

**NEPA SCOPING MEETINGS
JULY 12, 13 AND 14, 2004
STEERING COMMITTEE HAND-OUT

SOUTHEAST CORRIDOR
HIGH PERFORMANCE TRANSIT
ALTERNATIVES STUDY**



Nashville Area MPO

AND

FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION

July 2004

**SOUTHEAST CORRIDOR HIGH CAPACITY TRANSIT ALTERNATIVES STUDY
NASHVILLE TO MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE
SCOPING MEETING SUMMARY
JULY 12, 13, 14, 2004**

I. PURPOSE OF REPORT

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), a series of scoping meetings were held in July 2004. The series included three public meetings, held on July 12, 13 and 14th, and one agency scoping meeting, which was held in Nashville on July 14, 2004. The materials in this report document the outreach conducted prior to the meetings and the four meetings.

II. PRE-MEETING ACTIVITIES

Regarding the three public meetings, the public outreach, communications and attendance generation activities prior to the scoping meetings were numerous and comprehensive. The specific activities included:

- Development and production of all background and meeting support materials.
- Placement of required newspaper notification classified ads as well as special display ads in major newspapers and Minority and Spanish-language newspapers in the study corridor.
- Coordination and briefing of communications specialists for each city and county in the study corridor.
- Distribution of meeting announcement flyers in high traffic locations throughout the study corridor.
- Outreach and communications regarding the scoping meetings with Disabled, African-American and Hispanic organizations.
- Briefing meetings with key media to provide background and answer questions.
- Distribution of press releases, media alerts and direct contact with key media to generate additional coverage.

On June 23, 2004, the Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) mailed an agency scoping meeting invitation and scoping information package to 112 local, state and federal governmental offices, and elected officials. The package contained the invitation, project summary and project area map. The invitation explained that if invitees were unable to attend the July 14 meeting held at 1:30 at the Nashville Downtown Library, they could attend any of three other scheduled public meetings. The sign-in sheets of the meetings in Smyrna (July 12) and Murfreesboro (July 13) indicate that some of the invitees chose to attend the public meetings.

III. MEETING HAND-OUTS

Handouts at the meetings included the following:

1. Project Summary that included a project study area map.
2. Comment Form.

IV. SCOPING MEETING FORMAT

The meetings were “open-house” style, which made it easy for citizens or agency representatives to come and go at any time during the session. Large printed boards illustrating the draft goals and objectives, different types of transit technologies and the study area map were placed throughout the meeting locations. Visitors could view the boards between presentations and have one-on-one discussions with MPO and Consultant staff. A PowerPoint presentation, given by MPO and Consultant staff, was repeated at regular intervals and attendees were invited to ask questions during the presentations. An open question-and-answer (Q&A) session followed each presentation.

V. AGENCY SCOPING MEETING

Nineteen people attended the agency scoping meeting and represented local governments within and outside the study area, elected officials (Senator Harper’s and Congressman Cooper’s offices), state government (TDEC and TDOT) and two federal agencies were represented (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service [USFWS] and National Park Service-Stone’s River National Battlefield [NPS]).

The program consisted of a PowerPoint presentation given by MPO and Consultant staff and an open Q&A session. The following issues/questions were posed by attendees (answers are in italics).

- Has the MPO had contact yet with CSX? (Jacksonville CSX is the likely point of contact)
Yes, the MPO is initiating contact with CSX.
- Relax and Ride: The trip takes 90 minutes end to end – regardless of whether I-24 or Murfreesboro Road is traveled. 125 people per day ride Relax and Ride. It is important to get input on the transportation/transit needs of the riders.
- CSX goes through Stones River National Battlefield
Very good to know this. This will be considered in the environmental screening and alternatives development.
- East corridor – rail ownership?
TDOT funded, agreement with rail owner/Regional Transportation Authority (RTA)
- Concern with rail going forward in other corridors
Rail was selected for the east corridor, between Nashville and Lebanon. It is unknown if rail will be the technology chosen for the other four “spokes.” This Fall, the MPO anticipates that a study of the transportation options for the northeast corridor will begin.
- Need to look at on a regional perspective.
The regional perspective will be considered in development of the alternatives.
- What will happen in CBD – local bus service connections?
It is acknowledged that riders will need transportation from the terminus of the transit system in downtown Nashville to their places of employment or other destinations. This will be considered in the transit alternatives study.
- Consider reverse commute.
Yes, reverse commute is an important market and will be considered in alternatives development. Reverse commute markets include the commute from Nashville to Murfreesboro for MTSU students, or from Nashville to corridor employment locations outside Davidson County.

