



Stakeholder Involvement Plan

Archer Avenue at Belt Railway Company (BRC) Grade Separation Study



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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Project Background

The Archer Avenue at Belt Railway Company of Chicago (BRC) Grade Separation Study (also referred to as GS9) is an initiative of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency Program (CREATE), a historic public-private partnership that brings together the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT), the State of Illinois, City of Chicago, Metra, Amtrak, and the nation's freight railroads to invest in critically needed railroad infrastructure improvements throughout the City of Chicago.

This study will explore the opportunity to eliminate the existing at-grade crossing, where the railroad intersects with the roadway at the same level, at the intersection of Archer Avenue and the BRC, by building an underpass or overpass to separate train from vehicle and pedestrian traffic.

There are approximately 18,600 vehicles, 259 CTA buses (#62), and 32 freight trains that pass through the intersection of Archer Avenue and the BRC on a daily basis. This busy at-grade crossing causes continuous delays, congestion, and disrupts the flow of traffic for motorists and pedestrians. To a greater effect, this railroad crossing is a designated 911 route, and the current infrastructure makes it more difficult for emergency responders to access the communities of Archer Heights and Garfield Ridge.

This project will result in significant improvements to rail and roadway travel, including less congestion, fewer delays and increased public safety while improving the air quality and encouraging regional and national economic growth and competitiveness.

The Archer Avenue at the BRC Grade Separation Study is currently in the first phase of the project. Phase I will result in the necessary design analyses, including research and data collection, evaluations of appropriate policies, assessment of environmental issues, preliminary engineering, and public involvement to obtain design approval from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) and affected railroads, and to provide CDOT with an estimate of probable cost.

Project Benefits



Increased safety to drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists



Reduced congestion and fewer delays for vehicles and freight trains



Improved air quality from reduced vehicle idling



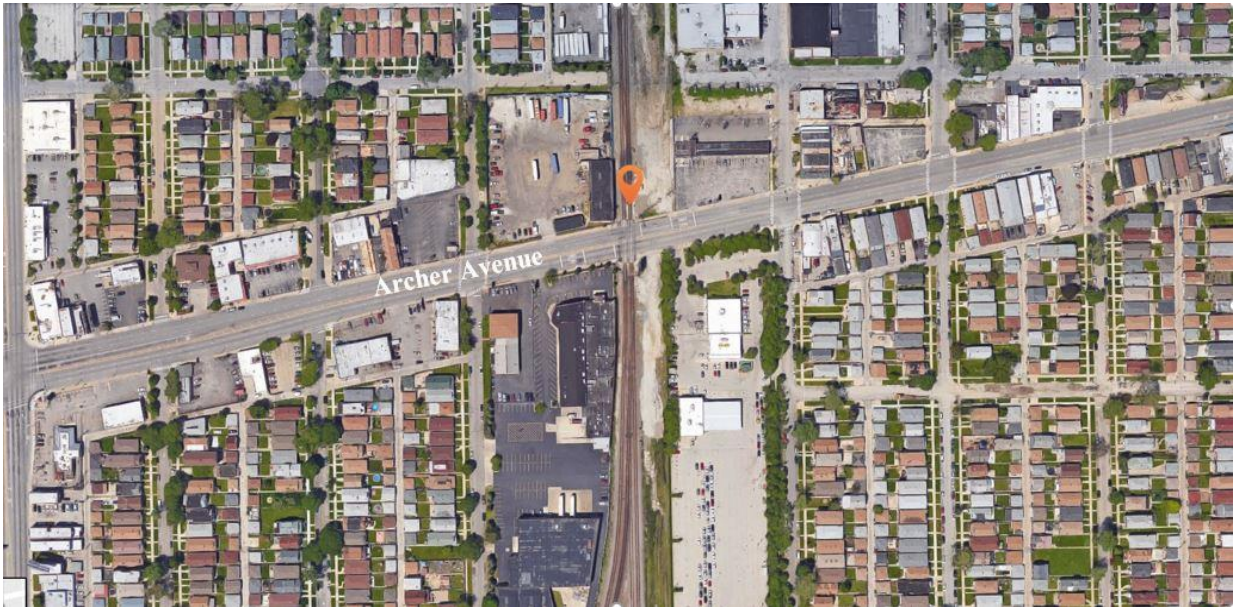
Easier access for emergency responders using this intersection, which is a designated 911 route



