

August 28, 2009

The Honorable David Cieslewicz
Mayor
City of Madison

Dear Mayor Cieslewicz:

The excitement is building as Madison officials and staff work to bring high-speed Amtrak service to Madison. In full support of this effort, a group of interested individuals and organizations has been meeting to discuss the location of Madison's new passenger rail station. The Dane Alliance for Rational Transportation and members of the City of Madison Downtown Coordinating Committee are advocating a new concept that proposes to locate this important transit facility near the intersection of First St. and E. Washington Ave. The concept is known as Yahara Station, referring to the proposed location immediately north of the Yahara River at Burr Jones Field.

Members of our group, and many other interested citizens of Madison, are excited by the potential at this location, with the following a short list of the advantages we see for Yahara Station:

- A location adjacent to mainline track, which does not require regional trains to traverse the difficult isthmus geography, and is covered by the same conclusions as the existing environmental documentation,.
- Quick access to Madison's central business district; only 1.7 miles from the capitol versus 5.1 miles, or three times the distance, from a station at the airport.
- An urban context that offers excellent access to the station from non-polluting modes, including pedestrians in surrounding neighborhoods and bicyclists traveling on an extensive network of trails and bike routes.
- True multi-modal opportunities that serve residents and visitors to Madison, including transfers available to 14 Metro Transit bus routes operating on E. Johnson and E. Washington, inexpensive taxi rides to the Capitol and UW, potential for cross-platform transfers to the proposed Dane County rail transit, and potential for a combined train depot parking garage and intercity bus depot on First Street. We strongly favor Yahara Station as a multi-modal transfer facility, and do not believe that the concept of plane-to-train transfers at the DCRA offers much utility, because such transfers will not serve any trips to destinations in the city of Madison or residents of Madison, given that the first stop on the Amtrak service leaving the DCRA will be in Watertown.
- Exciting redevelopment and infill opportunities in the East Washington corridor, with the potential to use an existing TIF district to help fund development of a first-class train depot, structured parking, and other infrastructure improvements. We believe that the potential for private investment within walking distance of Yahara Station is an unparalleled opportunity for the City, County, and State to advance economic development in Madison's downtown, and link our downtown business community to downtown Milwaukee and Chicago's Loop.
- A recent vote by the Tenney-Lapham Neighborhood Association Board in full support of bringing Amtrak to the Yahara Station site, and the potential for this train station to act as a catalyst for implementing the City's East Washington Gateway Corridor Plan.

The Campaign for Yahara Station is asking our elected representatives and leaders of the Madison community to explore the Yahara Station PDF presentation, and the attached supporting evaluation of environmental and service issues, and consider with us the steps needed to advance the Yahara Station concept. We believe that looking at Yahara Station at this time will help support Wisconsin's application for federal funding for the Milwaukee-to-Madison rail corridor, specifically because of the DOT's new focus on livable communities.

Indeed, Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood has made promotion of walkable, bikable livable communities, a center piece of federal transportation policy, testifying to the Senate that: "Multi-modal transportation combined with mixed-use development and smart community planning are important issues to address when we consider transportation's role in climate change."

And writing in his official blog on March 18, 2009:

"Fostering livable communities is a key aspect of President Obama's urban policy agenda Therefore, one of my highest priorities is to work closely with Congress, other Federal departments, the nation's governors, and local officials to help promote more livable communities through sustainable surface transportation programs."

The Federal Register, from June 23, 2009, provides a clear definition of livable communities, specifically as one of the criteria for evaluating high-speed rail project applications in terms of their proposed station locations:

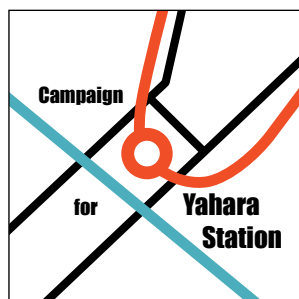
" • Promoting livable communities, including integration with existing high density, livable development (e.g., central business districts with public transportation, pedestrian, and bicycle distribution networks, and incorporation of transit-oriented development)." (Sec. 5.1.1.3)

Yahara Station meets the challenge of fostering livable communities, and will score higher points than a station at the airport on the criteria that Secretary LaHood will be using as he reviews high-speed rail project applications.

