



**CITIZENS FOR APPROPRIATE TRANSPORTATION (CAT)
UPDATE – MAY 20, 2016**

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There is a lot happening. This Update summarizes recent activities.

CORRIDOR WIDTH – The narrowest width in the corridor (the “pinch point”) is east of the Oak Park Avenue Bridge. The widths of the three modes in the corridor are CSX railroad (58 feet), CTA (64 feet), and expressway (114 feet) for a total of 236 feet.

1. CSX – The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) reports the CSX says none of their right-of-way is available. The CSX decision limits what can happen in the Corridor. Freight railroads need 23 feet bridge clearance. Interstate highways need 18 feet, so the height of the proposed Austin and Harlem ramps is about five feet higher than needed for the expressway.

2. CTA – Current platform widths at the Austin, Oak Park, and Harlem Stations vary, but are about 13 feet. The CTA needs wider platforms to meet the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and National Fire Protection Standard 130 (NFPA) requirements. CTA’s proposed platforms are 18.4 feet at Austin, 17.9 feet at Oak Park, and 20.9 feet at Harlem. The CTA also wants maintenance space north of the westbound track. The CTA plans to rebuild the eastbound track in its current location, build wider platforms, and rebuild the westbound track north of its present location. Proposed station ramps have 15-foot horizontal landings every 30 feet.

3. Expressway - IDOT wants to use up to 10 feet of the CTA width for the expressway. Wider shoulders provide access for emergency vehicles, especially during congested conditions.

NATIONAL FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATION STANDARD 130 (NFPA 130 – 2014 Edition) - NFPA 130 covers “*life safety from fire and fire protection*” for transit rail systems, “*including but not limited to stations, trainways, emergency ventilation systems, vehicles, emergency procedures, communications, control systems, and vehicle storage areas.*”¹

IDOT evaluated proposed platform widths and vertical circulation elements against NFPA 130 requirements under a worst-case emergency evacuation scenario. IDOT’s analysis is conceptual because their study is still in the Phase 1 Planning stage. IDOT will update their analysis during Phase 2: Design.

NFPA 130 applies two tests:

- “*Test 1 - The station occupant load must egress the platform in 4 minutes or less*”
- “*Test 2 - The egress from the entire facility to the safe area (usually the street) in 6 minutes or less*”²

¹ NFPA 130: Standard for Fixed Guideway Transit and Passenger Rail Systems, 1.1 Scope.

² Ibid., Page 3.

NFPA 130 says, “The system can be determined to be non-compliant if a single element in a system, such as emergency exit doors, are under-designed / inadequate; because that one element will cause a bottleneck and short-circuit the evacuation as a whole.”³

For Test 1: Platform Egress Time, the Harlem Station scored 3.21 minutes, Oak Park 3.17 minutes, and Austin 3.12 minutes. All three scores are under four minutes so the proposed wider platforms passed.

For Test 2: Total Exit Time, the Harlem Station scored 5.99 minutes, Oak Park 5.98 minutes, and Austin 5.77 minutes. All three scores were under six minutes, but not by much. IDOT will do further investigation in Phase 2: Design.

IDOT concludes egress barriers such as the widths of stairs and ramps from the platforms to station houses and/or the turnstiles, roto gates, fare gates, and emergency exit doors / gates are the limiting factors. Our Fire Department should review IDOT’s analysis.

CTA BLUE LINE EXTENSION – The decision not to extend the Blue Line west of Forest Park will mean more traffic and congestion on the expressway.

BRIDGE WIDTH AND EXPANDED DECKING – There is a verbal agreement between the Village and IDOT that wider bridges are desirable. In addition, the Village is considering two decks.

1. A 158 foot deck from the east side of Oak Park Avenue to the alley behind Fifth Third Bank would add 36,500 square feet (.84 acres) and provide commercial space to connect the business district north and south of the Corridor.
2. A 410 foot deck on the east side of East Avenue in front of Rehm Park would add 3.1 acres (about 135,000 square feet). The Village is talking to other government agencies about collaborating on recreational space on this deck.

IDOT will not pay for decks. The decision to build (or not build) decks must consider expensive construction and maintenance costs, possible cost sharing agreements, alternatives, neighborhood impacts, and other needs. Oak Park is far below national guidelines on recreation space for the number of people who live here. The decision requires careful thought about the trade-offs.

NOISE WALLS – IDOT will conduct a revote on whether to construct noise walls with more information on height, noise reduction, materials, and aesthetics prior to the vote.

SUSTAINABILITY - The United Nations 1987 Brundtland Report defines sustainability as, “Meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The U.S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) says, “Transportation projects and programs serve many different, and sometimes competing objectives. ‘Sustainability’ is a concept that enables decision-makers to make balanced choices around these objectives. The three principles of the ‘triple bottom line’ upon which sustainability is based – social, economic, and environmental – capture the broad range of transportation goals and objectives.”⁴

³ Ibid., Page 2.

⁴ U.S. Federal Highway Administration, “INVEST Economic Social Environmental Sustainable Highways Self-Evaluation Tool, Version 1.2, September 2015, Page 11.

IDOT is using a web-based tool developed by the FHWA called INVEST (**I**nfrastructure **V**oluntary **E**valuation **S**ustainability **T**ool), which is “a collection of voluntary practices, called criteria, designed to help transportation agencies integrate sustainability into their programs (policies, processes, procedures, and practices) and projects.”⁵ Two of the four INVEST modules that apply to the Eisenhower Corridor are (1) Project Development and (2) Operations and Maintenance. FHWA’s sustainability web site www.sustainablehighways.org has criteria and a point scoring system to evaluate and improve transportation projects. The Project Development Module has 33 criteria and the Operations and Maintenance Module has 14 criteria to help decision makers balance the values in the “triple bottom line.” IDOT suggests solar panels, LED lighting, native plantings, permeable pavement (as an option for the shared pedestrian and bicycle path), and self-cleaning concrete.

LETTER OF INTENT

The Letter of Intent is critical because it should account for uncertain future conditions, construction, changing technology, and transportation needs. Are the Year 2040 projections accurate? Who pays for what? What impact will self-driving vehicles have? Both IDOT and the Village expressed a desire to keep some options open.

For the estimated eight-year construction period, the Letter should account for access to CTA stations, alternate travel routes, emergency vehicle access, work hours, ground vibration damage, air and noise pollution, business disruption, dust, and debris. During the 50 to 60 year life of the reconstructed corridor, we will live with the provisions contained in the Letter and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). Issues such as the edge designs between the expressway and community, noise walls, and options for the Home Avenue Bridge need to be resolved. IDOT says their Traffic Surveillance Building on Harrison Street is “antiquated.” What is the future of this building?

At their May 9, 2016 Study Session, the Village Board expressed a desire to make short- and long-term improvements in the areas near the Austin and Harlem ramps to offset the negative impacts from the proposed higher ramps located closer to neighborhoods. They did not reach any conclusions. A while ago, I recommended the Village contract with an attorney who specialized in National Environmental Policy Act issues and construction contracts. I hope they have done this.

Many of us should carefully review the Letter of Intent. Our expertise, ideas, and experiences provide valuable input to its provisions.

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⁵ Ibid., Page 9.