

Harlem Avenue Underpass Project

GROUP MEMORY NOTES

Harlem Avenue Underpass Project

Steering Committee Meeting No. 3

March 24, 2010

Below is a transcript of the flip chart notes recorded during the third Steering Committee meeting that was held on March 24th 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.

Comments on the proposed Purpose and Need:

Accommodating alternative modes of transportation is extremely important.

Are the bus stops an existing problem or is it the conflict with pedestrians off loading from the buses?

The preliminary traffic studies show that buses stopping in traffic do not have a large impact on capacity. It appears that a larger impact is made by people exiting northbound buses and crossing Harlem Avenue, which obstructs the roadway for southbound traffic from South Blvd.

The bridge piers restrict movements such as left turns from South Blvd.

There is a multi-modal station only ½ mile away – synergy possible?

This will be a topic for our next agenda item when we are talking about solutions.

Discussion about solutions:

Oak Park wants to calm traffic. Removal of the piers will not accomplish this and pedestrians will feel less safe without the piers.

Oak Park's desire for traffic calming is noted, and will be explored. Regarding safety, handrails will be added along the sidewalks and the study team's architect will work on enhancing the pedestrian's experience when walking under the bridge.

Are the piers being removed just to add one lane?

It is part of IDOT's long-term plan for Harlem to have 5 lanes. Removing the piers will also greatly improve visibility and sight-lines under the bridge

South Boulevard has become a "bypass" during rush hour. Turning off of South Boulevard can be difficult at times.

What about closing the station at Harlem? Would this impact anyone?

The CTA entrance and exit near the bridge is heavily used and its closure would require PACE buses to be rerouted to the Marion Street entrance, which is not desirable to PACE.

Make the Harlem CTA station an exit only station.

It is not desirable to have a route using mass-transit that is not reversible. If people get off the train and use that exit for their commute, they will expect to be able to make the reverse commute.

What about putting in a pedestrian bridge? How much congestion is due to pedestrian traffic?

Managing and directing pedestrians is a very difficult thing to accomplish. Providing pedestrian bridges is typically done at very heavily used roadways and there is no guarantee that one at this location would be used or would solve the problem.

Southbound south of the tracks bus stop stops traffic.

Buses will wait for regular commuters, adding to congestion.

Take all buses to the intermodal facility?

This would require some PACE buses to be rerouted to the Marion Street entrance, which is not desirable to PACE.

Move the station from the west to the east side?

This would require a new entrance and station area behind the abutment, which would be extremely expensive to construct. A new access point through the CTA platform may also have clearance issues.

What happens with sidewalks as a result of the two-foot lowering of the road?

We will be examining in detail the impacts of the proposed roadwork on the sidewalks. Whatever is affected will need to be designed to meet ADA standards.

Oak Park does not feel that it shares the same goals as IDOT. A lot of issues can be solved without widening the road.

It is true that no one solution would solve all the problems. Often Steering Committees such as this one can take action beyond the parameters of the study to address related issues.

It would be great if the Study could discuss both the “now” solutions and, separately, the “ultimate” solutions.

We can consult with the FHWA on moving forward with both “now” and “later” alternatives, although projects that use federal funding (as in this study) typically focus on longer-term improvements. Short-term improvements that are suggested during this process can be made at any time by the local communities with their own funding if alternative funding is available.

What would be the possibility of adding a bus bay on the southeast corner?

Turn bays can be very effective but require additional right of way and must be relatively lengthy. Turn bays are also more desirable on the far side of an intersection, which makes it easier for buses to re-enter the traffic stream.

What about a raised median to discourage inappropriate passing of stopped traffic?

Harlem Avenue is an IDOT roadway and it is up to IDOT to allow a raised median.

Pedestrian traffic on the northwest corner lacks a clear line of sight to traffic.

Crash statistics indicate that this corner would benefit from safety improvements.

South Boulevard is not properly striped, resulting in a lot of side swipe accidents.

We will explore the lane width and striping on South Boulevard. Oak Park would prefer that this remain three lanes.

What about fixing the jog between Circle Avenue and South Boulevard?

At one time the project included removal of the CTA building and relocation of Circle Avenue, but was removed from the scope because Forest Park decided to study it themselves. A

report they produced did not make a firm recommendation of any improvements. While Oak Park does own a parcel along South Boulevard, they feel it would be best developed as it is which makes shifting South Blvd to the south undesirable.

From a realtor perspective, aesthetics are important and should be an important part of the improvement process.

The FHWA does allow for certain kinds of aesthetic improvements. The study team's architect will analyze possible aesthetic improvements for the underpass.

Action Items:

No action items were assigned during the meeting.