

Chicago Transit Authority Orange Line Alternatives Analysis Study

Screen 2 Public Involvement Responses to Public Comments and Questions

July 10, 2009

Written questions and comments regarding the Orange Line Alternatives Analysis Study were submitted by a variety of individuals and groups from throughout the Chicago region at the study's Screen 2 Public Meeting held on April 22, 2009 at Richard J. Daley College in Chicago. In addition, public comments and questions on Screen 2 were submitted directly to the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) via e-mail and postal mail through May 13, 2009.

All of the questions and comments have been collected and compiled to provide a comprehensive review of the issues raised along with CTA's responses. Every question, comment, and suggestion submitted during the public comment period has been compiled in the "Outreach Comment Database" (see separate document). Each question has been recorded verbatim and assigned a number that corresponds with the answers provided in this document, ensuring every question or comment submitted has been reviewed and answered or acknowledged. Collectively, the public comments and preferences will be considered in the evaluation of alternatives and concepts introduced through the public involvement process and may be evaluated and/or reflected in advancing alternatives as appropriate.

Many of the comments received were very similar in nature. As a result, similar comments and their responses have been grouped by topic and "General Comment" headings below to avoid duplicative responses. Questions or comments requiring individual or specific responses are also included below along with unique responses. In order to understand some terms used in the Comments and Responses, it may be necessary to review the original presentation materials which are posted on CTA's website www.transitchicago.com.

The list below shows the index of topics covered in the report, along with the number of comments received for each. Most of the comments received were regarding potential impacts of the extension to businesses and the surrounding area, alternatives analyzed, and station locations. A number of comments were in general support of the extension. Because comments often refer to more than one topic, the numbers associated with each do not equal the total number of comments received.

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1. Relationship of Orange Line Extension to Other Proposed Transit Projects

General Comment:

What other extensions are being proposed in addition to the Orange Line project?

Pertains to specific comments:

38, 20

Response to Overall Category Comment:

Every five to six years, the United States Congress enacts legislation that authorizes federal funding for highway, transit, motor carrier, safety, and research programs across the country. This federal support represents the primary source of capital funding for CTA and other transit agencies throughout the U.S. The current legislation, known as SAFETEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users), authorizes the federal transit and highway programs through 2009. SAFETEA-LU was enacted into law on August 10, 2005.

The SAFETEA-LU legislation authorized CTA to seek federal New Starts grant support for four new rail lines or line extensions including: the Red Line Extension to 130th Street; the Orange Line Extension to Ford City; the Yellow Line Extension to Old Orchard; and the Circle Line. In order to qualify for New Starts funding, CTA is required to perform comprehensive Alternatives Analysis studies for each. Alternatives Analysis studies for all four projects are currently underway following the same federally mandated process as the Orange Line Extension study, but addressing the unique transportation needs of their respective study areas.

CTA is preparing all of the New Starts projects to be advanced simultaneously from Alternatives Analysis with the selection of Locally Preferred Alternatives in each study area by Fall 2009.

Other Specific Comment Noted on this Topic:

Comment:

20: How would this project work with a possible mid-city transit way (Cicero-Belt Railway) routing currently under study by the CTA?

Response:

The proposed Mid-City Transitway is included in the 2030 Regional Transportation Plan and has been previously studied by the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) as a corridor for transit or freight investment. The proposed Mid-City Transitway would extend from the CTA Jefferson Park Blue Line station to the Midway station on the Orange Line via Union Pacific Railroad and then the Belt Railway of Chicago freight railroad right-of-way located east of Cicero Avenue. If a compatible rail alternative was selected for this corridor, the Mid-City Transitway would merge with the CTA Orange Line tracks just north of the Midway station. The Mid-City Transitway would use the Orange Line Rail Extension tracks extending south from the Midway station. As the Orange Line Rail Extension turns southwest toward Cicero Avenue, the Mid-City Transitway would turn southeast along the Belt Railway of Chicago freight railroad right-of-way toward a connection with the Dan Ryan branch of the CTA Red Line.

2. Future Extension of Orange Line

General Comment:

Has CTA evaluated the possibility of extending the Orange Line beyond Ford City Mall as a future project?