- Coordinate with other high speed rail efforts North and South of the study corridor, such as Chattanooga to Atlanta.
This is generally outside the scope of this study, however, the study will likely identify such plans and include coordination with them as part of study recommendations.
- TDOT – need to look at planned Harding Place Airport connector, which TDOT has planned
The Team will examine such plans in the development and analysis of alternatives.
- Connection from East and Southeast spokes to Airport difficult – which is more feasible?
The answer to that question at this point of the study is unknown. The East Corridor was a separate study and we will need to determine how and whether this point was addressed in that study. Whether and how the southeast corridor transit can connect to the airport will be addressed in this transit alternatives study.
- Will the study look at just commuter service?
No, other transportation needs such as transportation to sports events, medical centers, shopping, and other travel purposes will also be considered.
- Interchange City – employees schedules need to be looked at
The study team received comments at the public meeting regarding the possible need for transit to serve Interchange City. We will examine this in the transit alternatives study.
- MTSU – need frequency to serve students, faculty and staff mid-day, evenings and at peak travel times
This comment is acknowledged and will be addressed in the transit alternatives study.
- Contact Murfreesboro Housing Authority
We will contact the housing authority as part of our stakeholder involvement process.
- When will Team coordinate with NPS?
We will contact NPS during the alternatives analysis phase during environmental screening and will include the NPS in the database for future meeting notices.
- USFWS – Threatened and Endangered Species (T&E) – 3-4 T&E plants along rail line.
Comment noted. We will coordinate with USFWS during environmental screening to determine the location of these species.

One comment form was received. The comment came from Stuart Johnson of Stone's River National Battlefield. He stated that he supports transit if it can give visitors easy access to the battlefield. The railroad goes through the Battlefield and he is concerned about potential adverse impacts.

VI PUBLIC SCOPING MEETINGS

The public scoping meetings and attendees who chose to sign-in are as follows:

July 12, 4:00 – 7:00 p.m.	Smyrna City Centre	34 attendees (includes 5 staff)
July 13, 4:00 – 7:00 p.m.	Rutherford County Courthouse	32 attendees (includes 7 staff)
July 14, 11:00 – 1:00 p.m.	Nashville Downtown Library	22 attendees (includes 4 staff)

A summary of each meeting is below, followed by a summary of comments and questions of the attendees.

Smyrna, July 12, 2004

Among the 34 meeting attendees were representatives of the town of Smyrna (including Mayor Spivey), State Representative John Hood, and representatives from State Senator Larry Trail's office and US Congressman Bart Gordon's office. Reporters from the *Tennessean*, the *Daily News Journal*, and *WTVF TV* were also present. The presentation and Q&A session were repeated three times. Attendees had the following comments/questions:

