

Chicago Transit Authority Circle Line Alternatives Analysis Study

Screen One Public Involvement Public Comments and Questions (Appendix)

Comment No. 172

Topic Area: 5

Received via: Email

It wasn't clear from the proposed alignments whether the line would actually get to Fullerton or only to North and Clybourn. I would like to see the line go at least to Fullerton, possibly Diversey. A better alignment would include a Clark St. Subway, thus allowing tourists and neighborhood residents to get to the Zoo or Lincoln Park Conservatory or Home much faster than they currently can. Think about it this way:

The line would run along either Western or Ashland on the Westside, as you have it aligned but IN THE SOUTH have it run into CERMAK and all the way WEST to Indiana and then NORTH...light or heavy rail could be utilized for the run north...as the line continues NORTH it would run onto or under Columbus and then through Streeterville. With this alignment south and east of the loop, not only would it hook up with METRA south shore, but you would improve the cities ability to get to the Museum Campus and Soldier Field! As the line runs up Columbus it could turn WEST at Chicago and run toward the red line...finally making its turn to the NORTH under Clark St. or LaSalle St. and running up to Fullerton or Diversey where it would again turn WEST and finish off with the alignment you have set out in the west. The reason that this alignment seems superior is because it allows for better access by RAIL to several communities that only have limited bus service (esp. South Loop and Lincoln Park Zoo areas. If you are going to spend as much money as you are planning on, it would be wise to at least consider this alignment since you could use light or heavy rail, and would likely see an increase in revenue generated from the tourist dollars the line would certainly generate. Does this sound do-able to you? I am at least hoping that the people that live in the under-served South Loop and Lincoln Park areas where the line will run would appreciate this alignment!

Comment No. 294

Topic Area: 5

Received via: Email

I just wanted to add my opinion on the findings and direction for the proposed Circle Line. After looking over the PDF files and the findings so far, my opinion is that the Western Corridor probably would be the best option. It's pretty crucial for CTA and Metra to be connected outside of the Loop, so that suburban commuters are able to transfer seamlessly to the urban system, without the need for costly suburban extensions for CTA trains (such as Blue Line to Schaumburg, etc...). Metra already has several stations along Western, which makes that corridor a good and last costly choice to connect. Also, the further out the Circle Line is from the Loop, the better, and the more time commuters will save through the line's operation, the higher the ridership for the Line, which brings its eventual success. Both ends of the Blue Line, the Pink Line, and the Orange Line already have stops at Western as well. If the Line were to operate on Ashland it would potentially interfere with the Pink Line's operation on the Paulina Connector, putting the Circle Line on Western, would allow an uninterrupted and independent operation of trains. As far as elevated, above or below grade trains are concerned, I'm not sure if the right of way on Western is available above grade, but if so, I would put it on there, since the southern Blue Line and Pink Line stations are both at or below grade. Obviously by the time it got to the northern Blue Line station it would have to be below or at-grade, in order to connect with the Red/Brown/Purple line at the north. As far as the south is concerned, I assume that cost is the reason for not attempting to connect the Circle Line with the southern branches of the Red Line and the Green Line, but in order for the Circle Line to be most effective, steps would need to be taken to do that. Especially if Chicago is awarded the Summer Games

in 2016, riders would need an easy way getting from Soldier Field (Roosevelt on Red/Green) to the United Center, without having to go through the Loop. Finally, I was wondering what is the deal with the Red Line extension south of 95th Street. A large swath of the south side of Chicago is still without adequate rail coverage, besides the Metra Electric, and seems logical to do this in order to more fully cover Chicago's transit needs. Thanks for your time and good luck in finding the ideal solution for the Circle Line and getting it built.

Comment No. 295

Topic Area: 5

Received via: Email

I feel that the money that is being considered to be spent on a proposed Circle Line would be better spent enhancing existing CTA Rail Routes, and by getting the transit to remote areas of the city that lack transit at this time.

I propose the following alternatives:

Extend the Brown Line from Lawrence/Kimball to Northeastern Illinois University with a stop at Foster

Avenue-Swedish Hospital/North Park University, if not Peterson/Kimball

Extend the Congress/Forest Park branch of the Blue Line to Hines/Loyola

Extend the Douglas branch of the Blue Line to the North Riverside Park Shopping Plaza

Extend the Orange Line to 103rd/Pulaski or 103rd/Troy to serve St Xavier University. Stops should

include Ford City East and West, Daley College, Pulaski @95th, and SXU Terminal

A connector should run from the Brickyard Shopping Center to either the O'Hare Blue Line or the Green line. Wright College should also be included in the extension.

Extend the Englewood Branch of the Green Line to Kedzie/63rd

Extend Bus X49 to 119th/Western with local stops south of 95th Street

Create a route called W54. This bus would run a circular pattern from Midway, north on Cicero, south on Pulaski, and west on 115th and back north on Cicero to Midway. A south circuit would run the opposite way south on Midway, north on Cicero to about its usual northern terminus, and come back south to Midway. This bus would run on Weekends Only.

Create a weatherproof Sky Bridge or Pedestrian Tunnel from Clinton/Blue Line to Amtrak

Create a Transit Station at Madison, just east of the United Center.

