

January 18, 2008

Update on the
South Central Wisconsin Commuter Transportation Study

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The study started in November 2006 is an enhanced feasibility study for potential South Central Wisconsin commuter connections to North East Illinois with emphasis on the Harvard Metra Station. It has been broadened to include Dane County, Wisconsin as part of the study area with an emphasis on the Cities of Madison and Winnebago County, Illinois. This resulted from the fact there are greater commuter trips from Rock County to and from the Madison area and Winnebago County than there are to North East Illinois. The study was funded with \$248,600 consisting of \$198,880 in federal transportation funds and \$49,720 in WisDOT state funds. The government members of the Steering Committee were Beloit, Janesville, the Villages of Sharon and Clinton, Rock County, WisDOT, SLATS, and the Janesville MPO called JAMPO for the Janesville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization. Also, Senator Judy Robson was on the committee and Ken Hendricks was a member. EarthTech, now AECOM was the consulting firm which has a great deal of experience in this sort of work.

The initial specific work items were:

A **Stakeholder Survey Report** done in final form which was designed to determine the perception of stakeholders for a need:

- to improve regional transit links,
- for enhanced regional transit versus other transportation investments,
- to evaluate the quality of current regional transportation services, and
- to determine the maximum acceptable commuting distances and travel times.

It was determined there is support for regional transit including:

- the fact that current regional transit is considered inadequate,
- there is interest in expanding regional transit to Madison and Chicago especially to enhance economic development,
- there is a high use of transit to reach external destinations,
- there is a great deal of interest in improving connections to Madison and Rockford for job related purposes with Chicago being relatively less important,
- the fact that employers want access to the Madison and Rockford labor markets with Chicago being relatively less important,
- there is a desire to improve connections to Madison and Chicago for recreational purposes with Rockford being relatively less important, and
- the fact that elected officials and business leaders view transit as less important than other groups.

A **Preliminary Transportation Inventory Report** done in final form which identified and described the current rail, bus, and major roadway elements as well as certain new proposed facilities such as the Stateline Mass Transit District, the Beloit and Rockford Transit Transfer Centers, the capacity expansion on I-39/90, the North Central Illinois Transit Initiative, and the proposal to provide Amtrak service to Rockford. There are significant current resources that need to be considered when analyzing transit feasibility. Potential expansions to the roadway and transit systems further complicate the analysis while consideration must also be given to the fact that many of the new capacity expansion proposals may never be funded.

A **Market Analysis** which was subcontracted by EarthTech to Cambridge Systematics who developed a technical computer based model of the study area. The model described current travel flows within in the corridor between traffic zones defined largely on a county-wide basis. Additional work could be done to on a more refined level within the study area to examine trips on a more refined basis and to further quantify corridor travel demands. The modeling data was primarily derived from journey to work data, and may in the future be further refined to take into account special collectors such as major entertainment and shopping locations largely as reflected in weekend non-work related trips.

A **Purpose and Needs Statement** which is in continuing development that analyzes the current and future transportation demands compared to the inventory of current and future transportation resources and facilities. The Stakeholder Survey Report and Market Analysis can be seen as representing the demand side for services and the Transportation Inventory Report can be viewed as the supply side of the equation. The outcome of the demand and supply balance is the Purpose and Needs Statement and it must be technically sound and reasonable.

Two **Pivotal Summit Workshop** were held where the participants were advised of all the findings, and decisions. A fairly comprehensive list of criteria was identified for analyzing the alternatives. Through these pivotal workshops and using the criteria a list of almost thirty alternative options for improved transportation improvements was reduced to six options. These were studied more closely with the funds remaining and possibly analyzed in the future through further study possibly including an Alternatives Analysis Study. Certain early steps of the Alternatives Analysis process were carried out with the remaining resources available in this phase of the study process.

The Technical Pivot meeting was held on August 17, 2007. The main purpose of this meeting was to screen the long list according to technical criteria. The Policy Pivot Meeting was held on September 14, 2007. The main purpose of this meeting was to have a larger group of community leaders and regional transportation stakeholders review the progress made to date by the steering committee at the Technical Pivot Meeting and identify a final list of alternatives for study.

At the Policy Pivot meeting the list of alternatives that were agreed upon for further study included:

- Madison-Rockford via Milton (rail) and Madison-Rockford via Evansville (rail) combined,
- Madison-NW Cook County BRT (bus rapid transit),
- Madison-Rockford Express Bus (express bus),
- Madison-Chicago Introduce Discounted Commuter Fares,
- Subscription Buses (specialized transit) and Van Pools (specialized transit) combined,
- Beloit/Janesville-Harvard Feeder Buses (feeder bus)
- Janesville/Beloit commuter rail connection to Harvard

At the meeting on January 11, 2008 the five **Most Viable Rail Segments and General Areas for Station Locations** were discussed for the purpose of estimating capital costs. The six potential rail corridors are:

