



North Lake Shore Drive Phase I Study

Public Meeting #3 Responses to Public Comments and Questions

October 2017

Written questions and comments regarding the North Lake Shore Drive Phase I Study were submitted by individuals and groups from throughout the Chicago region at the project's public meeting held July 12 at DePaul University. In addition, public comments and questions were submitted directly to the project team via e-mail, the website's electronic comment form and postal mail through August 9, 2017.

All of the questions and comments have been collected and compiled to provide a comprehensive review of the topics raised along with project team's responses. Every question, comment, and suggestion submitted during the public comment period has been compiled and is available for viewing on the [NLSD project website](#). Collectively, the public comments and preferences will be considered in the evaluation of alternatives and concepts introduced through the public involvement process.

Many of the comments received were similar in nature. As a result, comments have been summarized and their responses have been grouped by topic to avoid duplicative responses. To understand some terms used in the comments and responses, it may be helpful to review the original presentation materials which are posted at www.northlakeshoredrive.org.

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Public Involvement Process

Q. I am interested in learning about this project and providing input. How can I get involved?

A. The Phase I Study features a robust public involvement component, and there are multiple ways for you to participate. The following options are available:

- Send us comments via the project website at any time:
(<http://northlakeshoredrive.org/contact.html>)
- Attend a Public Meeting. Two more public meetings, plus a public hearing, will be held over the next three years.
- Sign up for the project e-newsletter and receive project updates. Send us a request:
(info@northlakeshoredrive.org)

For reference, summaries of past public outreach events are available on the website located at http://www.northlakeshoredrive.org/involved_meetings.html.

Q. How are these involvement efforts being publicized?

A. Public meetings are publicized through a variety of ways, including email notifications, newspaper notices, informational posters on CTA buses, online ads, and coordination with community groups and aldermanic offices. If anyone is interested in being included in the email notifications they can sign up at <http://northlakeshoredrive.org/contact.html>.

Phase I Study Process and Project Scope

Q. Does this project include investigating extending North Lake Shore Drive to Evanston or the bike path to Howard?

A. No, the scope of this study terminates at Hollywood Avenue.

Q. What is the earliest date construction could start and how long would it last?

A. The project is currently in the planning phase ("Phase I"), which is the first step in the project development process, and is anticipated to be completed in 2020. A conceptual construction schedule will be developed toward the end of Phase I; the length of the construction schedule will be influenced by many factors, including the sequence of work and the amount of funding available.

At this time, Phase II (final design) and Phase III (construction) are not funded.

Q. How would this project be paid for?

A. Additional funding for future engineering or construction phases has not been secured. Funds may come from a number of sources including: the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, US Army Corps of Engineers, the Illinois Department of Transportation, Chicago Department of Transportation, Chicago Transit Authority or the Chicago Park District.

Q. How much would this project cost?

A. The scope of improvements will be developed in more detail in the coming months, which will allow for the development of preliminary cost estimates.

Q. What agency is responsible for selecting the alternatives to be carried forward in the process?

A. Many agencies are participating in the NLSD planning process, and the selection of a preferred alternative will be made based upon a combination of engineering and environmental factors, as well as stakeholder input. The Illinois Department of Transportation, the Chicago Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration have responsibility for determining the final design, with input from the Chicago Park District and the Chicago Transit Authority. Because IDOT has jurisdiction over the roadway, they have final local agency determination of the preferred improvement plan.

Q. On a daily basis, how many people travel in single-occupancy vehicles on the Drive versus using public transit, biking or walking?

A. NLSD is a crucial transportation artery for both automobiles and buses. The Drive currently carries as many as 155,000 vehicles per day on the Outer Drive, with an average vehicle occupancy of 1.2 persons/auto. Approximately 42,000 bus riders per day utilize seven express bus routes on the Outer Drive, with two bus feeder routes on portions of the Inner Drive carrying an additional 27,000 riders. The nearby Lakefront Trail is also heavily utilized and during a summer Saturday, the trail accommodated over 31,000 users of all kinds along the most heavily traveled portion of the trail.

Q. What kind of model data are you using to guide your decision-making?

A. The NLSD project is employing several modeling efforts to guide project decision-making. The region's federally-designated metropolitan planning organization, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) maintains the regional planning model. The CMAP model, which is regularly updated to incorporate the latest available information (i.e., census data, traffic information), is being used to provide "big picture" projections of future travel. The project team is also using a more corridor-focused model ("VISSIM") to assess the performance of various improvement options for NLSD. Other models will be used for the design of shoreline related elements. Finally, 3-D modeling will be used to convey project features and aesthetic elements of finalist alternatives.

Q. Can you elaborate on the accident and safety data?

A. NLSD averages three crashes per day, and overall, is considered to be amongst the state's most pressing safety needs. The predominant crash types include rear-end, side swipe and fixed object. The Oak Street curve and the Belmont Avenue junction experience the largest volume of crashes. For further information, please see the project Purpose and Need document that is contained on the project website.