I wholeheartedly agree with present efforts to extend the Red Line from 95th to FoMoCo. In addition, I would like to see larger and more prominent signs that would remind passengers that they can access Midway and/or O'Hare by using Rapid Transit

If you make transit more accessible to people, they will be inclined to use it.

Comment No. 297

Topic Area: 5

Received via: Email

I just thought I would contribute my thoughts on the proposed Circle Line.

The Western Avenue Corridor would serve the greatest number of people and create the easiest shortcut connections between the various El lines. It would be nice to not have to travel all the way downtown to transfer between El lines. The farther out the connecting circle line, the better. A subway beneath Western Avenue would be best, utilizing either heavy rail vehicles or light rail vehicles. Heavy rail would eliminate the need to transfer from one mode of transport to another, so I think that would be best. The idea of taking the Red Line to North/Clybourn, transferring across the platform to a Circle Line train, then transferring to the Blue Line to O'Hare when I need to get to the airport is very appealing.

Aligning the Circle Line under Western Avenue would also create new opportunities for dense commercial and residential development along a new corridor on the west side. Development will follow adequate, efficient transit. A subway under Western Avenue would permit fast movement up and down the corridor. A Western Avenue alignment would also create the possibility of a future connection to an extended

Ashland/63rd branch of the Green Line at Western and 63rd, creating a larger half-circle and bringing rail transit to the Marquette Park neighborhood. Just a thought.

Comment No. 293

Topic Area: 2

Received via: Email

I am writing as part of the Circle Line Alternatives Analysis Study. I am not in favor of the present development of the Circle Line. I feel that other transit projects are alternatives that should be given greater priority. The following are some of my reasons and suggestions, and I am including part of an article written by Little Village Environmental Justice Association. Both LVEJO and the Neighborhood Capital Budget Group are opposed to the current development of the Circle Line.

I am a regular transit rider, living in the Edgewood neighborhood. I have spoken previously at a CTA board meeting against the loss of the cash transfer and the current inequitable fare structure. As a freelance artist and educator in Chicago, one who has worked in various Chicago restaurants, the Shedd aquarium, Perspectives Charter School, and Harold Washington College, I have contact with and insight into the transit needs of many Chicagoland residents who, for various reasons, are living in low or median income situations and who are working directly with the educational, health, and service industries and facilities in Chicago.

I understand that the Circle Line as planned would be a beneficial addition to our transit system and, as it is close to and in the downtown area, would be especially beneficial to downtown businesses and tourist venues. (Particularly if it is true that Chicago is angling for an Olympic bid for 2016, the Circle Line could be a helpful downtown addition.) My concern is that Chicago, whether the Mayor's Office or the CTA or other decision making groups, is choosing to focus on the image of downtown Chicago and to spend local, state, and federal money irresponsibly. There are projects other than the Circle Line that should, for various reasons, take priority over continued research and development of the Circle Line. Specifically:

Research a wide circle loop that would connect suburban riders to existing train lines and that would cut across lines in a larger circumference. Just by looking at the CTA map, a rider can see that a new circle line, if developed, might connect Howard station with Jefferson Park with Oak Park . . .

Also merely by looking at the CTA map, one can see the places that do not have adequate train transit. There are huge regions between the red and blue lines in the southwest suburbs and beyond the current train lines that are currently underserved by transit. Why are funds being allocated primarily to developing areas that are already ahead in their transit access, such as the Brown Line corridor and the proposed Circle Line areas? Yes, the Brown Line is sorely in need of development, but there are also already many regular buses, Red Line trains, and Purple Line trains in close proximity to the Brown Line. Similarly, there are existing bus and train lines in close proximity to the proposed Circle Line route. There are other areas that are underserved by transit and that need to be priority areas before additional developments such as the Circle Line are funded.

Extend the Red Line.

Increase bus service hours and frequency.

Hire more train and bus drivers (and do so with good salaries, health insurance, and pensions). CTA is planning to purchase new train cars. Is CTA planning to increase capacity or merely to replace existing cars?

Consider putting funding into alternatives such as:
developing the monorail proposal that has been presented several times to the CTA

making some major downtown arteries such as Wabash (which has six lanes if parking is eliminated) electric transit, bike/rollerblade, and pedestrian only thoroughfares.

basing new transit circles on the trolley model using renewable or rechargeable fuel sources.

developing a circle/loop that has a much larger circumference than that of the proposed Circle Line, one that will give more people who are currently far from a train line greater access to existing train lines.

If the Pink Line is to be successful, incorporate a transfer on the current Blue Lines so that Pink Line service only increases service and does not decrease service/route options to any riders. In general, any development should serve to increase transit options and should not increase the options of some riders while decreasing the options of others.

Note that the proposed 180 day test dates for the Pink Line begin just as the school year is ending, and the first three months of the trial period are, primarily, while school is not in session. Therefore, the concerns of the Whitney Young High School riders, which were taken seriously by CTA and by the Mayor's Office, will not be as obvious. Will the trial period base its data on this first half, or will it consider the changing impact on riders when schools are and are not in full session?

