

Yellow Line Extension Project Scoping Report

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Acronyms

AA	Alternatives Analysis
CMAF	Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
CTA	Chicago Transit Authority
DEIS	Draft Environmental Impact Statement
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
LEP	Limited English Proficiency
LPA	Locally Preferred Alternative
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NOI	Notice of Intent
RTA	Regional Transportation Authority
SAFETEA-LU	Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users
TOD	Transit Oriented Development
TSM	Transportation System Management

Section 1

Introduction

1.1 Overview

The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) is proposing to make transportation improvements by extending the Yellow Line from Dempster Station to Old Orchard Road. CTA and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) will be preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that will evaluate the environmental effects of constructing and operating the proposed extension. FTA is the federal lead agency and CTA is the local lead agency.

CTA serves the City of Chicago and surrounding adjacent municipalities. The CTA rapid transit system is historically oriented toward travel to the downtown Loop central business district, the largest employment concentration in the region. In addition, established suburban communities with access to rapid transit include Evanston, Oak Park and Skokie.

The Yellow Line opened in 1964 as the “Skokie Swift” with service from Howard Station to Dempster Station. The regional long range transportation plan developed by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) has included an extension of the Yellow Line to the north since the 1980s. In addition, the Village of Skokie, with assistance from the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) conducted a feasibility study on a potential extension to the vicinity of Old Orchard Road in 2003.

During the past four decades, the Skokie area has established itself as a major employment and retail destination. Today, significant development activity is taking place and trips to suburban job concentrations are an increasingly important market for public transportation. The Village of Skokie, as an early promoter and implementer of transit oriented development (TOD), has sponsored a host of large scale and successful redevelopment projects. The Old Orchard Road area, one and one-half miles north of the current CTA Yellow Line terminus, now serves as the hub of travel demand in the area, and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future.

The Yellow Line currently provides shuttle service from a park and ride and bus terminal facility at Dempster Street to the Howard Street station where transit customers can connect to CTA’s extensive regional rail network and other public transit services. The Village of Skokie is constructing a new station at Oakton Street to enhance local access to activity centers in Skokie’s downtown and the City of Evanston is studying additional stations on the Yellow Line near Dodge, Asbury or Ridge Streets to serve southern Evanston.

Proposed extensions of the CTA Yellow Line from its current terminus at Dempster Street are part of the Chicago region’s long range transportation plan developed by the Chicago Area Transportation Study, now named the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP). The Village of Skokie and other organizations have studied extensions (in varying lengths and alignments) over the past few decades.

In 2007, CTA and FTA began the Alternatives Analysis (AA) process for the proposed Yellow Line Extension. As part of a two step screening process, CTA held two public meetings over

two years in order to gather input from the public regarding alternative options. Opportunities for public involvement during the AA process generated 241 comments from residents, elected officials, and stakeholders in the community. A Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) was identified through the AA process and designated by the Chicago Transit Board in August 2009. The results of the AA process are summarized in the report “CTA Yellow Line Extension Alternatives Analysis: Locally Preferred Alternative Report”, August 2009.

The Yellow Line Extension AA was a study of transportation, economic development, and community needs along potential corridors extending north from the current Yellow Line terminus at Dempster Street to identify opportunities for improved transit accessibility and leveraging existing transportation infrastructure.

The EIS will evaluate the LPA along with a No Build Alternative, and a Transportation System Management (TSM) Alternative developed during the AA process. In addition to these three alternatives, additional alternatives will be developed for analysis based on the comments received during scoping. Subsequent to the completion of the AA process, FTA and CTA initiated the public and agency NEPA scoping to obtain input on the scope of the EIS. The Notice of Intent (NOI) identified the three alternatives carried forward from the AA for evaluation. This report summarizes the results of the NEPA scoping process.

The Draft EIS (DEIS) will build upon the AA studies and form the basis for performance of Preliminary Engineering and preparation of a subsequent Final EIS. One of the primary purposes of scoping is to identify possible environmental impacts of the project, and eliminate proposed alternatives with substantial environmental impacts from further analysis. Transit improvements to the Skokie area could be financed with a mix of local, state, federal New Starts, and other federal funds. Accordingly, the project will be executed in compliance with current FTA Section 5309 New Starts guidelines, and all environmental documents will satisfy NEPA requirements.

1.2 Project Area

The proposed project area lies about 12 miles north of the Chicago Central Area (commonly referred to as the “Loop”) and is generally within the Village of Skokie. The limits of the project area are Old Orchard Road on the north and Dempster Street on the south.

The Skokie area has established itself as a major employment and retail destination and not just a suburban city. Significant development activity has meant that trips to suburban job concentrations are an increasingly important market for public transportation. The Old Orchard Road area now serves as the hub of travel demand in the area.

The three alternatives described in Section 1.3 were developed for scoping. These are the alternatives that were preliminarily presented as meeting the Purpose and Need in the Notice of Intent. Based on comments received during the scoping, additional alternatives that preliminarily meet the Purpose and Need will be developed for analysis in the EIS.

1.3 Alternatives

The Yellow Line Extension EIS will, at a minimum, include an evaluation of a No Build

Alternative, Transportation System Management Alternative, Fixed Guideway Alternative which is the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). The DEIS will also include other alternatives to be developed in response to scoping comments. The alternatives developed for discussion during scoping are briefly described below.

1.3.1 No Build Alternative

The No-Build Alternative is defined as the existing transportation system, plus any committed transportation improvements that are already in the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) FY 2007 – 2012 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Intersection improvements at Dempster Street, Golf Road, and Old Orchard Road along Skokie Boulevard are included in the TIP as well as road widening improvements of Old Orchard Road from Harms Road to Skokie Boulevard and the expansion of the northbound I-94 Expressway off-ramp lanes. In addition to a variety of resurfacing projects, Dempster Street is scheduled to be reconstructed and widened to Central Road. All elements of the No-Build Alternative are included in each of the other alternatives.

