



Grand Gateway

Community Advisory Group Meeting #2 Summary

February 18, 2021 – 10:00 a.m.
Virtual Meeting held via Zoom

Project Team Members:

Name	Company
Chris Leow	ESI Consultants, Ltd.
Joe Chiczewski	ESI Consultants, Ltd.
Scott Brejcha	Knight E/A, Inc.
Clay Shipley	Knight E/A, Inc.
Bill Eldringhoff	Knight E/A, Inc.
Mandi Jennings	Metro Strategies, Inc.
Michael Schuch	Metro Strategies, Inc.
Tammy Wierciak	Metro Strategies, Inc.
Kristen Robinson	Metro Strategies, Inc.

Community Advisory Group Members:

Name	Agency
Dan Sabatka	Canadian Pacific Railway
Tom Murtha	Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
Cecilia Diaz	Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways
Sam Wright	Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways
Tina Blumenberg	Federal Railroad Administration
Chip Pew	Illinois Commerce Commission
Anna Kutryn	Illinois Department of Transportation
Andy Rabadi	Illinois Department of Transportation
David Kralik	Metra
Nate Morriss	Metra
Al Bakotic	Metra
Tim Pitzen	Metra
Kate Sullivan	Metra
Lynn Dion	Metra (Right of Way)
Adam Eichenberger	PACE
Tom Robbins	PACE
Claire Serdiuk	Regional Transportation Authority



Frank Fagiano	Village of Elmwood Park
Angelo "Skip" Saviano (Mayor)	Village of Elmwood Park
Paul Volpe	Village of Elmwood Park
Kim Parrilli	Village of Elmwood Park
Kevin Flaherty	Village of Elmwood Park Fire Prevention
Andrew Hock	Village of Elmwood Park Police Department
Mayor Barrett Pedersen	Village of Franklin Park
Marjorie Manchen	Village of River Grove
Leonard Cannata	West Central Municipal Conference/North Central Council of Mayors

Presentation Overview:

Mandi Jennings with Metro Strategies, Inc. began the meeting by welcoming CAG members and outlining CAG's role throughout the project duration to advise on project direction, needs and details. She noted the importance of providing feedback to ensure the analysis and subsequent recommendations correspond to local conditions and solutions. Ms. Jennings requested attendees mute themselves and turn off videos for the duration of the presentation. Ms. Jennings also informed attendees the meeting was recorded for documentation purposes and encouraged CAG members to provide feedback and ask questions to the project team throughout the presentation using the chat function on Zoom.

Next, Ms. Jennings reviewed the agenda for the second meeting which included project details, PEL process, draft problem statement, draft purpose and need, a workshop to discuss criteria for alternative analysis and time for open discussion at the end of the meeting. Ms. Jennings provided an introduction for the Village of Elmwood Park attendees which included Mayor Angelo "Skip" Saviano, Kim Parrilli and Paul Volpe.

Paul Volpe thanked everyone for joining the meeting and participating on the project. Mr. Volpe mentioned the significance of the project to not only Elmwood Park, but the region as a whole as Grande Avenue connects the western suburbs to the City of Chicago. Mr. Volpe gave a brief background of the project, noting the occurrence of multiple accidents at this crossing (2nd worst crossing in the state), including a recent car/train collision that happened earlier in the week. He stated that safety is the reason this project is of the utmost importance and the time to advance the project through determination of next steps with funding, engineering and public engagement is now.

Ms. Jennings reviewed the involvement and roles of each agency and team included in the project. She announced the organizations who were invited to participate and those who have confirmed their participation in the Community Advisory Group (CAG), including those joining the meeting.

Scott Brejcha with Knight E/A, Inc. provided a brief recap of the first CAG meeting which was held on July 23, 2020 and reiterated the primary reason for the project is safety. Mr. Brejcha mentioned the project collaboration between the Village of Elmwood Park, the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways (CCDOH) and Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP). He ensured this project that will improve safety, regional mobility and allow room for redevelopment in many communities (not just Elmwood Park). Mr. Brejcha reviewed the CAG goal for stakeholders to provide feedback and advice to the project team about local concerns, safety, land use, etc.



Shared concerns among the stakeholders from the first CAG meeting included safety at the existing crossing, emergency response challenges, pedestrian safety and traffic delays, among others. He reiterated the project team wants to find the best alternative identified at the end of project and the vitality of stakeholders' input in order to do so. Mr. Brejcha noted that the end goal of the project is to reach a consensus on a recommended alternative.

