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NEWS Highlights City Edition

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Discuss Orange Line Extension

Residents Have Questions About Environment and Safety

By TASHA L. CLOPTON-STUBBS

The Chicago Transit Authority held a public scoping meeting on Monday to begin to assess environmental impact of a proposed extension of the Orange Line.

Held at Hancock High School, 4034 W. 56th St., the event began with a 45-minute meet-and-greet, during which time residents were provided with contact information for CTA officials and were able to leave comments.

Those who wished to voice their concerns during the meeting completed comment cards to help expedite the orderly meeting.

This marked the beginning steps necessary for CTA to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act, which requires study of a project's impact on the environment when applying for federal funding.

While the proposed extension was first discussed in 2006, it is actually a completion of the Orange line, according to Jeff Busby, CTA's General Manager for Strategic Planning.

"When the Orange Line was planned in 1980s, it was actually supposed to end at Ford City," Busby explained. Funding ran short, so the route ended at Midway airport.

"This plan is actually completing the original vision for the Orange Line," he added.

Suggestions for stops other than Ford City include 67th and 71st streets, but nothing has been set in stone. The extension from Midway would begin underground, running below 59th and 63rd streets, begin to rise to cross Marquette Road, and finally become elevated above Cicero Avenue.

After Monday's public scoping meeting, a draft of an Environmental Impact Statement — or EIS — will be completed by a projected date of 2011.

This draft will then be examined by the public for at least 45 days, according to Helene Kornblatt, a managing consultant for joint venture of consulting firms called CWC.

"Notification will be like we did for this (meeting): thousands of mailings, newspapers, e-mail blasts," Kornblatt explained. "There'll be a formal notice placed in the Federal Registry. There'll be a formal notice placed in the newspaper."

The draft will be placed on disks in public libraries and also be available electronically. The final EIS and planning will last from 2011 until 2013, and construction will take place from 2013 until 2016, when the extension would be operational.

After the meet-and-greet, Busby gave a 10-minute outline of plans, noting that because this is in the planning stage, many of the public's questions cannot be answered.

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Public comments were recorded by a court reporter for the official record, and included comments about delight in the possibility of providing additional transportation for the neighborhood to concerns about noise, undesirable people entering the neighborhood, and funding for additional security.

Busby also reviewed alternatives to the extension.

They included what the CTA terms a Transportation System Management (TSM) plan with rapid bus service from 59th to 76th streets on Cicero Avenue, as well as the re-routing of bus route 67, which includes 67th, 69th and 71st streets, to terminate at a new Ford City Station.

Residents have until Tuesday, Oct. 27 to file comments, and may do so by e-mailing Busby at OrangeExtension@transitchicago.com.

Further information may be found on the CTA's Web site, www.transitchicago.com.

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