

## **5.0 INTRODUCTION**

New Jersey Transit (NJ TRANSIT) has undertaken a robust public involvement program for the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail (HBLR) Route 440 Extension Alternatives Analysis. Throughout the study, project materials were made available on a project website. NJ TRANSIT actively sought input from agency officials and local stakeholders through a formal Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). NJ TRANSIT also hosted public open houses to inform residents and other interested individuals, including targeted outreach to property owners in the area of the potential alignments, about the progress and findings of the study.

This chapter describes the public involvement program for the project and summarizes the public meetings to date. It also provides contact information to obtain additional information on the study.

### **5.1 PUBLIC OUTREACH PROGRAM**

The purpose of the public outreach program is to maintain and foster communication, cooperation and interest with project stakeholders while the project continues through the alternatives analysis process. Continued public involvement is particularly important for this study because of the extensive public outreach that has already been conducted for various studies in the area including the Bayside Vision Plan, Bayfront Redevelopment Plan, the New Jersey City University (NJCU) West Campus Plan, and the ongoing the Route 440/Routes 1&9T Multi-use Urban Boulevard and Through Truck Diversion Concept Development Study (Route 440 Study).

The outreach program has made extensive use of the results of previous and ongoing outreach to the public and to elected officials. Throughout the study, NJ TRANSIT used individual meetings, project literature, electronic notification, and other means to keep the project stakeholders and general public informed about the project's status and to provide an opportunity to raise issues or ask questions prior to the study's completion.

The goals of this public outreach program have been to:

- Provide elected officials, agencies, special interest groups, residents, businesses, and property owners with necessary information and retain their involvement in the project;
- Strengthen ongoing support of the project by continuing to foster cooperation and coordination between NJ TRANSIT and the Bayfront redevelopment plan and Route 440 Study;
- Identify potential issues so that they can be addressed before the Locally Preferred Alternative is chosen;

- Gather feedback and documentation to be included in later phases of the HBLR project as well as in coordination with the Bayfront Redevelopment Plan and Route 440 Study; and
- Reflect public concerns in the recommended Locally Preferred Alternative.

### **5.1.1 APPROACH**

The basic public outreach approach includes:

- Targeted meetings to coordinate information sharing of prior and ongoing studies in the western waterfront area of Jersey City; and
- General outreach for stakeholders and other individuals with special interests, such as residents in the study area.

#### **5.1.1.1 TARGETED OUTREACH**

Key stakeholders have been identified and targeted for outreach briefings and/or meetings to update them on the project, the issues, and the process for developing and evaluating alternatives. In addition, the program includes e-mail or other electronic correspondence messages, which distribute information to those stakeholders with internet access.

As part of the targeted outreach, a Technical Advisory Committee was formed. The TAC includes representation from affiliated agencies and institutions, such as the City of Jersey City, Hudson County, other local planning departments, the New Jersey Departments of Environmental Protection and Transportation, NJCU, and representatives of Bayfront. The TAC was and continues to facilitate input from interested parties and stakeholders.

Throughout the study, NJ TRANSIT has been in close coordination with the Bayfront redevelopment plan team, NJCU, and the Route 440 Study team. The outreach program included continued attendance and participation in one-on-one, TAC, and other meetings held by these projects. Information about the HBLR project was shared both formally and informally, including collaborative public outreach efforts.

#### **5.1.1.2 GENERAL OUTREACH**

The general outreach included public open houses to facilitate and encourage broad-based participation and provide the opportunity for interested parties to stay involved in the project. Meetings have coincided with project milestones as a way of providing status updates, such as project initiation, alternatives development and refinement, and evaluation of alternatives. Materials prepared for these forums include formal presentations, informational boards, and fact sheets. All public materials are posted to the project website.

The project website includes a means to provide comments by e-mail, and comment sheets were made available at the public open houses. The comments that have been received are summarized in Section 5.2 below. NJ TRANSIT has considered the public comments in the preparation of the study.

### **5.1.2 OUTREACH MATERIALS**

The tools and deliverables to facilitate the public outreach program have included the following:

- Database: A project outreach database has been maintained, with information on all project stakeholders, including elected officials, community groups, local businesses, public agencies, affiliated team members, project committee members, and other interested parties. The database is updated after each public meeting to add any new attendees. The database is used to perform electronic communications with interested parties and to document correspondence and feedback received throughout the course of the study.
- Meetings: TAC meetings and public open houses have been scheduled in accordance with the study milestones. In addition, one-on-one meetings have been held to support data collection and to seek input on specific planning, engineering, and environmental issues.
- Fact Sheets: Fact sheets have been prepared at key project milestones to serve as project updates for the study. Fact sheets have been distributed at meetings, electronically, and through interested groups and organizations. Fact sheets have been provided both in English and Spanish.
- E-mail/Electronic Correspondence: To distribute information to key stakeholders, email and other electronic correspondence has been used.
- Website: Project information has been provided on the project website: [www.hblr440aa.com](http://www.hblr440aa.com). The project website also has the capability for the public to provide comments by e-mail.