Our growing group of Yahara Station supporters welcomes your interest and any opportunity to address issues that may be raised by you or your agency staff. Further information, and the full Yahara Station PDF available for download, can be found at the DART website: www.rationaltransportation.org.

Thank you for your time. We look forward to continuing this discussion with you.

Sincerely,



Fred Bartol
Barry Gore
Patrick McDonnell
Tom Miller
Noel Radomski
Sarah Reiter
Mary Lang Sollinger
Troy Thiel

Yahara Station and the Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

The EA's FONSI (page 6) states that: "It should be noted that while the EA evaluated initial station locations, local communities may choose an alternative station site when the project is implemented. Alternative station sites would be subject to NEPA review. If local communities select the station site identified in the EA, then the EA would be reevaluated for those sites."

The following points consider how the proposed location for Yahara Station relates to the existing EA, and identifies issues to be addressed in an addendum to the project documents:

- Yahara Station is on the same, existing mainline track owned by WSOR as evaluated for the airport and Pennsylvania Ave. stations.
- The existing railroad right of way between E. Washington Ave. and E. Johnson St. is 100 feet wide. Reconstruction of the mainline track for the overall project provides an opportunity to move the existing track further north in the right of way, thereby adding to the space available in the right of way to build the siding track and platform for Yahara Station without taking any parkland. Or, conversely, the new tangent siding track could be located to the inside of the existing curved track, providing for straightforward switching and no impacts to parkland; however this Option B (graphic available on request) takes some potential redevelopment land and has a less direct transfer to the local train station platform.
- If Yahara Station is accommodated without taking any parkland from Burr Jones Field, then all of the evaluation in the existing EA, and its finding of no significant impact, also hold for Yahara Station.
- The Yahara Station concept proposes to locate station parking to the north of the mainline on City property, or a combination of shared parking with the privately owned property at the corner of First St. and E. Washington, as part of a station area redevelopment project. The Yahara Station concept does not propose that relocation of City fleet services be part of the WisDOT project; rather the costs of this relocation would be covered by other funds, with the potential for private investment in station development, including a structured parking garage, as part of a larger redevelopment project.
- The EA estimates a demand for 340 parking spaces for the Pennsylvania Ave. station, and there are opportunities for developing that number of spaces in the immediate vicinity of Yahara Station, including property at the WSOR (Wisconsin & Southern Railroad) yard directly across E. Johnson St, if needed as an interim parking lot prior to, or during, redevelopment of the City fleet services property. This configuration would be similar to that of Amtrak parking at the downtown Milwaukee station. The concept does not propose to locate station parking on Burr Jones Field property; but would impact current parking for the park which is located in the railroad right of way.

If project designers find that it is of benefit to the overall station development project that a small amount of property be taken from Burr Jones Field, ***then*** the additional issues discussed below would need to be evaluated in an addendum to the EA. None of these potential small-scale impacts change the overall finding of no significant impact.

1. Section 4(f)

Federal transportation projects that take parkland are evaluated under Section 4(f). The law states that federal project managers must get permission from the local jurisdiction to take any parkland. The Madison City Council would be responsible for approving or disallowing the taking.

2. Section 6(f)

A check of online records shows no evidence of federal funds being used to develop Burr Jones Field as a park, therefore, there are no Section 6(f) impacts.

3. Deed restriction on Burr Jones Field property.

City of Madison staff claim that the deed for Burr Jones Field includes a deed restriction limiting use of Burr Jones Field property to park uses. WisDOT and the City of Madison could undertake an eminent domain taking of the affected property at Burr Jones for this important transportation project. Such a taking is within the legal rights of the state, in this case to clear the deed of restrictions placed on it by prior property owners, for property that the City already owns.

