

Meeting Notes

Meeting Date: July 8, 2009

Subject: MAG Commuter Rail Stakeholder Meeting

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Welcome/General Overview from Kevin Wallace, MAG

Kevin Wallace provided an introduction and general overview, highlighting the commuter rail planning work currently under way. These include a System Study, evaluating commuter rail options for the MAG region, as well as the Grand Avenue and Yuma West corridor development plans, providing a more detailed feasibility review of the implementation of the technology.

MAG Commuter Rail Planning Update Presentation, Rick Pilgrim, MAG Study Team

Rick Pilgrim, MAG Study Team, provided a brief introduction of the members of the study team and outlined the meeting's agenda as follows:

Background and Context of Commuter Rail Regional Planning

MAG Commuter Rail Project Updates:

System Study

- Overview
- Presentation of Evaluation Criteria
- Timeline of System Study and How Corridor Development Plans are Integrated

Grand Avenue Corridor Development Plan

- Existing and Future Conditions

Yuma West Corridor Development Plan

Next Steps/What to Expect at Next Meeting

Q & A

Background and Context of Commuter Rail Regional Planning

Rick Pilgrim provided an overview of the growth patterns experienced within the MAG region. He outlined the expected population growth within and around the MAG region, including the Hassayampa Valley, Hidden Valley, and Northern Pinal County. Potential

commuter rail corridors, rail extensions, future LRT routes, future & potential freeway network alignments, and existing freeway networks were outlined.

Rick indicated that previous transit studies showed the potential for commuter rail transit and its potential use of existing freight rail corridors. Prop 400 was approved by voters in 2004, which provided funding specifically for the purpose of evaluating commuter rail transit for the MAG region.

Rick Pilgrim explained that the MAG Commuter Rail Strategic Plan (2008) was initiated to determine the steps needed to implement commuter rail in Maricopa and northern Pinal counties. The Strategic Plan evaluated the region in five separate sub-regions. The Strategic Plan identified five primary rail corridors, with several potential extensions.

The five primary corridors included BNSF/Grand Avenue, Union Pacific (UP) Mainline/Southeast, UP Mainline/Chandler, UP Mainline/Tempe, and UP Mainline/Yuma West.

Rick summarized a 'get started' approach identified within the Strategic Plan. It includes:

- Five trains per peak period, in peak direction
- One reverse commute trip in peak period
- One mid-day trip
- One evening trip
- Four car trains
- ~10,000 riders/day
- \$50 – 400M capital cost

Rick summarized the MAG Regional Transit Framework Study. The Study is part of the statewide transportation planning framework, a multimodal strategy, and long range in nature (2030 and 2050).

Rick then summarized commuter rail as larger, heavier, and roomier than light rail transit. Rick added that commuter rail operates at higher speeds, uses cleaner fuel technology, and typically longer station spacing, e.g. 3 – 5 miles or more on average. Commuter rail technology can share right of way track with freight rail, and has a typical lower cost per mile than light rail.

Rick Pilgrim indicated the implementation of commuter rail in other areas provides an outline of potential issues and lessons learned:

Issue: Railroad Coordination

- Keep railroads informed and involved
- Collect as much data as possible
- Be realistic in developing operating agreements and scenarios, while understanding the railroads' perspective

Issue: Cost Estimating

- Update cost estimates at least on an annual basis
- Be conservative, while using industry standards
- Fully explain the baseline cost estimate to stakeholders

Issue: Rail Vehicles

- Unpredictable cost estimate, long lead time
- Explore options early
- Educate stakeholders
- Seek partnering opportunities, e.g. 'piggy backing' a contract

Issue: Existing and Future Land Use Plans

- Consider necessary land use changes and timing
- Realize jurisdictional needs and be realistic
- Identify other work and station nodes

Issue: Community Issues

- Prepare for opposition
- Address questions
- Educate public
- Be realistic as what impacts may occur
- Address typical issues, e.g. park and rides, safety, etc.

Issue: Funding

- Federal funding may not always be available
- Local funding advantages
- Right mix: public, agency, and legislative support
- Address both capital and operating

Commuter Rail Corridor Development Plan Purpose and Key Elements

Rick Pilgrim explained that the purpose of the corridor development planning process (Grand Avenue and Yuma West) is to determine the feasibility of implementing commuter rail service. The corridor development plan is required to move forward with implementation of service.

