



**OASIS RAIL TRANSIT PROJECT
PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT MEETING
QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION NOTES**

Milford High School · July 31, 2012

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Oasis Rail Transit Project

July 31, 2012 Public Involvement Meeting

Question and Answer Session Notes

The following is a summary of the Question and Answer session held at the Oasis Rail Transit project public involvement meeting held at Milford High School on July 31, 2012. Approximately 35 people signed in at the meeting; some attendees chose not to sign in and therefore were not counted.

Joe Vogel, Planning and Engineering Administrator from the Ohio Department of Transportation District 8, moderated the meeting. Opening remarks were made by Steve Mary, ODOT District 8 Deputy Director, and Todd Portune, Hamilton County Commissioner and chair of the Hamilton County Transportation Improvement District.

Panelists who addressed questions included Mr. Andy Fluegemann, Planning Engineer for ODOT District 8; Mr. Richard Dial, Transportation Planning Lead for HDR; Mr. Ted Hubbard, Hamilton County Engineer; and Mr. Portune.

Following is a summary of the questions asked and comments made during the Question and Answer portion of the meeting as well as responses given. While the material presented below captures the primary discussion points, it is not a transcript and questions and comments are not recorded verbatim.

Q: What level of projected ridership is needed to justify establishment of the Oasis Rail Transit line?

A: There isn't a magic number. Right now, we are focusing on the utility of the rail line and how the public would like to use it. At these public meetings, we're presenting a baseline level of service for the community's consideration – weekday service focusing on morning and evening commute times plus one mid-day roundtrip. We need the public's feedback on this proposed schedule to determine if it is a good place to start or if there are other levels of service that should also be included, such as evening, weekend, special event and reverse commute services. We will refine the projected ridership numbers in the next phase of study based on the feedback we get now. These numbers will help better identify system needs and requirements (such as levels of service, schedules, fuel costs, number of trains needed, etc.) and the costs associated with them. That information will then be used to create a proposed operating plan, fare structure, budget and financing strategy which will be presented to the public for review and comment at future public meetings before any final decisions are made.

Q: How do your studies and ridership numbers translate into revenues? And how does that translate into creating a budget that would raise other money and make the whole thing work? It's a question of feasibility.

A: We aren't there yet. Right now we are looking at getting agreement on the initial service concept (weekday commuter service). If the public agrees that this is a good starting point, great. Then, we can

go forward with determining key planning and cost factors such as the capital equipment needed to provide the desired service, the initial operating plan, projected fuel costs, maintenance facility needs, fare structure, etc. Once we have that information, we will present it to the community at future public involvement meetings for additional comment and feedback which all will help better determine feasibility.

Part of what we also want public feedback on right now is the concept of station area development: what should the stations look like, what kind of development should be part of the station areas and how many stations there should be. Tier 1 suggested that there should be 10 stations as part of the Oasis corridor. That may or may not be the case for the completed plan. And the final number of stations, where they will be and what they will look like will all play a part in determining ridership numbers. We believe that the current ridership numbers are very conservative. They are based solely on weekday commuter use, considering existing conditions. They do not factor in added use generated from future economic growth and development created by the rail stations and other Eastern Corridor Program elements. They also do not factor in evening, special event, weekend or reverse commute ridership which is expected to be an important – and large – segment of the line’s users.* It’s also important to note that the Oasis line is just the first piece of what is envisioned to be regional rail network. Ridership is expected to grow as more lines are added to the system.

Finally, this is a unique project. There is going to be a Business Case Assessment done on the transit portion of this project and that is going to give us a much clearer picture on feasibility. But, we are not talking about just rail. A big issue to consider is that when we add in the other Eastern Corridor roadway and transportation improvements together with the rail line, we have an opportunity to increase business to the transit oriented developments (TODs) which creates more opportunities for Public Private Partnerships to support rail development. We think we have an outstanding opportunity here to introduce rail service to the community and we are really excited about what we’ve got going.

*[*Special event service could include transportation to sporting events (Reds and Bengals games), major festivals (Riverfest, Taste of Cincinnati, Oktoberfest, etc.), events at U.S. Bank Arena and other such events both downtown and in areas located along the Oasis line. Oasis could also provide evening and weekend service transporting passengers to downtown entertainment destinations (such as the new Banks neighborhood), restaurants, parks and other locations along the line.]*

Q: Traveling along the I-71 corridor is a nightmare. What’s the possibility of tying part of the I-275 corridor into the Oasis line? Can you do the same with I-71 and I-75?

