



# The Eastern Corridor

**HAM/CLE-32F-2.50/0.00; PID 86462  
Segment II-III (SR 32 Relocation)  
Community Update Meeting with  
Mariemont Community Partners Committee  
January 22, 2013  
MEETING SUMMARY**

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## MEETING OVERVIEW

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT), in response to a request by the Mariemont Village Council and the Mariemont Community Partners Committee (CPC), held a community update for the SR 32 Relocation project, originally slated for Nov. 14, 2012, on Tuesday, January 22, 2013. The meeting was held at the Mariemont Elementary School Auditorium at 6:00 p.m. ODOT provided an overview and information session on the Eastern Corridor program of projects and specific information on the SR 32 Relocation project (Eastern Corridor Segment II-III) and the Mariemont National Historic Landmark (NHL). In addition, time was provided for a question and answer session for meeting attendees.

The purpose of the meeting was to address issues raised by Mariemont residents and the Village Council about the project including:

- Mariemont's concerns about potential impacts the SR 32 Relocation project's recommended corridors would have on the community's South 80 acres area and involvement of the community in the project development process
- The project decision making process
- Role of the Mariemont Community Partners Committee (CPC)
- Next steps and project advancement

Although oriented toward the Mariemont community, the meeting was open to everyone. Additional meetings may be scheduled for other communities within the SR 32 relocation project area upon request.

Steve Mary, Deputy Director for ODOT District 8 had said "We are holding this session as a follow up to several public involvement meetings held this summer and subsequent conversations with community representatives. We've received many questions and comments from Mariemont and think it is important to update the community on the project and discuss how to move forward."

### **About the SR 32 Relocation Project**

The Eastern Corridor is a program of integrated, multi-modal transportation investments. The program of projects will enhance the regional transportation network by improving travel and connections between central Cincinnati and the communities extending east through Hamilton County into western Clermont County. Program elements include improvements to existing road networks, new and expanded roadways, 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 Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and 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).

From the intersection of SR 32 and I-275 and extending west, the SR 32 relocation project would shift the roadway from its current alignment to a new connection with US 50 (Columbia Parkway) and the Red Bank business corridor. The new roadway is being planned in conjunction with portions of the Oasis Rail Transit corridor and would include accommodations for bicyclists and pedestrians. A new clear-span (no piers in the

river) bridge would be built to cross the Little Miami National and State Scenic River. The purpose of the project is to improve regional access and mobility, improve safety, and decrease travel times and congestion on the local road network by providing a new east-west connection between Hamilton and Clermont counties, better linking I-275 to I-71.

## Notification

Public notice for the meeting was through e-mail notification to project stakeholders and posting on the project web site at [www.easterncorridor.org](http://www.easterncorridor.org). Local media in attendance were provided with a media kit that included a project fact sheet, status update, list of frequently asked questions that was distributed at an August 2012 public meeting, a travel demand model fact sheet, and a copy of the revised SR 32 Relocation recommended study corridor map. The meeting notification is included in Appendix A.

## Attendance

A total of 218 people signed in at the meeting (see Appendix D).

## Meeting Format and Materials

The January 22, 2013 SR 32 Relocation Community Update Meeting started with opening remarks made by Dan Policastro, Mayor of Mariemont, followed by Steve Mary, ODOT District 8 Deputy Director. Mayor Policastro introduced Mr. Kevin Hassey, a Mariemont resident, who submitted to ODOT a petition opposing the SR 32 Relocation through the Village's South 80. ODOT then gave a presentation on the following discussion points:

- An overview of the SR 32 Relocation project and status of the current Tier 2 studies
- Mariemont's concerns about potential impacts the SR 32 Relocation project's recommended corridors would have on the community's South 80 acres area and involvement of the community in the project development process
- The project development decision making process
- Role of the Mariemont Community Partners Committee (CPC)
- Overview of the Section 106 process
- Next steps and project advancement

The ODOT presentation was followed by a 15-minute presentation prepared by Mariemont CPC members and delivered by Karen Sullivan, a Mariemont CPC member. The presentation outlined the CPC's concerns with the study corridor that traverses the South 80 acre area. General content included the following:

- Concerns that Mariemont's South 80 area was not included in project documentation as part of Mariemont's National Historic Landmark designation
- Questions on the boundaries of the Hahn archaeological district and other nearby archaeological resources
- Concerns that images depicting conceptual illustrations for the relocated roadway show a roadway traveling at grade, rather than one that is raised, which may be required to raise it out of the

floodplain

- Impact of the project on nearby bluffs and their stability
- Impact of on-going traffic and associated noise on nearby homes, park areas

Ms. Sullivan also shared additional information about the Little Miami River's meandering paths since the mid-1800's. Note: ODOT has requested a copy of Ms. Sullivan's presentation to be included as part of project documentation.