Pertains to specific comments:

16, 35, 42

Response to Overall Category Comment:

The current adopted regional long-range transportation plan and the Orange Line extension study area boundary do not call for an extension beyond Ford City; however, during the subsequent design phases for the Orange Line extension to the vicinity of the Ford City Mall, consideration will be given to potential future extension of the Orange Line so that the design does not preclude that option. Public and stakeholder input have included interest in future extensions of the Orange Line.

3. Evaluation Criteria Used in the Alternatives Analysis Study

Specific Comment Noted on this Topic:

What is the methodology to determine ridership, capital, and operations costs of various alternatives?

Pertains to specific comment:

21

Response:

Ridership estimates are prepared using a computerized travel demand forecasting model that is derived from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) regional travel demand forecasting model that has been refined for use in the Alternatives Analysis study. The travel forecasting model uses population and employment forecasts to estimate future trip making. Based on characteristics of the available highway and transit modes serving those trips, such as travel time and cost, the model estimates how many of those trips use those available transit and highway modes.

Conceptual capital costs are based on unit cost pricing for each alternative. Typical unit prices appropriate to the Chicago area for the types of work expected are based on previous CTA construction cost experience. The major types of work included in the conceptual capital cost estimates include guideway and track elements, station and stop facilities, vehicle storage yard and maintenance facilities, site work and special conditions, systems (signaling, communications, power supply, etc.), right-of-way acquisition, and vehicles. Soft costs, such as the cost of design, construction management, and agency costs are included as add-on percentages of hard costs. Contingency factors, appropriate for the level of alternative definition and engineering at this project phase, were also developed and applied.

The existing CTA operating and maintenance cost (O&M) model was used to estimate the annual cost of operations and maintenance. Inputs to the O&M cost model include the physical dimensions and levels of service developed in the conceptual designs and preliminary operating plans for the alternatives. This includes inputs such as the number of peak period trains and buses needed, the vehicle miles and hours, the number of stations and stops, track miles, bus terminals, fare collection equipment, and facilities (storage yards, maintenance shops).

4. Alternatives Analyzed

General Comment:

Describe the alternatives. Will there be parking at the Ford City Mall or at other locations along the line?

Pertains to specific comments:

11, 22, 31

Response to Overall Category Comment:

CTA evaluated four alternatives in the Orange Line Extension Alternatives Analysis Screen 2, including the No-Build Alternative, a Transportation System Management (TSM) / Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Alternative, and two heavy rail alternatives terminating on Cicero Avenue or Kostner Avenue, respectively.

The No-Build Alternative considers the system if no changes are made to transit services in the study area between today and the forecasted year of evaluation, 2030. Existing transit service in the study area includes 18 CTA routes and 8 Pace routes serving the study area, offering north-south travel through the study area on Cicero Avenue and Pulaski Road and east-west routes on 63rd Street and 79th Street. The Midway terminal station includes a parking facility with 327 spaces.

Additionally, CTA combined two alternatives from Screen 1, the TSM – or low-cost option – and BRT for evaluation in Screen 2. The TSM/BRT Alternative is an enhanced bus route from the Midway station to the Ford City Mall, operating in mixed-traffic on Cicero Avenue. In Screen 1, alternate routings for the BRT alternative were evaluated – including on the Belt Railway of Chicago right-of-way; however the Cicero Avenue alternative was advanced for the proposed BRT routing due to improved cost effectiveness over other corridors. This alternative does not propose to use exclusive lanes; however, implementation of transit signal priority at signalized intersections – to increase bus speeds by extending the green light cycle at traffic signals when needed – is proposed along the Cicero Avenue portion of the route. A fleet of enhanced 60-foot hybrid articulated buses are proposed for this 2.3 mile route. Additionally, an improved bus terminal and 750-space park-and-ride facility is proposed at the terminal station in the vicinity of Ford City Mall.

