

## FACTS ABOUT THE FULLER ROAD STATION

As you may have heard, the City of Ann Arbor is considering whether to invest with the University of Michigan and the Federal Government in a multi-modal transportation facility on Fuller Road – the Fuller Road Station (FRS). I write today to give you some important background information. Key points covered will include:

- What is Fuller Road Station
- How will FRS be funded
- Will it impact General Fund activities like Police and Fire
- High Speed Rail in Michigan
- Amtrak
- Commuter Rail
- Transit Oriented Development
- Is this the very best location for a Multi-Modal Station
- Will Fuller Road Station bring more cars into the city
- History of the land
- What's in it for Ann Arbor Residents

### WHAT IS FULLER ROAD STATION?

FRS is a multi-modal auto, train, bus, walking and biking facility proposed for the south side of Fuller Road where a paved parking lot sits close by the east-west rail line. The site is across the road from the City's pool and soccer complex on the north side of Fuller. It will serve the park and facilitate job growth at one of the fastest growing employment centers in our region, the University of Michigan Health Center, where 24,000 people go every day. It will also serve Downtown Ann Arbor, Central and North Campus, etc.

Fuller Road Station is an excellent example of intergovernmental cooperation. A broad based partnership is forming between AMTRAK, MDOT, the Federal Rail Administration, AATA, the UM and the City.

### HOW WILL FRS BE FUNDED?

Although the University of Michigan and the City of Ann Arbor will share usage of the parking structure/bus station portion, the University will pay almost all upfront costs to construct Phase 1 of the Fuller Road Station. Under the plan that is still being worked out, the City will own FRS and the City's portion of the costs will be made up over time from funds generated by parking spaces.

The financing plan will not impact the City's ability to pay salaries in Police and Fire or fund parks, etc. Besides some utility upgrades (non-general fund) that will improve service for 40,000 residents along with service to Fuller Pool and will also assist the project, the city will not be putting any money upfront except for funds from the economic development fund that went to pay for the environmental study. The study is required in order to be eligible for federal funding. This expenditure should be eligible for refund using a portion of the \$2.8 million federal award for FRS announced on May 9.

A big advantage of the financing plan for the overall community is that the University's upfront contributions can meet the required local match for federal funding for the entire rail station. The first stage of Federal Funding for construction of Phase 2, the rail station, was recently announced.

The Fuller Road Station, Phases I and II can be built without any significant upfront cost to the City.

## HIGHER SPEED RAIL IS COMING TO MICHIGAN.

On Monday May 9, 2011 United States Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood joined the Governor, both of Michigan's U.S. Senators and Congressman Dingell to announce that an additional \$196 million is coming to Michigan for rail projects. Included in this is the first stage of funding for a new train station on Fuller Road. (\$2.8 million) This comes on top of the previously announced \$165 million in rail money for MDOT and well over \$40 million for other station projects in Michigan. (\$400 million total)

The new train station on Fuller is part of the Federal Rail Administration's overall upgrade of stations, tracks and trains for better service and faster Amtrak trains (110 MPH) along the Detroit to Chicago High Speed Corridor. The new station in Dearborn is about to begin construction and Battle Creek's station is being significantly upgraded along with the stations in Pontiac and Grand Rapids (all receiving federal funds). Amtrak will be buying new cars and engines (made in the US) for its Midwestern routes. This is the most exciting time for rail in Michigan in over 100 years.

On July 8<sup>th</sup> I received a letter reaffirming AMTRAK's support of the Fuller Rd. Station project. The letter notes that their "formal support" goes back to mid 2010 and adds: "This would replace the existing AMTRAK station at Ann Arbor for intercity passenger rail service." The letter goes on to say, "A new station facility at Ann Arbor would represent a significant improvement for the high speed corridor." And, it will "complement other track and station improvements planned or under way on the corridor." Amtrak train ridership has "shown a steady and significant growth over the past several years." According to AMTRAK's ridership numbers Ann Arbor is the busiest rail stop in Michigan.

