



## **COMMUNITY ADVISORY GROUP**

### **Summary of October 10 and October 11, 2012**

#### **Preferred Alternative 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 preliminary engineering design and corresponding 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 of the CSS process is to identify and have a clear understanding of the community's transportation concerns. Community 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 project, providing input to the problem statement and purpose and need, the alternatives considered, and selection of the preferred alternative. The Community Advisory Group membership roster is provided as Attachment A.

On October 10 and 11, 2012, the third round of Community Advisory Group meetings were hosted at the Grand Crossing Park Field House and St. Bernard Hospital, respectively. These meetings focused on the recommended Preferred Alternative identified through the Range of Alternatives screening process. This memorandum describes the format and content of the October 10 and 11 Preferred Alternative meetings, the input received from Community Advisory Group members during these meetings, and the next steps for the project's public outreach program.

#### **1. Meeting Format and Agenda**

The Community Advisory Group-South Meeting was held on Wednesday, October 10, 2012 from 1:30pm to 4:00pm at the Grand Crossing Park Fieldhouse, 7655 S. Ingleside Avenue, Chicago and was attended by 20 people. The Community Advisory Group-North Meeting was held on Thursday, October 11, 2012 from 1:30pm to 4:00pm at St. Bernard Hospital, 326 W.

64th Street, Chicago and was attended by 14 people. A sample invitation letter is provided as Attachment B.

Project Team staff included Danielle Stewart<sup>1</sup> and Jakita Trotter from IDOT, as well as several members of the consultant team, including Tony Pakeltis, Craig Moore, Elizabeth Federico, and Brian McNuckle of Parsons; Ron Deverman<sup>2</sup> and Michael Hurley of HNTB; and Margarite Wypychowski, Josh Druding, and Lauren Ryan<sup>3</sup> of public outreach subconsultant Carolyn Grisko and Associates. Other attendees included Chuck Allen of Norfolk Southern and Joe Alonzo of the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT). No elected officials attended the meetings.

The north and south meeting attendance lists are included as Attachment C, and handout materials provided to each attendee can be found in Attachment D. Details on the discussions that took place during these meetings are provided in Section 2 below.

After a safety briefing, IDOT's CREATE Public Outreach Manager, Jakita Trotter, welcomed attendees and laid out some meeting guidelines to ensure that the afternoon proceeded in an efficient manner so that everyone had the opportunity to participate. Ms. Trotter then walked through the agenda for the meeting, which included Project Team introductions, a recap and review of the material presented at previous meetings, presentation of the Range of Alternatives screening results, a group discussion about the Project Team's Preferred Alternative recommendations, and a summary of upcoming outreach activities and next steps.

Next, Parsons Project Manager Tony Pakeltis delivered the technical presentation, which began with a review of the Grand Crossing Rail Project (including the project's Purpose and Need) and the Project Team's outreach and technical activities since the last round of Community Advisory Group meetings in March 2012. He then reviewed the alternatives development and screening process, explaining how the potential build alternatives were gradually narrowed to the four build alternatives that were presented at the March Community Advisory Group/public meetings. He laid out the criteria used to screen these alternatives and presented the results of this screening process, which led to the Project Team's recommendation that two alternatives be evaluated in detail in the EIS: the No Build Alternative and Build Alternative A. He concluded this portion of the presentation with aerial images and cross sections to illustrate the various components of Build Alternative A.

The Project Team's presentation was followed by a 45-minute group discussion during which Community Advisory Group members discussed the Preferred Alternative recommendations presented by Mr. Pakeltis. This discussion exchange is described further in Section 2. The meeting concluded with a discussion of next steps and other opportunities for community input, including Community Advisory Group meetings and Draft EIS public hearings tentatively scheduled for the first half of 2013.

