



Oasis Rail Transit

# PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY REPORT

February 2016 Open House Meetings

Public Input

Railroad Input

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Appendix A: Open House Meeting Materials

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*The Eastern Corridor is a program of integrated, multi-modal transportation investments designed to enhance Greater Cincinnati's regional transportation network by improving travel and connections between central Cincinnati and the communities extending east through Hamilton County and into western Clermont County. Program elements include improvements to existing road networks, new and expanded roadways, new rail transit, expanded bus routes and improvements for pedestrians and bicyclists. The Eastern Corridor Program is administered by the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) in cooperation with the Eastern Corridor Implementation Partners: Hamilton County Transportation Improvement District (HCTID), Clermont County Transportation Improvement District (CCTID), City of Cincinnati, Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI) and the Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority (SORTA).*

*A proposed project of the Eastern Corridor Program, Oasis Rail Transit is a regional rail line that would provide a new transportation alternative for people traveling between downtown Cincinnati and the City of Milford, and the communities along the way. The concept for Oasis came from a comprehensive transportation study which engaged community leaders, residents, property owners, businesses and others in the Eastern Corridor's 17 jurisdictions in identifying current and future transportation challenges within the Corridor and possible solutions for addressing those challenges. Introducing a new rail-based transportation alternative was one of the solutions proposed.*

*The Oasis line could be a foundation upon which future passenger rail lines can be added, connecting communities throughout the Greater Cincinnati region. The project is now positioned to be considered for local sponsorship and project planners are reviewing the best options for how to proceed with further development and evaluation.*

## **PURPOSE OF DOCUMENT**

The purpose of this document is to reflect input received during the development and subsequent release of the OASIS Rail Conceptual Alternative Solutions HAM/CLE – OASIS Rail Corridor (CAS) report and related documents publically available on February 8, 2016. Whether comments received were oral, written or otherwise, they should be considered an important part of the project and play an active role in guiding the project towards a successful implementation. All comments received and documented in this summary report will be addressed during subsequent phases of project development.

## **OPEN HOUSE MEETINGS**

### **Open House Overview**

On February 24 and February 25, 2016, the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) hosted three Open House meetings for the Oasis Rail Transit project. The purpose of the meetings was to share the results of recently completed studies that evaluated feasible alternatives for the proposed regional rail line and potential options for implementation, and to provide opportunities for public feedback on the proposed project.

The Open Houses were held at different locations within the project corridor. Two were held in the evening and one was held during daytime hours. Meeting times and locations were as follows:

**February 24, 2016**  
**11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.**

Taft Center at Fountain Square  
425 Walnut Street  
Cincinnati, OH 45202  
(US Bank Bldg, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor)

**February 24, 2016**  
**5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.**

Miami Valley Christian  
Academy  
6830 School Street  
Newtown, OH 45244

**February 25, 2016**  
**5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.**

Milford High School (Cafeteria)  
1 Eagles Way  
Milford, OH 45150

The planning team considered multiple locations throughout the project corridor for the Open Houses and selected three—two positioned at the east and west ends of the project corridor (represented by the Milford and downtown locations, respectively) and one in the middle (represented by the Newtown location). Meeting locations were chosen based on proximity to the rail line, size (must have space for at least 150 people), accessibility (in terms of both location and ADA accessibility) and convenience, availability, and cost.

### **Open House Format**

Each Open House took place over a two-hour period and attendees were able to come to the session most convenient to them at any time during the scheduled timeframe. Upon entering the meeting space, participants were greeted by project team representatives who asked them to sign in, provided them with meeting materials (detailed on the next page), and explained the format of the meeting. Each Open House attendee was also invited to complete a Comment Form prior to leaving the meeting.