- Consider toll road.
- Consider improving entrances/exits on I-24.
- Traffic – out of control! More roads not needed. Improve in existing I-24 Right-of-Way. Build Park-and-Ride – cities/counties responsibility.
- Against sharing track with freight trains.
- Does not want to ride bus.
- What does “combination” of transit modes mean?
- Reliable – FAST – Routine (frequency) – High Priorities.
- Lack Right-of-way in town for transit system.
- Location of stations important – (at end points, too!).
- Need airport area stops.
- How to measure approval/select alternative?
- Who operates systems in other cities?
- Connection to Lebanon System?
- Downtown stop – should be in CBD/Riverfront Park?
- Transportation to sports events—consider transit.
- Coordination with RTA? TDOT?
- Have discussions been held with CSX? CSX – what do they think about “us” using their rail line?
- Construction sequencing? All at once or phased?
- Does CSX actually own Right-of-Way?
- Consider looking at Gateway project in Murfreesboro. The development has mixed-use, compact development—similar to transit oriented development.
- Safety – which mode is most safe?
- Funding – how is it split?
- Will this be in TDOT's 25-year plan?
- Frequency important! Schedule—needs to accommodate work schedules.
- Consider Urban Growth Plan/boundaries.
- Commuter rail – will we look at other cities that use CSX lines?
- Need local bus service in Smyrna, LaVergne, Murfreesboro, Rutherford County.
- RTA Relax and Ride – not enough trips; not early/late enough, no service for early/late transfers.
- Need improvements now.
- Airport – Downtown connection needed (for visitors/employees).
- East corridor—will it have connections to the airport?

Murfreesboro, July 13, 2004

Among the 32 meeting attendees were representatives of Rutherford County (including County Mayor Allen), a representative from the City (Traffic Director Dana Richardson), State Representatives Kent Coleman and Larry Trail and John Hood, and a representative from Middle Tennessee State University. Reporters from the *Daily News Journal* and WKRN TV were also present. The presentation and Q&A session were given twice. Attendees had the following comments/questions:

- Consider extension to Tullahoma (42 miles) – commute to Nashville.
- Local bus service in Murfreesboro – impact on assumptions for this project?
- Nashville Downtown – consider how to access area destinations (children’s theatre, etc.) once transit terminates in Nashville.
- Nashville Airport – should be part of study – mistake not to access by shuttle, etc.
- MTSU bus system – should connect to rapid transit system.
- Electrified Trolley – environmentally cleaner mode is preferred.
- Rutherford County part of early environmental alternatives compact, consider this in NEPA EIS.
- Travel time is critical for system to be viable and to compete with auto use.
- Are transit systems self-sufficient?
- What are alignment alternatives other than CSX rail line?
- Cost estimates/comparisons for various modes: BRT, Commuter Rail, etc.
- Attractive service – must be clean and safe.
- How is decision made re: locally preferred alternative (LPA)?
- What is projected traffic growth on I-24 and other roads? How does this impact transit travel time?
- Sitting in gridlock is the better alternative to taking a bus.
- How are systems funded?
- Downtown Nashville – attractions (stadiums) would draw people onto transit system.
- Commuter trains – best alternative. – cost of transit fare less than gas – more efficient – high capacity (rail cars) – travel time faster on rail.
- Look at Gateway Development for transit friendliness– mixed use project in Murfreesboro.
- BRT – What is the travel time and speed?
- How can communities change their development patterns around rail/BRT stations?
- Have a downtown Nashville terminal near Titans stadium – buses/shuttles provide access to downtown locations.
- Bike-friendly systems are important.
- Safe and secure system is important.
- Travel transit time must be competitive to auto.
- Access to destinations at end points is critical.
- Ramp metering – bus (BRT) priority access.
- What does ridership need to be to justify BRT/other alternatives (e.g. cost-benefit ratio)?
- Projections show that TDOT can’t build enough lanes to reduce congestion.
- MTSU – students come from Nashville – create congestion and parking problems, reverse commute for these students.
- What are the costs of technology alternatives – capital and operating?

- Service periods of commuter train systems – other than peak hours?
- Give examples of cost effective LRT and commuter rail systems
- How will system be funded?
- Discuss road funding vs. transit funding; federal, state and local funding levels.
- What are local funding options for transit?
- Are roads subsidized?
- What types of improvements are required on the CSX rail corridor to make compatible with commuter rail?
- Does high capacity transit reduce congestion? Benefits of high capacity transit?
- Can transit technologies grow with population and density growth?
- Can HOV lanes be replaced by rail options?

