



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

LeBlond Recreation Center · August 1, 2012

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Oasis Rail Transit Project

August 1, 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 on August 1, 2012, at the LeBlond Recreation Center in the City of Cincinnati's East End neighborhood. Approximately 50 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 ODOT District 8 Deputy Director Steve Mary, Hamilton County Commissioner Todd Portune, and Clermont County Transportation Improvement District Chair Larry Fronk.

Mr. Mary discussed the importance of the Eastern Corridor Program to the region and shared information about the first Eastern Corridor contract that was to be put out for bid the following day. This contract is related to the SR 32 Improvements, Eastgate Area project and more specifically, improvements being made to the I-275/SR 32 interchange. Mr. Mary also offered information about two other additional contracts that will be put out for bid for this project within the next several months.

Mr. Portune emphasized that through its focus on transportation solutions, the Eastern Corridor Program supports local and regional land use planning visions and offers significant community enhancement and economic development opportunities. He also discussed that the Program's planning process is at a point where some decisions have to be made particularly in terms of the Oasis rail alignment, the type of train to be used and number and location of initial rail stations. Public input is needed and wanted, and feedback received will be considered as part of the decision-making process. Mr. Portune also briefly discussed funding strategies for the Program, placing emphasis on partial financing through the recently approved federal Transportation Bill and on the use of Public Private Partnerships (P3s).

Mr. Fronk also underscored the importance of the Eastern Corridor Program and noted the breadth of support the Program has from governmental and regulatory agencies across the region. He noted that it is quite unique to have so many jurisdictions cooperating together to move in the same direction.

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; Mr. Michael Moore, Director of the Department of Transportation and Engineering for the City of Cincinnati; and Mr. Portune.

The following pages contain 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 comments are not recorded verbatim.

Q: Is there a current economic analysis for the Oasis project, specifically an economic review of the transit stations – the costs involved for their development and the best funding resources (such as Public Private Partnerships)? And, how will your studies translate into revenues?

A: An economic analysis is in progress. At this time, the planning team is focused on getting feedback from the public on how people want to use the Oasis Rail Transit line and the locations of initial stations to be built to support it. Input received will be used to confirm the initial operations plan and will be incorporated into a Business Case Assessment (BCA). The BCA will consider such factors as the proposed operation plan schedule, services to be offered, need for track improvements, number of stations and what they will look like, etc. Based on this information, we will then determine the costs involved in establishing, operating and maintaining the line. A financing plan will also be developed as part of this effort.

Q: Are there private companies in the United States that manage the process of building rail stations, managing them and filling them with tenants? Do you have examples of where this has worked?

A: Yes, there are a number of places in which this has taken place throughout the country, one in particular being in Los Angeles County, CA. The local transit agency there purchases and owns the land and works with developers to include a station and parking as part of any development created on the site. This public-private partnership approach works very well, resulting in an income stream to the agency to offset operational costs.

Q: Looking at the stations locations that have been proposed, there are only two places that appear to be good for the level of transit-oriented development you are discussing. Ancor and Newtown are good but the rest of the sites are either industrial locations or are locations that have already been built out. As you do your modeling, you really need to think about the expense of these stations in areas where there already is a lot of infrastructure and roads or where there is no land within walking distance to do the kind of development you're talking about. Have you reviewed potential site locations from a developer's standpoint?

A: You are right with many of your observations. The 10 locations being discussed rose out of the Tier 1 public involvement process. The station locations were largely based more on the community and not necessarily specific sites. The current Tier 2 study will bear down on the proposed station locations to determine if and to what extent they should be developed and where the greatest opportunities are. We don't know yet whether all 10 stations still make sense but preliminary Tier 2 studies suggest that some changes need to be made. That's why we need public input on this issue. With your feedback in hand, we can better determine specific station locations, how many there will be and what they will look like. Events like these meetings are part of getting that input and Station Area Planning workshops (to be held in upcoming months) will also be key to this process.

Q: In the East End area, the existing rail tracks run very close to swimming pools, yards, etc. Are there any federal or other regulations in place that protect these kinds of areas from noise and rail related disturbances?

