

**Chicago Department of Transportation**  
**95<sup>th</sup> Street at Union Pacific Railroad Grade Separation Study**  
**Community Advisory Group (CAG) Meeting #4**

On Monday, September 27, 2021, the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) hosted the fourth [Community Advisory Group \(CAG\) meeting](#) online via Webex. The CAG meeting started at 10:00 a.m. and adjourned at approximately 11:35 a.m. The meeting began with introductions, providing a project overview, summarizing the previous CAG meetings, and presenting the CAG #4 meeting goals. Following this overview, the preliminary preferred alternative and potential impacts were discussed.

Attending the meeting were representatives from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), Cook County, Pace, Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), the Association of American Railroads, and several community and workforce development groups. See attached attendance report.

**Presentation Summary**

The CAG meeting included a team presentation followed by an open Q&A session and an opportunity for CAG members to comment on the project and any concerns they might have. The meeting agenda was as follows:

- Introduction
- Project Overview
- Previous CAG Meetings Recap
- Project Details
- Alternatives Considered
- Details of the Preferred Alternative
- Maintenance of Traffic (during construction)
- Next Steps
- Questions and Comments

Soliman Khudeira, CDOT Section Chief of Major Projects, welcomed participants and provided an overview for how the CAG meeting would proceed. The project is being led by CDOT and currently is undergoing the Phase I study to be completed at the end of 2021. Khudeira reviewed the aspects of phase I which includes preliminary engineering and environmental studies and data collection. Phase II will follow Phase I, and entails final design, contract plans, and land acquisition. Phase II is expected to be completed from 2022 to 2023. Construction (Phase III) is scheduled for 2024 and 2025.

Mr. Khudeira then provided an overview of the previous CAG meetings held on April 16, 2019, June 27, 2019, and July 28, 2020. He presented the goals of the CAG #4 meeting: to identify additional and updated details of the preferred alternative and to discuss the upcoming public hearing.

Tony Pakeltis of Parsons, presented the existing traffic and railroad conditions, crash data, project benefits, and the purpose and need. These items were covered at the previous CAG meetings and were summarized for this meeting. The purpose of the project is to provide a transportation improvement that addresses safety and mobility in the 95th Street corridor by eliminating train conflicts, reducing delay, and improving emergency response and air quality.

Mr. Khudeira summarized the alternatives development and evaluation that was conducted for this project. This information was previously presented at the CAG #3 meeting.

## **Alternatives Considered**

1. No Build
2. Eliminate UPRR Crossing
3. Railroad over 95th St
4. Railroad under 95th St
5. 95th Street over railroad
- 6. 95th Street under railroad**
7. 95th Street under railroad with Offset Alignment
- 8. Hybrid**

## **Feasible Alternatives**

Based on initial evaluation, Alternative 6 (95th Street under Railroad) and Alternative 8 (Hybrid) were identified as feasible alternatives that were the more cost effective with fewer impacts than the others.

Alternative 6, 95th Street would be grade separated under the railroad by lowering the profile of 95th Street. 95th Street would remain on its existing centerline alignment. The railroad would remain at its same location horizontally and vertically.

With Alternative 8, 95th Street and the railroad would be grade separated by raising the railroad by 11 feet and lowering 95th Street by 11 feet. 95th Street would remain on its existing centerline alignment.

## **Evaluation of Feasible Alternatives**

Both feasible alternatives were evaluated based upon performance, acceptance, and cost. In terms of the performance criteria, both alternatives would eliminate the conflicts between trains and vehicles. However, the evaluation proved alternative 6 to be a better alternative in terms of minimizing disruptions to 95<sup>th</sup> Street transportation as well as freight and passenger trains during construction; minimizing environmental resources impacts; and accommodating adjacent stakeholder and railroad access. The alternatives have similar right-of-way impacts.

In terms of the acceptance criteria, Alternative 6 is a better alternative for enhancing the project corridor appearance and facilitating construction with minimal disruptions. Alternatives 6 and 8 are similar in terms of minimizing overall impacts and accommodating pedestrian and cyclist traffic along 95<sup>th</sup> Street.

In terms of cost, Alternative 6 has a lower estimated construction cost compared to Alternative 8.

## **Identification of Preferred Alternative**

After evaluation, Alternative 6 was identified as the preferred alternative for the following reasons:

- Best achieved improving safety and mobility while limiting overall community impacts
- Avoids impacts to the 97<sup>th</sup> Street at-grade railroad crossing and adjacent residential properties
- Avoids noise impacts and noise barrier along railroad corridor
- Avoids raising the railroad and creating visual barrier
- Avoids long-term impacts to railroad operations

## **Elements of Preferred Alternative:**

The following summarizes the main elements of the preferred alternative.

