



**ARCHER AVENUE AT BELT RAILWAY COMPANY OF CHICAGO GRADE SEPARATION STUDY
COMMUNITY ADVISORY GROUP (CAG) MEETING #2**

Tuesday, May 9, 2017

10:30 a.m.

Archer Heights Public Library
5055 S Archer Ave, Chicago, IL 60632

Meeting Minutes

The Community Advisory Group (CAG) meeting began at approximately 10:35 a.m. and ended at 12:10 p.m. with the following people in attendance (see attached sign-in sheet):

Soliman Khudeira, Chicago Department of Transportation
Joe Alonzo, Chicago Department of Transportation
Jerry Hurckes, Office of Congressman Dan Lipinski, 3rd District of Illinois
David Espinoza, Office of Alderman Edward Burke, 14th Ward
Stanley Lihosit, Archer Heights Civic Association
Mark Ferguson, Belt Railway Company of Chicago
Adam Rod, Chicago Department of Aviation
Jason Biernat, Chicago Transit Authority
Michael Hurley, CREATE (HNTB Corporation)
Michael Kowalczyk, Federal Highway Administration
Zubair Haider, Illinois Department of Transportation
Jakita Trotter, Illinois Department of Transportation
Anita Cummings, United Business Association of Midway
Kirsten Mawhinney, AECOM
Elena Iovtcheva, AECOM
Dolan McMillan, AECOM
Tim Whalen, AECOM
Berenice Vallecillos, Morreale Communications
Allie Goodrich, Morreale Communications
Bernadette Moran, Morreale Communications



PRESENTATION SUMMARY

The first CAG meeting included a presentation followed by an open Q&A session. The agenda of the presentation (attached) included:

- Welcome – Berenice Vallecillos, Morreale Communications
- Introductions – Soliman Khudeira, CDOT
- Meeting Agenda – Soliman Khudeira, CDOT
- CAG #1 Recap – Soliman Khudeira, CDOT
- Project Overview - Soliman Khudeira, CDOT
- Community Updates – Soliman Khudeira, CDOT
- Proposed Purpose and Need – Tim Whalen, AECOM
- Alternatives – Soliman Khudeira, CDOT & Tim Whalen, AECOM
- Community Input/Q&A – Tim Whalen, AECOM
- Next Steps – Berenice Vallecillos, Morreale Communications & Soliman Khudeira, CDOT

MEETING SUMMARY

The Presentation

- Berenice started with a safety moment and welcomed attendees to the meeting. The safety moment included a reminder to refrain from using the hands-free device while driving as it impairs driver's attention by 40%.
- Soliman then started the PowerPoint presentation and went over the meeting agenda, introduced the project team, overviewed the purpose of the CAG and the CAG meetings, and gave a project overview.
- Soliman gave a recap of the first CAG meeting.
 - He provided a review of the first meeting's agenda, which included introducing the project team, introducing the project, presenting existing conditions, providing an overview of the Phase I design process and defining the role of the CAG.
 - He also explained the project's three phases – currently the project is in the Phase I Preliminary Design stage. Should funding become available, the intention is to complete Phase II design and Phase III construction by the end of 2021. Phase II design and Phase III construction are currently not funded.
 - Soliman went over existing conditions and showed attendees an aerial map of the project area.
 - Soliman reviewed community feedback received during CAG meeting #1, including the need to consider public transit users throughout the project's development; potential loss of access at Kolmar Avenue or Knox Avenue; new projects near the area, including the 1,000-car valet parking lot and restaurants and two boutique hotels coming to 53rd Street and Cicero Avenue; the sale of Dolphin Cartage property; and El Cubano Wholesale Meats, a new business.
 - Soliman requested any additional or new updates from the community and none were provided.