Bus transit service under the No Build Alternative would be focused on the preservation of existing services and projects. Although outside the project area, a significant transit improvement included in the No Build Alternative is the construction of a Yellow Line station at Oakton Street to serve the Skokie downtown and surrounding developments. All elements of the No Build Alternative are included in each of the other alternatives.

1.3.2 Transportation System Management (TSM) Alternative

The proposed TSM Alternative is a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) alternative that operates between the Yellow Line Dempster Station and Westfield Shoppingtown Old Orchard Mall via Dempster Street, Niles Center Road, Skokie Boulevard, Golf Road, and Laverne Avenue. The TSM Alternative would include a new park and ride facility at Old Orchard Road.

The 1.7 mile long TSM Alternative would operate in mixed traffic with traffic signal priority on Dempster Street, Niles Center Road, Skokie Boulevard, and Golf Road portions of the route. There would be no exclusive bus-only lanes and no intermediate stops. Existing bus routes would continue regular operations.

This alternative would include the transportation improvements that are already in the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning Fiscal Year 2007-2012 Transportation Improvement Program as described for the No Build Alternative.

1.3.3 Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA): Fixed Guideway Alternative

The proposed alternative presented here represents the preliminary alternative developed for scoping. Based on comments received during scoping, additional alternatives will be developed for analysis in the EIS.

The proposed LPA would extend the heavy rail transit line from Dempster Station north along the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) right-of-way from Dempster Street to the vicinity of Old Orchard Road (Figure 1-1).

The LPA would proceed northbound on a single track alignment within the UPRR right-of-way from Dempster Street to the area north of Golf Road. Beginning north of Golf Road, the alignment would curve east, paralleling the east side of the I-94 Expressway on an elevated profile to the proposed terminal location on the south side of Old Orchard Road. The elevated profile avoids grade crossings between Dempster Street and Old Orchard Road.

Summary:

- Includes the transportation improvements that are already in the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning Fiscal Year 2007-2012 Transportation Improvement Program as described for the No Build Alternative
- Heavy rail transit line extension from Dempster Station to Old Orchard Road
- 1.6 miles long with no intermediate stops
- 2 new stations:
 - 1) The Dempster Station would be completely rebuilt to accommodate longer length trains and support bi-directional ridership demands. The elevated alignment would place the new station centered above Dempster Street providing enhanced station accessibility from the north and south parking areas without requiring pedestrians to cross Dempster Street. Bus transfer, taxi, entrance and parking areas at Dempster Station would be reconfigured for the new elevated station.
 - 2) Terminal station would be located east of the expressway and in the northwest portion of the Niles North High School (NNHS) property. Parking spaces displaced by the project would be replaced by a multi-story parking structure with dedicated school parking and dedicated commuter parking.
- CTA and Pace bus services would be rerouted to pass through an off-street facility on the east side of the rapid transit station and continue to the existing bus transfer station at Old Orchard Mall.

1.4 Summary of Purpose and Need

The project purpose and need will be revised based on input received during scoping. The following purpose and need were developed through the Alternatives Analysis process. This purpose and need were presented in the Notice of Intent and the scoping materials that were made available for comment at the start of scoping.

The purpose of the Yellow Line Extension project is to improve transit accessibility and provide mobility options by better utilizing existing transportation infrastructure capacity. The investment would also support the Village of Skokie's land use plans.

The need for the project is based on the following considerations:

- There is a significant reverse commute to the project area that is not well served by the current Yellow Line terminal location
- Travelers on the existing system must make multiple transfers to reach activity and employment centers in the project area

- Transit alternatives will allow a portion of project area trips to avoid continued growth in project area arterial street and expressway congestion.

Based on input received during scoping, this purpose and need will be re-evaluated during the development of the environmental impact statement. The AA process identified a need to serve a significant reverse commute to the project area. That is, a significant percentage of the commuters within the study area were commuting to the Skokie area in the morning which is the reverse of the ordinary commute direction which takes commuters towards downtown Chicago. In addition, the AA identified that continued growth in the study area would lead to increasing congestion on both arterial streets and the expressway. By providing transit alternatives within the study area, a portion of the trips that originate and pass through the study area could be taken on transit allowing commuters to avoid this existing and projected congestion

1.5 Project Participants

The project participants include FTA, CTA, and CTA's consultants. CTA's consultants include the CWC Transit Group and CWC's subconsultants. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has been identified as a cooperating agency. Other project participants include federal, state, and local participating agencies identified in accordance with the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) 6002. Appendix C contains a list of participating agencies.

1.6 Purpose of Report

The following report summarizes the public participation process for, and the public comments resulting from, the Yellow Line Extension public scoping meetings and comment period. The process of determining the scope, focus, and content of an EIS is known as "scoping." Scoping meetings are a useful opportunity to obtain information from the public and governmental agencies. In particular, the scoping process asks agencies and interested parties to provide input on the proposed alternatives, the purpose and need for the project, the proposed topics for evaluation, and potential impacts and mitigation measures to be considered.

The Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA regulations requires federal lead agencies to conduct agency and public scoping when defining the appropriate range of issues and depth of analysis for a major environmental document (40 CFR part 1500 et seq.). This Scoping Report documents the proposed Yellow Line Extension project's lead agency's compliance with these requirements.

Section 2

Scoping Process

2.1 Early Scoping Activities

In 2007, CTA and FTA began the Alternatives Analysis (AA) process, for the proposed Yellow Line Extension. As part of a two step screening process, CTA held two public meetings between 2008 and 2009 in order to help define the purpose and need and identify a range of reasonable alternatives. This AA process is an early public scoping process and was conducted consistent with the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) guidelines. Early scoping is a process conducted prior to the start of the formal NEPA process. The activities summarized here helped to set the stage for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement Scoping process which is described starting in Section 2.2.

Early scoping included a series of two screening evaluations and public outreach efforts. The first step, Screen 1, included meetings with stakeholders and elected officials and one public meeting. The public meeting was held on August 26, 2008. A total of 57 persons attended the public meeting and 15 representatives of 12 organizations attended the stakeholder briefing. In addition, four briefings with elected officials were held including one suburban mayor meeting with four mayors.

