

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers from the Northeast Corridor Transit Public Meetings

Q How many stops would the proposed Northeast Corridor rail transit system have in Marion County and where would they be? Would Hamilton County residents have better access to the system than Marion County residents?

A The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) has made a long-term transit recommendation to help alleviate traffic congestion in the Northeast Corridor, our region's busiest. This recommendation uses the existing rail corridor between Noblesville and downtown Indianapolis, known as the Hoosier Heritage Port Authority (HHPA) corridor or the 'fair train' route, as the system alignment and diesel light rail or diesel multiple unit (DMU) as the transit technology. Final station locations have not yet been determined, but when fully built out as envisioned in 2035, this system would have 19 stops: 13 or 14 in Marion County and 5 or 6 in Hamilton County.



To jump start the process, the MPO has also recommended a near-term option using the same route but with traditional diesel commuter rail transit as the technology. This start-up option would be less expensive and faster to implement, costing about a quarter of what the long-term system will, but still featuring 5 or 6 stops: 3 or 4 in Marion County and 2 or 3 in Hamilton County.

This means that either option would provide convenient accessibility and enable travel in both directions.

Q With as often as the 'fair train' route crosses existing streets, won't frequent commuter trains make traffic congestion even worse?

A The recommended rail transit route will cross 14 existing streets in Hamilton County (when built out to the center of Noblesville) and 30 existing streets in Marion County. The streets crossed in Marion County include a number of low volume streets, but also Allisonville Road, Kessler Boulevard and 62nd Street – all busy thoroughfares with intersections that are already controlled by traffic lights.

The passing of a commuter train at any of these intersections would take less time than the average traffic signal, because of the trains' proposed operating speeds (40 – 50 mph) and their short length -- 2-4 cars on average. It is also possible to synchronize traffic signals to coincide with rail crossings.

The removal of single occupant vehicles from the roads as more and more commuters "get on board with transit" would do more to *improve* traffic flow than managed rail crossings would inhibit it.

How much would the recommended transit system cost?

The long-term system, when fully built out in 2035, is estimated to cost about \$690 million, with all 19 stations, double track, new equipment and all day service.



The near-term option featuring fewer stations, single track with sidings, used equipment (if available) and peak period service *only* would cost between \$100 and \$160 million.

Is the benefit of such a system really worth that much?

Consider the cost of doing nothing. According to the 2007 Texas Transportation Institute's *Urban Mobility Report*, Indianapolis already ranks 30th worst in congestion among the nation's 85 largest cities with area motorists spending an average of 43 hours a year delayed in rush hour traffic – more than an entire work week! The report states that our regional congestion delay totals 24,318,000 hours, wastes 16,098,000 gallons of gas and costs more than \$478,000,000 a year in regional productivity and wasted fuel. That's nearly half a billion dollars and this figure is calculated using the most recent data available from 2005 when gas cost less than \$2/gal. Imagine what the cost of doing nothing is now!

The recommended system is the lowest cost transit alternative that can improve mobility and reduce peak hour congestion in our region's busiest travel corridor. The capacity it would provide is a bargain compared to adding even more travel lanes for vehicles.

Would an improved bus system that allows east-west travel and has the flexibility to change routes be a better investment than a rail transit system that's locked into one corridor?

It isn't an either/or choice. All travel modes and transit systems need to work together to offer area residents the benefit of maximum choice and enhanced mobility. The MPO-recommended Northeast Corridor rail system assumes the expansion of IndyGo bus service which will run east-west routes to bring rail commuters to stations along the corridor and distribute disembarking passengers to their final destinations. It is recommended that funding for this system include funds earmarked to help IndyGo grow and may be the best opportunity to provide the capital necessary for IndyGo to develop a grid-route system. Currently, IndyGo has a 'hub & spoke' route system that brings most riders downtown before taking them to their final destinations. Such an improvement was recommended by IndyGo's 2004 Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA) which was conducted by the MPO as part of the rapid transit study *DIRECTIONS*.



What can be done about the engine noise and vibration associated with traditional diesel rail to help homeowners living along the rail corridor?

A lot. The MPO's long-term recommendation of diesel light rail is a much quieter type of equipment than most people are familiar with. It puts out an average of 20 decibels lower noise than a freight train (or fair train) when passing at a distance of 50 feet. Even the MPO's near-term start-up option, which would use new or refurbished diesel commuter rail equipment, would likely be quieter than the fair train.

The reason is two fold: Any transit equipment that would be put into daily commuter service along the Northeast Corridor would be newer than the fair train used for excursions by the Indiana Transportation Museum. Also, the MPO's long-term and

near-term transit options both include \$50 - \$60 million in rail bed and track improvements that will minimize train vibration and sound, including the installation of continuously welded track that eliminates the 'clickety-clack' noise associated with traditional rail.

Can anything be done about the train whistles blown at crossings? I know these are blown for safety reasons, but they're the noisiest part of the train.



