/individuals NOT present at today’s meeting should be invited to participate in future Community Advisory Group meetings?
 - Resident Association of Greater Englewood (RAGE) – Aysha Butler (aysha75@gmail.com)
 - Church organizations, such as Pastors of Englewood
 - CTA

- African American Contractors Association
 - Inner City Youth Foundation – Christine Perkins (773-285-2000)
 - Additional community leaders from the area immediately adjacent to the rail corridor
 - Local park district advisory council
 - Local school councils
 - Chicago Police Department
- What are the best media outlets and methods to communicate with members of the community?
 - Teamwork Englewood (teamworkenglewood.org)
 - Englewood Portal (englewoodportal.org) – run by Teamwork Englewood, gets thousands of hits a day
 - Radio (Kennedy King College station, WVON/Cliff Kelly, WGCI)
 - Flyers posted at library, local YMCA, and other high-traffic locations
 - Notices in aldermanic newsletters
 - Chicago Sun-Times
 - The Defender

5. Other Comments Received

Several additional comments were received at the North and South meetings:

North:

- Teamwork Englewood has a community meeting room that holds 100-200 people – the representative from Teamwork Englewood offered it for future meetings. He also requested a project map to hang in the room.
- Teamwork Englewood also has a literature desk...good place for public meeting postcards.
- Have a project newsletter
- Use local contractors

South:

- Inquiries regarding outreach and how the Project Team developed the Community Advisory Group list.
- Clarification on the difference between the Grand Crossing Rail Project and other CREATE projects.
- Discussion on the role Community Advisory Group members can play on spreading the word for public meetings, and what methods the Project Team is currently using to publicize the meetings.

- Clarification on the status of the project.
 - *The Project Team noted that property acquisitions have not been determined.*
 - *The Project Team confirmed that historical properties will be identified as part of the EIS process.*

6. Next Steps

The initial Public Meetings for the Grand Crossing Rail Project were held several weeks after the Community Advisory Group kick-off meetings, on December 12 and 13, 2011. The purpose of these meetings was to introduce the Grand Crossing Rail Project to the general public and to garner feedback on the project's Draft Purpose and Need Statement.

The next round of Community Advisory Group meetings are tentatively scheduled for February, 2012, to be followed several weeks later (in March 2012) by the next round of Public Meetings. Both sets of meetings will focus on the range of alternatives developed for the project and the methodology the Project Team will use to perform the screening analysis. Community Advisory Group members will be notified of both sets of meetings via invitation letters, with follow-up via phone and email.

In addition to these formal venues for comment, the Project Team encourages Community Advisory Group members and the general public to provide input on the project at any time. Comments can be submitted by:

- Email: info@grandcrossingrail.com
- Online comment form: www.grandcrossingrail.com/comment.html
- Phone: Tony Pakeltis, Parsons: (312) 930-5268
- Mail:

Grand Crossing Rail Project
Parsons
10 South Riverside Plaza, 4th Floor
Chicago, Illinois 60606
ATTN: Tony Pakeltis