The second step, Screen 2, again included stakeholder and elected official briefings, and a public meeting. The public meeting was held on April 30, 2009. A total of 62 persons attended the public meeting, and 19 representatives of 12 organizations attended the stakeholder briefing. Six briefings with elected officials and one suburban mayors meeting with nine mayors were held. In addition, one briefing of the Northwest Municipal Conference Transportation Committee was held.

Additional detail regarding this early scoping process is contained in the report "CTA Yellow Line Extension Alternatives Analysis: Locally Preferred Alternative Report", August 2009.

During the early scoping and AA process, CTA evaluated a wide range of alternatives and considered both agency and public comments through public meetings, stakeholder and elected official briefings, and during public comment periods. In August 2009, the Chicago Transit Board designated the Fixed Guideway Alternative as the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for further study in the EIS.

2.2 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) Scoping Activities

In accordance with NEPA, CTA and FTA have initiated the environmental review process for the Yellow Line Extension. An EIS will be prepared to identify impacts related to project construction and operation. As part of the initial phase of the environmental process, a public scoping meeting was hosted on September 23, 2009 to receive public comments on the alternatives and issues that should be examined as part of the environmental analysis. The public meeting is also a requirement of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation

Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), which requires project proponents to provide opportunities for public participation in transportation decision-making. The process of determining the scope, focus, and content of an EIS is known as “scoping.” Scoping meetings are a useful opportunity to obtain information from the public and governmental agencies. In particular, the scoping process asks agencies and interested parties to provide input on the proposed alternatives, the purpose and need for the project, the proposed topics of evaluation, and potential impacts and mitigation measures to be considered.

2.2.1 Public Participation Plan

NEPA and SAFETEA-LU require project proponents to provide opportunities for public participation in transportation decision-making. In order to meet the requirements of these two Acts, a Public Participation Plan (Appendix A) was developed to guide CTA through a comprehensive public participation process for the Yellow Line Extension EIS scoping phase. The plan includes public participation goals, strategies to engage the public, key audiences to be addressed and the plan for notification and outreach for the scoping phase of the project. The Public Participation Plan that is included in Appendix A was developed specifically for the scoping process and will be updated to address outreach needs for the release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

2.2.2 Coordination Plan

Section 6002 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) established an environmental review process for transit projects that has now been included in Section 139 of Title 23 of the U.S. Code. Section 139 directs agencies to prepare a plan for coordinating public and agency participation in and comments on the environmental review process for a project. The coordination plan describes how the lead agencies will provide opportunities for input from both the public and other agencies. The Coordination Plan includes the Public Participation Plan described above in Section 2.2.1.

2.3 Initiation of Scoping - Notice of Intent (NOI)

FTA published the NOI in the Federal Register on September 1, 2009. The publication of the NOI is the official federal notification of the agency’s intent to prepare a DEIS. The NOI included notification of the dates and locations of the agency and public scoping meetings, the public comment period, as well as a description of the project purpose and need and alternatives. The NOI initiates the NEPA scoping process. A copy of the NOI is in Appendix B. Comments were accepted by CTA from the date of publication of the NOI in the Federal Register (September 1, 2009) through October 27, 2009. This provided a public comment period of 57 days.

2.4 Agency Scoping

2.4.1 Participating Agencies

Participating agencies can be Federal, State, tribal, regional, and local government agencies that may have an interest in the project. In accordance with SAFETEA-LU Section 6002 requirements, CTA, in coordination with the FTA, prepared and mailed participating agency invitation letters to 76 agencies with a potential interest in the project in September 2009. The

identification of potential participating agencies built on the list of agencies identified through the AA process.

The responsibilities of these agencies include, but are not limited, to:

- Participating in the NEPA process starting at the earliest possible time, especially with regards to the development of the purpose and need statement, range of alternatives, methodologies, and the level of detail for the analysis of alternatives.
- Identify, as early as practicable, any issues of concern regarding potential environmental or socioeconomic impacts of the project.
- Participate in the issue resolution process, described in the Coordination Plan.
- Provide meaningful and timely input on unresolved issues.
- Participate in the scoping process.

Accepting the designation as a participating agency does not indicate project support and does not provide the agency with increased oversight or approval authority beyond its statutory limits.

Participating agencies for the project are listed in Appendix C and include federal, state and local agencies with an interest in the project because of an overlap in their area of jurisdiction or some specialized knowledge of potential project effects (such as the Village of Skokie or Pace suburban bus service). Invited federal agencies automatically become a participating agency unless they decline the invitation in writing, while local and state agencies must accept the invitation. The final list of participating agencies then includes federal agencies that both accepted and did not decline as well as state and local agencies that accepted the invitations.

Agencies were given 30 days from the date of the letter to respond. Agencies may also request to be added at any time during the process. Appendix D contains two sample invitation letters; one that was sent to federal agencies and tribes and one that was sent to state, regional, and local agencies.

2.4.2 Cooperating Agencies

Cooperating agencies are, by definition in 40 CFR 1508.5, federal agencies with jurisdiction, by law or special expertise, with respect to any environmental impact involved in the proposed project. A state or local agency of similar qualifications may, by agreement with the lead agency, also become a cooperating agency. The cooperating agencies are by definition participating agencies as well, and while the roles and responsibilities of both are similar, the cooperating agencies have a slightly greater degree of authority, responsibility, and involvement in the environmental review process.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has requested to become a cooperating agency for the Yellow Line Extension project because a portion of the proposed route extends along I-94

and is within the Illinois Department of Transportation right-of-way. Alterations to interstate highways or leases of right-of-way may require FHWA action.

2.4.3 Agency Scoping Meeting

One Agency Scoping meeting was held as follows:

Time: Thursday, September 24, 2009, 8:00 A.M.
Location: CTA Headquarters, Conference Room C
567 W. Lake Street
Chicago, IL 60661

Attendees: 15, representing the following agencies and jurisdictions (sign-in sheet included in Appendix E):

- Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT)
- Illinois Commerce Commission
- Metra
- Pace
- Niles Township High School 219
- Village of Morton Grove

CTA hosted and presented the meeting with FTA present to observe. The meeting included a PowerPoint presentation similar to the one shown at the public scoping meetings and described in Section 2.5.4.1 with some additional information on the AA process.

