

Meeting Notes

Meeting Date: November 17, 2009
Subject: Commuter Rail Grand Ave Corridor – PRT Meeting
In Attendance:

Marc Pearsall, MAG
Rick Pilgrim, URS
Matt Carpenter, URS
David Schwartz, Goodman Schwartz
Megan Casey, Goodman Schwartz

Bob Maki, City of Surprise
Denise Lacey, MCDOT
Jim Mathien, METRO
Randy Overmyer, City of Surprise
David Moody, City of Peoria

Introduction

Marc Pearsall, MAG, initiated the meeting by introducing the presentation, which followed the agenda as outlined:

- Overall Project Progress
- Ridership Forecasting
- Capital and Operating Cost Estimates
- Other Issues and Next Steps

Overall Project Progress

Rick Pilgrim reviewed the timeline and project progress since the September PRT Meeting. The Corridor Development Plan draft is underway, and the Study Team is working to summarize costs and conduct a comparative evaluation of the feasibility of commuter rail along Grand Ave compared with other regions. David Moody, City of Peoria, suggested including a section in the final report on implementation issues and governance. Rick said there would also be sections on funding and railroad coordination, among others. Marc Pearsall added that the PRT members will have the opportunity to review the final report as it is completed and submit comments before the report is submitted to the MAG Committees in February or March. Drafts should be sent out by mid-January to the PRT members for their review prior to the January 27 PRT Meeting.

David Schwartz gave a brief update on stakeholder involvement. The last stakeholder meeting took place on November 12 and had a good turnout. Marc Pearsall commented that he spoke to Gary Edwards, Town Manager of Wickenburg, at the meeting, and Gary said that Wickenburg is disappointed to not be included in the 2030 model runs, but is understanding of the need to gradually establish services.

Ridership Forecasting

Rick Pilgrim presented a ridership forecasting update, including interlining results with the Chandler corridor in place of the Southeast corridor and updated approach for sensitivity tests and extension ridership forecasting. The Grand Ave Corridor has the second-highest ridership of the five corridors in the System Study and boardings per mile exceeds the national average.

Matt Carpenter, MAG Study Team, presented the results of the interlined model runs.

1-Corridor Alternatives

The first alternative interlines the Grand Ave and Southeast Corridors from Wittmann to Downtown Queen Creek with 30/60 headways (on peak/off peak). Total 2030 daily boardings of 9,980 indicate this is a strong pairing. The individual station boardings also show considerable mid-corridor ridership.

The Yuma West and Southeast Corridors were also interlined from Buckeye to Downtown Queen Creek with 30/60 headways. Total daily boardings are estimated at 8,530. This pairing ties the strongest individual corridor with the weakest.

Multi-Corridor Alternatives

Several multi-corridor alternatives were also included in the model run. The first multi-corridor alternative consists of Grand Ave interlined with Southeast on 30/60 headways and Yuma West interlined with Southeast on 60/60 headways. This is an extremely strong combination with 11,290 daily boardings. Downtown Tempe is a strong destination.

The next alternative replaces Southeast with Chandler, consisting of Grand Ave interlined with Chandler at 30/60 headways and Yuma West interlined with Chandler at 60/60 headways and resulting daily boardings of 7,030. Downtown Tempe is again a strong destination. Rick Pilgrim added that the numbers for these first two multi-corridor alternatives show that Grand Ave ridership is fairly consistent in most scenarios, with not much interest for riders going past downtown Phoenix. This indicates that there may not be a need for commuter rail service between downtown Phoenix and downtown Tempe and that light rail could be used for this purpose. This scenario has not yet been modeled. Bob Maki, City of Surprise, commented that commuter rail needs to connect to SkyTrain or it won't be effective. Jim Mathien, METRO, commented that there is a need for an inter-modal hub for access to the airport with commuter rail, light rail, bus and SkyTrain, which also presents an opportunity for significant reinvestment in the Washington Corridor.

Matt Carpenter presented the next multi-corridor alternative of Grand Ave interlined with Southeast on 30/60 headways and Yuma West interlined with Tempe on 40/60 headways. This results in nearly doubled daily ridership of 15,100. The model used

does assume improvements on the I-10 at the Broadway curve and the completed South Mountain Freeway.