Increased mobility, helping to attract new businesses and creating more jobs

Project Location Area

The project study area is located at the intersection of Archer Avenue and the Belt Railway Company of Chicago (between Cicero Avenue and Kostner Avenue) in the community areas of Archer Heights and Garfield Ridge.



Existing Conditions



1.2 Regulatory Requirements

The process for this project will meet state and federal requirements meant to integrate environmental values and public interaction into transportation improvements. The requirements include the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, or "FAST Act" and follow the principles of the Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) approach.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

The Federal Highway Administration and the Illinois Department of Transportation will complete an Environmental Assessment (EA) for Archer Avenue at BRC Grade Separation Study to fulfill NEPA requirements. The FHWA is the federal agency responsible for final approval of the environmental document. This study and the supporting environmental documents will be governed by the NEPA and state

regulatory requirements. Opportunities for the public to provide input will be provided at key NEPA decision points.

The NEPA process requires federal agencies to integrate environmental values into their decision-making processes by considering the environmental impacts of their proposed actions and reasonable alternatives to these actions. IDOT will assess the social, economic and environmental impact of the proposed project as part of the NEPA and transportation decision-making process. NEPA also encourages early and frequent coordination with the public and resource agencies throughout the project development process. Environmental factors such as socio-economic, agricultural, cultural, air quality, noise, natural resources, water resources and aquatic habitats, groundwater, floodplains wetlands, special waste, special lands, Section 4(f), permits/certifications required, and other issues will be assessed. Public comments that are received during all phases of the project are considered in the draft environmental document. Following NEPA guidelines, an Environmental Assessment will be prepared.

Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21)

On July 6, 2012, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) was passed into law. With guaranteed funding for highways, highway safety, and public transportation, MAP-21 authorizes transportation programs and projects for the two-year period of 2012-2014. MAP-21 seeks to streamline the environmental review process to facilitate compliance with NEPA by providing for more efficient reviews of proposed actions while continuing to protect environmental and human health. USDOT will initiate further rulemaking to implement the various environmental provisions contained in MAP-21.

Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: Planning and Public Participation

Building off the Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users legislation (SAFETEA-LU), MAP-21 continues to support previous federal public participation guidelines. The transportation legislation expands the listing of interested parties to be engaged during the development of the participation plan, and the short-term and long-term transportation plans. These interested parties shall have reasonable opportunities to comment on transportation plans, and this will be the case with Archer Avenue at BRC Grade Separation Study.

The SAFETEA-LU requirements apply to all FHWA and Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) transportation projects processed as an EA, and therefore, the Archer Avenue at BRC Grade Separation Study project is subject to these requirements.

The 23 USC §139(g) requires the lead agencies for these projects to develop a Coordination Plan to structure public and agency participation during the environmental review process.

Context Sensitive Solutions

An essential component of the project is the integration of the Illinois Department of Transportation's Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS). CSS provides a collective and inclusive approach to the advancement of transportation projects by evaluating the needs of all stakeholders and carefully considering all trade-offs in the process. This approach strives to integrate strong community involvement and input from diverse stakeholders in all phases of program delivery.

In the development of the Archer Avenue at BRC Grade Separation Study, the CSS approach will provide stakeholders with the tools and information required to meaningfully and effectively participate in the process. With the help of this tool, stakeholders will have a clear understanding of the NEPA process, transportation planning guidelines, design guidelines, and the relationship between transportation issues (needs), and project alternatives. In other words, using the CSS process should provide all project stakeholders a mechanism to share comments or concerns about transportation objectives and project alternatives, in addition to improving the ability of the project team to understand and address concerns raised. This integrated approach to problem solving and decision making will help build community consensus and promote effective public participation throughout the process.

