



Mitigation Working Group Meeting #1

May 10, 2016, 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm

Perkins Square Baptist Church

Meeting Summary

Attendees

Matthew A. Henson Community Association	Marvin Cheatham
Mt. Royal Improvement Association	Steve Howard, Michael Marcus
Residents Against the Tunnels (RATT)	Soledad Salame, Laura Amlie
Reservoir Hill Historic District/Reservoir Hill Improvement Council	Rick Gwynallen
Western District Community Relations Council	Inez Robb
Whitelock Community Farm	Justin Kuk
Midtown/Edmondson	Ray Baylor
Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)	Michelle Fishburne
Amtrak	Amrita Hill
Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT)	Jaqueline Thorne
Baltimore City Consultant, Assedo	Odessa Phillip
Amtrak NEPA Consultant, RK&K	Henry Kay
Amtrak NEPA Consultant, RCI	Melissa Bogdan

Meeting Purpose

Odessa and Henry opened the meeting. The purpose of this and future Mitigation Working Group meetings is to identify potential mitigation measures for the proposed B&P Tunnel Project.

Introductions

The project team staff members introduced themselves. Community participants introduced themselves and the communities they represent, and described their interest in the mitigation discussion. The following concerns were raised:

- Construction and operation of the tunnel might damage homes and community facilities, including schools. Vibration from trucks and buses is already a problem.
- Alternative locations for the intermediate ventilation plant are adjacent to John Eager Howard Elementary School. Exhaust from the vent plant either on a daily basis or during a fire emergency could create health effects for children.
- Reuse of the old tunnel should be considered.
- The project should provide local jobs.
- The project should consider an alternative alignment developed by the MTA Citizens Advisory Council. This alternative would not cause impacts to any neighborhoods, and would consolidate freight and passenger rail. Michelle reported that the Federal Railroad Administration is preparing a response to the CAC, and the alternative is not consistent with the project purpose and need because it would not serve Penn Station.



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- Night time train horn blasts are already disruptive.
 - The project would “industrialize” the neighborhood in a manner that that zoning would not otherwise allow.
 - More freight trains, including trains with hazardous cargo, could be an unintended consequence of the project. Michelle explained that the B&P Tunnel would be designed and intended for passenger rail, but whenever you make an improvement to transportation infrastructure you do not preclude the widest range of uses. The interstate commerce clause of the Constitution has been interpreted to mean freight railroads are entitled to use the Northeast Corridor now and in the future.
 - The project should consider the findings of two reports on health disparities in Baltimore City by Johns Hopkins University. Why do we continue to put more problems on communities that are already suffering?
 - Improved transit is necessary, but the state’s decision to cancel the Red Line took away something positive for the neighborhood. The development of the Red Line would have helped bring back these neighborhoods, and now there will be more trains that will be coming through that are of no use to the community.

Project Overview

Odessa and Henry provided an overview of the project. The study will evaluate environmental impacts as well as to collect input from the community. There were 16 alternatives including the No Build alternative. The project looked at a variety of alternatives with the intent that the more alternatives that you look at, the better sense you have of things to try to minimize and avoid. This requires a full team working on each individual piece. A separate team is looking at the feasibility of alternatives from an engineering standpoint. A Final Environmental Impact Statement, including a mitigation measures, will be published this fall to be followed by a Record of Decision in spring 2017. The Record of Decision including mitigation measures that must be implemented along with the project.

Mitigation Measures Brainstorm

Michelle characterized FRA’s perspective on mitigation. FRA does not want the community to bear the burden of a project and would like to leave the community better off than it was before the project. She encouraged the community participants to think broadly and go beyond typical mitigation. The process of determining feasibility from the standpoint of affordability, reasonableness, legality, and practicality would come later. Henry said the rest of the meeting would be an opening brainstorming session with ideas grouped into categories. The project team is already working with regulatory and resource agencies, but we need a community perspective. Community participants provided specific ideas about mitigation in categories as follows:

Risks Associated with Freight Trains

- Establish restrictions on cargo travelling through the tunnel (type and frequency)
- Establish operating windows that reflect community routines and events
- Ensure proactive management of fire emergencies

Air Quality

- Restrict use of diesel locomotives through tunnel
- Filter tunnel air exhausted from the vent plant



Vent Plant

- Create joint community use for physical facility – i.e. the structure is dual purpose such as residential, shopping, museum, job training or community center

Construction

- Use barriers during construction to prevent people from entering construction zones
- Maintain pedestrian movement around work sites during project construction
- Place burden of proving damage to property on project rather than property owner by providing an advocate or legal services to homeowner
- Conduct pre-construction surveys of homes and businesses to provide the basis for establishing damage claims

Community Betterment

- Upgrade street lighting in communities to address safety and visibility concerns
- Secure old tunnel so access is restricted to authorized personnel only
- Redevelop the existing tunnel for community use
- Provide a home price guarantee to protect homeowner from property devaluation
- Improve bike access to West Baltimore MARC and Penn Station to promote rail commuting and travel
- Provide grants and low interest loans for rehabilitation and upgrades to homes in project area
- Fund upgrades to homes for elderly and disabled citizens
- Upgrade and improve existing sporting fields in the community
- Invest in park facilities and their maintenance
- Promote community health initiatives that address the health disparities in the community such as access to greenspace, exercise programs, access to healthy food

Job Opportunities

- Create local employment opportunities by redeveloping old industrial sites
- Create pathways to skills and trades for local community (training)
- Use local job training institutions such as Carver Vocational High School

Miscellaneous

- Preserve archeological findings discovered during construction and display in the community
- Develop the existing tunnel a community use facility
- Measure and report value of community input, time and effort into process

Next Steps/Assignments

The meeting notes will be distributed to participants and posted on the project website. Community participants are welcome to identify other possible organizations to be included in these meetings, share meeting notes with your respective organizations and gather feedback, and find examples where ideas have been implemented and bring to the group. The next meeting will be Tuesday, May 31 at Perkins Square Baptist Church from 6:30 to 8 PM. There will be a newcomers briefing from 5 to 6:30 PM.