- Maintain two 12-foot lanes in each direction
- Provide 12-foot flushed center median with left turn lanes at Eggleston Avenue and Harvard Avenue
- Provide new railroad bridge over 95<sup>th</sup> Street

- Provide retaining walls along 95<sup>th</sup> Street
- Provide new sidewalks
- Provide new pedestrian signal at Eggleston Avenue – Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon
- Provide roadway lighting
- Provide pump station

To assist pedestrian movement near Trinity United Church of Christ and to improve pedestrian safety, a Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon is proposed. The flashing beacon is activated by a push button and alerts motorists that pedestrians are crossing. Potential crosswalk treatments will be evaluated during Phase II design to determine the best treatment.

### **Summary of Impacts**

- Displacements/Relocation
- Closed Access
  - Eggleston East
  - Trinity United Church of Christ parking lot east access
- Construction Impacts
  - Fernwood Parkway Park – Easement – Section 4(f)
  - Trinity United Church of Christ parking lot - south side of 95<sup>th</sup> Street
- No Impacts Anticipated
  - Natural resources
  - Historic resources
  - Noise
  - Air quality

### **Potential Right of Way Impacts**

Right-of-way impacts are classified into three categories:

- **Temporary Easements (TE)**
  - Ownership retained by property owner
  - Purchased for specific term for completion of construction
- **Permanent Easements (PE)**
  - Ownership retained by property owner
  - DOT allowed access to property for maintenance of facilities
- **Fee Simple (Partial or Full Take)**
  - Acquisition of all rights and interests of Real Property

Temporary and/or permanent easements would be required from the following properties:

- Trinity United Church of Christ Parking (south side of 95<sup>th</sup> Street)
- Trinity United Church of Christ Garden/Storage
- Trinity United Church of Christ
- Fernwood Parkway Park
- Union Pacific Railroad
- Lowden Homes
- St. Matthew Gordon AME Church

Permanent acquisition would be required from the following properties:

- Allstate Office Building
- Trinity United Church of Christ Administration Office
- ABC Learning Center
- Durham Realty/A+P Tax
- Nywele Salon
- The Universal Church
- Park Island Jerk Chicken/Forever Photography
- Three single-family residences
- Several vacant buildings and lots

### **Maintenance of Traffic**

Tony Pakeltis introduced the proposed methods to maintain traffic during construction, and Patrick Smith of Parsons provided additional details regarding the options considered.

#### **Traffic Shift Option (Preferred):**

- Temporarily shifts vehicles south of the existing 95<sup>th</sup> Street right-of-way
- Involves constructing temporary pavement to accommodate two lanes in each direction with a 25-mph posted speed limit
- Reduces traffic impacts; results in some additional right-of-way impacts

#### **Detour Option:**

- Total detour distance traveled is approximately 3 miles
- No additional right-of-way impacts

Given the high volume of traffic on 95<sup>th</sup> Street, the traffic shift option is preferred. Detours might be required for short periods of time during construction of the project.

#### **Next Steps**

- CAG Meeting summary to follow
- Public Hearing: Fall 2021
- Complete Project Development Report: Fall 2021
- Obtain Design Approval (Completion of Phase I): End of 2021

### **Public Hearing**

The current plan for the public hearing was summarized during the meeting:

- Target date: Fall 2021
- Potentially a Virtual Public Hearing
  - Presentation
  - Formal comments provided by public
- If it is a Virtual Public Hearing, other opportunities to provide comment will be considered, such as:
  - Online at the project website
  - In person at local community facility

- The following methods will be used to get the word out regarding the public hearing date, time, and location:
  - Newspaper advertisements
  - Flyers
  - Mailer to adjacent properties
  - Email blast

### Summary of Questions

Charlotte Obodzinski, Pace

- Charlotte asked if all the landscape medians would be eliminated. Mr. Pakeltis stated that they will be eliminated due to the difficulty to maintain them in the area where the roadway gets depressed.
- Charlotte also asked what the left turn traffic volumes were from eastbound 95<sup>th</sup> Street to Eggleston and was there consideration for keeping the landscaping for traffic calming. Mr. Pakeltis noted there is definitely a tradeoff between improving traffic operations, particularly for the church service, and the loss of the landscaped median. Ultimately, the current recommendation is for the left turn lane and the loss of the landscape median.
- Charlotte asked if the temporary roadway would be able to accommodate bus stops. Mr. Pakeltis stated the project team believes that bus stop accommodations can be made, and those details will be worked out in Phase II. The temporary roadway will also accommodate pedestrians. There are currently two bus stops in the eastbound direction and three in the westbound direction along 95<sup>th</sup> Street through the project area.
- Charlotte requested CDOT include Pace in conversations surrounding the right of way so Pace can include sufficient right of way to install planned pulse stations. Mr. Khudeira stated CDOT will continue to coordinate with Pace throughout the project.

Terrence Wright

- Terrence asked if the presentation will be shared after the CAG #4. Mr. Pakeltis stated that the presentation will be posted on the website, which they have done for the previous three CAG meetings. The presentation and the meeting summary will both be accessible at the project website.

Pastor TD Hughes, Third Baptist Church

- Pastor Hughes asked if there has been an alternative reviewed that will not impact residents or businesses. Mr. Pakeltis stated that the feasible build alternatives considered would result in impacts to residents and businesses. The only alternative that would not affect businesses or residents is the no build alternative. The no build alternative is the do-nothing alternative.