4. Historic or Cultural Resources

The Yahara River Parkway was designated a historic landmark by the City of Madison in 1995 and the EA says it is on the National Register or Historic Places. Burr Jones Field may, or may not, be part of that designation; the existing EA addresses the Yahara River Parkway and Burr Jones Field separately. The City Council controls any restrictions that landmark designation may entail, and has final say on any changes to the park.

5. City of Madison Ordinance, Sec. 8.35 Preservation Of Shoreline Parks.

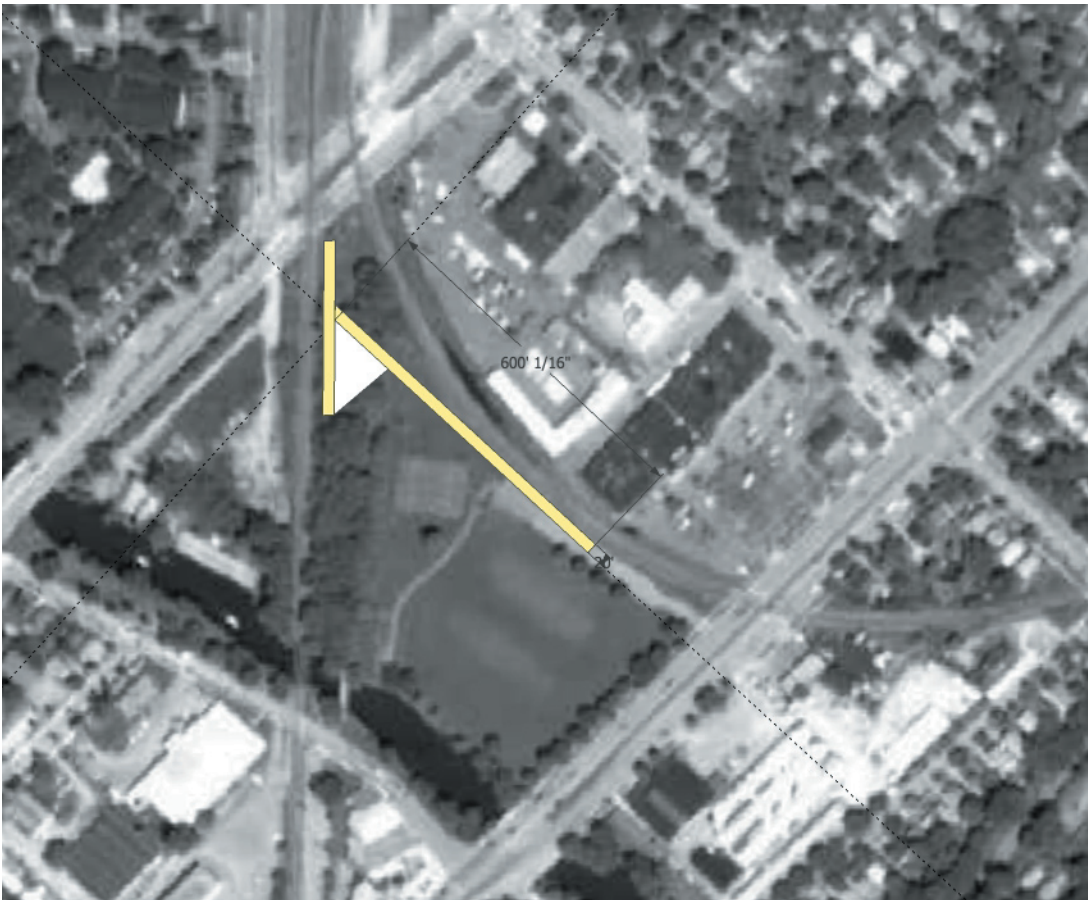
Taking land from Burr Jones Field *may* trigger the 'shoreland preservation ordinance' requiring a public referendum on the project. However, a project implemented by the State of Wisconsin with a clear public purpose may over rule an ordinance of the City of Madison.

