

Harlem Avenue Underpass Project

GROUP MEMORY NOTES

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Steering Committee Meeting No. 4

July 14, 2010 and August 26, 2010

Below is a transcript of notes recorded during the fourth Steering Committee meetings that were held on July 14th and August 26th in River Forest, Illinois. Both meetings followed the same format and were based on the same presentation. These notes have not been edited except for basic grammar or spelling corrections. Supplemental text has been added for clarification.

Dave Shannon presented a series of slides showing the process used to develop the proposed bridge and roadway improvements. Unfortunately due to IDOT policy and procedures, the slides from presentation cannot be distributed prior to the public hearing.

Since relatively little change to the railroad is allowed and a clear-span bridge with no center or sidewalk columns needs to have a thicker bridge deck, the replacement bridge will be need to lower the roadway. The minimum clearance is also greater than the existing clearance which pushes the replacement roadway down even further. The limits of the pavement replacement on Harlem Avenue are then based on how far it takes north and south of the bridge for the profile to come back up to the existing roadway elevation.

Lowering Harlem Avenue will also impact the four side-streets near the bridge. An additional issue to be corrected is that the profile of the side-streets should slope away from Harlem Avenue before coming back up to existing roadway which creates a small sag curve. South Boulevard and Circle Avenue are not as affected by this issue as Central Avenue and North Boulevard.

Once the required roadway improvements are defined, the effects of the roadway lowering on features within the project area can be determined. It is likely that retaining walls will be required along the existing railroad viaduct to avoid undermining the walls. It is also likely that splitting the sidewalks along Harlem Avenue may be necessary near the CTA station, along the retail building northeast of the bridge and behind the retail building northwest of the bridge.

Options and possibilities for architectural treatment of the proposed bridge were also presented. The bridge presents an opportunity for aesthetic enhancements ranging from simple paint to a facing based on a tree-theme (in keeping with the tree-related names of the three Villages) to a technologically modern option involving solar energy and sustainable fixtures. Lighting under the bridge can also be

designed to enhance the experience of users using downwash techniques, colors and modern LED fixtures.

The following issues, questions and comments were discussed:

How will drainage be addressed with the change in road elevation?

We will look at water run-off patterns so that drainage patterns are maintained. The bridge does not currently need a pump to drain the roadway dip under the bridge and there is no history of flooding issues. Drainage is not anticipated to be an issue.

The lane configuration needs to tie into existing lane patterns north and south of the bridge. IDOT indicated they have no plans to expand Harlem to five 10' lanes south of the bridge. Therefore, they recommend that the improvement under the bridge should allow for a gradual shift from the current configuration of four 12' lanes south of the bridge to the five 10' lanes north of the bridge. IDOT and the FHWA recommend constructing four 11' lanes with a painted median.

The side streets must be lowered approximately 2' on South Boulevard and Circle Avenue to line up with the new Harlem pavement.

Harlem is a strategic regional arterial (SRA), but large trucks won't regularly be driving on Circle Drive or South Boulevard so all corner radii were designed to accommodate a single unit truck with the exception of the northeast corner which must accommodate a city bus.

The north side of South Boulevard requires improvements to the bus stop including expanding the sidewalk to provide an accessible landing area.

It was suggested that awnings be installed along the railroad viaduct to guide pedestrians to the multimodal station.

Can we change the bus stop at the north corner of South Boulevard to stop at the multimodal station instead of on Harlem?

The agencies (CTA and PACE) running the existing bus routes are extremely hesitant to relocate stops off of Harlem Avenue. In addition, a number of riders exit buses on Harlem Avenue and utilize the shopping amenities as well as the CTA station.

The south side of South Boulevard also requires bus stop improvements. Proper shelters and seating to protect against weather could be installed.

The north side of Circle Avenue presents the challenge of bus stop placement. It can be moved to the stop bar or in front of the CTA station doors. A split sidewalk with a railing could be put in to accommodate for lowering the roadway 2'.

Moving the bus stops on Harlem Avenue to the north side of the bridge would eliminate a number of concerns for the intersection including traffic delays and dangerous pedestrian movements.

The south side of Circle Avenue will also have to address the 2' difference in pavement. This can be done with a low landscaping wall.

A turning lane would help with left turns off of Circle Avenue and also into the Dunkin Doughnuts.

IDOT is scheduled to repave Harlem in 1-2 years. If lane changes are going to happen, it will have to happen at that time or wait for another 5 to 10 years.

Sidewalk elevation changes on the north side of the bridge will be addressed with low walls and split sidewalks where appropriate.