*At each location, staff asked attendees to sign in upon arrival and handed out an information packet that included an Oasis Rail Fact Sheet, a Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU) Fact Sheet, an Oasis Rail Corridor Map, and a Regional Rail Vision Map.*



*Information display boards formed a semi circle around the perimeter of the meeting spaces.*

## Open House Content

The content of each Open House was the same. The information presented centered around the results of three Oasis Rail Transit project development reports, all of which were completed in early February of 2016. Each of the reports was posted on the Oasis Rail Transit Project Documents page of the Eastern Corridor website prior to the Open House meetings:

- Oasis Rail Transit Conceptual Alternative Solutions HAM/CLE – OASIS Rail Corridor (CAS)
- Oasis Rail Transit Economic and Financial Analysis
- Oasis Rail Transit Funding Analysis and Strategy

Key information from these reports was presented on a series of information boards placed around the meeting space. In addition, attendees were provided with several handouts that outlined additional information about the project:

- Oasis Rail Transit Fact Sheet
- Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU) Fact Sheet
- A map of the Oasis Rail Corridor
- A map of the envisioned regional rail system for the Greater Cincinnati metropolitan area

Project team representatives were positioned around the room to discuss the project information with visitors, answer questions and receive comments. Project team members who staffed the Open Houses included:

- Doug Moore, HDR
- Chris Nyberg, HDR
- Andy Fluegemann, ODOT District 8
- Laura Whitman, Rasor Marketing Communications
- Kaity Dunn, Rasor Marketing Communications
- Monica Humphrey, Rasor Marketing Communications

Copies of all open house materials (information displays, handouts and Comment Form) were posted on the Oasis Rail Transit Public Involvement page of the Eastern Corridor website on February 24, 2016. A link to a digital version of the Comment Form was also posted on the homepage of the website and the Oasis Public Involvement page on the same day. The online Comment Form was kept open until the public comment period closed at midnight on March 10, 2016. Copies of all Open House materials are included in Appendix A: Meeting Materials.



*Attendees were able to review the information presented on the information display boards and talk with ODOT representatives at their own pace.*

## Open House Meeting Attendance

A total of 104 people signed in at the Open Houses. Several attendees, however, opted not to sign in and the project team was not able to quantify how many. Therefore, those individuals are not included in the overall attendance count. A breakdown of the number of people who signed in at each meeting location is provided below:

<u>MEETING LOCATION</u>	<u>NO. OF SIGN INS</u>
Taft Center at Fountain Square	35
Miami Valley Christian Academy	47
Milford High School	22

## Publicity

To publicize the Open Houses, the Eastern Corridor Communications Team utilized multiple tactics including Internet communications (website postings, social media networking, and email announcements) and traditional media relations, detailed below. Copies of notification materials are provided in Appendix B: Publicity.

### Internet-Based Communications

The Eastern Corridor Communications Team posted Open House information online using a series of postings on key websites, networking through multiple social media channels and through email announcements.

#### **Website Postings and Social Media**

The Eastern Corridor Communications Team coordinated postings of meeting announcements on websites belonging to the Eastern Corridor Program, Hamilton County, Clermont County, City of Cincinnati, ODOT and Cincinnati.com. Information was also sent to multiple blogging sites focused on local community issues. In addition, the Communications Team promoted the Open House meetings through multiple postings on the Eastern Corridor Facebook site and through the Eastern Corridor's Twitter feed. Other Eastern Corridor Partners, including ODOT and the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI), shared meeting information on their Facebook and Twitter sites as well.

#### **Email Announcements**

Open House announcements were sent out multiple times via eblasts to individuals included in the Eastern Corridor Stakeholder Database. These individuals represent Eastern Corridor communities, business associations, special interest groups, resource agencies, environmental justice organizations, property owners, residents and other interested parties. The initial announcement was sent out on Feb. 5 and reminder emails were sent on Feb. 16 and Feb. 23. The eblast announcements outlined the purpose of the Open Houses as well as dates, times, and locations. They also included links to additional information. A copy of the initial email announcement distributed is included in Appendix B: Publicity. A follow up email was distributed on March 4 providing recipients links to meeting materials posted online and encouraging them to submit feedback using the online Comment Form survey.

## **Media Relations**

The Eastern Corridor Communications Team distributed a news release about the upcoming Open Houses to multiple local media outlets. The release outlined the purpose of the sessions and the Open House dates, times and locations. It also provided an overview of the Oasis Rail Transit Project and topics to be discussed at the meetings. A copy of the release is included in Appendix B: Publicity.