Reevaluation of environmental impacts for DCRA site

As noted in the FONSI on page 6, as stated above, locating the Amtrak station at the Dane County Regional Airport will also require a "reevaluation" of impacts at that site. Letters in the FONSI from the DNR (August 29, 2001) and the Dane County RPC (July 27, 2001) point out that the EA does not fully address the presence of wetlands at the proposed station site at the airport. Additional evaluation of impacts to wetlands for the airport site will be needed, including mitigation of wetland loss. In addition, it is not clear if the final design will accommodate a siding track for the station, or if the platform and station design will accommodate future development of a Dane County Transport 2020 rail transit station. If the final design of the WisDOT project does not accommodate a transfer to the Dane County rail transit, then the station would need to be reconstructed at a future date to allow transfers to that local train system.

Environmental assessment beyond NEPA: Carbon pollution and climate change.

NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) was signed in 1970 and does not require evaluation of impacts in regard to climate change. The existing EA provides some calculation of energy use, but this energy evaluation does not include an assessment or ranking of station locations in relation to access mode. Development of Madison's Amtrak station at the DCRA will require a majority of train patrons to drive in private vehicles to the airport and park; while at Yahara Station access by other less polluting modes, such as walking, bicycle, and bus, are much more likely. Yahara Station is superior to DCRA in the most important criteria for evaluation in the 21st century: impacts related to carbon pollution and climate change.



Without access to computerized engineering and survey files, the Yahara Station design analysis utilizes a scaled drawing produced with Sketchup and an imported Google Earth aerial photo map. The proposed 600 foot platform is what the project EA calls for, fitting within the 950 foot block between E. Johnson and E. Washington Ave. Only the passenger coaches need be on the tangent track to ensure safe boarding; the locomotives on both ends of the train could extend to the curved track sections if, at some future time, train sets are longer than 600 feet. The site could perhaps accommodate a total train length of 900 feet.



Dane County aerial photo with parcel lines and a rough simulation of track and 20' platform superimposed over the proposed Yahara Station site.

Note the tangent (straight) track and platform may overlap with a small area of parkland in the sharp triangle of land in the northwest corner of Burr Jones Field.

However, the mainline track will also be rebuilt with welded track and new ties, therefore the radius of the curve or the position of the mainline track could be adjusted within the 100 feet of railroad right of way to create more room for the siding track and platform, thereby avoiding any need to acquire parkland for Yahara Station.

Advantages of Yahara Station over the Dane County airport

The Yahara Station concept offers many advantages over the airport which are summarized in the table below:

Evaluation of Access Modes		
	Yahara Station	Dane County Airport Station
Pedestrian access	Yes. Good access from surrounding streets, including walking distance to Tenney-Lapham, Emerson, and Williamson neighborhoods, and Schenks Corners.	None. Lack of consistent sidewalks, International Drive is the only access street, and Cherokee Marsh precludes access from all four directions.
Bicycle access	Yes. Excellent access via the Yahara River trail, connecting to the Isthmus Trail. Designated bike route on Mifflin St. and bike lanes on E. Washington.	Very difficult, no trails or designated bike routes. No street grid connections.
Taxi service	Easy access to capitol square on E. Washington with low fares for the 1.6 mile trip, and to the UW on E.. Johnson /Gorham.	Taxi stand at airport, but 5.2 miles from the capitol square causing typical fares over \$12.
Bus access	Madison Metro operates 14 routes on E. Johnson (5) and E. Washington (9) that have existing stops near First St.	Madison Metro operates one (1) bus route to the DCRA, and that bus (#20) requires a transfer from all downtown buses at the North Transfer Point.
Drop off by private vehicle	Good connections to the street network make drop offs relatively easy for most patrons	The location on the extreme north side requires extra travel for drop offs or pick ups from the train station, for most patrons.
Park and ride	Lower parking demand with good access by other modes. Potential for vehicle parking in the immediate vicinity. Development of Yahara Station would begin with relocation of City Fleet Services and creation of surface parking on that site. Private investment would include a parking structure for shared use.	Yes. Existing, overflow parking is available at DCRA. The lack of access via pedestrian, bicycle, or bus will require a large parking lot for most Amtrak patrons.