Rick Pilgrim indicated there are several key elements within the formation of the corridor development plan:

- Stakeholder outreach
- Railroad coordination
- Purpose and need technical assessment
- Existing and future conditions (land uses, socio-econ.)
- Railroad operational assessment
- Rail service operating and capital requirements

Grand Avenue Corridor Development Plan ***Existing and Future Conditions***

Rick indicated that the project corridor is expected to grow in population more than 41% between 2007 and 2030. The total corridor employment is expected to grow 52% between 2007 and 2030. Rick indicated this is not unlike population and employment growth patterns expected in the MAG region overall, with a 56% and 74% increase, respectively.

Rick shared that the most prevalent existing land use in the corridor is vacant land at 51%. Rick added that the most prevalent future land use is residential at 70%.

Rick mentioned that several Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway facilities lie within the corridor, including the Phoenix Yard, Mobest Yard, Desert Lift Intermodal Facility, and several others. Each facility is designed to interface with freight rail activity (loading, distribution, switching, etc.) within the corridor.

Rick explained the future plans associated opportunities related to the corridor, including relocation of Mobest Yard activities to the northwest portion of the corridor. However, Rick emphasized there may be potential plans by BNSF to increase activity in Phoenix, resulting in 41,000 carloads a year, resulting in 10 trains per day.

Rick shared that the current Regional Transportation Plan identifies several roadway improvements for the Grand Avenue corridor. These include additional general purpose lanes, grade separations, right turn lanes, sidewalks, and landscaping.

With respect to existing transit services, Rick mentioned there are over a dozen local and regional routes, one regional connector, and two express bus services. The Regional Transportation Plan identifies 12 supergrid regional bus services, and one express bus route.

Rick Pilgrim explained that over 172,000 home based work trips originate within the corridor.

System Study ***Overview***

Rick Pilgrim indicated the currently underway System Study is charged to evaluate commuter rail options for the MAG region and the potentially connecting routes immediately adjacent to the region, e.g. northern Pinal County.

Rick added that the Study is to establish priorities for implementing commuter rail service through the evaluation of ridership forecasts, operating scenarios, and capital

and operating costs. Also considered are existing freight corridors and possible rail extensions.

Rick mentioned the Study has several key elements:

- Analysis of regional ridership potential
- Operating strategies and transit connectivity
- Railroad coordination
- Collaboration with statewide and inter-regional planning processes

Rick mentioned the System Study does include a conceptual level financial analysis for service implementation and potentially FTA New Starts funding.

Rick mentioned study factors include an analysis of operations, stations, and ridership – each providing assumptions and forecast results in the analysis of commuter rail service. Rick added that the first step is to develop initial operating concepts. Then refine initial assumptions based on the High Capacity Transit Study, Commuter Rail Strategic Plan, and the Regional Transit Framework Study.

Rick explained the next step is to refine the operating plan(s), taking into consideration station spacing, run times, and fleet size assumptions.

Rick indicated all of these assumptions and modifications provide input into the travel demand model (MAG model). Ridership forecasts are then developed from the model. Model runs include stand alone corridors, as well as interline or network scenarios. These scenario runs would begin in July, 2009.

With respect to cost estimation (capital, operating and maintenance), Rick explained the following assumptions:

Capital costs:

1. Grand/Yuma Corridors: based on individual infrastructure components
2. System Study Corridors: unit per-mile costs based on current industry costs, engineering, constructability issues, and identified railroad issues

Operating and maintenance costs:

1. All corridors: based on analysis of comparable systems

Rick explained the evaluation process related to commuter rail corridors. The criteria focus on primary mode choice, rider perception, system/policy compatibility, cost effectiveness, and implementation/constructability.

Rick walked through each of the corridor segment assumptions.

A minimum cost is associated with: initial service, one or more corridors, limited capital improvements, and peak period service focus.

Maximum service is associated with: a full corridor or system, peak period and all day service, and significant capital improvements.

Timeline of System Study and How Corridor Development Plans are Integrated

Rick Pilgrim explained the relationship between the three studies using the Gantt chart for the purposes of illustration within the PowerPoint presentation. Rick mentioned that the System Study's implementation plan will be complete by the end of the calendar year.

Next Steps/What to Expect at Next Meeting

Rick Pilgrim indicated the next steps related to the System include a detailed system evaluation, including a system-wide ridership forecast, operations plan by corridor, and a defined implementation plan for the region.

Rick added that the corridor development planning process would include a detailed evaluation of each corridor, completed existing and future condition analysis for Yuma West corridor, and a draft corridor development plan for the Grand Avenue corridor (with the Yuma West plan to follow in early 2010).

Q & A

Q: Now that light rail is planning on a route in the I-10 median, how do you expect to compliment commuter service so near?