As identified in IDOT's CSS policies, stakeholder involvement is critical to project success. The CSS process strives to achieve the following:

- Strike a balance between cost, safety, mobility, community needs, and the environment.
- Involve stakeholders in the decision-making process early and continuously, throughout the development of the project.
- Address all appropriate modes of transportation in the plan and design of the project, including mass transit, pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Use all appropriate disciplines to help plan for and design the project.
- Apply the flexibility inherent in the design standards to fit the project into its surroundings. Incorporate aesthetics as part of basic "good design."

A Stakeholder Involvement Plan (SIP) is critical to the success of CSS principles on a project. This SIP was developed using the principles of CSS and to address the

Coordination Plan requirements of 23 USC §139(g) within the context of the NEPA process.

2.0 Goals and Objectives

The purpose of the SIP is to provide a guide to effectively obtain public involvement for the Archer Avenue at BRC Grade Separation project. This SIP will be used as a blueprint for defining methods and tools to educate and engage all stakeholders in the decision-making process for this project. The SIP has been designed to ensure that stakeholders are provided a number of opportunities to be informed and engaged as the project progresses.

2.1 Stakeholder Involvement Plan Goals

The Stakeholder Involvement Plan will:

- Identify key stakeholders
- Identify the Project Study Group (PSG)
- Identify the Community Advisory Group (CAG)
- Establish the timing and type of involvement with all stakeholders
- Establish stakeholder requirements for providing timely input to the project study process
- The goal of the SIP is to actively seek participation of groups (communities, agencies, etc.) and to build consensus on the project

Involving the public in the project development process will help to gather input and ideas, address community concerns and ensure that the project proceeds smoothly. The SIP will be updated and revised as needed throughout the process.

2.2 Stakeholder Identification Process

An important component of the project is to include diverse representation and participation by affected stakeholders. This group will help to provide input and advised the Project Study Group (PSG) on the challenges and opportunities that exist within the project study area. Key stakeholders will be identified with the help of community leaders and local databases.

The project team will utilize existing stakeholder lists from previous projects as a starting point for the study. It is anticipated the list of stakeholders will grow throughout the process.

Stakeholders may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Residents
- Business owners
- Community representatives
- Churches and schools within the area
- Neighborhood groups
- Elected officials
- Railroad representatives
- Government and transportation agencies
- Utilities
- Emergency services
- Bicycle groups
- Transit agencies
- Special interest groups
- Others outside the study area with an interest in the project

2.3 Stakeholder Involvement Ground Rules

The PSG will establish ground rules under which the Stakeholder Involvement Plan (SIP) will operate. They will be the basis for respectful interaction of all parties ensuring that all participants have an opportunity to share their input.

These rules include the following:

- Stakeholder input will be duly considered in order to yield the best solutions to the challenges identified by the process.
- Participant input in the process is valued and will be considered.
- All participants must keep an open mind and participate openly and honestly.
- All participants should work collaboratively and cooperatively to seek a consensus solution. Consensus is defined as when a majority of the stakeholders agree on a particular issue, while the remainder of stakeholders agrees its input has been heard and duly considered and that the process as a whole was fair.
- All participants in the process must treat each other with respect and dignity.
- The project must progress at a reasonable pace, based on the project schedule.
- The role of the stakeholders is to advise the Project Study Group. A consensus of stakeholder concurrence on project choices is sought, but the final project decisions will be made by CDOT.
- CDOT decisions must be arrived at in a clear and transparent manner and stakeholders should agree their input has been duly considered.

- Members of the media are welcome at all stakeholder meetings; however, they must remain in the role of observers, not participants in the process.

3.0 Joint Lead Agencies/Section 106 Consulting Parties

CDOT will act as lead agency for the Archer Avenue at BRC Railroad Grade Separation Study in cooperation with the IDOT and the FHWA. CDOT will be responsible for making final recommendations and decisions.