Why is the Circle Line getting the aggressive follow through over other projects? Public action groups are frustrated with the lack of real public input in the decision making process. National and international coverage of the Pink Line seemed to focus on the naming process over the pros and cons of the line itself.

I recently rode a train from Noyes whose placard stated that the refurbished train car had debuted in the 1970's. Trains have longevity. They are efficient and cost effective. We need to be funding a project that will help to bring efficient and environmentally sound transit to the areas that are currently underserved by CTA trains, that are currently dependent on fuel guzzling, high polluting busses, before we fund a project such as the Circle Line. CTA transit options are currently inequitable. Riders in the southwest city and suburbs, specifically, are currently underserved. These places are often also underserved by busses, with routes and schedules not meeting the needs of the residents who commute into the city. (I met a hospital worker on a 35th Street bus recently who said that she is buying a car so that she can get home from working at the hospital on weekends/at nights.) (Note also that it is the underserved bus riders who are significantly affected by the loss of the cash transfer and the inequitable fare structure established with the implementation of the Chicago Card programs.)

The underserved Chicagoland riders are largely the front lines and behind the scenes people in many of Chicago's restaurants, services (such as hospitals), and attractions. These riders are often disproportionately lower income, Black, and Hispanic. Whether or not transit developments are intentionally discriminatory, discrimination exists. As NCBG states in discussing other alternatives such as Red Line and Blue Line extensions, "These other neighborhood rail service expansion projects have the potential to serve more underserved transit riders at a far lower cost than the Circle Line" (NCBG Circle Line April 2006 Update, page 2). Please consider the alternatives fully.

I would like to see CTA (and RTA) developments that increase transit options overall and especially in underserved areas and that do not increase the options of some riders while decreasing the options of others. I urge the CTA to postpone development of the current Circle Line project and to pursue funding for other projects which serve currently underserved areas first.

Thank you for your consideration,

Below is copied from the LVEJO website:

"On June 1st, 2006 the CTA Plans to cut the Blue Line in half. It will cut off the Douglas L/54th Cermak Blue Line branch off from the Forest Park Blue Line branch.

Instead of the 2 lines connecting at the Racine station, the Douglas L will run directly north of Polk across the newly rebuilt Paulina Connector to the Green Line. From there it will turn east to downtown, where it will circle around downtown on the elevated loop and then return via the Green Line and Paulina Connector to Polk St. and 54th/Cermak

1. This Phase 1 of the NEW Circle Line will cost Chicagoans and suburbanites \$5 Million and put 8 trains per hour onto the Green Line from Ashland through the loop. This will make it harder to increase trains on the Green Line from Oak Park & Chicago's West Side to/from Downtown and the South Side.

Instead of spending \$5 Million on the NEW Circle Line the CTA should bring back the Lake St. and 31st St. buses and run more trains per hour!

2. We need Green Line trains to run at least every 5 minutes during the rush hour and 7 minutes in the non rush hour. Adding Circle Line Trains will not only make it harder to add more trains, but slow down existing trains into and out of downtown, especially at the Wells & Lake Crossing where there are 5 Brown & Purple Line Trains going across for every Green Line train . The Circle Line will create a lot more congestion, slow down trains and potential safety issues inside the elevated loop: competing with Orange, Brown, Purple and Green Line trains

3. The Circle Line calls for 2 new stations to be built 1/3 of a mile apart: Medical Center Elevated and United Center Stations.

What about the Green Line stations at Western, Damen and Morgan/Halsted that have never been rebuilt after 12 years? There are no stations between Clinton and Ashland, Ashland and California!

4. The Circle Line will cut off the Forest Park Blue Line from the Douglas L/54 th Cermak Blue Line. There is now a direct connection at all the stations from Racine to O'Hare. After October, 2004 there will be no more direct connections.

5. The CTA says the Circle Lines will put more trains on the Forest Park Blue Line to O'Hare

The CTA can put more trains on the Forest Park Blue Line Today. Every day it has extra cars at each of its train terminals ready to roll, including during the rush hour.

Now rush hour trains run every 15 minutes. From the time the Blue Line opened to O'Hare in 1984 until the early 1990's rush hour trains ran every 5 minutes from Forest Park, non-rush hour every 7-10 minutes. The CTA does not run extra trains because it does not want to hire more train operators.

6. The Mid-City Transitway (MCT) should be supported by residents of Chicago's West Side and Oak Park, not the Circle Line. Only 1 of these new train lines will be built in the next 10 years due to federal funding limits.

MCT will run north and south 1-2 blocks east of Cicero Ave. from Old Orchard in the North to Ford City in the south and then turn east to the Lake. It will connect to every CTA and Metra Train line, including the Green & Blue Lines and dozens of bus routes.

The MCT will cut West Siders & Oak Parkers train travel time to O'Hare and Midway in half with transfers from the Green and Forest Park Blue Lines at Cicero Ave: increasing access to jobs and travel. . ."

www.lvejo.org

Comment No. 177

Topic Area: 18

Received via: Email

I was at the meeting last night at LPHS concerning the proposed Circle Line. Thank you for the info made available.