A: The Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI) is developing a long-range vision that would connect Hamilton, Clermont, Butler and Warren counties as well as Northern Kentucky and possibly parts of southern Indiana through a regional rail network. The Oasis line would form the foundation for this network. But this future expansion is outside of the current Eastern Corridor Program and lies more with OKI.

Q: Which companies in this area have committed being a partner for the Oasis project and how much are they planning to contribute?

A: At this point in time, no companies have committed dollars to the project. We aren't to that point yet and haven't asked for any commitments. However, some private entities have expressed interest in dedicating Right Of Way for the project's use which would help greatly in cutting down costs. In addition, the state of Ohio just adopted legislation that allows for the use of Public Private Partnerships (P3s) to help finance transportation-oriented projects that have federal components. We can capitalize on this to help with Oasis funding. We've seen with the Brent Spence Bridge that there is interest among private companies to invest their money to expedite bridge construction. Some of these entities have also stepped forward to advance the I-75 North/South Corridor improvements, and, they have stepped forward with discussions about the Eastern Corridor projects. This is evidence that there is interest among these groups, although we have not yet put any Eastern Corridor projects out for bid as we are still in the project planning and development phases. Also, some local communities have already spent money to make some of the Eastern Corridor's smaller, roadway network improvement projects a reality. These include intersection improvements in Hamilton and Clermont counties, the Anderson Township Park & Ride, and roadway improvements in Fairfax. This demonstrates that there is interest and that things are moving forward.

Q: You mention that private companies are interested in contributing to the Brent Spence Bridge project. But that project is already in place, it's an existing structure, repair is long overdue, and maintaining that bridge across the Ohio River is a necessity. Oasis is new. How can you compare the two?

A: Some of the companies that have expressed interest in the Brent Spence Bridge project are also interested in the Eastern Corridor. One of these companies is presenting at the HCTID meeting on August 27, 12:30 p.m. at the Hamilton County Administration Building at 138 E. Court Street, room 610. These meetings are open to the public. In addition, the Eastern Corridor Program and hence the Oasis project, grew out of extensive studies defining transportation needs and the land use vision of the region. The Program you see now is the result of what the public has said it wanted. It is unique in that it started first through meetings with stakeholders and asking the question "what do you want?" Now we are asking "how do you want it to look?" We want an end result that pleases as many people as possible. That's why we're here tonight, to get to a preferred alternative and get to where you want us to go. We expect that this strategy will resonate with private companies that may become project investors.

Q: My concern is that when using mass transit, it can be hard to get to your ultimate destination. If you have a car in the garage, the tendency is to use the car and you're there in 30 minutes as compared with 45 minutes, an hour and a half, if using mass transit. So, unless you have a comprehensive enough network of rail lines and transit service, people will often avoid using transit and just drive. Also, since we are so far out in planning with this project, we should be creative when

looking at technologies to be used. How much thought has been given to imaginative/creative transit approaches that focus on high tech solutions – such as magnetic levitation trains or trains with breakoff feeder cars that can take people to locations without needing to leave the train car – and not depending on more nostalgic concepts that are at least 100 years old?

A: In terms of technology, the focus for the Oasis project is based on the community needs and Program recommendations, as defined in the 2005 Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement. While there are many new and emerging rail technology options out there – and we have looked at them – we need to consider what options best meet the needs of our community, the expected level of use they will receive here, and are cost effective for our community and most efficient for us locally. Don't forget that there are many solid, older technologies—such as cars and airplanes—that we are using today which continue to hold great value and will do so well into the future.

Q: Will you use new or existing tracks? Do you have a partnership with the railroads?

A: Most of the Oasis line will use existing rail tracks. There is not a lot of service on these tracks currently and they will need to be brought up to modern standards. The extent of the work we will need to do depends on the level of service offered. These public meetings are being held in part to better understand what the community wants in terms of service. More service equals more rail vehicles, maybe more track needed, etc. All that needs to be taken into consideration. And yes, we are working with the railroads to advance this project.

Q: I'm an avid supporter of light rail and think the Oasis line could be interesting as a pilot project. Also, what happened to the Cleveland-Columbus-Cincinnati (3C) rail plan which was being discussed? Would that plan be integrated into the Eastern Corridor rail?

A: The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) administration was proactively working on that project a few years ago. However, ODOT's new administration is no longer working on the 3C rail project and Oasis is the only rail project currently being discussed.

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