## 5.2 PUBLIC MEETINGS

NJ TRANSIT hosted public meetings following completion of each of the three phases of the project. At each milestone, a TAC meeting was held prior to each of the public open houses. At each milestone, NJ TRANSIT also reported its progress to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

### 5.2.1 PHASE 1: PROJECT INITIATION

#### 5.2.1.1 TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

NJ TRANSIT held a TAC meeting at 10 AM on February 17, 2010 at 30 Montgomery Street in Jersey City. Following a brief presentation on early project planning, there was an informal question and answer session.

The questions and comments were both general and specific to the information presented:

- TAC members requested clarification on how materials would be provided to them and the format for them to comment.
- Members inquired about the timing for the selection of the Locally Preferred Alternative and the overall timeline for its implementation.
- Members inquired about the measurement and consideration of evaluation criteria, including the relative importance of capital costs and considerations for pedestrian safety and mobility.
- Members requested clarification on the north-south alternatives, specifically inquiring about a potential intermediate station at Bayfront. (As a result of this comment, intermediate stations close to Bayfront were added to all north-south alternatives.)

Where possible, NJ TRANSIT answered questions directly or identified next steps in the study that would investigate the questions raised.

### 5.2.1.2 PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE

NJ TRANSIT and the City of Jersey City hosted a joint public open house for the HBLR Route 440 Extension Alternatives Analysis and the Route 440/Routes 1&9T Multi-use Urban Boulevard and Through Truck Diversion Concept Development Study. The open house was held on March 9, 2010 from 5 PM to 8 PM at NJCU in Jersey City, New Jersey. At 6:30 PM, NJ TRANSIT gave a brief presentation on the HBLR Route 440 Extension Alternatives Analysis followed by a presentation by the City of Jersey City on the Route 440 Study.

Before and after the presentation, members of both project teams were available to informally answer questions by attendees. The following summarizes the comments and questions raised by attendees related to the HBLR Route 440 Extension Alternatives Analysis:

- Attendees inquired about the existing operation of HBLR, particularly travel times and speed.
- Attendees requested information on the timeline for implementation of an extension and whether or not private property would be sought.
- Attendees identified additional alternatives, including direct HBLR service to Manhattan and extending the HBLR system to Newark Airport. Attendees also identified a potential circulator service between a Bayfront Station and Society Hill rather than direct HBLR service or better shuttle service between Society Hill and West Side Avenue Station. (Bus circulator shuttle service is included in the TSM Alternative.)
- Attendees expressed an interest in “green” alternatives that incorporate pedestrian-friendly and bicycle-related elements.

NJ TRANSIT provided informal responses to questions as appropriate.

## 5.2.2 PHASE 2: DEVELOPMENT AND REFINEMENT OF ALTERNATIVES

### 5.2.2.1 TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

NJ TRANSIT held the second meeting of the HBLR Route 440 Extension Alternatives Analysis TAC at 10 AM on September 21, 2010 at 30 Montgomery Street in Jersey City. Following introductions by the attendees, NJ TRANSIT gave a presentation on the project. The presentation described the progress of the study, the development and refinement of a long list of alternatives, the evaluation of the long list of alternatives, alternatives recommended for further study as the short list of alternatives, and next steps in the study.

During and following the presentation, members of the TAC made comments and asked questions regarding the study:

- In terms of conceptual alignments, members inquired about the possibility of a station over Route 440, the rationale for making Alternative 1D elevated, and the potential to modify Alternative 2A to directly serve NJCU’s West Campus on the east side of Route 440 and then cross over Route 440 to Bayfront and Society Hill.
- There were a number of questions and comments regarding Alternative 1C, including whether it would be an intermediate extension with eventual service to Bayfront, whether

provisions could be made to add the intermediate station later as development comes on-line, the distance between the intermediate station and the adjacent stations, and the potential cost and operations constraints of the intermediate station.

- Questions regarding the Bayfront Station (Alternatives 1A and 1C) included whether commuter parking would be provided and whether a grade-separated crossing between the Bayfront Station and the Bayfront development would be feasible.
- Members inquired about the level of quantitative analysis that had been undertaken in the screening of the long list of alternatives as well as a specific question on the rationale for the scoring of Alternative 1A in its screening evaluation.

Where possible, NJ TRANSIT answered questions directly or identified next steps in the study that would investigate the questions raised.