Mr. Brejcha provided a brief project overview addressing the project history, study area (including study limits and perimeters), potential alternatives, project objectives, project benefits and proposed project limits.

Ms. Jennings discussed the project timeline for public engagement and project development with the purpose of building community consensus and promoting involvement through participation throughout the process. She noted that there will be two public meetings and one public hearing for the project. She reviewed components included in the current project phase and subsequent phases, highlighting that public engagement will occur in each phase. The project website, grandgatewayep.com, was launched to ensure continued outreach efforts during the project and to keep the public and stakeholders informed.

Clay Shipley with Knight E/A Inc. presented the Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) process overview and components. A PEL essentially performs as a feasibility study with the addition of stakeholder and public involvement, as well as regulatory and agency coordination, which is important to achieve approvals at key decision points in the NEPA process. Mr. Shipley discussed the benefit of PEL in relation to the project's development and the achievement of sufficient study during the PEL process will result in the project entering into a full phase one.

Tammy Wierciak with Metro Strategies, Inc. introduced the draft problem statement development process which was guided by the stakeholders' identification of existing transportation issues during the first CAG meeting. The insights helped the project team to develop the problem statement and draft the project's purpose and need, which is the first milestone in the study process. Ms. Wierciak shared the drafted problem statement during the meeting and opened up the meeting to allow attendees to share comments or feedback regarding the statement. Feedback from attendees included clarification regarding resolving issues of congestion and reliability in addition to safety concerns. Ms. Wierciak then presented a map of the study area that reiterated the characteristics and location identified within the problem statement.

Mr. Brejcha defined the draft purpose and need and explained that in addition to the problem statement, the two components help to verify the stakeholders' and publics' perception of issues associated with the identified problem. The purpose and need statement is a project requirement to provide justification under the federal NEPA Policy and Process. He reviewed in more detail the current project need, future traffic demands and factors contributing to safety deficiencies. Mr. Brejcha then defined the project purpose of alleviating congestion, improving safety and enhancing reliability and mobility for all transportation users at the Grand Avenue crossing and impacts it would have throughout the region.

Mr. Brejcha reviewed traffic volumes in the project area and provided daily traffic statistics as well as projected 2050 traffic statistics.

Chris Leow with ESI Consultants, Ltd. reviewed information regarding crash data at the crossing. Mr. Leow stated the crash data analysis included statistics from 2014 - 2018 that were provided by IDOT. Police reports from local enforcement agencies were also referenced to spot check the crash data. The crash data highlighted seven specific locations within the project area and corresponding statistics for each location. The most common type of accident in this area is a rear end accident, followed by a turning accident.



Ms. Wierciak informed all CAG members that alternatives will be developed to address the issues identified in the project's problem statement and purpose and need. She reviewed the screening process that will be utilized by the project team to conduct an initial evaluation of the different alternatives and explained that the feedback from CAG members helps to further eliminate options to ultimately develop a preferred alternative. Ms. Wierciak provided a brief overview of the workshop session, including the five concepts for discussion and goals for the session. CAG members were then broken out into three small break out groups for the 20 minute workshop.

CAG Feedback:

Feedback below documents responses that were sent in the Zoom chat unless otherwise noted.

- CMAP; Tom Murtha asked, in relation to the draft problem statement, if the goal is to solve congestion or reliability.
- IDOT; Anna Kutryn concurred with Mr. Murtha and shared her perspective that congestion is more of a roadway capacity issue versus travel time reliability.
- Metra; David Kralik requested the draft problem statement include some language that focuses on solving the reliability issue in addition to congestion.
- Ms. Kutryn suggested the draft problem statement encompass all mentioned issues under "mobility."
- Knight E/A, Inc.; Clay Shipley thanked Mr. Murtha, Ms. Kutryn and Mr. Kralik for their comments and agreed "mobility," seems to encompass all mentioned thoughts/problems.
- Mr. Murtha stated the study team should consider eliminating "congestion" from purpose and need and leave as mobility and safety, only. Based on Elmwood Park staff discussions, congestion was not mentioned. He hopes IDOT and FHWA regulators will understand that the big issues here are safety and crossing blockages, the latter of which may be for extended periods. But for the crossing, Grand Avenue within the project limit would not require extensive improvements (and IDOT recently made some geometric improvements).
- ICC; Chip Pew with ICC, State Coordinator for Operation Lifesaver expressed a willingness to utilize the association with the organization to help with outreach efforts.
- *Feedback was provided during the general presentation.*

CAG Break Out Group Summaries:

Feedback below highlights collective ideas from each group during the workshop session.

