

CTA's Ashland Avenue Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Proposal

The CTA BRT planners invited representatives from the West Town Chamber of Commerce, the Wicker Park & Bucktown Chamber of Commerce, Wicker Park Committee, East Village Association and West Central Association to CTA headquarters to review block by block design plans for the BRT on Ashland in mid July. The CTA BRT presenters shared the plans and were looking for specific feedback on specific blocks of the proposed BRT on Ashland from Grand to North Ave with the group. We discussed the various concerns that the attendees shared that would arise with no left turns for certain intersections and the increase in congestion of traffic with just one lane of traffic traveling in each direction. The CTA shared studies that showed that the BRT would save commuters travel time, why Ashland was chosen for the BRT, they explained that BRT would be a much faster way for Chicagoans to travel north south, they had statistics and will be sending studies to show that this system has worked in other cities and will in the long run increase economic development along the corridor.

At the July meeting the CTA had notes from a previous meeting and showed new maps that indicated to add left turn capabilities at certain intersections would result in the loss of about 12-14 parking spots at those intersections. The WTCC shared the feedback that we have had from specific businesses on Ashland, and the other representatives at that meeting also shared their concerns. The CTA presenters took notes on specific intersections and mentioned that it may be possible to create some dedicated left turn lanes at the expense of parking. Right now the current BRT design plan for Ashland retains almost all of the parking. The current design plan has dedicated rapid transit bus lane in each direction, stops every 1/2 mile at new CTA stations in center, transit signal priority intersections and longer green lights, parking and loading zones retained on both sides of street, one vehicle traffic lane eliminated in each direction, and left-hand turns removed. [Click here](#) for more detailed information.

The CTA representative said that they were going to keep holding meetings with community leaders along the various sections of Ashland to be included in the proposed BRT (Irving Park Road to 95th Street) block by block. Their process for outreach and holding broader public meetings regarding the specifics of the design and to garner feedback from the businesses affected directly by the BRT plan is just beginning. They said that this late summer and fall they were going to be holding several larger public meetings to present the proposed plans, go over the specifics, and take suggestions and input from the community and businesses. The final BRT design would then be determined by the Spring of 2014.

The WTCC encouraged CTA representatives to reach out to the Ashland-Western Coalition leaders. [The Ashland-Western Coalition](#) strongly opposes the BRT and their goal is to mobilize local businesses, residents and groups to lobby to stop it from happening. The Coalition is suggesting an alternative to BRT, Modern Express Buses (MEB), which is described below. The WTCC made the CTA aware of the growing opposition to the BRT, and also informed the local Aldermen of the feedback we have received thus far from members on Ashland and Western (most of whom oppose the BRT). More details and specifics about the CTA's proposed BRT can be found: www.brtchicago.com and www.transitchicago.com/ashlandbrt. We will announce the CTA's public BRT meetings when they are scheduled and keep members updated via this newsletter. Since the last newsletter the chamber has actually received feedback from some residents located on or near Ashland that support the BRT.

The Industrial Council of Nearwest Chicago (ICNC) which is West Town Chamber's neighboring association to the south representing the Kinzie industrial corridor south of Grand, issued a letter in their newsletter opposing the BRT. [Click here](#) to read the ICNC stance letter. The Wicker Park & Bucktown Chamber of Commerce Board has yet to vote on a stance because they too, like the West Town Chamber Board, want to see the specific traffic studies and economic development studies from the other cities where the BRT has been initiated. The WTCC Board also wants to wait to create an official stance until we can poll the members through our Ashland Avenue Committee and more input has been received regarding the project.

Ashland-Western Coalition OPPOSES the BRT and instead suggests Modern Express Buses (MEB)

A coalition called the Ashland-Western Coalition (AWC) strongly opposes the BRT and is proposing an alternative. The AWC includes residents, churches, businesses, schools, neighborhood groups and economic development agencies on or near Ashland and Western Avenues. They formed in November 2012 responding to the CTA's request for public input on its BRT proposal. The coalition opposes the BRT and instead supports Modern Express Buses (MEB) for Ashland and Western Avenues.

MEB is based on the successful CTA express buses that ran on these streets in the past decade and reduced bus stops to increase bus speeds. MEB adds new traffic-signal priority and bus-boarding technologies along with minor intersection changes to increase bus speeds; adds on-board bus, bus stop and bus shelter improvements; and adds pedestrian and traffic safety improvements. The AWC believes that MEB would vastly improve CTA bus service on Ashland and Western and spur new development at a fraction of BRT's \$16 million/mile cost.

The Coalition states that the BRT demands far too extreme sacrifices from Chicagoans on and near Ashland and Western. Proposing fundamental street reconfigurations that slash vehicle capacities 50%, prohibit left turns and exclude service to special uses on these streets, The AWC believes that BRT is unacceptable for Ashland and Western Avenues. [Click here](#) for more information and the AWC's most recent official statement. Please email ashlandwesterncoalition@gmail.com if you are interested in joining the coalition to oppose the BRT and receiving their updates and notices for meetings.

Please send us your opinion:

The WTCC has shared the Ashland members stances which were previously submitted with the local Aldermen. The board hopes to [receive further input](#) from the broader community and from more business members on Ashland and it is on the agenda to discuss further at the August board meeting. Prior to voting on an official chamber stance, the board would also like to see the CTA's traffic studies and their specific design proposal. WTCC board is also hoping to form an Ashland Avenue Committee in order for outreach to take place and to garner feedback from more of the affected businesses. Thus an official WTCC stance is still pending. [Chamber members - please send any opinions or comments.](#)