#### 5.2.2.2 PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE

NJ TRANSIT held the second public open house for the HBLR Route 440 Extension Alternatives Analysis from 5PM to 8PM on October 20, 2010 at NJCU.

Informational boards were provided for review by the public. The boards provided an overview of the study, the schedule of the study, the long list of alternatives considered, and the evaluation of the long list of alternatives. Project staff was available throughout the open house to informally answer questions from attendees. At 6:30 PM, NJ TRANSIT gave a formal presentation on the project. Attendees were invited to direct any questions or comments to project staff following the presentation.

During the open house, questions and comments were raised to project staff. The following summarizes the comments and questions pertinent to the study:

- Attendees expressed both positive and negative comments on the Bayfront alignment with two stations (Alternative 1C). Commenters in favor of the station thought that it would serve the NJCU West Campus better than the existing West Side Avenue Station. However, one attendee stated that the intermediate station is not necessary since it is a short walk to the West Side Avenue Station from the new campus.
- Several attendees expressed that serving Society Hill would be beneficial to the area but understood that this alternative (Alternative 2A) would be difficult to implement.
- An attendee asked about the feasibility of providing an additional entrance to the West Side Avenue Station to and from the east. The attendee felt that this would substantially improve access to the station for those walking from Kennedy Boulevard. (As a result of this comment, NJ TRANSIT considered this request as part of potential changes to the existing West Side Avenue Station evaluated during development of the short list of alternatives. These changes are described in Chapter 4, "Short List of Alternatives.")
- An attendee asked whether the reuse of the former railroad right-of-way that runs north-south along the east side of Route 440 was considered. The attendee felt this alignment might avoid the use of private property. (However, the former railroad right-of-way is now private property.)

- There were also general questions regarding HBLR operations and station design. An attendee asked if bikes are and will be allowed on HBLR trains. An attendee asked if climate (cold weather and rain) will be a consideration in the design.
- Several attendees made comments about current HBLR operations (related to crowding, headways, and other issues). These comments were not specific to the HBLR Route 440 Alternatives Analysis and were forwarded to the appropriate personnel at NJ TRANSIT.

NJ TRANSIT provided informal responses to questions or identified next steps in the study that would investigate the questions raised, as appropriate.

### **5.2.3 PHASE 3: ALTERNATIVES EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION OF LOCALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE**

#### **5.2.3.1 TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING**

NJ TRANSIT held a third TAC meeting at 10 AM on February 1, 2011 at 30 Montgomery Street in Jersey City. Following introductions by the attendees, NJ TRANSIT presented the study, including work completed to date, a description of the short list of alternatives, the evaluation of the short list of alternatives, the recommendation of the locally preferred alternative, and the next steps required to implement the project. The presentation consisted of slides and boards. During and following the presentation, members of the TAC made comments and asked questions regarding the study. NJ TRANSIT also invited members of the TAC to review the draft alternatives analysis report and provide comments by February 15, 2011.

The following summarizes the questions and comments received during the TAC meeting:

- Members inquired about the changes to the West Side Avenue park-and-ride lot that would be necessary with implementation of the light rail alternatives.
- Members inquired as to whether cost estimates accounted for planning and design costs.
- Two questions were raised regarding the operations analysis. The first was regarding the study's assumption that the alternatives must function within the existing service plan's 10-minute headways on the West Side Avenue Branch. The second was whether the TSM circulator bus would have a fare or would be free of charge, and there was a request to identify this assumption in the final report. (In response to this comment, Chapter 4, "Short List of Alternatives," describes the fare assumptions for the TSM Alternative.)
- Questions regarding the ridership forecasts included clarification on the analysis period (daily, weekly, etc.), whether a proposed circulator between Bayfront and the NJCU West Campus was included in the forecasts for light rail alternatives, and clarification on the forecast year and the future development that was assumed in the forecasts.
- Members inquired about the next steps in moving forward with the project, including the process for obtaining project approvals, the timing for funding commitments, and the anticipated schedule for design and construction.

Where possible, NJ TRANSIT and the project team answered questions directly or identified next steps in the study that would investigate the questions raised.

### 5.2.3.2 PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE

A third public open house was held by NJ TRANSIT on February 2, 2011. The event was from 5PM to 8PM at NJCU. A fact sheet was made available to attendees. The open house included boards that described the project, the short list of alternatives, and the recommendation of a locally preferred alternative. Project staff was available to answer questions throughout the open house. At 6:30 PM, the project team presented a slide show that described the study and its findings. NJ TRANSIT made the attendees aware that the draft report was available for review and requested any comments by February 15, 2011.