Group 1:

Bill Eldringhoff, Knight; Cecilia Diaz, CCDOTH; Mandi Jennings, Metro Strategies; Skip Saviano, Village of Elmwood Park; Kim Parrilli, Village of Elmwood Park; Paul Volpe, Village of Elmwood Park; Tina Blumenberg, Federal Railroad Administration; Tom Murtha, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning; Chip Pew, ICC; Tim Pitzen, Metra; Adam Eichenberger, Pace; Dan Sabatka, Canadian Pacific Railway

- Geometric issues at crossing
- Railroad tracks divide the community and present not only a safety issue but from a pedestrian perspective hinder access to local entities such as parks, schools, the library and senior home.



- Concern about the character of the community and the connectivity issues that the grade separation roadways would cause as a result.
- Need for access to the frontage road near Thatcher Avenue for Metra and CP to be maintained.

Group 2:

Clay Shipley, Knight; Joe Chiczewski, ESI; Tammy Wierciak, Metro Strategies; Andy Hock, Elmwood Park Police Department; Marjorie Manchen, Village of River Grove; David Kralik, Metra; Leonard Cannata, North Central Council of Mayors, Kate Sullivan, Metra

- Concerns regarding the dangers the crossing poses for vehicles and pedestrians
- Concerns regarding the pedestrian crossing located just north of 77th Street
- Vehicle access issues and drivers not knowing where to stop in relation to the railroad crossing
- Access issues for emergency first responders and the fire department
- Concerns about noise in relation to future project construction
- The opportunity to work with PACE regarding coordination of access to bus stops
- Concerns regarding air quality

Group 3:

Scott Bechja, Knight; Chris Leow, ESI; Kristin Robinson, Metro Strategies; Sam Wright, CCDOTH; Nate Morris, Metra; Kevin Flaherty, Elmwood Park Fire Prevention; Barrett Pedersen, Village of Franklin Park; Anna Kutryn, Illinois Department of Transportation; Tom Robbins, Pace; Lynn Dion, Metra (Right-of-Way)

- Access issues for emergency first responders and the fire department due to limited resources and unavoidable delay in response times which forces them to rely on neighboring communities for assistance during emergencies
- Need to improve pedestrian access along the railroad crossing and crossing at Grand Avenue on either side in conjunction with this improvement
- Property access issues with proposed alternatives – alternative access would need to be redefined
- Possible need to relocate some PACE bus stops or remove all together
- Accessibility issues for ADA and seniors and the needs to extend crossing times to accommodate those groups
- Noise concerns are popular among property owners
- Potential for flooding issues with an underpass as the preferred alternative and would require a pump station

After the workshop, CAG members were brought back from break out groups to conclude the meeting as one large group. A member from each group provided a brief summary of their group's discussion and shared ideas among group participants. Ms. Jennings informed CAG members of the next step in the outreach plan to engage the general public through a public information meeting. Ms. Jennings provided a tentative timeline for the meeting which is scheduled for Spring 2021 and ensured all attendees will be notified once the date is finalized. She highlighted the topics that will be addressed at the public information meeting which include safety issues, needed improvements, existing conditions, problem statement and purpose and need. She briefly reviewed the phase one timeline, noting that the CAG is planning to reconvene after the spring public meeting to review feedback gathered from the public meeting.



Closing out the presentation, Ms. Jennings opened the meeting for discussion with the project team and village members standing by to address comments. Mr. Volpe thanked all attendees for their participation, reiterated the importance of the project and expressed his appreciation for the support received thus far in the project.

Andrew Hock with the Village of Elmwood Park police department added that anything that can be done to eliminate the crashes between trains and pedestrians is vital as past collisions resulted in the loss of three Elmwood Park residents. There were no further comments from CAG members.

Ms. Jennings then thanked everyone for their participation, reminded CAG members to check the project website for updates, provided the project email address to direct questions or comments to and concluded the meeting.