### **Print Media**

The Eastern Corridor Communications Team sent the meeting release to the following print media outlets:

- *Cincinnati Business Courier*
- *Cincinnati Enquirer*
- *Cincinnati Herald*
- *Cincinnati Profile Magazine*
- *Cincinnati Magazine*
- *City Beat*
- *Clermont Sun*
- *Community Press newspapers*

Placements of meeting announcements or articles were confirmed in the following print publications:

- *Cincinnati Enquirer*
- *Cincinnati Business Courier*
- *Forest Hills Journal*
- *Clermont Sun*
- *Milford Miami Advertiser*

### **Television/Radio**

Public meeting information was sent to the following television and radio outlets. The Communications Team actively followed up with TV and key radio stations to ensure receipt of information and to pitch promotion of the meetings.

- WCPO-TV, Channel 9
- WKRC-TV, Channel 12
- WLWT-TV, Channel 5
- WXIX-TV, Channel 19
- WLW-AM
- WVXU-FM
- WDBZ-AM
- WKRC-AM
- WNKU-FM

Television placements were confirmed on the following:

- WLWT-TV, Channel 5
- WKRC-TV, Channel 12
- WVXU-FM

*(Note: the Communications Team did not actively track placements on radio, therefore, additional coverage may have been obtained on radio stations.)*

## Online

In addition to print and broadcast media, public meeting information was sent to the following local websites and blogs:

- Cincywhimsy.com
- UrbanCincy.com
- Building Cincinnati Blog
- 5chw4r7z.blogspot.com
- Cincinnati Development Blog
- Cincinnati Black Blog
- Nextdoor

Postings about the Oasis community meetings were confirmed on the following sites:

- Cincinnati.com (Cincinnati Enquirer website)
- Cincinnati.com (Cincinnati Enquirer calendar pages)
- ClermontEngineer.org (Clermont County Engineer's website)
- Communitypress.cincinnati.com (Community Press website)
- GoClermont.org (Clermont County Transportation Improvement District website)
- Hamiltoncountyohio.gov (Hamilton County website)
- Hamilton-co.org (Hamilton County Engineer website)
- Nextdoor.com
- ODOT.state.oh.us (ODOT website)
- OKI.org (Ohio Kentucky Indiana Regional Council of Governments)
- Progressive Railroading

Postings about the Oasis community meetings were also confirmed on the following social media feeds:

- Ohio Department of Transportation Facebook and Twitter
- Ohio Kentucky Indiana Regional Council of Governments Facebook and Twitter
- City of Cincinnati Facebook
- Clermont County Transportation Improvement District Facebook and Twitter
- Clermont County Ohio Government Facebook
- Clermont County Engineer Facebook and Twitter



*Oasis Rail Transit Project Manager for ODOT, Andy Fluegemann, was interviewed by WLWT at the Taft Center Open House on Feb. 24, 2016.*



## PUBLIC INPUT

The public was invited to submit comments and feedback on information presented at the Open Houses and documented in the Oasis Rail Transit Conceptual Alternative Solutions, Economic and Financial Analysis and Funding Analysis and Strategy reports through the following channels:

- Completing a hardcopy version of the Comment Form provided at the Open House meetings
- Completing an online version of the Comment Form (developed using Survey Monkey) made accessible through links posted on the Eastern Corridor website, Partner websites and social media networking. This response tool was available to the public until the public comment period closed on March 10, 2016
- Participating in one-on-one discussions with project team representatives
- Sending an email to project team representatives through [EasternCorridor@EasternCorridor.org](mailto:EasternCorridor@EasternCorridor.org)
- Sending letters directly to ODOT

### **Open House Comment Forms**

Comment Forms were provided to all Open House attendees. A digital version of the form which included the same questions was developed using Survey Monkey and posted on the Eastern Corridor website homepage and Oasis Rail Transit, Public Involvement page. The Comment Forms included questions regarding how familiar respondents were with the Eastern Corridor Program and Oasis Rail Transit project, how likely respondents would be to use the rail line and in what way, respondents' priorities pertaining to Eastern Corridor transportation issues, and whether or not funding the Oasis Rail Transit line should be considered as a priority for the region. In addition, respondents were given the opportunity to submit comments for consideration.

Fifty-nine completed forms were received by the Oasis Rail Transit project team at the Open Houses. In addition, 199 people completed an online Comment Form, bringing the total number of Comment Forms received to 258. Not every person answered every question.