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

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<sup>1</sup> North meeting only

<sup>2</sup> South meeting only

<sup>3</sup> South meeting only

## 2. Group Discussion

Both meetings included a discussion among the full group. Questions and comments heard include the following (with Project Team responses shown in red):

### South (October 10, 2012):

- If the North 1 alignment is built, would that be the southern limit of the NS yard expansion?
  - *The Project Team noted that the Grand Crossing Rail Project and the NS yard expansion are independent projects. Chuck Allen from NS added that regardless of whether the Grand Crossing Rail Project moves forward, NS plans to expand its yard south from Garfield Boulevard to around 60<sup>th</sup> Street or 61<sup>st</sup> Street, between the existing NS tracks, located east of Stewart Avenue, and the existing Metra tracks, located east of Wallace Street. He confirmed that if the North 1 alignment were constructed, this would be the southern limit of the yard expansion.*
- Does the North 1 cost estimate assume that the alignment would be built with a sloped embankment or a retaining wall?
  - *The cost estimate assumes a retaining wall, which is the more expensive option.*
- When determining the number of properties that would be impacted by the North 1 alignment, did the Project Team distinguish between those that would occur to the north of the proposed alignment and those that would occur to the south? It would be helpful material for the next round of public meetings.
  - *Not for today's meeting, but this information can be developed for the public hearings.*
- Another suggestion for the next round of public meetings is to communicate the trade-offs of retaining wall (more expensive but fewer impacts) versus sloped embankment (less expensive but more impacts).
  - *Noted; thank you.*
- Are you moving ahead/focusing on the North 1 alignment?
  - *Yes, that is the Project Team's recommendation, pending input from the Community Advisory Group and future public meetings.*
- In terms of noise/vibration impacts, which is better – sloped embankment or retaining wall?
  - *We will be able to answer that question once we have the results of our noise and vibration analysis, which is currently underway.*
- Explain the “19 minutes” in time savings you referred to in the presentation...who is saving this time?
  - *Currently, Amtrak trains on the Illini, Saluki, and City of New Orleans lines use an indirect and inefficient route to access Union Station, which requires all trains to back into Union Station. This maneuver lengthens the schedule by 19 minutes. If the Grand Crossing Rail Project were constructed, Amtrak trains would have direct*

*access to Union Station, which would reduce the schedule by 19 minutes. In addition, the CREATE Program overall will result in benefits for passenger and freight trains, as well as motorists in the City of Chicago and region.*

- This study is focused on how the project would benefit Amtrak. It's a good deal for Amtrak and a good deal for the freight railroads, but how will the project benefit the people of Englewood? Between this project and the NS yard expansion project, Englewood will be gone.
  - *Mr. Allen noted that the Grand Crossing Rail Project and the NS yard expansion are independent projects; they are being advanced separately. Mr. Pakeltis added that tomorrow's meeting at St. Bernard Hospital will focus on Englewood, providing Community Advisory Group members from this portion of the study area to comment on the North 1 alignment and other issues in the northern portion of the study area.*
- When will the project be completed?
  - *Currently, only Phase I (the environmental study phase) of the project is funded. This phase is expected to be complete in early 2014. If funding becomes available for Phases II and III, it would take approximately an additional three years for construction to begin.*
- Is it possible that NS would wind up building these improvements instead of IDOT?
  - *There are no plans for NS to build the proposed Grand Crossing Rail Project improvements, which would re-route Amtrak trains onto the NS line north of Grand Crossing. If no additional Amtrak trains are added to the NS line, then NS does not require these improvements.*
- Are the Grand Crossing Rail Project, the CREATE Englewood Flyover, and NS yard expansion separate projects or not? Could each of them be built independently? If they are independent, the Project Team should make this clear – the public perception is that they are a package.
  - *The CREATE Program includes the Grand Crossing Rail Project, the Englewood Flyover and the 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project (CIP). While components of the larger program, these projects' environmental studies are being advanced independently of each other. The CREATE Program is monitoring these projects closely as they need to be constructed in a certain order to achieve all of the improvements' benefits. The NS yard expansion is a separate project entirely than the CREATE Program.*
- Will we see more rail car storage in our neighborhood due to the Grand Crossing Rail Project or the NS yard expansion? Any additional passenger trains will move through the neighborhood, but freight cars will just sit there.
  - *Mr. Allen stated that there will be more freight storage on rail sidings in the area regardless. However, residents will notice a reduction in the number of freight trains sitting on the mainline waiting for rail conflicts to clear once the Englewood Flyover and 75<sup>th</sup> Street CIP are constructed. Metra conflicts are a major obstacle for freight operations in the area, and these two projects will remove several of these conflicts.*