This presentation was followed by questions and answers for those in attendance. Comment Forms, a Section 106 (Historic Preservation) Fact Sheet and Consulting Party Applications (included in Appendix B) were made available at the Welcome/Sign-in areas of the meeting. The ODOT presentation was posted to the Eastern Corridor project website following the January 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting ([www.eastercorridor.org](http://www.eastercorridor.org)) and is included in Appendix C.

### Question and Answer (Q&A) Session

The Question and Answer portion of the meeting was moderated by Joe Vogel, Planning and Engineering Administrator from ODOT District 8. Panelists consisting of representatives from ODOT, OKI and the project consultant team addressed questions. ODOT representatives included Steve Mary, District 8 Deputy Director; Andy Fluegemann, District 8 Planning Engineer; and Tim Hill, Administrator of ODOT's Office of Environmental Services. OKI's representative included Robert Koehler, Deputy Executive Director. Additionally, Todd Portune, Hamilton County Commissioner and Chair of the Hamilton County Transportation Improvement District and Ted Hubbard, Hamilton County Engineer were in attendance and answered questions posed by the audience. The Q&A session lasted approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes (7:15pm to 9pm).

## SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

Questions and comments raised during the Q&A session organized by key category of concern are presented below, followed by the response provided at the meeting, with notation of the agency that provided the response. Some responses are augmented with additional project information for further clarification. Comments from the meeting will be considered during the SR 32 Relocation Tier 2 evaluation and decision-making process.

### 1. Tier 1 Information

*Question/Comment: There are several archaeological, historic and recreational sites that were not noted or accounted for in the initial studies and on the maps shown on the Eastern Corridor web site.*

Response (ODOT): The Tier 2 studies currently underway will update project information for changes that have occurred in the area since completion of the Tier 1 work and provide detail to the broad overview that was part of the Tier 1 process. These ongoing studies will provide the appropriate level of information needed to evaluate alternatives and ultimately to select a preferred. Information from the communities, the public and resource agencies are also needed to ensure that this process is robust and complete.

Additional Project Information: The SR 32 Relocation project is following a tiered approach to assessing consequences to the natural and social environment as required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). In accordance with the definition of tiering outlined in 40 CFR 1508.28(b), Tier 1 focused on broad issues for the full Eastern Corridor program including identifying transportation needs, mode choice, general corridor locations, preliminary impacts, and land use implications of the transportation improvements being considered. A Tier 1 Record of Decision (ROD) issued in June 2006 identified multimodal projects to be further evaluated in Tier 2. The SR 32 Relocation project is one of several roadway projects carried forward from the Tier 1 ROD. Separate Tier 2 analyses for the SR 32 Relocation and other projects identified by the Tier 1 ROD are focusing on more detailed environmental impacts, evaluating alignment locations and configuration, identifying a preferred alternative, and developing mitigation.

## 2. Tribal Coordination

*Question/Comment: There is a concern that ODOT is not coordinating with Native American tribes or complying with federal legislation pertaining to Native American artifacts and burials in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).*

Response (ODOT): ODOT/FHWA is in active consultation with the federally recognized Native American tribes through their official contacts to proactively develop a plan/approach for action when encountering Native American cultural items. FHWA is responsible for ensuring the trust and security of the process as “sovereign nation to sovereign nation” diplomacy. The names of the tribes and their contacts are available from FHWA.

## 3. Impacts to Mariemont’s South 80

*Question/Comment: Mariemont residents are opposed to a corridor that encroaches on the South 80 and are skeptical about any possible mitigation. There is also concern about impacts to the village bluff area, including potential noise impacts, air pollution, bluff instability, and decreased property values, and residents do not see any benefits of the project to their community.*

Response (ODOT): Additional studies to assess environmental impacts and refine and evaluate alternatives to avoid and minimize impacts to the South 80 and other resources in the project area will continue in Tier 2. As the project develops, the project team will work with the Village through the Mariemont Community Partners Committee to obtain current and future park plans for the South 80 area to be considered in alternatives development, project design, and the identification of potential suitable mitigation opportunities. Input from the community will be sought through public involvement meetings to be held throughout project development.