I actually have an unrelated concern and maybe you are in a position to consider it and pass it on to the appropriate person. I work for US Dept of HUD and like many federal employees, I receive transit checks. I also have a Chicago Card Plus which I use to buy a monthly pass. The problem is that the only place you can add transit checks to your account is at CTA HQ. The current rules restrict you to a \$300 balance in your account. This means that 3 times a year I have to hurry on my lunch hour from my office to Jefferson and Lake and back. The available hours do not include early in the morning or late in the afternoon. For me, this is doable although annoying. I am sure for others who receive transit checks, it is nigh unto impossible. I would suggest having at least a few other locations, such as the RTA headquarters (where they already sell CTA passes) at 175 W Jackson, to serve the folks in the Loop and maybe at CTA garages to serve the neighborhoods. I would also suggest raising the limit to at least \$450. I receive \$450 in checks every six months. At least I could cut my trips back to twice a year. At the bare

minimum I would suggest having longer hours so that people can come in before or after work if that is their only option. It would seem that if the CTA wants to encourage the use of CTA Cards, which clearly the CTA has been promoting, and if we agree public transit (use of transit checks) is better than driving individual cars, the CTA would add a few more computers to their system and coordinate the two plans. Thank you.

Comment No. 277

Topic Areas: 5, 18

Received via: Email

Hello Darud, at the recent Alternatives Analysis study where I met you, CTA displayed information about the various corridors and transit modes being considered, and asked for input from the public as to which routes and what type of vehicles most people would prefer.

The Alternatives Analysis is the mandated first step Transit Operators, or Government Agencies, must process in following the guidelines for seeking Federal funding for Capitol Projects. The public's comments and desires are supposed to be incorporated into any decisions on the various facets of submitted projects.

In the original Circle Line Plan as announced by CTA (<http://tinyurl.com/quqeq>) the new line was to use much existing 'L' infrastructure as a cost-efficient way to create a larger overall service.

Circle Line trains would use the existing Red Line rails and State St. Subway south from the North & Clybourn station to 13th and State, there they would exit the subway and climb onto the Orange Line tracks, which they would then follow to 35th and Ashland.

Phase 2 of the Circle Line would create a new elevated structure from the 35th and Ashland station north to join the Blue and Pink Lines at 18th and Paulina.

Phase 1 (completed) of the Circle Line was the re-construction of the old Paulina Connector just west of Paulina St. from the Eisenhower Expy. to the Lake St. 'L'.

This newly rebuilt section of track will be brought in to service (as was required by the funding agencies) next month as the new Pink Line. Phase 3 would require the construction of a new subway under Ashland Ave. from Lake St. north to North Ave., and east under North Ave. to join the Red Line at North & Clybourn.

A large part of the purpose of the Circle Line is to connect the various CTA and Metra lines outside the downtown area.

Metra of course would have to be directly involved as Metra would have to construct many new Metra stations at multiple locations to connect with CTA Circle Line trains at:

18th & Clark on the Rock Island

Cermak & Archer on the Southwest Service

35th and Ashland on the Heritage Service,

16th & Ashland on the Burlington Northern Santa Fe

Ashland & Kinzie on the UP West, Milwaukee and North Central

North & Elston on the UP North and Northwest (4 blocks from Clybourn station).

This would represent a sizable cost investment from Metra, which I don't think is covered in CTA's cost estimates, which I'm sure reflect only

CTA's costs (please correct me if I'm wrong Darud).
I don't remember ever seeing much in the way of official response from Metra on the CTA Circle Line project, as it is not THEIR project (it's CTA's), and I don't know how Metra feels about the investment they would be required to expend to make the project work (has CTA talked to Metra about it?). Of course if Metra choose not to participate, the Circle Line could still connect all the CTA 'L' Lines outside the Loop.
Some of the tentative results from a poll by the Chicago Tribune (linked below) from the initial Circle Line Alternatives Analysis meetings show some very interesting trends.
CTA displayed various route choices at the meetings such as the Ashland Ave., Ashland/Ogden, and Western Ave. Corridors.
You also offered various transit mode choices, such as Bus Rapid Transit, like Boston's Silver Line (<http://tinyurl.com/k3ff5>), Light Rail (<http://tinyurl.com/rw3j9>), Heavy Rail (like the 'L'), or Commuter Rail (like Metra).

The Tribune ran an article just after the meetings (<http://tinyurl.com/jn3b2>) which at the time included a poll using those choices, and the poll got some very interesting results.

The results indicated that the majority (over 50%) of those questioned preferred the Western Ave Corridor over Ashland (about 25%), or Ashland/Ogden (about 20%), this makes sense as it would enclose and provide service to a much larger central portion of the city.

But a Western Ave route would require much more new construction, especially using any of the rail alternatives. It also could not use the newly re-built Paulina Connector.

The Western Ave. Corridor could also utilize some already existing Metra stations (18th & Western on the Burlington, Kinzie & Western on the Milwaukee Rd). saving Metra the cost of constructing new ones.

And if a Circle Line Light Rail were routed along Armitage Ave. instead of North Ave., it could serve the existing Clybourn station on the UP North and NW Lines, saving Metra the cost of constructing a new stations at North & Elston (which would be too close to Clybourn station for Metra's purposes anyway - two in-city stops just four blocks apart would adversely impact Metra schedules).