*Mr. Allen also explained how intermodal transfers occur at freight yards, and that the frequency and timing of these transfers is driven by the railroads' customers (e.g., UPS, FedEx).*

- Is it correct, then, that once these improvements are constructed, we should not see the same rail cars sitting for more than 24 hours?
  - *Yes, that is correct, because the Metra conflicts will have been removed (see response to previous question).*
- With regard to potential street closures/lowerings, 75<sup>th</sup> Street and 76<sup>th</sup> Street cannot be closed simultaneously – it would be too disruptive to the community.
  - *Noted. Construction sequencing and maintenance of traffic during construction activities will be evaluated during Phase II (Final Design).*
- What is the impact of the project/street lowerings on sewer lines and other utilities? The City recently performed work on the sewers to stop flooding in this area – you need to look at how this project will impact the sewers and include this information in the EIS. Also, if you have to redesign the project to address drainage issues, this could extend the timeline by a lot.
  - *Joe Alonzo of CDOT stated that CDOT traffic engineers are looking at this now. Mr. Allen added that although the specifics of utility and drainage design are worked out during Phase II (Final Design) rather than in the EIS, the City cannot issue a construction permit without approval of a drainage design that mitigates potential drainage issues.*
- Part of our concern with the closure of 75<sup>th</sup>/76<sup>th</sup> Streets is that it would require kids walking to school to travel on blocks that are less safe than the routes they currently take. It would also impact businesses, emergency vehicles, schools, churches, etc. Will you come back and meet with us to discuss street closure plans?
  - *The details of the temporary closures of 75<sup>th</sup>/76<sup>th</sup> Streets for construction purposes won't be worked out until Phase II; however, potential street closures will be coordinated among the community, City of Chicago, and CREATE partners.*
- How can we make sure the things you promised us in your response to the Citizens Coalition of Grand Crossing Rail Project's (CCoGCRP) March 26, 2012 comments actually happen?

Right now we're experiencing a major disruption from the Skyway viaduct painting at 79<sup>th</sup> Street, and this is just a minor project. What will happen to us during a big project like P4?

- *Jakita Trotter of IDOT pointed out the Project Team's record of working with the CCoGCRP and other community groups. She added that IDOT and other CREATE partners are committed to continuing this level of coordination moving forward, throughout all three phases of the project.*

- Is this our last chance to comment on the project?
  - *No, the Project Team encourages comments throughout the life of the project. Comments can be submitted at any time via mail, email, or the project website: [www.grandcrossingrail.com](http://www.grandcrossingrail.com).*
- What is the lead federal agency for the EIS?
  - *The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).*
- How can we stay in touch with CDOT/the City of Chicago? They do not keep us informed about other non-CREATE construction projects happening in the area.
  - *Ms. Trotter suggested that those concerned about other projects speak individually with IDOT/CDOT representatives after the meeting so that the group can stay focused on the Grand Crossing Rail Project. Mr. Alonzo provided his contact information to several CAG members after the meeting.*
- Is EIS still on track for completion in early 2014?
  - *The Project Team is in the process of updating the schedule but still anticipates completion of the EIS in that general timeframe.*
- Is it correct that the South 1 alignment would not require any property acquisition?
  - *No residential property acquisitions would occur in the South 1 alignment area, though the alignment may require the taking of small pieces of land from the Chicago Skyway right-of-way.*
- What about the black tanker cars that currently sit at Greenwood and 82<sup>nd</sup> Street/Greenwood and 91<sup>st</sup> Street?
  - *Mr. Allen replied that those cars belong to CN and not the NS.*
- Is the Grand Crossing Rail Project a hidden bonanza for NS? Will they see benefits they wouldn't see if P4 were not built? This money would be better spent on investment in job training, etc. in the community.
  - *No, the proposed capacity improvements on the NS line that are in the Grand Crossing Rail Project have been coordinated with the railroads, FHWA, IDOT, and the City of Chicago. The proposed improvements, which include the installation of a single new track (South 1) west of the existing tracks, are required to accommodate re-routed Amtrak trains without reducing freight capacity along the NS line. Without the additional track, Amtrak would not be able to operate along the NS line. If these Amtrak trains are not re-routed from the CN to the NS line, then NS would not need the additional capacity.*

*Mr. Allen added that there used to be a vibrant intermodal operation in Chicago, but now many of those intermodal jobs (and related construction jobs) are in Joliet. This project will help Chicago retain and potentially expand intermodal employment opportunities.*

We want to see the numbers on this – will there be a direct, quantifiable benefit? We also want to see the environmental/health impacts analyzed against the potential economic growth the project would generate.