Gene Holmerud, Coalition of AZ Bicyclists

A: There is potential of connectivity between commuter rail transit and light rail transit by way of bus transit service provision. It undetermined whether light rail transit will serve the I-10 corridor at this time as bus rapid transit is also under consideration.

Q: Would P³ legislation be needed or helpful when making agreements with railroads?

Gabriel Rushing, Phoenix Chamber of Commerce

A: The industry has not really seen public-private partnerships with railroads; generally P³'s are used when there is a financial tradeoff. However, we will take a look at this.

Q: What is the cost difference between "greenest" locomotives (air pollution) and least cost locomotives?

Diane Arnst, ADEQ

A: We will have information on this at the next Stakeholder meeting. An entry level service can probably benefit by using used equipment, similar to Salt Lake City. Most equipment falls within a tier 3 emissions profile.

Q: Does your System Plan contemplate the location(s) of maintenance and layover facilities?

Chris Barber, Kimley-Horne & Associates

A: Yes. A satellite maintenance facility would be likely; however there probably will not be a need for a heavy maintenance facility but potentially outside the Phoenix region, even perhaps the state.

Q: Have you done any cost analysis on the impact of doing something similar to what New Mexico did when it purchased the line outright from BNSF and granted track rights to BNSF?

George Jones, Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen

A: There are two approaches: one is to buy the track and lease it back to the railroads; the other is to use the track under agreement with the railroads. There have been very limited discussions with Union Pacific on this issue.

Q: How will the process for determining station location take place?

Ruth Clark, City of Avondale

A: The Study Team is reviewing the 2003 MAG High-Capacity Transit Study (HCT) station recommendations and considering additional station areas for analysis within the travel demand model. Additionally, a review of ridership forecasts by catchment area is being reviewed by corridor. Specific station locations will not be recommended as part of these study processes.

Q: Will MAG or any other organization promote legislation to provide funding for transit (bus/rail) only that would come from these studies?

Pat Dennis, City of El Mirage

A: The Maricopa Association of Governments must address this question specifically. A regional process will likely be entailed to support further transit funding commitment in the MAG region.

Q: What is the current position of the BNSF Railway and Union Pacific Railroad? Are they indicating a willingness to cooperate/participate with this plan?

Monica Hernandez, HDR, Inc.

A: MAG has met with BNSF Railway a few times during the study process and they've been nothing but supportive, including participation in a rail tour to review track conditions, opportunities and constraints this year. MAG is anticipating a meeting with Union Pacific Railroad later this year. To date, both rail lines have been supportive of these planning processes.

Q: For existing railways, how extensive are the track modifications to accommodate commuter rail?

Daniel Elias, DSWA

A: Improvements would be required to primarily provide safety for passenger service, but in most cases improvements are needed mostly for speed to handle commuter service. Based on rail assessment thus far, the Yuma West track seems to be in worse shape, while the downtown to Queen Creek track is in best shape.

Q: What would the comparable price be if we created (started from scratch) versus paying BNSF/UPRR for their track and upgrading them?

Pat Dennis, City of El Mirage (?)

A: The key to this issue is available right-of-way. There isn't enough existing ROW to build separate tracks.

Q: Have you considered electric lines?

Angela Cotera, Avondale Commissioner

A: Commuter rail trains don't typically operate under wires. Freight traffic needs to have at least a 23-foot clearance therefore electric power in the study corridors is not feasible.

Q: Do the forecasting models account for the effect of building the trains, e.g., what factors do you use to account for consumer attraction to areas with station/line connections?

Pete Carlone, Avondale Neighborhood and Family Services Commission

A: Forecasting models for light rail look at this issue more so than commuter rail.

Q: Once the final report is done, what is the next step?

Laura Turiano, David Evans and Associates

A: This will be key. The next steps will begin with the MAG committee process.

Q: How successful is commuter rail at alleviating traffic congestion in other cities?

Laura Turiano, David Evans and Associates

A: Commuter rail is a tool, like a driver in a whole bag of golf clubs. Commuter rail cannot likely reduce peak congestion. It can provide increased safety and another mode choice for the commuter.

Q: Would there be cost savings in sharing/enlarging the light rail facility or would that be considered?

Bob Jenson, Coalition of AZ Bicyclists

A: This is not likely to be an option. The light rail maintenance facility does not have the space, and there would be issues in connecting the trains to the facility.

Q: Will you model a no build for the 801?

Rogene Hill, City of Avondale

A: The models generally are working under what is in the Regional Transportation Plan. However, "what ifs" are being considered, including if the 801 is not built, or if the South Mountain freeway is not built.