Also, over 50% of those questioned choose Light Rail over BRT (about 15%) or Heavy Rail (about 30%) as their chosen Circle Line transit mode. Heavy Rail could of course utilize existing 'L' infrastructure for half of the new system (North & Clybourn to 35th & Ashland).
Bus Rapid Transit, while it may cost the least to implement, provides the poorest service performance of the modes, and certainly would not attract much residential or commercial development long the route, nor make any significant changes in the property values or real estate adjacent to the line.

This is probably why it got the least support.

Light Rail has many pro's and con's, but I think it would be the best choice.
Unless it operates with traffic conflict control aids such as dedicated

lanes and/or private ROW and/or traffic signal pre-emption, Light Rail is subject to being caught in vehicular traffic; it is also a bit more affected by adverse weather conditions than Heavy Rail.

It does however have a vastly lower implementation cost, as it operates mainly on the surface, with no 'L' structure, or vastly more expensive subway to build.

It also has a much closer relationship with the neighborhoods it passes through, and has been proven time and time again to increase property values and attract much new development into adjacent communities.

It could also tie-in with the Ogden Ave. Rail Corridor being considered, and could include a rail link to Navy Pier,

It could also operate some old-fashioned type trolleys like Kenosha or New Orleans to attract tourists.

It could not however use ANY existing 'L' infrastructure, and would have to be built entirely from scratch (but the cost of an entire Western Corridor Circle Line Light Rail System might still be much less than just the Phase 3 Circle Line Subway between Lake & Ashland and North & Clybourn).

I wonder, if after the final tally, if the majority of citizens choose a Light Rail service utilizing the Western Corridor, how CTA would work with that?

Would CTA attempt to go on with their own Heavy Rail plan regardless, or change their plans and implement what the public requests?

Would the Federal government supply funds for something other than what the public requests in the CTA Alternatives Analysis meetings?

Please let me know what you think, Big Guy...

Comment No. 296

Topic Areas: 2, 5, 12, 14, 16, 18

Received via: Email

On behalf of the Neighborhood Capital Budget Group and its Campaign for Better Transit, we hereby submit the following comments on the proposed Circle Line "New Start" project. Members of our organization attended the CTA's Stakeholders' Meeting, and the three CTA "Open House" meetings held during the first week of May 2006.

Our organization raises the following concerns about the project:

1. The CTA is focusing on and prioritizing the Circle Line expansion of the existing rail system without adequate consideration of other needs and priorities. The question should not be, which version of the Circle Line would the public prefer, but rather, do we need the Circle Line at all?

CTA has made the presumption that the Circle Line Alternatives Analysis Study Area has serious public transportation problems and deficits, and that building the Circle Line (under one of the various routes or modes still under consideration) would be the solution.

There are certainly some areas of the City's West Side and near southwest side that need additional access to public transportation, but for the past nine years (ever since the CTA service cuts of 1997-98), the communities on the West Side have proposed solutions to their transit needs that are far less expensive than building the Circle Line. These recommendations and requests for service enhancements have been largely ignored by CTA.

2. The CTA has not given adequate consideration to community-based proposals to enhance transit in the study area. Most of these proposals would be far less expensive than building the Circle Line, and have included:

Restoration of 24/7 service on the existing routing of the 54th/Cermak branch of the Blue Line
Additional train stations on the existing CTA Green Line at Lake/Morgan-Lake/Halsted, Lake/Damen, and Lake/Western

Restoration of east-west bus service on Washington Blvd, possibly in combination with restoration of Lake Street bus service, to serve residents of the west side from west of California Avenue to the city limits at Austin Blvd.

Restoration of bus service along Harrison Street on the weekends, to better serve John Stroger Hospital, the Medical Center District, and the University of Illinois-Chicago campus.

Additional train stations on the existing Forest Park branch of the CTA Blue Line at the Eisenhower Expressway/California and the Eisenhower Expressway at Central Avenue.

There are certainly additional community-driven recommendations that CTA might develop in partnership with local stakeholders. Some of the CTA's bus route changes included in the West Side and West Suburban Service Enhancement Plan may be helpful, but since there was virtually no community notification or review of the changes, the 180-day experiment approved by the CTA Board will be the first real test of the viability of these route configurations.

However, at no time over the past 9 years have residents, riders or businesses and employers on the City's near west, west, and near southwest sides suggested that they want or need the Circle Line.

There have also been at least two other rail line extension proposals for the study area:

Extension of the 54th/Cermak branch of the Blue Line west of 54th Street

Extension of the Forest Park branch of the Blue Line west of Des Plaines Avenue

The question that the Circle Line Alternatives Analysis study should answer is, how did CTA decide to prioritize study of the Circle Line alternatives ahead of consideration of these proposals?

3. What problem is the CTA trying to address with the Circle Line Alternatives Analysis? At the Circle Line Alternatives Analysis "Open House" events, CTA and its consultants said that the City and region need circumferential and intermodal connections to link existing CTA and Metra infrastructure, and overcome the obsolescent configuration of CTA's radial rapid transit lines feeding into Downtown Chicago. The city and region need "cross city" and neighborhood-to-neighborhood connections.