- We would like information from NS on the health impacts of the yard expansion and the associated increase in truck drayage through the community.
  - *Mr. Allen will provide this information.*
- Why is CN not at these meetings?
  - *They were invited but chose not to attend. If you have comments for CN, please share them with the Project Team, and we will make sure they get them.*
- What are the federal requirements for environmental review of NS/CN projects?
  - *NS and CN are private companies advancing projects with private capital, so they are not subject to the same federal environmental requirements as the Grand Crossing Rail Project, for which IDOT will seek federal funding.*

North (October 11, 2012):

- Can we get jobs for members of the community through this Community Advisory Group?
  - *There are limited project-related employment opportunities prior to construction. The construction phase of the project, which, if funded, would begin in 2016 or later. In the meantime, the Project Team has provided information on other transportation job opportunities, and training opportunities to prepare for future IDOT jobs, which may or may not be project related.*
- What is being evaluated in terms of potential environmental impacts? For other projects that have occurred near our home, we weren't hit directly but still experienced a lot of impacts during construction.
  - *The EIS will evaluate potential impacts such as noise and vibration and will consider both the long term impacts and temporary, construction-period impacts of the project. The study area for these analyses takes into account the distance over which these types of impacts would be experienced; it does not look solely at properties immediately adjacent to the existing/proposed rail corridors.*
- How will the trains be propelled? What type of fuel will they use?
  - *The Amtrak trains that would be re-routed to the NS line are pulled by diesel locomotives.*
- Will the potential air quality impacts of adding these trains to the NS line be evaluated in the EIS?
  - *Yes.*

- What is the timeframe for notifications to impacted property owners/residents?
  - *After the EIS is completed and a Record of Decision (ROD) is issued, which is anticipated in 2014. The Record of Decision is the federal approval that is required for the project to move on to the next phase.*
- Do the public meeting letters/postcards that were sent to owners/residents of impacted properties contain language that lets them know they would be directly impacted by the project?
  - *No, these letters and postcards were the same as those received by everyone in the study area. However, to ensure that all residents in the direct impact area received these notices, the Project Team also distributed door hangers containing the same information about the public meetings.*
- How will you determine the value of homes that are acquired?
  - *IDOT's Bureau of Land Acquisition will handle the acquisition/relocation process; they will be at the public hearings to answer questions from community members. IDOT's policy is to pay fair market value, although there is currently a program to help address situations where homeowners are upside down on their mortgages. However, it is uncertain whether this program will be in place when the property acquisition starts in 2014 or later.*
- Can we contact IDOT's real estate/land acquisition office right now?
  - *Yes, the Project Team can put you in touch with them. Danielle Stewart of IDOT added that we will also bring a representative from IDOT's Bureau of Land Acquisition to the next round of Community Advisory Group meetings.*
- When is the next Community Advisory Group meeting? If the boundaries of the project change, will that information be shared at our next meeting?
  - *We expect to hold our next round of Community Advisory Group meetings sometime in the first quarter of 2013, prior to the EIS public hearings. Community Advisory Group members will receive a full update on the project, including any changes to the Preferred Alternative/study area boundaries.*
- When will the Draft EIS be published? How will it be made available to the public?
  - *Publication of the Draft EIS is anticipated sometime in the first half of 2013. It will be distributed to state and local agencies and will be made available at libraries and other community venues, as well as on the project website.*
- What is the website URL?
  - *www.grandcrossingrail.com. The URL (as well as other Project Team contact information) appears throughout the materials in the handout packet you received today.*