The typical Comment Form respondent was male (71% of respondents) and 45 years old or older (70% of respondents). Most reported being familiar with the Eastern Corridor Program and Oasis Rail Transit project (89% of respondents), though only 32% attended the Oasis Open House meetings. The majority of respondents live and/or work within the Eastern Corridor region.

Following is a summary of key information received from the Comment Forms. All Comment Form results are documented in Appendix C: Public Input.

- Respondents were fairly evenly split regarding whether or not they would use the Oasis line to get to and from work or school. Approximately 43% either Strongly Agree (25%) or Agreed (18%) that they would use the Oasis Rail Transit Line to travel to and from work or school, while another 41% either Strongly Disagreed (21%) or Disagreed (20%). Sixteen percent weren't sure. However, a majority of respondents (73%, 159 people) either Strongly Agreed (47%) or Agree (26%) that they would use the Oasis Rail Transit Line to get to and from entertainment destinations (sporting events, festival, shopping, dining, etc.). By contrast, 21% (46 respondents), said they Strongly Disagreed (12%) or Disagreed (9%). Six percent weren't sure.

- The majority of respondents (83%, 180 people) said they Strongly Agreed (61%) or Agreed (21%) that introducing commuter rail as a new public transportation option in Greater Cincinnati is important to them whereas 16% (35 respondents) said they Strongly Disagreed (9%) or Disagreed (7%). Only two percent (5 people) weren't sure. Looking deeper, 72% of respondents (156 people) said they Strongly Agreed (52%) or Agreed (20%) that implementing the proposed Oasis Rail Transit line is important to them. Twenty-five percent (54 people) said they Strongly Disagreed (17%) or Disagreed (8%), and approximately three percent (6 people) weren't sure.
- The majority of respondents (70%, 151 people) said they Strongly Agreed (53%) or Agreed (17%) that implementing the Oasis Rail Transit line should be considered a transportation priority for the region. Twenty-five percent (54 people) said they Strongly Disagreed (18%) or Disagreed (7%). When asked if the Oasis Rail Transit line should be considered a local funding priority, approximately 72% of respondents (144 people) said Yes, while 18% (37 people) said No and the remaining 10% (19 people) said it should not be a funding priority at this time.
- Transportation needs most often identified as Very Important by respondents were Less Congestion (63%, 127 people), New Rail-Based Transit Service (62%, 126 people) and Better Air Quality (60%, 121 people). Transportation needs most often identified as Not At All Important were Expanded Bus Service (13%, 27 people), Expanded Bicycle Routes (12%, 25 people), and New Rail-Based Transit Service (12%, 24 people).
- Fifty-eight percent of the comments submitted (52 comments) indicated some level of support or conditional support for the Oasis Rail Transit line. Another three comments (three percent) also indicated support, but identified concerns related to funding. Twenty-two comments (25%) indicated opposition to the rail line due to either environmental, funding, routing or prioritization concerns, while another nine percent (eight comments) outlined more general concerns that the Oasis Rail Transit line would be a poor choice for funding or that funding dollars would be better spent elsewhere. Approximately six percent (five comments) were neither for nor against the project but instead outlined suggestions or comments for further consideration.

### **Eastern Corridor Email**

During the two-week comment period that followed the public involvement meetings, five people sent Oasis-specific emails to the Eastern Corridor team through the Program's email system and the Eastern Corridor website. Three emails expressed strong support for the project to move forward, one requested more information, and one email expressed disapproval of the project and the location of the meetings. Each of the emails received are documented in Appendix C: Public Input.

### **Additional Feedback Received**

In addition to the Comment Forms, feedback was received via a Letter to the Editor published in the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, and several letters submitted to the project team and ODOT. Two of these letters were attached to Comment Forms left at the Open Houses and the others were submitted electronically to ODOT:

- In a Letter to the Editor (*Cincinnati Enquirer*) entitled "Annoyed by Streetcar Supporters Who Oppose Oasis Line," Eric Douglas commented that the Cincinnati Streetcar and Oasis Rail Transit project are different projects and should be evaluated based upon their own impacts and merits.
- Richard Greiwe of Greiwe Development wrote a letter stating that there is a lack of development opportunity near the proposed Oasis stations and recommended realigning the

Eastern Corridor rail transit option along Wooster Pike/US 50, which travels through more community centers.