Evaluation of Travel Time and Impacts on the Transportation System		
	Yahara Station	Dane County Airport Station
Travel Time	Stopping trains at Yahara Station will shorten trips from Milwaukee by 3.5 miles. Riders will be closer to downtown destinations by the 3.5 miles distance between Yahara Station and DCRA.	DCRA is 3.5 miles further distant from the capitol square than Yahara Station and will require train riders from Milwaukee to retrace the distance from the airport back to First St. once they exit the train.
Connection to future commuter or light rail	Cross-platform transfer to Dane County rail is part of the design, which utilizes close proximity between the Amtrak platform and an existing freight railroad corridor and bridge over the Yahara River. Travel times on the light rail would be shorter than a trip from the airport.	A siding track will need to be built at the airport station to allow for easy transfers to the proposed Dane County diesel light rail. If this siding is not constructed at the time of the Amtrak station, then the station will need to be reconfigured when the Dane train is funded.

Evaluation of Economic Development Potential in terms of Redevelopment and Infill		
	Yahara Station	Dane County Airport Station
Redevelopment Potential	<p>Very high. Yahara Station has the potential to act as a catalyst for major redevelopment on the east isthmus, and supports the goals of the Capitol Gateway Corridor Plan. The City Fleet Services site would become a prime redevelopment opportunity. The strip mall at the corner of First St. and E. Washington could be redeveloped as a major mixed-use node, with office, commercial, and residential space adjacent to regional rail service.</p> <p>Other property on E. Washington would also become valuable redevelopment sites within a five to ten minute walk of the regional train station.</p>	None.
Infill potential	<p>Very high. There are a number of sites with infill development potential within the half-mile walk circle of Yahara Station, including on E. Washington, E. Mifflin, and in the Schneks' Corners area.</p>	<p>Little to none. The DCRA is located within the bigger Cherokee Marsh, which is not suitable for development. In addition, strict building height limits are enforced within three miles of the airport.</p>
Potential for private investment in depot development and existing TIF districts	<p>The City Fleet Services site could be sold to private investors and the revenue (minus relocation costs) used to develop a high quality train depot. Most of the properties shown in the Yahara Station concept plan are within an existing TIF district which could be used to share the costs of structured parking with private developers.</p>	None.

Evaluation of Costs		
	Yahara Station	Dane County Airport Station
Track reconstruction	<p>If the project stops at Yahara Station, this first phase project will not require reconstruction of the additional 3.5 miles to the DCRA, with a potential savings of over \$10 million.</p> <p>Addition of siding track has a cost.</p>	<p>Includes the cost of the additional 3.5 miles of track reconstruction. The second phase project to St. Paul, MN would still require this track work so any savings are temporary only.</p> <p>If no siding track is added then no transfer to the future Dane train are possible.</p>
Station development	<p>WisDOT costs for the platform will be the same at Yahara Station. Parking costs may initially be higher, but private investment in parking lots could lower costs to the public. Cost of developing a real multimodal facility, including a first rate train depot could be paid for through an agreement with private investors and TIF.</p>	<p>Poor soils at DCRA may increase the cost of platform construction, including costs of wetland mitigation.</p> <p>No private investment is likely in the station development. Madison will not have a train depot, only a platform with a canopy, shelter, and parking lot.</p>