- The EIS should also address what happens next (e.g., the long-term noise impacts of adding more trains to the corridor).
  - *It will. Mr. Pakeltis explained the CREATE Noise and Vibration Methodology that is used for all CREATE projects to assess the potential noise and vibration impact of the proposed projects as part of the Phase I EIS.*
- Who chose Build Alternative A? Who will decide between the No Build Alternative and Build Alternative A?
  - *The Project Team recommends Build Alternative A based on its technical evaluations and input from previous Community Advisory Group and public/community meetings. The consultant team developed and screened the potential build alternatives, with their work reviewed by IDOT, FHWA, and the railroads at every step.*

*The decision between the No Build Alternative and Build Alternative A will be made after the Draft EIS public hearings and comment period are complete and will be documented in the Final EIS and ROD. The decision will be made by FHWA and IDOT, based on input from agency reviewers and the public.*
- While we're waiting for Phase I and II to be completed, can we devise a project-specific training program in the meantime?
  - *IDOT has an ongoing program called the Highway Construction Careers Training Program (HCCTP), which readies students for jobs on all IDOT construction jobs. Handouts that describe the program and provide information on the next 8-week training session are available at the sign-in table.*
- Have impacted property owners/residents been notified?
  - *All residents in the study area (regardless of whether their property would be impacted directly) have been notified of public/community meetings via letters, postcards, and door hangers. At the time of previous meetings, the Project Team had not yet developed the detail of information on property impacts that was presented here today, so we did not yet know which specific properties would be impacted by the Preferred Alternative.*
- CAG members should let their neighbors know about this project, and about the difference between the Grand Crossing Rail Project and the NS yard expansion that is also underway.
  - *Agreed. We need your help to make sure information about the project reaches all members of the community.*
- What project is currently underway along 55<sup>th</sup> Street? Who is the contractor?
  - *Mr. Allen replied that NS is working on improvements to the retaining wall at its 47<sup>th</sup> Street yard as part of the yard expansion project. NS is improving the wall east of Normal Avenue and building a new wall west of Normal to the Metra tracks.*
  - *Mr. Allen couldn't remember who the contractor is but said the work is being done under a community development agreement with the City of Chicago. The contract*

*has a 24 percent disadvantaged business enterprise (DBE)/minority-owned business enterprise (MBE) requirement, and NS is working with the City to preserve the integrity of Garfield Boulevard.*

- What if we think of a comment/question later?
  - *The Project Team encourages comments throughout the life of the project. Comments can be submitted at any time via mail, email, or the project website: [www.grandcrossingrail.com](http://www.grandcrossingrail.com).*
- How soon will you respond to us if we submit a comment/question via the website/email?
  - *The Project Team responds to your questions and comments as quickly as we can. Depending on the complexity of the question/comment, it will take anywhere from a few days to a couple of weeks.*
- Does NS plan to create new housing near the yard expansion project?
  - *Mr. Allen indicated that no housing will be constructed by NS as part of the expansions project. Mr. Allen added that historically, intermodal yards have been an economic generator, and NS is hoping that will be the case here, and that the yard expansion project will help retain and expand intermodal employment opportunities in Chicago, which have been relocating to Joliet,. NS's role is to build the intermodal facilities; it is up to the city planning department and private developers to take advantage of that.*
- What is NS's policy for relocating residents impacted by the yard expansion project? Do we have a choice where we can move?
  - *Mr. Allen said NS's policy is to let people decide where they want to move, then help them find housing there.*
- Will either P4 or the NS yard expansion provide opportunities to convert rail corridors to bike/horse trails?
  - *No rail corridors would be abandoned for either project, so neither would present an opportunity for rail-to-trail conversion.*

#### **4. Next Steps**

The next round of Community Advisory Group meetings are tentatively scheduled for early 2013. At the meetings, the Project Team will ask members for their input on the Draft EIS. Public hearings on the Draft EIS will be held shortly after these Community Advisory Group meetings.

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](mailto:info@grandcrossingrail.com)
- Online comment form: [www.grandcrossingrail.com/comment.html](http://www.grandcrossingrail.com/comment.html)

- Phone: Tony Pakeltis, Parsons: (312) 930-5268

- Mail:

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