



**OASIS RAIL TRANSIT PROJECT
and the
STATE ROUTE 32 RELOCATION PROJECT
COMBINED PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT MEETING
QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION NOTES**

Nagel Middle School · August 2, 2012

Prepared by:

Rasor Marketing Communications

7844 Remington Road

Cincinnati, Ohio 45242

(513) 793-1234

Oasis Rail Transit and State Route 32 Relocation Projects

August 2, 2012 Public Involvement Meeting

Question and Answer Session Notes

Following is a summary of the Question and Answer session held at the joint Oasis Rail Transit and State Route (SR) 32 Relocation public involvement meeting held at Nagel Middle School on August 2, 2012. Approximately 130 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; Ms. Deb Osborne, SR 32 Relocation project manager for Stantec; Mr. Ted Hubbard, Hamilton County Engineer; Mr. Jim Bednar, NEPA specialist for CH2M Hill; 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 is a Transportation Improvement District (TID), what are its responsibilities, and to whom does it report?

A: TIDs are a statutory bodies created by the Ohio legislature to look at transportation improvements as a vehicle for economic development in the state of Ohio. TIDs collaborate with local jurisdictions and other regional, state and federal agencies to implement regional transportation solutions. There are approximately 13 TIDs in Ohio with four of those in the southwest Ohio region: Hamilton County TID, Clermont County TID, Warren County TID and Butler County TID.

Q: I am in favor of rail. Cincinnati needs it – it works – it moves people quickly and safely. There is too much traffic on our roadways and it comes to a halt when there is an accident or half an inch of snow. My concern though is, what is going to happen to Newtown? It's a small community. Will houses be taken and, if so, will people be compensated fairly and kept informed in advance of anything happening to their property? I'm also concerned about the river.

A: Regarding Newtown, we are narrowing the SR 32 Relocation study area, as you have seen. We need your feedback on those recommendations. We are aware of Newtown's concerns about the SR 32 Relocation project. One of our goals for the Eastern Corridor Program is to ensure that its benefits are good for all communities, not just some – and certainly not at the cost of others. We will continue to reach out to the people of Newtown in an effort to work with them and identify ways in which the

Eastern Corridor Program can be used to benefit their community. We need your input. In terms of compensation for lost properties, ODOT will follow the state requirements.

Regarding impacts to the Little Miami River, every effort is being made to minimize impacts of this project on the natural, historic and cultural environment, including the river. We have already conducted multiple environmental assessments and will continue to do more specific studies as the study areas are narrowed down and we get closer to identifying possible alignments. We have already identified some measures for reducing impacts to the Little Miami River. For example, the new river crossing we are discussing will be a clear-span bridge which would completely span the watercourse and does not require construction of supports within the river channel or alterations to the riverbed or its banks. Also, all work related to the Eastern Corridor Program must be environmentally sound and meet federal regulations and standards. The river is an important asset to all of us.

Q: At what point does SR 32 become a set plan and when would property owners be notified?

A: We expect that a preferred alignment for the SR 32 Relocation project will be chosen by next fall [Fall 2013]. Once the environmental documentation supporting the alignment recommendation is approved by the federal regulating agencies, we will then know which properties will be affected and the degree to which they will be impacted and ODOT will begin the notification process. Federal law ensures that property owners will be treated fairly.

Q: I live in Mariemont. I saw the new proposed route for SR 32. Who decided where it would be located and can it be changed?

A: First, a clarification: we don't know yet what the specific route or alignment of the relocated SR 32 roadway will be. What has changed is the size and location of the project's study corridor, and it's being recommended that the roadway be located somewhere within that refined study corridor (assuming the No Build alternative is not selected). Recently completed environmental and archaeological studies were used to determine the more specific study corridor location. Many of the study corridors identified in earlier phases of the project are now being eliminated from consideration based on projected impacts to sensitive environmental and archaeological resources, historic structures and community resources (churches, cemeteries and schools), potential displacements of homes and businesses and projected construction costs. The recommended changes are outlined in the March 2012 SR 32 Relocation Feasibility Study which is available for review under the SR 32 Relocation Study Documents section of the Eastern Corridor website [www.EasternCorridor.org]. The decision to approve the recommendations and move forward with next steps is a consensus process between ODOT and the Federal Highway Administration, based on the data that has been acquired. And because a goal of these kinds of projects is to minimize negative impacts and increase benefits, it is unusual for these decisions to be changed. Not impossible, but unlikely.

Q: Was there a vote on the changed route?

A: No. Decisions are based on technical data and ODOT controls the decision process itself, including reviewing the technical analyses that have been conducted. These kinds of decisions are based on what options would result in the least amount of negative impacts.

Q: I commend the Eastern Corridor planning committee for their hard work. I am speaking on behalf of the Village of Newtown, however, and we have been strongly opposed to this project from day one. There's no good route that wouldn't affect us negatively. Businesses depend on the traffic that comes by. The project would be a disruption to parks and the lake. At what point will the Powers That Be listen when we say we do not want this project and say, ok, we won't build it?