There are ways to safely reduce the audio footprint of a moving train. For example, full width barricades that completely block off *both sides* of the street being crossed by track, and prevent drivers from risking collision by driving around partial barriers, eliminate the need for crossing whistles.

An alternative would be wayside horns that are permanently installed at the crossing site. Because of their elevated, stationary mounting, these whistles have a smaller audio footprint yet have proven an effective warning system.

Either way, the current recommendation is to spend additional money in system development to create "quiet zones" through residential areas along the route. These zones will be defined in greater detail in the next phase of the project development.

Given the poor state of regional air quality, does it really make sense to recommend a diesel rail transit system? Why not something cleaner like electric rail?

The recommended long-term and near-term diesel-based systems have the potential to be powered by bio-diesel fuel -- the cleaner, environmentally responsible alternative to traditional diesel fuel. However, even without bio-diesel, the environmental impact of either system on regional air quality is more than offset by the projected number of private vehicles removed from Northeast Corridor roadways.

In addition, the recommended systems are the lowest cost rail alternatives, which means they may be able to start improving regional air quality sooner than more expensive systems like electric rail which costs nearly twice as much and may, therefore, take longer to fund. Further, most electric rail systems still rely on the consumption of fossil fuels to generate the needed electricity though that generation does not occur at the site of service. In Indiana, coal is most often burned to generate electricity and coal consumption is one of the region's leading contributors to our federal air quality non-attainment status.

Finally, investing in track and roadbed improvements and minimizing investment in vehicles now will optimize opportunities to acquire new technology vehicles later, as they become available.



If I live along the HHPA rail corridor, what is the recommended system going to do to my property values?

We understand the concern of corridor residents, but believe the presumption of negative impacts is exaggerated. We have been monitoring peer cities (cities similar in size, locale, population distribution, etc.) who have invested in rail transit to assess their experience with property values. In most cities, the value of properties located within the transit system corridor have remained stable or risen from 10 to 25 percent, depending on proximity to stations. Studies over the past two decades have indicated that housing within .25 to .5 mile of a transit station is worth 6.4% more than other properties in Philadelphia, 6.7% in Boston, 10.6% in Portland, 17% in San Diego, 20% in Chicago, 24% in Dallas, and 45% in Santa Clara County, California.¹

In some cases, declines in property values have been observed for dwellings that are close to especially noisy transit systems. Apartments abutting Chicago's elevated lines frequently have lower rents, unless they are close enough to stations to benefit from the location advantage of improved transit access. Reductions of as much as 10 to 20% have been observed along suburban

¹ Transit Cooperative Research Program. *Report 102: Transit Oriented Development in the United States: Experience, Challenges, and Prospects*. 2004.

commuter rail lines in San Francisco and Boston that do not have effective noise mitigation features. Noise impacts can be minimized or eliminated through good design features, such as modern vehicles, railcar wheel maintenance, continuously welded track, noise barriers, and landscaping. These strategies will be explored in the next phase of project development.



Q **Would the recommended rail transit system be accessible to people with disabilities?**

A Absolutely. ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) standards would be incorporated into the design guidelines of any system considered for adoption.

Q **Has the decision already been made to move ahead with a transit system in the Northeast Corridor?**

A No. That decision can only be made by the Policy Committee of the Indianapolis Regional Transportation Council (IRTC) -- the decision-making body of the regional transportation planning process which is made up of elected officials from throughout the area. On April 30 2008 the Metropolitan

Planning Organization (MPO), the region's primary transportation planner, recommended a Northeast Corridor transit route and technology to the IRTC which voted unanimously to proceed with public meetings to present the recommendation for public comment. Those meetings, hosted by the MPO and the Central Indiana Regional Transportation Authority (CIRTA), took place in June 2008. Public comment gathered there and from other sources has been compiled in a report for presentation to the IRTC in August 2008. After reviewing the report, the IRTC will vote on the transit recommendation at a special meeting in September 2008.

Even then, the decision-making process won't be over. The locally preferred alternative emerging from the current process will be reviewed in greater detail (along with improved bus and "do nothing" options) in the upcoming Environmental Impact Statement. Meetings will be held throughout that process to discuss the project, and when all the facts are in, a formal public hearing will be conducted to present the project and record input. Approval of the Final Environmental Impact Statement will open the way for design and construction.

Q **Is it too late to comment on the transit recommendation?**

A No. Comments still can be made at three related web sites: indympo.org, cirta.us, and cleardirections.info. In addition, the MPO hosts a 24-hour bi-lingual comment line at 317/327-8601.

As implementing agency, CIRTA will see the recommended system through Draft Environmental Impact Study, Preliminary Engineering and funding identification if it is approved by the IRTC. There will be ample opportunity for continuing public comment throughout these subsequent phases.



The Indianapolis Metropolitan Planning Organization