2.4.3.1 Agency Scoping Meeting Comments

The topics addressed in the question and answer session included:

- Discussion of the ridership analysis conducted for alternatives in the AA process
- Discussion of the differences between the TSM Alternative and BRT as described in the AA process
- Potential effects on Niles North High School including land acquisition and parking
- Potential traffic impacts on Old Orchard Road
- Discussion of other potential alternatives including a terminal west of I-94 Expressway or a terminal at Golf Road
- Potential for future expansions further north of Old Orchard road
- Potential conflicts with I-94 alignment and off ramps
- Discussion of factors to consider when estimating project costs

The agency scoping meeting minutes are included in Appendix E.

2.5 Public Scoping

Public scoping is an important element in the process of determining the focus and content of an EIS. Scoping helps to identify the range of actions, alternatives, environmental effects, and mitigation measures to be analyzed in depth, and helps eliminate from detailed study those issues that are not pertinent to the final decision on the proposed project. Scoping is an effective way to bring together and address the concerns of the public, agencies, and other interested parties.

Notification of the public scoping meeting was completed via several forms of media as described further in this section. This outreach was in addition to the official notice published in the Federal Register. One public scoping meeting was held on September 23, 2009 as described in Section 2.5.4.

2.5.1 Notification Database

CTA maintained and updated the stakeholder database developed during the AA study to track interested individuals and groups. To the extent possible, CTA includes mailing addresses as well as e-mail contact information on the database. The database includes those who participated in the early scoping AA process by attending a meeting or providing comment during the process.

In addition to those identified through the AA process, the notification database was expanded to include residents and businesses adjacent to the proposed build alternative alignment. Addresses for businesses and residences on parcels either immediately adjacent to the proposed alignment or separated from the alignment by a street, park, vacant parcel, or one residence, were also added to the notification database.

At the time of the scoping meetings, 606 entries were listed on the Yellow Line Extension project database. A list of the public agency database entries is provided in Appendix F.

2.5.2 Public Notification Activities

In order to engage the public to participate in the environmental review process and attend the scoping meeting, some basic strategies were used including: 1) make it easy to participate, 2) provide easy-to-understand information that helps people provide informed scoping comments and 3) provide multiple ways to obtain information and provide comment and ensure stakeholders are aware of the planning process and are shown how public input will be used.

Invitations were mailed directly to people, businesses, and agencies on the project mailing list and e-blast invitations were also sent to those with e-mail addresses. Newspaper display ads were placed in a total of 8 publications, transit cards were placed on public transit and flyers were placed at strategic locations in the project area. Additionally, a project web page was developed to provide all of the project information and pertinent scoping information.

2.5.2.1 Direct Mail Notice

Scoping meeting invitations were mailed on September 1, 2009 to a list of 606 entries that included elected officials, government agencies, tribes, general interested persons, businesses, organizations, neighborhood associations and property owners adjacent to both sides of the

proposed build alternatives routes. The notice provided information on scoping, the alternatives, how to provide a comment, and the public scoping meeting information. The mailed invitation included information in English and Russian. (Appendix G).

2.5.2.2 Transit Cards

In order to reach a large audience of transit riders, “transit cards” or “car cards” with the public scoping meeting information were placed in various buses and stations in the project area. (Appendix G) Approximately 311 transit cards were distributed on September 4, 2009 for posting at all Yellow Line stations and on bus routes originating from the North Park Garage.

2.5.2.3 E-mail Notification

An invitation e-mail was created that included information on the public scoping meeting and how to provide comments. The e-mail was sent to approximately 253 email addresses on September 5, 2009. A copy of the e-mail notification is included in Appendix G.

2.5.2.4 Newspaper Advertisements

To invite the public to the scoping meeting and notify individuals about the comment period, display advertisements for the scoping meetings were placed in eight newspapers within the project area. Newspapers were selected based on their geographic focus, language needs, and audited circulation numbers. Display ads ran during the week of September 8, 2009 through the week of September 18, 2009. Ads were placed in different papers on different days of the week throughout the notification period. Ads were placed in the two papers with the largest circulation twice, running a week apart. In addition, a legal notice was placed in the Chicago Tribune on September 8, 2009. The display ads and legal notice are included in Appendix G.

Table 2-1. Newspaper Display Advertisements

Newspaper	Ad Size	Geographic Coverage	Language	First Ad Date	Second Ad Date
Chicago Sun-Times	¼ page	Region	English	Tues, 9/08/09	Tues, 9/15/09
Hoy	¼ page	Citywide	Spanish	Fri, 9/11/09	--
RedEye	¼ page	Citywide	English	Wed, 9/09/09	--
La Raza	¼ page	Citywide	Spanish	Sun, 9/13/09	--
Tribune - City and North Shore Zones	¼ page	City, N suburbs	English	Wed, 9/09/09	Wed, 9/16/09
Pioneer Press (5 weeklies)	¼ page	Skokie area	English	Thurs, 9/10/09	--
Chicago Jewish News	¼ page	Region	English	Fri, 9/11/09	--
Legal Notice: Chicago Sun Times	n/a	Region	English	Tue, 9/08/09	--

Source: CWC Transit Group

2.5.2.5 Project Web Site

A project web site, www.transitchicago.com/yellowEIS/, was developed for the Yellow Line EIS. The site includes information about the project, the environmental review process, and the scoping information. The site also included information about how to submit scoping comments and who to contact for additional information. The web site prominently featured the dates and times of the public scoping meeting, as well as links to directions using public transit to access the meeting location. Website content included the scoping booklets, presentations made at the public scoping meeting, and other information of interest to the public from the AA process. The website will continue to be updated at key milestones.