The fourth multi-corridor alternative is Grand Ave interlined with Chandler on 20/60 headways and Yuma West interlined with Tempe on 40/60 headways. This shows total daily boardings of 10,580.

Next is Yuma West interlined with Southeast and Grand Ave interlined with Tempe, both on 20/60 headways. This is one of the strongest combinations with total daily boardings of 17,960. This combination also increases boardings along the Grand Ave corridor.

The last alternative is Yuma West interlined with Chandler and Grand Ave interlined with Tempe, both on 20/60 headways. This shows more moderate daily boardings of 13,230. Downtown Tempe ridership is not as strong as when Southeast is incorporated.

Matt presented a comparison of all eight interlined scenarios (both single and multiple corridor alternatives). In some cases the Chandler corridor reduces ridership. Most corridors exceed the national average for boardings per revenue mile. The model run observations are:

- Interlining improves ridership and boardings per revenue mile over the individual corridors.
 - When Grand Ave or Yuma West are interlined with Southeast, ridership increase is under 10%
 - Boardings per revenue mil are improved the most on Yuma corridor when interlined with Southeast
- Of the multi-line corridors, the Yuma West-Southeast/Grand Ave-Tempe model run performed the best in terms of daily ridership (18,000) and boardings per revenue mile (2.6)
 - Performance is influenced by the 20/60 headway.
- As expected, Southeast interlined combinations perform better than Chandler interlined combinations.

Capital and Operating Costs Estimates

Rick Pilgrim presented cost estimating methodology, which represents a conservative approach:

- Includes both capital and annual operating and maintenance (O&M) costs
- Conceptual design level (1-2%)
- 2009 dollars
- Uses recent industry costs and costs from vendors where possible
- Structured to match Federal Transit Administration (FTA) format where possible
- Estimates contingencies

Rick also briefly addressed what the federal government looks at when determining funding. Efficiency is 20%, which is why the study looks at boardings per revenue mile. Ridership levels and travel time reduction is 20%, land use is 20%, economic development is 20% and overall mobility transportation improvement is the final 20%.

The Study Team is using a phased cost estimate approach for service along the Grand Ave Corridor. Phase A could begin by 2020 with service between Wittmann and Central Phoenix with 30-minute peak headways and one off-peak round trip. Phase B could begin between 2020-2030, also from Wittmann to Central Phoenix with 30-minute peak headways and three off-peak round trips. Phase C could begin between 2030-2040 with 60-minute peak headway service from Wickenburg to Wittman and 30-minute peak headway service from Wittman to Central Phoenix, with 60-minute off-peak headway along the entire corridor (Wickenburg to Central Phoenix).

Denise Lacey, ADOT, asked if a stop could be considered for Morristown to break up the ride to Wickenburg in Phase C service. Marc Pearsall said that a station could be added as a placeholder. Bob Maki commented that a station at Morristown would be consistent with the Surprise General Plan.

Rick Pilgrim commented that Phase A service is similar to other city startups. It would require double track in the downtown Phoenix area, which presents high capital costs. Marc Pearsall commented that Phase A service could be possible in 2020 if funding was directed within the next five years.

Detailed capital cost information will be presented at a future PRT meeting, with information on cost categories of: guideway and track (including structures), stations, support facilities (maintenance and layover), utilities, environmental mitigation (as a percentage of total cost), auto/pedestrian/bicycle facilities, systems (including Positive Train Control), right-of-way and property, vehicles and contingencies (including professional services for design and management).

Peer city comparisons were presented for capital cost per mile and annual operations and maintenance costs per rider. Rick noted that commuter rail is a premium service and the average farebox recovery rate is 40%.

Jim Mathien, METRO, commented that the use of 2009 dollars could be problematic because costs will undoubtedly increase.

Other Issues and Next Steps

Rick Pilgrim reviewed the next steps for the study. The Study Team is working to finalize costs and implementation requirements, including refinement of cost estimates and contingencies, finalizing cost estimates for other corridors for comparison purposes, and finalizing cost-effectiveness evaluations of the Grand Ave corridor and other corridors. The

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Corridor Development Plan will be finalized in November/December, and sent to the PRT members in early/mid January for review prior to the next meeting.

The next Grand Ave PRT Meeting is scheduled for January 27, 2010 at 9:00 am.