

## Circle Interchange Project

# Project Working Group Meeting #3 Summary

December 11, 2012

### PWG #3 Participants:

- Derek Boeldt- CTA
- Frank Caputo- Special Service Area #16
- Roger Deschner- UIC
- Peter Fahrenwald- RTA
- Janine Farzin- CTA
- Larry Gage- Fulton River District Association
- Toulia Georgakopolos- Hellenic Museum
- Tanesheha Harris- Emergency Management & Communications
- Jerry Lockwood- UIC
- Mike McLaughlin- CTA
- Tom Murtha- CMAP
- Bob O'Neill- Grant Park Conservancy
- Dennis O'Neill- connecting 4 communities
- Bonnie Sanchez-Carlson- Near South Planning Board
- Jeffery Sriver- CDOT
- Paul Swanson- CTA
- Heather Tarczan- Illinois Medical District
- Darin Taylor- Emergency Management & Communications
- Yanni Theoharis- Greektown Chamber of Commerce
- Juan Valenzuela- Illinois State Police
- Jesus Yopez- CDOT
- Mike Witt- Illinois State Police
- Melita Ristovska- AECOM
- Kevin Miller- Hellenic Museum
- Hannah Higgins- CDOT

The third Project Working Group (PWG) Meeting for the Circle Interchange Project was held on December 11, 2012 at the Marriott Chicago-Medical District/UIC, 625 Southbound Ashland Avenue Chicago, IL 60607, from 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM. To announce PWG Meeting #3, a Save the Date email was sent out on November 9, 2012, followed by a formal email invitation sent on November 29, 2012, and an RSVP reminder on December 6, 2012. The meeting was attended by 24 PWG members.

The meeting included an introduction of participants, followed by a live PowerPoint presentation. The presentation provided an overview of PWG Meeting #2 and highlighted conceptual local street modifications and aesthetic enhancements. The presentation was followed by a group workshop that encouraged participants to identify corridor themes and streetscape elements.

After a twenty minute break, the study team presented an analysis of remaining interchange alternatives and identified Alternative A-7.1C as the recommended alternative. PWG members had the opportunity to discuss aesthetic enhancements of the overall interchange along with the proposed flyover ramps over Halsted and Harrison.

Each PWG member received a copy of the PowerPoint presentation, artistic renderings, a booklet of the remaining alternatives, and local street modifications for their PWG binder. Items provided to PWG participants have been posted to the project's website.

### Questions and Comments

During the meeting, PWG members provided comments and questions regarding local street modifications. The discussion included the following:

- **Local Street Bridges**  
A PWG member questioned whether or not local street bridges would need to be reconstructed entirely or partially as part of this project. The Study team identified that modifications to local street bridges would require complete bridge reconstruction.
- **Proposed Halsted Street Concept**



A PWG member questioned why there wasn't a pedestrian crossing with a refuge island shown as part of the concept. The Study team responded that though this concept was not shown, it has been considered and is being further refined. The PWG member encouraged the study team to continue investigating opportunities for additional pedestrian amenities in this location since this is a popular loading and unloading zone for CTA buses.

The study team identified that the Halsted Street concept proposes tighter corner radii than existing conditions. CDOT supported this concept, and identified that they are working to avoid "pork chop" islands with free flow right turn lanes.

## **Group Workshop – Aesthetics**

During the meeting, PWG members were asked to provide comments and questions regarding corridor themes and streetscape elements to be employed in select locations. The discussion included the following:

### ***Positive Design Elements:***

- Pedestrian/bicycle oriented elements such as bump-outs, landscaping and aesthetic details are attractive and could serve as economic engines by drawing a more diverse customer base.
- A balanced approach, like the study team presented, recognizes the needs of different users and neighborhoods and satisfies many PWG members.
- Proposed tighter corner radii with mountable areas for trucks and large vehicles are a good idea.
- Additional signage and traffic control devices should be considered on the Kennedy exit ramps in advance of the cross street intersections to warn motorists of pedestrian and bicycle crossings.
- Halsted, VanBuren and Jackson should all flow into the established Greektown theme.
- Existing Greektown gateway signage should be maintained and enhanced to strengthen the neighborhood's identity.
  - Signage needs to comply with existing sign standards and not conflict with driver awareness.
- Accessibility regulations should be considered first in designing sidewalks/pedestrian areas.
- Aesthetic considerations are important.
- Renderings help people visualize the anticipated interchange improvements.

### ***Negative Design Elements:***

- Automobile oriented streets/bridges, such as the old Madison Street Bridge or others that were built in the 90's, are undesirable and not bicycle or pedestrian friendly.
- Less emphasis should be placed on accommodating truck traffic than has been given in the past.
- Focusing on only one mode of transportation (pedestrian/auto/bike) would be detrimental.
- "Vulnerable" areas, such as landscaped areas, may be subject to wear and tear or poor maintenance in the future.
- Maintenance efforts can require lane or shoulder closures on expressways; therefore, maintenance needs should be minimal. Native landscaping is an option that could be considered.
- Raised planters are undesirable in areas where roadway users will be opening car doors.