Along with the complete upgrade of the rail line for higher speed rail included in the new federal funding, "two track" will be installed at the Fuller site (as well as other areas along the corridor) so the commuter and Amtrak trains can pass. The fully built plan will include an over-the-tracks walkway right into the Medical Center.

## THE COMMUTER RAIL PROJECT IS FARTHER ALONG THAN MOST PEOPLE REALIZE.

MDOT has a train (see photo attachment) for a commuter rail line running from Ann Arbor to Ypsilanti, Metro Airport, Dearborn and Detroit where it would link with the new Woodward Line. The most significant hurdle for this project has been over \$30 million in track and crossing upgrades but the improvements for higher speed AMTRAK service included in the federal award will correct the problems along the line while adding more "two track" areas for the commuter and Amtrak trains to pass.

## TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT (TOD)

It is a subject onto itself but TOD is a phenomenon experienced in regions with commuter and light rail that will be a significant bonus to our region. In other parts of the nation new commuter or light rail stops have proven to generate \$6 to \$8 in private sector investment for every \$1 of public investment as people move in to be closer to the rail stop. Approximately 4,000 UM employees have an Ypsilanti zip code. Ypsilanti leaders believe that not long after the commuter rail starts, hundreds of people will move to be within walking/biking distance of a station that will deliver them to work in 10 minutes. The most obvious site for transit oriented development in A2 is the Lowertown site on Broadway that currently sits vacant. With an active rail stop 10 minutes walk away this site will be a prime candidate for residential and mixed-use development.

## IS THIS THE VERY BEST LOCATION FOR A MULTI-MODAL STATION?

The transportation professionals at MDOT, WATS and the City's own expert on alternative transportation, including rail, agree the Fuller Rd. site is the very best location for a station in Washtenaw County, if not SE Michigan. This is because 24,000 people go to the Medical Complex every day; 18,000 employees and 6,000 visitors and patients. The site is just a hop and a skip from North or Central Campus, Downtown A2, etc. Approximately 68,000 workers travel by car into Ann Arbor every day, a good portion of them to locations easily reached on foot, by bicycle or shuttle bus from this site. FRS will also provide additional parking for Fuller Park, and better access to the Border-to-Border Trail system of connected parks.

The medical center is one of the fastest growing and most intense employment centers in our region with 500 new jobs being added this year alone. It is a huge contributor both to the health of our residents and the local economy.

With ridership going up the existing Depot St. rail station is nearing capacity for AMTRAK alone. The Depot station, in a cramped site, no matter how it is reconfigured, would be inadequate for expanded higher speed Amtrak service and commuter rail. One reason is because of the heavy, in and outbound hospital traffic on Depot each morning and late afternoon. Buses taking commuters back and forth to the Medical Center, Plymouth Rd. Corridor, etc., would be caught in the same traffic adding 15 minutes to the commute. To be successful, commuter rail needs to be accessible, efficient and easy for all users.

#### WILL THE PARKING STRUCTURE BRING MORE CARS INTO THE CITY?

According to the UM there is a great need for more parking as the medical center grows. But, it is important to note that the parking component at FRS does **not** represent a net increase in parking spaces for commuters. If not for the FRS plan, the UM would now be pushing forward with their plan for two new parking structures on Wall Street along with a new bus terminal. But of course their plan did not include rail infrastructure and more people would still need a bus to get from the new structures to work. Note that the University attempts to provide parking for only 50% of their 40,000 employees.

The commuter rail component of the project will significantly reduce automobile travel to and from our city, especially since the UM has offered to buy a rail pass for any employee who rides the train to work. The UM will pay full price the first year, ½ in the second and 1/3 in the third. The current discussion is that this would continue into the future. About 35,000 workers leave Ann Arbor each day, many of them headed to the east. FRS will open new options for A2 commuters, airport users and travelers.

Traffic engineers have reviewed the plans for FRS time and time again.

They indicate that a fully implemented FRS will not harm traffic flows on Fuller Road, and that after long planned, federally funded, intersection improvements are completed, traffic flow should improve substantially.