The FHWA is responsible for involving consulting parties in findings and determinations made during the Section 106 process. The Section 106 regulations identify the following parties as having a consultative role in the Section 106 process:

- State Historic Preservation Officer
- Indian Tribes and Native Hawaiian Organizations
- Representatives of local governments
- Applicants for Federal assistance, permits, licenses and other approvals
- Individuals and organizations with a demonstrated interest in the undertaking

4.0 Stakeholder Group Organization

4.1 Project Study Group (PSG)

The PSG is a working group consisting of a multidisciplinary team of representatives from CDOT, IDOT, FHWA, and the project consultant team from AECOM, and sub-consultants. This is a CREATE Program and CREATE representatives will be part of the PSG and will assist in sharing information with CREATE partners. The PSG will also work closely with the Belt Railway Company of Chicago (BRC) regarding the crossing of the railroad at Archer Avenue. This group is tasked with determining the ultimate project recommendations and decisions on this project. The PSG has primary responsibility of the project development process. This group will meet regularly as the project progresses to provide technical oversight and expertise in key areas, including study process, agency procedures and standards, and technical approaches. The PSG also has primary responsibility for making sure they implement and are in compliance with the SIP.

4.2 Community Advisory Group (CAG)

To assist in the development of the environmental and engineering studies for the Archer Avenue at BRC Grade Separation Study, CDOT has proposed the establishment of a Community Advisory Group (CAG). The CAG consists of community leaders and key

stakeholders who are directly impacted by the study, and who have authority to enter into intergovernmental agreements. The CAG will represent the views of the communities and Cook County within the project area. The responsibilities of this group include providing input on the study process, and reaching a consensus at key project milestones, e.g., project purpose and need, alternatives to be carried forward, and preferred alternative.

The meeting program will be designed to encourage timely and meaningful opportunities for input, and to encourage information sharing and collaboration between the CAG and the PSG.

Any community leader outside the study area who shows interest in the project and who is not part of the CAG will be added to the stakeholder list, ensuring they will receive meeting invitations, and project updates. The project team will also be available to meet with organizations on a one-on-one basis throughout the project.

4.3 Dispute Resolution

CDOT is committed to working with all agencies and stakeholders in the study process to identify issues early and seek consensus on disagreements.

CDOT is committed to building stakeholder consensus for decisions. However, if an impasse has been reached after making good faith efforts to address unresolved concerns, CDOT may proceed to the next step of project development without achieving consensus. In the case of an unresolved dispute between the agencies, CDOT will notify stakeholders of their decision and proposed course of action. CDOT maintains the final word.

CDOT is the agency responsible for the safety and integrity of the study. As such, there will be considerations that cannot be compromised. For each CREATE project, there will be many different stakeholders, such as local elected officials, other agencies, special interest groups, property owners, business owners, and the public; each will have differing views and interests. Although conflict resolution is a tool to resolve these differences, CDOT is held ultimately responsible and, therefore, makes the final decision.

4.4 Implementation

Public involvement in the planning process begins as soon as the study starts and continues well after the ending date of a study contract. The SIP serves as a guide for public involvement in Phase I of this study, but includes strategies that can be used throughout all phases, including design and construction. Implementation of this plan

requires the commitment and efforts of all involved parties. As an implementation guide, this plan links specific strategies to the study schedule and identifies the audience that each strategy is intended to reach. Implementation of this plan requires the commitment and effort of all study participants and includes the expected actions, responsibilities, and timing. The PSG will be responsible for the overall development, implementation and coordination of the Stakeholder Involvement Plan.

5.0 Tentative Schedule of Project Development/Stakeholder Involvement

This section describes the general project development process, project activities, and associated stakeholder involvement activities.