A: We have heard your comments and have documented them. However, we are also hearing and have documented comments from others in your community who have expressed interest in and/or support for the project and for continuing with the development process. A No Build option will be considered among other alternatives to be identified for the project. But we believe that this project can be done in a way that benefits your community, or, that we will be able to find a solution that is tolerable. We appreciate all feedback we receive.

Q: As a Madisonville Community Council representative, our focus is on the Red Bank Corridor project and we therefore don't have a position on the other Eastern Corridor projects. We have had some good meetings with ODOT for planning the Red Bank project. But we have also found that we cannot make decisions on intersection modifications without knowledge of how those changes would impact our local businesses. We need an independent firm to complete a competent economic impact analysis to help us better evaluate the options and make decisions. This is a requirement for the rail project, but is not a requirement for roadway projects. Also, we have been studying roundabouts and really like the possibility of incorporating them on the Red Bank Corridor project. We are organizing a trip to Carmel, Indiana, to see how they have used them there. Anyone interested in attending is welcome to come. Please see me (Bill Collins) after the meeting.

A: Thank you for your comments.

Q: I'm from Newtown and have owned an auto repair shop for many years. It is my experience that people are in love with their cars and even if they are given another travel option, they will continue to use their cars. When people bring their cars in for repair, they want their car back that day and they don't want to share rides with others. You are beating a dead horse by trying to push through the rail project.

A: Thank you for your comment.

Q: I live in Anderson Township in the Ancor area. I spoke with the team staffing the Station Area Planning boards and they were talking about how the Ancor station could be developed into a district-serving station. I also attended the 2011 Anderson Township Comprehensive Development Plan meeting. That plan discouraged new development in the Ancor area, but here you are encouraging it. The Oasis plan is in complete conflict with that Anderson plan. I am confused about the conflict.

A: We did not mean to be contrary to Anderson Township. At this time, we are looking at development opportunities and capacity for each of the 10 rail stations that were recommended for further study in the 2006 Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and whether it makes sense or not to move forward with planning and developing specific stations. The Ancor area is industrial and could be further

developed that way. We would like the public to weigh in on this issue as we advance through the decision-making process.

Q: I would like to address a comment made a few minutes ago. I'm one of the youngest people here and I would love to ride a train. There is a growing consensus among young people that rail transit options are both wanted and needed, and there are growing numbers of young people my age who like public transportation and would like to have rail here.

A: Thank you for your comment. Also, it is important to understand that rail line development in Cincinnati will not be limited to the Oasis line. Oasis is simply the first. There are a number of other lines being considered that would link into the Oasis line and together they will form a regional rail system connecting communities in Hamilton, Clermont, Warren and Butler counties as well as Northern Kentucky (including the airport) and portions of southeastern Indiana. The Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI) has a long-term plan in place that looks at how various existing railroads can be integrated into this regional rail system. If the Oasis concept of building regional rail service on existing, but minimally used, freight rail tracks is successful, it can be replicated throughout the region.

Q: I live in Mariemont near Clare Yards. Has anyone done noise studies to determine the noise impacts of running the roadway near there? I'm not worried about rail noise; 18-wheel trucks concern me.

A: We're not talking about constructing a seven or eight lane highway here, just four travel lanes [two in each direction] are being considered. Environmental studies that are now underway will study the impact of noise on nearby areas and identify possible ways to reduce any negative impacts using federal standards as a guideline.

Q: The refined SR 32 Relocation study corridor comes very close to Miami Bluff. I am very concerned about that. I am also concerned that freight would increase on the rail lines. I am supportive of the project, but can the light rail use transition to heavy rail, and is there any kind of guarantee that that won't happen? I greatly support the Eastern Corridor project. I was at UC 20 years ago when people first started talking about it and believe we will get to a good place. But, I'm also concerned about the environmental impact and about the impact to Newtown.

A: A portion of the Oasis line belongs to Norfolk Southern – we would negotiate with them regarding how the line will be used but as owners, they can use their portion however they choose. Other sections of Oasis line, however, are owned by the Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority (SORTA) and are therefore in public hands. SORTA dictates the terms of use for those tracks and can set their own usage standards. Our goal is for robust passenger service not increased freight service. Thank you for your comments.

Q: There is a rail station planned for Newtown. How many people in favor of the project are from Newtown? Also, where would they park?

A: Although we don't have specific numbers, we have received support for the Oasis project from people in Newtown. We have not yet finalized the alignment of rail through the Newtown area or selected a station location – that's one issue we would like your input on this evening. Once an alignment decision is made, we will work with the community on developing a plan for the Newtown area station that will identify the location, size and design of the area; the preferred mix of business, retail, residential and restaurant space; and station area features such as central gathering spaces, walk-up/bike-up options and parking options.