2.5.2.6 Additional Outreach During Public Scoping Period

In order to maximize the coverage of the outreach effort for the scoping meetings, a media release (Appendix G) was sent to local press outlets, meeting announcements were posted on local on-line community calendars, and flyers (Appendix G) were put in key locations around the area. The meeting announcement was distributed to the following village hall and library locations:

- City of Evanston
- Northwest Municipal Council of Governments
- Village of Glenview
- Village of Golf
- Village of Lincolnwood
- Village of Morton Grove
- Village of Niles
- Village of Northfield
- Village of Skokie
- Village of Wilmette.

The flyer was distributed to the following libraries:

- Glenview Public Library
- Kenilworth Village Hall (Kenilworth Village Library District)
- Skokie Public Library
- Wilmette Public Library
- Winnetka – Northfield Public Library District

2.5.2.7 Limited English Proficiency Analysis

A fundamental requirement of NEPA is communication with local citizens who could be affected by a project. This means that informational materials should effectively communicate to everyone in a project area. The Village of Skokie has historically supported a very diverse

population. However, as immigrants become integrated into American culture they become more widely distributed and new groups of immigrants arrive. Skokie has a history of welcoming successive waves of immigrants. It was important at the start of this project to determine whether there was a significant population with limited English proficiency within the project area.

Due to the small size of the affected area surrounding and adjacent to the CTA Yellow Line extension (the project area), a combination of census data and a field visit were necessary to gain a better understanding of the languages used in the households near the project area. A Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Baseline report was developed from census tract data. This was combined with the more geographically focused census block data and information collected during a field visit.

The LEP Baseline Report shows a large concentration of Russian speaking households (10-20%) surrounding the project area. Other languages identified by the census data included Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Tagalog, and Polish, but in much lower percentages. The field visit did not identify any significant population of non-English speakers. In addition, neither the local high school nor the Village of Skokie identified any significant population with limited English proficiency.

Based on this analysis, scoping materials were provided in Russian and a Russian translator was available at the public scoping meeting. Scoping notices also included a line offering additional translation services with advance notice. This offer was printed in Spanish, Tagalog, and Korean. No requests for additional translation services were received prior to the public scoping meeting.

2.5.3 Elected Official and Stakeholder Briefings

There were three briefings with elected officials or stakeholders held on the Yellow Line Extension project. Generally, briefings covered a description of the project and the scoping process. The briefings included the following:

- Office of Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky; Office of State Representative Julie Hamos; and Office of State Senator Jeff Schoenberg, September 21, 2009
- Mayor George Van Dusen, Village of Skokie, September 10, 2009
- Representatives from Niles School District 219 and Niles North High School, September 10, 2009

2.5.4 Public Scoping Meeting

CTA hosted one public scoping meeting to inform the public about the project and gather input on the scope of the environmental studies, draft purpose and need, and alternatives to be evaluated. The meeting was conducted in compliance with NEPA guidelines, and the location was within the project area, accessible by public transit, and ADA compliant. The scoping meeting was set approximately five weeks in advance of the end of the public comment period on October 27, 2009.

For the convenience of all attendees, bus lines to and from the meeting location were publicized on some notices and on the website. In order to provide the greatest opportunity for community participation, the meeting was scheduled in the early evening on weekdays.

A total of 309 people signed in at the meeting. There may have been a few additional attendees at the meeting who did not sign in. Approximately 93 people provided verbal and/or written comments at the meeting. An additional 96 comments were received via letters, e-mail, and mailed comment cards throughout the public scoping period.

Public Scoping Meeting:

Time: Wednesday, September 23, 2009, 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Location: Oakton Community Center
4701 Oakton Street
Skokie, IL 60076

Attendees: 309 people signed in

Comments: 56 verbal, 37 written

2.5.4.1 Public Scoping Meeting Format

The scoping meeting began with a 45-minute open house format. During the open house session, project team members were present at project display boards to answer questions related to the technical aspects of the project. The open house session provided attendees with an opportunity to review the project information and clarify their understanding of the project and environmental process prior to the start of the presentation and subsequent comment period.

Following the open house period, a PowerPoint presentation was made to provide attendees with information regarding the purpose of scoping and information on the project purpose and need, background, the recently completed AA process, and the alternatives being carried forward into the DEIS (Appendix I). Emphasis was placed on the importance of the community providing comments before the comment deadline, at the public meetings or via e-mail, fax, or postal mail.

Following the presentation, the meeting shifted into a formal public comment session, which was recorded by a court reporter. Members of the public provided verbal comments to CTA on the scope of the EIS and the project which were recorded in a formal transcript. (Appendix K) Comments were also accepted by comment sheets at the meeting and by mail, fax, and e-mail after the meeting until the close of the comment period on October 27, 2009. The oral comment period was moderated, and speakers were asked to limit their comments to three minutes. Those requiring translation were provided with six minutes. Due to the large number of meeting attendees, the public comment session was extended and at 10:00 pm the comment session closed and the meeting ended.

Russian and sign language interpreters were made available throughout the meeting. Interpreters assisted members of the public during the open house as well as during the more formal presentation and comment period that followed.

Agenda:

6:00-6:45 pm Open House

6:45-6:55 pm Presentation

6:55-7:55 pm Public Comments

7:55-8:00 pm Next Steps/Adjournment (meeting actually ended at 10:00 pm due to the large number of speakers)

2.5.4.2 Public Meeting Materials

Each meeting attendee was offered the following materials: an EIS scoping information booklet, a comment sheet, and a speaker card (Appendix H). The scoping information booklet provided a project overview and included the following sections: purpose of the EIS and scoping, environmental issues to be considered in the EIS, project overview, project alternatives, project purpose and need, public participation, how to participate in the decision-making process, and next steps. This scoping information booklet was also available in Russian at the meetings. The scoping booklet was also posted on the project web site.

The comment sheet allowed attendees to submit written comments during or after the meeting. The comment sheet was designed as a self-mailer so that individuals could easily mail comments to CTA if they needed more time to develop them after the public scoping meeting (Appendix H). A speaker card was provided for attendees to fill out and turn in before or during the public comment session if they wanted to give verbal comments. The speaker cards were provided to the hearing facilitator and names were announced to allow people to approach the microphone to make a comment (Appendix H).

