

## SIERRA CLUB – SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN GROUP

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Re; Ann Arbor to Detroit Rapid Transit Study

The Sierra Club both nationally and locally has a long history of promoting public transit for the obvious reasons of reducing air pollutants, global warming gasses, urban sprawl, protecting human health and enhancing the quality of life. Therefore, we would like to offer our views on what we think would be the most practical and successful alternative to carry forward.

We would choose Commuter Rail Transit alternative 01 (CRT01) using the Norfolk Southern Michigan Line that is currently in use for Amtrak passenger service and some freight service between Ann Arbor and Detroit. Commuter Rail is the most environmentally preferable because it has the lowest pollution and energy use per passenger mile. As stated in the study document, it is the least costly because of the existing right of way, faster travel time and would be the quickest to implement. This will be most important when it comes time to ask for public funds. However, we believe that certain criteria must be followed for this option to be a success.

1. **There must be a downtown terminal.** The proposal to terminate at the Amtrak station in Detroit would compromise the whole project. The Amtrak station is 3-4 miles from downtown. The Amtrak station is a good transfer point to access light rail or rapid bus for north and south on Woodward. Light rail or BRT timed to arrival and departures would be a good connection to the universities, hospitals, museums, restaurants and entertainment south on Woodward and eventually arriving downtown. However, we don't believe that a majority of commuters to downtown would want to change modes and endure a slower on-street route with multiple stops to reach their downtown destination. Therefore, in addition to a Woodward Ave. connection, we would recommend the extension of the route through the Dequindre Cut as shown in option CRT01C to terminate as close as possible to the east side of the RenCen complex on the east riverfront. A big advantage for the Dequindre Cut is that most of the route is below grade with no major road crossings. Even with the new bike path being built, space has been set aside for at least one or more tracks. As the route exits the cut, perhaps one of the streets such as Woodbridge or Franklin could be closed off for trains to get as close to downtown as possible.

2. If the right of way cannot be extended towards the RenCen, a secondary choice for a station would be where the Dequindre Cut goes under Jefferson Ave. at the present Vigliotti Building. This would position a station at least closer to downtown at little less than  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles from the East Tower of the RenCen. Potential developers, the Riverfront Conservancy, and the City of Detroit should be aware that rail transit will further enhance the riverfront revival as that area will be an attractive destination.

Earlier, the Dequindre Cut was used by commuter trains under SEMTA that ran from Pontiac, Birmingham, Royal Oak, Ferndale, and Highland Park to the east side of the RenCen on the Grand Trunk Western right of way. The present State of Michigan roadmap still shows this

line in the downtown Detroit insert. The service was abandoned in 1983. But most of the right of way and some rails are still there. Extending the Ann Arbor route through the cut could serve as a basis for renewed service along this same GTW route to Oakland County.

3. **Park and ride lots.** The success of the SMART park and ride lots would indicate that this concept should be available to the rail commuter. There should be easy access to the rail line for those that begin their journey in a car. The downtown Ann Arbor Amtrak station is in a congested area with inconvenient access to the local expressways and parking. Our suggestion would be to construct a stop near Dixboro Rd. which is about ½ mile from the Geddes Rd. exit on US23. The recent upgrade to this exit and the new Dixboro bridge makes for easy access and there seems to be room at this location. This would also be near the Washtenaw Community College Campus. Another possibility is a park and ride along the US12 connector between Michigan Ave. and I-94. This is also near the Willow Run GM Plant and the Willow Run Airport. Another good location would be where I-275 crosses over the rail line near Michigan Ave. There is already an exit at Michigan Ave.

4. **Airport stop.**

Many of the news articles describe this project as a downtown to airport transit. But the configuration of the present routes would make direct service to each terminal at the airport very costly and then you would lose travel time between Ann Arbor and Detroit no matter what method is chosen. The idea of having timed shuttles between the three airport terminals and a station stop on Merriman Rd. makes the most sense. Some people would point out that you wouldn't want to change modes with luggage in hand, but people who park at the airport have to take a shuttle to their terminal anyway.

4. **More stations than proposed.**

More stations near activity centers could be implemented without compromising travel time. Perhaps there could be express trains along with local service at peak times to cover more stops. The six daily Amtrak trains cover the 38 mile route from Detroit to Ann Arbor in less than one hour even with stops in Dearborn and Greenfield Village. The route from Detroit to the west side of Dearborn (about 9 miles) is virtually free of grade crossings thereby conducive to high speed use if track, interlocking and signals can be improved. The route is mostly free from mainline freight service west of Dearborn. This line is only single track for part of the route and may have to be double tracked. We propose the following stations or stops to take advantage of the proximity of activity that could increase ridership.

Ann Arbor Amtrak station; Close to downtown and University of Michigan and hospitals.

Dixboro Park and Ride; Close to US23 and WCCC.

Eastern Michigan Univ.; The route borders the north side of EMU.

Ypsilanti Depot Town, Activity center and close to downtown- it looks like parking is available at the freight house or the presently abandoned station.

US12/I-94 Park and Ride near Willow Run GM plant and Willow Run Airport

I-275 Park and Ride; Near the booming communities of Canton, Westland and Belleville.

Airport; Merriman Rd. would serve the three airport terminals approx. 3-4miles distant via timed shuttles and also could serve as the stop for Inkster, Wayne and Westland.

Greenfield Village; Major tourist destination also near west Dearborn and U of M Dearborn Campus, Henry Ford Community College, Fairlane Town Center. This is already a stop for Amtrak and was proposed for a new future intermodal station for Dearborn.

Dearborn Amtrak station; Can connect to intercity trains, also east Dearborn and Ford World HQ. There is plenty of free parking. Close to Michigan Avenue busses.

Detroit Amtrak station; Near the New Center business district, Fisher Building, Wayne State University, museums and entertainment. Connect on Woodward Ave. to downtown and north to Highland Park/Hamtramck and northern suburbs.

Eastern Market; The market is undergoing a rehabilitation that will be a major destination especially during the growing season and special events.

Downtown Detroit on the east riverfront; close to the GM HQ at the RenCen and downtown, state park, riverwalk and hiking -biking trail, and other east river front activity and can be accessed from the east on Jefferson Ave.

Providing more stops at these locations would offset the disadvantages for CRT1 that is pointed to in the study. The locations for these stations or stops provide more access to employment, school, downtown Central Business Districts and entertainment. If this option is adopted, we feel that it should be done in a first class manner so that this project will be a prime economic stimulus around the fixed stations and to encourage more comprehensive transit options to the entire metropolitan area. The station locations must be convenient and clean with attractive landscaping and architecture. There should be free parking to attract the most ridership. There should also be special accommodation for bicycle storage such as in Europe. It would also be most efficient to have room on the train for bicycles. This would be especially attractive for students and young people. The rolling stock must be attractive and have the latest pollution control technology. There must be frequent and reliable service. The fare should be economical. It must integrate well with Woodward corridor transit plans that will be built to the north side of Detroit and Oakland Co.

The accompanying map that was published in the Detroit News showing job sprawl was used as their argument against the project; but it really should be interpreted as a good visual argument for the project. As you can see the proposed route would connect three out of four of the most concentrations of jobs in the metro area. If this project is implemented, we will be well on our way to the revival of the whole region.

Thank you for taking the time to review our comments, the enclosed maps and photo tour of the Dequindre Cut.

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