NCBG heartily agrees with this concept. However, the problem of cross-city travel does not impact the Circle Line Study area. It impacts the city's southwest, far west, and northwest side neighborhoods; as well as the metropolitan region's inner-ring southwestern, western, and northwestern suburbs.

The Circle Line "problem statement" is borrowed from the rationale for the proposed Mid City Transit Way, a project that would provide cross city transfer options and interconnections at points on the transit grid far closer to the need. Why would commuters prefer to ride almost all the way Downtown before making the cross-city transfer? Any of the configurations of the Circle Line under consideration would provide the transfer option only minutes before the commuter has completed the trip to the hub.

4. CTA's public participation process remains too little, too late.

CTA had already decided to submit the Circle Line project for authorization under SAFETEA-LU before holding any meaningful public participation sessions to inform its capital planning and budgeting process. The Paulina Connector underwent repairs as "Phase One" (now being called the "Pink Line") years before SAFETEA-LU was enacted.

Every year, CTA holds only one public hearing on its proposed upcoming capital program and annual operating budget. The CTA Board does invite public comment at its monthly board meetings, but members of the public are only allowed 3-5 minutes to make a presentation, and are discouraged from testifying more than once in any given 12-month period.

The West Corridor Study process that preceded the West Corridor Service Enhancement Plan was very limited and not inclusive or open to the general public. At the time NCBG raised questions about the CTA's limited outreach, its screening of those who registered for meetings, the failure to publicize the sessions ahead of time, the arbitrary cut-off of how many people could attend, and the limited availability of meeting notices in languages other than English. CTA never published the data collected through on-board surveys of bus and train riders. More recently, the round of CTA "Open House" Meetings on the Circle Line also received little advance publicity, and allowed little debate. In most of the sessions, CTA staff required members of the public to write down questions that were then screened by CTA employees before CTA staff or its Circle Line consultants would provide answers. No written materials were distributed prior to or at the Circle Line Open House meetings to enable the public to more closely examine the Circle Line proposals for themselves. While CTA has posted information on its website, not every one has access to that information technology. These forms of public input are not adequate.

Instead, without providing substantive planning and participation opportunities for the public as a matter of policy and sustained over time, CTA took aggressive steps to put Phase One of the Circle Line (the Pink Line) into operation, and then to fast track planning for the remainder of the Circle Line. While the May 2006 Open House meetings may technically fulfill the FTA's public participation requirement for the "Alternatives Analysis" phase of a New Start project, they did not provide a substantive exchange of views, discussion, or public review.

5. The Circle Line threatens to compete with and delay other projects that communities actually want and need.

By placing so much emphasis on the Circle Line, which is being designed to primarily serve areas of the city that are already rich in transit resources, CTA is committing our public funds and the agency's political capital. While CTA promises that other projects worthy of consideration are also to be studied, they will likely go unfunded or be deferred in preference to CTA's pursuit of the Circle Line. The CTA has not justified why the Circle Line should come first in its priorities. Realistically, transit capital funding will be limited over the next 6 years, and the Federal New Starts Program is a highly competitive program. CTA says it hopes that the agency will succeed in getting more than one New Start project funded during the SAFETEA-LU era. However that is currently speculation on CTA's part. It is incumbent upon the agency to prioritize those projects that will maximize access to public transportation for the broadest segment of the society, extend service to currently under-served areas, are cost-effective, and attract new riders to public transportation. What criteria did CTA use to prioritize the Circle Line study first?

6. Given CTA's intent to pursue some version of the Circle Line Phases Two and Three, NCBG is concerned about the potential route configurations of the Circle Line for community impact. The Ashland Avenue and North Avenue corridors are already densely developed. Any alignment of the Circle Line in this corridor will likely result in significant demolition of existing residences and businesses. Such displacement and disruption would be costly in both human and economic terms.

At its core, the Alternatives Analysis is supposed to be about local decision making. An effective Alternatives Analysis is intended to develop solutions to address documented problems in a corridor, relieve the underlying causes of those problems, and identify the viable options to address the problems, as well as assess costs and benefits. At this point in the public outreach process, CTA has not provided convincing evidence that the agency has documented the problems in the corridor, is examining the underlying causes or evaluating appropriate options to address such problems.

As for a comprehensive and accurate assessment of costs and benefits to the public, we can only hope that in the months to come that elected bodies such as the Chicago City Council and the Illinois General Assembly will join members of the public in seeking much more information about the origin of and impetus for the Circle Line proposal when the public has clearly tried to communicate other transit needs as more urgent. We hope to discover what if any evidence CTA decision makers weighed when they decided that this corridor and these Alternatives are the most urgent concerns for the CTA to address. We also hope that the CTA will provide a thorough and meaningful evaluation of the controversial 180-day experiment with the Pink Line, given that communities along the 54th/Cermak branch of the Blue

Line, as well as Green Line riders, have raised concerns about the potential negative impacts that re-routing most of the 54th/Cermak trains over the Pink Line, onto the Lake Street branch of the Green Line, and then around the old Loop Elevated tracks, may have on their daily lives.

