

Ashland BRT Environmental Assessment: logos of CTA, CDOT, Chicago Department of Housing and Economic Development

Overview

The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), in partnership with the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is proposing to implement an approximately 16-mile long Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service along Ashland Avenue to improve transit speed and reliability and enhance the pedestrian environment. The project corridor extends north-south along Ashland Avenue from Irving Park Road to 95th Street, to improve transit speed and reliability and enhance the pedestrian environment

An Environmental Assessment (EA), which is a document that provides a detailed assessment of social, economic, and environmental impacts of the project, has recently been completed for the full 16-mile corridor in accordance with federal requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA).

This handout provides a summary of the EA, including the project purpose and need, alternatives considered, and results. It also provides information on how to obtain a copy of the EA and provide oral or written comments on the EA and the project.

Public Open House Goals

This open house serves as a formal public hearing for this Environmental Assessment (EA), and is being conducted in accordance with federal requirements of 23 CFR 771.119. The goals of this open house are to:

- 1) Present the analysis and findings of the EA
- 2) Present additional information about:
 - What is Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)?
 - The Ashland Avenue BRT Project, including block-by-block concept designs
 - Where we are in the overall planning process
- 3) Seek formal comments on the EA and the project

Image: Map depicting the proposed Ashland BRT corridor, listing all proposed BRT stops from north to south, on Ashland Avenue: Irving Park, Addison, Roscoe, Belmont, Diversey, Fullerton, Cortland, North, Division, Chicago, Grand, Lake, Madison, Jackson, Harrison, Polk, Roosevelt, 18th, Blue Island, 31st, 35th, Pershing, 43rd, 47th, 51st, Garfield, 59th, 63rd, 69th, 74th, 79th, 83rd, 87th, 91st, 95th. The image also highlights the "Phase 1" corridor, which includes all stops between the Cortland Street stop and the 31st Street stop.

This project is planned as part of a citywide BRT initiative consistent with the goals and objectives outlined in the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning 2040 regional long range transportation plan (GO TO 2040). The project purpose and need were developed through the Alternative Analysis process in coordination with public and agency outreach efforts.

Project Need

CTA and CDOT are proposing to implement the Ashland Avenue BRT Project to address the following issues:

- Regional growth patterns outside of Chicago's Loop

- Congestion and a lack of competitive travel options
- Large number of transit dependent customers
- Lack of non-downtown, north-south, fast transit alternatives
- Slow bus speeds, frequent stops, and unreliable bus travel times
- Street design issues no longer meet corridor needs or land use policy objectives

Project Purpose

The purpose of the Ashland Avenue BRT Project is to expand connectivity to the region's existing transit system by providing a new and upgraded high quality, high capacity and cost effective premium transit service—a service which provides faster, more reliable, and comfortable passenger experience. The proposed project would address the transportation needs of expansive population and employment growth outside of the Central Business District or “Loop” and support local and regional land use, transportation and economic development initiatives. Specifically, the project will improve accessibility, mobility, transit travel times and reliability, and passenger facilities in this heavily transit reliant corridor.

Alternative Analysis

After technical analysis and input at six public open houses in 2012, the center running configuration was chosen as the “Preferred Alternative” to move through subsequent environmental evaluation and conceptual design. Further details on the Alternatives Analysis process and results are discussed in CTA's “How We Got Here: Western and Ashland Corridors Bus Rapid Transit Project Alternatives Analysis Summary,” available on CTA's project website (www.transitchicago.com/AshlandBRT).

Project Features and Benefits

BRT will offer riders faster, more reliable service and new, amenity-filled stations with enhanced, landscaped medians between stations. Local bus service will remain in addition to the BRT service.

This project will provide enhanced regional connectivity to existing transit bus and rail services that intersect with the corridor, and serve 232,000 residents and 133,000 jobs along the corridor. Ashland currently has the highest ridership in the system, with more than 31,000 boardings each weekday.

How it Works

- Center running bus-only lanes (one in each direction), to keep buses moving fast and on-schedule, out of general traffic
- Limited stops: approximately every half mile and at CTA ‘L’ stations
- Transit Signal Priority intersections and longer green lights to keep traffic moving
- Potential for paying fares at the station before boarding to make boarding faster
- Wide doors on left side of new, high-capacity vehicles to make boarding easier
- Improved lighting, ADA ramps and real-time bus arrival information at stations
- Maintains most existing medians and adds more than 75 blocks of new landscaped medians
- Approximately 90% of parking and loading zones retained on both sides of the street
- In order to accommodate BRT, the following adjustments would occur:

- Two general travel lanes (one in each direction) dedicated as center running bus-only lanes
- Most left turns removed to keep buses and general through-traffic moving

Image: Conceptual Rendering of an Ashland BRT Station

Environmental Assessment Summary

An Environmental Assessment (EA) was recently completed to evaluate and assess potential impacts to the natural, manmade and community environments that may result from implementation of the 16-mile Ashland Avenue BRT Project. To evaluate impacts, the proposed configuration (“Build Alternative”) was compared to the existing configuration (“No-Build Alternative”). The No-Build Alternative assumed no major transit system improvements or investments within the corridor.

