

## 5.0 Comments and Coordination

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This chapter describes the agency and public coordination and participation activities conducted during the environmental study phase. These activities were conducted in an open and inclusive manner throughout preparation of this Environmental Assessment. The objectives of the public involvement program were:

- To disclose potential impacts and benefits of the proposed project
- To provide opportunities for timely public comment
- To inform *The Rapid* staff and Board of Directors of key project issues

Multiple public participation approaches and tools were used in this process and a Public Involvement Plan (PIP) was prepared at the onset of the study that described the framework for the public involvement activities. Key public involvement activities included public open houses, stakeholder meetings, a project Website (<http://www.rapidsilverline.org/Media>), and a Project Fact Sheet.

The community meetings provided forums for obtaining direct citizen input and feedback, while project website provided opportunities for continued access to project information. *The Rapid* staff and Board of Directors served in an advisory capacity to assist in both formal and informal methods of communication. The study also took into account a Community Survey (Jacokes & Associates, September 2009) that indicated two-thirds (67 percent) of residents indicated they would either be willing (28 percent) or somewhat willing (39 percent) to use the Silver Line system instead of their automobile. The passenger survey was conducted as part of the continual efforts by *The Rapid* to improve service to its customers. The latest survey was administered to 546 passengers selected from 21 routes and 42 representative runs. The demographic composition consisted of 52% of female and 48% males comparable to previous surveys.

Notable findings from the survey include a 6-percent increase in ridership between 19-24 year olds, students, and entry-level work force. The most frequently experienced difficulties cited in the survey include overcrowding during peak periods (64%) and difficulties in getting seats during peak periods of travel (58%). About two-thirds of passengers generally felt that they would continue to use public transportation even if they had other transportation options.

### 5.1 Agency Coordination

Coordination with local, state and federal agencies occurred throughout the project consistent with agency policies, transportation planning regulations, and requirements of NEPA. Agency coordination was undertaken with the following agencies:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment

- Michigan Department of Transportation
- City of Grand Rapids Engineering and Planning Departments
- City of Kentwood Engineering and Planning Departments
- City of Wyoming Engineering Department
- Grand Valley State University

Copies of materials communication with and materials presented to many of these organizations is presented in Appendices A, C, and D.

## 5.2 Community Meetings

A number of community meetings were conducted during the course of this Environmental Assessment.

Meeting locations were selected to provide citizens easy access from different parts of the project area. A bilingual project fact sheet (English and Spanish) was prepared for distribution at these meetings. Additionally, a handout containing Frequently Asked Questions regarding the Silver Line BRT and the EA process and large board exhibits were used at these meetings.

Table 5-1 details the community meetings that were held as part of the study, including the purpose; time, date and location; and the format of the meetings.

As shown in Table 5-1, two stakeholder neighborhood meetings were held on June 30, 2009 and December 14, 2009 at the Rapid Central Station Conference Center. The purpose of the meetings was to initiate discussion and receive stakeholder comments related to the Locally Preferred Alternative and consideration of the Ransom Avenue Alternative. Approximately 15 people attended the June 30<sup>th</sup> meeting and approximately 13 people attended the December 14<sup>th</sup> meeting. The meetings included presentations that highlighted the alternatives under consideration, the environmental process and technical areas of evaluation, including historic, traffic, and noise (see Appendix D). The attendees were then provided an opportunity to pose questions to project team (*The Rapid* staff and consultant team). Comment forms were also provided at each meeting.

A total of nine comments were received after the June 30, 2009 neighborhood meeting. There were no comments received after the December 14, 2009 meeting. The comments focused on the original Locally Preferred Alternative (routed along Lafayette Avenue) and the potential impacts to the Heritage Hill Historic District. Comments received are included in Appendix E, along with meeting agendas, meeting notes, sign-in sheets, and copies of materials presented. Comments received focused on concerns for the Lafayette Avenue segment of the Locally Preferred Alternative and were grouped into three main categories based on the primary reasons cited in the comments. These include traffic, noise and vibration, and potential for negative impacts on the character of the Heritage Hill Historic District.