Pastor Otis Moss, Trinity United Church of Christ

- Pastor Moss stated that there are about 27,000 residents in Washington Heights and asked how many residents have been included in these conversations. Mr. Pakeltis responded that the CAG meetings are intended for a smaller audience, and participation has been similar at all the CAG meetings. Attendance at CAG Meeting #4 is approximately 30 people, excluding the CDOT project team, which is similar to the attendance at the three previous CAG meetings. The next event being planned is the public hearing which is intended for greater community involvement.
- Pastor Moss stated that Trinity would lose the existing community and butterfly garden, farmers market, administrative building, and the cafe being built with a neighborhood grant. During

construction, access to the church would be impacted, and activities that take place in the church parking lot will be lost. Pastor Moss asked if CDOT has looked at community impacts and examined the alternatives so there is not an impact of losing businesses and community activities. Moss also stated that currently these are community activities that bring access to food and the distribution of food for the community. Mr. Pakeltis stated that in terms of the physical impacts, the CDOT project team is aware of the potential impacts on the church, the Trinity office building, and community gardens, and these impacts were considered in the planning process. The project team has not identified an alternative that eliminates these potential impacts. Mr. Khudeira also noted that during Phase II, additional coordination will occur with affected property owners to determine how to mitigate and/or compensate for the loss of access.

- Pastor Moss asked if they would lose access to Eggleston while they are building the alternative street. Mr. Pakeltis stated that during construction there will be no access to Eggleston from 95<sup>th</sup> Street.
- Pastor Moss noted that the church has 8,000 congregants. Impacts to church access will create traffic issues in the community as alternate routes off of 95<sup>th</sup> Street will have to be used to access the church.
- Mr Khudeira stated that Trinity is the main stakeholder of this project, and the CDOT project team will continue to coordinate with Pastor Moss and Trinity United Church of Christ to minimize impacts.

Melvin Thompson, Trinity United Church in Christ/Endeleo Institute

- Melvin Thompson stated that the Endeleo Institute has been invested in the immediate area since 2014. \$2M in funding has been secured for potential development on property that would be impacted by the project. Mr. Thompson indicated he does not believe the alternatives have been exhausted publicly and believes the plan is detrimental to the development of the community. Melvin wants a plan that would address the existing issue while continuing to protect the existing community. Mr. Thompson noted the south side has been impacted by urban renewal planning, and that the 95<sup>th</sup> Street grade separation project runs counter to the goals of the church and community. One of the buildings that would be displaced (325 W. 95<sup>th</sup> Street) is required to be preserved for the Endeleo Institute to receive grant funding. According to Melvin, the demolition of buildings on the south and west sides instead of preservation of communities has the potential to depress the community. Mr. Khudeira noted that the CDOT project team will continue to work with affected property owners. He also noted that adjacent parcels that are acquired that are not needed at the end of the project will be available for purchase. Mr. Pakeltis noted that the CDOT project team has met with Melvin twice since the last CAG meeting to discuss the potential impacts of the project. The CDOT project team will continue to evaluate whether impacts can be avoided at 325 W. 95<sup>th</sup> Street and any other potentially impacted property in the project area. The alternatives development process has been discussed at the CAG meetings, and no solution has been identified that avoids impacting property along 95<sup>th</sup> Street.

Brenda Dixon, Major Taylor Trail Keepers

- Brenda asked if the slides will be shared with the attendees. Mr. Pakeltis stated that the presentation will be posted on the project website.
- Brenda asked if the decisions that were shared were final or are they open to making changes based on the community response. Mr. Pakeltis stated that nothing is final, and the public hearing will offer the opportunity to hear from the community. The project team will continue to work towards minimizing impacts.

- Brenda asked what the process is of presenting an alternative outside of the ones presented. Mr. Khudeira recommended reviewing the alternatives that were considered and evaluated at previous CAG meetings. Any suggestions and comments can be emailed to the project team.
- Brenda asked if bike lanes are being considered. Mr. Khudeira stated that 95th Street currently is not a bike route, and the project will not include bike lanes.

Dallas Gordon

- Dallas asked if the list of attendees will be posted. Mr. Pakeltis stated that the list of participants will be included with the meeting summary.

### **Meeting Conclusion**

Soliman Khudeira thanked everyone for participating and went over the project's next steps:

- A meeting summary will be posted to the project website.
- A public hearing will be scheduled for later this year
- The project website is located at: [www.95thuprr.com](http://www.95thuprr.com)
- The project point of contact is Tony Pakeltis: [Anthony.Pakeltis@parsons.com](mailto:Anthony.Pakeltis@parsons.com), (312) 930-5268

Feedback through the CAG is critical to the project's success. Please reach out to the project team if you have any questions regarding the project.

**95th Street at UPRR Grade Separation Study  
CREATE Project GS21a**

**Community Advisory Group Meeting #4  
Monday, September 27, 2021  
ATTENDANCE ROSTER**

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