Existing Configuration (No-Build Alternative)

Before **image:** Photograph of typical No-Build Alternative conditions along Ashland Avenue.

- Two auto travel lanes in each direction
- Parking on both sides
- Left turns mid-block and at intersections
- 15’ sidewalks
- Painted and landscaped medians

Proposed Configuration (Build Alternative)

After **image:** Photo-simulation of proposed typical Build Alternative (Preferred Alternative) conditions along Ashland Avenue at a station.

- One center running bus-only lane in each direction
- One auto travel lane in each direction
- Approximately 90% of parking and loading zones maintained on both sides of street
- Left turns removed, except at interstates
- Maintains existing 15’ sidewalks and wider sidewalks (17’ to 28’) provided at station intersections
- Most landscaped median widths maintained throughout corridor
- Over 75 blocks of new landscaped medians provided

Environmental Evaluation

The EA evaluated potential impacts related to various features that may result from a project. These features include:

- Natural Features – Air quality, water, biological, geology and soils, indirect and cumulative
- Community Features – Land use and economic development, neighborhood and community, environmental justice, historic and archaeological, park land and recreational, visual quality, noise and vibration, displacement/relocations

- Vehicular Traffic and Parking Features – Vehicular traffic volumes and speeds, vehicular diversion routes, parking
- Transit, Bicycle and Pedestrian Features – Transit travel times and reliability, transit ridership and demand, station access, pedestrian space, connectivity to bike-share
- Construction and Operational Features – Energy, safety and security, temporary construction, hazardous materials

Evaluation Results

Based on the results of the EA evaluation, the Ashland Avenue BRT Project is expected to have positive impacts on air quality, land use, economic development, neighborhoods and communities, transit service, and the bicycle and pedestrian environment. Potential negative impacts of the project include noise and vibration, vehicular traffic, parking, energy, and temporary construction impacts. Proposed mitigation measures identified in the EA would render these impacts not adverse.

Additional detailed analyses can be found in the full Environmental Assessment. Copies of the full Environmental Assessment are available at this meeting and online at www.transitchicago.com/AshlandBRT.

The Ashland Avenue BRT design is still being developed. CTA and CDOT are considering options and modifications, including the addition of some left-turns to the design, and we want your feedback on the current proposal.

How Can I View a Copy of the Environmental Assessment?

Copies of the Environmental Assessment are available at CTA's website (www.transitchicago.com/AshlandBRT), and at the following locations during the 30-day comment period:

CTA Headquarters

- 567 W. Lake Street, Chicago
- Hours: Weekdays 8:00 A.M. – 4:30 P.M.

Harold Washington Library Center

- 400 S. State Street, Chicago
- Hours: Weekdays, Sat.: 9:00 A.M. – 9:00 P.M., Sun: 1:00 P.M. – 5:00 P.M.

Chicago Public Library Branch Locations:

- Lincoln Belmont
1659 W. Melrose Street, Chicago
- West Town
1625 W. Chicago Avenue, Chicago
- Lozano (Pilsen)
1805 S. Loomis Street, Chicago
- West Englewood
1745 W. 63rd Street, Chicago
Branch Hours: Mon., Wed.: 10:00 A.M. – 6:00 P.M., Tues., Thurs.: 12:00 P.M. – 8:00 P.M., Fri., Sat.: 9:00 A.M. – 5:00 P.M.

Project Schedule

- Alternatives Analysis: 2012

- Environmental Analysis and Conceptual Engineering: Spring 2013 to Fall 2013 (We are Here)
- Detailed Design: Date to be determined, contingent upon available funding

All Phases include public engagement

Next Steps

- Comments on the Environmental Assessment (EA) are being taken over a 30-day period that began with publication of the EA.
- Comments will inform the next phase of design.
- Comments and responses will become part of the final EA, which will be available on CTA's website.
- Detailed design will begin on the first 5.4-mile segment (Phase 1). Concept designs will be refined based on additional technical analysis and community input.
- CTA and CDOT will hold additional public meetings as part of the next phase of design.

How to Comment/Stay Involved

Comments may be submitted during this open house by either speaking with the court reporter or completing a comment form. In addition, written comments may be submitted via email to AshlandBRT@transitchicago.com or by mail to:

Chicago Transit Authority
Strategic Planning & Policy, 10th Floor
Attn: Joe Iacobucci
567 W. Lake Street
Chicago, IL 60661

To be added to the project contact email or mailing list for future updates, contact CTA by email address at right or U.S. mail at the address above.

Project Email

AshlandBRT@transitchicago.com

Phone

1-888-YOUR-CTA (1-888-968-7282)

En Español

Para información en español, llame al (312) 681-2704

Project Web Site

www.transitchicago.com/AshlandBRT/ For more information about other BRT projects and events in Chicago: www.brtchicago.com