Two rail alternatives were also evaluated in Screen 2. Both of these alternatives would have similar northern segments operating between 59th Street (the existing CTA Orange Line Midway station) and Marquette Road, adjacent to the existing Belt Railway of Chicago freight tracks using excess right-of-way. These alternatives would operate below grade at 59th Street and 63rd Street and elevated over Marquette Road (avoiding at-grade street crossings). South of Marquette Road, the Cicero Avenue alternative would veer southwest over the Belt Railway of Chicago Clearing Yard to 4800 West (Cicero Avenue) and travel south over, or adjacent to, Cicero Avenue to approximately 76th Street. Alternately, the second rail alternative - Kostner Avenue – would veer east from the northern Belt Railway of Chicago right-of-way to approximately 4400 West (Kostner Avenue) and then south over the Belt Railway of Chicago Clearing Yard to terminate over Kostner Avenue at approximately 76th Street. Both rail alternatives are approximately 2.2 route miles do not have intermediate stations planned. (See topic category 5 for more details about proposed station locations.) For each alternative, a proposed bus terminal and 750-space park-and-ride facility is proposed at the new terminal station.

Note that for the purposes of evaluating alternatives in Screen 2, terminal facility and park-and-ride assumptions used for the preparation of capital and operating costs are provided above; however, the proposed size of the bus terminal and amount of parking in the adopted locally preferred alternative will be determined based upon refined forecasts of bus and auto access to the new Orange Line terminal station. The next step in the New Starts process, Preliminary Engineering and Draft Environment Impact Statement preparation, will identify the specific location and size of facilities needed. The CTA will coordinate with all potentially affected landowners and continue its public involvement during these studies.

Other Specific Comments Noted on this Topic:

Comment:

17: How can you add more cars to trains when you are already running 8 car trains? 8 cars is the maximum length.

Response:

For the proposed Orange Line Rail Extension, CTA anticipates maintaining its existing frequency of service and use of 8-car trains during peak periods and at other times of the day. With the Orange Line becoming nearly two miles longer with the extension, 16 additional rail cars (and four spare rail cars) will be needed to form two additional 8-car trains. If needed, greater capacity can be provided by increasing the frequency of service for the Orange Line.

Comment:

25: ... Please keep the alignment on the east side of Cicero Ave.

Response:

The location of the final alignment for the Cicero Avenue segment will be identified during the next step in the New Starts process, Preliminary Engineering and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement preparation. The CTA will coordinate with all potentially affected landowners and continue its public involvement during these studies.

Comment:

32: How high is the elevated line over the Belt Rail yard? We are already expected to lose southern exposure due to the Lee Pasteur Harley new school.

Response:

A minimum of 23-feet vertical clearance is required above the freight railroad tracks. The Orange Line Rail Extension via the BRC and Cicero Avenue will be located immediately east and to the south of the Lee Pasteur Hurley Elementary School.

Comment:

42: Let me suggest the center lane light rail model being operated in communities like Portland. Very attractive and well patronized.

Response:

During Screen 1, eleven transit technologies, including light rail transit and streetcars, were evaluated applying a series of screening factors including vehicle operating speeds, station spacing requirements, capacity, reliability, and daily use in revenue transit operations. Preliminary findings for Screen 1 identified two technologies to advance to more detailed evaluation – Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Heavy Rail Transit (HRT), the existing type of Orange Line technology – to be carried forward. The other nine technologies were deemed not as well suited to this study area due to factors like the

operating speed and other compatibility issues. The primary disadvantage of light rail for the Orange Line extension is the requirement to transfer at Midway station for trips continuing to the Loop.

Comments:

43: Will there be any direct pedestrian connections to the Bedford Park side of Cicero Avenue...

49: ...Also, the Village of Bedford Park highly recommends a pedestrian bridge over Cicero Avenue from the site of the proposed station...

Response:

The location of the final alignment for the Cicero Avenue segment will be identified during the next steps in the New Starts process, Preliminary Engineering and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement preparation. Providing safe and convenient pedestrian access to the proposed terminal station in the vicinity of the Ford City Mall is an important consideration. This would include pedestrian accessibility from the both sides of Cicero Avenue. The CTA will coordinate with all potentially affected landowners and continue its public involvement during these studies.

5. Proposed Orange Line Stations

General Comment:

Will there be station locations between Midway station and Ford City Mall?

