

Renovation in sight for Red Line eyesore

CTA station projects revive Chicago's aging public transit

Jon Hilkevitch's Getting Around

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The renovation of one of the CTA's worst eyesores, the **Clark/Division** subway station on the Red Line, is finally in sight.

On the Loop's elevated tracks, plans are advancing to consolidate a pair of too-closely spaced stations built 115 years ago at **Randolph** and at **Madison** into a modern station at **Washington/Wabash** serving the Brown, Green, Orange, Pink and Purple/Evanston Express lines.

And there's more renovation about to be completed in the CTA system, including:

- The \$67 million, 4-year-old station overhaul at **Grand/State** on the Red Line subway is more than 90 percent finished and will wrap up this year, officials said.
- Construction will be done in mid-2012 on a new "L" station at **Morgan and Lake** that will serve the Green and Pink lines. The station's structural steel and concrete platform sections are in place. The \$38 million project, just outside the West Loop, is about 30 percent complete, officials said.

The CTA station projects seem to represent the slow rebirth of aging public transit infrastructure here, even as the near-term outlook points to a likely fare hike and the possibility of more service cuts on top of 2010 reductions.

The abrupt disparity stems from how transit money is spent. Rider fares and state and local taxes cover daily operations. Federal funding, supported by state and local matches, pays for capital improvements and capacity-expansion projects.

The last piece of federal funding will be in place in October to start rebuilding the decrepit Clark/Division station, which opened in 1943 and is well past its 50-year useful life span, officials said. The improvements will make the station more accessible with the addition of a new entrance at **LaSalle Street** that includes two elevators.

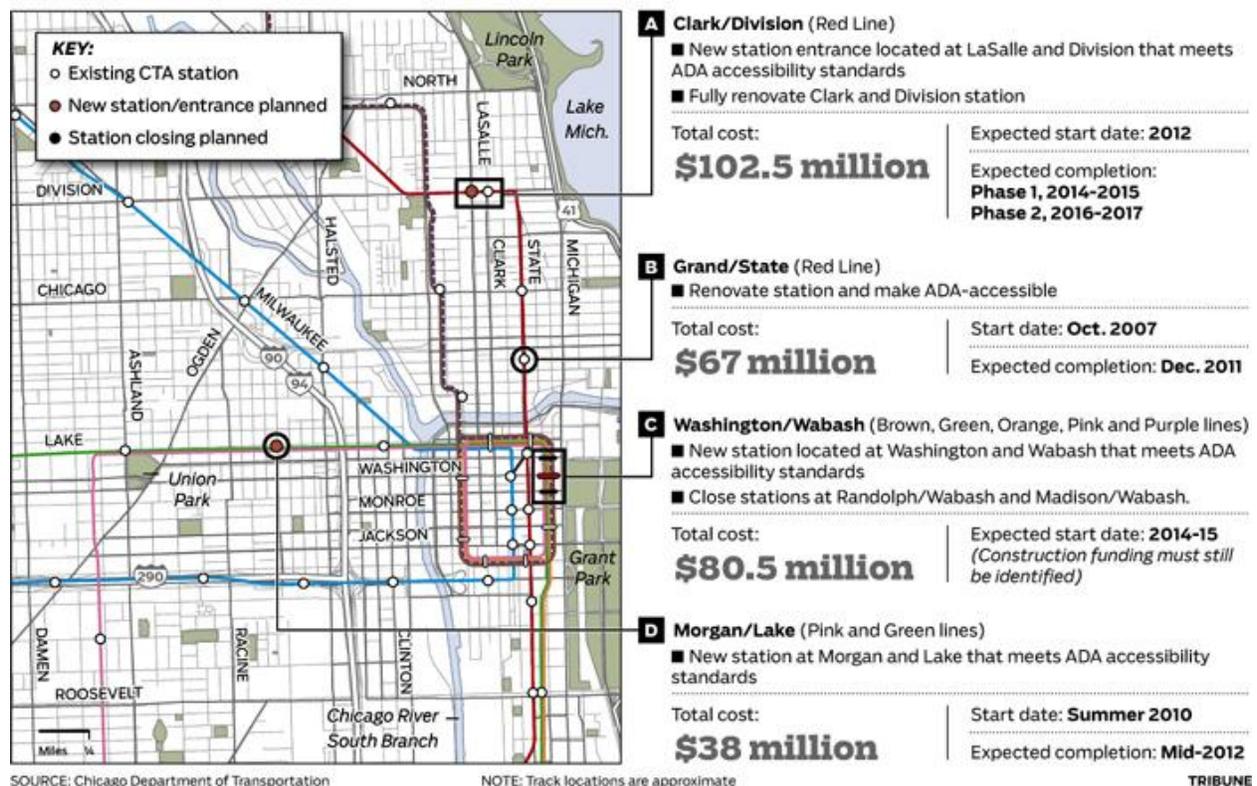
"The basic physical plant of the station is World War II era. Not much has been done since the station opened," said Brian Steele, spokesman for the **Chicago Department of Transportation**, which manages CTA station projects.