Additional Project Information: The Eastern Corridor Program is a regional endeavor to benefit a multi-jurisdictional area of Hamilton and Clermont counties. Tier 2 studies will include a detailed noise analysis, an air quality assessment, geotechnical studies, assessment of socioeconomic conditions, and other environmental and engineering studies to identify project impacts and further develop avoidance, minimization and mitigation measures.

## 4. Local Funding for the Project

*Question/Comment: How will Hamilton County and the local communities be able to provide funding for the project with the current economy and why continue to spend taxpayer money if the project is being opposed?*

Response (ODOT): Communities in Hamilton County and Clermont County have the ability to pool their resources to move projects ahead by leveraging funding through their Transportation Improvement Districts (TIDs) with the use of methods such as tax increment financing and similar programs to help fund transportation improvements. ODOT/FHWA is committed to completing the current phase of work to identify a preferred alternative, including consideration of the No Build Alternative.

Additional Project Information: Source of the current Tier 2 funding is primarily FHWA and ODOT with support from the Eastern Corridor Implementation Partners. Funding for future phases has not been identified, but is anticipated to be obtained through a combination of federal, state and local sources, both public and private.

## 5. Coordination with the National Park Service

*Question/Comment: What does it mean when you say that this project was coordinated with the National Park Service?*

Response (ODOT): During Tier 1, the project team worked with various state and federal agencies, including the National Park Service (NPS), to obtain input on transportation improvements in the Eastern Corridor. In Tier 2, ODOT will continue to work with these agencies to provide the level of detail needed to evaluate the alternatives and ultimately to select a preferred.

Additional Project Information: Representatives from the NPS Scenic Rivers Program participated in four resource agency coordination meetings held throughout various stages of Tier 1 development, and were provided with the opportunity to review and comment on the Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement. The project team used input provided by NPS to help develop preliminary mitigation measures to protect the Little Miami National and State Scenic River for further development in Tier 2, including the commitment to include a clear span structure (no piers in the river channel) as part of the project design.

## 6. Missing Transportation Link and Other Options

*Question/Comment: What is the missing transportation link in the region and can other options outside the current study area/corridor still be considered (such as improving I-71, widening SR 32, etc.)?*

Response (ODOT): After repeated transportation studies conducted in the 1970's and 1980's, a Major Investment Study (MIS) completed by the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI) in 2000 evaluated preliminary options for addressing regional transportation problems in the Eastern Corridor, which identified a gap in the existing infrastructure. This gap is reflected by the existing circuitous roadway network being overloaded, leading to heavy congestion and high numbers of accidents throughout the corridor. Regarding other options outside the corridors initially identified in the March 2012 Feasibility Study, the project team is examining a southern corridor just south of the Horseshoes Bend to avoid the Mariemont National Historic Landmark, and another option that follows the existing rail line within the study area. Additional information and analysis are needed to develop feasible alternatives, include consideration of the No-Build.

Additional Project Information: Transportation improvements in the Eastern Corridor are needed because the existing roadway network cannot support the travel demand, leading to congestion, delays, and accidents. The existing local network has limited capacity with indirect routes to central Hamilton County and downtown Cincinnati (resulting in circuitous travel via the interstate system) and few travel options (modes), resulting in poor regional connectivity and inefficient movement of goods, services, and people. The Eastern Corridor MIS

evaluated preliminary options for addressing regional transportation problems and determined that the most effective solution needed to: be a multi-modal approach; support economic goals; balance impacts with environmental protection; and consider land use. The MIS confirmed a 'gap' in the existing regional infrastructure, specifically the need for a new east-west connection between I-275 and I-71, linking Cincinnati/eastern Hamilton County to communities in western Clermont County. The MIS evaluated a variety of options for improving the transportation network and eliminated concepts that didn't address regional needs, including a crossing at the Beechmont Levy and the widening of SR 32, among others. The MIS recommended as part of a multimodal program that a relocation of SR 32 and link to US 50 in the Fairfax vicinity (and ultimately to I-71 via the Red Bank corridor) would provide the needed regional east-west connection. The MIS was used to establish the Eastern Corridor study area for Tier 1 analyses, and MIS recommendations were adopted by OKI and are incorporated into the region's long range transportation plan.

## 7. Modal Relationships

*Question/Comment: If the rail transit component of the Eastern Corridor has more support, can it be built without the SR 32 Relocation? Will the roadway improvements be built without the rail transit if there's no funding for rail?*

Response (ODOT, Hamilton County): The previous Eastern Corridor work determined that the most effective solution for addressing transportation problems in the area needed to be multi-modal, and that no single mode or project could provide the needed capacity, connectivity and safety benefits for the region. Implemented together, the rail transit component reduces the roadway footprint, and the roadway expands the market for transit oriented development associated with the rail.