Alternatives Under Consideration

- Q. Why is the Project Study Group requesting to remove light rail, submerged tunnels and causeways from consideration?**
- A.** Following the Level 1 screening process, it was determined that the Light Rail Transit (LRT), submerged tunnels, and causeway options did not meet the project's Purpose and Need, or were substantially more costly than other alternatives that provided similar safety and operational benefits with fewer impacts. Because better, less costly and less impactful alternatives were available, these options were dropped from further consideration. It should be noted, however, that the forward compatibility of alternatives with a future light rail transit system is one of the design considerations for the remaining alternatives that are being studied.
- Q. What are the costs between the various alternatives?**
- A.** The Level 2 screening process, which is currently under development, will estimate order of magnitude costs for each of the alternatives that are still under consideration. Cost comparisons will be developed and shared with stakeholders in the coming months.

North Lake Shore Drive

- C. Many people commented on the unique nature of the Drive and stressed the importance of preserving its scenic beauty.**
- R.** The project team acknowledges and agrees that NLS D is a unique facility that passes through a unique and historic park. The Purpose and Need, which sets forth the goals for the project, emphasizes the importance of maintaining the character of the Drive and avoiding negative impacts to Lincoln Park while addressing the Drive's many deficiencies.
- Q. A number of people cited the high levels of congestion along the Drive as a major problem. How will this project address this problem?**
- A.** This project will not be able to "solve" the congestion problems that exist along NLS D, as travel demand will exceed desirable capacity during many hours of the day, even after the roadway is improved. Rather, the project is focused on improving safety and addressing local traffic bottlenecks to improve traffic flow. For example, measures to improve exit and entrance ramps at junctions can eliminate lane blockages and improve overall safety and traffic flow on the Outer Drive. Replacement of the traffic signal at Chicago Avenue with a full access junction will eliminate a traffic bottleneck that is a substantial source of congestion on the Drive while improving neighborhood access. Improvement measures such as these will help to reduce overall congestion levels and/or reduce the number of hours of heavy congestion that occurs each day.
- C. Several comments identified speeding as the biggest safety concern surrounding travel on the Drive.**

R. The existing design of the Outer Drive makes speed enforcement not only difficult, but hazardous, as there are limited locations where speeds can be safely monitored and few locations to pull an offending driver over outside a live traffic lane. While changes to the posted speed limit are not within the scope of the Phase I study, the designs for project alternatives not only contain features that would allow safe speed enforcement, but include design criteria that will lessen the safety hazards associated with the prevailing vehicle speeds that are experienced on the Outer Drive.

Q. Noise was a concern of several respondents. How will this project address this problem?

A. Traffic noise impacts and potential mitigation measures will be evaluated in the later stages of the Phase I study, when a more detailed design and refined traffic is available.

Q. Traffic going to and from the Drive has a significant impact on local neighborhoods, especially those located at its northern terminus. How will this study address this?

A. A separate investigation called the *Northern Terminus Traffic Study* (NTTS) is being conducted to address many of the long-standing traffic concerns that result from the termination of NLS D at Hollywood Avenue. The NTTS will collect and analyze traffic patterns to and from the northern terminus. With this information, the NTTS will identify and evaluate potential improvement strategies to better direct and control traffic flows and analyze the impact of each of these strategies on all users as well as on the neighborhood as a whole. The study area is 1.5 square miles generally bound by Foster Avenue on the south, Ashland Avenue/Clark Street on the west, and Devon Avenue/Sheridan Road on the north. You can find additional information on the study at <http://northlakeshoredrive.org/nt.html> as well as sign up for notifications of future public meetings on this study.

Q. How are the other transportation systems at play prepared to handle potential disruption and increased ridership?

A. It is too early in the project development process to identify construction staging and traffic mitigation plans, or how each transportation provider in the corridor will contribute to those plans. As part of Phase I, a conceptual plan for constructing the project will be developed; a detailed plan for construction, as well as mitigation strategies, will be developed in Phase II (final design), and may be further refined in Phase III (construction).

Q. How will the improvements affect my everyday driving experience?

A. As the project team refines each alternative we will continue to work with the public to discuss and weigh the different options of the roadway movements and aesthetics. Your input on different alternatives and how they impact your driving experience will be critical.

Q. Does this project take into account how future technologies, such as driverless vehicles, may impact public transit and existing traffic flows/patterns?

- A. The timeframe for fully deploying autonomous vehicle technologies, and the effects upon the transportation system, is not known at this point. However, the project team will look for opportunities to be forward compatible with a variety of different transportation trends in the future. It should be noted that other technological improvements, including electronic vehicle identification, traffic signal priority, dynamic traffic management and driver information systems are being considered for this project.

Junctions and Access

- Q. Several people commented on the congestion present at Chicago Avenue and Belmont Avenue. Will this project address these junctions?**

- A. The Chicago Avenue and Belmont Avenue junctions are the two most congested locations along NLSD. All project alternatives that are under consideration specifically focus on measures to mitigate congestion and improve safety at these locations.