Project exhibit boards were developed and used during the public open house part of the meeting. The boards included: No-Build Alternative, the Transportation System Management Alternative, the Locally Preferred Alternative, Project Purpose and Need, How to Submit Comments, How to Stay Involved, Welcome to the Meeting, Environmental Review Process, Issues Potentially Considered in the Environmental Impact Statement, Meeting Agenda, and the Project Timeline (Appendix J). Exhibit boards were also posted on the website.

2.6 Comments Received

The public scoping period was from September 1, 2009 to October 27, 2009 which was greater than the 45 calendar days required by FTA rules. People were provided opportunities to comment in writing or orally at the two public scoping meetings or they could comment in writing via e-mail, fax, or postal letter. The comment cards distributed at the public meeting were designed to facilitate return of written comments both at the public meeting and via postal mail later during the public comment period. E-mail comments could be sent to a project specific e-mail address found on the project website and included in all notice materials distributed. In total, approximately 189 comments were received by the close of the public comment period. All comments received are included in Appendices K, L, and M.

At the September 23rd public scoping meeting, 53 people signed in, 56 people made formal public comments and 37 submitted written comments by the end of the meeting. An additional 96 written comments and one petition with 913 signatures were received on the Yellow Line Extension project by the close of the public comment period.

Section 3

Summary of Scoping Comments

3.1 Introduction

CTA accepted comments on the Yellow Line Extension project throughout the entire scoping period, from September 1, 2009 until October 27, 2009. Agencies, community groups, members of the public, elected officials, and other interested parties submitted an approximate total of 189 letters, e-mails, comment cards, and individuals' oral testimony during this period. The summary table (Table 3-1) provides a tally of the topics discussed in the comments.

It should be noted that the combined numbers of comments listed in the following subsections and the summary table will be greater than the total number of comment submissions because some commenters discussed multiple topics in their submission. Topics covered in the comments included the purpose and need, the alternatives to be analyzed in the DEIS, potential impacts and mitigation measures, and other substantive issues. This section contains a summary of comments received during the scoping period.

3.2 Summary of Substantive Comments

All comments were reviewed and categorized in an electronic database. The database contains information documenting the name of the commenter, the agency or organization the commenter represented, the method by which the comment was received, the topic categories addressed in the comment. The full text of each comment is included in Appendices K, L, and M.

The comments were largely fit into three topic categories. The major categories of comments were the project purpose and need (approximately 3 comments), the alternatives to be studied in the DEIS (including alignment options, station location options, and potential design features; approximately 171 comments), and environmental impacts and mitigation measures (approximately 126 comments). In addition, CTA received a petition with 913 signatures that addressed the alternatives and potential environmental impacts. The following sections contain summaries of the comments from each major category.

Table 3-1 provides a summary of the comments received during the scoping period. Transcripts of the spoken comments submitted at the public scoping meetings and full text of all written public comments are provided in Appendices K and L, respectively. Agency comments are provided in Appendix M.

Table 3-1 Comment Summary			
Purpose and Need	Ridership declining Transit extension may not serve needs of reverse commuters		
Proposed Alternatives	<u>Support No-Build (2)</u> <u>Support TSM (1)</u> (support a bus alternative 57)	<u>LPA (24)</u> Support (19) Do Not Support (152)	
Design Comments	<u>Stations (6)</u> Alternate terminal locations west of Old Orchard and I-94; at I-94 and Golf; other locations along Golf Road; at Old Orchard Shopping Center; near Lawler Park; east of Lawler Ave.; at the Courthouse	<u>Design Features (4)</u> Single track loop Double track Bike path Economic development around Oakton Station Size station to accommodate 4 to 6 rail cars	<u>Design Features (cont)</u> Adequate bus bays for Pace, CTA, Paratransit Operator facilities Passenger information Signal priority for bus access
Other Alternatives	1. UP right-of-way west of I-94 to Courthouse 2. Terminate at Golf Road 3. Use railroad right-of-way to extend further north 4. Use at-grade alignments 5. Extend line through forest preserve	6. Subway under Dempster Street and Gross Point Road to Golf Road 7. Follow I-94 to Old Orchard Road, turn east to Lawler Park 8. Shuttle bus loop linking Yellow Line with Skokie Hospital, Old Orchard Road, Holocaust Museum, Courthouse, and National Louis University	
Potential Impacts	Transportation Impacts (51) Land Acquisitions, Displacement and Relocations(24) Community and Neighborhood Impacts (70) Visual and Aesthetic Impacts (18) Noise and Vibration (50)	Parklands (5) Natural Resources (2) Wildlife and Ecosystems (4) Economic and Fiscal Impacts (27) Safety and Security (92) Construction Impacts (1) Utility Impacts (4)	

Note: Tallies are approximate

3.3 Comments Related to Purpose and Need

Most comments regarding the purpose and need for the project cited the benefits of the rail extension. In total, approximately 3 comments related to purpose and need were received. The general topics that these comments addressed were:

- Concern that ridership is declining
- Concern that transit extension may not meet needs of reverse commuters

3.4 Comments Related to Alternatives

An approximate total of 171 comments specifically discussed the alternatives. The majority of the comments, approximately 152, opposed the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). In addition, a petition with 913 signatures also expressed opposition to the LPA. Most of the comments in opposition of the LPA focused on the terminal station at Niles North High School. Two comments specifically supported the No-Build Alternative and one comments specifically mentioned the TSM Alternative. Approximately 57 comments expressed support for enhanced bus service or a BRT alternative. Twenty-five comments offered other alignments.

