



Circle Interchange Project

Design Charrette Summary

January 22, 2013

The Project Working Group (PWG) Design Charrette was held on January 22, 2013 at the Marriott Chicago-Medical District/UIC, located at 625 Southbound Ashland Avenue Chicago, IL 60607, from 8:30 AM - 12:00 PM. To announce the Design Charrette, a Save the Date email was sent out on January 2, 2013, followed by a formal email invitation sent on January 10, 2013. The meeting was attended by 22 PWG members.

The Charrette focused on establishing detailed visions for key areas of the Circle Interchange study area. Four stations were set up: 1) the interchange area (including the landscaping and Accident Investigation Site), 2) Peoria Street, 3) Halsted Street and Harrison Street, and 4) the City streets (including the Des Plaines Street Underpass and the landscaping of the four corners on top). Participants rotated to each table and were able to view and rate existing conditions and proposed aesthetic enhancements for each area to help shape the overall theme and feel of the Circle Interchange area.

Each PWG member received a Ratings Booklet, which included images of standard treatments, existing streetscape styles in the Chicago area, and proposed aesthetic themes including formliner options for piers, retaining walls and sound walls. PWG members also received a Design Charrette Booklet with images of existing conditions in key interchange areas, as well as renderings highlighting proposed improvements to be completed as part of the Circle Interchange Study. Items provided to PWG participants have been posted to the project's website.

Participating PWG Members by Group

Group #1

Tom Murtha	Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
Bennett Haller	Chicago Streetscape Committee
Peter Fahrenwald	Regional Transportation Authority
Hannah Higgins	Chicago Department of Transportation
Paul Swanson	Chicago Transit Partners
Jackie Grimshaw	Center for Neighborhood Technology
Sgt. Angelo Mollo	Illinois State Police

Group #2

Jeff Sriver	Chicago Department of Transportation
Ben Brockschmidt	Illinois Chamber of Commerce
Jerry Lockwood	University of Illinois - Chicago
Janine Farzin	Chicago Transit Authority
Mike McLaughlin	Chicago Transit Authority



Group #3

Frank Caputo	SSA #16/Greektown
Christopher DiPalma	Federal Highway Administration
Bob O'Neil	Grant Park Conservancy
Dennis O'Neil	Connecting 4 Communities
Sgt. Juan Valenzuela	Illinois State Police

Group #4

Bonnie Sanchez-Carlson	Near South Planning Board
Jesus Yopez	Chicago Department of Transportation
Kevin Miller	Hellenic Museum
Roger Deschner	University of Illinois - Chicago
Dereck Boeldt	Chicago Transit Authority

Station 1: Interchange Components

Formliners

- Some participants expressed concerns that formliners and piers with more detailed designs would distract drivers.
- One consistent color throughout formliners was preferred to simplify maintenance.
- Designs incorporating long, wavy forms are desirable; however, straight horizontal lines may be better as to not distract the motorists.
- Participants recommended choosing a timeless design so that the interchange does not look outdated in the future.
- Some participants identified a preference for piers that are more statuesque.
- The project logo is generally more desirable on piers rather than formliners.

Reactions to specific formliners

- The multi-colored formliner with the Circle Interchange logo was undesirable. (page 15 of ratings book)
- The formliner with a prairie grass theme was identified as a *suitable* design. (page 13 of ratings book)
- Simple piers with only vertical design elements or horizontal design elements were rated highly - participants did not like mixing the vertical and horizontal lines on the piers - they felt this would conflict with the Chicago Wall.
- Some participants liked the existing Dan Ryan walls with the medallions; however, only a few medallions reflecting the adjacent communities are desired.
- Some participants liked the use of the Circle Interchange Logo, however, not on the formliners. If used they would like to see them on the piers and strategically placed throughout the interchange.

See the following page for highest ranking formliners and piers.

Preferred Formliners

This formliner received the highest ratings, averaging a 3.95.



This formliner received the second highest ratings, averaging a 3.33.



Preferred Piers



These piers received the highest ratings, averaging a 3.95.

** Subsequent to the Design Charrette, these piers are no longer being considered due to constructability and profile considerations.*



These piers received the second highest ratings, averaging a 3.5.

Chicago Wall

- Many participants felt that the Chicago Wall was an appropriate design feature to be included within the interchange itself.
 - The formliner with the prairie grass design was identified as incompatible with the Chicago wall.
 - Some preferred the design that included the railing on top; however, it is not appropriate in the interchange itself.



