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Transportation Advice Sought by Several Agencies

By Clint Confehr

COLUMBIA, TN — Nashville-based transportation agencies are studying corridors in and out of the capitol city a year after Metro voters rejected a mass transit referendum.

In late April and early May, those agencies obtained suggestions from residents on what to do along the Interstate 65 corridor between Nashville and Columbia. The latest session was Monday in the Adventure Science Center.

Based on a similar study completed nearly 18 months ago, commuter rail to and from Clarksville is recommended for that Interstate 24 corridor. Abandoned rights of way between Ashland City and Clarksville must be reacquired for new tracks.

“But up to Ashland City, there’s an existing rail line,” says Felix Castrodad, director of Planning and Grants at the Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority.

Castrodad and consultant Doug Delaney, senior supervising planner at WSP USA, helped residents document suggestions on what’s needed to improve transportation in and around Metro.

“We can’t get federal [construction] funding unless we do this study,” says Rochelle Carpenter of the Greater Nashville Regional Council (GNRC), an association of local governments in 13 Middle Tennessee counties. GNRC helps develop plans and programs for regional prosperity. This study and planning process cost about \$1 million.

More highway travel lanes and exit ramps, and better bus service may be anticipated sooner than passenger rail, as improvements to existing services are described as shovel-ready and awaiting funds.

Nevertheless, Delaney notes several

train stops in the North Nashville area are recommended by a completed study for commuters “closer to downtown” late in the next decade, assuming concepts become reality that soon That’s probably because Nashville-Western tracks to Ashland City are not heavily used compared to CSX tracks in the South Corridor Study area.

Freight trains serving the GM plant in the South Corridor and freight service to Nissan’s plant along the corridor between Nashville and Murfreesboro present scheduling problems for passenger trains on those tracks.

Nashville Star commuter train ridership between Nashville and Lebanon continues to grow, Castrodad said.

Recommendations are still being accepted at the Nashville Chamber of Commerce (615) 743-3000, Williamson Inc. (615) 771-1912, Maury Alliance (931) 388-2155, and the Spring Hill Chamber of Commerce (931) 486-0625. Operators can direct callers to those offices where study materials are available so residents’ recommendations may be filed in-person.

“Our schedule is to come back to the public in the June-July timeframe with some initial recommendations ... from the input and analysis that we’ve done,” Delaney said.

A second round of public meetings is anticipated in that June-July timeframe, southcorridor.org states.

“By the September-October timeframe we will have our final recommendations” to be delivered by Dec. 31, Delaney said.

Agencies cooperating for the study include the Nashville area Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Tennessee Department of Transportation, GNRC and WeGo, the new name for the area’s bus/transit system.



From left, Columbia Vice Mayor Christa Martin, transportation consultant Doug Delaney and Columbia Mayor Chaz Molder discuss what might improve transit in the I-65 corridor.
Photo by Clint Confehr