The following summarizes the questions and comments received during the open house:

- As in previous meetings, attendees inquired about the reuse of the former Central Railroad of New Jersey right-of-way that travels south of the parking lot to behind the Home Depot as an option for extending the HBLR. (The CNJ right-of-way was considered as the Preferred Alternative in the Final Environmental Impact Statement [FEIS] for the HBLR. The alignment would have terminated at a station located between West Side Avenue, Route 440, Carbon Place, and the Home Depot. Subsequent to publication of the FEIS, NJCU has identified this site for their West Campus, which is a project that has received approval by the City of Jersey City. The reuse of the right-of-way, as identified in the FEIS, would directly conflict with the NJCU West Campus plan. Furthermore, this option would require the acquisition of privately-owned residential and commercial properties between Pollock Avenue and Carbon Place, and this option would not provide direct HBLR service to Bayfront or other points west of Route 440.)
- A member of the Cityhomes at West Side Station Condo Association inquired about the construction phasing for the project, its location relative to Cityhomes at West Side, the height of the viaduct, and about the appropriate timeframe for providing design suggestions. This commenter also noted that he prefers Alternative 1A to the others, because it would not have a new HBLR station immediately behind the condominium complex. (Specific questions were addressed by the project team. The project team informed the condo association member that design comments could be provided now, if desired, and that there would be additional opportunities for public review in future phases of the project.)
- A member of the public stated the comment period was not sufficient. (Project staff explained that this was the third public open house and that comments have been solicited at each of the open houses. Information presented at this meeting is building upon a consideration of comments received to date.)

### 5.2.3.3 PUBLIC REVIEW OF THE DRAFT ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS REPORT

The Draft Alternatives Analysis Report was made available on the project website beginning January 31, 2011. The public was invited to review the report and provide comments by February 15, 2011. Comments were received from two local residents. The comments pertinent to this study are summarized below.

- Will your plans help to keep this area safe and secure? The abandoned Cookson Electronics warehouse located behind our community is fenced in and gated, which provides an additional sense of safety, especially at night. Since the proposed tracks are raised, will

there be some type of barrier or wall to keep vandals out from underneath the tracks? We have seen massive amounts of graffiti on existing light rail walls. We chose our unit because the area behind it is quiet, aesthetically pleasing, and family friendly. (In an e-mail response, NJ TRANSIT advised that following completion of the Alternatives Analysis, detailed designs will be developed and more in-depth environmental analysis will be conducted. Construction will not begin until those efforts are completed. As the project advances, design features and aesthetic treatments for the alignment to minimize adverse effects on the adjacent residential development will be considered. During the next phase of the project, there will be additional opportunity for review of project documents and for input from the public into the design of the project.)

- How will you keep our area environmentally friendly? We are concerned about the effect an electrical rail system running so close to our living space will have on our environment. Our research on dirty electricity says it could produce negative effects on our health. What green solutions will be used regarding this mode of transportation? (The comment was addressed with the above response regarding future design efforts, additional environmental review, and public outreach opportunities.)
- How will you reduce the noise impact to the neighborhood? Our community is only 6 years old and is the start of a renaissance occurring in this area. As first time homeowners, we spent a great deal of time and thought into the purchase of our home. Excessive train noise could have a negative effect on our property value. What choices have you made to reduce noise during day-to-day operations, as well as the noise during the construction phase? (The comment was addressed with the above response regarding future design efforts, additional environmental review, and public outreach opportunities.)
- The TSM Alternative is substantially cheaper to operate and will provide access to more riders (i.e., Droyers Point and Society Hill and well as Bayfront). The TSM bus route could also be shortened by skipping the far Society Hill stop (Kellogg St. provides reasonably convenient access to most of Society Hill). Should Alternative 1A nevertheless get selected, aesthetic features such as landscaping should be included to minimize the impact of a 20-foot-high elevated track dominating the view from the neighboring Westside Station community. (In an e-mail response to the commenter, NJ TRANSIT clarified that while the TSM Alternative would be substantially cheaper to construct, it would actually be more expensive to operate [\$2.6 million annually in future year dollars] than the light rail alternatives [\$1.8 million to \$2 million annually in future year dollars for Alternative 1A]. In addition, although it would bring transit service closer to more possible HBLR riders, the ridership modeling conducted indicates that the TSM Alternative would be used by far fewer people than any of the other alternatives [385 new HBLR riders as compared to 4,700 for Alternative 1A]. Furthermore, as noted above, NJ TRANSIT indicated that detailed designs would be prepared following completion of the Alternatives Analysis.)

In addition to comments from private citizens, the City of Jersey City provided correspondence to NJ TRANSIT expressing its support of the project and commitment to continued coordination through future phases of project development.



### 5.3 CONTACT INFORMATION

For further information regarding this study, please visit the project website at [www.hblr440aa.com](http://www.hblr440aa.com) or you may contact:

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