Nashville, July 14, 2004

Among the 22 meeting attendees were representatives of the Regional Transportation Authority, the Nashville Area MPO, the Greater Nashville Regional Council and the Board of the Metropolitan Transit Authority. The presentation and Q&A session were given twice. Attendees had the following comments/questions:

- Do not widen highway.
- Special lanes on highway for transit would be acceptable.
- Supports mass transit.
- What will a trip look like? (Murfreesboro to Green Hills)
- Studies show people don't like to use multiple forms of transit
- How to change people's minds – cars to transit.
- Nashville far behind other areas in transit.
- Street layout produces chaos for transit.
- Five spokes too ambitious (due to population density)?
- Consider transit service to sports and other downtown special events.
- Why commuter – why not improve intercity transit?
- Who is coordinating system planning?
- Choose mode separate from congested roads.
- System needed for disabled.
- What are the incentives to use transit besides time savings?
- East spoke – how far along is it?
- Will CSX be a serious obstacle?
- How are stakeholders being involved?
- Need East-West service at Interchange City.
- Operating schedules need to consider workers' schedules – Need earlier/later options – more frequent.
- Fast rail or express bus preferred.
- Concern with having connections from high-capacity transit to places of work.
- Need input from stakeholders, e.g. MTSU, large employers.

Meeting summaries prepared for the MPO by Margaret Slater, AICP, Parsons Brinckerhoff, with input from Ackermann Public Relations, July 2004

Summary of Comment Sheets

The following is a summary of the input from scoping meeting participants that was received through the comment sheets distributed to each meeting attendee.

1. Would you like to receive additional information and/or meeting announcements about this study?

All of the commenters requested to receive additional information and/or subsequent meeting announcements.

2. What types of transit service should be investigated for this corridor?

- Improvements to local bus service
- Commuter rail service
- Bus Rapid Transit Service
- Express or commuter bus service
- Light rail transit service
- Other types of transit service

Most of the participants provided more than one answer. Of the responses received, the interest was evenly dispersed between rail and bus services. Specific responses included:

<u>Transportation Alternative</u>	<u>Respondents Favor Investigating Mode</u>
Local Bus Service	44%
Commuter Rail Service	70%
Bus Rapid Transit Service	52%
Express or Commuter Bus Service	38%
Light Rail Transit Service	58%
Other Types of Transit Service	---

3. What concerns do you have about putting new transit service in this corridor?

- Noise
- Air pollution
- Should have connections from main route
- Cost to taxpayers
- Accessibility is important
- Must be user friendly
- Convenient parking at stations is important
- Will the public use it?
- Put transit on both I-24 and US-41
- Getting close to destinations is important
- Service should be quick, clean and frequent
- No adequate marketing
- No real community commitment
- Must run on time
- Must be accessible to disabled
- It will never be built
- Should be bike friendly
- Frequency of service important

4. Other comments or ideas about the transit study? (verbatim comment):

- "Charge people to ride the rail, contract with a private company to run the rail."

- “Long range planning like this is a must, education and ease of use is vital.”
- “I personally prefer light rail or buses with dedicated lanes for buses. Express buses can’t be express when they are stuck in traffic, which is what happens now.”
- “My concerns are environmental and personal. The transit options should reduce emissions and pollution significantly. The system should be comfortable enough to accommodate business travelers.”
- “Murfreesboro needs local bus service with a modern (not trashy) terminal to help feed the system.”
- “I think it would be most advantageous to have the Nashville Airport as a station, a big mistake to not have it.”
- “I believe commuter trains are the best all around alternative because of their lower overall startup cost and greater speed.”
- “We need many region-wide, extensive seminars/meetings about this that involves multiple constituencies. I worry that the hard issues are not being discussed sufficiently.”
- “Please include a plan to gain serious support from our congressional delegation (House & Senate) for earmarking federal funds.”

Comments summarized for the MPO by Ackermann Public Relations