**Table 5-1 Community Meetings**

| Purpose                                    | Date/Time                           | Location   | Format  |
|--|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| Downtown Stakeholder Meeting               | June 30, 2009<br>6:30-8:30 p.m.     | Rapid Central Station Conference Center (2nd Floor) 250 Grandville Avenue SW<br>Grand Rapids, MI 49503 | Open Forum, Presentation and Question and Answer Series |
| Public Information Meeting                 | October 29, 2009<br>4:00-6:00 p.m.  | City of Hope Ministries<br>1975 Jefferson Avenue SE<br>Grand Rapids, MI 49507                          | Open Forum, Presentation and Question and Answer Series |
| Public Information Meeting                 | October 29, 2009<br>6:30-8:30 p.m.  | Tommy Brann's<br>4157 S. Division Avenue<br>Grand Rapids, MI 49507                                     | Open Forum, Presentation and Question and Answer Series |
| Downtown Stakeholder Meeting               | December 14, 2009<br>6:30-8:30 p.m. | Rapid Central Station Conference Center (2nd Floor) 250 Grandville Avenue SW<br>Grand Rapids, MI 49503 | Open Forum, Presentation and Question and Answer Series |
| Section 106 Consulting Parties Meeting     | December 14, 2009<br>3:00-5:00 p.m. | Rapid Offices<br>300 Ellsworth Avenue SW<br>Grand Rapids, MI 49503-4005                                | Presentation and open discussion                        |
| West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce | April 15, 2010<br>8:00-9:00 a.m.    | Grand Valley Community College, Sneden Hall, 415 East Fulton Street,<br>Grand Rapids, MI 49503         | Formal Presentation and Question and Answer Series      |
| Environmental Assessment Public Hearing    | To be determined                    | To be determined   | Open Forum, Presentation and Question and Answer Series |

The specific reasons cited ranged from increases in traffic congestion, potential for pedestrian and vehicular conflicts at the intersection of Lafayette Avenue and Michigan Street, potential for adverse effects to quality of life, to transit having a negative impact specifically on the character of the Heritage Hill Historic District which could include loss in property values. The Heritage Hill Neighborhood Association was the most vocal in opposing the original Locally Preferred Alternative, citing these reasons. There was a broader comment made that indicated general opposition to transit and higher taxes that was associated with introducing higher capacity bus rapid transit in Grand Rapids.

Two public information meetings were held along the project corridor on October 29, 2009. Presentation materials were prepared to illustrate the environmental process, characteristics of the Locally Preferred Alternative, and technical areas of evaluation, including historic, traffic and noise (see Appendix D). The attendees were provided an opportunity to pose questions to project team (*The Rapid* staff and consultant team). Comment forms were also provided at each meeting. One written comment was received (see Appendix E).

A Section 106 Consulting Parties meeting was held December 14, 2009, consistent with the National Historic Preservation Act to gauge concerns for the potential effects of the proposed project, specifically the presence of the proposed stations and platforms associated with the Silver Line project (see Section 3.6 for a further discussion of this meeting and Appendix A).

### 5.3 Environmental Justice Outreach

Particular outreach to low income and minority populations was made part of the public involvement process. Consideration was given in selecting the locations of the public information meetings listed in Table 5-1 in terms of access to these facilities by minority communities. While it was expected that some members of these populations would receive notices of these meetings through general media, including the project website, additional efforts were made to increase a higher level of awareness for the project. Specialized outreach to environmental justice populations, including bilingual project fact-sheets, was used for these meetings. A copy of the bilingual fact-sheet is attached in Appendix D. Meeting notices were mailed and follow-up calls made to associations as listed in Table 5-2 representing environmental justice populations and representative businesses through their constituents.

**Table 5-2 Community Organizations along Division Avenue**

| Organization Name   | Address  |
|---|--|
| Wyoming/Kentwood Chamber of Commerce                              | 590 32nd Street SE, Wyoming, MI 49548-2345           |
| West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce                        | 1251 Century Ave, Suite 200, Grand Rapids, MI 49503  |
| Burton Heights Business District                                  | 949 Wealthy St SE, Suite 200, Grand Rapids, MI 49506 |
| Heartside Business District                                       | jenn@heartsidegr.org                                 |
| Madison Square Business District                                  | 949 Wealthy St SE, Suite 200, Grand Rapids, MI 49506 |
| Division South Business District                                  | 517 S. Division, Grand Rapids 49548                  |
| East Fulton Business District                                     | 1041 E. Fulton Street, Grand Rapids, MI 49503        |
| Division Avenue Business Association (28th Street to 54th Street) | 4157 Division Ave S., Grand Rapids, MI 49548         |
| Heritage Hill Neighborhood Association (GR)                       | 126 College SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503               |
| Garfield Park Neighborhood Association (GR)                       | 334 Burton SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49507                |
| South East Community Association (GR)                             | 1408 Madison Ave SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49507          |

A presentation to the West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (WMHCC) was made on April 15, 2010 to introduce the project to a group representing a predominant minority population in the project area. Additional coordination through phone-calls was exchanged with WMHCC to develop information for member updates. The update focused on alignment and stations, scope of the EA, schedule, and critical path items; general discussion and questions were addressed following the presentation (see Appendix D).

## 5.4 Future Public Communications

Community outreach will continue for the Silver Line project as it proceeds into station design and engineering studies. Outreach to involve the general public and minority populations is an integral part of this phase of the project. One series of meetings was conducted in August 2010 additional meetings are planned over the next four to six months to engage the community, local residents, and business owners.

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