### ***Additional Questions/Comments:***

- Does VISSIM modeling consider fiscal and maintenance aspects?
  - No, however, a financial plan will be developed in later stages of the project.



- Why are bicycle amenities shown on the north side of Jackson where the ramps are?
  - Bike lanes are proposed on the north side of Jackson to be continuous with other sections. It is safer to keep bicyclists on one side of the street continuously rather than having them cross traffic lanes to stay in designated bike areas.
  - Safety for these bicycle lanes may be improved with additional signage and other traffic control devices.
- The Circle Interchange area is valuable and could serve as a revenue generator for the State. Has any consideration been given to billboards or advertising?
  - There are regulations against billboards and advertising within IDOT right-of-way.

### **Group Discussion – Recommended Alternative**

During the second half of the meeting, PWG members were asked to provide comments and/or questions regarding the recommended alternative. The discussion included the following:

#### **Alternative Selection Process**

- It is apparent that the study team is recommending Alternative A-7.1C. What is the estimated cost and why aren't the positive aspects of Alternative A-15.4 shown? Previously, concerns over a Halsted flyover were voiced, but it appears that the recommended alternative requires this flyover.
  - The study team considered multiple alternatives but alternatives that did not include the Halsted Street flyover resulted in geometric elements that are less desirable than those associated with Alternative A-7.1C. The Screening Matrix highlighted the differences between the alternatives and did not show elements that were equal. The estimated cost of Alternative A-15.4 is approximately \$8 million more than A-7.1C.
- Is it possible to shift the flyover to the south to better share the burden of the ramp between Greektown and UIC?
  - The study team will evaluate the feasibility of shifting the flyover ramp further south. The vertical profile of Halsted includes a high point in the middle of the bridge, so shifting the flyover south will result in raising the height of the flyover and would require less desirable steeper vertical grades.
- A good design could visually improve the area and help the flyover function as a gateway to surrounding neighborhoods.
  - Renderings are attractive, but it is difficult to grasp what these areas will look like in reality.
- On Roosevelt Road, a concrete bridge is enhanced with lighting and is very attractive. The flyover presents opportunities to create something similar that is attractive and monumental.
  - The Roosevelt Road Bridge is nice, but maintenance of the lighting has been lacking as evidenced by some light fixtures not working.
- There are a lot of institutional uses in the area around Halsted, and gateways are needed to help separate these uses from nearby residential areas.
- Halsted feels narrow in this location, and the left turn lane is often backed up. Something wider will be needed to accommodate landscaping. Does the study team identify private property that will be needed to realize proposed improvement plans?
  - The goal is not to acquire additional space for proposed improvements, but details will need to be refined as the process moves forward.
- Valet parking in front of restaurants should be considered and maintained.



- Current roadway configurations do not provide ample room for landscaping, so the renderings provided may not be realistic. The study team should consider additional design concerns in the review of alternatives.
- Who will ultimately decide what will be built?
  - A decision will be made in Spring 2013, but decisions made concerning aesthetic elements will be ongoing. The study team is soliciting input from PWG members at today's meeting. Additional public input is welcome especially given the proposed changes in the area. Community impact is recognized as a key issue with the local community. Information from the PWG meeting will be available on the website to encourage input from other community members.
- Are alternatives A-7.1C and A-15.4 both improvements over the existing interchange? And do vehicular impacts outweigh neighborhood impacts?
  - Both alternatives are improvements over the existing conditions. When compared to other alternatives, Alternative A-7.1c has many benefits including improved ramp alignments, greater sight distances, less steep grades, shorter construction duration and best meets the project Purpose and Need by improving safety, mobility and facility condition. All impacts are being considered in the evaluation process, including constructability, neighborhood impacts, safety, etc.
- The I-90/94 mainline is being widened to 4 lanes in each direction.
- Will future improvements involve narrower lanes or shoulders?
  - This project will provide lanes and shoulders widths that meet current design standards. Existing bridge piers will be removed and proposed bridge piers will be placed to allow as much width as possible.
- The study area is a very constrained and will require more complex construction. The study team will explore staging at a conceptual level.
- The neighboring community is and has historically been important in this area, so it is important that the proposed improvements do not compromise community values. If a flyover ramp is recommended, it needs to be attractive and enhance the pedestrian and bicycle experience in the corridor. It will be important for local businesses and the community at large to be involved in the process and support the recommended improvements.
- This is a small area, but there are several large stakeholders involved. Maintenance will be an ongoing issue, so good intergovernmental agreements and partnerships will need to be formed.
- Renderings from different perspectives are desired.