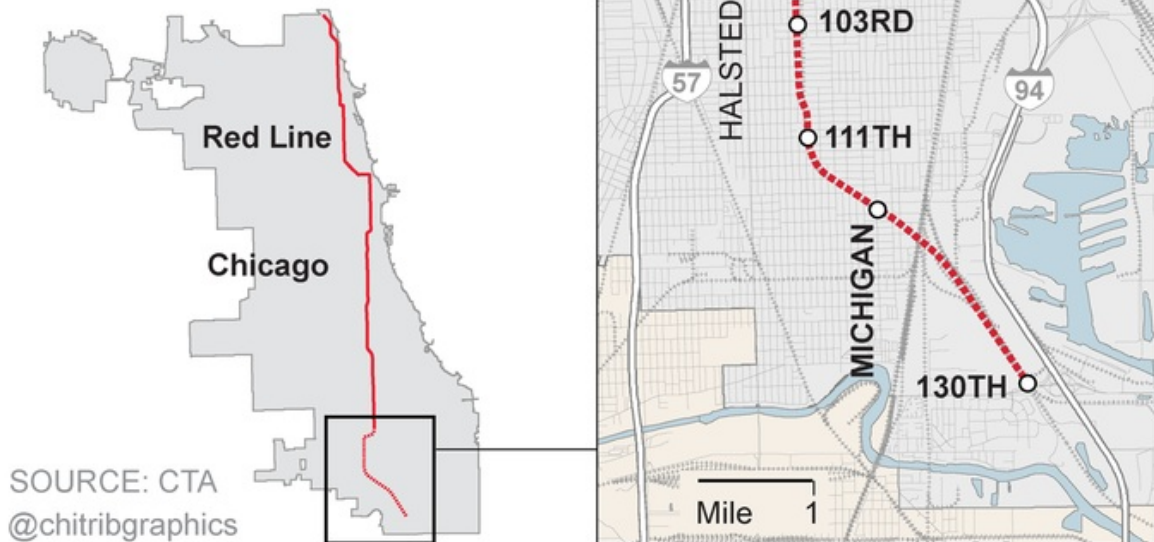


As officials plan Red Line extension, there's still no green to fund it

chicagotribune.com/news/ct-met-red-line-expansion-20180126-story.html

Mary Wisniewski, William Lee

CTA Red Line extension route



For Yolanda Christian, news that the CTA has chosen a path for its extension of the Red Line from 95th to 130th streets was music to her ears.

“They’ve been talking about this since I was a child,” said Christian, 45, who lives in the Altgeld Gardens complex on the city’s Far South Side. She said she and her neighbors must endure long bus rides just to get to the train to get to downtown jobs. “I think we really need this.”

The 5.3-mile, \$2.3 billion Red Line extension would be built on both the west and east sides of the Union Pacific Railroad tracks — a long stretch of it west of Wentworth Avenue in Chicago and end in the city’s Riverdale neighborhood, the CTA announced on Friday. The extended line would fill in what community activists have called a “transit desert” on the South Side.

But now that the CTA has an idea about where to put the elevated train extension, the big question is how to pay for it.

The CTA was able to fund half the \$2.1 billion Red and Purple Line modernization project through a federal grant in the last days of the administration of President Barack Obama, a Chicagoan and transit supporter. The rest of the project is being funded by tax increment financing in growing, populous and affluent North Side communities.

But the CTA will be seeking Red Line extension funding in a totally different environment — President Donald Trump had expressed hostility toward Chicago, and his stated budget priorities show little interest in transit. The cash-strapped state has cut back on transit operating funds and has not had a capital bill since 2009. And a transit TIF in the poorer and less populous far South Side is unlikely to be as lucrative as it would be up north.

Despite these prospects, both Mayor Rahm Emanuel and CTA President Dorval Carter were upbeat about upcoming efforts to secure a mix of federal, state and local funding for the project at a news conference on Friday near the site of a proposed new 103rd Street train station, one of four planned stops on the extension.

Carter noted that after decades of talk about the Red Line extension, the CTA is now putting real money into it — it has secured \$85 million in federal, state and local funding for preliminary work, including engineering and an environmental analysis, which it needs to complete to get money for the project.

“There is a federal process we have to go through to get the federal funding,” Carter told reporters. “I intend to pursue that process. The timeline is going to be driven much more by our ability to get the state capital funding that we need to make the project happen than by whether or not there are federal resources to support it.”

Emanuel said the project has economic merit and is just the type the state and the U.S. Department of Transportation want to see, though it is too early to talk about it with Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao.

“That would be premature at this point — what we just announced is the planning,” Emanuel said. He said now is the time to proceed with the extension plans, since the CTA finished the \$425 million Red Line South reconstruction in 2013 and is now completing a massive \$280 million building of the 95th Street station.

Ald. Anthony Beale, whose 9th ward will be served by the extension, told the Tribune he’ll be excited when he sees shovels in the ground. He noted that the extension had originally been promised by Mayor Richard J. Daley more than 40 years ago.

CTA Chairman Terry Peterson said he would not underestimate Emanuel’s “creativity” in finding the money.

The newly proposed path would start at 95th Street and run along the west side of the Union Pacific Railroad tracks from I-57 south to about 109th Street. It would then cross the UP tracks and continue along the east side of the tracks until crossing Metra Electric tracks near 119th Street, and then continue south to 130th Street, the CTA said.

In addition to a stop near 103rd Street, the CTA plans new stations near 111th Street, Michigan Avenue near 115th Street and 130th Street.

The route could require acquisition of up to 154 privately owned parcels, including 79 buildings. The CTA would be able to acquire the parcels through eminent domain, which allows a government entity to take properties for public use, after paying the owners. The price for the acquisitions is not yet known, CTA spokeswoman Tammy Chase said.

The CTA will hold an open house on Feb. 13 from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Gwendolyn Brooks College Preparatory Academy gymnasium to present the alignment to residents.

The earliest construction would begin in 2022, and the project would take about four years.

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, the region's planning organization, identified the Red Line extension in its GO TO 2040 plan as a capital project of "regional significance." CMAP Executive Director Joe Szabo said in a statement that the next regional plan, ON TO 2050, coming out in June, will include strategies for securing money for high-priority projects in light of declining state and federal resources.

Elizabeth Williams, a 56-year-resident of the area near the 95th Street terminal, said she is hopeful that now is the right time for the extension, though she did express some concerns that the project would displace numerous businesses and longtime homeowners.

"I'd hate to see people who lose their homes, especially older folks that own their homes," Williams said.

Carter acknowledged that there would be disruptions from the project, but said there would also be great benefits to the community, including transit-oriented development opportunities and other economic development. The project also is expected to create about 6,200 jobs, the CTA said.

Emanuel said there is disruption now, caused by people having to waste time taking buses to the train. "If you don't have to take a bus to a train, that means you have more time with your children," he said.

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[South Side residents look forward to Red Line extension »](#)