A: Noise impacts are being taken into account as part of the environmental studies and documentation being completed as part of the current Tier 2 study. That said, the low-noise, low-emission diesel multiple-unit trains being considered for the Oasis line are not particularly loud. Noise generated from

passing trains may be comparable to that of the engine of a passing bus or truck. With some trains of this type, you can even maintain a conversation on a cell phone when standing next to the tracks as the train passes by. Also, there are opportunities to establish quiet zones in certain areas. Within quiet zones, additional safety measures are provided to reduce the ability for vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian traffic from crossing the tracks as a train passes. This improves safety around the tracks and can reduce the need to sound train whistles within the quiet zone, thus reducing some of the noise concerns. Ultimately, of course, the train operator maintains the right to sound the horn in the event of an emergency.

Q: In some places in the East End area, there are homes that have front doors practically on the tracks or less than 10 feet away. Is there a rule regarding distance required between residential property and a rail line in operation?

A: Not that we are aware of. But, this is an issue we would like to discuss with affected property owners and to talk about ideas on how to best manage this situation. It is important to keep in mind though that the trains being considered are low-noise, low-emission vehicles and are not like the big, loud, smelly diesel engines that you may have seen or experienced on some of the East Coast lines.

Q: I live in the Mt. Lookout area and own commercial property off Eastern Avenue near Beechmont. My family often plays in Armleder Park and at Lunken Playing Field, but there is no easy bike or walking access to these areas from Mt. Lookout. I'd like to suggest that the proposed Beechmont rail station also provide a bike/pedestrian connection that can help take advantage of these great assets.

A: Thank you for your comment. We will be sure to document your request.

Q: My experience along the Eastern Corridor has changed over the last ten years. I live in Mt. Lookout and like to go to the Reds games. If I go by car and park, it costs me \$25. I've tried taking taxis, but it costs me \$13 there and \$18 to return home. The riverfront has become too expensive to be citizen-friendly. We've lost the ability to get around to affordable entertainment without paying 50% of our costs in parking. If you can give me a train ride to the Reds games and other downtown venues for \$5, sign me up. This would provide a valuable alternative to driving and parking downtown. But why stop at the Boathouse?

A: Thank you for your comment. Although we don't know yet what the train fares will be, we anticipate that they will indeed be competitive. Your comment confirms what we already believe to be true – that there is significant interest in special event service (such as to Reds and Bengals games, festivals, concerts and other entertainment destinations). We haven't yet factored special event service into the projected ridership. Also, no final decisions have been made with respect to how many stations there will be or their specific locations. We are currently looking at all 10 rail stations proposed in the Tier 1 EIS – including the Boathouse station – to determine which of them are still needed or still make sense to build at this time. A station was originally proposed at the Boathouse location because that site is where the existing tracks currently end. As part of this project though, we will be constructing a new, one-mile segment of tracks that will extend the rail line from the Boathouse to the Riverfront Transit Center, which is located under Second Street between Great American Ball Park and Paul Brown Stadium.

Q: I live downtown. Parking downtown is an issue. I'm interested in the ability to take a train from downtown out to the suburbs – that's a great opportunity for our community and you guys are doing a good job.

A: Thank you for your comment.

Q: How many people here [at the meeting] live within 100 feet of the existing train track? [Multiple people raised their hands.] It is going to be a serious problem with this train going by my house several times a day. It took me 40 years to move down here from suburbs and it's been nothing but disappointments. The benefits of the train for those who might want to go a game sometimes need to be weighed against the costs of reduced property values for those who own property near the line.

A: Thank you for your comment. We will be sure to document your request.

Q: Will there be any measures implemented at the stations and on the trains to ensure the security of users as well as nearby properties? Also, will there be any need to relocate property owners?

A: Yes. There will be security at the stations and on the trains. Security measures on the trains will meet with federal safety standards and will include live video security cameras in the cars. There will also be operator-contact buttons which can be used to speak with the train operator in case of an emergency. The level of security at the stations will vary depending on the community in which the station is located and the associated security needs.

As to the need for relocating property owners, one of the advantages of this line is that there does not appear at this time to be any need to relocate tracks and therefore property owners.