- Robert B. Dick, Anderson Township, wrote a letter in support of a rail option and the benefits it would bring, particularly in regard to potential development and potential federal investments in local mass transit.
- The Ohio River Way submitted a letter outlining its concerns with rail alignment recommendations made for Segment 2 (Boathouse to US 50 near the Red Bank/Fairfax area) and possible impacts on the group's plans for biking and walking paths along that same alignment.
- A letter submitted by the Sierra Club Ohio Chapter, Miami Group, stated that while the organization generally supports the expansion of commuter and inter-city passenger rail in Ohio and Greater Cincinnati, they would prefer the expansion of alternative mass transit options such as bus service, bikeways and walkways within the Eastern Corridor Program area. They stated that doing so will be more sustainable, cost-effective and would have less impact.

Copies of the above materials are included in Appendix C: Public Input.

## **RAILROAD INPUT**

Much of the railroad right-of-way identified for Oasis Rail Transit Segments 1 and 2 is owned by the Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority (SORTA) and, Oasis Segments 3 and 4 are owned by the Norfolk Southern Railway Company (NS). SORTA, as the local transit agency, is one of the Eastern Corridor Partners and has had continuous involvement in the Oasis planning process. NS has been involved in this initial work over the course of the last four years and NS will remain a key partner as the project advances further.

NS has raised several fundamental concerns during project planning, confirmed in recent conversations, as summarized below.

- **Shared Track:** NS generally is opposed to sharing its tracks with passenger trains in this corridor, regardless of the passenger equipment used. Alternative alignments would be preferable. Notwithstanding this, however, NS is willing to study the possibility of shared tracks under certain conditions. These conditions would include, among other things, the use of authorized passenger equipment, specified station platform and operating clearance configurations, and infrastructure that would be based upon analysis from a Rail Traffic Controller modeling (RTCM) study conducted by NS at project cost.
- **Equipment Choice:** NS does not support the consideration of diesel multiple unit (DMU) vehicles for operations on its tracks, although it will agree upon their use in certain circumstances. NS does not support the operation of alternatively-compliant diesel multiple unit (DMU) vehicles. An alternatively-compliant Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU) vehicle is a type of DMU technology that is not currently approved for joint freight/passenger service absent the grant of a specific Federal Railroad Administration safety and operational waiver. The FRA will not grant the request for a waiver absent agreement with the owner of railroad.
- **Temporal Separation:** Temporal separation blocks out significant operating hours for passenger service, and, in the context of the Oasis project, would result in most, if not all, freight service being permitted only during nighttime hours. NS does not approve operations requiring

temporal separation. “General Principles Guiding Norfolk Southern Evaluation of Intercity and Commuter Passenger Rail Proposals,” dated May 17, 2013, is available upon request.

- Clearances and capital infrastructure: NS notes that shared track scenarios using authorized passenger equipment including FRA compliant DMUs generally involve the construction of high or higher level platforms built close to the tracks in order to accommodate Federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) level boarding requirements. These requirements are incompatible with freight operations and so would necessitate a separate station track and other accommodations. NS notes that certain passenger equipment scenarios utilizing alternatively compliant DMUs would require the construction of rail lines at a location of greater separation from its freight lines than anticipated in the Final Report.
- RTC Modeling (RTCM) Study: Current operations modeling efforts do not reflect input from NS regarding service assumptions or parameters and did not include any freight operations. To advance the project, a thorough RTCM study is necessary using detailed criteria regarding future freight traffic, track maintenance, station and platform configuration, and passenger equipment and service requirements. RTCM would further define the infrastructure and right-of-way necessary to enable the passenger service to be transparent to freight operations. NS has agreed to perform this more thorough RTCM study at project cost.
- Capital, operational and other costs: Other expenses that may not have been considered include the potential tax impact on NS, insurance and liability protection costs. Many of the infrastructure and right-of-way items identified by NS may involve capital costs not specifically taken into consideration.

In addition to NS, short line railroad operation in the corridor must also be considered as the project advances. Genesee and Wyoming (G&W) currently provides service to several customers along the proposed route on the SORTA-owned track. Their representative has attended Eastern Corridor meetings during the planning process. Additional coordination will also be required with G&W.

As noted previously, coordination with all of the freight rail services is a critical element in advancing an Oasis Rail Transit project from the current conceptual plan through design and construction.