Landscaping

- Participants identified the need for access to be provided to landscape areas for maintenance, and a desire for low maintenance landscaping.
- Landscaping should be consistent throughout the interchange, able to grow, and should be consistent with the Master Plan.
 - The four corners of the interchange area should be enhanced as they are gateways.
 - Trees will add vertical dimension to landscaping.
 - Evergreens were preferred over deciduous trees for year-round color.
 - Several felt the interchange area is too small to have different themes in different sections.
- Participants identified a preference for trees and elements to be located in areas that will provide a visual buffer and hide as much concrete as possible.
- Landscaping that minimizes visual disruptions is desired to soften views.

Accident Investigation Site (AIS)

- Visibility and access into/out of the AIS site is in need of improvement – some participants identified a need to stripe and delineate where vehicular movements should occur within the site.
 - The State Police do not recall any major issues with vehicles pulling in or out of the AIS Site.
 - Some participants recommended installing a sensor that will alert drivers of entering traffic.
- Some felt that the approach to the AIS site should be improved with landscaping.
- Participants identified that planter boxes and trees on the periphery of the site could improve the appearance.

Station 2: Halsted & Harrison

Station 2 focused on the recommended alternative's proposed flyovers at Halsted Street and Harrison Street. Photographs of existing conditions were shown from different vantage points, and renderings with potential enhancements were shown.

General Comments

- Each group felt it was important that there be decorative elements on the flyovers for both Halsted and Harrison. Some noted that the rendering with blue color blocking, or something similar, would be appropriate; and, if implemented properly, eliminated the need for an additional gateway.
- Participants recommended that the CTA canopy be more decorative and be treated like a gateway---the design shown was not preferred. Many participants desired a gateway that makes an architectural statement.
- There were differences of opinions on whether a standalone gateway was needed. If gateway type elements are added to the flyover such as color blocking, formliner, or if words like "Welcome to Greek Town" are embedded into the concrete, then the flyover could be the gateway feature. Others felt that the CTA canopy could better serve as the gateway feature if the design was improved.
- Most participants supported color blocking on flyover structures.
- No one opposed the Chicago wall on bridge parapets at the pedestrian level.
- Everyone opposed the chain link pedestrian fencing shown in the image. Participants generally did not like the curvature of the fence and preferred something more decorative like wrought iron.



- Some participants emphasized the importance of having the bridge provide a connection between both neighborhoods.
- Discussion was held on whether the width of the bike lanes on Harrison is correct- some identified that it may be too wide.

Halsted Street Renderings

- One group commented that the flowering trees shown on the first rendering are on a private lot (Giordano's).
- Some thought that the illustrated light pole foundations would make snow removal and ADA compliance difficult because they protrude too far.
- All participants felt that the rendered fencing was unattractive and uninviting because of the curves and the look of chain link; they suggested something straight and more decorative than chain link, probably wrought iron.
- Lighting and a well-designed underside of the bridge is desired.
- Some participants identified a desire to see a rendering looking north towards the canopy/flyover as well.
- The importance of "realistic" landscaping to provide a screen was emphasized.
- Some felt that the first rendering shown appeared stark and had too much concrete.

Halsted Street Gateway

- Some participants supported the idea of constructing a separate gateway that would shield the bridge structure from view.
- Concern over the potential for a sound wall was expressed, and some thought it would negatively impact the appearance of the flyover.

Pedestrian/Bicycle Amenities

- A discussion regarding the appropriateness of a bike lane on Halsted occurred; most members supported showing a bike lane on Halsted; others felt it was more appropriate on a less busy street such as Peoria. Some participants identified a need for a wider sidewalk on the west side.
- There was a suggestion to put the bike lanes in the middle of Halsted with protective zones rather than in between the traffic and bus lanes
- One group expressed concern over potential sound impacts to pedestrian traffic on Halsted Street due to the flyover.
- Some desired that new pedestrian signs or a hybrid pedestrian signal be installed at this location.

Harrison Street

- Concerns due to two flyovers were expressed. To alleviate these concerns, participants recommended using good design standards and dressing up the flyovers, as well as installing lighting under the bridge.
- Some participants recommended utilizing a theme that relates to a downtown/South Loop entrance.
- Some felt that there was additional opportunity for a gateway treatment to be implemented on the structure.
- Some preferred that streetlights be located off of the sidewalk and on walls instead. It was noted however, that the Chicago Department of Transportation requires streetlights to be located within two feet of the roadway.
- Some felt the bike lane depicted in the rendering may be too wide causing cars to drive in it
- One group questioned whether or not it would be possible to stain the grooves on the Chicago Wall to make the pattern more prominent.

