

# Harlem Avenue Underpass Project

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## GROUP MEMORY NOTES

Harlem Avenue Underpass Project

Steering Committee Meeting No. 1

September 30, 2009

Below is a transcript of the flip chart notes recorded during the first Steering Committee meeting on September 30<sup>th</sup> in River Forest, Illinois. No editing has been done except for basic grammar or spelling corrections. Supplemental text has been added for clarification and appears in brackets.

The blue text indicates a question or comment and the green text identifies any response that was given.

### DISCUSSION

**All of Harlem Avenue from Irving Park to the Eisenhower is a bottleneck, not just the bridge location. Buses cause the problem. The slide was misleading.**

**The SRA identified lots of locations for improvements. For this project, however, the focus will be the bridge and the surrounding area. Any improvements will be done without acquisition. There is extremely limited ability to widen the right-of-way.**

**Will there be street closures? Do you anticipate permanently changing a one way to a two way or vice versa?**

**Future engineering studies will help to calculate both quantitative and qualitative data.**

**If we can't add lanes, what can be done?**

**"We can't build our way out of congestion"**

**Any thought of CTA abandoning the Harlem Avenue location and moving to the multimodal center?**

**This has been mentioned, but is a problem because of the substation. There are also issues with the abutment.**

Can the CTA relocate its' main entrance to allow for more space?

The CTA entrance is located on the west side of Harlem Avenue. Ideally any expansion with involve the eastern abutment. Usage and structural reasons limit alterations to the west abutment.

Is there anything wrong with the bridge today?

No. The bridge is structurally sound. It is being widened for potential lanes, sidewalks, etc. Narrow lanes act as a visual barrier.

The project will include the bridge plus structural features.

Have other bridge designs been looked at (i.e., Lewis and Clark type), etc.?

Yes. Various bridge designs were investigated but due to horizontal clearance issues at track level and vertical clearance issues at street level, the only practical design is a through-girder bridge.

Do we have to maintain the existing rail elevations and station locations?

Yes.

How low would the elevation of Harlem Ave need to be? There are old tracks beneath the surface.

The minimum vertical clearance is 14'-9".

Has anyone actually measured the height?

We have survey data on the bridge and roadway and will be checking the existing clearance.

Is it feasible to use taller beams on each end?

This would require taller floor beam as well which would require lowering Harlem Avenue even further.

Existing pier locations are no longer up to standards, so replacement would mean removal or a change in location.

Why do we need to maintain the existing rail elevations and station locations?

The existing rails cannot be raised mainly because trains do not do well with hills. We will look into lowering the street for trucks as opposed to raising the bridge. The current height of the bridge is 14'0"

The bottleneck is the minor issue caused partially by buses and narrow lanes.

Will you provide alternative space for a bus stop and/or a bus lane? The bottleneck is caused by transit stations and stops.

This sort of thing is part of what we'll be studying.

PACE routes run on the west side of Harlem Avenue.

CTA bus routes circle around the project site.

The project area goes beyond just Harlem Avenue to include streets, sidewalks, etc.

South Boulevard will definitely feel the impacts of any road widening.

The current bus shelter is not pedestrian friendly.

Pedestrian traffic due to transit must cross Harlem Avenue which slows vehicular traffic.

What about creating a central side stairway to the EL to reduce the need to cross Harlem?

Have you considered a pedway or skyway to allow entrance into the western CTA station and then cross over to the trains. It could include retail space to draw people in.

Any major structural additions must be ADA accessible.

Consideration of the CTA station moving is beyond the scope of this project.

We should look into the South Boulevard alignment.

The CTA building holds more than just a station.

Any large structural changes must be ADA compliant.

We must think long-term. Movement towards transit based movement will be cheaper to do today than tomorrow.

Will there be complete closure of Harlem Avenue at any point during construction?

Since Harlem Avenue is a major arterial in the area, full closure is not likely. There are ways to construct bridges under traffic . One is called roll-in construction.

What are the current traffic counts?

This data has been collected and will be presented in a traffic report.

How long will the construction phase last?

Full construction is expected to take approximately two years. There are periods of time when work will be on hold such as in the winter when you can't work on the rails due to how they respond. We do not expect to ever close 100% of Harlem.

What is the most frustrating part of this process for you?

IDOT's objectives do not always line up with business owners objectives.

It is not only regulated by IDOT, but also FHWA who have stricter contextual standards.

Replace the bridge vs. solving the problem.

What positive aspects do you see with this method?

Proactive approach.

Do you [the steering committee] have any concerns about the project?

Negative impacts on retail spaces during construction.

Safety issues with regards to the facades.

Overall aesthetics of the area. It is unsightly for all three communities.

This area acts as a gateway. And we must think long term.

Would only the sidewalk on Harlem be improved? What about east-west sidewalks?

The project area is not just Harlem Avenue, it's the whole area.

Development at South Blvd. and Harlem could be affected

East-west pedestrian traffic for CTA is an issue

The bus stops are not good for pedestrians. Have we thought about how to keep people from having to cross Harlem Ave.?

Studying pedestrian flow through the project area will be part of this project.

Does the western abutment need to stay in place?

Keeping it in place would alleviate a lot of problems

At the public Kickoff Meeting, there was a discussion about re-routing Circle Drive and moving the CTA facility to the east. Is this still being considered?

Relocating Circle Drive is not part of the project. The cost of moving the CTA building and electrical substation makes this option beyond the scope of the project.

IDOT will be resurfacing Harlem Avenue in 2013. This is an opportunity to stress IDOT to do more than just resurface.

The tracks (UPRR) move 30-40K people per day. Impacts will go beyond just the project area and onto suburban and Chicago traffic.

Will there lighting under the bridge?

This is the village's responsibility.

Who is responsible for the bridge aesthetics?

Union Pacific is responsible for maintenance. Fascia beams – which are installed to absorb the shock and damage from any collisions with trucks – can have a wide variety of aesthetic treatments.

Who is responsible for the problems such as falling concrete?

Union Pacific Railroad.

Can CTA do a better job of cleaning the station at Harlem?

CTA will take a look at the situation.

CTA comments: echoing those of UP regarding high levels of ridership on the rail lines.

What is CTA's stance on closing the station at Harlem?

It's difficult to envision this happening.

What about just closing the pedestrian entrance?

This can be explored.

**ACTION ITEMS**

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**Provide a vocabulary list of engineering terms.**

**Provide sketches of the ideas we're discussing.**

**Provide traffic data to the Steering Committee.**

**Distribute a contact list that includes emails.**

**Provide a map of all transit routes and stops including any available data such as ridership levels.**