Q: The East End used to be the second busiest rail corridor in Cincinnati, second only to Queensgate. We had a roundhouse at the end of Walworth Avenue behind the Precinct that would handle anywhere from 15 to 18 engines a day and 25 to 30 rail shipments through this area. It was an east-west and even north-south connector through the Wooster Pike area. It was part of life down here that you had eight to 10 trains going by per day. We were a railroad community. We have historical trains stops that still exist on Riverside Drive but people forget that that this was a steamboat, horse, carriage, buggy and railroad community. So although we have to look at other methods of transportation other than cars, it's not always going to be right.

A: Thank you for your time.

Q: I want to know how you will prioritize the four different components of the Eastern Corridor Program.

A: The Eastern Corridor Program is a multi-modal program comprised of four core projects. Each of these projects has independent utility which means they are useful on their own, although they will be most effective once all are completed and operating together. Construction timing for each project will depend on when a preferred alternative is identified for each individual project and when the associated environmental documentation is completed and approved. It will also depend on cost and when the necessary funding is secured. Funding availability will ultimately determine priority.

Q: Didn't they start on this project back in January 1959?

A: Discussions about transportation needs in the Eastern Corridor started in the 1960s. Initial discussions focused on transitioning US 50 to a divided highway as it traveled east. However, construction of the Appalachian Highway addressed that need. Multiple options were discussed in the subsequent decades, although nothing was decided and the needs were getting stronger. An Eastern Corridor Major Investment Study was completed in 2002. That study asked Eastern Corridor communities: "how do you want the Eastern Corridor region to look like in 20 years?" Answers to that question formed the foundation of the current, multi-modal Eastern Corridor transportation program. With the completion and adoption of the Eastern Corridor Land Use Vision Plan (completed in 2002) and a Green Infrastructure Master Plan (completed in 2005), land use visioning and regional economic development goals were incorporated into the Eastern Corridor plan. Then, in 2006, the Tier 1 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) identified a series of transportation improvements to be made as part of the Eastern Corridor Program and preliminary options to be advanced for further study. We are now completing the Tier 2 study in which the Tier 1 recommendations are being examined and evaluated in much more detail and preliminary alternatives will be narrowed and refined. The Tier 2 study will conclude with the identification of preferred alternatives for the four core Eastern Corridor projects. Next steps will be securing the funding needed to undergo detailed design and construction.

Q: At one point, it was suggested that Amtrak take over the rail lines you want to use for Oasis but Amtrak didn't want them. If the tracks wouldn't work for Amtrak, why would you think it would work for Oasis?

A: Amtrak provides an intercity rail service on a number of routes throughout the country. Their service and needs are very different from those of a regional rail line. The configuration of the existing rail tracks within the Oasis rail corridor works very well for regional rail and we are very excited about the opportunity we have here.

Q: I'm totally in favor of this but worried about the percentage of people who would use the Oasis rail line versus those who would just stay in their cars. I think we need more trains per day to increase usage.

A: The conceptual train schedule that was shown at the meeting tonight – weekday, commuter service – is a baseline from which we can start. We can add service depending on community preferences, demand, and the availability of operational funding to provide an expanded service, if desired. This is why your feedback is so critical – depending on what the community wants, the line's service can be expanded to include more daytime service, evening and weekend service, special event service and/or reverse commute service. More trains would be added as needed to accommodate the chosen services.

Also, it is important to keep in mind that the Oasis line is just one part of an overall regional rail plan that would connect communities in Hamilton, Clermont, Butler, Warren counties, as well as Northern Kentucky and portions of southeast Indiana. Potential alignments exist along I-75 and Lawrenceburg, I-71 and Martin Luther King, Eastgate to Xavier to I-71, the Airport and Kings Island. This rail program is actually much bigger than just the Oasis line. However, because most of the Right of Way needed for the Oasis line is already owned by the Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority (SORTA), it is the logical place to start. More lines will be added that will increase the utility and value of the Oasis line as part of a regional rail network.

Q: What is the cost difference that would make a reverse commute concept work, and, what would you have to do to provide more services beyond a commuter-based service?

A: We will have to do further analysis to see if there is more interest in additional services, how it would work, what the associated costs would be and how we can obtain the necessary funding.

Q: I think it would be a good incentive to offer a leisure time train.

A: Cincinnati has rail history. We have to let people see the utility of a train and let people see the starting point. Then we can expand services based on demand and the availability of funding.