Additional Project Information: Building upon the multi-modal framework established by the Eastern Corridor MIS, Tier 1 identified a program of multi-modal improvements for further analyses, including four core projects currently underway in Tier 2 – the Red Bank Corridor Improvements, the SR 32 Relocation, SR 32 Improvements in the Eastgate Area, and the Oasis Rail Transit. Although functionally independent, these projects are interrelated and complimentary to each other. The implementation strategy for the Eastern Corridor approved by FHWA in the Tier 1 ROD is that all multi-modal components of the program be constructed incrementally over time as funding becomes available, resulting in maximum benefit for the region.

## 8. Benefit to Local Communities

*Question/Comment: There is concern that the project only benefits outer ring communities, not Hamilton County, and concern about how the project will affect existing infrastructure in Hamilton County, like Columbia Parkway, and its impact on Mariemont.*

Response (Hamilton County): SR 32 is a state route and ODOT has an obligation to improve the operational capacity of the facility if it does not meet performance standards. The Eastern Corridor program, however, is not just about improving transportation, but how to use transportation improvements (multi-modal bikeway, transit and roadway) to improve and enhance communities and be consistent with community goals. The project is about two counties and 17 jurisdictions working together to develop a regional multimodal transportation system that helps the project team marry together the objectives of the Eastern Corridor program with the desires of the affected communities. The project team acknowledges that Mariemont opposes the project through its South 80 area and other potential impacts to its community. Although one neighborhood's goals might be different from another's goals, the project team is requesting input from the communities to help identify workable solutions. The Eastern Corridor project is discussed every fourth



Monday of the month at the Hamilton County Transportation Improvement District monthly meetings for additional project information updates.

Additional Project Information: The Eastern Corridor Program is about addressing regional transportation problems that affect communities in both Hamilton County and Clermont County who deal with congestion, delays, inefficient travel patterns and safety during peak travel periods. Shifting traffic from the primarily 2-lane local roadway network to a modern SR 32 roadway with improved/controlled access and increased capacity is expected to result in reduced travel delays and travel times for local communities including Newtown and Mariemont, and the region. Urban sprawl (outer ring growth) was an important issue raised during the Eastern Corridor MIS and Tier 1 work. It was addressed by incorporating the Eastern Corridor Land Use Vision Plan and Green Infrastructure planning efforts into the project development process. The intent is for proposed transportation improvements to be consistent with and support local land use goals as identified through these community-based planning efforts. Tier 2 will continue under this context-sensitive framework where proposed transportation solutions are being designed to help support local communities based on input from affected communities.

#### **9. Accuracy of the Travel Demand Model**

*Question/Comment: There is concern about the accuracy of the Travel Demand Modeling (TDM) being conducted for the project. Traffic counts in the area indicate that traffic volumes have been decreasing in recent years.*

Response (OKI): Traffic volumes being developed for the Eastern Corridor are using the nationally-recognized Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana's Regional Travel Demand Model (TDM) that has been developed and refined over the past 40 years. The OKI TDM is the currently accepted tool used by ODOT and local jurisdictions in the eight-county OKI region for regional traffic analyses. It identifies current and future traffic volumes, identifies problem areas, and tests projected impacts of implementing proposed improvements to the regional system, such as new or widened roadways, additional transit service, etc. The TDM analyses for the Eastern Corridor project has also gone an additional step/refinement by incorporating information from the Eastern Corridor land use visioning effort develop with input from local Eastern Corridor communities.

Additional Project Information: For the Eastern Corridor TDM analysis, input into the model included traffic counts taken in 2011 and 2012 along key roadways in the Eastern Corridor. These volumes were then calibrated based on traffic trends from updated population and employment data entered into the model. Traffic data will continue to be updated as more detailed alignments are developed and evaluated. Additional traffic counts are being taken in early 2013 along key roadways in the SR 32 Relocation project area to continue to calibrate and fine tune the model as the project further develops in Tier 2.

#### **10. Decision-Making Process and Public Input**

*Question/Comment: Who is the decision-maker(s) and are how much is the public being listened to?*

Response (ODOT): The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is the final decision-maker for the project. Public input is an important consideration because the project team wants to address community concerns and develop solutions that support the local communities.