Finally, it will be imperative and incumbent upon the CTA to provide compelling answers to questions about the cost-effectiveness, net new ridership attraction, and potential positive benefits and negative community impacts that any proposed configuration of the remaining two phases of the Circle Line will have on the affected communities.

We urge the CTA to reconsider and redesign its community outreach and public engagement efforts from this point forward with the Circle Line Alternatives Analysis study, to ensure that a far broader public will be informed and involved in the remaining phases of the process.

Comment No. 303

Topic Areas: 5, 12

Received via: USPS

I am submitting this letter as public comment for the CTA's Circle Line Alternatives Analysis. While I strongly support the construction of a Circle Line, I think there are 2 reasons that the CTA needs to reconsider its tentative conclusions about what corridors to study in the next phase of the analysis.

Additionally, I believe that CTA has failed to take seriously its obligation to respond to public comments and questions at its recent public meetings, and thus I believe an additional, more open meeting should be held before the next phase of the alternatives analysis begins.

1) Multiple Corridors & rail station density

The corridors that the CTA has tentatively decided to study further—the Ashland corridors and Western Corridor—would encircle too large a geographical area without providing any rail service to the interior of that area. The result is that travel to and from the interior of the enclosed area would require multiple transfers (from existing transit line to the Circle Line to a bus), which would be unattractive to many potential transit users. As the area grows and traffic worsens, reliance on bus connections in this new downtown center will be especially unattractive.

I would urge the CTA to consider further two potential solutions:

A) Combined Halsted/Ashland corridors

The CTA should consider (or further consider) utilizing a combination of two corridors. For instance, this could be done by providing a new rail service along both an Ashland corridor and a Halsted corridor. (See attached map.) Along with the construction of a few additional rail stations along a Halsted corridor, this combination of corridors would have several substantial advantages over free-standing Ashland/Western corridor:

-greater density of rail stations more of enclosed area within walking distance of rail would promote greater reliance on public transit in expanding downtown area, would promote greater economic development within interior of enclosed area, greater flexibility in connecting existing lines and providing new service. Halstead corridor would enable direct service from far north side to Midway, reduced need for multiple rail transfers.

Obviously, new rail service along two corridors would be more expensive than construction along one corridor. However, the additional economic growth and service improvements would be dramatically greater than construction along one of the Ashland or Western corridors alone.

B) Halsted Corridor

If the CTA concludes that new rail service along two corridors would be prohibitively expensive, I would urge the CTA to reconsider the exclusion of the Halsted corridor from the next stage of the alternatives analysis. Rail service along the Halsted corridor would allow existing rail lines to be connected in two

ways a circular route traveling via the Loop, and a new north-south route directly connecting the far north side to Midway airport (see attached map). Additionally, a Halsted corridor would not create a large, unwalkable “hole” in downtown rail service, as would a free-standing Ashland/Western corridor.

2) Lack of Responsiveness to Public Comments and Questions

Unfortunately, the CTA has not taken seriously the potential role of public input in this project. As you may recall, I attended the May 4th public meeting. There was no opportunity for attendees to speak during the meeting or ask questions directly of the presenters. While attendees were invited to write questions on comment cards, almost none of these questions were actually provided to the individuals available to answer questions. Instead, only a general description of selected questions was provided to the presenters for a response.

After the meeting ended, I asked you why my question—a relatively boring but perfectly reasonable question about station density and the feasibility of studying multiple corridors (see above)—had not been read to the presenters. You replied, essentially, that the CTA could not possibly address all of the questions it receives because there are too many. To put it mildly, this came across as disingenuous. The meeting started 15 minutes late and ended 25 minutes early; thus there was plenty of additional time available to answer further questions. Given the modest number of people in attendance, I suspect that the 40 minutes of unused time would have been sufficient to answer most, if not all, of the questions that did not fall within the general descriptions of questions that you provided to the presenters. For whatever reason, the CTA made a decision not to answer as many questions as it could have.

That is simply not adequate treatment of public participation for a project of this scale and importance.

The CTA is a public agency. It is not too much to ask that it address questions from the public in a public forum to the extent that time permits. While I appreciate that greater public participation at these meetings would no doubt tend to make the meetings a little more unruly and perhaps less pleasant for CTA staff, that is the one of the costs of living in a democratic society. Public comments and questions are sometimes unpleasant for those on the receiving end of them. The solution is not to avoid responding to comments and questions.

If even very strong supporters of expanded public transit are leaving your public meetings feeling like the CTA is ignoring them, the CTA needs to rethink its approach to public meetings. It is doing itself and the public a disservice.

For the purposes of the Circle Line Alternatives Analysis, I request that the CTA hold an additional public meeting before the next phase of the analysis begins, for the purpose of reading and answering questions that were submitted but not addressed during the previous meetings. Members of the public in attendance should be permitted to ask follow-up questions to the answers and ask additional questions as time permits.

Because the latter portion of this public comment addresses the topic of the CTA’s responsiveness to the public, I felt it should also be sent to a CTA official who is more directly accountable to the public (or at least to elected officials). Consequently, I have CC’d this letter to the chair of the CTA board.

