



Response to the recommended Locally Preferred Alternative for the Blue Line Corridor Extension Alternatives Analysis

Jan. 30, 2012

Background: In the coming weeks, and after two years of Alternatives Analysis planning and input from public meetings, the Blue Line Corridor Extension consulting team will present to the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority's (GCRTA) Board of Trustees its recommended Locally Preferred Alternative. The board will then decide whether to accept, reject or refine the staff recommendation. A copy of the Blue Line Corridor Extension presentation is available here: <http://www.riderta.com/usercontent/file/2012-1-17-BlueLineAnalysis.pdf>

If accepted, and if the U.S. Department of Transportation concurs with the recommendation, the project could then proceed into preliminary engineering, then final engineering and ultimately construction, presuming that Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and local funding shares are available at each step.

All Aboard Ohio's preferences and goals: As Ohio's only statewide, citizen-based nonprofit organization representing rail and transit consumers, we take great interest in the process and proposed outcomes of project-based planning efforts such as the Blue Line Extension Alternatives Analysis. All Aboard Ohio's preferences and goals for such endeavors are that they:

- Are within the capacity of the sponsoring organization(s) and partners to undertake, realize and sustain.
- Supply long-term transportation choices that offer the potential to stimulate or sustain compact, mixed land uses which offer low-mileage lifestyles that increasing numbers of Ohioans demand.
- Produce economic development, environmental enhancement and greater access to opportunities and services that inspire stakeholders in other geographic areas to replicate well-designed rail/transit investments for their citizens' own benefit.

Summary of Response: All Aboard Ohio supports the recommended Blue Line Corridor Extension LPA, with minor adjustments as suggested herein, because we believe that components of the LPA will meet our preferences and goals upon service start-up, while other components will reduce barriers and create conditions more favorable to support future expansions of higher-level transit within the funding constraints of GCRTA, FTA and others.

Detailed Response: All Aboard Ohio believes that rail transit is often the superior mode of public transportation because of its broad customer acceptance. It also has the ability to provide a combination of neighborhood-level access, high origin-to-destination average speeds and a stable, identifiable route which provides levels of passenger traffic density and long-term availability necessary to attract and sustain high-density real estate development around stations.

While rail can often create the built environment necessary to sustain it, rail is not always appropriate with regards to timing, politics, fiscal constraints or economic conditions. In those situations, bus-based modes of transportation (bus rapid transit, express buses, mainline route buses, circulators and demand-response) can be the superior mode of transportation. And sometimes their provision may create conditions which ultimately support higher levels of transit, including streetcars, light-rail, heavy-rail metro/subway, regional commuter rail, and intercity conventional/high-speed rail.

All Aboard Ohio considers that to be the case with the recommended Blue Line Extension LPA. We were initially disappointed to see that extending rail transit all the way out to the “belt” highways (I-271, I-480, US422) would not meet the FTA’s “pass-fail test.” But we are pleased that the project team’s baseline recommendation is designed to stay within the project award criteria of the FTA while intending to create the conditions necessary to support higher levels of transit as a potential follow-on project someday.

The recommended baseline elements accomplish the following items which are of importance to All Aboard Ohio (SUGGESTED CHANGES ARE NOTED IN **BOLD-CAPS**):

1. The 1,300-foot-long Blue Line route extension...
 - a. By having two stations (Farnsleigh and the new Shaker Intermodal Transit Center or ITC) that are more evenly spaced in the vicinity, this will accommodate, encourage and sustain the planned Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) at the intersection of Warrensville Road and Chagrin Boulevard.
 - b. A fully built-out TOD should provide a significant transit ridership anchor at the current east end of the Blue Line and create a major employment node into which existing and proposed transit routes will converge.
 - c. This short extension will address a major construction cost component of a longer Blue Line extension, such as to Chagrin Highlands or to North Randall, thereby reducing the cost of the longer extension in the future by \$25.4 million (in current dollars).
 - d. The Shaker ITC will be a more attractive setting as a “mode mixer” including bus-to-rail transfers and the expansion of free parking spaces for park-n-ride transit users.
 - e. **SUGGESTION-1:** remove the adjoining BP gas station on Chagrin to provide a turning lane for an exit route from the Shaker ITC for eastbound #5 Chagrin buses. Its removal would also create a safer, more pleasant pedestrian-oriented setting as well as avail a new parcel available for future, transit-supportive development.

2. University Circle Express (UCX) bus service...
 - a. The new bus route initially concerned All Aboard Ohio because it partially follows and partially duplicates the Blue Line – an underperforming route in terms of its ridership and revenue-to-cost ratio compared to other light-rail lines nationally (its underperforming status may change as a result of implementing the recommended LPA and the proposed Shaker TOD).
 - b. However, the UCX would provide a transit service which does not now exist – a fast, one-seat ride from the southeast “belt” highways to University Circle. The Blue Line serves a different purpose and market – rapid transit to downtown.
 - c. The only segment where the UCX duplicates the Blue Line is between the Shaker ITC and Shaker Square. But there is not a significant amount of origin/destination transit travel between these two points. All Aboard Ohio’s continued support of the UCX is contingent upon UCX buses not making any additional scheduled service stops along existing rail lines.

