

*Note: Because Governor Jim Doyle suspended the high-speed rail project after Scott Walker won the November 2010 election, the La Follette Avenue High Speed Rail Corridor Group did not submit these recommendations to any public official, nor did it organize a meeting or literature to discuss them, relying just on e-mail and personal contact to finalize this draft. The intent was to have the recommendations ready when high-speed rail is revived again in Wisconsin. This PDF was posted online on February 1, 2011.*

*This document contains a cover letter and two sets of recommendations, one for state officials, one for city of Madison officials.*

Dear public official,

Enclosed are recommendations compiled by the La Follette Avenue High-Speed Rail Corridor Group that formed in response to concerns with the lack of two-way information-sharing in regard to the planning of the high-speed rail corridor, especially given the rapid pace at which the planning process was progressing in September and October 2010. Although xx people indicated their names could be listed in this report, many others contributed to three months of organizing, meetings, and information gathering and disseminating by volunteers. The recommendations were finalized in December 2010.

The La Follette Avenue High-Speed Rail Corridor Group is mostly concerned about block group 4 of census tract 20 in the city of Madison, an area within city ward 33, specifically the area east of Anziger Court and Winnebago Street and west of Waubesa Street that parallels La Follette Avenue. However, many of the concerns and experiences are common to residents and property owners in other areas of the city along the 3-plus miles of high-speed rail corridor. More information about the group, its findings and concerns is available at [www.ohioavenue.com/rail](http://www.ohioavenue.com/rail).

High-speed rail was supposed to be up and running in 2003 but dropped from the public agenda after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. It reappeared in 2009 with passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and Wisconsin officials said construction would start in April 2011 after a hurried planning process in the fall of 2010. Even if high-speed rail remains off the table for the next decade, the same communication problems and lack of concern for residents along the corridor are likely to remanifest.

We hope our efforts and recommendations herein can help to offset those problems and help build respect between the State of Wisconsin and its residents as it develops inter-city transportation.

Sincerely,  
La Follette Avenue High-Speed Rail Corridor Group

The following people indicated their support in December 2010 for the following recommendations; many others contributed their opinions and ideas:

Karen Faster, 133 Ohio Avenue  
Peter Fee, 54 Farwell Street  
Ken Fitzsimmons, 58 Farwell Street  
Maggie Fitzsimmons, 58 Farwell Street  
Laura Johnson, 113 Ohio Avenue  
Michael Johnson, 113 Ohio Avenue

Dan Melton, 2138 La Follette Avenue  
James Montgomery, 2649 Milwaukee St.  
Jefren Olsen, 105 Talmadge Street  
Megan Schliesman, 105 Ohio Avenue  
Paula Storch, 102 Corry Street  
Megan Williamson, 2901 St. Paul Avenue

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## **Recommendations to the State of Wisconsin and its consultants for planning related to a high-speed rail corridor in the city of Madison**

Compiled by the La Follette Avenue High-Speed Rail Corridor Group, Madison, Wisconsin, December 2010.

During the summer and fall of 2010, problems emerged in the high-speed planning process operated by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT) and its consultants as they executed a “corridor management plan” that proved on the microlevel to be sorely lacking in transparency from the perspective of residents and property owners along the Madison portion of the rail corridor.

The recommendations that follow were compiled by neighborhood residents mostly in Madison’s census tract 20, which is contiguous with city of Madison ward 33. The residents formed the La Follette Avenue High-Speed Rail Corridor Group after they became concerned with the lack of two-way information-sharing in regard to the planning of the high-speed rail corridor, especially given the accelerated timeline of track construction to commence within three months of the first meeting of the advisory Madison corridor management plan focus group.<sup>1</sup>

Should the state of Wisconsin ever develop a railroad corridor, the planning and execution should include the following:

### **I. Communications and Transparency**

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT) staff, its consultants and the city of Madison all neglected to establish a mechanism by which residents and property owners could learn about corridor plans and construction and effects on their property and neighborhood. Except for individuals invited to take part in the advisory corridor management plan focus group, no mechanism existed for residents and property owners to make recommendations about the project.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, we recommend:

- A. Conduct a new environmental assessment.* Using one conducted in 1999 is bad policy and unfair to city residents and misses many items, additions and events, including city-adopted development plans, pedestrian-bicycle paths, community gardens, and new and planned urban infill-developments.
- B. Rewrite, publish and distribute portions of the environmental assessment in lay language pertinent to each community to provide background.*

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<sup>1</sup> Wisconsin Department of Transportation, “Wisconsin High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail,” [n.d., circa summer 2010], four-page full color 11 by 17 inches handout.