Central Avenue can be reduced down to one lane from its current two lanes (left and a straight/right) with no change in capacity issues since the light stays green longer for South Boulevard.

Don't cut Central down to one lane. It is already backed up with people turning right onto Harlem and getting stuck under the underpass due to pedestrians, buses, etc.

The Purpose and Need statement for the project was then reviewed to see if each item in the Statement would be addressed by the proposed improvements.

The bridge is functionally obsolete for traffic along Harlem Avenue.

Will be resolved by the proposed improvements.

The bridge prevents improvement of Harlem Avenue according to the plan presented in the SRA Study.

Will be resolved by the proposed improvements.

The columns along the curb and center lines reduced the effective lane widths under the bridge which creates a safety risk.

Will be resolved by the proposed improvements.

The low clearance of the bridge continues to cause trucks to become stuck.

Will be resolved by the proposed improvements.

The low clearance and columns of the bridge obstruct sight lines to the traffic signals and intersections.

Will be resolved by the proposed improvements.

The sidewalks through the area do not meet the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Will be resolved by the proposed improvements.

The bridge is in a state of deterioration and no longer aesthetically fits within the community.

During the replacement process a number of aesthetically pleasing elements will be added to the underpass, including lighting and visually appealing construction materials.

The geometry of the side streets is substandard and contributes to the crash frequency.

Will be resolved by the proposed improvements.

The deteriorated condition of the bridge and sidewalks discourages pedestrian activity and is a barrier between the commercially successful north side and the under-developed south side.

An improved bridge and improved sidewalks will no longer act as a barrier to pedestrian movement through the area.

The poor aesthetics and geometrics of the bridge are a detriment to the overall economic vitality of the area.

Will be resolved by the proposed improvements.

The poor lighting under the bridge creates a safety issue for pedestrians.

A number of solutions for improving the lighting under the bridge are possible.

Pavement markings and crossing geometry are deteriorated and cause pedestrian confusion which is a safety concern.

Will be resolved by the proposed improvements.

Accommodate all forms of transportation. (South Boulevard bike lane)

The Harlem Avenue corridor is crowded with sidewalks and roadway lanes and the addition of bicycle lanes would require additional right of way and is beyond the scope of this project. A bike path or lane along South Boulevard would require a similar improvement along Circle Avenue to ensure route continuity and improve safety. This issue can be explored further based on community interest.

Better and safer accommodation of pedestrians crossing Harlem Avenue to improve safety and traffic flow on Harlem Avenue.

Will be resolved by the proposed improvements.

The center columns restrict some turning movements.

The proposed bridge will remove the current center columns.

In addition to the Purpose and Need, various issues that had been raised at previous meetings were also examined. Accommodation of alternative modes of transportation

Bus movement or pedestrians causing congestion?

A combination of both. Recommendation will be to move the bus stops on Harlem to the north side of the bridge.

Bridge piers restrict mobility and visibility.

Will be resolved by the proposed improvements.

Tie-in multi-modal station at Marion Street.

It is not within the scope of the project to require PACE to shift bus routes to the Marion Street station. Moving the bus stops will hopefully encourage better use of the station.

Close the CTA station or make exit only.

It is not within the scope of the project to require the CTA to close a well-used station entrance/exit.

Add pedestrian bridge.

Pedestrian bridges are expensive, not well used and difficult to construct in developed areas.

Reroute buses to the multi-modal station.

It is not within the scope of the project to require PACE to shift bus routes to the Marion Street station.

Move the station to the east side of Harlem.

It would be extremely expensive to construct a new station entrance through the east abutment.

Install raised median.

A raised median is possible but a painted median provides less of a hazard and is easier to be used by large vehicles making wide turns.

Properly stripe intersection.

Will be resolved by the proposed improvements.

Fix the jog between Circle and South.

No interest has been expressed thus far to straighten the jog except as a suggestion to seemingly simplify the geometrics. However, if the intersection is straightened and additional movements are provided, such as westbound through or left, then new conflicts are created against westbound traffic and the capacity of the intersection will therefore degrade significantly. Additionally, the added movements may result in undesirable increase in traffic through the neighborhood west of Harlem Avenue. Forest Park will research the level of support for straightening the jog and providing additional movements at the intersection.

Key Changes to the Proposed Improvements

1. Look into moving the bus stops along Harlem Avenue to spots north of the bridge to eliminate dangerous pedestrian movements and improve traffic movement through the intersection.
2. Keep Central Boulevard as two lanes since it already has congestion issues due to Harlem Avenue signals.