Q: A lot of money has been put into the Wags Dog Park, the golf course and new developments, and that's been good for Newtown. That will be destroyed by this project.

A: We don't know yet what the alignment would be. We will know which properties and businesses will be affected once a preferred alignment is identified, most likely next fall [Fall 2013]. We will work to minimize the impacts to the Newtown area.

Q: As the owner of Motz Turf Farms for many years, I am right in the middle of this project and I've been coming to these meetings for 30 years already. I think the people putting it together have studied it well and I was surprised to hear the extent of the environmental studies that they have completed. We need industry in Newtown and we have the space. There are opportunities and a railroad doesn't take much space. There are a lot of public lands along the river though that do need to be protected and I want to make sure that the project respects the agricultural history of this area. What are the plans for Clare Yards?

A: Thank you for your comments. Clare Yards is owned by Norfolk Southern and their plans are to continue using that facility.

Q: How high will the railroad banks be and where will they go?

A: We won't know that until we complete the environmental documentation next year. Then, we will go into detailed design and can better answer your question.

Q: Your materials say that there will be a lot of reduced emissions as a result of the Eastern Corridor Program, but there will be increased traffic through the area. What's the basis for your claim? Doesn't that concern the EPA? Also, the lakes in this area will pose a lot of construction challenges. How will you address that? I've lived here all my life; I don't want to see a gravel pit.

A: Regarding air quality, the first phase of the Eastern Corridor Study [2006 Tier 1 EIS] found that the Program would reduce vehicle miles traveled by 50 million vehicle miles per year. This is because right now, there are no direct routes through the Eastern Corridor region and people are taking longer, more winding routes to get around. Also, cars currently traveling on the region's congested roadways and highways results in higher fuel consumption and higher levels of emissions when sitting in stopped traffic. The relocated SR 32 provides a shorter route option and this, coupled with the rail transit option, will reduce the overall number of vehicle miles traveled and will help traffic flow more easily and safely. As a boulevard-type roadway aimed at supporting local traffic – the relocated SR 32 will be the missing link in the region's arterial system. But there is still more studies that need to be done. Regarding

construction challenges, construction needs and strategies can be better addressed once a preferred alternative is identified.

Q: Will there be a shuttle service to get to the rail stations?

A: The extent of bus service to be provided will be determined once we know more about specific project alignments. There will be future conversations held with transit agencies to address these issues.

Q: What is the typical lifetime of a land use vision and MIS plan, and when do you relook at them?

A: Planning efforts are constantly underway and land use plans are generally updated as things change. At OKI, the regional Land Use Plan is updated every five years.

Q: I've come to learn that while this project is being done to enhance the road and transportation, there are also opportunities to enhance and benefit Newtown. Mr. Portune, can you talk a little more to that?

A: Thank you. The Eastern Corridor Program is not your typical transportation program aimed simply at getting people from Point A to Point B using the fastest way possible. This Program is about looking at what transportation improvements make sense as well as at how they will benefit local communities and how they can enhance them. We can't answer that for you—you need to find your own answers to that and share them with us.

The NEPA process that we are using to develop the Eastern Corridor Program has required us to look at everything possible that could be done in terms of transportation for the region. After completing the necessary studies, specific transportation recommendations have been identified and funneled down in scope to create specific projects. Now, we are in the process of refining those projects even further to identify preferred project alternatives. I believe there are transportation solutions for the Eastern Corridor that can support everyone's needs and goals.

For the Eastern Corridor's Red Bank Corridor project, we've been working with a designated Community Partner Committee made up of representatives from Madisonville and other nearby communities, local business and interest groups. We meet with this group somewhat regularly to discuss the project and alternatives that would not only meet transportation needs but also support local community and economic development goals. I invite Newtown to organize a similar group of citizens to meet with us regularly to explore options on how the SR 32 Relocation and Oasis projects can be used to help achieve your community's goals. We want to work together on this to maximize potential benefits.

Q: I'm from Terrace Park. Rail is the number one thing to concentrate on before we go through and build highways through lakes and property. Has anyone talked to Norfolk Southern? I think the ridership numbers look high. What is the magic number needed to gain federal support? We have Metro buses going out to Milford with two people on them.

A: We believe that the projected ridership numbers shown at tonight's meeting are conservative. They don't include estimates for reverse commutes [traveling east from downtown], evening or special event service. Parking downtown is expensive and people have expressed that they are interested in train service. Regarding federal funding support, this is not a traditional funding process in which we are looking solely at public funds. There are many good opportunities for Public Private Partnerships (P3s) which can help fund the projects and significantly reduce reliance on federal funding. As for Norfolk Southern, we have been in contact with them and, in fact, met with them today and had a good dialogue about the Corridor. So that conversation is moving forward.

Q: I started riding the bus during the stadium construction and ride it regularly. Many buses have 10 – 12 people on it, while the maximum capacity is 60.

A: Thank you for your comment.

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