<sup>2</sup> People could leave a message at a Milwaukee DOT telephone number or send an email; however, doing so proved to not produce answers in a timely fashion that facilitated making recommendations to the corridor management plan focus group.

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- C. Create, publicize and use a detailed, ongoing communication plan between DOT and city residents and property owners within two blocks of corridor and within six blocks of any street, pedestrian or bicycle crossing to be added, closed or moved. DOT should contact every resident and property owner at least monthly by postal mail, in addition to online communications and literature drops. Detailed recommendations for a communications plan were presented to a member of Governor Doyle's staff during a meeting in Representative Joe Parisi's office on Thursday, November 4. A copy of those recommendations are available at <http://www.ohioavenue.com/rail/NovemberDOTParisimeeting.pdf>*
- D. Create a planning process that gives at least equal weight to corridor issues as to location of station.*

## **II. Neighborhood accessibility and cohesion**

Connectivity between the neighborhoods north and south of the tracks is very important to people living on both sides of the tracks as evidenced by unofficial crossings that neighbors have created and maintained over the decades.. People on both sides of the tracks do not want to lose ready access to the public library, public health department, community center, churches, business districts and bus stops, including amenities that would be added when the city of Madison develops the Union Corners property it purchased in 2010. Closing Corry Street and fencing the corridor from Waubesa to Winnebago Street would seal off Union Corners from the residential walking neighborhood to the south and prevent Union Corners residents from accessing Lowell School and Atwood Avenue businesses and churches by bicycle or foot. Therefore, we recommend:

### ***Crossings***

- A. Add pedestrian-bicycle paths at unofficial crossings. Their existence demonstrates their importance. All efforts should be made to maintain the quality of life and neighborhood for those living north of the tracks, whom a fence would seal off from the Schenk-Atwood neighborhood. Installing an accessible bicycle-pedestrian path would be a logical solution.*
- B. Do not close official pedestrian-bicycle paths, although neighborhood residents might be willing to support moving the Division Street path several blocks east to facilitate better access. Moving it west toward Winnebago Street is a waste of money.*
- C. Research and distribute recommended best practice for minimum distance between legal crossings for vehicular AND pedestrian traffic. Explain how the distance between crossings is determined for an urban walking neighborhood.*
- D. Immediately publicize and distribute list of streets DOT officials and its consultants wish to close. These include Brearly, Livingston and Corry streets.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation et al., *Milwaukee-Madison Passenger Rail Corridor Project Environmental Assessment*, June 2001, pages 104, 150, 154.

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- E. Do not close streets unless neighborhood residents request it. Some people who live north of the tracks on Farwell Street and North and South courts are concerned about their access to areas south of the tracks. Closing Corry Street would require them to drive north to Milwaukee Street, turn east (right), then south on Waubesa Street, rather than simply turning south on Corry Street from North/South Court. However, people living on Corry Street are concerned about additional noise from crossing signals and impact on placement of signal and crossing equipment in juxtaposition to their homes.*

### ***Fencing***

- F. Immediately distribute explanation of the specific elements that dictate requirements for fence. Illustrate need for fence with site-specific examples of places where fence would likely be constructed. DOT officials and consultants can and should educate residents and property owners about what makes a portion of a corridor “unsafe.”*
- G. Immediately inform give property owners the worse-case scenario for placement of fence and crossing gate equipment so they can plan accordingly.*
- H. In fencing decisions, give the same weight to neighborhood concerns as to the “operational preference that is strongly influenced by public safety, railroad security, and liability.”<sup>4</sup>*
- I. Preserve homeowner land adjacent to the rail corridor and chop up land in a slightly and logical way. Any fence must be aesthetically pleasing and agreed upon by neighbors who live adjacent to rail property to reduce loss of property’s value and quality of life.*
- J. Once fencing decisions are made, distribute explanation in lay language of why a fence is recommended at every location.*
- K. Immediately release possible fence designs and heights rather than withholding the information.*