- It was recommended that the Study Team check with the City Water Department regarding access requirements for the pump station.

Ratings Results



*Based on the ratings received, the Chicago wall design averaged a **3.38**.*



*Based on the ratings received, this flyover treatment averaged a **3.21**.*



*Based on the ratings received, this flyover treatment averaged a **3.46**.*



Based on the ratings received, this flyover treatment averaged a 3.2.

Station 3: Peoria Street

Station 3 focused on the reconstruction and enhancement of Peoria Street. Each group that rotated through this station generally supported the enhancements proposed as part of Phase I improvements, or the IDOT Plan. Specific comments, suggestions, and questions voiced are outlined below:

UIC/CTA Discussion

One of the groups that came to Station 3 included representatives from CTA and UIC. Discussions had with this group focused more on technical details and configurations of the Peoria Street bridge, as opposed to aesthetic elements. Key discussion points are identified below:

- CTA questioned whether or not IDOT is proposing to replace the stairs going down to the CTA platform.
- UIC identified that the proposed alignment of Phase I improvements does not help further the intent of the UIC Master Plan. Realignment of the bridge (angling or widening) would be helpful and better accommodate UIC's vision. Additional coordination between UIC, CTA, and IDOT is desired to better merge all concepts and reduce the potential for conflicts or costly future improvements.
- CTA identified that reducing the width of the CTA Building (mentioned as a potential concept) to increase the walkway on the east side of the bridge from 12 feet to 20 feet would not allow the CTA to construct an elevator shaft in their building in the future. Likewise, providing station access from the north and south sides of the building, as opposed to the current east side, would not permit the construction of elevator shaft as tentatively planned.
 - Additional details are needed to determine if a future elevator shaft is feasible; and, to determine if it needs to be accommodated or planned for as part of the Circle Interchange Study.
- The CTA Visioning Study that is about to begin addresses the CTA Blue Line, from Clinton to Forest Park. This study is being completed in coordination with the I-290 Phase I Study, but will be moving at a slower pace than the Circle Interchange Study. Additional coordination is desired to work out details with regards to the future of the Peoria Street station.
- CTA questioned IDOT's letting schedule for Peoria Street improvements.



In conclusion, it was recommended that an additional one-on-one meeting be set up between the Project Study Team, UIC, and CTA to discuss details and identify a design that can accommodate each stakeholder's needs.

Consistency

- Participants generally liked both renderings shown for Peoria Street improvements; however, the need for design consistency throughout the bridge was emphasized (i.e. consistent pavement and landscaping).

Reconfiguration of Space

- The majority of participants recommended reconstructing the CTA building with north and south access points, as opposed to an east access point.
- Some recommended that the width of the CTA building be reduced to allow additional space for pedestrians and bicyclists on the east side of the bridge.

Placing More Emphasis on Safety

- Some emphasized the need to ensure that the proposed concept allows emergency vehicles to drive all the way up to the CTA building. They wanted to make sure that the location of proposed planters and landscaping did not conflict with this access.
- Additional lighting is desired on the bridge to ensure the area is well lit and inviting at night.
- Safety stations/emergency phones are recommended on the bridge to improve safety and comfort levels.

Bicycle Amenities

- Generally, all participants supported the proposed addition of bicycle racks to Peoria Street.
- The majority of participants identified that opportunities for Chicago's bike share program should be explored in this location. If feasible, a bike share station should be considered for inclusion in the proposed concept.
- Dedicated bicycle lanes are desired in the proposed concept.
 - Some identified that there may be opportunities to construct a bump-out east of the CTA building to provide additional space for bicyclists and reduce conflicts with CTA users entering and exiting the building.

Other Amenities/Enhancements

- The majority of participants liked the proposed landscaping and decorative, black wrought iron fencing anchoring the east and west sides of the bridge.
- Additional wayfinding signage was recommended for inclusion in a revised concept.
- Some identified a desire for additional streetscape elements to be included, and that it would be desirable for streetscape elements to reflect a recognized UIC streetscape theme to create more of a "campus feel."
- Additional seating areas are desired.
 - Some supported the idea of raised limestone planters that were tall enough for patrons to sit comfortably on.
 - It was identified that the existing concrete UIC benches have an undesirable design.

Maintenance Discussion

- Several members stated that while the decorative pavement proposed is attractive and desirable, it may be difficult to maintain. They questioned how snow would be removed from these areas and recommended



that a more durable and consistent material such as standard concrete be used in high traffic areas. Decorative pavement and stone could be used as accents.