Pertains to specific comments:

16, 26, 27, 28, 34, 41, 43, 44

Response to Overall Category Comment:

The preliminary recommendation is to have no intermediate stops between Midway station and the Ford City Mall. Potential intermediate HRT stations at 63rd Street and Marquette Road were considered, but not recommended. Construction of a station at 63rd Street does not meet the desired HRT station spacing of one-mile and surrounding land use is of a lower density single-family home residential, which is not projected to generate sufficient ridership to offset the cost of the station. Provision can be made for a future station at this location for an additional construction cost of \$6 million (exclusive of the station costs and contingencies) due to retaining wall requirements for additional length and width of the cut under 63rd Street to accommodate a station. Similarly, at Marquette Road, there is lower density development, including a rail yard to the south and no CTA bus service along Marquette Road at Cicero Avenue. A station stop at Marquette Road would have appropriate station spacing and provision can be made for future construction at modest increased construction costs due to elevated structure requirements and the curve that transitions the alignment towards Cicero Avenue; however, due to the adjacent lower density land uses and additional construction costs, a station is not recommended there at this time. CTA did not evaluate potential station locations at 71st or 72nd Street, due to the close proximity to the proposed terminal location at 76th Street.

General Comment:

Where will the station at Ford City Mall be located?

Pertains to specific comments:

41, 43

Response to Overall Category Comment:

The specific location for the station in the vicinity of the Ford City Mall will be identified during the next steps in the New Starts process, Preliminary Engineering and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement preparation. The CTA will coordinate with all potentially affected landowners and continue its public involvement during these studies.

6. Alternatives Analysis Public Involvement Process and Format

General Comment:

How can I get a copy of the presentation materials?

Pertains to specific comments:

13, 14, 48

Response to Overall Category Comment:

Copies of the presentation and meeting boards displayed at the public meetings are available on CTA's website: www.chicagotransit.com. Also available are materials from previous meetings, a listing of all comments and questions received along with CTA's response to those questions. Presentation and meeting materials are also available in hard copy by written request to Darud Akbar, CTA Government and Community Relations, PO Box 7567, Chicago, IL 60657-7567 or at dakbar@transitchicago.com.

7. Funding for Orange Line Construction and Operations

General Comment:

How will the extension of the Orange Line be funded?

Pertains to specific comment:

36, 25

Response to Overall Category Comment:

Two types of funding are needed for the extension – operating funds and capital funds.

CTA's operating budget supports day-to-day service delivery on its bus and rail system and determines the frequency and hours of service offered. Half of CTA's operating budget comes from customer fares and revenue generated from advertising, concessions and other sources. The other half comes from regional sales taxes, real estate transfer taxes, and matching funds from the State of Illinois. Once the Orange Line Extension is built and operational, funds to operate the system will be consistent with funding mechanisms that support CTA's other bus and rail transit services.

Meanwhile, CTA has initiated this Alternatives Analysis study for the Orange Line Extension as a first step towards obtaining capital funding for the project through the Federal Transit Administration's "New Starts" grant program.¹ This program provides funding for major public transit infrastructure projects throughout the U.S. through a highly competitive process. These are discretionary funds that are only available for system expansions and do not compete with federal funds that CTA receives for capital maintenance (or state of good repair) needs.

Upon successfully advancing through Alternatives Analysis, Environmental Impact Statement, Preliminary Engineering, and Final Design, a project will be qualified to receive a "Full Funding Grant Agreement" (FFGA) from the U.S. Government. The FFGA can cover up to 80 percent of a project's capital cost, although typically project sponsors request 50 percent to increase the competitiveness of their projects. Other non-federal funds (in Illinois, these have traditionally been state funds) will comprise the remainder of capital funding. It is possible to seek alternative sources of federal and non-federal funding for the project, but the federal New Starts grant program is specifically intended to support transit projects of this nature and is the public funding mechanism generally most capable of doing so.

CTA is simultaneously pursuing solutions to its overall operating and capital funding challenges while also positioning itself (through Alternatives Analysis studies such as this one) to secure capital funding to meet the region's future transit infrastructure needs. For example, many of today's key transit links—including the Blue Line to O'Hare and the Orange Line to Midway—were made possible by past generations who understood the need to invest in transit's future even as they addressed significant day-to-day financial pressures.