#### HISTORY OF THE LAND

As with any parcel, there is some history with this land. At one time it was an open playing field and it remains part of the parks system. Back in the early 1990's the City of Ann Arbor was putting in a new road near the VA Hospital. It was scheduled to go through a natural forest and it would have required cutting down many landmark burr oak trees, the symbol of our city. Residents objected to the removal of the old oaks.

The Parks Commission and City Council were able to work out an agreement with the UM so the natural area and the old oaks could be saved. The UM granted an easement on a parcel of their land

for the road to go through in exchange for the City agreeing to the joint-use parking lot currently on the proposed site of FRS.

A 15 year lease with subsequent 5 year renewals was agreed on and the UM paved the lot. It has now been a paved parking lot for nearly 20 years with revenues going to Ann Arbor's parks system.

There are some in the community who have raised questions about using this site for a multi-modal station because it is part of the parks system. As someone who has won awards for parks advocacy and who has championed the growth of our parks system and the Greenbelt; including by far the largest expansion of protected open space in the history of our region, I believe this is the very best place for a new station. Several factors enter into the balance.

There is no other parcel in the 2,100 acre park system (157 parks) with anything close to the history of this parcel. The UM granted a new easement to save the old oak forest in exchange for sharing parking on this site. There is a nearly 20 year history of a paved parking lot on the site where busses go. There will not be a change in use. Revenues from user fees will go to the parks system. FRS will provide new parking for parks users, restrooms for hikers and soccer players and a bike station with rentals all right on the Border to Border trail. Soccer players will have a new, quality playing field.

Except for the new rail platforms FRS will fit on the existing pavement and the amount of impervious surface at the site should not increase while storm water capture and cleansing will be greatly improved beyond what exists today. The wide swath of land (1,100 ft.) between the new buildings and the riverbank will be substantially improved for soccer (irrigation added, etc.) along with landscape improvements. Importantly, this parcel is the only site in our area that will greatly facilitate both commuter rail and the growth of AMTRAK. It is clear the positive environmental benefit will be felt in our community far into the future and this far outweighs the benefit of leaving it a surface parking lot. Returning it to an open field would only mean that parking structures would be built elsewhere and all of the efficiencies of this site as a multi-modal rail, bus, and bike station would be lost along with the added amenities for parks users.

#### WHAT'S IN IT FOR ANN ARBOR RESIDENTS?

FRS opens another gateway to our city for visitors and commuters but also a fresh new way for Ann Arborites to travel to the airport, to metro Detroit and Chicago for concerts, sports, museums and beyond to other high speed rail hubs. Expanded rail options will benefit city residents heading east to work in Dearborn or Metro-Detroit. It presents new opportunities for AATA. The new Mott Hospital will create 500 more jobs in Ann Arbor when it opens this fall. FRS addresses worker and patient transportation issues at Washtenaw County's fastest growing center for new jobs, spurring the local economy while reducing the number of cars coming into and leaving our city. It facilitates the environmental benefits of rail travel with reduced congestion and pollution and helps grow the overall economy. It has great potential to spur Transit Oriented Developments in Ann Arbor and in our neighboring city, Ypsilanti, further benefiting our region. It will provide new amenities for those using the Border-to-Border trail for recreation or just getting to work. The UM investment can be used to match the entire federal investment for FRS meaning our city gets a new rail station at minimal expense.

The Fuller Road site is the best place for a new Train Station. The specific location is essential for rail to be a success, it facilitates job growth, boosts the local economy and contributes greatly to the expansion of AMTRAK service.

Ann Arbor is already one of the highest ranked cities in the nation for the number of people who walk, bike or ride the bus on their daily commute. We need to continue to plan for a fossil fuel constrained future. Gasoline prices are only headed up over the long term. The addition of higher speed and regional commuter rail will greatly enhance alternative transportation in our city and region as it reduces the number of car trips into and out of our city. New transit options are needed to improve our town's livability, economic vitality and the ability of residents to live here without owning an automobile. FRS presents a one time opportunity for our community to advance into the modern age of rail.

Thank you for your time and interest.

John Hieftje