In other words, it's a dump. Rail stations need not be places where people dwell and have picnics, but Clark/Division, serving a fast-changing residential and hotel neighborhood as well as one of the city's top night spots, falls far below the bar.

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning is scheduled next month to release the final \$48.24 million in federal funds that are paying for the \$102.47 million Clark/Division project. The project is made possible through the federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement program, or CMAQ, which supports efforts that lower pollution and provide relief from traffic congestion.

Current and future CTA station improvement plans

The aging Red Line station at Clark and Division will undergo renovation and expansion, while two Loop stations will be consolidated in favor of a single station at Washington and Wabash. Current work is expected to finish at Grand and State and at a new Morgan station within the next year.



The Clark/Division work involves installing elevators to make the station accessible to disabled riders, rehabbing the existing mezzanine and platform, and adding a second accessible entrance and mezzanine on the LaSalle end of the existing platform, Steele said. The LaSalle work will be done first, over 2½ to three years, followed by the second phase with expected completion in 2016 or 2017, officials said.

CDOT plans to seek bids on the Clark/Division project late this year or early next year and start construction in 2012, Steele said.

He acknowledged the project is expensive, but it is overdue. To help pay for the Grand/State upgrades, CDOT previously redirected federal money that was designated for other transit projects, including about \$30 million earmarked to renovate the Clark/Division station in 2010.

The new LaSalle mezzanine, adding 8,789 square feet of space at the station to ease the crunch of passengers and to allow for future growth, will include elevators from the street to the mezzanine and train platform. Additional escalators, more fare turnstiles, new lighting, 35 security cameras and other improvements will transform the station, officials said.

The station will also accommodate 10-car trains, which are two more cars per train than operate now.

Meanwhile, on the Loop elevated structure, the Randolph/Wabash and Madison/Wabash stations, built a block from each other in 1896, will be combined into a new station at Washington and Wabash serving five CTA rail lines, officials said.

The new station will have larger platforms — from 7½ feet wide in some places currently to up to 16 feet — elevators and other improvements.

Officials also predict better service throughout the Loop, while reducing CTA maintenance costs.

"By eliminating one extra stop, you can improve travel times and increase the frequency of service by reducing the congestion of trains in the Loop," said Douglas Ferguson, program manager for the CMAQ program at the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.

At Washington Street, stairs and an elevator will be on the west side of Wabash, and stairs and an escalator will be on the east side, according to the new station blueprint. Midway between Washington and Madison, two stairwells will serve exiting passengers. Two auxiliary entrances will be located on each side of Wabash just south of Madison to serve former users of the Madison-Wabash station.

But so far, only funding for design and engineering has been secured, officials said. Still needed is about \$75 million for construction. The project's estimated total cost is \$80.5 million, and officials hope to have the money lined up to begin construction in 2014 or 2015, Steele said.

CMAQ funding is a key to the metro planning agency's long-range action plan, called "Go to 2040," for implementing improvements across the Chicago region. The agency's fiscal 2012-16 CMAQ plan will allocate more than \$411 million in federal funds for an assortment of projects in the region supporting cleaner air and an improved quality of life.

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