- d. **SUGGESTION-2:** adding transit buses to Van Aken and other busy residential streets may cause safety and pavement quality concerns. Thus, as part of the branding of the UCX service, buses could be painted in vivid colors to make them more noticeable, such as with bright yellow fronts. Also, Van Aken and other streets could be resurfaced shortly before the start-up of service after which GCRTA may offer financial assistance, if needed, to Shaker Heights to accelerate its resurfacing cycle.
 - e. **SUGGESTION-3:** broaden the UCX's University Circle distribution/collection area to include the Cleveland Clinic, such as extending the route west on Euclid to the Cleveland Clinic Intermodal Facility at East 93rd Street.
3. Increased frequency of Blue/Green Lines rail service...
- a. The recommended LPA proposes to slightly improve headways between trains during peak travel periods, from 12 minutes to 10 minutes east of Shaker Square and from 6 minutes to 5 minutes west of Shaker Square.
 - b. We understand this was proposed to improve connectivity between the Blue/Green Line trains and the UCX buses.
 - c. All Aboard Ohio supports this change as long as it does not degrade the revenue-to-cost ratio of the Blue and Green Lines.
4. Laying the foundation for future transit expansions and improvements...
- a. The recommended LPA, within the constraints of GCRTA and FTA funding, establishes some important physical and operational foundations for future expansions.
 - b. One of those was noted earlier, namely the extension of the Blue Line through the Chagrin-Warrensville intersection and the construction of the Shaker ITC, thereby removing \$25.4 million (in current dollars) from the cost of a longer, future rail extension.
 - c. Another foundation is the park-n-ride lots in the Chagrin Highlands and in North Randall, each of which tentatively has an average capital cost of about \$5 million, depending on their final location and design. Since a future Blue Line rail extension will probably go to only one of these park-n-rides, one park-n-ride could remove about \$5 million (in current dollars) from the cost of a longer, future rail extension.
 - d. The most cost-effective rail extension to the "belt" highways was the Harvard option at nearly \$145 million. Construction of one park-n-ride and the Shaker ITC extension were, in total, projected to reduce the capital cost of the Harvard option by more than 20 percent.
 - e. However, the Chagrin Highlands lacks higher density land-use patterns necessary to support a higher density transportation mode like light-rail. All Aboard Ohio does not believe the provision of a park-n-ride lot will change this as no park-n-ride lot elsewhere in Greater Cleveland has done so either.
 - f. **SUGGESTION-4:** in addition to the limited number of intermediate bus station stops proposed between the Shaker ITC and the southeast end of the UCX routes, add other design elements and enhancements to create a route identity like what exists along the BRT-lite section of the HealthLine east of East 105th such as a different style of light poles, ADA-compliant crosswalks, UCX banners on utility poles, etc..
 - g. **SUGGESTION-5:** using public sector incentives, encourage a transit-supportive development example(s) at an intermediate bus stop (such as at Harvard/Green or near Northfield/Ellacott) to provide a land use paradigm different than the large setbacks prevalent now. Without a different paradigm, the FTA is unlikely to

- support a light-rail extension out to this extremely low density, pedestrian-unfriendly area.
- h. All Aboard Ohio strongly supports GCRTA's preferred site for the North Randall park-n-ride, the vacant Syms warehouse property, for the following short- and long-term reasons.
 - i. **REASON #1:** In the short-term, this site works best because it is easily accessible to/from both US422 (via Miles) and I-480 (via Northfield). The UCX bus park-n-ride lot would probably be at the north end of the property, using an existing parking lot.
 - j. **REASON #2:** In the long term, the vacant Syms warehouse could be demolished to expand the park-n-ride into the south end of the property, next to Norfolk Southern's Randall Secondary between Cleveland and Aurora, now leased by Cleveland Commercial Railroad. This rail line has been rated by the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency as one of the region's most promising for commuter rail.
 - k. **REASON #3:** All Aboard Ohio envisions that someday a rail commuter from Mantua, Aurora or Solon could make a seamless transfer at this station to a UCX express bus to the west end of Chagrin Highlands, the Shaker TOD and/or University Circle. Or a quick reverse commute to one of the industries in Solon or south of Aurora could be made. Such linkages should increase the cost-effectiveness of both transit services.

All Aboard Ohio looks forward to the final Blue Line Corridor Extension LPA, and hopefully soon to preliminary engineering, then final engineering and construction. We stand ready to assist GCRTA and its project development team in advancing this project to reality. We do so in order to help create a foundation for additional, higher level public transit service in this corridor for citizens to enjoy in the not-too-distant future.

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