

Date: September 2, 2014

To: Eli Cooper, Transportation Manager, City of Ann Arbor
From: Project Team

Subject: Ann Arbor Station—Consideration of Ann Arbor Michigan Central Depot in Station Siting Alternatives

The purpose of this memorandum is to evaluate incorporating the historic Ann Arbor Michigan Central Depot into a potential new multi-modal, intermodal, intercity and commuter passenger rail station (Ann Arbor Intermodal Passenger Rail Station). The depot is located at 401 Depot Street, just east of the existing Ann Arbor Amtrak Station. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

This memorandum informs the Alternatives Analysis for the Ann Arbor Station Environmental Review. Led by the City of Ann Arbor, the Environmental Review began in February 2014 and is scheduled to conclude in December 2014. Its stated purpose is to:

“provide an intermodal facility that will accommodate existing and future intercity passenger rail ridership; improve intermodal connectivity, including the possibility of commuter rail in the City of Ann Arbor; and to improve the integration of the station with the City of Ann Arbor and its neighboring communities.”¹

¹ Ann Arbor Station Environmental Review Purpose and Need Executive Summary, June 24, 2014. Available at http://www.a2gov.org/departments/systems-planning/Transportation/Documents/AAS_PurposeNeed_1-Page_Summ_06-24-2014_Final.pdf

The Environmental Review is a concept planning study for:

- a. Defining the long-term needs for an Ann Arbor Intermodal Passenger Rail Station;
- b. Identifying potential sites and station options;
- c. Evaluating benefits and impacts of various station options, including Build Alternatives and a No Build Alternative (continued use of the existing station); and
- d. Complying with Federal, State and local requirements, resulting in approval of a preferred alternative for an Ann Arbor Intermodal Passenger Rail Station.

The Alternatives Analysis process is divided into two phases:

- **Phase I:** Identification of possible sites for Build Alternatives, and an initial screening of these alternatives; and
- **Phase II:** Development of site-specific station footprints for and environmental analysis of a smaller set of Build Alternatives and the No Build Alternative; and selection of and conceptual design for a Preferred Alternative.

The Michigan Central Depot

Upon completion in 1886, the Ann Arbor Michigan Central Depot was considered “the Michigan Central's finest station between Buffalo and Chicago.” It was also considered the most important railroad station on the line between Detroit and Chicago (excluding those cities’ majestic stations).² The depot is shown in Figure 1.

² Historic Preservation Objects, State of Michigan Center for Geographic Information, at <http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/hso/sites/20537.htm>

Figure 1: Michigan Central Depot/Gandy Dancer Restaurant



(Source: Gandy Dancer Restaurant website at <http://www.muer.com/gandy-dancer/locations.asp>)

Local historian Grace Shackman depicts the depot's architectural details, and how it was,

“designed by Detroit architect Frederick Spier (who also designed the Kelsey Museum and St. Thomas Catholic Church) in the then-popular Richardson Romanesque style. It was built by Gearing and Sons of Detroit of glacial stones quarried from Four Mile Lake between Chelsea and Dexter and cut at Foster's Station on Huron River Drive near Maple Road.”³

³ Ann Arbor Observer website at <http://aaobserver.aadl.org/aaobserver/15258>

Shackman goes on to describe the depot's status as a gateway transportation center through World War II and decline thereafter. She writes that restaurateur Chuck Muer purchased the building in 1970 and restored it intact.

“The original stone walls, slate roof, stained-glass windows, red oak ceilings, fireplace, and baggage scale are still there. He added a kitchen in the open area between the baggage building and waiting room, windowed in the platform area, and changed the color of the outside trim, from green to dark mauve. Muer named his restaurant the Gandy Dancer, after the laborers who once maintained the tracks.”⁴

According to a state historic registry website, the depot building “has undergone few alterations and is well maintained.”⁵

Considerations Regarding the Michigan Central Depot and the Proposed Ann Arbor Intermodal Passenger Rail Station

In the Alternatives Analysis process, three Build Alternative locations and the No Build Alternative (repurposing of the existing Amtrak Station) remain in consideration for locating the proposed Ann Arbor Intermodal Passenger Rail Station. The Build Alternative locations are:

- Build Alternative 1: North Main Street. This alternative is located along the tracks east of North Main Street near Lake Shore Drive;
- Build Alternative 2: Depot Street/Existing Amtrak. This alternative would reuse the property currently occupied by the Ann Arbor Amtrak station, along Depot Street adjacent to the historic depot; and

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

- Build Alternative 3: Fuller Road (West). This location extends along the tracks south of Fuller Road near the East Medical Center Drive overpass.

As part of the Ann Arbor Environmental Analysis, several project stakeholders have requested that the Michigan Central Depot/Gandy Dancer Restaurant be evaluated as a station building for Build Alternative 2. These requests have come from several comments at community and public meetings and from permitting agencies. The Project Team has also been considering how the landmark depot can enhance a Build Alternative at the existing Amtrak station site. The Build Alternative 2 location is shown in Figure 2.