Additional Project Information: FHWA in cooperation with ODOT will issue a Tier 2 Record of Decision (ROD) upon completion of the SR 32 Relocation Tier 2 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that identifies a

Preferred Alternative. This decision will be made based on equal consideration of all feasible project alternatives, including the No Build alternative. Community input has and will continue to be an important element in the evaluation of alternatives and selection of a preferred alternative (including consideration of the No Build alternative), along with the ability to meet project purpose and need and fulfill regulatory agency requirements. Additional public involvement opportunities will be provided throughout all phases of project development.

### 11. Questions about Project Design

*Question/Comment (ODOT): What is the planned roadway speed limit and what will the elevation be in the floodplain and the bridge over the Little Miami River?*

Response (ODOT): The SR 32 Relocation is planned as a four-lane divided roadway with limited access and a speed limit of 45 miles-per-hour. Design details, including elevations in the floodplain and at the bridge crossing, have not yet been developed, but are part of the current phase of work for the project.

### 12. Scope of the Tier 2 Evaluation

*Question/Comment: Is it safe to assume that the Tier 2 studies take a deeper look at all the aspects of the project?*

Response (ODOT): The Tier 2 studies take an in-depth look at the preliminary corridors identified in Tier 1 for the relocation of SR 32. Through the course of these studies, recommendations will be made about which corridors should be eliminated from further consideration and which should be advanced for additional detailed study. Corridors recommended for advancement represent broad areas in which more detailed alignments for the roadway, rail transit line and bike and pedestrian paths will be developed. As part of the project development process, these corridors will undergo further analysis to determine options for minimizing negative impacts, and to eventually identify a preferred alternative.

Additional Project Information: Tier 1 of the Eastern Corridor focused on broad issues for the full Eastern Corridor program including identifying transportation needs, mode choice, general corridor locations, preliminary impacts, and land use implications of the transportation improvements being considered. A Tier 1 Record of Decision (ROD) issued in June 2006 identified multimodal projects to be further evaluated in Tier 2, including the SR 32 Relocation project. Tier 2 studies for the SR 32 Relocation are focusing on more detailed environmental impacts and evaluating alignment locations and configuration. After completion of the Tier 2 environmental impact statement (Tier 2 EIS), FHWA will issue a Tier 2 ROD for the SR 32 Relocation project that identifies a preferred alternative, including consideration of the No Build.

## COMMENT FORMS RECEIVED

To date, five Comment Forms have been received, including one form returned at the meeting and an additional four forms received after the meeting. The five Comment Forms are included in Appendix D. The key questions/comments noted on the forms include the following:

- How are voices from the public being considered?

ODOT/FHWA Response: Public input is an important consideration in helping the project team address community concerns, and will continue to be an important element in the evaluation of alternatives and selection of a preferred alternative, along with the ability to meet project purpose and need and fulfill regulatory agency requirements. Additional public involvement opportunities will be provided throughout all phases of project development.

- Opposition to a project corridor through the Mariemont South 80 due to various concerns including noise, bluff instability, National Landmark status, archaeological resources, proximity to residences, and recreational use of the area for biking, hiking and river access.

ODOT/FHWA Response: Tier 2 noise analyses, geotechnical studies, historic and archaeological investigations and other environmental and engineering studies currently underway will be used to develop an impact matrix to evaluate alternatives and ultimately to select a preferred alternative that avoids or minimizes to the extent possible the impacts to the South 80 area and other important resources along the project corridor. Information from the communities, the public and resource agencies will be considered in the alternatives evaluation.

- Explore alternatives elsewhere (outside of Mariemont), including further west closer to Otto Armleder Park and Red Bank, south of the Horseshoe Bend, or through Newtown.

ODOT/FHWA Response: The Eastern Corridor MIS completed in 2000 evaluated a variety of options for improving the transportation network and eliminated concepts that didn't address regional transportation problems, including a crossing at the Beechmont Levy (at Otto Armleder Park) and the widening of SR 32, amongst others. The MIS recommended plan established the need for a relocated SR 32 corridor with a new crossing of the Little Miami River in the Fairfax vicinity. The project team is currently examining a southern corridor just south of the Horseshoes Bend to avoid the Mariemont National Historic Landmark, and another option that follows the existing rail line within the Eastern Corridor study area. Additional information and analysis are needed to develop feasible alternatives, include consideration of the No-Build.

- Build rail transit only.

ODOT/FHWA Response: The previous Eastern Corridor work determined that the most effective solution for addressing transportation problems in the area needed to be multi-modal, and that no single mode or project could provide the needed capacity, connectivity and safety benefits for the region. The implementation strategy for the Eastern Corridor is that each of the multi-modal components (rail transit, roadway, bike, expanded bus) be constructed incrementally over time as funding becomes available, resulting in maximum benefit for the region.