



CTA Tries To Reassure Anxious 'L' Riders About Fullerton, Belmont Construction

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Bob Roberts Reporting

CHICAGO (WBBM) -- Rider anxiety was obvious Thursday night at the second of four hearings hosted by the CTA to field questions on upcoming delays for north side "L" riders.

WBBM's Bob Roberts has the story.

"A lot of people probably think there's a lack of communication," said rider Stephen Landfear. "What's your strategy to respond to those hot spots?"

The CTA's general manager for service planning, John Paquet, essentially told the 50 people attending the meeting that a lot of CTA personnel with radios will be watching the bus lines that parallel the Red and Brown Lines through the construction zone at the Fullerton and Belmont stations.

"You'll see them most obviously at Belmont and Lake Shore Drive, but they're scattered throughout the system," Paquet said.

It was a typical exchange during the two-hour session at the Agassiz School, 2851 N. Seminary Av., within site of the "L" structure.

State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz (D-Chicago) attended the meeting, and said she believed riders came up with a number of ideas for transit planners to consider. The information and responses given did not always encourage her.

"There never really seems to be enough of it, or it doesn't seem to be disseminated in such a way that it's useful," she said. "I hope that they took copious notes because there are legitimate concerns for people who are CTA riders."

Feigenholtz said construction through the next two or three Cubs seasons won't help matters.

CTA Planning Vice President Mike Shiffer, the senior staff member at Thursday night's hearing, conceded that he expected anxiety to be on the high side.

“Whenever there is change and significant change, people need and want to be informed,” he said. “That's why we're out at these meetings and why were going to be out on the street and on the platforms.”

CTA Chair Carole Brown said after Monday's initial hearing that it yielded several ideas worth considering, including extension of the Ashland bus line to make additional connections and greater flexibility for riders to use Metra Link-Up passes, which are now accepted only between 6:30 and 9 a.m. and 3:30 to 7 p.m. weekdays.

Likewise, Shiffer said, he heard ideas Thursday night that he said are worth “tossing around.”

“We look at all of these comments very constructively,” he said. “this is going to be a work in progress.”

Shiffer said changes are likely to be made throughout the construction, which will continue through late 2009, but said it will be especially true during the first few weeks of the project as planners determine where riders are going and how many trains they can run through the single remaining northbound track.

“The service that's out there Day One won't necessarily be what's out there on the 30th day,” he said.

The reconstruction of the Fullerton and Belmont stations is being undertaken to make both stations handicapped- accessible. The extra space required on each platform for elevators requires the stations to be rebuilt from the ground up.

Additional hearings are scheduled 6-8 p.m. Monday in the Truman College cafeteria, 1145 W. Wilson Av., and 6-8 p.m. March 26 at CTA headquarters, 567 W. Lake St.

Brown said Wednesday that a special meeting of the CTA's board is likely to review the proposed changes and set the starting date for the three-tracking.

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