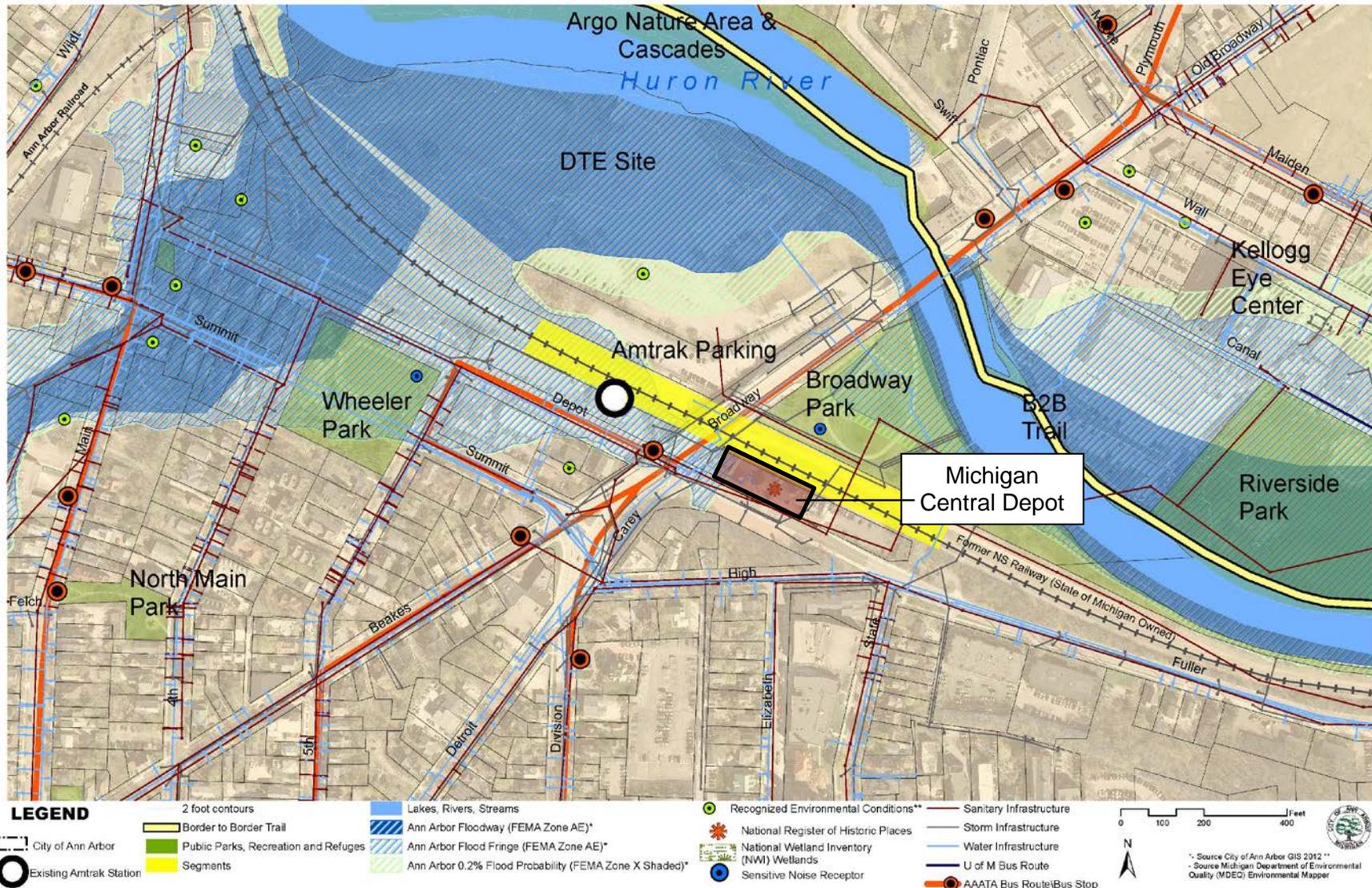
The Environmental Review's Phase I Alternative Analysis memo explains some difficulties in using the depot as the primary building for a Build Alternative 2 station. These include:

1. The depot and its surrounding land (other than the tracks and train platform areas) are privately owned. Should property in addition to Amtrak parcels be required for a new station at the site, the financial and socioeconomic impacts of property acquisitions must be considered;
2. As previously mentioned, the Michigan Central Depot is on the National Register of Historic Places. Thus, building uses that are not consistent with its design integrity should be avoided. Some modifications to the building would be required should it serve as the main passenger building for a new station;
3. The depot and surrounding brick streets are in the Division Street Local Historic District, which would limit alteration and new construction;
4. The projected 2040 station activity at a new Ann Arbor Intermodal Passenger Rail Station is over 1 million annual boardings and deboardings. According to Amtrak guidelines, that level of activity requires a station building with between

