

MADISON'S EAST RAIL CORRIDOR BRIEF HISTORY & PLANNING PROCESS BACKGROUND

The geographic focus for this study is located on Madison's Isthmus, in an area bounded by South Blair Street, East Washington Avenue, the Yahara River and East Wilson Street. This area, known as the "East Rail Corridor," was historically a wetlands resource until it was filled for urban development in the early 20th century, becoming Madison's first factory district. The East Rail Corridor area included a 25-track railroad yard at its prominence and it housed many typical industrial uses, including power generation and manufacturing plants. After the 1950s nearly all of these tracks were removed and the area now includes a mix of commercial and industrial uses, outdoor storage areas, and vacant and underutilized lands, although power generation and other industrial uses and businesses remain. The potential for eventual redevelopment of portions of these former railroad and industrial lands for housing, business development and open space has been recognized and recommended in City-wide and neighborhood plans for years.

The 177-acre East Rail Corridor area is located within the Marquette Neighborhood, immediately east of the downtown and within close proximity to distinct neighborhoods and commercial areas. In 1994, the Marquette Neighborhood Association and City of Madison completed a neighborhood plan. In the *Marquette-Schenk-Atwood Neighborhood Plan*, the neighborhood and City identified the East Rail Corridor as under-utilized and needing environmental and visual improvements. It is the feeling that the area is underutilized and a prime candidate for selected redevelopment, including commercial and industrial uses, housing, open space and recreation. The City, in concert with Dane County and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, is also currently evaluating high capacity transit through an alternatives analysis being conducted by Parsons Brinckerhoff. One alternative under consideration will be a rail based system that would go through the planning area using existing rail lines, and would include one or more "station" locations as well as the track right-of-way.

Recently the Marquette Neighborhood Association and the Urban Open Space Foundation (UOSF) began work on a redevelopment concept that includes a large urban open space within the East Rail Corridor area. The park concept proposed by the UOSF and the Marquette neighborhood has stimulated renewed interest in the planning area, generating a great amount of public interest and enthusiasm to complete the development of detailed plans and physical improvements to implement the development concepts.

Because of the area's significance, the identified need for detailed planning and the current interest, the Madison Common Council created the 18-member East Rail Corridor Plan Advisory Committee (ERCPAC) and planning process in October of 2000. This two-part process includes an update to the Madison Land Use Plan for the area and the preparation of a detailed physical development plan, including securing the necessary commitment of resources to implement the plan. Part one, the land use plan update, is nearly completed with land use recommendations provided by the Advisory Committee.

A side note: In 1998 the City of Madison completed *The Isthmus 2020 Committee Report: A Guidebook for a Model Isthmus*. This study and subsequent report was initiated as a part of the regional process of developing the *Vision 2020 Dane County Land Use and Transportation Plan*. A locally appointed planning committee looked at the whole Isthmus and recommended targets for future population and employment growth. The committee concluded that an additional 4,500 housing units could be built in the Isthmus and 14,000 new jobs accommodated by the year 2020. The committee identified the East Rail Corridor area (along with others) as locations for significant amounts of housing and employment growth. They stated, "The continued growth of employment in the Isthmus is an important element in maintaining downtown vitality, strengthening Isthmus neighborhoods, and promoting transit systems with either urban or urban and regional service. Light or high-tech industries with low impacts on neighborhood design and the architecture of the existing built areas could be appropriate in parts of the Isthmus to keep a mix of jobs and income available in the City and the region." "Several recent projects along the rail corridors have shown good reuse of land and increased employment numbers for the area, as exemplified by...Mainstreet Industries, Sonic Foundry, and others."

The East Rail Corridor planning process brings together these existing plans, with the goal of developing standards for new development in this area.