### **III. Neighborhood impacts**

Potential and perceived impacts on the neighborhood as a whole include an increase in air pollution from the train and from cars idling at crossings while freight and passenger trains pass through; an increase in noise pollution from trains, crossing gates and idling cars; lack of accessibility for ambulance, fire and police due to street closings; and a decrease in public safety due to increase in physical barriers that could lead to increase in physical assaults and robberies. Therefore, we recommend:

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<sup>4</sup> Caron Kloser, HNTB Corporation, to Karen Faster, La Follette Avenue High-Speed Rail Corridor Group, 20 October 2010 e-mail, attachment “Meeting with LaFalette {sic} High Speed Rail Corridor Group – corridor questions and answers.”

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### **Noise**

- A. *Design the corridor so no train horn is required.* However, find out and publicize whether crossing designs require additional warning bells.
- B. *Distribute information on expectations about noise* to address additional noise from high-speed and freight rail in comparison to current 10 miles-per-hour freight trains, including train horns, cars shifting, friction of wheels on rails, additional safety equipment at crossings, and cars idling at rail crossings.

### **Increased rail traffic**

- C. *Distribute information about the time of day and the number of trips expected for the high-speed rail and how those trips are expected to increase once Madison-to-St. Paul service is added and where that train will be routed through the city of Madison.* Be clear whether each trip means that the train will go through the neighborhood twice, once coming in and once going back out.
- D. *Distribute information about the expected vibration of people's homes and businesses due to rail traffic.*
- E. *Distribute information about expectation for increase in freight train traffic, including increased number of trips and time of day for those trips.*<sup>5</sup>

### **Public safety**

- F. *Study and distribute information on effect of fencing and closed streets on ambulance, fire and police services.*
- G. *Study and distribute information about whether physical assaults on people will be expected to increase because physical barriers added to rail corridor provide additional spaces to hide and to take victims, and reduce ability of victims to escape.*
- H. *Operate the train at a speed that ensures children and other neighbors are safe.* Many children commute to school across and along this rail line. People may walk between fence and tracks.

## **IV. Property values**

The green space afforded by some portions of the rail corridor adds financial and psychological value to many homes. The green space substitutes for park space for walking and exercising dogs. At least one Madison property owner won a construction variance to add a story to her house because the adjacent rail corridor that she mows qualified as city-required green space. Therefore, we recommend:

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<sup>5</sup> Wisconsin Department of Transportation, *From Vision to Reality* high-speed rail newsletter, November 1, 2010, says a reason to invest in high-speed rail is that it “[i]ncreases capacity and reduces travel times for freight rail operators.” DOT staff and consultants had denied expectations that freight traffic would increase. Newsletter accessed November 21, 2010, via <http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/projects/d1/hsrail/docs/nl-2010fall.pdf>.

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- A. Consider financial compensation for property owners whose property loses value because of addition of fence. Establish a legitimate measurement of financial loss.*
- B. Immediately inform renters and property owners on the rail corridor how much of the railroad right of way adjacent to their property will be consumed so that they can make informed decisions about whether they want to sell their property or rent in another location.*
- C. "Maintenance agreements" between the state and/or city with the railroad owners and operators and right-of-way owners must be based on worst-case scenario in recognition that the railroad operators and right-of-way owners are terrible stewards of their property. All maintenance agreements must address areas inside and outside of any fences and other barriers. Agreements should include best practices for:
  - urban forestry*
  - graffiti removal*
  - trash removal*
  - mowing*
  - weed removal*
  - brush removal*
  - communications plan for residents and property owners to contact to get action on a problem (a single telephone number, postal address and email address, for starters).**
- D. Inform property owners and residents on the corridor how companies will access buried and overhead utility lines during construction of the rail corridor and after corridor is fenced.*

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## **Recommendations to the city of Madison for planning related to a high-speed rail corridor in the city of Madison**

Compiled by the La Follette Avenue High-Speed Rail Corridor Group, Madison, Wisconsin, December 2010.