11,770 and 13,000 square feet (sf) for essential functions. (11,770 sf is the minimum for a station with intercity rail only; 13,000 sf is the required space if Ann Arbor to Detroit Commuter Rail is implemented.) Most of that space would consist of an open passenger waiting room. This building sizing provides minimal accommodations for intercity bus passengers; more space will be required if the station functions as Ann Arbor's intercity bus hub. Still more space is needed for options such as a sit-down restaurant or community room. On the surface, the depot appears nearly large enough, in that it contains approximately 11,500 square feet of floor space. However, the division of space within the depot is not ideal for the Intermodal Station program. The depot contains a modest historic waiting room, but other rooms would need to function as satellite waiting areas. This raises functionality and security concerns. An initial assessment indicates that load bearing walls and architecturally significant features would prevent a simple combining of spaces to form a larger waiting room;

5. A new station would require long boarding platforms on both sides of the tracks and a grade-separated pedestrian crossing over or under the tracks. The likely crossing design would be a bridge over the tracks with elevators and other vertical circulation on either side of the tracks. Regarding placement of pedestrian bridge landings and elevator shafts: land on the east side of the Broadway Street Bridge, where the depot is, is more constrained than land west of the bridge. A pedestrian bridge east of Broadway Street would need to be incorporated into the depot building, thus impacting historic and architecturally-significant features. Broadway Park borders the tracks opposite the depot, which also limits pedestrian crossing options at this location;

Figure 2: Location of Build Alternative 2—Depot Street/Existing Amtrak Station



6. Amtrak design guidelines emphasize the importance of connectivity to other modes of transportation to enhance the multimodal nature of stations. The depot has very little adjacent property to accommodate the multimodal aspects of the station. The building was constructed to line Depot Street's north edge. As a result there is very limited space in front of the building for drop off and pedestrian access, especially during peak hours. Kiss'n'Ride (passenger drop-off areas), parking, taxi, and bus access would have to be located at parcels that are not immediately adjacent to the depot. These include the current station site or short-term parking area to the west, and across the tracks to the northwest at the existing long term station parking lot. This configuration would reduce rider movement efficiency and convenience, and make wayfinding more complex.
7. Most buses in the area currently follow the Broadway Street Bridge between downtown and northern Ann Arbor. These buses would likely interface with the station on the north side of the tracks and west of Broadway Street. The depot building is too far removed from that location to serve as a waiting area for those passengers;
8. The narrow, linear parking lot across Depot Street from the depot building contains 20 parking spaces. Modifications to this lot for additional parking or multi-modal access are constrained by an adjoining forested slope that includes and borders residential structures. Also, this parking lot is in the Old Fourth Ward Local Historic District, which could limit construction on the site. A second parking lot east of the depot, including about 40 parking spaces, could possibly extend linearly. However, is probably too narrow to enable vertical station parking.
9. Existing station parking and large parcels that can possibly host expanded parking are on the west side of the Broadway Street Bridge and north of the tracks. A Build Alternative 2

- station building connecting directly with these parcels would be situated west of the Broadway Street Bridge;
10. The Ann Arbor Intermodal Passenger Rail Station is expected to function equally as a destination and an origin for commute-to-work and other trips. This means that during travel peaks, as many passengers would be boarding as disembarking. In such a scenario, equal and easy access to either platform from the waiting area is critical. The Michigan Central Depot's placement would favor access to its adjacent platform, which is anticipated to be the future eastbound platform. One building location considered for a station with Ann Arbor's anticipated passenger volumes is above the tracks west of Broadway Street. In such an arrangement, waiting passengers can transition directly to and from platforms on either side of the tracks. Passenger concourse areas would be sheltered and weather protected; and
 11. The depot has been beautifully restored to function as a restaurant. The program for the proposed station would require a nearly complete renovation of the interiors to accommodate the new function and related amenities.

Conclusions

The Project Team does not recommend using the Michigan Central Depot as the station building for Build Alternative 2. An alternative location for a station building is recommended for further consideration: west of Broadway Street and above the tracks. A separate station building does not preclude incorporation of the landmark Michigan Central Depot into the passenger experience at a new station.

High volume passenger transportation stations typically provide space for concessions and dining. Some feature sit-down restaurants. Should Build Alternative 2 advance, the Gandy Dancer restaurant or

any other vendor in the depot could elect to orient services toward the passenger transportation market. Perhaps a casual café could open in a portion of the building. Restaurant doorways and patios could open to passenger walkways and even the adjacent platform. This type of station-oriented private restaurant building is common at railway stations. The Project Team recommends that the City pursue similar arrangements with the depot/Gandy Dancer ownership.

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