¹ CTA is also conducting concurrent Alternatives Analysis studies for other candidate New Starts expansion projects that have been authorized by the U.S. Congress—including extending the Yellow Line to Old Orchard, extending the Red Line south from 95th Street, and the constructing the Circle Line.
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Other Specific Comments on this Topic:

Comment:

37: How much did the construction of the entire orange line cost initially?

Response:

The existing Orange Line – including 9.2 route miles and seven stations from Halsted to Midway Airport station – opened in October 1993 at a cost of \$406.2 million, excluding the cost of additional rail cars purchased for the extension. For purposes of comparison to the proposed extension, it is important to note that construction costs, as measured by the Engineering News Record Construction Cost Index for Chicago, have increased by approximately 97% from 1993 to 2009. This suggests the Orange Line would cost more than \$800 million if built today. Moreover, the cost estimate for the extension includes a projection of future inflation in construction costs between 2009 and a projected opening year of 2015. If the original Orange Line costs are adjusted for this anticipated inflation, a comparable cost is more than \$930 million, again excluding the cost of vehicles, which is included in the Orange Line extension cost estimate.

8. Potential Orange Line Impacts on Existing CTA Services

General Comment:

How will the extension impact existing CTA Orange Line rail and bus services? Would travel times be reduced?

Pertains to specific comment:

12, 40

Response to Overall Category Comment:

The proposed extension is planned to operate at the same frequency as existing CTA Orange Line service.

It is anticipated that the structure of existing bus routes in the study area will be modified to complement new high-capacity transit service. Restructuring bus services can allow for reduced travel times as well as alleviate roadway congestion. For the proposed rail alternatives, the number of bus routes feeding into the Orange Line Midway Airport station may change.

For the proposed rail alternatives, it is anticipated that CTA Route 67 (67th/69th/71st) would be re-routed to serve the new Ford City terminal station. In addition, Pace Route 379 (W. 79th Street), Pace Route 382 (Central/Clearing), Pace Route 383 (S. Cicero), Pace Route 384 (Narragansett/ Ridgeland), Pace Route 385 (87th/111th/127th), and Pace Route 390 (Midway CTA Station-UPS) would all be re-routed from the Midway station to the new Ford City terminal station. Changes to bus services will be subject to public input and will be implemented after construction.

Specific Comments on this Topic:

Comment:

33: Orange Line and loop el are already very congested on existing track. What plans are in place to handle the additional projected 3 million new riders that will be added due to this extension?

Response:

The Chicago Transit Board has adopted loading standards for bus and rail services operated by CTA. According to these guidelines, service on all rail and bus lines is monitored to ensure that loading standards do not exceed vehicle capacity. Customer demand in relationship to these standards drives service frequency and vehicle assignments, meaning that additional passengers require more frequent service or more available space on-board vehicles. To accommodate the proposed Orange Line Rail Extension new riders, it is anticipated that an additional 16 rail cars (plus four spare rail cars) in the form of two 8-car trains will be added to the rail car fleet for the Orange Line service. The cost for these new rail cars is included in the capital and operating and maintenance cost estimates for this project. Additionally, passenger volumes on the new extension would be monitored to ensure that the Orange Line does not exceed the board-adopted Service Standards. If passenger loads did exceed the Service Standards, train frequency would be adjusted (subject to available funding) based on actual passenger demand.

9. Potential Orange Line Economic and Environmental Impacts

General Comment:

What will be the economic and environmental impacts of the Orange Line Extension?

Pertains to Specific Comments:

1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 24, 29, 30, 32

Response:

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will analyze in detail the social, economic, and environmental consequences and benefits of the proposed Orange Line Extension. The environmental review process required by the *National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA)* and related laws include environmental impact analyses and the preparation of documentation for public review. Per Federal Transit Administration (FTA) guidance, the environmental evaluation begins upon completion of the Alternatives Analysis study, and it will result in a detailed written statement on the anticipated environmental impacts of the Orange Line Extension improvements and the steps that will be taken to address impacts to the community and the natural environment.