The city of Madison as a corporate entity should be an active participant in any state planning process related to interregional transportation such as high-speed rail. The city should not sit back and let the state and its consultants decide what is in the best interests for residents and property owners in the city of Madison. Ideally, the city government (elected officials and staff) would advocate for its residents as part of the negotiations with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT), the Wisconsin Office of the Commissioner of Railroads and the Federal Rail Administration.

### **I. City of Madison should demand of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation:**

- A.* New environmental assessment. Using one conducted in 1999 is bad policy and unfair to city residents and misses many items, additions and events, including city-adopted development plans, pedestrian-bicycle paths, community gardens, and new and planned urban infill-developments.
- B.* Detailed ongoing communication plan between DOT and residents and property owners within two blocks of corridor and within six blocks of any street, pedestrian or bicycle crossing to be added, closed or moved. DOT should be required to contact every resident and property owner by postal mail, in addition to online communications and literature drops. Communication plan should include a commitment to not blaming another entity for lack of information, poor planning, lack of response, as was evident in the summer and fall of 2010.
- C.* Addition of pedestrian-bicycle paths at unofficial crossings. Their existence demonstrates their importance. Access that exists between neighborhoods split by the railroad corridors should be enhanced, not diminished, especially between neighborhoods with different socioeconomic demographics. Addition of a pedestrian-bicycle path at the bottom of Jackson Street or Ohio Avenue could go a long way in ensuring the economic vitality of the city-owned Union Corners development and fuel further economic along Atwood Avenue by facilitating easy pedestrian-bicycle traffic. A fenced rail corridor would seal off the entire south side of Union Corners would from neighborhood to the south.
- D.* Design of every crossing so it meets criteria to eliminate need for train horns.
- E.* Distribution of clear explanation in lay language of why a fence is recommended at every location. This explanation is especially important because the speed of the train does not dictate requirement for fence.
- F.* Distribution of information and consideration of research that predicts increased freight train traffic.
- G.* Study and distribution of information on effect of fencing and street closures on ambulance, fire and police services.

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- H. A trust fund to compensate property owners and the city whose property loses value because of addition of fence. Establish a legitimate measurement of financial loss.
- I. Planning process that gives at least equal weight to corridor issues as to location of station.
- J. Immediate release of possible fence designs, heights and locations, and of plans during and after construction to access buried and overhead utility lines.

**II. The city of Madison should prepare its own recommendations to the DOT for maintenance agreement(s) between state and railroad companies, operators and owners of right of way that addresses inside and outside of any fences.** These recommendations should be based on the worst-case scenario in recognition that the railroad operators and right-of-way owners are terrible stewards of their property.

Recommendations should include best practices for:

- urban forestry
- graffiti removal
- trash removal
- mowing
- weed removal
- brush removal
- establishment of a communications plan for residents and property owners to contact to get action on a problem (a single telephone number, postal address and email address, for starters).

**III. The city of Madison should request state and federal rail officials and agencies to add pedestrian-bicycle paths at unofficial crossings. Their existence demonstrates their importance.**

**IV. The city of Madison should devise its own communication plan to ensure all residents and property owners along the rail corridor, plus other parties that indicate their interest, are kept informed and able to receive answers to questions, share concerns and make recommendations.** This communication plan should NOT rely solely on elected members of the city council or volunteer neighborhood associations and organizations or on local media. Paid staff should be assigned to the corridor to ensure local and state officials and consultants are not dismissive of residents' and property owners' fears and concerns. The communication plan should include a commitment to not blaming another entity for lack of information, poor planning, lack of response, as was evident in the summer and fall of 2010. The communication plan must include regular postal mail and not rely solely on word of mouth and online communications.

**V. The city of Madison should devise and publicize its own planning process to inform the state's planning process for development of the railroad corridor. This plan should be shared with all residents and property owners along the corridor.**