3.4.1 Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA)

Approximately 152 comments and one petition with 913 signatures were received opposing the LPA. The most commonly expressed concerns on this alternative included:

- Potential effects on Niles North High School
- Potential safety and security concerns including increase in crime
- Potential effects on property values
- Potential noise and vibration impacts
- Concerns about the appearance of the rail extension
- Potential effects of traffic congestion
- Potential impacts to parking around the terminal station
- Concerns about the cost
- Potential disruption to neighborhoods and quality of life
- Incompatible land uses (transit and education)
- Potential impact to athletic fields and other open spaces and parks

3.4.2 Station Locations and Alternate Routes

Approximately 25 comments suggested alternate routes or station locations that the Yellow Line Extension could take. The comments pertaining to station locations included:

- Alternative station locations could include:
 - Old Orchard Road, just west of the I-94 Expressway, at the Old Orchard Shopping Center, or just north or south of Golf Road
 - Northeast corner of Golf Road and I-94
 - Southwest corner of Old Orchard Road and I-94
 - North side of Old Orchard Road on vacant land
 - South of Golf Road
 - West of I-94 adjacent to grouping of office complexes
 - Station at Lawler Park, just north of Old Orchard Mall

- Station at the mall
- Locate station and parking structure east of Lawler Avenue to limit conflicts with high school campus, students and parking lot
- Station at Skokie Courthouse as terminal stop with buses running to mall

Alternate routes suggested by commenter's included:

- A single-track loop, either on a single-track elevated structure over the middle of the street or at street level
- A double-track to Old Orchard Station; double track will better accommodate future transportation needs
- Use Union Pacific (UP) right-of-way to the Skokie Courthouse on Old Orchard Road west of I-94 Expressway Terminate extension at Golf Road
- Use railroad right-of-way as far north as CTA wants to go
- Use at-grade alignment to reduce costs
- To reach a station at Lawler Park, line should follow the I-94 Expressway to Old Orchard Road, curve east and go over the road. Track would enter the southwest end of Lawler Park.
- North, under I-94 Expressway to reach Old Orchard; provides access to Skokie Courthouse and there is a lot of land and parking available
- Extend the tracks through the forest preserve
- A subway, double-track line under Dempster, Gross Point Road to Golf Road to terminate in an underground station
- Have a shuttle bus make a loop from the Swift to Skokie hospital, to Old Orchard Road, to Old Orchard, the Holocaust Museum, the Skokie Courthouse, to National Louis University, to Old Orchard to Swift.

3.4.3 Design Features

Approximately four comments were submitted suggesting additional design features to be taken into consideration. These features include the following:

- Include sufficient bus bays at the stations to accommodate both Pace fixed/express routes, Regional ADA Paratransit services, and CTA bus routes
- Include bus operator facilities and passenger information as well as bus priority access such as transit signal priority or bus-activated signals to allow buses to enter/exit the terminal with minimal congestion
- Include a bike path
- Build up downtown Skokie around the new Oakton stop
- Old Orchard Station needs to accommodate a minimum of 4-6 rail cars to help in snow or cutbacks when 2 cars (30 minute lead time) might be overloaded

3.5 Comments Related to Potential Impacts

Approximately 126 comments plus one petition with 913 signatures were received pertaining to specific potential impacts of the project. Commenters discussed a wide range of potential impacts, though the majority touched upon safety, community compatibility, noise, and transportation related issues such as traffic congestion. The comments on each type of impact are summarized in the following subsections.

3.5.1 Transportation Impacts

Approximately 51 comments plus one petition with 913 signatures touched on potential transportation impacts including potential impacts related to increased congestion, traffic circulation and parking. Comments included the following issues:

- Need for easy access for First Responders such as police, fire, and EMT response during an emergency
- Potential impacts related to increased vehicle traffic
- Potential impacts to neighborhood and school parking
- Potential effects on traffic patterns and congestion in the larger region beyond the project area

3.5.2 Land Acquisition, Displacement, and Relocations

Approximately 24 comments and one petition with 913 signatures expressed concerns related to land acquisition, displacement, and relocations. The issues addressed in these comments include concern about the potential need to acquire land from houses around the stations and the extension, and from the North Niles High School athletic fields and facilities.

3.5.3 Community and Neighborhood Impacts

Approximately 70 comments and one petition with 913 signatures included comments related to neighborhood compatibility and potential community impacts. The comments focus on the potential impacts to the community due to the construction and operation of the Yellow Line Extension. Comments included the following issues:

- Potential impacts to North Niles High School including student safety, increased traffic and noise, and reduced parking
- Potential impacts to safety due to potential increase of registered sex offenders accessing the area
- Potential impact to North Niles High School academic reputation
- Potential increased safety issues for residents near the extension
- Potential loss of residential homes
- Potential impact to community character and residences including relocation, property value changes and increased traffic

3.5.4 Visual and Aesthetic Impacts

Approximately 18 comments and one petition with 913 signatures regarding potential visual and aesthetic impacts were received. Comments typically were not specific, simply citing concerns about the potential appearance of the proposed transit facility.

3.5.5 Noise and Vibration

Approximately 50 comments plus one petition with 913 signatures regarding noise and vibration were received. The issues raised in these comments included potential noise and vibration from the trains moving along the tracks and potential damage to buildings adjacent to the proposed transit line due to vibration. One comment requested that the CTA provide the public with the noise and vibration data and to consider measures to reduce impacts.

3.5.6 Air Quality

Two comments were received about potential air pollution.

3.5.7 Parklands

Five comments about parkland and recreational facilities were received. Comments noted potential impacts to security in particular with potential for sex offenders to access Lawler Park. A few comments specifically expressed concern about potential impacts to athletic fields at Niles North High School. Given the number of comments that expressed concern about impacts to the school grounds it is likely that the number of comments counted in this category under-represents the level of concern for potential impacts to recreational facilities.

3.5.8 Wildlife and Ecosystems

Approximately 4 comments expressed concern about potential impacts to wildlife along the proposed alignment, habitats, and green space.

3.5.9 Economic and Fiscal Impacts

Approximately 27 comments were received related to the economic and fiscal impacts of the project. These comments included the following issues:

- Concerns about the project costs
- Several suggested design variations were mentioned as potentially being lower cost options

3.5.10 Safety and Security

Approximately 92 comments and one petition with 913 signatures were received about safety and security issues. Comments included the following issues:

- Potential impact for students at Niles North High School due to increased traffic and increase in access to the area by registered sex offenders
- Ability of first responders (e.g. police, fire, EMT) to access construction areas

- Potential impact for increased crime at stations and surrounding neighborhoods

3.5.11 Utility Impacts

Approximately four comments were received related to concerns about the proximity of the proposed line and the transmission towers near the proposed alignment.

