



## Southeast Chicago residents awaiting proposed Red Line extension to 130th Street

April 20, 2014 1:00 am • [Gregory Tejada Times Correspondent](#)

CHICAGO | When Peggy Salazar, of the Slag Valley neighborhood, needs to travel to downtown, her commute is longer than that of many suburban residents who live farther away.

Her community has only one Chicago Transit Authority route that leads downtown. It's a No. 30 South Chicago bus route that works its way from the Hegewisch station on the South Shore line at Brandon and Brainard avenues north to the Red Line train line at 69th Street.

"It's a long, slow kind of route," she said of the commute that can take 1 1/2 hours to complete.

Salazar and others at Chicago's southern end were interested in the news the CTA is looking at improvements on the Red Line trains.

For now, the focus is on building a bypass meant to ease congestion on CTA train lines that service North Side neighborhoods. CTA officials said they're also submitting applications to federal agencies for more funding for an expansion of the Red Line trains south to 130th Street.

CTA President Forrest Claypool said money is to complete environmental impact studies that began in 2011 and are required before engineering studies on the extension proposal can begin.

Officials said they will begin a community outreach program this spring meant to get local views on the project, while also allowing the CTA to disseminate information to the public about when the long-desired extension would begin. An open house already is scheduled for May 13 at Palmer Park gym, 201 E. 111th St.

What they're going to find is that some people already are working to prepare area businesses and residents for the day when a CTA train route extends nearly to Chicago's far southern border at 138th Street.

Michael LaFargue, president of the West Chesterfield Community Association, said his group and several other far South Side community organizations meet regularly to discuss the extension, which they say will revitalize businesses in their area by making it easier for people to travel so far south in Chicago.

“We want any businesses located near the train stations on the extension to be ready when it takes place,” LaFargue said, adding it also would allow people to work jobs outside their home neighborhoods.

“It will provide motivation for many unemployed people to go out and get a job if we make it easier for them to get to work,” he said.

LaFargue said he and other activists will be watching closely as CTA and City Hall officials act on the project.

“We’re hoping this doesn’t get bogged down by politics, because this is a very important project,” he said.

Currently, the Red Line goes south down the middle of the Dan Ryan Expressway as far as 95th Street. In 2009, the CTA’s governing board approved the concept of an extension to add stations in the Roseland neighborhood at 103rd Street, 111th Street, 116th Street and Michigan Avenue, and a final station at 130th Street near the Bishop Ford Freeway in between the Hegewisch neighborhood and the Altgeld Gardens public housing complex.

CTA officials do have an alternate route in mind that would go south along Interstate 57, then become an elevated train on Halsted Street ultimately winding up at 127th Street in Blue Island, if negotiations with the Union Pacific Railroad are unsuccessful in getting access needed to make the 130th Street extension.

But CTA officials say the route to 130th Street is the “locally preferred” route that community officials have expressed support for.

Cheryl Johnson, an Altgeld Gardens resident and head of the People for Community Recovery group, said she and her neighbors are “confident” the day will come when the extension will be built.

“Chicago is a big city that stretches so far south,” Johnson said. “It isn’t right that such a large part of it doesn’t have train access.”

She also said that with plans to build extensive parking lots around a 130th Street station to accommodate commuters, it might be possible for people from nearby suburbs such as Calumet City and Dolton to also begin using CTA trains on a regular basis.

“This would help revitalize the entire area,” Johnson said. Agreeing was Peggy Salazar, executive director of the Hegewisch-based Southeast Environmental Task Force, who said people from other parts of Chicago often have trouble getting to the 10th Ward.

“When we try to bring in interns, it is hard for them to get here if they don’t happen to drive,” she said. “If they extend the trains and put in a 130th Street bus, it would really help improve the connection between Hegewisch and the rest of Chicago.”