- Tim Whalen reviewed the purpose and need for this study. The purpose is to provide a transportation infrastructure improvement in the Archer Avenue corridor and the need is to reduce congestion and reduce road-rail conflicts. He also covered project benefits, including improved safety, reduced congestion, and improved pedestrian/cyclist path. In addition the reduced number of cars waiting at the gates would improve the air quality.
 - A community member asked why Knox Ave. at 47th St. is accessible, but Knox Ave. at Archer Ave. may not be with a grade separation. Tim responded that the grades between the surrounding areas at 47th St. and the lowered Archer Ave. did not warrant as much of a cut as is expected at Archer Ave. and the BRC tracks.
- Soliman went over the six alternatives:
 - No-Build alternative – No improvements other than routine maintenance would be made.
 - Road Underpass – Lower Archer Avenue under the railroad. Soliman explained further that research shows pedestrians/bicyclists prefer underpasses to overpasses and the underpass would meet the Midway height requirement/restriction in the area. Moreover, the underpass would provide for aesthetics opportunities with the railroad bridge structure and the retaining walls, which could be treated with form liners, off-the-shelf designs, or even custom designs as the budget allows.
 - Road Overpass – Keep the railroad at the same location and elevate Archer Avenue over the BRC. Soliman further described that this option would extend the project limits, access to Knox and Kolmar would be potentially cut off altogether, the height would increase greatly over the existing railroad to meet the necessary vertical clearance over the tracks, exceeding the Midway height restriction, creating challenges for multimodal uses (especially bikes and pedestrians), and potentially becoming a neighborhood barrier. These types of overpasses have been eliminated recently by the City to eliminate these barriers and remove maintenance-heavy structures.
 - Railroad Underpass – Railroad would go under Archer Avenue and Archer Avenue would become a bridge. Soliman explained that the necessary length of track needed to achieve the grade separation would exceed the physical constraints of the existing site, and is therefore not an affordable or very feasible solution.
 - Railroad Overpass – Leave Archer Avenue as is and build the railroad on a bridge.
 - Eliminate the Crossing – Archer Avenue traffic would not be permitted to cross the railroad tracks, or the railroad would be relocated; This is not considered a feasible option.
- Tim went into detail on the Alternatives Analysis, saying the team wants to improve safety and operational efficiency for rail and roadway and emergency services, while also keeping in the mind the design considerations, such as a vertical clearance ordinance due to proximity to Midway International Airport; cost as it's a public expenditure; community impact; aesthetic compatibility; alternative transportation modes. He also explained the Alternatives Evaluation Criteria, which grades all of those items with a 1 (low benefit or high cost), 5 (moderate benefit or moderate cost), or 10 (high benefit or low cost). The chart on the presentation shows:
 - Road Underpass has the highest score of 85 points
 - No Action has the next highest of 36
 - Road Overpass and Railroad Underpass each had 45



- Railroad Overpass has 32
- Eliminate Crossing is deemed an unfeasible option and was not scored
- A CAG member asked how the team determined the numbers and why a score of one was given for construction cost under the No Action Alternative, and why this was not scored a 10 since there would be no construction cost associated with this alternative. Another CAG member mentioned that there are maintenance costs associated with the existing roadway. Tim and Soliman agreed that this was a valid point and explained that the numerical scale used and the scoring method is somewhat subjective, though commonly used. He further explained that even if the score for the construction cost was increased to 10 points, the No Build Alternative would still be below the highest-ranked alternative. It was also added that it does not meet the Purpose and Need for the project.
- Tim presented each alternative with more detail.
 - He explained that the road underpass would require going down about 20 feet. The challenges, he said, would be the retaining walls while the benefits include meeting the purpose and need objectives, eliminating the at-grade crossing and improving mobility. The trade-off would be they would have to be careful about how the surrounding communities would be impacted. He showed the project limits and pointed out that pedestrians and cyclists prefer underpass conditions. In terms of the airport, Tim said it's beneficial because they would stay well below the height ordinance requirements. A trade-off would be more impacts during construction.