5.1 Stakeholder Identification, Development of SIP, Project Initiation

This stage of the project development process begins with various agency notifications, project organizational activities, and scoping activities. These activities include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Develop and circulate the draft Stakeholder Involvement Plan (SIP).
- Assemble and organize the internal Project Study Group (PSG) and identify participants for the Community Advisory Group (CAG).
- Identify project partner agencies.
- Identify and compile a list of key stakeholders for targeted outreach
- Organize and hold initial meetings with agency stakeholders and CAG.

5.2 Project Purpose and Need Development

This stage of the project consists of the identification of transportation problems in the study area. This information will be used as the basis to understand the challenges and opportunities that exist within the study area and to develop the project Purpose and Need that will guide project development. Activities in this stage include:

- Analysis of existing and future rail transportation performance; opportunities for stakeholder input will be provided to ensure that findings represent both technical analysis findings as well as stakeholder perspectives.
- Develop Section 106 Area of Potential Effect and coordinate with Section 106 consulting parties.
- Development of the project Purpose and Need statement. Opportunities for stakeholder and public review will be provided prior to FHWA approval of the Purpose and Need statement through the NEPA process.

5.3 Alternatives Development

A range of project alternatives will be considered to address the project's objectives. Steps in the alternatives development process include the following:

- Identification of alternative development procedures, planning and design guidelines, and alternative evaluation procedures. This information will serve as the general guidance for the alternatives development and evaluation process.
- Identify historic properties within the project's Area of Potential Effect and coordinate with Section 106 consulting parties.
- Organize and hold CAG meeting to discuss and identify initial alternatives.
- Achieve stakeholder consensus on the range of alternatives.
- The number of alternatives will be reduced as the project progresses.

5.4 Preferred Build Alternative

This milestone of the project consists of screening the list of suggested alternatives, to identify those alternatives that best meet the project Purpose and Need. This milestone is intended to help shape an end product titled Alternatives to be Carried Forward.

- Evaluation of the initial alternatives.
- Organize and hold CAG meetings/workshops to discuss alternatives that meet Purpose and Need.
- Identification of Alternatives to be Carried Forward.
- Agency update on the Alternatives to be Carried Forward.
- Organize and hold a public meeting to present and solicit input on the project's Purpose and Need, Range of Alternatives identified, the recommended Alternative(s) to be Carried Forward, and present the next steps of the study.

5.5 Proposed Schedule of Community Advisory Group Meetings

The CAG meetings will be held at easily accessible locations in the two community areas. The meetings will be held on the days and times that best meet the needs of the group.

- CAG #1 – Initial Meeting – Grade Separation Project Overview, CAG input and comments
- CAG #2 – Introduction of Grade Separation Alternatives, CAG input and comments
- CAG #3 – Discuss Range of Grade Separation Alternatives, chosen alternative, CAG input and comments

6.0 Public Involvement Plan

The following public involvement activities are proposed for the Archer Avenue at BRC Grade Separation Study. Unless otherwise noted, the PSG is the responsible party for the coordination of all of the activities, which will be approved by CDOT before proceeding.

6.1 Stakeholder Activities

There are two key groups of stakeholders identified in this study: those with decision-making capabilities related to implementing transportation investments; and those with public standing who speak for the public and can influence a broader spectrum of public opinion. These representatives, divided into two groups, include:

- Local, regional, state, and federal elected/appointed officials, and agency representatives that are affected with environmental, historical, cultural, and economic resources and have jurisdiction over the transportation planning processes
- Area businesses, professional associations, and local, regional community, civic and environmental organizations.

6.2 Public Information Meetings

Public outreach and stakeholder involvement are essential parts of the Archer Avenue at BRC Study and will be ongoing throughout the process. This section summarizes the methods for stakeholders to be involved. These outreach methods will be used by the project team to keep the public informed of the project study and solicit input from stakeholders.

Agency Coordination

The preparation of Environmental Analysis requires compliance with many local, state and federal rules, regulations, and laws. To ensure compliance, coordination with resource agencies will occur periodically throughout the study process. As the project progresses, meetings will be held with individual resource agencies to discuss environmental findings and compliance with local, state, and federal requirements.