- 1) Madison-Evansville-Janesville, M-E-J
- 2) Madison-Milton-Janesville, M-M-J
- 3) Janesville-Rockford, J-R
- 4) Janesville-Harvard, J-R
- 5) Beloit-Clinton, B-C

The Study website is operating thanks to the ongoing and diligent efforts of the Richard Cannon and Kathleen Holford from Rock County, and the EarthTech consulting team. It can be found in the Rock County Planning, Economic & Community Development Department site at:

<http://www.co.rock.wi.us/Dept/Planning/Planning.htm>

The Following reports were prepared by EarthTech in the final phase of the study as directed by the Steering Committee:

1a. Recommend Rail Station Locations – An initial set of recommended locations were presented at the Jan 11, 2008 meeting. Based on feedback at the meeting and subsequent input received, a report was prepared. The specific station locations were eliminated from the work product and a generalized area-wide approach for station locations was implemented for the report.

Suggested generalized locations are offered primarily to guide land use planning and development decisions

1b. Refine Commuter Rail Alternatives & Est. Costs – As follow-up to the discussion at Jan 11th meeting, the consultant Team has prepared a Discussion Paper on possible future rail scenarios that was the basis for determining infrastructure requirements and capital costs to implement commuter rail service on the five short-listed corridors.

2. Develop Express Bus Service Plan & Costs – An overall route between Rockford and Madison, directly serving the downtowns of communities in the corridor (e.g., Beloit, Janesville, Edgerton and Stoughton), was proposed. An operating plan is prepared, which suggests logical segments of the overall route to be run as independent, but coordinated routes. One of the underlying objectives for the proposed service has been to design a service that could mitigate traffic congestion during the I-90 reconstruction project. A summary of the task objectives and status of work to date was presented.

3. Research on Discounted Regional Commuter Bus Fares – As part of the research to enhance and expand regional transit options in South Central Wisconsin, an investigation of the economics of offering a discounted fare for commuters on an existing intercity bus service was proposed. Unlike other options being considered, requiring significant financial resources, minimal funding is needed to initiate and sustain this program. Issues associated with access, service levels, and marketing are also discussed. This proposed program was started in the Fall of 2008 promoted by the City of Janesville in conjunction with the Van Gelder/Coach USA Bus Company.

4. Investigate Vanpools in Rock County – Research and documentation work complete. Vanpool information has been provided on the SCWCTS project web site.

5. Public Open House - A Public meeting was held on June 18, 2008 at Blackhawk Technical College. State Senator Judy Robson welcomed the participants and Gary Foyle from EarthTech made the presentation summarizing the findings of the Study. Thirty-seven public participants attended. A survey of the participants indicated they were interested primarily in commuting to Madison (26 out of 37). There was a 47% interest in commuter rail and a 22% interest in Commuter bus service. There was a 16% interest in commuting to Rockford and a general feeling that a poor system in the area concerning commuter connections. The highest level of interest overall was expressed in: 1) Commuter rail between Madison and Janesville, Janesville and Beloit and Rockford, and Janesville/Beloit and Harvard, 2) Feeder bus to Harvard, 3) Van Galder commuter bus fare discounts, and 4) Express bus service between Beloit, Janesville and Madison.

6. Final Steering Committee meeting with acceptance of all the consultant's reports including the Purpose and Needs Statement and subsequent preparation of the final report. There was a

review of the Draft Executive Summary revised as directed at the final Steering Committee meeting on July 18, 2008 in Janesville.

7. Final Recommendation. Here is the SLATS MPO's understanding of the final local recommendations derived from the study:

- Representatives of Beloit and Janesville concluded not to pursue an Alternatives Analysis at the cost of \$3 million, Robert Soltau, Project Manager, having previously received an indication of support that such an amount could be available through a federal "high priority" programming earmark. There was strong feeling that even after an Alternatives Analysis study the rail projects outlined would not qualify for Federal Transit Administration capital or operating support.
- The concept of developing commuter rail or bus transportation should be examined again at some time in the future as conditions change.
- The Steering Committee strongly supports the preservation of the rail lines, facilities, and rights of way outlined in the study between Beloit/Janesville and Harvard, Madison via both Milton and Evansville, and Rockford.
- It is appropriate to promote a commuter pricing option by Janesville for Madison trips using the existing Van Galder service.
- There is encouragement for "park and ride" facilities, vanpooling, and ridesharing, as well as the possibility of a north-south commuter bus experiment with a Madison destination when WisDOT reconstructs and widens I-90 in the future.

7. Presentation of the Final Executive Summary Report – It will be made to a combined meeting of the Stateline Area Transportation Study (SLATS) and the Janesville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (JAMPO). SLATS and JJAMPO have scheduled a joint meeting at 6:30 PM on Wednesday, January 14, 2009 in Room 1400-B, Lower Level also called the North Commons at Blackhawk Technical College, 6004 Prairie Avenue, Janesville.

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