- C. Concern was expressed by a number of people on the potential reduction of lanes north of Montrose.**

- R. The study team will examine this issue in further detail during the evaluation of various alternatives.

- Q. What is the purpose of removing vehicle access at Wilson Avenue and how will the closing or merging of Montrose and Wilson exits affect traffic on other streets, such as Lawrence?**

- A. The Montrose, Wilson and Lawrence Avenue junctions are spaced only a quarter-mile apart, which causes traffic weaving problems on NLSD due to very short weaving zones between junctions. The traffic volume on Wilson Avenue is relatively low compared to other junctions along NLSD, averaging just over half the travel demand that is handled by the Montrose or Lawrence Avenue junctions. Eliminating general purpose traffic ramps at the Wilson junction will allow Wilson Avenue to serve as a transit, bike and pedestrian gateway between Lincoln Park and the adjacent neighborhood and the Red Line station to the west.

Parks

- C. Several people were concerned that parkland may be lost as a result of roadway improvements, especially in Lincoln Park.**

- R. The planning process for NLSD follows the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which requires that a priority is placed upon avoiding impacts, followed by minimizing, and providing mitigation for impacts that cannot be avoided. In addition, there are other federal regulations that specifically protect parkland and historic properties. Based upon studies to date, parkland could be affected to varying degrees by the proposed alternatives. As the alternatives evaluation moves forward, the benefits, impacts, and potential mitigation strategies associated with the alternatives will be discussed with the Chicago Park District, and project stakeholders in

general. The goal is to develop a preferred plan that addresses transportation needs while protecting and enhancing the surrounding environment.

Q. What is the purpose of the large park space proposed between Grand and North?

A. The increase in park space that is proposed between Grand Avenue and North Avenue is due largely to the need to protect NLS D and the Lakefront Trail from wave overtopping from large storms, as well as the need to realign NLS D to resolve substantial safety issues at the Oak Street curve. Increased separation between the Inner and Outer Drives is also proposed in this section in order to allow or improve northbound bus stops as well as to provide adequate and inviting access facilities to the lakefront. This increase in space also offers opportunities to improve operations on the inner Drive.

Transit

C. Numerous comments were received on the need to improve transit operations along the Drive and possibly add dedicated bus lanes.

R. Improving the speed and reliability of transit service in the NLS D corridor is a major goal of this project. The study is considering a wide range of transit improvement initiatives that range from transit signal priority and bus-only queue-jump lanes at junctions to dedicated bus-only lanes on or adjacent to the Outer Drive. The project is looking to balance transit needs with the safety and operational improvement needs of NLS D and the need to minimize impacts to Lincoln Park.

Lakefront Trail

Q. Pedestrian and bicycle access to the park is currently very difficult because of vehicle traffic. Will this study improve east-west accessibility?

A. A primary goal of this project is to improve access and circulation and improving east-west pedestrian and bicycle access is specifically mentioned in the [project's Purpose and Need statement](#). All of the alternatives will incorporate improved east-west pedestrian and bicycle access, with the most heavily used lakefront access locations provided with bike and pedestrian access facilities that are unencumbered by vehicular traffic.

Non-motorized Vehicles/Activities

Q. How will this project integrate people walking, biking or using other alternative transportation options (Segway, rollerblading, etc.)?

A. This study seeks to balance the safety and operational needs of all users and will evaluate a wide range of alternatives for various types of users. The project will build on the Chicago Park District's effort to provide separate paths along the Lakefront Trail for high speed and low speed

users. The improvement will take that effort one step further, however, by providing grade separations along the higher speed path at all junctions and lakefront access facilities.

- C. Several people commented on the need to enhance safety along the Lakefront Trail. Suggestions included separating pedestrian and bicycle traffic, improving trail crossings and intersections, and adding markers and signage.**
- R.** A key goal of the project is to improve safety for all users. As noted above, providing separate facilities for high speed and low speed trail users will be evaluated, as well as improving trail crossings and circulation.

Beaches and Shoreline Protections

- C. Several people noted their concern that the proposed shoreline protections would have negative impacts on the surrounding environment, including marine life.**
- R.** The NLSD planning process will consider a range of potential environmental effects, including potential impacts to marine life. The project team will work with the Chicago Park District, and regulatory agencies such as the USEPA and the Army Corps of Engineers, as well as project stakeholders in general, to determine the most appropriate shoreline treatments along the project corridor.
- Q. In the past several years, how many times has flooding occurred on the segment of the Drive between Grand and Chicago or Michigan and North?**
- A.** Recently, large storms which have impacted the operation of NLSD and/or the Lakefront Trail have occurred in December 2015 and April 2017. Storms that closed travel lanes on NLSD and caused substantial damage to the Lakefront Trail occurred in September 2011 and October 2014.
- Q. Will the added shoreline protections reduce the amount of beach available to the public?**
- A.** Proposals for shoreline protection improvements would likely affect the beaches at Ohio Street, Oak Street and North Avenue. However, these proposals will be discussed and developed in consultation with the Chicago Park District and other stakeholders in order to preserve their size, stability and attractiveness to beach-goers.