- Each group emphasized the importance of maintenance agreements to ensure that landscaping and streetscape elements remained in a state of good repair.

Station 4: City Street Modifications

Jackson Boulevard

- The bicycle lane and sidewalk conflicts with the NB entrance ramp were a major concern for all four groups. Motorists tend not to look left for conflicts and not all bicyclists are careful to watch for turning traffic. Possible improvement suggestions include additional signage with flashing beacons up to full traffic signals. Rumble strips in the bicycle lane was also suggested.
- Take care when placing planters near ramp termini, as it may cause a sight distance issue.
- Consider placing bicycle traffic adjacent behind the planters as more of a protected area.
- The three 10-foot wide lanes are a concern given the truck and bus traffic on Jackson. Consider reducing to two lanes with a wider width.
- Use bump-out sidewalks at intersections where parking lanes are present.
- Do not show parking on the bridge (the exhibit showed a slight overlap on the NE quadrant of the bridge)
- Make sure that light poles are set back at a sufficient distance so that banners do not overhang the traveled way.

Adams Street

- Make the Adams Street Bridge inviting to walk across.
- Apply the Jackson Boulevard suggestions to Adams Street, if applicable.

Van Buren Street

- Of all Kennedy trench bridges, Van Buren is the longest and does not have ramps. It is very plain and in need of aesthetic enhancement.
- The Hellenic Museum is concerned about their glass wall on the south façade of the building. Providing means to prevent errant vehicles from crashing through the glass wall is of great interest to the museum. Planters were suggested as a possible improvement.
- The Hellenic Museum wants improved bus access to their building, perhaps along Halsted north of Van Buren.

Van Buren-Adams-Jackson

- As a whole, the participants across all four groups had mixed reaction to the red rail. Some believed that the rail is safer for pedestrians compared to standard railing. Others believe that the red color is the wrong choice for the neighborhood (does not match any other neighborhood scheme). There was a consensus that the red rail needs more maintenance.
- Retaining the overlooks on the bridge was not a priority for any of the participants. The consensus was that pedestrians would not stop and admire the view of the expressway, especially with the expressway noise and pollution. The geometrics of the overlooks also tend to collect blowing garbage.
- The Greek Town theme should extend from Halsted to the west abutment of all three of these bridges.



Taylor Street

- UIC has plans to expand their campus east of the Dan Ryan Expressway in the next 10 to 20 years. Providing wider sidewalks as shown in the exhibit is welcomed.
- Taylor Street is an important connection between UIC and retail developments to the east.
- The proposed improvement looks bland. There seems to be an opportunity to enhance the landscaping for this bridge.
- Consider a green median on the Taylor Street bridge.

Morgan Street

- UIC has plans to expand their campus north of the Eisenhower Expressway in the next 10 to 20 years. Providing wider sidewalks as shown in the exhibit is welcomed.
- Alternative #1 did not receive notable reaction from the participants.
- Alternative #2 provides bicycle lanes, which was welcomed by some participants. Others noted that no bicycle facilities would connect to this block of Morgan Street. Also, planter boxes between the bike lane and travel way was suggested as a way to bring casual bicyclist into the bike lane.
- Alternative #3 received the most attention from participants. There were concerns about loss of green space and the need to channelize the perpendicular parking (so that people do not back onto Tilden Street). Some asked if the added expense of a new, taller retaining wall and more paved area was worth saving a block's drive on Van Buren.
- Some participants do not favor the standard IDOT chain link fence. However, the Illinois State Police said that some sort of screening is necessary to prevent people from dropping objects onto the expressway below.

Des Plaines Street

- Given that the existing underpass of Congress Parkway is uninviting (and intimidating to some), the shown improvements were welcomed by the participants. They were especially pleased with the enhanced lighting. The artwork on the piers received mixed reaction.
- Participants said that the Des Plaines rendering is a good precedent for the underpasses on Jefferson Street, Clinton Street and Canal Street – given that those are in the project area too.

Four Corners Landscaping on Top

- These exhibits received lukewarm reaction from the participants. Some noted that people are not likely to spend time in these spaces given their location.
- One aspect that received accolade was the use of trees in these spaces, because trees add height and shield the proposed flyover structures.
- Participants said that care must be taken so that vehicles will not use walkways as turn lanes (the exhibits did not clearly convey curbs).
- It was suggested that the Halsted Street/Harrison Street corner (southwest of interchange) carry a UIC theme.