He showed an example of the recently completed underpass at 130th St. and Torrence Ave. A CAG member noted that this photo is not a very good example for the Archer project because the walls looked like towers. Another CAG member asked if they were planning to put a wall along Archer Avenue, concerned about impact to surrounding neighborhoods. Tim and Soliman explained that the viewpoint of the photo in the presentation was misleading and the actual wall height would be highest at the bridge and diminish as it extends away from the bridge. It was recommended that the project team select a more closely representative picture of the potential Archer Ave. underpass to present at a public meeting to avoid confusion. Tim said the team could provide a rendering at the next CAG meeting and more examples to better illustrate it.
 - The Road Overpass would go about 30-31 feet above the road grade. The challenge would be the airport height ordinance and more impact to surrounding communities for access. The limits of the project would have to expand, with impacts to Knox and Kolmar. In a construction sense, it's preferable for the railroad because there would be less impact, but similar benefits as the underpass. In terms of the corridor, this could create a barrier for alternative modes of transportation like pedestrians or cyclists. An example was shown at Pershing and Racine. Tim added that it's not as visually appealing and two overpass structures in the City have recently been replaced with at-grade intersections.
 - The Railroad Underpass alternative is not feasible for existing railroad infrastructure. The project limits of this alternative would extend beyond the limits of the graphic shown on the presentation.
 - Tim said the results show the Road Underpass is the preferred alternative – it meets the project needs and provides additional benefits. A community member asked about the issue of



flooding in the underpass. Tim replied that there won't be an impact on historical properties or wetlands, but stormwater control will be key. It will likely require a pump station and some type of detention to prevent flooding.

- Tim said effort will be made to avoid right-of-way acquisitions, easements and displacements wherever and whenever possible. Some level of right-of-way acquisition would be needed including temporary easements for construction or permanent easements for utilities. Tim noted that either the road overpass or road underpass would result in property impacts.
- Tim also went over construction considerations. Maintaining access to properties will be key and will come into play during Phase 3, but they're thinking about it now. They're also thinking about how to maintain BRC track while designing. A CAG member asked how the team will keep trucks moving and how much time road and rail traffic might be stopped. Tim stated that the team will need to further investigate the phasing, which may include outages for the railroad (a 1-day outage for example) or reduction to 1 track during construction. Traffic may be detoured, operate on a run-around (i.e. temporary road), and/or operate on reduced lanes through the site. Construction is anticipated to go for 2 seasons, albeit an 18-month duration.
- A CAG member asked for a copy of the presentation. Berenice said all materials would be available on the project website, www.ArcherBRC.com, but hard copies could be made available as well.
- Tim continued construction considerations and suggested the use of a shoofly, a temporary diversion, to minimize operational effects on the trains.
- The team fielded the following questions during the Question & Answer portion of the meeting before Berenice reinforced appreciation for attendees' participation. She also reminded CAG members they can call or go to www.ArcherBRC.com for more information or to provide comments. Soliman went over the next steps, including the third CAG meeting, scheduled for Tuesday, July 11, as well as a public meeting scheduled for Fall 2017.

Summary of Questions and Comments

1. A CAG member asked if construction is set to begin in 2020, how long will it take from start to finish?
 - Tim replied that it will probably take two construction seasons to complete.
2. A CAG member asked if the design would consider a pump station because underpass flooding is a concern.
 - Tim replied that a pump station with detention storage would be provided as part of the design.
3. A CAG member asked whether the project team would look at bike facilities on both sides of the street going under the railroad?
 - Tim said the preference would be to have them on both sides, but the challenge is space constraints. It looks like it will be difficult to have two full facilities on both sides; there could be a multi-use path on one side and accommodations of a narrower width on the other side; preferably a 6-foot-wide pedestrian sidewalk.
 - A CAG member also asked the CTA representative if CTA would have a preference as to which side of the road the ped/bike accommodations would be provided. CTA indicated that they would need to look at the ridership at the bus stops along here, but that for mobility purposes accommodations on both sides of the street are preferred.



4. A CAG member asked about integrated systems.
 - A CAG member added that it would be ideal to have integrated pedestrian paths for safety and that traffic speeds may increase with the grade separation, which means crossing will be more difficult. Further, the member stressed that maintaining bikes and pedestrian movement down both sides would be preferable to one-side only, but understands the space constraints. Another CAG member stated that street crossing on Archer is already a big concern. If accommodations are only provided on one side of the street, then the design will need to carefully consider how bikes and pedestrian cross to opposite sides of the street to travel through the underpass.
5. A CAG member said his fear is trucks using side streets as an alternate route and tearing up roadways. The member suggested possibly restricting traffic through the construction area to only trucks and buses only and detouring cars to an alternate route. It was also noted that sufficient advanced warning would need to be provided to detoured vehicles. Tim stated that this was a good consideration and the team will investigate this option.