Typically, environmental reviews for proposed transit projects address the potential impact areas of air and water quality, noise and vibration, historic and cultural properties, parklands, contaminated lands, displacement of residences and businesses, and community preservation. During the federal environmental review process, the CTA will work concurrently with state and other local agencies to also comply with state and local environmental laws. The environmental review process includes opportunities for public review and comment.

See specific comment sections below for more details on particular impacts.

Other Specific Comments on Private Property Impacts:

Comments:

2, 29, 30

Response:

The private property impacts will be determined as part of the EIS. CTA has not determined at this point of the study process how much private property, if any, would need to be acquired in order to construct and operate the selected alternative. Public acquisition of private property is governed by federal and local laws. In accordance with these laws, affected property owners would be compensated for their properties based on fair market values and can be provided relocation costs. Acquisition of residential property is not anticipated.

Other Specific Comments on Business Impacts:

Comments:

1, 6, 7, 8, 9, 24

Response:

As described above, an EIS will be prepared as part of the next steps in the New Starts process. The EIS will identify and evaluate potential impacts to businesses, as well as related traffic impacts. It should also be noted that for commercial properties, transit proximity potentially broadens the customer base, increases foot traffic near the business, and contributes to employee accessibility. In some cases, transit may have negative impacts due to what often are called "nuisance" effects – noise, increased foot traffic, visible infrastructure, transit-associated parking facilities, and increased bus traffic. Such nuisance effects most often occur in areas where value is attributable to the remoteness of the location.

It is also recognized that access to businesses during construction activities could be temporarily affected. A maintenance of traffic (MOT) plan will be developed by the contractor prior to construction that will address the temporary effects on access to businesses during construction. For previous construction projects, the CTA has used mitigation measures such as a public information campaign to reassure people that the businesses are open during construction and to encourage their continued patronage, maintaining access to businesses during construction, the continued coordination with business owners of construction activities and schedules, providing signing, lighting, and other information to indicate businesses are open, and to the extent practicable, coordinating the timing of any temporary facility closures to minimize impacts on business activities, especially those related to seasonal or high sales periods.

Other Specific Comments on Traffic and Congestion:

Comments:

4, 8, 10

Response:

The Orange Line Extension project's purpose and need is to improve transportation access in the study area and to provide an alternative to traffic congestion due to expected growth in study area population and employment. As part of the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement, the traffic and parking impacts of the proposed transit improvements – at key intersections, at proposed terminal locations, and throughout and beyond the study area – will be evaluated in more detail. CTA coordinates with the Illinois Department of Transportation and local municipalities when evaluating traffic issues. Maintaining traffic flow and related efficiencies is a major consideration in CTA's planning of this extension.

Other Specific Comments on Safety:

Comment:

5

Response:

Safety and security are a top priority at the CTA. The CTA works with the City of Chicago and other municipalities served by CTA to provide plain-clothed and uniformed patrols of system property, in addition to hired private security guards. Similar safety measures will be implemented as part of the extension. Proposed stations and new rail cars being purchased by CTA will be equipped with video cameras.

10. Statements of Support or Opposition of the Extension

General Comment:

General comments in support of the Orange Line extension were received. There were no comments received in opposition to the project.

Pertains to Specific Comments:

16, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 45, 46, 47, 49, 50

Response to Overall Category Comment:

These comments do not ask a question or refer to a specific issue, but rather voice general support of the project which have been noted. Thank you for your feedback.

11. General Customer Service Questions/Compliments/Complaints

General Comment:

General comments related to CTA and/or CTA service.

Pertains to specific comments:

39, 45, 47

Response to Overall Category Comments:

CTA Customer Service representatives were in attendance at the public meetings for the Orange Line Extension and were available to answer specific questions on existing CTA services and to take suggestions for improvements to those services. Several questions submitted to the Orange Line Extension study team also covered these topics, which are outside the purview of the study itself. The study team notes these questions and comments for the record and has referred them to the CTA Customer Service Department for an independent response and filing through CTA's Customer Service procedures.

12. Other

General Comment:

This section includes general comments and viewpoints that can be characterized as public input into the study process.

Pertains to Specific Comments:

3, 15

Response to Overall Category Comment:

These comments do not ask a question or refer to a specific issue, but rather point out general views on the subject, which have been noted. Thank you for your feedback.