

**MADISON COUNTY LIGHT RAIL FEASIBILITY STUDY
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
DRAFT**

1. Study Background and Purpose

The original MetroLink light rail system, opened in 1993, extended from Lambert Airport to East St. Louis, Illinois. Prior to that time, East-West Gateway Council of Governments (EWGCOG) completed the St. Louis Systems Analysis for Major Transit Capital Investments. This document has since served as the blueprint for transportation planning in the region.

Nine transportation corridors were identified in the Systems Analysis as potential locations for additional light rail transit (LRT). Included were two corridors into Madison County, Illinois. Potential corridors for light rail expansion were also included in the 1999 Madison County Long Range Transportation Plan. Figure 1 shows MetroLink corridors and study areas.

The original MetroLink line and the St. Clair extension were funded through the “New Starts” program under the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Local revenue (from the one-quarter cent transit sales tax approved in 1994) was the funding mechanism for the Cross County MetroLink line. Federal funds will likely be required for a Madison County extension.

To examine the opportunities for the extension of light rail into Madison County, EWGCOG entered into an agreement with Madison County Transit (MCT) to conduct this light rail feasibility study. The primary goal of the study was to establish the general feasibility of implementing light rail in Madison County. Although the evaluation of the feasibility of rail involved a variety of factors, the major issues were cost, ridership and financial funding capacity.

The technical planning work was integrated with a community engagement program to both inform and involve the public. The end product was enough information to make a decision on whether to pursue a light rail corridor in Madison County, not to recommend a corridor. If light rail were pursued in Madison County, detailed planning studies would need to be completed.

2. Public Involvement

Because the purpose of the study was to explore and determine the feasibility of light rail in Madison County, an outreach and media campaign was conducted to solicit public input. This effort included stakeholder interviews, focus groups and public meetings. Approximately 250 people attended the public meetings. Information presented included an explanation of the planning process, the expected outcomes of the study and potential community benefits of a light rail extension. Input from the public involvement process helped the technical team:

- Understand the existing conditions impacting Madison County
- Envision future conditions for Madison County
- Determine mechanisms and obstacles to the expansion of MetroLink
- Identify key destinations, activity centers and routes

3. Policy Advisory Committee

The Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) was comprised of a diverse cross-section of individuals, familiar with transportation issues in Madison County. PAC members were Chair Robert Wetzell, Monica Bristow, Ronald Capek, Dave Dietzel, Nancy Dooling, Saundra Hudson, Jerry Kane, Charles King, Jr, Steve Knobbe, George Machino, Richard Mark, Matt Melucci, James Pennekamp, Robert Plummer, Les Sterman, David Werner and Richard Worthen. The PAC acted as a sounding board for the technical team, gave a local perspective and assisted in public outreach and consensus building. The PAC met four times with the technical team during this study.

4. Goals and Objectives

Goals and objectives for light rail expansion into Madison County were identified, responding to public input and consideration of previous transportation and land use planning studies. Evaluation criteria were defined to support the goals and objectives of the project.

The following goals and objectives were identified as the Purpose and Need for this study:

Goal: Mitigate Congestion
 Objective: Increase use of transit across Mississippi River Bridge

Goal: Improve Access to Opportunity
 Objectives: Increase access to employment, education and other activity centers
 Reduce travel times
 Serve transit dependent population

Goal: Foster Sustainable Development
 Objectives: Utilize transit accessibility to encourage economic development
 Preserve quality of life
 Coordinate transit and land use

Goal: Evaluate Cost-Effectiveness
 Objectives: Identify potential ridership
 Determine initial and operational costs
 Establish financial feasibility

5. Development of Options

Although the purpose of this study was not to recommend a corridor, options for light rail corridors were developed. These options were developed in response to the stated goals and objectives of the project; demographic and economic conditions; land use; and opportunities and constraints.

To determine the feasibility of the light rail corridors, these options were identified as minimum, moderate and full build and are depicted on Figure 2. All of the options connect with the existing St. Clair MetroLink line.

The minimum build option serves the Tri-Cities area in Madison County. The length of this corridor would be approximately 4 miles, with a potential 2005 construction cost of \$150-165 million. Annual operating costs are about \$1.5 million (2005\$). Daily ridership of about 7,000 people is projected.

The moderate build area extends to Interstate 270 on the north and Interstate 255 on the east. Within this area are several build options serving varying destinations: the Illinois Route 3 corridor, serving Granite City; the Illinois Route 162 corridor, serving Granite City; and an option serving Collinsville. The length of this corridor varied from about 10 to 13 miles, with a potential 2005 construction cost of \$300-400 million. Operating costs were estimated to be between \$6-9 million (2005\$) annually. Daily ridership estimates are between 8,000 and 11,000.

The full build option would extend light rail to the Alton or Edwardsville communities, with possible lengths between 21 and 23 miles. The 2005 estimated construction cost is \$500-650 million. Annual operating costs of \$14-15 million (2005\$) are anticipated. Daily ridership estimates are 14,000.

Potential opportunities and constraints for extending light rail into Madison County exist:

Opportunities may include:

- Use of existing or future transportation corridors
- Connection of activity/population centers
- Preservation of neighborhoods
- Potential station-oriented development
- Providing direct routes
- Serving low income communities

Potential constraints include:

- Engineering design and construction issues
- Neighborhood opposition
- Impact on natural and cultural resources

6. Financial Feasibility

Federal funds will likely be required to build any MetroLink extension in Madison County. The financial analysis assumed Federal participation of 50% of the construction cost.

To obtain the Federal participation required to advance light rail in Madison County, there will need to be a plan that shows how the region can afford to build, operate and maintain a MetroLink extension, while continuing to operate and maintain the existing transit system. It seems likely a significant new source of funding would be required for any of the options beyond just Federal. Further, there would be competing demands for any new revenues. A funding plan would have to take these demands into account.

In summary, the following conditions must be met in order for a Madison County MetroLink extension to be considered financially feasible:

- A much more robust state/local funding commitment for both capital and operating costs would need to be in place to compete for Federal funds.
- The ultimate Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) would need to compete with other projects nationally for Federal funds, when evaluated pursuant to the FTA evaluation criteria in effect at such time. The severity of the competition will depend on the quality of other projects being proposed, as well as the size of the Federal program. At this juncture, there is no way to predict whether any of the identified alternatives would successfully compete for Federal funds. However, based on a cursory analysis, one or more of the options may be successful.
- A significant increase in State of Illinois funding for transit in Madison County would be required under all of the funding scenarios. Currently, the State provides approximately \$7 million annually in operating assistance to MCT. For a Madison County MetroLink extension, the amount of the capital contribution from the State ranges from \$18-182 million, depending on the option and the funding scenario. Similarly, the annual operating and maintenance funding requirement from the State varies, from \$250,000-2.5 million.
- Without an unexpected level of funding from the State of Illinois, an increase in the sales tax in Madison County would most likely be required. The analysis shows an additional local sales tax levy (or equivalent) would be required to cover initial capital and operational costs. Further, a one-quarter cent levy would be sufficient only in the case of the minimum build option. The moderate and full build options would require an increase ranging from just over one-quarter cent to three-quarter cent.

7. Next Step

Should Madison County decide to pursue light rail service, the next logical step would be the completion of an Alternatives Analysis and Draft Environmental Document. This would be required to determine a LPA and apply for “New Starts” Federal funds.