Elected Officials Briefings

Briefings will be conducted with local and regional elected officials, including legislators, regarding project updates and progress. These meetings may be held at major milestones in the project or as requested. Appropriate project summary materials will be prepared for distribution at these meetings.

Stakeholder and Community Advisory Group Meetings

Stakeholder and CAG meetings will be held with identified and agreed upon, by the PSG, representatives from the project area communities, organizations, and businesses. At these meetings, the project team will introduce the project, discuss potential issues, and solicit input from potential stakeholders who have an interest in the project.

Public Meeting

A public meeting in the form of an open house will be held during the planning process. This meeting will encourage public attendance and raise public awareness of the project goals and the alternatives being evaluated. The meeting will be held at a location in the project study area that is convenient and accessible to diverse constituencies, possibly at a local church or high school. The meetings will provide a forum for public input, including concerns and comments related to proposed project alternatives. Meeting attendees will have the opportunity to discuss the project with team members, view project displays, and submit written and verbal comments. The meeting will be advertised through postcard notifications, social media platforms, media releases, and the project website.

6.3 Communication Tools

Various communication tools will be used throughout the Archer Avenue at BRC Study to engage project stakeholders and community members. Communication tools will include a project website, a project fact sheet, and media outreach.

Project Identity

A project identity, including a logo and presentation template, will be developed to provide a consistent image and messaging for the project. The project identity will be used on all stakeholder involvement materials.

Project Fact Sheet

A project brochure will be designed to provide interested parties with important information about the project, including an overview of the study, existing challenges and benefits, potential alternatives, and project timeline.

Project Website

A project website will be developed and maintained throughout the project. The website will support broader outreach and provide access to project information. It will serve as a comprehensive information resource for the project. Project overview, purpose and need, public involvement opportunities such as meeting location information and materials, resources, media, and contact information will all be available on the project website. Website visitors will also have the opportunity to

provide public input and comment on this platform. This project page will be regularly updated to include key project milestones throughout the development of the study.

The project website will be in addition to the CREATE Program website, www.createprogram.org. There will be a link between the CREATE Program website and the Archer Avenue BRC website.

Website Domain: www.archerbrc.com

Media Strategies

The integration of media strategies will be a critical component in the sharing of project information with the public and interested stakeholders. Various communication tools such as newsletters, social media, and media alerts, particularly relating to public meetings will be distributed through the CDOT Public Information Officer.

Public Comment Database

A comment summary database will be developed to record comments received from the public. Comments may be obtained through the website, email, and comment forms from the public meetings. It is important to address public comment so that the public understands that its concerns and opinions are being heard. Responses will be handled by the PSG and CDOT as directed. Comment summaries will be used to incorporate public comments into the planning process.

Mailing List

A mailing list will be developed at the beginning of the study using existing resources (names and addresses of officials from other recent projects in the area) as well other identified stakeholders to provide project information and updates. The mailing list will include a diverse range of recipients including landowners; federal, state, and local officials; special interest groups; resource agencies; businesses; and members of the public who have a stake in the project study area. This list will be updated throughout the course of the project through various means of communication, such as sign-in sheets and the project website.

Review and Update of Stakeholder Involvement Plan

The Stakeholder Involvement Plan will be reviewed on a regular basis for accountability, consistency, and to ensure that project goals are being met. Implementing the SIP requires, but is not limited to, the following:

- Maintaining a current list of project stakeholders.

- Maintaining a detailed public involvement record (log) that includes records of all stakeholder contacts, meetings, and comments.
- Ensuring two-way communication and timely responses to stakeholders through formal and informal channels.

Revisions to this SIP may be necessary through all phases of the project. The PSG will provide updated versions of the SIP to all agencies involved, as necessary.

7.0 Availability of the Stakeholder Involvement Plan and Updates

The SIP is a dynamic document that will be available to stakeholders through the project website and will be updated as appropriate through the duration of the project. The PSG will make the SIP available to stakeholders for review at public meetings, on the website, and at all public events.