3.5.12 Construction Impacts

Approximately three comments about construction effects were received. Comments included the following concerns:

- First responders (e.g. police, fire, EMT) need access to and through construction zones.
- Potential for construction vibration to damage nearby homes.
- Potential impacts of construction noise.
- Potential disruption of neighborhood traffic patterns and parking.

3.6 Comments Related to Process

Approximately 12 comments raised issues related to the AA process and about the decision making process for the NEPA phase. Several comments expressed concern about the identification of the Fixed Guideway Alternative as a LPA. Issues included a perceived lack of notice and public involvement. Concern was expressed that future decision making processes should include more community participation.

3.7 Comments Submitted by Federal, State, and Other Agencies

Four agencies submitted written comments during the scoping period and two additional agencies presented oral comments at the public scoping meeting. One additional agency raised concerns at the agency scoping meeting that were not included in other written or oral testimony. Most of the topics mentioned were also covered in the comments discussed in the previous sections. However, some of the agency comments presented new issues, including requests to ensure compliance with government-mandated policies and regulations, coordination among transit providers, and safety concerns.

The agency comments are summarized in the following sections, and full text of the agency comments is provided in Appendix M. The concerns of all the agencies will be addressed both through the DEIS analysis and through on-going coordination with CTA.

There were no comments from federal agencies. Comment letters were received from three state agencies, one regional transit provider, two school districts, and one Village.

3.7.1 Comments Submitted by State Agencies

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency did not have any objections to the proposed project and highlighted the future need to obtain construction permits for construction stormwater management and the potential need to obtain permits from the US Army Corps of

Engineers if there would be any in-water work. The Illinois State Police highlighted concerns for first responders including access to construction zones and access to elevated tracks. The Illinois Department of Transportation voiced concerns about the proximity of the alignment to the I-94 alignment and potential effects related to traffic congestion and safety at the Old Orchard Road off-ramp.

3.7.2 Comments Submitted by Other Agencies

Representatives of the Pace suburban bus service, Niles Township School District 219, Golf School District 67, and the Village of Skokie submitted comments or spoke at the public meeting covering some of the topics mentioned in previous sections, as well as:

- Station design should include consideration of access requirements for both Pace and CTA bus routes and regional ADA paratransit, operator facilities, passenger information, and bus priority access.
- Environmental analysis should include proposed alternatives, cost, and ridership projections.
- Evaluation of connecting bus service to new stations should consider likely route restructuring that would occur to reduce service overlap.
- Potential impacts to Niles North High School, particularly with respect to safety and security; parking, traffic circulation and congestion; compatibility of school functions with transit operations; and existing space constraints for educational programs and operations.
- Potential construction impacts on Niles North High School.
- Recognition of need to enhance transit service, but opposition to the LPA as presented.

Several agencies specifically mentioned the desire to work closely with CTA in the refinement of alternatives and the analysis of potential impacts.

Section 4

Responses to Comments

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of scoping is to provide an opportunity for agencies and the public to comment on the purpose and need, the range of alternatives proposed for analysis, and to help the project proponent identify issues that should be evaluated in the DEIS analysis. Therefore, all comments that fall within the scope of the NEPA process will be addressed in the DEIS. CTA will also continue to work closely with agencies and stakeholder groups to address issues identified through scoping.

4.2 Comments Related to Purpose and Need

Two comments expressed concern that the alternatives under evaluation would not meet the expressed purpose of the project. One comment indicated that the need for transit enhancements may not be present while others acknowledged that there is a need for transit enhancements in the Skokie area. The DEIS will expand and clarify the purpose and need statement in response to these comments.

4.3 Comments Related to Alternatives

The Yellow Line Extension project has completed an Alternatives Analysis (AA) and conducted early scoping on the potential range of alternatives. The results of that study may be found in the Locally Preferred Alternative Report (CTA 2009) and which is incorporated here by reference.

The AA provides the reasoning for decisions regarding the identification and narrowing of the range of alternatives. The AA process identified an initial set of four corridors and eleven transit modal technologies. The process screened these options into a set of ten conceptual alternatives that potentially met the project purpose. These alternatives were screened against criteria related to constructability, right-of-way constraints, impacts of configurations, and operational concerns. This screening step narrowed the range of alternatives to five build alternatives and a no build alternative and a transportation system management (TSM) alternative.

These alternatives were then screened against the goals, objectives, and evaluation criteria established for the project. In addition, input from stakeholders, the public, and agencies was solicited in the process of narrowing the range of alternatives. The AA process resulted in the identification of a locally preferred alternative (LPA), the No Build Alternative, and a TSM Alternative that were carried forward into EIS scoping.

Most commenters expressed opposition to the LPA. Comments that included reasons for that opposition also provide insight into potential impacts or benefits of all of the alternatives. Based on the comments received during scoping, additional alternatives will be developed for discussion with the community.

A few comments expressed a preference for an alternative that is not currently proposed for consideration in the DEIS. The DEIS will summarize alternatives previously considered and eliminated and the process used to do so. Alternatives that do not meet the project purpose and need will not be evaluated further. In addition, new alternatives will be developed based on scoping comments received.

4.4 Comments Related to Potential Impacts

Potential impacts or benefits of alternatives identified by commenters will be analyzed in the DEIS. Insights into how a particular alternative may affect traffic, neighborhoods and communities, safety, or accessibility in the project area and the region are a valuable result of the scoping process. Many comments reflected an awareness of the traffic circulation issues within the project area and the potential benefits that may result from transit enhancements. Specific comments on each potential impact will be used to guide development of new alternatives and the analysis of alternatives.

Specific comments on potential impacts were related to traffic circulation and congestion, safety, community and neighborhood compatibility, visual and aesthetic concerns, and noise and vibration.