Comment No. 305

Topic Area: 5

Received via: USPS

1) If the Circle Line is built, the best route would be the Western Avenue Corridor.

a) Using the Union Pacific right-of-way from near Archer Ave (where the Orange Line curves east) to the Western Ave junction of the Union Pacific West Line and the Milwaukee District West & North Lines, the North Central Line and Amtrak (Western Ave Station) would be the most economical and least disruptive route for the southern portion of any of the proposed corridors.

b) Building a large Westside transit center at the current Metra Western Ave station would make the most sense because there is an existing station and a large area that could be developed for the transit center without displacing current businesses or residents.

c) Existing stations are nearby or new ones could easily be built along the above described southern section of the Western Avenue Corridor where the Circle Line would intersect with the other transit lines.

2) The Western Avenue Corridor would also provide the flexibility to link the Circle Line with other major transit project being currently studied, the Mid-City Transitway.

a) The Circle Line easily could be connected with the Mid-City Transitway by building a line along the Union Pacific West Line or the Milwaukee District West Line rights of way from Western Avenue to the Chicago Belt Railroad /Union Pacific right-of-way and then north from there to join with the Blue Line (Kennedy Expressway). The Chicago Belt Railroad right-of-way is largely abandoned north from its junction with the Milwaukee District West Line to the Kennedy Expressway. By making the connection to Mid-City Transitway, the north portion of the Mid-City Transitway could be built while the mid-section of the Mid-City Transitway is still used for freight traffic and while creating an efficient direct link between O'Hare and Midway and the areas around and between those airports without having to go through downtown and transfer trains. It would also encourage work on the extension of the Mid-City Transitway to link with the Red Line along the Dan Ryan, thus providing rapid transit service to more of the underserved Southside.

b) Median of the Eisenhower Expressway from circle interchange to past the Union Pacific right-of-way over the Ike has more than enough room for an additional set of tracks. The CTA could use this additional set of tracks to run express trains out to the Circle Line and join with it much as the Douglas Branch of the Blue Line now joins the Paulina Connector. This would allow for "express" trains from downtown to midway and O'Hare using the Circle Line and the connection to the Mid-City Transitway.

Comment No. 306

Topic Area: 5

Received via: USPS

Dear Mr. Akbar,

Thank you for the community presentation. I attended the Thursday, May 4, 2006, presentation and found it to be well organized and informative. After careful consideration, I am writing in support of the Western avenue corridor for the proposed Circle line.

The Juvenile Court Center is located just east of Western avenue at Roosevelt road. It is two connected buildings at 1100 South Hamilton and 2245 West Ogden on the western edge of the Illinois Medical District. These buildings include 27 courtrooms, a detention center that with room for 500 juveniles, the Nancy B. Jefferson school and administrative offices for various county and state agencies. The courtrooms hear case both of juveniles accused of crimes and of children that may be abused. There are 2,075 employees at the Juvenile Court Center. This number does not include people going to either the courtrooms, detention center for office visits with attorneys, probation officers, social workers and others. The employees and users of this court facility will be assisted by the west side service improvements that will become effective next month, especially the # 38 and the #127 bus routes. The users of the Juvenile Court Center come from all parts of the city, county, and beyond. Many users do not have transit choices and the location of the Circle line along Western avenue corridor would assist both employees and users of the Juvenile Court Center. Additionally, there are other related agencies that are immediately west of the courthouse, They are TASC, a substance abuse counseling agency, and WIC a Women's Infant's and Children center managed by Catholic Charities.

The Western avenue corridor would also improve transfers to the following existing Metra lines: Milwaukee west line at the Western avenue station near Grand avenue, Milwaukee North Line at the Western avenue station near Grand Avenue, BNSF line at the Western avenue station at 18th street. Additionally, a Metra Union Pacific West Line station at Western Avenue could be constructed alongside the existing station.

Besides the advantages to the employees and users of the Juvenile Court Center, a Western avenue corridor would also increase access to the following schools, hospitals, government agencies and others along its route:

Aspira alternative school at Fullerton, St. Elizabeth Hospital at North, Chicago Board of Health at Division, Clemente High School at Division, St. Mary Hospital at Division, Illinois Department of Corrections, Juvenile at Lake, Illinois Department of Employment Security at Lake, Illinois Department of Human Services at Lake, Crane High School at Jackson, Juvenile Court Center at Roosevelt, TASC at Roosevelt, WIC at Roosevelt, Federal Bureau of Investigation at Roosevelt, Chicago Department of Buildings at Roosevelt, Chicago Taxi Commission at Roosevelt, Mt. Sinai Hospital at Ogden and California, railroad container yards between Roosevelt and 18th, Cook County Criminal Courthouse at 26th street, Cook County Department of Corrections including boot camp between 26th and 31st, Chicago Animal Control at 28th, Chicago Technical Institute of Daley College of the Chicago City Colleges at 28th.

In summary, the Western avenue corridor, although longer than the other proposed corridors, would have the greatest positive impact on the area. It would allow for rapid transit and commuter riders to make connections without having to travel downtown and would plan for eventual expansion of the central business district.